



I Thought of Emily
Part One

Chapter One

It's beginning to rain, Mr. Greenleaves, sir. Shall I fetch your cape?" I stepped back from the small grave and shook my head. "That won't be necessary, Henry, I am finished here."

Henry, my chauffeur, held open the back door of the black Oldsmobile sedan, and asked if we would return immediately to New York.

"Not for awhile," I replied, politely refusing his hand as I climbed into the back seat with much difficulty, as I suffered from gout during my declining years. Nevertheless, I managed to laugh when I told Henry that we first needed to pay a visit to Victoria Falls.

"Sir? Then I should start booking passage."

"We'll see, Henry, but before doing so I would like to pass by the town's old schoolhouse."

My chauffeur grinned as he revved up the car. "Memory Lane, sir?"

"Why else...?" I replied with a wistful chuckle.

Still surrounded by blackberry vines, the schoolhouse in Stonewell, Maine had remained unchanged, except for the floors having warped considerably and the same battered wooden desks bearing forty-six more years of jack-knife inscribing. My thoughts wandered back to a late afternoon in the summer of 1879. I was twelve years old and standing in that same classroom, dithering* diffidently* before the professor of literature and his desk.



"I had no idea you had such a proclivity*, Joey." I had waited until the classroom had emptied out for the day before presenting a poem to graying Professor Hargreaves, who was nodding his head approvingly.

"I do like poetry, sir," I said.

"This is a remarkable piece of work."

"Thank you, sir."

"Yes. Aside from pleasing meter and rhyme, it rolls easily off the tongue."

I could only stand and blush; the professor looked again at the paper.

proclivity: liking, taste for

dither: to act in a nervously uncertain manner; to waver

diffidently: lacking in confidence; too modest or shy

Art by Jeremy

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“How do you go about that?”

“Go about what, sir? Writing poetry?”

“How you get it to ‘roll off the tongue’?”

“Oh, I pace back and forth in my bedroom or in the garden and practice reading it aloud—when I am sure no one is in earshot, of course!”

The professor grinned and looked toward the half-open classroom door. “And it seems someone is listening in at this very moment. ... Yes?”

A tangled towhead* peered around it. Emily Winters, a gangly girl two years my junior.

“Come in, Miss Winters. You didn’t go home yet?”

“No, sir,” she said as she entered hesitantly. “I ... umm ... forgot something. ... I was waiting until you had finished your conversation.”

“No need to be so timid,” said the professor, rising from his seat. “Come and get what you need. Joey and I are finished.

“Do you have a typewriter, by the way?” he asked me as he opened his case. I replied that I did not. “Then do you mind if I keep this? I would like to type it down.”

“No, sir.”

“Well, keep up the good work.”

The professor shut his case and walked briskly out of the classroom. “Good evening, Joey. And good evening to you, Miss Winters.”

We both mumbled a “good evening,” and stood staring at each other for a few seconds until Emily broke the silence.

“I overheard you talking about poetry.”

“We were...”

Emily smiled. “Talking about *your* poem to be exact. I’d like to see it.”

“As you probably noticed, Professor Hargreaves took it with him.”

“And you didn’t make a copy?”

Suspecting that the girl’s incisive blue-eyed stare was transforming my complexion from shades of pale pink to red, I snatched up my satchel and turned to leave.

“I love poetry,” she quickly said.

I said nothing and strode toward the classroom door. I stopped when she said, “I write it too.”

“You do?” I said, having restrained myself from turning around until I heard her rummaging through her desk.

“Yes. In fact, that’s why I returned ... for my book of poems. ... Oh, here it is! You’re welcome to read some.”

“Really? It’s rather embarrassing to show that sort of thing to others, isn’t it?”

towhead: somebody with pale yellow hair

"You showed yours to Professor Hargreaves."

"I meant more like to our own age. Professor Hargreaves isn't going to laugh at it."

"And you think *I* would?"

"Uh ... no."

"Would you laugh at mine, Joey?" Emily asked almost impudently as she handed me her book.

"Of course not."

We strolled out of the classroom with me leafing through Emily's decoratively bound, octavo-sized volume containing pages of neat cursive handwriting.

"I write them in there once I am pretty sure they're finished," she said in response to my remarking on there seeming to be nary a mistake. "You can read one if you like."

"While we walk?"

Emily shrugged. "Why not? You live close to my house, don't you?"

"Yes. Poplar Street."

"Right, mine's on Orchard." She paused to place a finger on a page I was turning. "Oh, this one is my favorite ... 'Midwinter's Day.' It just came to me."

*Misty gray,
Midwinter's day,
Beckoning me out to play;
I bid you not for Spring make way.
For as the swans did graciously migrate,
And grant me space to freely skate
Into the cold crisp evening late—
Gliding, forming figures of eight
On the frozen silver lake
Left in Autumn's golden wake—
So, misty grey,
Midwinter's day
Beckoning me out to play,
I bid you not for Spring make way.
(At least not yet!)*

I nodded, veiling my admiration. "And this one looks amusing," I muttered, browsing a previous page. "Aunt Mabel's House of Smells."

"Oh, that's one of my 'aunt and uncle' series. I've written a poem about each one."

*Odors spanning waste to musk
Linger there from eve to dusk.
Couches, curtains, rugs, and mats
Retain the stench of dogs and cats.
While bedrooms reek of mold and mothballs,
The kitchen stinks of last week's meatballs,
Along with every daily dish,
From pasta sauce to deep-fried fish.
I take care, when at her table,
To sit far from Auntie Mabel,
Yet the pong of her perfume
Permeates the dining room,
And I must with much restraint propose
To hold my breath and not my nose.
God grant me patience to forbear
Her strange aversion to fresh air,
And grant me grace to suffer well
Auntie Mabel's house of smells.*

"And this is another ... 'Great Uncle Benjamin.'"

*Great Uncle Benjamin.
I can tell him anythin'.
For he's experienced many a thin'.
An expert he on everythin'.
And oft even the very thin'
Of which I'm inward worryin'.
Great Uncle Benjamin.*

"They're pretty good," was all I managed to say, and silently vowed never to show her my attempts at verse. To my relief, she inquired no further after them except to ask if I would submit any for the end-of-term poetry competition. I mumbled a maybe, and we parted at the intersection of Poplar and Orchard Streets with a hasty good bye.

After much fretful deliberation, I ended up submitting a piece for the competition, and lost of course to Emily Winters and her incontestably excellent "Midwinter's Day."

Chapter Two

As the gathering dispersed from the school's assembly hall, Emily stood clutching her trophy, while I stood at a distance nursing my wounded pride. I had no incentive to walk over to her and congratulate her, but she appeared crestfallen, and curiosity piqued me enough to take a couple of steps toward her. Nevertheless, resentment and timidity conquered my curiosity, and I turned and scurried out, resolving to walk home at once. Something, I know not what, thwarted my purpose, however, and I found myself loitering in expectancy for Emily to exit the school building. She eventually did, wearing the same disconsolate expression. Upon seeing me, she approached me.

"I'm so sorry," she said, lowering her tear-filled eyes.

"Sorry for what?"

"For winning. I hated going above you."

Hated winning? I could not understand it. I felt stupid, and I shuffled my shoes in the snow.

"Why?"

Emily's eyes fell even lower and a flush filled her cheeks. "B-because you see ... I love you."

A lump came to my throat and my heart began racing in the timeless interlude following her confession. Our eyes briefly met, and I stood motionless and speechless. I remained that way as I watched the ungainly girl turn and stumble out of the playground. Regrettably, it was as though my legs were rooted in the icy ground, and I could not follow her.

Nevertheless, it was a mystery to me that after such a connection, our ensuing communication after the Christmas holidays fell from distant to non-existent. In retrospect, I suppose it was because Emily felt she had declared herself, and the next step was up to me.

I ventured no such step.

The following term, however—my last year at Stonewell Junior High, before going on to high school—marked an odd but memorable development in our relationship. Emily suddenly began behaving blithely uncomplicated in her interactions with me, and I attributed the change to her having grown older. Still, something about her conduct unnerved me. Despite her yet young age, she was treating everyone with equal warmth and candor. Perhaps it was the concern of my developing male ego, but I wondered if she still cared for me. I never asked.

She did urge me, however, to enter the end-of-year poetry competition, saying she was certain I would win and would deserve to.

"Most of the town will be there," she told me while standing in the lunch queue one day. "Don't give up, Joey."

I remember being startled, yet shrugging with a show of indifference.

"It's your passion isn't it?" she added. "The taste of words."

The taste of words!

I said nothing in reply, but for many days, I marveled at and mulled over this eleven-year-old girl's insightful turn of phrase, and decided to enter the competition.



"And the winner is Joseph Green!" Professor Hargreaves announced from the small outdoor stage to the expectant audience of beaming parents, relatives, and teachers. I stepped up, surprised and somewhat proud of myself. I say "somewhat" because I was troubled.

Emily Winters failed even third place. With such innocently delightful a poem as she had submitted and delivered with such earnest, it was unsurprising.

*The Son of God lives in my heart,
And He'll ne'er e'er depart.
His grace it is that saved My soul,
Filled me, thrilled me, made me whole.
He has given me true love
That only comes from up Above.
I declare it hereby to the moon,
Why? Because it rhymes with June!*

Consequently, I walked off that stage holding a trophy that felt as hollow as the victory. I knew that Emily could have won hands down over the other contestants; I was her only competition.

I took my place beside her in the front row and could only shake my head in response to her smiles and congratulations.

"You deserve it," she said.

"But you could have won, Emily," I finally managed to whisper. "You would have won. ... Why?"

She smiled again, but I detected a moistening of her eyes. Still I persisted.

"That poem obviously meant something to you ... but that wasn't the one you had originally thought of submitting, was it?"

Emily shook her head.

"Which one was it?"

"It doesn't matter."

"It does to me, Emily," I said with unanticipated tenderness.
"Here," she said, handing me the paper in her hand.

The Silent Realm

*Some say "your" and some say "my,"
Some say "you" and some say "I."
Some speak truth, while some hiss lies
That piercingly betray their smile's disguise,
In the silent realm
Of eyes.*

*"I'll be right there," some eagerly declare,
Some shyly say, "I'll stay back here."
Shrieking, some recoil in fear.
Some request you to draw near,
In the silent realm
Of eyes.*

*Strange, how from love's outward call
To hatred's slating inward pall,
It seems the silent realm so-called
Is not so silent after all.
Quite a noisy realm,
The eyes.*

My mind was awchirl with questions as I handed her paper back to her. *How does she get these poems? Does she copy them? Is someone writing them for her? A relative?*

"It's very good," I said. "You would have won."

Emily stood up and slipped a folded piece of paper into my hand. "Wait until I've left before you read it," she said. "Bye, Joey."

"Er ... bye, Emily," I hesitantly replied to her farewell's undertone of finality. She walked alone out of the school grounds and I unfolded the note.

*Dear Joey,
Away with thought of fleeting due,
I could not go above you,*

*I lost 'cos Jesus asked me to,
For still, you see, I love you.*



The following end of the school-year vacation was more hectic for me than for other neighborhood children of my age, as my family moved to the district city of New Haven, Connecticut. Fortunately, my credentials as a budding poet followed me, and within a few months I was in good standing with the local high school's poet society and its senior member, Archibald Somers. Archie—as he preferred to be called—was an ardent lover and writer of excellent poetry, and he and I became good friends, sharing our mutual passion.

"I suppose you will enter it," I said to him after a few months, referring to the upcoming, end-of-term poetry competition.

"Of course. But Joey, should *you* enter, you will most certainly win."

I puffed in affected dismissal of his words.

"I mean it. And in truth, you should head the society once I graduate. You are a better poet than me."

Dear Archie was of that rare breed that, according to the scriptural admonition, esteemed others better than themselves, and he genuinely rejoiced in the success of others as if it were his own. I confess that I found that quality difficult to relate to—let alone attain—realizing even after the most rigorous internal scrutiny that it was not within me. I wanted to enter that competition and initially I wanted to win.

Yet, amid the clamor and applause that engulfed me as I stepped down from the podium that day, having won first prize, I again felt that success was eluding me. I was thinking of Emily, and something inside me was inexplicably hurting.

It was still hurting when Archie smiled and clasped my hand. "I knew you would win, Joey."

"I didn't mean to," I said. "I'm sorry."

"Didn't mean to? *Sorry?* What's this? Be happy, man! I'm happy for you."

"For that I'm grateful, Archie, but..."

"No buts, old friend. Enjoy your success."

I had submitted what was in my opinion my most mediocre of poems—an almost parodied attempt at what was becoming known as free verse*, hoping to ensure Archie's triumph.

You see, I had thought of Emily. Now I was ashamed. Archie's poem was actually very good. It was meaningful and reflective without being overly introspective or self-indulgent.

free verse: term describing various styles of poetry that are not written using strict meter or rhyme

It was written in the classical style using iambic pentameter*, however, and I knew that I had that genre somewhat mastered, although not even close to... Again, I thought of Emily. Motivated by my musings, I went out of my way to encourage Archie Somers in his endeavors, which in turn stimulated him to solicit my suggestions on initial drafts of his verse. This surprised me, for any fledgling poet—me included—would have normally polished such drafts to a satisfying semblance of finality before presentation. Did he accept my humble suggestions? For the most part, he gladly did so.

“Co-written,” he even remarked on one such verse, a string of playful observations on the comings and goings of characters living in his neighborhood. “Archie Somers and Joey Green.”

“No such thing,” I told him. “The poem is yours. It's your brainchild.”

It was published that month in the local newspaper to favorable reviews, and I resolved to contact Emily ... someday.

The busyness of the following months, however, somehow swallowed up that “someday.” I began attending various literary youth societies and guilds, which inevitably led to evening socials and weekend parties, at one of which I met Violet Springs, a slender, beautiful debutante of French descent. Nevertheless, regardless of her, I just wanted to write poetry, and upon graduating, I moved to New York, took up scanty, low-cost lodgings, and discovered that the solitary job of a night watchman at a nearby bank afforded me the luxury of doing so.

“Unusual,” parents, relatives, and acquaintances remarked at my choice of vocation.

“Especially for a young man graduating with honors.”

“And you're missing such marvelous opportunities for developing a rich social life.”

“You work while others play.”

I was well aware of, and usually said nothing in response to these observations.

“How do you expect to meet the love of your life?”

“I've already met the love of my life,” I once replied to this particular inquiry.

“Violet?”

“Umm, more like poetry, and...”

I thought of Emily.

iambic pentameter: describes a particular rhythm, measured in small groups of syllables, that words in a verse establish in each line

Chapter Three

It's good, young man. Very good." Sholem Brookfield, a slight, rosy-cheeked man in his late thirties and chief editor of New York's bestselling periodical, the *Heritage Gazette*, pushed his chair back from his desk and took off his glasses. He rubbed his twinkling eyes and squinted through the frosted office window.

"Sleet's letting up at last, thank God. How old are you?"

"Eighteen."

Putting his spectacles back on, Sholem perused the sheet of paper again.

"Classical ... good form, rolls off the tongue."

I chuckled at having heard that before, and thanked him.

"You are serious about being a poet?"

"Very."

"I suppose you realize it's not easy being one—making a living at it, that is. Tougher than the job of a playwright or even a novelist."

With as grim an expression as I could muster, I nodded.

"However, get one of your poems printed in a weekly like ours and you're sitting prettier than the average novelist if it flies. Do you know why?"

I indicated some uncertainty and suggested that unlike most novels, people read poems more than once. Sholem smiled and continued.

"True, and if they like your poems, the readers will search them out every week. Then at the end of a couple of years—more or less—we print a book of them and presto. Guaranteed sales. I mean, as much as they may love your work, who keeps their newspapers?"

"Few," I said. "Although I do keep clippings."

"Maybe so. Anyway, we save the readers the work by attractively packaging the compilation for them. That's how Beatrice Wilson Chalmers did it. From the rags of a Brooklyn slum to the riches of a Baltimore mansion on the back of *Liberty Monthly*."

"A remarkable ... umm ... poetess," I said.

"Yes. Amazing talent and an amazing woman. So, now that you've left high school, what are you doing while not writing poetry?"

"I have taken the rather ignominious* post of a night watchman, but it grants me time to write and get paid for it."

Sholem laughed. "Smart. I like that. That kills your social life, though, doesn't it?"

I shrugged and told him that I pack in some hours of play before I go to work, but I admitted it was a lonely existence.

ignominious: humiliating

“Well, Joey, if it produces more of this, I won’t complain. I assume you have more where this came from?”

“A full folder in my briefcase, sir. Do you wish to...?”

Sholem batted his hand. “Later. I’ll just go ahead and run this one next week. My question is, do we mention your age at the onset? It could generate interest. However...”

“I would prefer it if my work would stand on its own merit,” I said.

“My sentiments exactly. If it flops, which I seriously doubt, we’ve lost nothing. But if and when it flies, we pull out the trump card of your young age.”

I chuckled and nodded while nibbling on a fingernail. Seeing his enthusiasm, I felt quite content to let this sprightly fellow steer my poetic destiny.

“And one other point, young man. Your *name*.”

“My name? Joseph Green. ...”

“Green what ... Baum? Berg? Span?”

“Green nothing, as far as I know,” I replied. “My great grandparents were Polish immigrants, so if the surname was Green anything else, they must have cut it.”

“Makes sense. We have to survive. Hey, how about Greenleaves? That’ll go great in the literary world.”

“I suppose, if you say so,” I conceded.

“Okay. Do you have a *middle* name?”

“For some reason, my parents didn’t give me one,” I replied.

Sholem sat pensive for a moment. “We’re going to have to cook one of those up too.”

“Why?”

“It’s obvious. Even to sound credible in today’s American literature circles, especially poetry, you need three names. How about Joseph *Whitman* Greenleaves?”

“Sounds a bit long.”

“Let’s face it, young man, Joe Green isn’t going to cut it, unless you’re churning out pulp about the seamy plight of Bronx immigrants. What if Beatrice had dropped the ‘Wilson’ and stayed Betty Chalmers? The average reader would have thought she was the author of a cookbook!”

I laughed. I was now Joseph Whitman Greenleaves.



And what Joseph Whitman Greenleaves became and how he became it would be too detailed to recount here in what is supposed to be a short story*. Let it be

short story: is a literary term used to describe fictional narrative prose that tends to be more concise and to the point than longer works of fiction, such as novels. Short stories have their origins in oral storytelling traditions and the prose anecdote, a swiftly sketched situation that comes rapidly to its point.

sufficient to say that from week one, I enjoyed significant success at the publishing of my work in the *Heritage Gazette*; success that was further enhanced by the subsequent disclosure of my young age. Within two years, a volume containing over a hundred and fifty poems (with the added attraction of a number of them being “hitherto unpublished”) became a bestseller, along with other publications of my verse and short stories. Predictably, my success gained the Springs’ family’s fawning approval, and Violet and I became engaged. Sholem allotted me a couple of literary columns in the *Heritage Gazette*—one devoted to summarizing the works of past poets, known and unknown, and the other to reviewing budding young poets. Upon embarking on the latter commission, the contents of an envelope addressed to me at the *Heritage Gazette* office quelled my initial natural tendency to deprecate* any newcomer to the poetry field that posed a threat to my tenure. Though postmarked from Stonewell, the envelope bore no return address and contained an anonymous, uncannily appropriate poem. I recognized the handwriting.

*Passing on the praise,
Passing up applause,
To another giving place
For a hidden, higher cause.*

*Exulting in the one who’s
Exalted in your stead,
Making room for fleeting honors
To crown another’s head.*

*Leaving for the many
That which they seek and horde
Has only gained within me
Immeasurable reward.*

“It’s Emily!” I exclaimed to Sholem’s surprise. “It has to be.”

“Emily who?”

“Emily Winters. A poet.”

“Never heard of her. But why the anonymousness?”

“No idea. Unless it’s for the very same reason that she puts forth in this poem. She lives this creed. ...”

deprecate: to express disapproval of something; to deplore something

I paused. Something was written on the back of the sheet.

*P.S. This opportunity
Doth beg your promise solemn,
To not promote my poetry
In your weekly column.*

With sad reluctance, I honored Emily's wish, yet due to her perceptive prompting, I gladly featured Archibald Somers in my first column on aspiring poets. To my delight, the article generated many enquiries after the availability of his work, and he and I maintained a stream of mail communication over the following two or three years. Sadly, our communication diminished to a trickle and finally silence.

Nevertheless, I continued to receive Emily Winters' poetic narrative on the life of Joseph Whitman Greenleaves, and one entitled "Somers' Day," written in response to my article about Archie, became a source of incentive for me in the years to come.

*Jolly good show, dear Joey!
Slap on the back, ol' chum!
To the sweetened lure of glory
You did not succumb.*

*I'm proud of your integrity
In honoring another,
A humble hewer of poetry,
As though he were Christ's brother!*

*It took grace to lay aside
Your vanity and say,
"Get thee hence, oh foolish pride,
Make way for Somers' day."*

*So, take my commendation,
Ponder on its worth,
For it hints of treasures laden
In vaults above this Earth.*

*"Ah," you say, "but this is fanciful,
A flighty woman's dreams."*

*I say, reality in full
Is beyond what now it seems.*

*This difficult decision
To give another sway,
And slaying your ambition,
Will crown your head one day
With joyful balm of knowing
You pleased the Heart above,
Through inadvertent sowing
Of a timeless seed of love.*

*You'll say, "I saw Thee thus, but when?"
And He'll reply to thee,
"What ye've done to the least of My brethren,
"Ye've done unto Me."*



Initially, Sholem insisted that I clock in at his office in order to write the said columns—a request I could have easily declined—but I perceived that besides enjoying my company, he appreciated the opportunity to “pick” my brain concerning the magazine’s literary content. I also enjoyed his hushed insight into the current, inner workings of the media industry, particularly newspapers.

At the announcement of my marriage to Violet, however (the Springs being lucrative supporters of the *Gazette* through advertising and financing municipal and political endeavors), Sholem rescinded on his requirement that I show up at the office to work on my columns. For the reasons mentioned above, I continued to clock in anyway, even contrary to his more fervent insistence that I work at home upon hearing of Violet giving birth to our first child, Tennyson.

It was soon to be the turn of the century, however, and the world of art, music, and literature was evidently taking a turn for the worst. It seemed that those gaining attention in these fields were abandoning order, reason, and beauty for chaos, gibberish, and ugliness masquerading as art. Poetry was suffering no less. Modern “free” verse was also being masked, paraded, and touted as “artistic freedom of expression,” and any voice in the wilderness decrying it was silenced at the royal request of the media’s hidden Herodias.

And with predictable frequency, Emily Winters’ poems were arriving at the *Heritage Gazette* office, their envelopes still postmarked Stonewell, bearing no

return address and unsigned, but their contents still inscribed with the same flawless handwriting.

And with equally predictable frequency, my resolutions to contact Emily faded into my daily routine.

They did, except for one occasion when my marriage to Violet was at low ebb and I made impulsive arrangements to journey up to Stonewell. With train tickets in hand, I was walking out of my house when the postman handed me an envelope. Emily had somehow discovered my home address, and in a fortuitous display of fate, it had arrived before I had set off to meet her.

*These words may come as bittersweet,
That say for now, we cannot meet.
But it's only for the best
That you honor my request,
And stay your purpose to retrace
Your steps to see me face to face.*

*Yet pray the Father up above
To grant His blessing on our love.
That in the soil of faith it can
Patiently await the years.
And with hope's promised sunshine stand
The rains of bitter tears.*

*For love is stronger, yea, than death,
I know, but in the selfsame breath
I deem this nurture better than to let
It wither through neglect.
So take not my request as loss,
For I know someday our paths will cross—
Nay, more than cross but intertwine—
My hand in yours and yours in mine.*

To be continued...



I Thought of Emily

Part Two

The story so far: Joseph Whitman Greenleaves has come far from his humble beginnings at Stonewell Middle School, to becoming a contributing poet for a column in the illustrious *Heritage Gazette*. However, in all his success, he cannot forget his childhood friend, Emily Winters, nor escape her influence on his life.

Chapter Four

Tides of taste are changing, Joey, old boy. Hey, you could cook up some poem on that. ..."

"I don't know what you mean."

"Look, I ran that little piece by Scott Fitzpatrick. ... I don't know if you could say 'poem,' it's more like..."

"Free verse?"

"Is that what you call it? Anyway, it's modern and the readers loved it."

"Doubtless," I concurred. I watched Sholem Brookfield staring out of the window, evidently distracted, and I wondered if he was pondering on his inevitable retirement. I waited for him to comment on the weather, which he did. The leaves were turning brown earlier; it had been a short summer.

"Speaking of tides," I said, "did you read this poem I submitted by Emily Winters?"

Brookfield shook his head. "I was just about to."

"Read it," I urged.

Sholem sighed and picked up the paper.

*With heaving, churning, curling crest,
Pursuing their eternal quest,
Relentlessly they surge for home
In ceaseless, restless roar.*

*Until they all, from small to great,
Meet their common crashing fate,
And sink with crowns of milk-laced foam
Into the sandy floor.*

*Then I pondered how the sea
Like life and name, and kingdoms be.
With ebb and flow, and calm and squall,
As waves they rise and fall.*

He nodded distantly. "Nice."

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"That's all you can say, Mr. Brookfield? 'Nice'? That work is deep."

"That kind of deep doesn't make it anymore, Joey."

"What kind of deep does, sir?"

Sholem shook his head and waved his hands. "I can't explain it. People nowadays want something they can look into and never grasp. Eternally unsolvable mystery."

I pulled another sheet from my briefcase. I handed it to him. "Emily Winters sums it up in this one about poetic license and justice, poetically speaking..."

*On behalf of those who know, but loathe
To say the emperor has no clothes,
I charge much poetry today
Is drifting far from "yea" or "nay."
Such concepts that appear profound,
Wise scrutiny shall prove unsound,
And with the commoner declare with sneer,
"This ain't deep, it just ain't clear."*

*Divided though by random will,
Into four- or five-line stanzas, still,
Such work remains, I yet propose,
Pretentious babble of abstract prose.
But to pass this off as "verse,"
Is it not a travesty far worse?
Which, mocking dying poetry,
Adds insult to her injury?*

*But though her license set at liberty
Word and passion to wander free,
And all iniquity to indulge
And once unmentioned practice to divulge.
Take heart, her justice firm doth wait
With iron summons to berate,
And put to rest and silence shared with shame
E'en the best her license dared to claim.*

At least Sholem chuckled as he lay the paper down on his desk. "She does have a point, Joey. A sharp one at that! But hey, let's talk about *you*."

“Me?”

“Yeah. We’ve worked together for what ... fifteen years now?”

“Twenty or so.”

“Okay, twenty. I like you, and at the risk of sounding schmaltzy*, you’ve become like a son to me, and I don’t want to see your career slump. I’ve offered you the post of chief editor once I retire, and you’re still not interested?”

“I appreciate the offer. I want to think further about it. ...”

“Look, the *Heritage* is still the top-selling weekly, and I want to keep your regular columns. What I’m trying to say is you’re doing great, but it wouldn’t hurt to secure your future by jumping on the bandwagon.”

“What bandwagon?”

“All I suggest is that you churn out some more of that ‘free verse,’ which your poet friend decries, and you’ll stay on top. You did it before in a pinch. Anyway, I’m running Scott Fitzpatrick in ‘Poet’s Place’ every week starting now.”

I stared at the floor. *Free verse*? I knew I could do it with my eyes closed, or at least with my mind shut off and my pen driveling aimlessly on the paper. I could possibly beat the young upstart at his own game. Then I thought of Emily.

“Have you ever met him?” I heard Sholem ask. I shook my head.

“Nice kid. Scatterbrained, though. Not like you when you first came in—you were focused.”

“I would like to meet him,” I said numbly.



And I did—at a literary convention held in a Manhattan hotel six months later. Scott was a gaunt, pale, and nervous young man, possibly what was then becoming the accepted idea of an ascetic*, and yes, one would suppose a scatterbrain. But I liked him. We discussed poetry while sipping cocktails, and he—besides expressing his elation at my having named my son Tennyson* and my daughter Shelley*—to my surprise and carefully concealed ego boost, declared his admiration for my past work. “Classical,” I reminded him. “Of that I am painfully aware,” he rejoined and with unexpected candor said, “I would write that way if I could.”

He smiled in response to my raised eyebrows.

“I took the easy way out,” he went on. “You, on the other hand, can write beautifully classical, and yet you have been successful at free verse.”

schmaltzy: Yiddish (adj.) old fashioned, sentimental

ascetic: choosing or reflecting austerity and self-denial as personal or religious discipline

Lord Alfred Tennyson (1809–1892) was a popular British poet of the 19th century.

Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822) was one of the major English Romantic poets.

"It's a charade," I whispered. "I have a wife and family and it pays the bills."

"Aye, but the very fact that you can write classical poetry with no apparent strain and yet choose to write free verse endorses it in such a way that I, a clumsy babbler in the classical, am unable to do. The irony is that I can remain a clumsy babbler in the asylum of modern verse!"

Ashamed, I could say nothing for a while. I thought of Emily.

"But there is one greater than me," I said finally with a wry smile. "Her pen I am not worthy to dip in ink!"

"A woman! Ah..."

"A childhood friend. I expect her to outdo me any day. Emily Winters."

"Can't say I have heard of her. Still writing?"

I shrugged. "To a degree."



"Poets used to meet together to savor reason, rhyme, and rhythm. ..." Scott was later saying to my pleased astonishment.

I thought of Emily. *The taste of words!*

He and I had reconvened at his lodgings overlooking Central Park to continue our discourse, Scott having opened a choice beverage, courtesy of a recent visit to his Irish kin.

"But now they merely nod their heads in pretense of understanding for fear of peer banishment."

"That is true," I said. "There is no longer a savoring, just acknowledgement. Endorsement that this painting, piece of music, work of literature—what have you—although I do not understand it, is the work of genius. I am taught, nay, virtually *commanded* to love it!"

We laughed long into the night, toasting and talking, and verbally tearing to shreds the ramblings of the latest and supposed greatest.

"Take Clarence Lord Sales, for instance..."

*I betook to the road
Freethinking*

"I know it," I said, and laughingly quoted along with him.

*Notwithstanding
The passion that drove me onward*

Inward

As a potion flushing

My innards

With virgin-like flutter of

Discovery.

When I arrived home that evening, having thought of Emily, I picked up my pen and described the conclusion of that enjoyable evening as follows:

But as we shared a toast again,

And roared with gloating glee,

We knew with undisclosed chagrin

That Sales had sold more poetry.

And though Scott and I parted drunken at the door

And blearily agreed,

That the evening did provoke in thought;

I venture to propose that we'd

Silently concluded

It would never be in deed.

The following week I worked on the aspiring poets' column and, thinking of Emily, featured Scott Fitzpatrick himself, having solicited from him what he considered the best examples of his verse. Upon reading them with a more open view, I discovered that although his poems fell into the category of blank or free verse, they contained substance and clear meaning. In fact, I enjoyed their refreshing, random movement, and said so in the article. Emily commented on my synopsis in the following poem.

Though clarity be out of time

And classic out of season,

If poetry boweth not to rhyme

She must needs stand to reason.

I say again, though risk the crime

Of literary treason,

If poetry boweth not to rhyme

She must needs stand to reason.

Chapter Five

There came a day, when I was about forty-two years of age, that the relatively smooth sailing of my life's barque* ran into turbulent waters. Due to an indiscretion on Violet's part, my marriage was heading for the rocks. I had placed great stock in our secure and comfortable existence, and now it was as though the couch, carpet, and even the ground itself had been ripped out from beneath me. With predictably uncanny insight, Emily Winters encapsulated my predicament in simple but poignant verse.

*Hints,
Like tints
Of subtle shade and hue,
Did I once impart
My heart's
Innermost thoughts to you.
And so
I throw
My pride into the dust
And meekly
Speak
Of Him in Whom I trust.
The Man
Who can
Console you in your trial
When pain
Must feign
An even-tempered smile.
In shed,
Blood red,
I now proclaim my view.
Jesus,
Christ Jesus,
The One to hold onto.*

barque: sailing vessel of three or more masts

Jesus Christ? He had asked Emily to step down from winning the prize that day in Stonewell Middle School. Why? Because Emily loved *me*. Sitting with this poem in hand, I logically concluded that if He had told her to do that, then He must love me. Consequently, that very evening in my study lit by only a fire in the grate, I whispered a prayer to Him. I don't remember exactly what I said, but it was a confession of acceptance of Him, and a profound peace fell upon my heart.

I now know it was a result of my feeble prayer, but after further contemplation, I suddenly found myself asking just what makes the difference between good and bad verse. If I were to apply, regardless of style, the same criterion when judging classical or modern verse, what gives one spark and life, while leaving another dark and dead?

Was it beauty? To a degree it was, I conjectured. Along with reason, of course. But there was a more important element, and like Archimedes leaping out of the bathtub, I felt I could have declared my discovery from the rooftops.

Love! It's all about love.

Trite? The sated, cynical soul could consider this truth as such, but at that moment, it dawned on me as the secret of the ages. This magical, living, breathing, creative element permeated Emily Winters' poems, of course, even those of censure—and even those of Scott Fitzpatrick.

And what of Clarence Lord Sales?

I picked out a volume of his early work from my bookshelf. Generous as I attempted to be in my appraisal; morbid, cynically lofty, and senseless were the only words I could find to describe it, and except for an ambiguous declaration of a scorching craving for an individual—relation, age, or gender not specified—no *love*.

Love. I sat cogitating* on this truth until the fire died in the grate. Had my work so far displayed this mysterious intrinsic* quality in all its forms? I ruthlessly reflected on it, and to my pleasant surprise, concluded that most of it had! And though some of my earlier material bore the tincture of haughty, untried observation, nevertheless an underlying golden thread of generous benefit of doubt ran through it. I had unknowingly observed through the eyes of this all-encompassing wonder. Well, I had thought of Emily. And I thought of Emily as I slid the book of Clarence Lord Sales' early works back into the bookcase and even considered giving him the benefit of the doubt by featuring him in my column on contemporary poets. My fleeting consideration remained just that.

cogitate: to think deeply and carefully about something

intrinsic: one of the basic and essential features that make something what it is



Fortunately, my conversion, which endowed my nature with the virtues of mercy and forgiveness, salvaged my marriage to Violet, and she became a believer. Over the following years at *Heritage Gazette*, I continued to receive at least two or three poems a month from Emily Winters. They encompassed topics from nature—environmental, animal, human, and divine—to poignant observations of everyday life that polished seeming insignificance to a fascinating luster. Other poems, however, continued to eerily pinpoint, with praise or reproach, a significant choice I had made at that point in my life. Unsurprisingly, as I now knew better, the success of my senseless free verse solicited the most scathing censure in the following poem.

*Appalled, I've pondered your last submissions,
And who would sanction such commissions.
An avaricious* editor I presumed,
Who, with lust for gain consumed,
Would disseminate supposed art
Inscribed with pen but not with heart.
So I searched long for name or face,
Anywhere the blame to place.
For charity so strong and true
Could never lay it all on you.*

"So, who was it from?" Violet asked as she entered my study, having seen me perusing this particular missive. "Another admirer?"

I shook my head.

"That makes a change," she said, straightening the paperweight on my desk. "But you seem disturbed."

I opened a desk drawer and placed the letter in a burgeoning file folder marked "From Emily."

"You can't please them all," I muttered, though aware that I was without excuse.

"Darling, I don't wish to pry," said Violet. "But that folder still seems to mean a lot to you."

"In some ways, yes ... she's a..."

"A poet. I know, you told me. Look, if I can pull you away from your pondering,

avaricious: excessive desire for money, possessions

Tennyson and his fiancée are banking on our joining them in a game of bridge.”

“I’ll be there,” I said.

Wandering through our manor’s opulence, I reflected on the fruits of my success. After employing me as assistant editor of the *Heritage Gazette* for five years, Sholem Brookfield had promoted me to chief editor just two years before his retirement. He retained the title in print until the sad day he officially left the office and passed away the following year, disillusioned with the state of journalism, much as I was with poetry.

The ideology that truth was more intriguing than fiction was retreating from the collective American mind as the infant king of Hollywood conquered its territory, and Sholem felt that truth was becoming a less saleable commodity in the face of sensationalism that was satisfying a satiated readership. He blamed this state of affairs not only on the public’s appetite but also on an increasingly powerful unseen “they” who stringently censored every printed sentence and celluloid frame.

Fortunately for me, however, my books were selling steadily and as head of the Poet’s Society of America, I received a government stipend through its much-touted advancement of the “arts.” I gave lectures, interviews, wrote articles, all of which kept me occupied with travel and otherwise, but monetary stability came mainly from my recent volume of free verse. The publisher was greedy for more and was offering an increased percentage of the profits.

As I mused on these matters and gazed at my surrounding sumptuous bric-a-brac*, ornaments, and oil paintings, I yet again thought of Emily. Her recent incisive communication in verse was not unlike her gaze that day in the classroom. Once more, I momentarily vowed to contact her, but Tennyson and his fiancée were awaiting our game of bridge. Nevertheless, in light of the coming Poet of the Year award, I gathered up a collection of Emily Winters’ poems to present to the poet’s council the following week.



“This is Emily Winters’ work,” I announced, as I passed carbon copies of typewritten papers to a circle of somber faces gathered in a conference room at the New York Public Library. “A great poet.”

“Never heard of her.”

“Does that make her work any less great?”

bric-a-brac: small ornamental objects that are of interest or sentimental value

I waited in the grave silence that followed as the members read.

"It's good," someone finally remarked.

"I agree," said another. "Excellent."

"It panders to the bourgeoisie*," squeaked Evan Schiel, an edgy, bearded, and bespectacled newcomer to the council. "As do all classically academic poets."

"And Clarence Lord Sales, for instance, does not?" I asked.

"Come, come, Mr. Greenleaves, sir. How can you even *mention* this Emily ... whoever ... and Lord Sales in the same breath?"

"Very easily, without even drawing one. And I will expend most of it on extolling the work of Emily Winters. Let me remind you, and all of us here, that Sales panders to the bourgeoisie as much as, or even more so, than any of us with his undeserved receiving of their grants and endorsement. Even most of his readership comprises the idle rich and its offspring. The remaining lesser mortals either have too much integrity to pretend to read into his contrived convolutions or are too busy with more essential matters to even try to."

"But this woman's work is sentimental, trite, and ... *derivative*," Schiel said, smirking with triumphant emphasis on the last adjective. "I relegate her work to obscurity. Granted, my endorsement matters little against the established order."

"That's not the issue, Evan," I said. "Classical or not, her work deserves recognition. Note the rhyme and meter, alliteration* and assonance*, qualities that we as poets must still regard as essential."

"Maybe you of the old guard do, Mr. Greenleaves, but we advanced literary thinkers regard those so-called virtues as hampering at worst and inconsequential at best. The enlightened cardinal rule of modern poetry—as in any art of worth today—is that there are no rules! However, what gives me greater concern is the fact that you having some sort of 'last word' in poetry today endows your endorsement with unmerited power."

To my remembrance, I did not reply to Evan Schiel's objections, but put forward my vote for Emily Winters. I left that committee meeting slightly ruffled, but with greater determination to set about publishing her lyrical correspondence to me in a volume entitled *The Taste of Words—Poems to a Poet*, by Emily Winters.

The following poem, her last one to me, which I received on the 25th of April 1925, I decided to put in the opening, dedicatory page.

bourgeoisie: affluent middle-class people characterized as conventional, conservative, or materialistic in outlook

alliteration: the repetition of the same sound at the beginning of each word or each stressed word in a phrase

assonance: correspondence or resemblance in the sounds of words or syllables, either between their vowels, e.g., in "meet" and "bean," or between their consonants, e.g., in "keep" and "cape".

*I am a poet too, not great,
And boast no crown of laureate,
Yet I trust that, as mouth tasteth meat,
My words your test has proven sweet.
For is it not true that on that day
It shall be by the words we say,
Whether verbalized or penned
We'll be pardoned or condemned?*

Chapter Six

Of course, in order to publish a volume of Emily's work I needed her permission, so with ailing health in the latter years of my fifth decade, and more than two thousand of her poems in my possession, I purposed to return to Stonewell, the town of my birth, which I had not seen for forty-seven years. Upon arriving, my chauffeur Henry and I spent a night in a hotel, where I inquired after the Winters' family. The next day, I discovered from an aging local pastor who invited us in for coffee and muffins, that Emily's parents were long deceased and her brother, two years her junior, was a locksmith in nearby Rockport.

But what had become of Emily?

"You didn't know?" the pastor asked.

I shook my head and he shook his, although in sad reminiscence.

"A rare blood disease."

"Really?"

The pastor nodded. "A unique and wonderful girl. A joy to others in the town."

"Of that I have no doubt," I said, and as I shared his reflection, I suddenly recognized him and told him so.

"Pastor 'Baggy' Biggs!" I exclaimed with a grin. "We kids would nickname you that on account of your baggy flannel breeches!"

He laughed and nodded. "And I still wear them, as you can see. And you do too!"

"They're back in fashion!" I said, jocularly*. "But speaking of Emily Winters, she must have passed away only recently. For barely a month ago I received communication from her."

Pastor Biggs looked at me askance. "What manner of communication was it, if I may ask?"

"Poetry, nothing more, and anonymous."

"And you *know* it is Miss Winters?"

"Absolutely. The style, though developed over the years, of course, is unmistakably hers—the handwriting even more so."

Pastor Biggs stood up. "Unless you want more refreshments, may I show you something?"

"Certainly."

"Come with me."

jocular: humorous

Leaving Henry at the car, I followed the pastor out to a graveyard situated on the hill behind the church, where he pointed to an overgrown gravestone and said, "Once you have meditated on this, I suggest you pay a visit to Victoria Falls."

"That's a rather long way, isn't it?" I said.

"That is, *she* isn't. Miss Falls lives in a slate stone cottage some ways out of the town on the road to Rockport. You can't miss it. The cottage is called 'Poet's Pique*,' with an 'i-q-u-e' not 'e-a-k.'

"I will leave you to your reflection," he said upon seeing my look of shock as I pondered the gravestone. He bowed and departed.

*The Son of God lives in my heart,
And He'll ne'er e'er depart.
His grace it is that saved My soul,
Filled me, thrilled me and made me whole.
He has given me true love
That only comes from up above.
I declare it even to the moon,
Why?
Because it rhymes with June.*

Emily Winters. Born 3 March 1868. Died 25 June 1881.



"Good afternoon, madam," I said later that day as I stood on the steps of Poet's Pique cottage, facing a regal-looking woman of about my age wearing a blue velvet robe; her blonde, graying hair neatly coiffed in a bun. Struck by her clear grey eyes, I reflected that the "silent realm" in this case was a sparkling lake of serenity. "My name is Joseph. ..."

"Joseph Whitman Greenleaves. I know, I was expecting you. And I assume this is your chauffeur, Henry. So pleased to meet you. Do come in."

"Pastor Biggs informed you?" I asked.

"He did not. But I was informed. Tea?"

Baffled by Victoria's air of precognition, I nevertheless accepted her offer of tea. She led us to the living room and instructed her maid to prepare the brew

pique: (v.) interest, intrigue

together with a tray of blueberry shortcake. Henry, sensing a desire for candor on the part of the lady and me, excused himself for a cigar outside.

"*The Complete Works of Joseph Whitman Greenleaves*," I remarked with a chuckle, having been perusing the bookshelf. "Recent?"

"Yes, I purchased it just yesterday, actually."

"Hmm, I had no idea the company had published such a volume. Sounds portentously posthumous*, though!"

"Could be."

Her remark startled me, and she perceived it. "Oh, I do hope that my extra-sensory manner does not alarm you, Mr. Greenleaves."

I indicated that it did not, but said that I would appreciate some explanations.

"Pardon me, ma'am," I went on to say, "but to get straight to the point on the nature of my visit, what is the link between you and Emily Winters?"

"She was and is a good friend."

Is? I wondered. I pulled the folder out of my briefcase and laid it on the coffee table between us.

"I gather you have something to do with these."

Victoria nodded. "As a go-between."

"Go-between?"

"Yes. A sort of mediator between Emily Winters and yourself, Mr. Greenleaves."

"But how do you account for this work?" I demanded, despite feeling inwardly cautioned on my annoyance. "Who ... wrote these?"

"Emily, of course. More tea?"

I shook my head, exasperated. The woman remained collected and assured.

"But she's been dead forty-odd years, ma'am, and I never knew!"

"It's not really that important when it comes down to it, Mr. Greenleaves. Emily Winters is not 'dead.' In fact, she's not even sleeping.

"This is proof positive," she added, tapping the wad of manuscripts. "I could never lay claim to this, not in a million years. I have absolutely no gift for writing—literature or otherwise. Let alone poetry."

"But I gather you *did* write it?"

"*Literally*, yes. Putting pen to paper."

"I'm sorry, ma'am, but I don't understand."

"I grant it is a little hard to believe, but you see, Mr. Greenleaves, Emily dictated this all to me. Every word. It is her style, is it not? Not to mention the handwriting."

posthumous: published or printed after the author's death

"True, it is," I said. "So what is this? Some kind of necromancy*?"

"I believe in Jesus," Victoria replied. "I was raised strictly religious. Quaker. But I have had these proclivities since childhood."

"What? Seeing ghosts?"

"*Hearing*, Mr. Greenleaves. Hearing voices—*good* voices. None countering or opposing what I have learned from Scripture, but rather confirming it. This gave me great solace. But upon disclosing the nature of these occurrences to my parents, they marched me off to the local pastor, an interview which resulted in an interrogation before a church council bordering on an inquisition and my eventual banishment from the Society of Friends. Thenceforth, after much deliberation and prayer, I joined a spiritualist type of church, which accommodated and encouraged what they deemed my gift. In fact, many members called upon me to 'listen' for instruction from the blessed departed. I often did so, resulting in comfort and instruction for others.

"It's an enormous responsibility," she earnestly added, taking my hand.

"But how did you know I would not return to Stonewell, and, you know, *uncover this*?"

"Emily continually reassured me that you wouldn't come until the right time," Victoria replied.

"But how did she enter your, er ... *realm*?"

"I was Emily's best friend while she was alive. Do you remember?"

"Victoria Falls," I said pensively and chuckled, astonished. "Of course! Now I remember. We teased you because of your name. The place had not long been discovered."

"Marriage could have delivered me from such ridicule!" she said.

"You never did?"

"Marry? No. When I was nineteen, I was engaged to a charming young man, Albert Weatherby. He died a few months later of a strange condition they couldn't diagnose. He was my first and last love."

"I'm sorry about that."

"Oh, I am long over it. Besides, Victoria and Albert would have drawn its own occasions for mirth!"

I laughed. I liked the woman, and though I sensed a warm bond growing, I suddenly felt tired ... so tired that I only wanted to get back to the car and go ... I knew not where. I stood up.

necromancy: the practice of communicating with the spirits of the dead in order to predict or influence the future

"Henry...," I called out falteringly, holding my forehead as I leaned on my cane. He, prompt as ever, was at the living room door.

"Henry, m-make ready the car."

"Are you sure you won't stay for supper?" Victoria asked.

"Thank you, but I really should be going."

"I know," she said and clasping my hand, kissed my brow. "It's time to go home. You have Emily's permission, by the way."

"P-permission?" I asked, my voice fading to a whisper. "For what?"

"To publish *The Taste of Words*. That's what you originally came here for, wasn't it?"

I nodded. Suddenly, Victoria gave a start and walked over to the bookcase.

"Oh, and she naturally wants to include the contents of this in it," she added, placing a small, decoratively bound notebook on top of the manuscripts. It was Emily's book of poetry that she showed me in the Stonewell schoolhouse that late afternoon so long ago.

"Of course...," I said.

"Under the circumstances I suppose we should leave the details of its publishing with your wife and Henry."

"That would be best," I gasped.

"Wonderful, Mr. Greenleaves," she said. "I must not detain you from your journey home. It's been a pleasure meeting you. I will see you shortly."

I managed to bid Miss Falls goodnight and with even greater difficulty than usual, I hobbled to the car and climbed in. This time not refusing Henry's aid.

"Now that we've paid our visit to Victoria Falls," he said merrily, "I would propose that home, a hot meal, and bed will do you the world of good, sir."

I smiled weakly, barely able to prop myself up on the back seat. Henry instinctively took the cue and the car roared off into the night.

By now, I was unable to keep my eyes open and my body was beginning to feel weightless. I felt a sudden slight tug on my heart and I was no longer struggling for air—in fact, it was as if I didn't need to breathe. Then I heard a rushing wind and I was shooting through a dark void while sensing a light ahead of me.

Chapter Seven

It is still difficult to describe, but it was as though I tumbled into that light and gently landed on my feet; the grassy ground seeming like a soft cushion. Someone was walking toward me and I could discern a woman's form in the hazy glow. She spoke.

"Hello, Joey. Welcome home."

I recognized neither the voice nor the form until it drew closer.

It was Emily Winters; older, taller, still recognizable, but radiantly beautiful, dressed in a sparkling diaphanous* gown resembling a Grecian toga, and her tangled mass of white gold locks was glowing like a crown. She took my hand. The light had diffused and was now bathing a path upon which we were walking. "I suppose you know by now that you're dead, for want of a better word!" she said gaily.

"Funny. I hadn't even thought of it," I said. "But now that you mention it, I suppose I am! Er ... this *is* Heaven, is it not?" I added.

Emily laughed and gestured at the surrounding rolling green hills. "Why would it be anywhere else? Can you imagine anywhere more beautiful?"

I admitted I couldn't.

"I was so happy for your successes," Emily said at length after I had taken a few moments to absorb the surrounding splendor. "You deserved it."

"But, Emily, it was unmerited."

"Who says?"

"You told me in so many words ... in your poems reprimanding my prostituting poetry for profit."

"One poem," she said and took my hand. We were now strolling, almost floating along a rose-bordered marble pathway flanking a sparkling lake that hosted a group of splashing, exuberant children.

"And if you had, that had nothing to do with your success, believe it or not," Emily said as though she was now delivering a perceptively received answer to my question. "By and large, Joey, you made the right choices regarding people along the way, at the possible cost of your own success—choices based on love, such as promoting that widowed, old poetess in your column, or even Scott Fitzpatrick. ..."

"Much like you did ... with me," I said. "I never forgot it."

"I know."

"But what about you, Emily? Although I tried, the poems you dictated to Victoria received neither the success nor even the recognition they deserved."

diaphanous: transparent

“On Earth, Joey. But what of it? Success for me was seeing the repercussions in the lives of those your decisions affected as a result of mine. Archibald Somers, for instance. ...”

“Archie? He and I lost touch after awhile. ... What happened with him?”

“He became a teacher of literature. It was not our Heavenly Father’s perfect will for Archie to be a renowned poet, but due to your obvious vexation at having won over him at that poetry competition and your promotion of him in your column, he resolved to encourage the success of others, even to his own hurt. Clarence Lord Sales for one, who became one of the most successful proponents of modern free verse.”

“Really?” I said. “At the expense of Archie’s failure, I gather.”

Emily smiled. “True in some ways, but to this day, Sales attributes his achievement to the encouragement of an insignificant teacher of classical verse—Archibald Somers, who renounced a chance for success to make way for Clarence Sales.”

“How on earth did he do that?”

“The details escape me now,” said Emily. “But the irony of it all, and possibly the greatest result, is that Mr. Sales will be the very one who will decide to print and promote *The Taste of Words—Poems to a Poet* through Pickwick!”

“Pickwick?”

“His own publishing company! Victoria will contact him. You can even dictate a foreword to her through me.”

I was still shaking my head in wonder when we stopped at the brow of a hill overlooking the lake and a boat moored at its edge.

“Poet’s Pique,” I said, remarking on the inscription on the boat’s prow.

“Yes. Come, let us launch out!”

With her hand still in mine, we ran down the steep embankment.

“We don’t really need these,” she said once we had clambered into the boat and she had taken hold of the oars. “But it’s nice to occasionally experience the sensation of rowing and having *some* imaginary control of your destiny!”

“You mean to say that you no longer do?”

Emily laughed. “There is an element of such if we would wish it that way, but in all truth, most of us don’t! The guidance of His all-pervading love is always for our ultimate good and even pleasure. Do you not sense it?”

Having been so embroiled in meeting Emily and our consequent exchange, I had to admit that I hadn’t. I took a few moments metaphorically to “breathe in” the atmosphere that enveloped us. I smiled.

No, I would not wish it any other way.

Seeing my glad realization, Emily continued. “Anyway, I would often come here and take the boat out onto the lake where I would receive and ‘project’ my poems to

the only receptive ... 'receiver' I could find there on Earth—my best friend, Victoria Falls."

"Miss Falls," I said with fondness. "Thank God for her."

"Yes. Thank God for her." Emily paused from rowing and as the boat drifted and we stared into what was like a sunless sunset sinking into the lake's not so distant horizon, she smiled and said, "Her mission on Earth is done."

"Her mission?"

"Yes, you! She'll be joining us shortly."



*The years from days to months did pass
During which I'd peered through darkened glass,
And thought of Emily.
Times when I would tempted be
To ignore a need and think of me,
I thought of Emily.
Or sway to opinion's rising tide
That says that virtue lies in pride,
I thought of Emily.
And though I ne'er fulfilled my yen*
To visit her in flesh or pen,
I thought of Emily.
Do I censure thwarted purpose,
Or my faint resolve?
Neither one, 'tis clear, because
'Twas not yet time to solve
My lifetime's taunting mystery
Of why I thought of Emily.
Until the day together we,
On a celestial lake would sail,
Joyfully reflecting on the parting of the veil
That hung 'twixt her and me,
And hid the haunting mystery
Of why I thought of Emily.*

The End

yen: yearning