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## Poetry.

### The Reproach.

Has doubt compell'd that heart of thine  
To think me false to thee?  
Believe, Jeanette, the pain is mine,  
And thou art false to me.  
How could'st thou think that I would wrong—  
Or be to thee untrue;  
I, who have loved so deep and long,  
And been so faithful too!  
From childhood we have loved, Jeanette—  
Since those bright days of yore,  
When first as little ones we met,  
Outside the schoolhouse door,  
I loved thee, too, when, as a boy,  
I led thee by the hand,  
And thought each smile of thine a joy—  
Each wish a sweet command.  
Do you forget how, at the fair,  
When we last met, to part—  
I placed a rosebud in your hair,  
And clasp'd you to my breast?  
"Dear maid," I cried, "for thee I live,  
And Death shall claim this breast  
Before a thought of mine shall give  
One pang to mar thy rest."  
Believe, Jeanette, I'm still the same,  
I love thee even now;  
I still dwell fondly on thy name;  
I still repeat the vow.  
Then be to me the same again,  
A maiden fond and dear;  
For truth like mine should know no pain,  
Nor love like mine a tear.

## Miscellany.

[From the Independent.]

### The Little House at the Crossing.

It stood right at the railroad crossing—a small, homely house, with a low, unpainted door and three narrow slips of windows. Any one would have called it ugly in winter, crowded in between its dingy neighbors and the iron track, along which the trains went screeching day and night, sometimes fairly stifling the house in black, sulphury smoke.

But in summer that was another thing. The little three-cornered yard was exactly filled by three flower beds, bordered with turf and crowded to the very edge with Johnny-jump-ups, grass-pinks, none-so-pretties, four-o'clocks, and all manner of sensible old-fashioned beauties, that grew without a night of coaxing. And the morning glories started with the first of May, and climbed up in green rows, never once stopping until they hid all the brown wall and dangled down from the eaves.

Behind the house was another little wedge of ground, as full as the flower-garden, only that the borders were of pale green lettuce and curly cress; while radishes, onions, peas, and cabbage fairly elbowed each other for a chance at the mellow soil.

At the end of this garden was a queer, low shop—so low you never left off wondering about it until you chanced to see, standing in his place at the switch, a little man, a hunchback, only four feet high. The house, and the shop, and the two gardens all belonged to him, Tom Larkin, the switch-tender. The name was on a board over the shop-door, done in black letters:

### Tom LARKIN, CISTRENS.

You might not see at first just what was the matter with the crazy little sign, especially if you were on the express, which goes by without stopping; and I assure you it did not make a particle of difference, for Tom had given up the cistren business, and only kept the sign because Maggie painted it and he fancied it looked respectable.

That reminds me to tell you about Maggie; for you might pass a great many times and not see her. But if you chanced on a fine day, when the wind blew the smoke to the west, to come down on the Cranston mail and wait at the switch for the express to pass up, you'd be pretty sure to hear some one singing like a blackbird, and see a small girl, with an old face, sitting in the doorway, busy with straws and ribbons. Always busy and always singing, in spite of the crutch leaning against her chair—a pitiful little beggar, that stood there through the singing, and said as plain as a battered old stick could say:

"She's a cripple and she sings. They are as happy as the day is long, and one's a cripple and t'other a hunchback. What do you think of that?"

Well, to be sure, it did seem hard at first thought; but, when you came to know all about it, you'd see plainer than ever how the Lord never forgets the least of his little ones, but follows them all with his tender mercies, and the Lord's tender mercies are good all the way through.

It was Christmas Eve when Maggie came to the little house at the crossing. Tom Larkin sat brooding over his fire, without so much as a cat or a dog to keep him company. Christmas was coming on Sunday that year, and Tom had been down to the market to buy his bit of dinner, and had seen the shops lighted up, and the children shouting about the windows, and people hurrying along with all manner of mysterious bundles; and the jollity and merriment made him more wretched and lonesome than ever. Why should he, of all the world, have nothing for which to be glad on Christmas Eve? The very crossing sweepers danced with their muddy brooms and rattled the coppers in their pockets, but he had not a soul to wish him well or care if it went ill with him. It seemed all the worse because there had been some one, not so very long ago.

The wife who loved him, in spite of his deformity, had only been dead a year; and though he felt that, somewhere and somehow, she was with the blessed, he had never learned to think of her as a Christmas angel, singing the old song of peace and good will to men.

So Tom was lonesome as he sat by his fire waiting until the sound of hurrying steps and noisy voices should cease, as it did after awhile. The lights went out, too, from all the houses in the neighborhood, and Tom's lantern burned on until it was time to set the switch for the night express. Then he went out gloomily, swinging his lantern, and never once looking up. He could hear the faint whistle of the train, three minutes late that night. He wondered at it as he set the switch.

Down the long street, right and left, all was still and dark, only at the bridge, where the night patrol made a restless black shadow on the little strip of light. Overhead the stars were glittering; and away beyond them, Tom thought, was God, forgetting all his poor. Up and down for a little way the red gleam of the lantern showed the cindery road and the dull black rails; showed the little frozen puddles between the ties; and something else—Tom was not quite sure what—a small dark bundle lying upon the track. He had it in his hands in a moment. None too soon, for the express came thundering down, and the engineer had a glimpse of something darting away from the very brink of destruction. But Tom had the bundle, and, with his breath coming quick and hard, he turned into the house, and laid it down in the light of the fire.

"It's a baby, and it's dead!" he said, opening the dirty old shawl and looking curiously at the white, pinched face and thin, blue lips. Never in all his life had Tom touched a baby before; and his dull heart stirred a little as he lifted the small, pallid hands, and let them fall again, stroked the cold cheek with his coarse finger, and then, folding the shawl about it, laid it on the foot of his bed. Just as he laid it down the Christmas chimes began to ring from the St. Madeline steeple, and poor Tom stopped his ears with his pillow, and said in his angry heart: "It is all a lie. There is neither peace nor good will."

Tom slept late the next morning. He liked his Sunday-morning nap, when there was no train to waken for, and nothing else, indeed—no Christmas greeting from wife or child. He thought of it sorrowfully, lying half awake, with the red sunshine streaming across his face. Then he started up with a sudden remembrance of the little bundle

in the dirty old shawl. It seemed warm, and not cold, lying there at his feet; and he almost thought it stirred a little, as the sunbeams, full of flickering, dusty notes, laid long, bright figures upon it. He opened the shawl, half dreading to see the wan face by daylight; and oh, wonder! the great sorrowful eyes were wide open, and the baby looked in his face with the mute, appealing patience of one used to nothing but utter neglect, and making no claim upon any loving care.

How soon the fire blazed again upon the hearth, and how tenderly Tom's clumsy fingers held the cup, with its draught of strong coffee, to the baby's mouth. He had a vague impression that milk was the proper food for babies. But milk he had none; and the little one showed its appreciation of the situation by eagerly swallowing the coffee, and going off into a sleep a shade less like death. It slept on and on, while Tom ate his breakfast and took counsel of his heart. "I'll bring Mistress McBride to look at it," said Tom, at last. And so he did.

The motherly old body laid it tenderly on her knee, chafed the thin, pallid hands, and stretched out the little cramped feet to the blaze, while Tom looked on, wondering and anxious.

"So, so, poor thing, poor lamb!" said the nurse. "She's beginning to come round a bit. 'Deed, then, Mister Larkin, the croolty of this world is past believin'." The baby's been drugged 'till its brains is all of a water; an' to think of layin' the poor innocent on the track!"

"Might have been dropped accidental," suggested Tom.

"Might be," said the nurse, "some poor drunken creetur'." And she dipped her finger in the coffee and moistened the baby's mouth.

"Here's teeth, Mister Larkin," said she, triumphantly—"stummick teeth and grinders; the baby's goin' on two year, if she's a day. I wouldn't wonder now, if she pulled through, after all."

Tom's face lighted up, as if this were good news; and then fell again, as he added: "Her mother'll be after her, most like."

"Like enough," said the nurse, "some poor creatur' has used her for beggin' pupposes; and she's been drugged with gin and what not to keep her from growin'."

Tom looked so angry that she hastened to add: "There's a-many folks does it, and maybe this one got sick of the child and left it. Look at that, now," said she, as the baby opened her eyes and fixed them on the dancing flames; "she's comin' round peart enough. An' what'll you do with her, then, Mister Larkin?"

"Keep her," said Tom, without any hesitation.

"The Lord be good to ye, Mister Larkin. The baby's sure to bring a blessing, coming on Christmas, and Sunday too." And the old nurse bent her gray head and kissed the little skinny face on her knee.

Poor baby! She knew well enough what blows meant, and cold and hunger; but in all her little life she had no experience of love and tenderness. So she lay quiet and unresponsive, only her eyes seemed to follow the dancing flames.

"I'll go and see to my old man, now," said Mistress McBride. "Just you lay her in the warm, and give her time to come rightly to herself. I'll brew her some porridge, and fetch it after a bit."

News traveled fast at the crossing; and by the time Mistress McBride started out with her bowl of porridge all the neighbors knew of the baby at Tom Larkin's. "I'd take it kindly of you, Mister Larkin," said the nurse, "if you'd come over in a friendly way and have your bit of a dinner with us. There's my old man, bed-ridden, as you may say,

to his chair, and he do get uncommon lonesome; and it's many a year since a baby came under our roof."

"They're plenty enough hereabouts," said Tom, with his old gruff way. But in a moment his face broke into a twinkle of a smile, as he added:

"Well, well, I'll come over. What a thing it is, now, to have a baby!" And all the neighbors started in wonder to see nurse McBride carrying the baby home in her arms, as carefully as if it had been a little princess; and Tom walking after, with a proud air—proud of his baby, to be sure.

The nurse was right. The baby brought a blessing. The dear Lord sent her a messenger before his face to prepare the way for him to enter into that humble little house and that poor heart. Even Tom found that Maggie would always be a cripple, let her live as long as she might. It only brought a little cloud on his sunshine. "It'll turn for the best, some way," he said. "We've both our cross to carry; and maybe it'll keep us nearer to each other and the Lord."

As for Maggie, everything was right to her. She sung, and smiled, and kept the little house full of sunshine, in spite of the crutch, which never seemed a bit in her way. Every Christmas Eve they two sat together by the fire, and Tom told the story of the baby that lay upon the track; and Maggie listened, with her eyes shining in the firelight, and even the cross, grumbling old crutch grew amiable for awhile.

"I thought the good Lord had forgotten all about me, away up yonder among his angels; and all the time he was nigh at hand, a takin' thought how to save me," said Tom, with reverent wonder.

"He's a good Lord, Father," said Maggie.

"Yes, a good Lord," said Tom, fervently. "Do you mind the hymn they learned you at mission-school, Maggie—

"To save thy soul from sin and shame  
Thy Lord a helpless child became?"

Well, I can't seem to get it out of my head that the Lord did more than that for me. He came twice for me; once in Bethlehem, that time the angels sung; and once ten years ago this very night, right here at the crossing. And it's my mind the Lord comes to a-many doors where they never know what they lose by shutting of him out."

"I've got my Christmas gifts all ready," said Maggie. "Such a lot of 'em, too!" And, picking up the crutch, before it had a chance to growl, she whisked it over the floor to the corner cupboard, and back again, with a big covered basket. "See, Father! Something for everybody at the crossing." And Maggie spread out the gifts, enough to load down St. Nicholas himself. Warm cloth slippers for old Sandy McBride. Cut out by an old shoe and shaped like the foot of a gouty elephant; but that was no matter.

"The tailor gave me the pieces," said Maggie, "and quilted the soles on his big machine. And this flannel night-cap is for Granny Peters; she's been wishing for one a long time." She clapped it on her own bright head, and looked so funny even the crutch laughed a little.

Well, I cannot begin to tell you. Soft balls and hard balls; rag dollies, paper dollies and queer little old dollies, with heads made from hickory nuts, looking in their Quaker dresses and white caps like a regiment of blessed grandmothers. Pretty pictures, pasted on box covers and painted gaily; mittens, made of old stocking-tops and finished with bright yarns at the wrist; pin-cushions, holders, all manner of ingenious little trifles, manufactured out of odds and ends of ribbon, calico and silk. Nothing came amiss to Maggie.

"Something for everybody but me," said Tom, pretending to look grave.

"Oh, dear!" said Maggie. "But you and I don't want any Christmas gifts. I don't see how anything could possibly make us any happier."

All the time the old crutch was laughing to itself. It knew of two secrets. One was a splendid long muffler—gray with green stripes at the end; every stitch knit by Maggie, and safely hid away for Tom's Christmas present. The other was a pair of brown gloves, flannel-lined and trimmed with fur at the wrist, that were rustling in their paper wrapping that very moment with impatience for Maggie to hang up her stocking and go to bed.

They were both asleep, Tom and Maggie, that night when the chimes rang from St. Madeline's steeple; but I know that the angels and the Lord of the angels blessed them, for they had done what they could to bring "peace on earth and good will to man."