



Bobbin's Journal
Waif to Wealth

by

Carol Jeanne Kennedy



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Dedications

To all my wonderful friends and family who helped me along the way in writing my novels. This book is dedicated to Don Knight, Billy Miller, Jean Gess, Carol Silvis, and Mary Burdick. Also, special thanks to Hennie Bekker whose musical compositions *Algonquin Trails* and *Stormy Sunday* provided the creative spark for *Winthrop*, followed by the rest of my Victorian Collection.

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Chapter 1 – London, Beginning in the Year 1850

TO A CHILD

*On parent's knees, a naked, new-born child,
Weeping thou saddest when all around thee smiled:
So live, that, sinking in thy last long sleep,
Thou then mayst smile while all around thee weep.*¹

Snowflakes floated down upon the raging inferno licking the flames like a hissing cat. Horrific pleas from neighbours to extinguish such a blaze fell numb on the frozen snow. Flames, in frenzied mass, burned everything up, burned everything down and the charred remains of the old Derby house crumbled upon itself—and atop all those within.

A few blocks distant, the vicar's voice rang out in the moist air, crystallising into words that floated cheerfully from his tongue, "Merry Christmas to one and all."

Unaware of the terrible fire that had claimed the lives of Bobbin Derby's family, the vicar closed the ancient iron-studded church door and forgot to lock it—again. He took his ailing wife's arm and helped her down the slippery church steps pausing only briefly to sniff the air. "It is a bit smoky this evening, my dear."

¹ Exact origin unknown. The poem was either composed or recorded by Kalidasa, 4th century China. Sir William Jones, (1746 – 1794) translated the poem from Sanskrit to English. The version quoted here is from Bliss Carman, *The World's Best Poetry*, 1904.

Had he looked up he would have seen an orange glow flickering on the church's grey stone spire; he would have seen the sparks circling, spiralling, and floating heavenward amidst the fire's updraft, but he continued along in careful and deliberate steps thinking only about the slippery places along the pathway home.

* * *

The centuries-old church, now dark and empty, held the close acrid smell of recently extinguished candles. Though Bobbin heard the vicar leave and the familiar dead thunk of the door as it closed, she remained hidden—too frightened to move. Finally satisfied that she was alone, she hugged herself in the numbing cold. “Mama,” she murmured, “where are you, Mama? Oh, I am so cold.”

In the sanctuary of her little heart, she heard a whisper. Feeling a great warmth move through her small naked body, she stretched out her little arms wide and smiled up at the cross above the altar. “Yes,” she promised, “I will.”

As if awakened from a dream, she felt the frigid wintry air move about her and rubbed her bare arms briskly. *Oh, the cloakroom, maybe I'll find a stray coat.* Shivering as she tiptoed along the back wall, she found the room's door slightly ajar.

Moonlight shined through the room's only window and shed its grace on a lonely shawl hanging still and lifeless on a wall peg. With a quiver of relief, she snatched up the old moth-eaten woolly and wrapped it tight around her shoulders, relishing its warmth.

When she bent down to rub her toes, she noticed alongside the mud tray, a pair of woollen socks. No matter that they were hard from filth and full of holes, she slipped them on and counted the find a miraculous blessing. To stop her teeth from chattering, she stuck her fingers in her mouth. Suddenly she heard the massive old sanctuary door open. In the dead of darkness she made out the shadow of someone creeping alongside the offering table, *but it is not the vicar, Mr Tillyard.* She backed up against the wall and held her breath. She watched the dark figure flip open the poor box's wooden lid and rummage for coins. There must have been a meagre few, for the

stoop-backed shadow cursed and slammed the lid—it was a man's voice—gruff and mean. She closed her eyes, trembling.

“What ye doing in there hiding—shivering? Shivering like a mad dog. Come ‘ere.”

Bobbie obediently walked toward him, tugging her shawl tightly about her body. “Sir, I was searching for my mama.”

He glanced around the sanctuary and then back at her. By the faint light that shone through a slice of the open door, he must have seen that she was nearly naked, but for the long wool stockings and raggedy shawl. “What’s ye name?”

“I I cannot remember, sir,” she whimpered.

Through one squinty eye, he looked her up and down. “Wait where ye are. Can’t go outside with no shoes, you’d freeze your toes off. Stay here, I’ll be back.” He walked to the door and stopped. “Stay.”

“Yes, sir.”

She waited, shivering for a very long time when finally she heard the door open.

Tossing her a pair of boots, the old man said in a gruff tone, “Put ‘em on. Best I could do. Least your toes won’t fall off.”

She found that the over-sized wool stockings filled up the toes of the boots and made them fit quite nicely. She took a few steps. “Oh, thank you, sir. They are very warm.”

“Where’s ye mother?” He looked her up and down. “Little girl, is it?”

“I don’t know, sir.”

“You know anythin’ about that fire a little ways from here?”

She shrugged.

“What’s ye mother and father’s name?”

“I can’t remember, sir.” Trembling, she wiped her runny nose on the shawl.

He glanced up at the cross hanging askew on the wall and shook his head. “Very well then little girl, I’m gonna carry ye to an orphanage on the other side of the river.”

He wrapped her tight within her shawl and threw her over his shoulder. She awoke when he stood her up on the sidewalk in front of the orphanage. It was early morning when she faced him, rubbing her eyes awake. “Happy Christmas, sir,” she blurted.

He climbed three steps to the orphanage’s door, turned the knob and pushed it open. “Merry Christmas, little girl.” He

patted her head with a smile. "Go in now, child." He turned and descended the snow-covered steps and never looked back.

Bobbin watched as he walked onto the bridge and slowly disappeared into the morning's snowy whiteness.

A sign above the door read: Newpark Institution, Charity School, London. It was snowing just a little, and as she stood in front of the open door, warm air moved slowly around her body. A shiver grasped her as she stepped across the threshold into the warmth of the room. Across from her was a blazing fire, four huge logs stacked atop each other in a frenzy of snaps and hisses. Red-hot coals smouldered amidst the grey ash beneath. The scent of the burning wood brought tears. It smelled like ... she closed her eyes for she could not quite remember what it smelled like exactly. Her teeth began chattering again. *Mamma, I am so cold.*

Miss Susanna Neilson, a teacher at Newpark, was passing through the vestibule when she felt a cold draft. When she stopped to find the matter, she found a half-naked little girl standing in front of the open door.

Bobbin's spindly legs were knocking, rumped socks bunched up over boots fit for a man, flesh bumps on her arms, and an old shawl wrapped around her. The child's hair was dragged, matted, and tangled.

"Dear me," said Miss Neilson, "who are you?"

Bobbin coughed, hugged herself, and glanced longingly at the fire.

"Well, then, come in, child, come in." Before she closed the door, Miss Neilson looked up and down the street. "Did you come here all alone?" She took her hand. "Why, child, you are cold as ice."

Miss Neilson wrapped the skinny, shivering little body within her arms and sat in the rocking chair next to the fire. She could feel her settle and thought the pathetically worn little waif's mind was confused. She rocked her to sleep and watched her tear-stained, black-smudged little face fade into a dream.

Miss Neilson was ten and eight, rather tall for her sex, with light blonde hair twisted and braided atop her head. Her clothes were of a modest grey, and everything about her was clean and neat. Her features were soft and warm; her kind smile invaded the hardest little hearts. Her soft blue eyes crinkled as if she found humour in all things, profound or lightweight. She kept a face that the children found comfort in.

On her desk, she kept Bulwer-Lytton's: 'The veil which covers the face of futurity is woven by the hand of mercy.'²

She had taught at the institution, a charity school for educating orphans, for several years now and developed a personal rule against favouritism. However, Bobbin proved to be the one exception; this orphan was somehow different, saintly in a way. Indeed she emanated an aura of goodness, certainly a destiny.

* * *

After waking that Christmas morning in the arms of Miss Neilson, Bobbin found that she could not speak and remained mute for many months. However, the patient teacher continued to nurture the child and wisely allowed her to find her own way. Bobbin had great difficulty in recalling her mother's name, thinking perhaps it was Mary—her father's name remained hidden in the deepest part of her mind.

The other children accepted little Bobbin's quiet ways. After all, she was not a crier. She dressed her own self and promptly. She rarely coughed at night, nor did she make trouble. And most importantly, thought the older children, she did not wet the bed.

One dismal February morning as the children sat in the refectory eating their porridge, Toby (the biggest boy) was told to fetch more firewood, for it had grown very chilly. At one end of the rectangular shaped room sat the hearth—a huge, charred and woefully sparse fire pit. This morning it held two pitiful logs that burned and sputtered upon the useless iron grate. Wet wood burns 'sizzly' remarked the children as they watched Toby carrying another armload. When he stooped to drop it into the woodbin, he slipped on a wet spot and fell hard onto the floor.

All the children laughed, except Bobbin. She stood. "My name's Bobbin Derby. I am nine years old; my Papa fell by the fire too." She dropped to the floor and curled into a little ball. "Papa, Papa," she cried over and over, "no, no, you must stop."

² Edward Bulwer-Lytton (1803 – 1873) English novelist, poet, playwright, and politician. Quoted from *A Dictionary of Thoughts*, by Tryon Edwards, (1908)

She curled tighter and tighter, writhing and shaking as she sobbed.

The children stopped eating and stared.

Miss Neilson picked her up wiping away her tears. "There, now Bobbin, there now."

But Bobbin would not stop sobbing, and the other children began to cry too.

Mrs Moll, the cook, came out of the kitchen. Wiping her floured hands on her apron, she saw Miss Neilson carry her from the room. "Well then, what could the matter be?"

"I dunno," said Toby with a shrug. "I fell, and it musta frightened her."

Tilley, one of the older orphans tugged on Cook's apron. "It's only that she finally remembered her papa, Mrs Moll."

"Oh, well then, yes. Now I understand."

"Miss Neilson will calm her," added Tilley confidently.

"Yes, she sure can do that." Mrs Moll offered rare second helpings of porridge to the orphans, and that soon settled them as well. They knew it was just a matter of time until the newest addition to their family would begin to speak.

"I like the name Bobbin," said Tilley.

One by one, each child began to laugh again. "Aye, Bobbin is just the name for her. She is so small. Little Bob Bob Bob Bobbin ..."

Their chatter and laughter again filled the glum dining hall, the crisis was over—Bobbin was finally becoming one of them.

When Miss Neilson and Bobbin heard them laugh, a certain calm settled over them as well. Holding tight to Miss Neilson, she closed her wet eyes. "I think my Papa is gone away forever, miss."

"Why is that?"

"He fell hard to the floor, miss, like Toby. One night Papa came home full of ale. It was very dark, miss. The fire was nearly gone when he fell. He called Mama a dog and spit on the floor. I told him Mama wasn't a dog at all and he got very angry at me."

There was a long silence. "Go on."

"Papa spanked me hard." She covered her eyes with her hands. "Papa took a burning log from the fire and threw it at me. He crawled after me laughing and spitting up heaps of ale. When he tried to grab my leg, he started to choke and cough,

for the smoke was very thick by then. I ran and hid with our dog, Hester, and the others in the wood closet.”

Bobbin wiped her eyes. “I heard someone outside shout: ‘Fire, fire.’ I crawled under the smoke to the door and unlatched it. Our landlady was screaming. ‘Fire, fire.’ She ran down the street holding her hands to her head.

“I heard Papa slam the wood closet and latch it. They were hidden in there. He tried to find me, but it was too thick with smoke. I could hear them shriek and beg to be let out, Miss Neilson. Hester was inside with them, barking and gnawing at the door to get out. I heard her whine. I could not find them. I covered my ears, miss.”

Bobbin’s hands were trembling. “Then the room was like that.” She pointed to the fire in the hearth. “I ran away, fast as I could. I looked back, and it was burning; neighbours came running, shouting. I think my mother’s name was Mary.”

Miss Neilson patted Bobbin’s head. “Perhaps it is, my child, perhaps it is, but you said you hid with the others? What others, dear? Where was your mother?”

“There were no others, miss, that I can remember, but only my dog, Hester. My mother ran away. Oh, I was so cold. I was so cold. I ran to the church to find Mama.”

Bobbin’s eyes clouded over.

“You must be very confused my dear Bobbin, but perhaps someday I shall understand.” She rocked her back and forth, singing aloud a line from Dickens to which she added her own melody. She often sang to the orphans, “*I love these little people; and it is not a slight thing when they, who are so fresh from God, love us.*”³ Let us not cry about yesterday, my dear sweet little Bobbin, rather, let us look happily for tomorrow.”

* * *

The very next day Miss Neilson perused the month-old newspapers at the lending library for any news of a missing child. She found only an account of a bad fire in the poorer section of Squire Hill about the time Bobbin arrived at the orphanage. It was reported that a Mr Derby along with his son

³ Charles Dickens (1812 – 1870) English Novelist. *The Old Curiosity Shop*, (1841).

and two daughters were found in a charred clump in their house on Long Sutton Street.

Further investigation indicated that the mother had run away with an unsavoury crowd of gipsies; then again there was a rumour she jumped in the Thames and drowned. The teacher had to assume that Bobbin was an orphan.

A few years later Miss Neilson learned that the church to which Bobbin had fled was St. Anthony's. When visiting there, she was shown Bobbin's baptismal entry and learned a little more about the family.

Mr Derby had been a drunk with a wife named Mary and three children. The family rarely went to church except for handouts. Because Bobbin could not or would not remember her family, Miss Neilson wisely decided to let the child remember on her own and gave her a journal in which to write her thoughts. Perhaps her memory would be restored naturally, in her own time.

Chapter 2 – The Year Being 1855

All the gestures of children are graceful; the reign of distortion and unnatural attitudes commences with the introduction of the dancing master. ⁴

It was late spring in London, the sky was cloudy and grey. The trees were just beginning to bud—a touch of green against the winter's bleak swirl of sooty black and muddy brown. The streets shone from early morning misty fog. The rhythmic clop, clop of horses as they pulled wagons and carriages, echoed hard against the city's cold stone buildings. It was the beginning of a new day in London, the voices of street peddlers, greeters, and the ever incessant muffled drone of the rushing crowd moved along as precisely as a shop-clock. It was going to rain again, but then everyone was quite used to that.

In one home in particular, Mr John Philip Collier, wealthy and prominent Governor of the Bank of England, was discussing some important financial matters with his two sons. The lads were to accompany him to Liverpool that very morning. They had just sat down for their breakfast when the youngest of Mr Collier's three children, Maria, hurried into the room.

"Oh, Papa, why must I stay home again? When will I be able to go along as my brothers do?"

⁴ Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723 – 1792) English portrait painter. Quoted from *A Dictionary of Thoughts*, by Tryon Edwards (1908).

"See here, Maria," replied her brother, Philip, "you must settle yourself. We are about important business. Women have no place in the business world. You are surely old enough to know that for you have been told many times." He snapped his napkin open, "Far too many times."

Even her favourite brother, Edward, just two years older than she, ruled in Philip's favour. "Now, Maria, we will not be gone so very long. When we return, I promise we will take you to a very happy assembly at Victoria Gardens."

Never lifting his well-trimmed, greying temples but once to look at his silly daughter, John Collier continued eating, pausing only to reprimand her. "Maria, sit still." Finishing the last of his revered coffee, he said in quiet exasperation, "Maria, I repeat, you must sit still."

She stuck out her lip and crossed her arms defiantly. "Why do I have to sit still, Papa, when they get to go with you every day?"

He sat down his cup. "Maria, I will explain to you once again that young ladies do not accompany their fathers and brothers when they are about business matters. We will return within the week. You must learn to entertain yourself. Read, walk, or go to a play. Does not your governess, Mrs North, have a plan for you? You are most annoying when you clamour about so—rather puts me in mind of a little ape."

She swallowed hard. "A little ape? Humph. I am an ape because I am alone so very much of the time, Papa. Mrs North is not such good company. Besides," she lowered her voice, "she is much too old. She has me reading silly, stupid books. I should like to read what I choose. I should like to walk in the park alone, if I want."

Collier shook his head. "Maria that will do, I will speak with Mrs North."

"Before you go, Papa?"

He glanced at the shelf-clock. "No, Maria, I do not have the time. We are to leave immediately after breakfast. I will speak with her when I return."

She glanced at Philip with a mulish pout.

Edward pinched her arm. "Maria, act the lady if you please. I shall be humiliated in public with your spoiled behaviour. You behave like a child."

"A child?" She took a penitent look. "Well, I am sorry if you think so."

Philip smirked. "Oh, my baby sister, Maria, you are a great actress. I know very well you are not sorry. You may fool Father, but you do not fool me."

"That is not fair, Papa, that he taunts me so. I was sorry. Indeed I was." Keeping a close eye on him, she sighed deeply.

Both brothers shook their heads.

Collier looked up at her. "Try another tactic, my dear, that one is wearing thin." Casually dabbing his lips with his napkin, he stood, excusing his family.

Knowing full well her charms had failed again she hastily removed from the table. Outnumbered and furious, she stomped out of the room. She was hurt more so since Edward was laughing, too. They had been close at one time, but lately, he was teaming more with Philip and her father.

* * *

Collier, feeling guilty over his daughter's behaviour, confided in his sons: "I must soon find a suitable school for your sister, she is growing quite wild. I do not believe Mrs North can handle her whims and trickery. I cannot imagine what must be going through your sister's head."

"Father," replied Philip, "she is a clever girl and needs a goodly portion of discipline. She needs a mother. Who else could reach her?"

"That is very true, Father," agreed Edward, nodding sympathetically. "Maria was always such a pleasant child, but, alas, to lose a mother and reach that particular age of," he hesitated, "age of transformation into a young lady must be horrid. It is obvious Maria has changed—and not for the better. No, I do not believe Mrs North is the one to help her. I agree the woman is simply too old."

Reaching for the door, Collier stopped. "Maria has been alone too much since her mother died. Perhaps I have not been as thoughtful of her as I should be." He sighed heavily. "She still misses her mother terribly."

"As we all do, Father," said Philip.

Edward smiled. "Father, what say we take her with us, then? What harm could come of it?"

Maria was eavesdropping and overheard her brother's words. She bounded up the winding staircase and into her room. She was confident a knock would come any moment, announcing that she was to go along. She rang for the house-

maid in preparation for packing. Within those brief moments of anticipation, there indeed came a knock. "Come, I am ready," she called out in a happy tone.

Noticing her sunny countenance, Collier was surprised yet relieved at her mood change. "Maria, dear, your brothers and I shall be gone only one week. When we return, I have much I must discuss with you."

Her smile faded. "But, Papa, am I not to go along after all?"

Her disappointed air disturbed him; she was not acting now. "No, my dear," he kissed her forehead and glanced at the hearth, "I shall have Tessy tend your fire, it is beginning to wane."

"Indeed, Papa." Her face tightened. "Goodbye."

From her window, Maria looked down at her family's waiting carriage. Philip did not look up as he left the house, but Edward did. With a half-smile, he blew her a kiss. Collier followed and paused to exchange words with the footman. He briefly glanced up at her window, and without hesitation, followed his sons into the carriage.

Watching their vehicle jostle for position into the busy street, Maria sighed. Just as she was to turn away, she noticed a baker drop three hard-crust loaves of bread on the sidewalk strewn with house-slop and horse dung. He picked them up, wiped them off, and stuck them back into his basket.

She turned from the window. "How disgusting."

Leaving her room in a huff, Maria found one of the maids dusting the bannisters and flew past her taking the steps two at a time.

The maid shrieked and dropped her pail. "Oh, for my very life, miss, I thought you were falling, so I did."

Maria giggled. "Have you seen Mrs North?"

Resetting her day cap, the maid nodded. "Aye, Miss Maria, Mrs North is in her room."

"Humph, tell her I wish to see her. I will be in the study."

The maid found Mrs North. "Ma'am, Miss Maria requests your presence, immediately."

Raising her brows, Mrs North shook her head. "Immediately, is it?" Her lips pursed. "Indeed, one must be at her beck and call without a moment's rest." Closing her book, she exhaled heavily. "Very well, where is the little scrub?"

"In the study, Mrs North," she said with a deep sigh. "Aye, she's been a handful ever since her mum died. Indeed, the typhoid, ma'am, is a terrible thing. Miss Maria misses her so."

"Oh, that was over two years ago, she should be well recovered by now. The girl is simply melancholy for pity. Why, she has every single thing imaginable to make her light-hearted: money, prestige, a fine home, a distinguished family name, two handsome brothers, and a very fine father. What reason has she to mope about so?"

"I have no idea, ma'am."

"Of course you don't, nor will you ever."

* * *

When the governess came to her charge's summons, she found Maria in her father's study, sitting at his desk. The very desk she had been forbidden to even come near. Papers were lying askew, India ink spilt on the floor, and the rubbish bin tipped, but Mrs North knew Maria was in no mood to be reprimanded, so she listened patiently, as always, to her charge's complaints.

"Mrs North, as you must know by now, I have been left alone again." Knowing how the noise irritated her governess, Maria rocked back and forth in her father's squeaky leather chair. "And I hate being alone, the only relief being I will read and read, becoming swept up in someone else's happy life rather than my own stupid one."

"Well, now, Miss Maria, your life is not a stupid one. Perhaps a walk in the garden would occupy your idleness. Certainly the air would do you good."

"No, Mrs North, that simply will not do. I must have something else to 'occupy my idleness' as you call it. Come now, surely you can think of another." She continued rocking.

Anxious to quell more temper tantrums, Mrs North replied in a happy tone, "Well, Miss Maria, perhaps then we shall visit More Towns End Bookstore, if that pleases you."

Maria paused. "Yes. Yes, that shall please me. And, Mrs North," she lifted her chin, "I shall find my *own* books to read, without your help."

"Very well, miss. I will arrange that with your father."

"That shall not be necessary, Mrs North. Papa does not care one straw what I read. After all, I am ten and four you know. I am perfectly able to select a book of my choice." She

stood abruptly. "Let us be done with it, Mrs North. I shall be in my room until we leave."

Maria ascended the long winding staircase, but instead of turning left toward her room something pulled her toward the right—her mother's bedchamber. Not having been there since her mother's death, Maria did not know why she now wanted to go into her room. Turning the crystal doorknob, she slowly entered. Her mother's scent yet lingered.

The room was warm; a fire burned softly. She walked reverently over the beige floral rug and passed her mother's bed without looking directly at it. She moved methodically to the long oval mirror, closed her eyes and breathed in deeply. Slowly opening her eyes, she pondered her reflection for a few moments. "Mama, I do not think that I look like you."

Leaning into the mirror, she fingered the soft blonde curls dangling deftly about her face. "My hair is much lighter than yours, Mama; my eyes, like Papa's, are dark brown and piercing." She glared at her reflection. "My, but I can look quite spiteful when I wish it." She pinched her cheeks, fluttered her eyelashes and then stepped back. "I am taller than you, Mama—by a head at least. I am most certain of it, though not as slender, perhaps." She went to her mother's wardrobe and brought out one of her gowns. Holding it up to herself she smiled. "You see, Mama, it is much too short."

Maria sensed the presence of an observer and froze. Turning, she found Mrs North staring from the open doorway. She dropped her mother's gown. Kicking it aside, she slowly walked toward the dour-faced woman. Holding a frosty glare, Maria moved past the governess and closed the door behind her.

* * *

Later that afternoon as the two were travelling to Maria's favourite bookstore, More Towns End Bookstore, she had a wish to break the monotony by admonishing her governess. "Why must you always twiddle your thumbs so, Mrs North?"

Being a nervous twig of a woman, and very much removed from the whimsical, naughty side of a young girl ten and four, the governess straightened. "I have no idea, Miss Maria. It is just a habit, I suppose." Irritated at her snippy mood, she added, "Yes, I suppose very much a habit, just as you swing

your legs in idle motion, I choose to twiddle my thumbs. With no consequence at all, I would imagine." She lifted her chin.

Smirking, Maria looked out the window. "Boredom being the consequence, Mrs North."

The governess did not know what Maria meant and said nothing more. She dabbed at her upper lip, occasionally meeting Maria's gaze. The carriage remained quiet.

Maria read the expression on Mrs North's face. *Oh, but she is dull. In a short while, though, she shall be very entertaining.*

Mrs North caught her smirking. "Miss Maria, I would wish that you stay near me this afternoon and do not wander away."

"Oh, but of course, Mrs North."

* * *

The sudden familiar jostling of the carriage signalled that they had arrived at the bookstore. While Mrs North conversed with the footman, Maria noticed a brick wall being erected that adjoined the bookstore. Curious, she inspected the bricks and suddenly discovered that she was well hidden behind the newly erected six-foot wall. She peeked through a bit of misplaced mortar to watch Mrs North turn this way and that, obviously searching for her.

"I am over here, Mrs Grundy,"⁵ whispered Maria with a giggle.

When Mrs North spied the brick wall, Maria thought the game had come to an end. However, the governess immediately turned and headed in the opposite direction, toward the bookstore.

"Good for me, then," laughed Maria. *I shall just follow her now and look quite dismayed that she would walk ahead and not wait for me.* When she turned to leave, she stumbled over something. Regaining her balance, she found a book lying at her feet and opened it, but found no name.

"Excuse me, miss," said Bobbin Derby, "I dropped my journal, and I see that you found it."

⁵ Mrs Grundy, a prude with a moralistic voice of disapproval-19th Century England.

Maria looked down her nose at the little dormouse of a girl. "Indeed, I almost tripped over it and fell. I could have injured myself, you know."

"I am sorry for it, miss." Bobbin's large brown eyes lowered out of respect for the obviously wealthy young lady.

Maria was intrigued with the very poor and was close enough to smell her. Oh, the poor seemed so hideous to her. With all the books she read, never were they nearly as descriptive as the real adventure of standing within touching distance of one of them. When she should walk along the avenue with her father or brothers, she was always spoken to with polite words by gentlemen and gentlewomen. White gloves, clean teeth, and smiles—tired of all that, Maria became fascinated with poor, destitute people.

And she paid particular attention to their rotten teeth, often thinking, to her amusement, that they were piano key beige with ebony edges. That always brought a laugh from her friends. Next, it was their hair she inspected, for not being covered with a proper cap left it filthy, matted, and frizzy. Her nose wrinkled as she envisioned little bugs nestled deep within the follicles. She shuddered at the thought. And now this girl, much her own age, with simple clothes, though Maria noted they did not stink, stood before her, hinting that she, Maria Collier, should hand over a book. "Humph, maybe I shall keep it." She casually thumbed through it, but soon became bewildered. "This is not a book."

"No, miss. It is a journal," replied Bobbin in a soft voice.

"A journal?"

"Yes, miss. I began writing in it when I was ten. There were things my Papa said that I do not want to forget. I try to write down his spoken words so that I shall always remember."

"You read and write then?" Maria looked at the little dormouse in doubt.

"Yes, miss. I work in the bookstore just up the street."

Maria eyed her suspiciously. "But you are too little to work."

"I am ten and three, miss, soon to be ten and four. I am little, yes, I have been told, but I must work, miss. My father died, and I now live in an orphanage." Bobbin respectfully added, "I must pay for my keep for soon I shall be sent out."

"Out?" responded Maria, "Out?"