

Old Maids
Written by Lavinia Goodell
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I love old maids – I do! They are decidedly the most excellent portion of the community, the cream of society, the very salt of the earth! Who is the heart, and soul, and life of the Benevolent Society? – The old maid. Who makes the home circle, and her own, sunny and joyous, through her kind care and forethought? The old maid. Who is the oracle, the model, the joy and delight, the Alpha and Omega of numberless wee ones? The old maid auntie. Who is the minister’s right-hand man? Who is always on a collecting expedition for the Missionary Association, or the Industrial School? Who is ever ready to go on an errand of mercy to the suffering and afflicted? Who is to be depended upon to undertake what *must* be done, and nobody else *will* do? In short, who is the most unselfish of mortals? The old maid – God bless her!

The careless, unfeeling manner in which people of coarse and degraded natures speak of old maids, is beneath contempt. Must she be despised who withholds her hand because she cannot give her heart; and she esteemed who, for a home, a name, a station, weds one whom she cannot love? Rather, all honor to the woman who holds marriage as a thing too sacred for speculation or barter. Nobler ideas of life and love has she than that wedded sister who, from the imagined dignity of her station, looks down scornfully, or perchance, pityingly upon her. Has the woman to whom earth suddenly grew dark when he, through the sunshine of whose love she had viewed it, was removed, less claim to regard and sympathy because the tie had not been acknowledged before the world? Is she who, from the depth of a trusting heart, poured out her wealth of love on an unworthy object, entitled only to ridicule and contempt? Are faith, and love, and truth so lightly esteemed?

Our old maids are our heroines, seldom appreciated, seldom understood, and oftentimes deeply wronged. O, who among us knows aught of the world behind this exterior – this patient, quiet, useful, self-denying exterior. Who of us can tell aught of the deep ploughing and harrowing of heart and soul which preceded this golden harvest? What has moulded the character? What has wrought this work of self-abnegation? Ah, could we look behind the scenes into the soul; could we trace its history, from the fresh, rosy morn of girlish hopes and dreams, on through the strange, varied phases of its life-experience, till its lights of earthly joy were all extinguished, and, alone, in the cold, and dark it had grouped its way to a higher plane – till it had learned to live for something higher than self, higher than mere enjoyment – then only could we *know*, and prize, and love the character.

Those who have reached these heights through the flower-strewn rather than the thorny path; who have learned to live in others, by the bright fireside, surrounded with warm hearts, strengthened and elevated by a true, noble love, purified by the innocent, gushing affection of childhood; those whom human love has led upward to the Divine – little dream they of the weary wastes over which many a fellow-traveller must pass to reach the goal. Take that sunny home, that cherished friend, those blue-eyed, rosy, gleesome ones; take away the rich memories with which they have crowned the past; would you, my sister, have strength to tread the way before you – or, would you, my brother? Yet this path has been trod, and the height attained by many whom you meet daily, with whom you mingle freely, but of whose whole soul-life you are as utterly ignorant as if the ocean rolled between you.

When the seeming shall give place to the real, when mind and soul shall be prized above name and station, gold above time! Then shall a high rank be accorded among us, to those whom we now term “old maids.”

L.G.