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PROPER ROMANCE

All That
Makes
Life
Bright

The Life and Love of
HARRIET BEECHER STOWE

JOSI S. KILPACK



FOR REVIEW ONLY

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Chapter One

January 6, 1836

Harriet Beecher looked around her bedchamber—which had been transformed into the bride’s room for her wedding day—and found it ironic that all three of her bridal attendants had never been married.

Aunt Esther, her father’s sister, and Aunt Harriet, her mother’s sister and Hattie’s namesake, had both mothered Hattie at various times in her life. Hattie had only been four years old when her mother died, and she was never quite sure if she remembered Roxanna Foote Beecher or had simply turned other peoples’ memories into her own.

The third bridal attendant was Catharine, Hattie’s older sister by eleven years. She was Hattie’s mentor, teacher, mother in many ways, former business partner, and—sometimes—her dearest friend. Today, however, Catharine would not meet Hattie’s eyes in the mirror as she did up the buttons on the back of Hattie’s wedding dress she had borrowed from a member of their father’s congregation. The tightness of

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Catharine's jaw reflected her disapproval that had begun when Hattie accepted Calvin's marriage proposal. Hattie had held out hope that Catharine's heart would soften in the months since—she had always wanted Catharine's approval—but her hope had been in vain.

"Well," Aunt Esther said, standing up straight and adding one more article of clothing to the armful of discarded linens she'd been picking up from around the room, "I shall check in on the kitchen and see what else needs to be done." She flipped open the pocket watch pinned to her apron. "You've almost twenty minutes until Henry will come for you, Hattie."

"Thank you, Aunt Esther."

Aunt Esther smiled and let herself out of the room.

"I'll see what I can do to help as well," Aunt Harriet said. "I do hope they have put the chairs where I told them to." She came to Hattie and pressed a kiss on her cheek. She smelled of the orange blossoms she'd used to make Hattie's bouquet. "You make a lovely bride, my dear." Aunt Harriet's smile rounded out her apple cheeks. She held Hattie's eyes a moment, and then turned toward the door.

Once Aunt Harriet left, Hattie took a breath and turned her attention to her sister. "Aunt Harriet is kind to extend the compliment, but I fear even a dress as fine as this one will never make up for what I lack."

Catharine concentrated on her task without responding. There were at least fifty tiny buttons.

How on earth will I get out of it later?

Hattie held back a laugh at the realization that it would be Calvin undoing those tiny buttons a few hours from now.

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Goodness.

Is this truly happening?

Determined not to let her anxiety of *those* aspects of matrimony take over, Hattie attempted again to engage her sister. “I suppose it’s a good thing Mr. Stowe has always been attracted to my intellect.”

Catharine still did not respond, and Hattie’s irritation rose. She had attempted to playfully engage her sister, and it had not worked. So be it. “If you are so angry, Caty, then go help Aunt Esther and send Aunt Harriet back. At least *she* is happy for me.”

Catharine finally met Hattie’s eyes in the speckled mirror. “I am happy for you, Hattie.”

If not for her dry tone, Hattie might have considered believing her. “Ah, I see. That explains why you are so morose and judgmental, then. My mistake.”

Catharine pursed her lips and concentrated on the buttons again.

“Is this about the Institute?” If resurrecting that argument would fix things, Hattie would face the tired topic yet again. “I never wanted to be in the classroom, Caty. My being a teacher was your dream for me, not mine.”

Before Calvin’s proposal, Hattie had accepted that her future would likely be in teaching. She had invested time and money in Catharine’s Western Female Institute when the Beecher family came to Ohio, and she had agreed to help it find its footing in this “London of the West.” That the school had not grown as they had hoped, forcing Hattie to stay in the classroom instead of assuming a more flexible position of management, was not Catharine’s fault. But the school had

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never been Hattie's dream, and marriage was a fair enough reason for her to resign her position.

"I have accepted your leaving the Institute, Hattie."

Oh, well, that is good. But if Catharine's sour disposition was not because of the school, there was but one reason left. During the previous three months they had rather expertly avoided it, like horse dung on the street or the smallest biscuit in the basket.

Hattie took a breath. "I am not going to lose myself in marriage, Caty, for all your worry that I will. I know I can make my own way but I am choosing not to."

Catharine finished the last button on the high neck of the gown and stepped to the side. She faced Hattie fully in the looking glass. "Yes, you are *choosing* not to. That is the hardest part."

Ah, they'd finally arrived at the heart of the matter. "I want to marry Calvin. I want to be his partner, and I want to be a mother."

"And waste your gifts—I know."

Hattie turned around to face her sister, struck by the caustic reply despite having braced herself for it. "Do you truly believe that becoming a wife and mother puts to waste what God has given me? Have we not taught any number of young women to embrace their God-given roles?"

"Because a husband and children are all they have to look toward for security," Catharine said.

"Are you certain that you are not simply envious that I am to have those roles after all?"

Catharine's neck turned red, and her jaw tightened. "I envy nothing you have, Hattie, except for the working of

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your mind. I am disappointed that you are giving up your writing, your potential, and your influence for what any other woman without such intellect and education could do in your place.”

“I am not giving up any of those things! Mr. Stowe is proud of what I have accomplished already and promises to help me meet my potential, not hinder my progression.”

Catharine was shaking her head before Hattie finished. “There is boundless irony in such a promise,” she said, raising a hand to massage her temple. “The very things so attractive to him will be lost, mark my words.”

“They will not.”

“They will!” Catharine put her hands on her hips and looked at Hattie, her eyes tight and her jaw set. “Name me one married woman who has a voice left. Even in her own home she is drowned out by the cries of her children and the opinions of her husband. You will give yourself away piece by piece.” She paused and blinked back tears. Catharine’s emotions crashed against Hattie’s growing anger, leaving her feeling unsettled.

When Catharine spoke next, her voice was soft and tired. “Mother gave up everything of herself for her family. The *second* Mrs. Beecher did the same, and, should Father marry a woman young enough to still bear him children, his third wife will become one more woman worn through. They were raised at a time when there was nowhere for women to go but from their father’s hearth to their husband’s bed, but *you* are different, Hattie. Times are changing. Women are being heard, and you have a gift that can make a difference. This isn’t about the Institute or your being in the classroom; it’s

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about who you have already become on your own and what you will now give up to become Mr. Stowe's wife instead."

Her voice was pleading, and Hattie wished she could concede to Catharine's argument in some measure.

Catharine's tone sharpened so that once again her words were a reprimand. "You are educated and capable, but you will throw away your potential for a girlish fantasy that will bury you."

A dozen arguments passed through Hattie's mind as she stared at her sister. She could hear the ticking of the old walnut clock counting down the minutes toward her marriage. Most of what Catharine had said was true—both their mother and the second Mrs. Beecher had worked themselves quite literally into the ground—but Hattie was not like them. She was herself, and until Hattie *proved* Catharine wrong there would be no convincing her. Hattie longed for the unity she once shared with her sister, and yet, it seemed obvious that her hopes to dispel the difficulties between them would not be realized. Not today.

The fight had left her, so Hattie looked away from Catharine's sharp gaze and fiddled with the folds of the cream-colored silk dress, trying to blink back the tears in her eyes. "Well, you've had your say then."

Catharine took a deep breath. "I'm sorry, Hattie. I had not intended to say such things on your wedding day. There is nothing to do but move forward. I will wait downstairs with everyone else." She let herself out of the room but did not take the heavy mood with her.

Hattie stared at the closed door and felt her solitude as sharply as the winter wind biting at the windows. The fire in

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the grate burned off most of the chill, but winter was never completely forgotten in Ohio. Catharine's words were not easily ignored either. Hattie took a shivering breath and let it out slowly.

Am I doing the right thing?

When Calvin had first professed his feelings, Hattie had put him off for the very reasons Catharine had stated. She feared losing herself in the minutiae of daily family life. She had never been a domestic sort, and at twenty-four years of age, she had accepted a future that did not feature a family of her own. Her little geography textbook had done better than anyone expected, and she'd already written nearly a third of her next endeavor—a collection of short stories about New England life. Hattie felt called to write just as surely as Father felt called to preach and Catharine felt called to teach. And yet, even with that knowledge had come the whisper of another calling. God wanted her to marry. God wanted her to marry Calvin Stowe, the man she'd grown to love. And so she would. Doing so would not overtake the whole of her existence.

Hattie turned back toward the mirror and was startled by her reflection. It was strange to see herself as a bride, but she finally felt centered and calm. The angst of the preceding weeks was gone, and her heart had shifted so there was room for Calvin where there had not been room before. *Calvin*. Dear Calvin who understood her desire to be a literary woman and who supported such a dream. Was there another man in all of the new America who would support her in such a way?

We will be happy.

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A smile on her face did not improve her features any more than the dress did; the cleft of her chin remained, as did the squareness of her jaw and the roundness of her gray-blue eyes. Her plain brown hair was done up in curls on either side of her face for today's occasion. If she squinted her eyes and smiled just right, she almost looked pretty. Almost.

A knock at the door spared her a more critical assessment of her looks, and Hattie turned away from the mirror as her brother, Henry, peeked in. His best gray suit brought out the blue in his eyes, the same shade as Hattie's, and she thought him very handsome today. He looked around the room as though he did not see her, then startled when his eyes landed upon her. He put a hand to his chest with exaggerated drama.

"I'm very sorry, madam, I'm looking for my sister—Harriet Beecher? She's small—only about this big." He put his hand at the level of his chin as he stepped into the room. "And easy to overlook until she opens her mouth. A rather large man with thinning hair waits to marry her in the parlor. Have you seen her, by chance?"

Hattie rolled her eyes but could not hide her smile. She crossed to the dresser and picked up her orange blossom bouquet. Thank heavens for Henry and his easy nature. "Am I to be escorted to my destiny by an idiot? Such an auspicious beginning."

Henry laughed and put out his arm with formal exactness while clicking his heels together like a soldier. "Ah, it *is* you. My mistake." He grinned, then leaned in and kissed her on the forehead. As he withdrew he whispered, "Calvin Stowe is the luckiest of men, Hattie. You make a beautiful bride."

Hattie could not speak around the instant lump in her

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throat. She squeezed his arm. He could not know how his compliment helped to heal the wound Catharine had left behind.

“Thank you, Henry.” As they left her bedroom, Hattie realized that from this day forward she would be forever known as Harriet Elisabeth Beecher Stowe. She took a fortifying breath and lifted her chin. She would meet her future with confidence.

A new life.

A new future.

Calvin and I will flourish together, she thought as she and Henry reached the stairs that would take her to her destiny. They descended in silence and stopped in the doorway of the parlor. Hattie looked up to meet Calvin’s eyes. He was dressed in a sharp black suit, waiting at the front of the room. He smiled at her, and the last of her anxiety softened into calm anticipation of this adventure they were about to embark upon. Together.



Chapter Two

February 16, 1836

Calvin Stowe jotted down his final notes for tomorrow's lecture and placed the pages in their reserved space on the corner of his desk. He returned the pencil to the drawer, replaced the pen in the stock, and double-checked to see that the lid to the inkwell was good and tight. He stood to return *Tholuck's Commentary* to the expanse of shelving that filled one full wall of his office at Lane Seminary. Oh, how he loved German thought on religion.

As Calvin removed his coat and hat from the stand by the door, he made a final inspection of the office, verifying it was as tidy as it had been when he'd entered. The few papers in the bin would start tomorrow's fire in the stove. Assured all was in order, Calvin allowed his mind to move from his responsibilities as biblical professor to the evening ahead. Hattie would be waiting for him, and he was eager to see his new bride after such a long day. He was also famished, having only had tea and bread for lunch due to an afternoon class

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and faculty meeting. Hattie's father, Lyman Beecher, was not only the president of Lane Seminary but a minister besides, which made faculty meetings a combination of instruction, report, and pounding sermons.

He wondered how long he would stay at the Seminary.

The board and the trustees continued to argue over the results of the rebellions of former years, and the lingering difficulties were wearing on him. Lane Seminary had fulfilled very few of the promises they'd made when they'd recruited him from Dartmouth, and yet his roots were deeper than ever. The Beecher family was set upon the business of converting the West to evangelical Presbyterianism, and Hattie had no expectation of leaving the frontier. He would be well to do as Hattie often reminded him: "Count your blessings instead of your miseries."

Calvin buttoned his wool coat up to his chin and wrapped his favorite scarf—knitted for him by his mother years earlier—around his neck three times. He pulled his beaver hat low on his head to better protect his ears from the February cold. The streetlights cast a heavy orange glow over the campus, and the metallic winter air smelled of wood smoke mingled with the aroma from various dinners cooking within the two dozen or so cottages that framed the campus. His mouth watered at the remembered promise of roast chicken for dinner. He and Hattie usually had remnants from her father's table or milk and bread for supper, so he was prepared to be effusive and gracious in order to encourage future dinners like this one. He craved normal routines and simplicity and hoped that Hattie—so carefree and flighty—was coming about to his way of thinking.

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It was not a long walk across campus to Kemper Street, but even so Calvin's toes had begun to tingle with cold by the time he arrived at the door of the humble cottage. One of the promises Lane had yet to fulfill was for a larger house befitting his position. He stomped his feet on the doorstep to knock off as much of the mud-churned slush as possible, wiped his feet vigorously on the mat, then turned the knob and stepped inside. He stopped in the doorway as his breath caught.

The small parlor was usually furnished with a settee, a small table, and an upholstered chair near the fire—perfect for reading after dinner. However, the regular furnishings had been pushed aside to accommodate an easel, a folding table covered in paints, and a wooden chair from the bedroom. Sitting in that chair was his wife of six weeks, dressed in nothing but her shift—amply smeared with paint—and her head wrapped in a brown scarf. She held a paintbrush in one hand but paused to look at him, the brush a few inches away from the thick paper clamped to the easel.

He did not smell roasted chicken.

“Calvin, dear,” she said, her face breaking into a smile. “Don't tell me the day has flown already.”

Calvin stepped inside and closed the door before facing his wife. Thank goodness no one was on the street to see what he'd come home to. “Good grief, Hattie, what are you doing?”

She smiled indulgently and waved her brush toward the easel. “Painting, of course.”

Hattie painted?

She returned to the unfinished painting before her, a summer landscape full of bright greens and yellows and reds that irritated Calvin. They were stuck in the churning gray of

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winter in Cincinnati, and no one had any business pretending otherwise! Fatigue and hunger and disappointment at not coming home to a hot meal knotted in his chest.

Hattie kept her eyes on her work while she spoke. “I awoke this morning fairly clutched by the needs of creation that had nothing to do with a pen. I went to Father’s house and resurrected my mother’s easel, which I have not touched since coming to Ohio, I’m horrified to admit.”

Painting?

“The house is wrecked, Hattie,” Calvin said, his irritation sharpening in his chest. The coal bin had been placed upon his chair, which currently sat in the corner like a scolded child.

“It is not wrecked.” Hattie dabbed her brush upon the paper, widening the yellow patch already dashed upon the page and not looking up. “And I shall have it restored in a day or two, once this fit of artistry has passed me. It always passes, you know, but when it comes upon me, I’ve no choice but to surrender—like a story or an essay. You understand.”

“A day or two!” Calvin exclaimed with more intensity than he meant to. Once it was out, however, he couldn’t stop. “And where am I to sit until then? Where am I to read and recover from the trials of a long day?” His head began to throb.

Hattie finally seemed to realize his displeasure and looked at him first with surprise, then her eyes narrowed and her chin came up in defiance. “You may sit wherever you like. Simply move what might be in your way and *recover*. Really, Calvin. You are a grown man.”

He took a breath that did little to invite calm. “A grown man who has spent the day by the sweat of his brow only to come home to this . . . chaos.” He waved his hand around

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the room. “My wife sits in her underclothes, and . . . and . . . I do not smell any dinner.” He had not come home to a home-cooked dinner in all the six weeks of marriage, in fact. Tonight was supposed to be a new beginning. He’d looked forward to it all day.

“I did not make dinner,” Hattie said, sitting up straight and watching him with a challenge in her eyes. “I was not hungry, and I wanted to paint.”

“Well, *I* am hungry! You said you would have dinner when I returned. You promised you would have it ready.”

She shrugged and said coolly, “I changed my mind.”

They stared at one another, Calvin’s fists clenched at his sides.

“*And,*” Hattie continued, “if you want dinner on a schedule then perhaps we need to hire that help I have asked for a hundred times.”

Calvin unwound his scarf, refusing an argument about hiring help—Hattie knew they couldn’t afford it—when he realized how warm the room was. His eyes went to the coal bin on the chair and then to the merry fire in the stove. He paused. “How much coal have you used today?”

“Enough to keep myself from catching my death, thank you very much.” She put down her paintbrush and stood with her hands on her hips. There was a smudge of green paint on one side of her thin linen shift and a spattering of orange across her stomach that matched the swipe of color upon her cheek.

Calvin was acutely aware of the state of her undress, though it might have been more distracting had he not been so upset.

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“And the paper and paints? Am I to believe you had them on hand for such an occasion as this?” The chance that such useful things would have survived at President Beecher’s house was beyond consideration. The Beechers, for all their fervor and merit, were not as industrious or thrifty as Calvin had been raised to be, something he had not fully realized until after he and Hattie had set up a home together.

She lifted her chin in challenge. “I used my own income, Mr. Stowe. I’ve still some left of my final draw from the Institute.”

That she would spend the last of her money on something as frivolous as paint was beyond Calvin’s understanding. “And shall *my own income* pay for twice the day’s usual ration of coal, then? And a new shift, household incidentals, and the like? Am I to have no say in what is considered necessary versus mere flippancy in my own home? And then I am to come home to no dinner despite your having *promised* me? How do you expect a man to conscience such things, Hattie?”

Her eyes flashed, more gray than blue. “I expect a man to abide a change of expectation from time to time.”

“From time to time, not every night!”

She clenched her jaw. “You are capable of making use of the bread and jam in the cupboard. There are several jars of applesauce as well. Or heat the stove and make yourself some eggs.” She sat before her easel again, dismissing him.

Calvin clenched his teeth and wound his scarf back around his neck as he glared at his wife, who looked as ridiculous as she sounded. He let himself out of the house, slamming the door as his way of getting the last word.

Hunching into his collar, he started across Kemper Street

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toward the college cafeteria meant for boarding students. If he was lucky, the doors would still be open and he could have himself a plate. If he was unlucky, Gilly's Pub served ham and potatoes most nights, but paying for it would further infuriate him. Calvin had become familiar with the meal options of Walnut Hills after the death of his first wife, Eliza. How he'd missed her; how he missed her still.

A wave of guilt attended the thought. He should *not* miss Eliza, not with Hattie sharing his name and his house and his bed. He loved Harriet. Of course he did. But some aspects of Hattie's character caused Calvin to remember Eliza's qualities from time to time. Eliza had been a fine cook, for one thing, and kept an efficient house. Duty came before frivolity for Eliza, whereas the opposite was true for Hattie far too often. Calvin shook his head to jar the thoughts out of his mind. He could not travel down the road of comparison. It was poison.

Calvin turned a corner and shuffled up the steps to the dining hall. The doors were still unlocked, and a smattering of students sat around the tables. He was embarrassed to be there. He was a married man, but instead of eating in his own home, he took a seat at an empty table on the far side of the room. Within minutes he had a plate of roast beef, squash, carrots, and a hearty slice of brown bread placed before him. His mouth watered as he unfolded the napkin and placed it perfectly square in his lap. With his fork in one hand and his knife in the other, he cut the meat into uniformly sized pieces and raised the first bite to his mouth. He would be better able to speak evenly with Hattie when his hunger pangs had abated.

Speak evenly, he repeated and felt the irony of those words.

When he and Hattie were aligned on a topic, there was

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no end to their invigorating discussions. The working of her mind was astounding, and, coupled with her wit, she was unparalleled in intellectual conversation. However, in a disagreement, she was a formidable opponent. A contentious household was nothing short of purgatory in his mind. The exact opposite of order and ease he thrived on. Hattie had to know he'd be vexed when he returned to the house after a long day and found no promised food upon his table. Or did she? Had she been so taken up with *painting* that she'd thought nothing of him? If that were the case, then the situation was more dire than he'd considered. If his comfort was of *no* consideration, what was he to do?

What if he had made a mistake in marrying Hattie? What if his loneliness after Eliza's death had pushed him to a hasty decision? And yet just considering not being Hattie's husband brought the sting of emotion to his throat. He loved Hattie. Even after only a month and a half of marriage he could not imagine life without her. She enlivened his mind and his senses; she brought color and laughter into his life. He longed for her company and opinions. But sometimes . . .

He turned his attention back to his plate and tried to push away the tense thoughts regarding his marriage.



After lingering as long as manners permitted, Calvin returned to his office at Lane. He needed to center himself in an environment of order rather than risk further agitation from the disarray of his home. To prove a point, he did not add more coal to the stove in the corner but instead kept

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his coat on. He pulled out an anthology of contemporary Christian thought and read about marriage, but he put it away when it placed too much attention on women remaining silent and subservient to their husbands. He and Hattie had agreed that they wanted a companionate marriage. Such a liberal ideal did not lend itself to submission on Hattie's part or dominance on his, but surely his expectation that she would fulfill the promise of dinner at the end of the day was within the realm of reason. He remembered something from a current periodical he'd kept for a future lecture and pulled it from his files.

"The companionate ideal, in short, raises the emotional stakes in marriage. The rewards can be great, but the potential for disappointment has never been greater."

Calvin groaned and threw the periodical on the desk, paused, and then picked it up and returned it to the file. *Every marriage has difficulties*, he told himself, and yet his marriage to Eliza had not. Their temperaments had been perfectly aligned, and, though he may have been overbearing at times and tended to "cultivate indigo," as Hattie had named his brooding moods, Eliza had been patient and accommodating, allowing him to feel all that he felt as deeply as he wanted to while still putting her effort toward his comfort.

He groaned again and pushed aside comparisons for the second time that evening. He attempted to distract himself with his notes for tomorrow's lecture and then, when he had run out of things to do, he bundled up and headed for home.

He wondered if Hattie's father might have some advice

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for him. Both of Lyman Beecher's late wives had cared for his children, managed boarders, and run household schools. Perhaps Lyman could help Calvin better understand how to inspire Hattie's compliance.

Braced as he was to face the madness, Calvin stopped just inside the front door and let his eyes travel slowly around the room, which had been somewhat restored to its usual condition. The settee was still against the wall and the easel was where it had been before, but both the fireplace chair and end table were in their usual places and the coal bin was beside the hearth. Light streamed from the kitchen, set to the left of the common room, and he smelled cooked butter in the air. Calvin warily removed his outer clothes before exploring further.

The kitchen was empty, but the lamp burning on the table illuminated a single plate filled with scrambled eggs and a slice of bread. A crock of butter sat beside a glass of water, and a jar of applesauce stood ready to be opened and poured into an empty bowl. The rest of the kitchen was a disaster, but she'd chosen him—chosen *them*—over her painting, and he could not ignore that olive branch.

With a softening heart, Calvin crossed to the bedroom and opened the door. The light from the kitchen illuminated a triangular portion of the bed enough for him to see Hattie's small form beneath the quilt. He entered the room and knelt beside the bed, reaching to brush a lock of her hair from her forehead.

Hattie blinked her eyes open, then smiled and reached a hand from beneath the quilt to lay against his cheek. Her touch felt like a kiss and made his skin tingle.

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“I don’t like it when we quarrel,” she said in a voice husky with sleep.

“Neither do I.” Calvin leaned in to kiss her full lips as the night’s argument slipped away. When he lifted his head, Hattie put her hand behind his neck and pulled him back for an answering kiss of her own. Calvin was reminded from head to toe the ways in which he found marriage to Hattie extremely pleasing; her passions were not limited to creative pursuit, and in matters of intimacy they were perfectly matched. Surely he ought to factor that compatibility higher than he had so far tonight. After some time, she put her hand against his shoulder and pushed him away.

“We shall be all right, I think,” she whispered, grinning up at him wickedly. “Did you eat your eggs?”

The eggs were surely cold, and Calvin was full from his dinner at the cafeteria, yet she’d gone to all the trouble . . . “Not yet,” he said, knowing he would eat every bite even if his stomach burst.

“Well then, Mr. Stowe, go on and eat.” She pulled the blankets up to her chin once more. “When you’re finished, come to bed so we might make up properly.”

Calvin smiled with eager anticipation, leaned down for one more kiss, and then left the room so that he might eat his eggs.