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LIFE AND LETTERS

# THE OTHER SISTER

*Was Nathaniel Hawthorne a cad?*

BY MEGAN MARSHALL

On the evening of November 11, 1837, Nathaniel Hawthorne, accompanied by his sisters, Elizabeth (Ebe) and Louisa, stopped at the Peabody home, in Salem, Massachusetts. It was Hawthorne's first visit to the family, though he lived just a few blocks away. Painfully shy, he had spent the previous ten years in almost complete seclusion, composing short stories at a desk in his bedroom in the hope of establishing himself as a professional writer. Elizabeth Peabody, the eldest of the three Peabody sisters, who were then living with their parents on Charter Street, had read and admired the stories in Hawthorne's first book, "Twice-Told Tales," which had been published that spring. She was impatient to meet him.

Elizabeth, like Hawthorne, was thirty-three years old. A woman of prodigious energy and determination, she belonged to an impoverished branch of an old New England family (the Peabody Museums at Harvard and Yale, and the Peabody-Essex Museum, in Salem, were named for a distant relative), and had managed to befriend many of the leading thinkers of her time, including Ralph Waldo Emerson, who had tutored her in Greek when she was a teen-ager. In her twenties, she had begun corresponding with Wordsworth, whose poems, she declared, "define all the mysteries of the heart."

The abolitionist minister Theodore Parker called Elizabeth the transcendentalists' Boswell, but she was more accurately an instigator and an impresario. Emerson read her translations of French and German Romantic philosophy, including "Self-Education," by Baron Joseph-Marie de Gérando, which she published in 1830, at twenty-six—seven years before Emerson proposed the idea in his essay "The American Scholar." In 1834, she and Bronson Alcott, the father of Louisa May Alcott, founded the progressive Temple School, in Boston. A year later, she published "Record of a School," a series of dialogues between Alcott and his students on art, religion, and "the advantage of having an imagination"—the first book-length exposition of transcendentalist ideas.

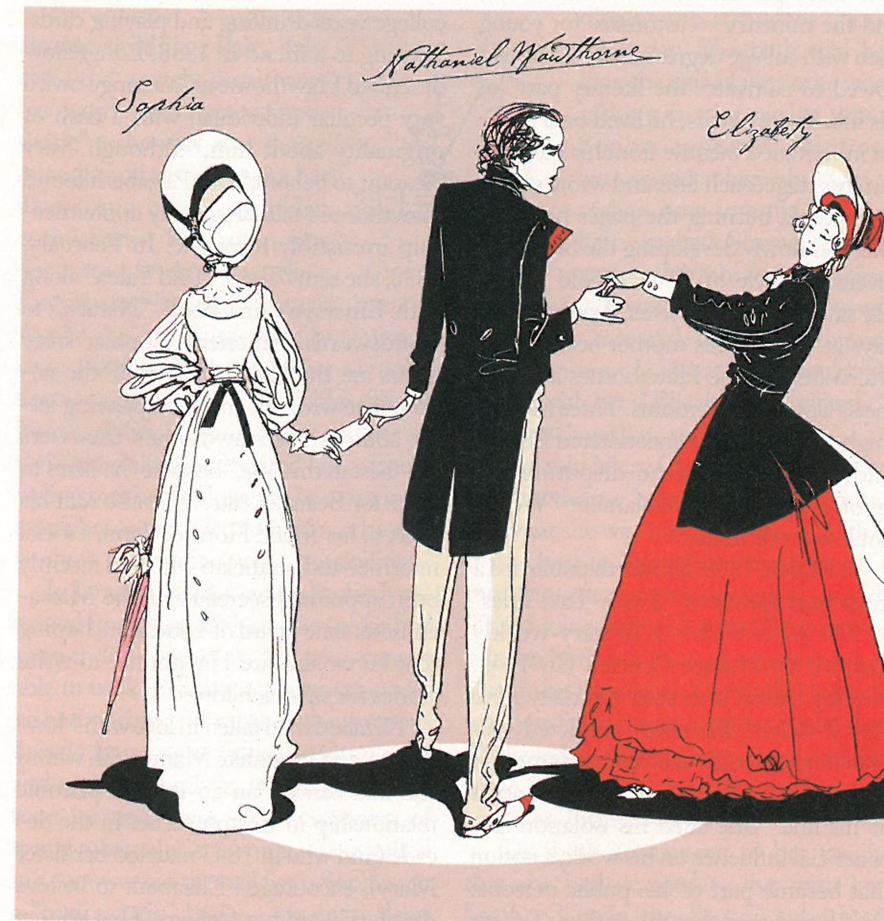
Literary historians have portrayed Hawthorne's first visit to the Peabody home as a turning point, marking his entrance into public life and the beginning of his transformation from an obscure short-story writer into the world-famous author of "The Scarlet Letter." In 1842, Hawthorne married Sophia Peabody, Elizabeth's youngest sister. "There are only a few great love stories in American fiction, and there are fewer still in the lives of American writers," Malcolm Cowley wrote in a 1958 essay, "The Hawthornes in Paradise." Cowley declared Hawthorne's "courtship and conquest of Sophia Peabody" a story that should be retold "as long as there are lovers in New England." Invoking "The Scarlet Letter," he added that, unlike the novel, "the lived story was neither sinful nor tragic."

However, the marital idyll had a troubling prelude, which shows Hawthorne in a harsher light. On the night of his first appearance at the Peabodys', Elizabeth enthusiastically befriended Hawthorne, and he seemed to welcome her attention. Over the next few months, he visited her frequently—before entering the parlor, he would steal up to the door and peer through the crevice, to make sure that no other visitors were present—and they were often seen walking together in Salem.

In April, 1838, five months after they met, there were rumors in Salem that, as Hawthorne reported with amusement in a letter to friends, "I am engaged to two ladies in this city." In the weeks leading up to his wedding to Sophia, some Salem residents still didn't know which Peabody he intended to marry. Whichever sister became Hawthorne's wife, the lawyer Benjamin Merrill wrote to Salem's Whig congressman Leverett Saltonstall, "The world may be blessed with transcendental literary productions."



Scholars have traditionally dismissed the notion that Elizabeth and Hawthorne were romantically involved, citing an account that Elizabeth gave her nephew, Julian Hawthorne, in 1882, twelve years before her death, and that Julian incorporated in his 1884 biography, "Nathaniel Hawthorne and His Wife." Elizabeth told Julian that Sophia had been too ill to come downstairs during Hawthorne's first visit. But they met "soon after," she said, depicting their romance as "the coming together of two self-sufficing worlds," with "all the glow of the rush together of young hearts."




*Hawthorne doubtless saw Elizabeth as someone who could help advance his career.*

ISTVAN BANYAI

However, an unpublished and previously unexamined biography of Elizabeth Peabody, housed at the Massachusetts Historical Society, in Boston, tells a less happy story. The biography, written in 1904 by Mary Van Wyck Church, one of a group of young admirers of Elizabeth, quotes from her letters and journals and describes an interview that Church conducted with Elizabeth at Church's house on the Hudson River.

"It was quite towards the latter end of her life," Church wrote, "that Elizabeth one summer day, seated under the trees on the lawn . . . drifted back to this far away passage of her life. . . . Her voice trembled & the sentences came brokenly." Hawthorne had been "the love of her life," Church recounted, and he was "warmed & comforted in soul by the glow of her ardent comprehention of his genius." Even so, Church added, "With Hawthorne, it never was love, though he doubtless . . . so considered it," and Elizabeth "was too strong, too magnanimous & too clear in her understanding to be long held in the bondage of an unhappy passion."

Nevertheless, Church asserted, Hawthorne's treatment of Elizabeth had been reprehensible. "But for . . . his constant tendency to belittle her even sometimes to the extent of discourtesy in his notes, no need would exist to unveil the truth after all these years."

Elizabeth had been enchanted by Hawthorne from their first meeting. She described the evening in detail to Julian, beginning with Hawthorne's arrival at her home, where he appeared flanked by his sisters and wearing his customary black cape and cravat. (Conscious of his striking good looks, he made a point of dressing well, in order to conquer his reserve.)

She told Julian that she had welcomed the Hawthornes into the parlor, where they sat stiffly in a row. She tried to put them at ease by showing them drawings by the English artist John Flaxman. While the Hawthornes looked at Flaxman's illustrations of "The Iliad," she ran upstairs to Sophia, who was twenty-eight years old, a talented landscape painter whose migraines frequently kept her in bed. "Mr. Hawthorne and his sisters have come," she announced, "and you never saw anything so splendid—he is handsomer than Lord Byron!" Sophia refused to see him. "I think it would be rather ridiculous to get up," she said. "If he has come once he will come again."

Elizabeth returned to the parlor, where she was joined by her middle sister, Mary, who was thirty-one, a teacher and writer of children's stories. Sophia, who was alternately awed and irritated by Elizabeth's overbearing intelligence, may have feared that she would be outdone in literary conversation by her sisters. Her headaches had made her, as she put it in a letter to Elizabeth, "to all appearances a *bed case*—a poor, miserable, maimed—nerve twisted—trembling, wearied concern." She had hardly painted in more than a year; that winter, she rarely came downstairs at all.

Mary described Hawthorne's visit afterward in a letter to her brother George in New Orleans, reporting that he had "lived the life of a perfect recluse till very lately," and was "so diffident that he suffers inexpressibly in the presence of his fellow-mortals." Mary also noted Hawthorne's "temple of a head," his "eye full of sparkle glisten & intelligence," and his promise to come again.

Over the next several weeks, Hawthorne confided to Elizabeth that he had come by his "cursed habit of solitude" as a child. His father, a sea captain, had died of yellow fever in Suriname when Nathaniel was three. He had been raised in Salem and rural Maine by a mother who, Elizabeth observed, had adopted an "all but Hindoo self-devotion to the manes of her husband," seldom appearing in public. His sister Ebe, who was rumored to have been disappointed in love as a young woman, had retreated to her

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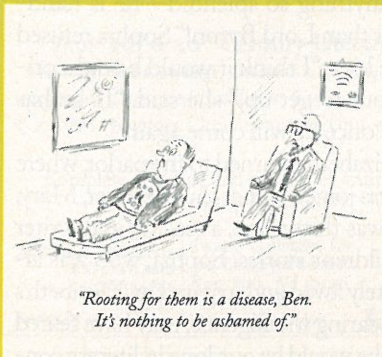
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room, where she spent most of her time reading. Hawthorne wished he could do the same. He wrote to his mother at the age of fifteen, on the eve of his departure for Bowdoin College, "Why was I not a girl that I might have been pinned all my life to my Mother's apron."

He told Elizabeth that he had been unable to bring himself to enter one of "the three professions"—law, medicine, and the ministry—customary for young men with college degrees, and that he had vowed to cultivate "the literary part" of his life. For ten years, he lived on a modest inheritance, income from his mother's family's stagecoach line, and wrote stories at his desk, burning the pages he didn't like, and slowly developing the brooding, revelatory style of "Twice-Told Tales." He saw his younger sister, Louisa, most days at tea, and his mother occasionally afterward, but the Hawthornes ate their meals alone in their rooms. Three months might pass before he encountered Ebe, he said. There seemed no disputing the emotional truth of his lament "We do not live at our house."

In March, 1838, Elizabeth published a front-page review of "Twice-Told Tales" in *The New-Yorker*, a literary weekly founded by Horace Greeley. (In 1841, Greeley closed it to start the daily *New York Tribune.*) Elizabeth predicted that Hawthorne would "take his place amongst his contemporaries, as the greatest artist of his line." She cited his isolation as a beneficial influence on his work, a notion that became part of his public persona: "We have heard that the author of these tales has lived the life of a recluse; that the inhabitants of his native town have never been able to catch a glimpse of his person; that he is not seen at any time in the walks of men." Hawthorne, she said, wrote with "the wisdom which comes from knowing some few hearts well."

He was also more calculating than she realized. Opportunistic if not bold, Hawthorne doubtless saw Elizabeth, in part, as someone who could help advance his career. The previous year, he had sent a copy of his book to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, who had been a classmate at Bowdoin and was then teaching at Harvard. In a subsequent letter, he gave Longfellow an account of his life similar to the one he later gave Elizabeth—down to the melodramatic description of his solitude. "For the last ten years, I have not lived, but only dreamed about living," he wrote, adding, "I seldom venture abroad till after dusk." A month later, a review by Longfellow appeared in the *North American Review*, pronouncing Hawthorne "a new star ris[ing] in the heavens." Since then, however, there had been only silence from reviewers and dwindling sales.

In truth, Longfellow had been put off by Hawthorne, who had squandered his college years drinking and playing cards. Writing to a friend in 1838, Longfellow described Hawthorne as "a strange owl; a very peculiar individual, with a dash of originality about him," although "very pleasant to behold." But Elizabeth found Hawthorne's tale of solitary apprenticeship irresistibly romantic. In February, 1838, she sent "Twice-Told Tales," along with Emerson's first book, "Nature," to Wordsworth. America's "popular story tellers are the ballad makers of the nation," she wrote in an accompanying letter, adding that Hawthorne's tales were the "best in this line," because "he dares to write for Beauty's sake." She also sent his book to her friend Horace Mann, a social reformer and politician who had recently been appointed secretary of the Massachusetts state board of education, hoping that he would hire Hawthorne to write stories for schoolchildren.

Elizabeth had fallen in love with Hawthorne, and he, unlike Mann, with whom she had carried on an intense platonic relationship in Boston earlier in the decade (and who in 1843 married her sister Mary), encouraged Elizabeth to believe that he shared her feelings. That winter, even as he was extricating himself from a desultory flirtation with Mary Silsbee, an attractive Salem heiress and experienced coquette, he told Elizabeth that he wished she had written to him years before, when she had first read his stories in magazines and gift annuals. It would have made "an epoch" in his life, he said, for at the time he had felt "like a man talking to himself in a dark place." Hawthorne urged her to visit his home, ostensibly to see his sisters. But his invitation—"I will come for you whenever you say I may"—seemed to convey a more personal motive. "I wish you would come for my sake," he added.

Elizabeth Peabody was small and slim, with fair hair and a square chin. She was also headstrong, and careless of her looks. Emerson was dismayed by her appearance. She was "not neat—and offended," he said. But he praised her for having "the ease & scope & authority of a learned professor or high literary celebrity in her talk." Hawthorne was accustomed to unusual women, but the qualities that enabled Elizabeth to help him professionally—her unflagging initiative, her impulsive generosity, her bossiness—may have also repelled him.

By contrast, Sophia was almost childlike. Pale, delicate, and acutely sensitive—her word was "hypersympathetic"—she was also determinedly optimistic, despite her illness, and prone to sudden enthusiasms. Her room was decorated with art work—English and Italian landscapes, busts of Apollo and Hercules—and her journals were filled with descriptions of wildflowers and sunsets. When Hawthorne learned of Sophia's migraines and her artistic sensibility, he declared her, without having met her, "a flower to be worn in no man's bosom, but let down from heaven to show the human soul's possibilities."

In January, 1838, George Peabody returned from New Orleans, where he had gone to look for work. He was scarcely able to walk. Just twenty-four years old, he had suffered for most of the previous decade from vague stomach complaints and spells of paralysis, which, the family soon learned, were early symptoms of spinal tuberculosis. George was installed in a room across the hall from Sophia, on a "hydrostatic" bed—a six-inch-deep trough filled with water and sealed with an India rubber sheet, designed to keep him from contracting bedsores.

When Sophia felt well enough, she sat in George's room, offering advice about how to combat pain. She recommended that he take his morphine in the morning, as she did, to avoid nightmares. And she described the benefits of the hammock she slept in, the "dear little couch" that reminded her of a sea voyage to Cuba, where she had spent nearly two years pursuing a rest cure.

But George's condition seemed to confound all that Sophia believed about invalidism. "It is the lot of woman to be ill," she wrote to her friend Mary Foote in early March. She could hardly bear to see George, a man "in the very glory of his youth, shut up in one room and fastened to one chair." By then, Sophia was able to contemplate the journey downstairs. She warned friends whom she had not seen for weeks to prepare for her "sword face and white hue" and to "see me shrink at the sound of my own voice."

It is not clear just when Sophia and Hawthorne finally met; letters and journals from the period suggest that the encounter probably took place sometime during the spring of 1838. That day, Elizabeth told Julian, she and Hawthorne were talking in the parlor when Sophia appeared. "He rose and looked at her—he did not realize how intently," Elizabeth recalled. She watched as each of Sophia's infrequent remarks, delivered "in her low sweet voice," was met with that "same intentness of interest." "What if he should fall in love with her?" Elizabeth wondered. "I was struck with it, and painfully."

She told Mary Church that she wrote to Hawthorne immediately, informing him that she was leaving home, and "that it was best to look upon the chapter of our pleasant companionship as closed. That I felt convinced it had been a mistake on both our parts to regard it other than mere friendship. Certainly I knew it was best for me so to consider it, and that I believed he would later on come to the same conclusion. I bade him farewell and then I went away."

Elizabeth announced to her family that she had decided to live with her brother Nat in the Boston suburb of Newton Corner, where he was starting a school for boys. Nat's barely concealed dislike of her must have made the plan particularly unattractive. In a recent letter, he had berated her for not marrying when she had had the chance. He was most likely referring to Lyman Buckminster, a young Harvard Divinity School graduate from a prominent New England family, who had proposed to her when she was eighteen. Had she married, Nat complained, "the fortunes of your own and our family would have been different, perhaps prosperous."

Before leaving Salem, Elizabeth lent Hawthorne the hand-stitched volumes of a journal that Sophia had kept in Cuba, where he could read about her sister's illness and, Elizabeth may have hoped, begin to understand the burden

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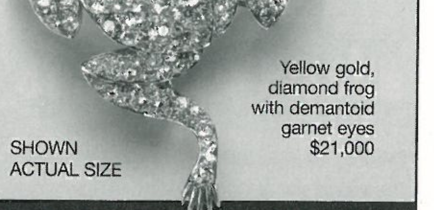
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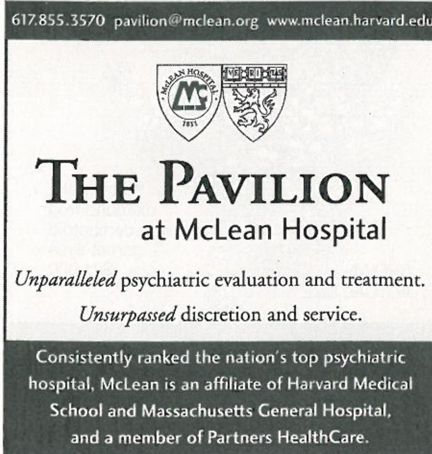

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her care would pose for the man who married her. Hawthorne was captivated by the journal, keeping it for more than a month, and copying numerous passages into his notebooks. When he returned it to Sophia, he told her that she was "the Queen of Journalizers."

Sophia's recovery was not immediate, but, if she was expecting Hawthorne, she would be up and dressed; if he failed to appear, she took to her bed and refused to see him the next time he came. Hawthorne would visit George instead, knowing that Sophia would overhear them from her room. On his way past her door, Hawthorne might have been able to glimpse her lying in her hammock, where, she told Elizabeth in a letter, she "pulled all the combs out of my hair and sent it streaming like a comet over my shoulders."

She developed a sense for when Hawthorne was at the front door, feeling "just as sure it was Mr. Hawthorne as if I had seen him." She gave him a nosegay of sweet violets, which he kept in water for a week before taking one to Boston to be set under black crystal—"enshrined from every possible harm"—and mounted on a gold brooch that he intended to wear himself. Returning to Salem, he declared the brooch "too fine" for him and gave it to Sophia.

Elizabeth complained that Sophia was "cutting" her out of the friendship by seeing so much of Hawthorne while she was away. Sophia replied that "Mr. H's coming here is one sure way of keeping you in mind." She was certain, she wrote, that Hawthorne found her companionship "excessively tame" compared with Elizabeth's "society and conversation," adding, perhaps disingenuously, "I think you will shine more by contrast."

Hawthorne had promised to write to Elizabeth, but apparently she had received no response to several letters. In late April, Sophia wrote that Hawthorne had drafted a letter to Elizabeth and that "it was a great thing for him" to have completed it. She reported that Hawthorne was bringing a packet of letters for Elizabeth to Boston; he might even take the fifteen-minute train ride to Newton to find her. Impatient, Elizabeth went to Boston and waylaid Hawthorne in the lobby of his hotel, only to learn that the letters he had for her were all from Sophia.

By now, Elizabeth was tired of hearing about Hawthorne's "celestial expression" and about how "brilliant" he looked. After reading a book about Persia, Sophia wrote that she hoped to travel there someday, like the retired Harvard president John Thornton Kirkland and his wife, before catching herself: "Oh! I forget. I never intend to have a husband." In another letter, Sophia mentioned that Hawthorne planned to write a story based on an incident from her stay in Cuba. She had told him that, while visiting friends in Havana, she had cleaned a sooty religious painting using her fingers dipped in aromatic oils, and uncovered a beautiful Mary Magdalene, which she took to be the work of the seventeenth-century Spanish painter Bartolomé Esteban Murillo. Hawthorne set to work transposing the scene to Colonial New England.

"You should at least learn an instrument."

The finished story was "Edward Randolph's Portrait," whose heroine, Alice Vane, is "a pale, ethereal creature," an artist of "no inferior genius," who disrupts the war deliberations of a Colonial council when she cleans a grimy portrait hanging in the council chambers, revealing a dark omen. The colony's outraged governor rebukes Alice for daring to bring her "painter's art" into his office and for presuming to "influence the councils of rulers and the affairs of nations, by such shallow contrivances."

In mid-June, Elizabeth informed Sophia that she had received a letter from Hawthorne, which does not survive. She told Sophia that it was "queer and written in some sort of excitement when he was fighting with some unhappiness." In it, she added, he alluded to a second letter, written "out of his heart," but which he had decided not to send.

Soon after this exchange, Hawthorne left Salem to travel. Sophia sent Elizabeth a terse account of his parting visit: "He said he was not going to tell anyone where he was to be the next three months . . . that he neither intended to write to any one *nor be written to*."

In July, Elizabeth began to hint that she wanted to come home. She complained to Sophia that despite all she had done for Nat—finding him a house with an ample schoolroom, recruiting pupils, teaching every day—he seemed "utterly indifferent" to her efforts. She decided to return to Salem by way of Concord, where she spent much of August with Waldo and Lidian Emerson, absorbed in the public debate over Emerson's "Divinity School Address."

In the speech, which Emerson had delivered at Harvard on July 15th, he had urged graduating divinity students to "cast behind you all conformity," and to reject the pulpit, as he had done, in favor of lectures and essays preaching a "universal" spirituality. Andrews Norton, one of the divinity school's founding professors, had responded in a Boston newspaper, calling the address an "incoherent rhapsody" and an "insult to religion." Emerson was not invited back to campus for nearly thirty years.

Elizabeth had likely been in the audience at Harvard and was captivated by Emerson's idea that, as she put it in a letter to George, "*Power* is the eternal life we find ourselves to have." In a journal entry quoted by Mary Church, Elizabeth wrote that the notion gave her a way of understanding her attraction to the men she described as "the three greatest actual powers" with whom "I am in direct relation": Emerson, Mann, and Hawthorne. She told herself that it was "the divine" in them that "clutches my imagination and melts away my understanding." Hawthorne, she wrote, had "tenderness enough to make a hundred husbands." But, she added, "at this very moment Hawthorne may be passing out of the state of celibacy." She vowed not to write to him again.

By September, 1838, the Peabody sisters were in Salem, taking care of George, who was now often in acute pain. Elizabeth may have been hoping to win back Hawthorne, who had returned from his travels. She left her knitting at his house, telling his sister Louisa that she planned to spend "four or five evenings" there "in the course of the winter," and she resolved to find him a paying job. Hawthorne's finances were precarious: that summer, train service had connected Salem to Boston, and his mother's family's stagecoach line was near collapse. Elizabeth again encouraged Horace Mann to hire Hawthorne to write children's books, arranging for them to meet in the Peabody parlor. Afterward, she wrote to Mann that she hoped "the frigidity" of Hawthorne's "diffidence" did not "quite destroy the brilliancy of his beauty."

She had more success persuading friends to give Hawthorne a political appointment requiring, as she put it in a letter to his sister Ebe, "very little time & work—& having abundant leisure and liberty" for writing. By November, she had found him a job as customs inspector for the Port of Boston, with a salary of eleven hundred dollars a year, which he could supplement with income from the sale of his stories.

Hawthorne was less solicitous of her


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welfare. In May, 1839, when Elizabeth had not been paid for an article he had helped her to publish the previous year in *The Democratic Review*, he wrote to John O'Sullivan, the review's editor, telling him not to worry about the money. Elizabeth, he assured O'Sullivan, "is a good old soul and would give away her only petticoat, I do believe, to anybody that she thought needed it more than herself."

Sophia's efforts to assist Hawthorne were more warmly received. Without telling him, she began an illustration for "The Gentle Boy," her favorite story from "Twice-Told Tales." She chose the opening scene, in which a boy, Ilbrahim, is found weeping beneath the gallows tree in a Colonial New England village, where his father has been put to death for Quaker heresies. When Sophia finished her drawing, she showed it to Hawthorne, saying, "I want to know if this looks like your Ilbrahim." Hawthorne studied the sketch and replied, "He will never look otherwise to me!" Soon there were plans to publish the story and the drawing in a special edition, subsidized by Susan Burley, whose literary salons Hawthorne and the Peabody sisters had attended. "The Gentle Boy: A Thrice Told Tale" served Sophia's ambition to establish Hawthorne as an author worthy of illustration, an American Shakespeare.

With the prospect of a steady salary, Hawthorne was in a position to propose to Sophia, and by the end of December they were secretly engaged. Apparently unable to tell Elizabeth directly, Hawthorne contrived a way to let her know. On January 1, 1839, the Salem *Gazette* printed Hawthorne's "The Sister Years," a New Year's "address" to the city of Salem and, implicitly, to Elizabeth and Sophia, who read it sitting together on the train from Salem to Boston.

Sophia was on her way to see the engraver Joseph Andrews, to supervise corrections to her illustration of "The Gentle Boy." Sophia wrote to their father that she and Elizabeth had "passed the time" on the train reading "The Sister Years" aloud, finding it "full of wisdom" and "illuminated with wit."

The address, presented as a seasonal allegory, features the New Year as a young woman full of "smiling cheerfulness" arriving in Salem on the first morning train of January, 1839. Wearing a dress "rather too airy" for winter, and carrying a basket of roses, she has come to replace her "disconsolate" older sister, the Old Year, who waits for her on the steps of City Hall, burdened with an enormous folio volume, her "Book of Chronicles." Spilling from her arms are remnants of the difficult months of 1838: "several bundles of love-letters, eloquently breathing an eternity of burning passion, which grew cold and perished, almost before the ink was dry," as well as "an assortment of many thousand broken promises" and "a large parcel of disappointed hopes."

The New Year listens uncomprehendingly to the Old Year's litany of woes, offering as consolation the "fine lot of hopes here in my basket." Finally, she turns away and starts up the street, "a wonderfully pleasant looking figure," handing roses to everyone she meets.

Elizabeth had at last found her way into one of Hawthorne's stories. So, again, had Sophia, this time as a woman full of "so much promise and such an indescribable hopefulness in her aspect, that hardly anybody could meet her without anticipating some very desirable thing—the consummation of some long sought good."

There is no record of Elizabeth's reaction to "The Sister Years." Remarkably, she continued her work on Hawthorne's behalf. In 1840, she opened a foreign-language bookshop in Boston that served as a gathering place for transcendentalists, and a year later she became the publisher of *The Dial*, the movement's main journal. At her own expense, she printed Hawthorne's first stories for children, three volumes of historical tales beginning with "Grandfather's Chair," in 1840. But when the series didn't sell he quarrelled with her, and, in 1841, in a rare expression of bitterness, Elizabeth confided to Theodore Parker, a new friend, that, as he put it in a commiserating letter to her, she had been "cruelly wronged." It's not clear whether she named Hawthorne as her offender.

Biographers often cite Sophia as the inspiration for several of Hawthorne's characters. Yet his relationship with Elizabeth may have been equally significant. All of his novels feature powerful women, and more often two. Both "The Blithedale Romance" and "The Marble Faun" involve pairs of women—one sunny and vulnerable, one troubled and manipulative—who view themselves as sisters and vie for the affection of the novel's hero. The defiantly sensual Hester Prynne, Hawthorne's most memorable heroine, combines the attractions of both Elizabeth and Sophia.

In 1853, Sophia and Nathaniel moved with their three children to England, where Hawthorne assumed the position of United States consul in Liverpool, a government sinecure provided by President Franklin Pierce, another Bowdoin classmate. Four years later, Elizabeth sent Sophia an antislavery essay she had written. Hawthorne intercepted it and returned it to her without showing Sophia, chiding her for "bothering" her sister with propaganda. "No doubt it seems the truest of truths to you," he wrote, but "you look at matters with an awful squint, which distorts everything within your line of vision."

By the time of the Civil War, Hawthorne and his family had moved to Concord. There he was afflicted with a mysterious ailment that made it difficult for him to work. He died in 1864, at the age of fifty-nine, leaving behind several unfinished manuscripts.

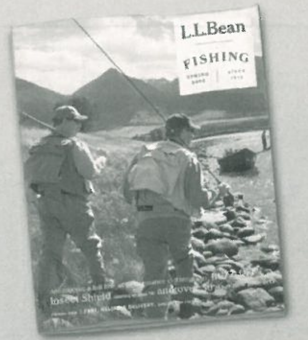
Elizabeth lived to be ninety and became a formidable advocate of progressive ideas, promoting abolition, woman suffrage, and Indian rights; establishing the first American kindergarten; and attaining literary immortality as Miss Birdseye, the indefatigable spinster activist in Henry James's "The Bostonians." (Elizabeth had been a friend and correspondent of James's father.)

When pressed by strangers and acquaintances, Elizabeth steadfastly denied that Hawthorne had jilted her. In an 1886 letter to Amelia Boelte, a niece of one of Elizabeth's kindergarten colleagues, she was emphatic: "I must hasten to tell you that it is all a mistake.—It is true that for the first three years after Hawthorne became known to and a *visitor* in our family, it was *rumoured*, that there was *probably* an engagement between him and *me* for we were manifestly very intimate *friends* and Sophia was considered so much of an invalid as not to be marriageable by any of us, including *herself* and Hawthorne."

Except to a few close friends, Elizabeth never spoke of how Hawthorne had used and mistreated her, apparently not even to Sophia, to whom she remained devoted. Mary Church, realizing the significance of Elizabeth's confession, had debated whether to include it in her biography: "Only after careful consideration did I decide to give it as an incident of her life that tends to clear the atmosphere & put in right relation much that has seemed inexplicable and indeed must so remain until the whole truth were made known—Naturally it could never be during the lives of any who bore a part."

Elizabeth's relatives evidently considered the biography too inflammatory to publish. Benjamin Pickman Mann, Elizabeth's nephew, had lent her letters and journals to Church, but after he read her manuscript he refused to coöperate further. "I threw my storehouse open to you with almost complete abandon, not contemplating your independent use of its contents," he wrote to her in an indignant letter. (Mann may have destroyed material that he found offensive; many of the journals Church quotes are missing from the collection of Peabody and Mann family papers that he donated to the Massachusetts Historical Society in 1915.)

Elizabeth had been in Concord shortly before Hawthorne died, but had not seen him; Sophia had insisted that he was too weak to receive visitors. Her letter to Elizabeth after the funeral was contrite. "He said he wished I had told him you were here that last Sunday," Sophia wrote. "But I know he did not wish to say any particular thing. It was a feeling of old friendship and solid regard—a sympathy with your great-heartedness—which was always in any one who had it—so powerful with him." Sophia seemed to be trying to make amends. "I do not believe any one understood him better than you except myself," she wrote. "No one appreciated you—as he constantly said—so well as he. 'I am her best friend,' he always said." ♦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