

## Part II Chapter 29 Better Not Tell!

That Monday Lena couldn't wait to let her friends at school know that she would be staying another week with the Learys, and that she would be walking back and forth alone with Nell who was at the Academy! She enjoyed the limelight until Sr. Rose Marie told her that it was time for her to attend to her lesson and stop the whispering.

She felt much more important now than she had last week, in proof of which, she had been delegated to stop by the boarding house to tell them the news and to collect a change of clothes so that Mama could wash their clothes.

Bridget planned to visit Mrs. Daly and asked Betty if she could look after Will and Dan during their naps one or two afternoons for several hours. She would take the twins with her and visit Mrs. Daly.

Cook let her in the servants' entrance and told her that Mrs. Daly had guests but wanted her to be shown up to the back parlor. There Bridget found her surrounded by a group of ladies. She recognized Mrs. Green and thought the other ladies were probably friends of hers.

"These are members of the Ladies New York Anti-Slavery Society, Bridget. We are meeting here with our special guest, Miss Sarah Grimke. I thought you might be interested to hear what we have been talking about—a matter of importance to us all. Please take a seat and listen. You may have some questions. I will ask Nurse to look after your twins while you are visiting." She rang a bell and Nurse came and took the sleeping infants.

"More than a million of our own sex are subjected to a traffic in bodies and souls more dreadful than death, to the sudden and cruel sundering of the most sacred relations of domestic life . . ." The women were speaking of slavery as a violation of female chastity and of the sanctity of the Christian family.

"We should go out into the highways and hedges, to bring people in to hear of the abuses of slavery. . . . We should not be afraid to gather in all classes from the neighborhoods roundabout. . ." Bridget could not imagine them really doing this, but they sounded sincere.

From what they said, she could tell that they had been ridiculed. "We are like the women who with heavy hearts followed the Savior to Calvary, and who were very probably ridiculed for meddling in politics."

They all nodded. Bridget wondered what they were referring to.

Miss Grimke was speaking. "Slavery is a preeminent domestic evil! It pollutes the very shrine of the home. Can it be claimed that woman has no interest here? It is the very ground on which she walks. Here she moves. . . . Women should be rising up to take their part in this mighty struggle. We are not asking them to leave their firesides, but to speak up and use their powers of persuasion in the circles in which they move, to convince the men in their lives of the great evil of slavery."

They all shook their heads.

She wondered who had been ridiculing them that they were so defensive.

"If Mr. Tappan only understood. Juliana, can't you bring him to our side?"

"My father has nothing but praise for our efforts, but he does not believe that the women question needs to be addressed by the Anti-Slavery Society at the same time."

Gradually Bridget understood that it was the New York City Anti-Slavery Society itself, led by Lewis Tappan, that was opposing women's participation. What had happened, she wondered. What was the women's question?

She recalled the time when Tim and Tom had gone to the anti-slavery meeting at the Chatham Street Chapel. Many women had been many women, he said. And Lewis Tappan along with Pastor Finney had led the meeting until anti-abolitionists who had forced the meeting to close and had gone on to riot and arson in nearby Five Points. She knew that most New Yorkers did not support the abolitionists and that the few who did were often punished for it, including Lewis Tappan. How was he now saying that women should leave it up to the men? She wondered what women like herself could do.

So she asked the question, "What can a woman such as I do, with five children?"

"That's what our husbands wonder—how can we do both—care for our children and speak up at public meetings."

"They think we should stay out of the limelight—so many of them have stopped backing us. They say we are not following St. Paul's words---

Sarah Grimke shook her head vigorously. "It is time that woman should move in the sphere Providence assigned her, and no longer rest satisfied in the limits which corrupt custom and a perverted application of the Scriptures has placed her."

"All we can do, I'm afraid, is to pray and fast," one of the women said in answer to Bridget's question.

Another, who identified herself as Sara Ingraham, editor of *The Advocate for Moral Reform*, agreed. "Pray for the slaves, that God will protect them."

But Sarah Grimke said, "Nonsense, Ladies. We should sit with them in places of worship, walk with them in the streets, visit them in their homes and encourage them to visit us."

The ladies looked at one another, then looked away.

"Well, shall we plan another meeting of the Ladies New York Anti-Slavery Society or not?" Mrs. Green asked. I move that we do."

The motion was seconded and a discussion commenced.

"Our husbands—" began one lady.

"And fathers--" added Juliana.

". . . Would not approve. They are resigning from the Board of Directors of the national organization of the Ladies Anti-Slavery Society."

"—which we just joined last year," Ms. Tappan lamented.

After a silence, Mrs. Green spoke again. "Well, shall we hold another meeting?"

"Sisters, we have found common cause with each other," one of the women finally said, looking around after a long silence during which no one called the question. "We know that the majority of our New York group would not want to pursue the path with the national organization which seeks to add the women's question to the abolitionist cause, but perhaps some of us who do favor both causes could just meet informally, to keep ourselves informed?"

So the motion died and the ladies agreed to meet informally.

After the others left, Miss Grimke who was staying for dinner with the Dalys, turned to Bridget. "Bridget was our seamstress, Sarah. She and I have been friends for since before my son was born."

Nurse returned with the twins followed by Willie, 7 and Molly, the same age as Daniel. When Nurse handed the twins to Bridget she gave her a look that said, I'm keeping count, then called, "Come along Master Will and Miss Molly."

"Sarah, tell Bridget your story," Mrs. Daly invited.

“I grew up on a plantation in South Carolina. My father was a judge and my brother was educated at Yale, while I, who wanted to become a lawyer, was made to stay home and never received an education beyond reading and writing. My father did not believe education was appropriate for girls.

“We had many slaves; I could not understand why my parents, who required that they all be baptized and attend church services, yet would not let them learn to read even the Bible that they might share in the faith. I taught Sunday school to them every Sunday from the time I was twelve, and secretly taught my personal slave to read and write. When my father learned of this, he nearly had her whipped and forbade me to teach her any more. He said learning would only make the slaves rebellious and discontented, and that teaching them to read had been illegal in South Carolina since 1740! From that time I decided to devote myself to helping the unfortunate—slaves and women.

“When my father died in 1821, I moved to Philadelphia and became a Quaker, hoping they would help.” Bridget remembered that the Quakers had been of great assistance to the Irish girls back home. “However enlightened they were about slavery, they had no interest in furthering the education of women. I have had to champion that cause myself, yet when I have tried to join it to the abolition cause, I seem to have brought about the opposite result within the Abolitionist cause.”

“New York is the worst!” Mrs. Daly complained. “Ever since women have begun to speak up for their own freedoms, men have changed their tune and told us we should stay at home and remain in our place, abandoning the ladies’ anti-slavery society completely,”

Bridget didn’t know how to respond to this except to tell Miss Grimke that she had received an education in Ireland from the Sisters, and hoped that all her children would receive an education, including her daughters. Later she felt foolish, for they were speaking of a real education—a classical education, such as Tom had been getting in the seminary.

Mrs. Daly invited her to return on Thursday afternoon, promising that she would not have any other visitors, so they could visit.

She returned to the Learys eager to tell Betty and Lena what Sarah Grimke had said.

As she and Betty were preparing dinner that evening, Nell was in the kitchen teaching her letters to Cathy. Lena, who had no need of help from Nell, as she could read, was running errands for her mother. Will—who had been told to “sit there and learn your letters as well,” using the slate that Nell had used long ago—jumped up and screamed, “No, I don’t want to!” He preferred to run out and see whether there were any cart men on the road that he could hail down.

“No, Will. Stay there with Nell. Be a good boy,” Bridget said.

“Can’t you see Mama’s busy, you naughty boy!” scolded Lena.

But he kept pestering his mother until she finally said, “Let him go, Lena. He’s too much trouble in the kitchen anyway.” She was beginning to prefer peace wherever Will was concerned. Fighting with him was taking up all her energy. She had hoped to use that week to get on her feet and figure out how she was going to take care of twins, in addition to Lena, Dan and especially Will.

When she and Betty were alone later that evening sitting at the kitchen table, she confided, “I named her Elizabeth for you, Betty,” Bridget was saying. “I couldn’t have survived last week without you. Elizabeth will always remind me of your kindness. I pray that I never feel like that again. I didn’t care about anything or anyone. I was lost.”

Bridget could see that Betty was embarrassed. Women didn’t speak that openly to each other about their emotions. Reading Lydian Maria Child’s *The Mother’s Book* and hearing the ladies speaking up for women (not “ladies,” she thought), had made her self-reflective. Who else could she talk to? She didn’t want to burden Tom with her fears. She and Tom had a tacit rule that they didn’t unburden themselves to each other. She needed to talk to someone, and Betty had helped her survive that terrible week.

“I’m dreading not having Tom at home in the evenings now. Will needs a stronger voice than mine telling him what to do and not to do. He takes advantage of me as soon as he sees I’m too busy to attend to him. Now that I have the twins, I’m afraid he’ll be almost unsupervised. I’m afraid he’s going to continue this way unless someone settles him down. I’m not going to be up to it; I know that now, after last week..”

“You had a shock. With two children under six, having two more at once would give anyone a shock. You’ll be back to your old self soon.”

On Thursday, Mrs. Daly received her in the back parlor. Nurse came to take the twins into the nursery, giving her a reproachful look, and left the women alone. Bridget could see that Mrs. Daly had been crying.

“Bridget, I’m so glad you came. I need to talk to someone, and you were here the other day and heard our conversation.”

“It was inspiring, although I was embarrassed later that I had mentioned my meager education to Miss Grimke, who plainly wanted a classical education, such as your husband has. But what’s happened?”

“That’s the trouble. She told that to Mr. Daly, and . . .”

“And Mr. Daly didn’t think it appropriate??”

“I knew you’d understand. When Sarah spoke that way at our dinner table the other evening, he was shocked. He has never come to any of the abolitionist meetings, although he knows that I have been going for several years, but the cause has never interested him. As soon as she began to speak about equality, I could see that he was beginning to get uneasy. I tried to warn her, but she continued, using the example of herself to claim the intellectual equality of woman with man. She’s not afraid to speak up to men, even to judges. Indeed she told him that her father had been a judge and had said if she **had only been a boy**, ‘she would have made the greatest jurist in the country.’”



“I could see Mr. Daly was astonished at this claim, and tried to change the subject, but she went on with her argument. Even though women are not able at present to prove they are equal, she told him, they should never admit inferiority. Instead, they should pursue and are already beginning to pursue admittance to the professions hitherto monopolized by men—as physicians and lecturer, as lawyers—where their talents will be appreciated and rewarded by all who have willing eyes and ears. She told him that we have already heard women speaking at our various conventions and see that some are fine orators. She was likely referring to herself, as she is a natural orator.”

“She is an imposing woman,” Bridget agreed.

“My husband was astonished. He hadn’t even known that women spoke publically at these meetings. He just assumed we all sat in the gallery and listened politely to all the men. Oh, how I wish that I had taken him along to hear the fine speeches that women have made. Now it is too late.”

“What happened?”

“She told him that she could see that this was all a surprise to him and offered to give him a copy of her *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes* which she had addressed to the President of the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society.”

“And?”

“I encouraged him to accept, and invited him to come to an anti-slavery meeting, where such things were discussed—though not any more, I fear, in New York, after our meeting.”

“I dread to hear what he said to that offer.”

“He told me that he should never go to listen to a woman speaking in public nor read a book written by a woman, and that I should never go again myself. Of course he didn’t say that in front of Miss Grimke, only told me that we would discuss it later. I believe it was a mistake to give him the chance to meet her. I should have left him in the dark, where he was happy.”

“But isn’t it better that he knows, especially if it means a lot to you?”

“Men needn’t be told everything women think and believe.”

Bridget herself had the same thoughts with regard to Tom, so she couldn’t disagree.

“I asked her to give the book to me instead, that I would read it and perhaps I could introduce some of her arguments to him.” She showed Bridget the book, and promised to let her read it when she had finished.

When Lena returned home after school that Thursday, she found Will outside on the sidewalk, teasing Cathy by attempting to snatch Cathy’s hoop, backing off, then snatching pushing her away, and taking off with it and driving it down the street.

“You bad boy, give the hoop back to Cathy,” Lena called, but he was too far away, so she went inside to find her mother to tell her what he was up to and ask her to go after him. She found only Mrs. Leary hanging laundry in the back. “Your mama just came home, Lena, and is taking a nap upstairs with the babies. Let her rest.”

Lena was forced to run Will down herself, take the hoop from him, give it to Cathy, and take him by the hand and pull him indoors. She couldn’t wake up her mama, so she took her crying brother outside, where his cries couldn’t disturb his mother, pushed him into the privy, slammed the door shut and told him he would have to stay inside until he promised not to bother Cathy. He began screaming and crying, but he got no response. He tried to push open the door, but Lena was holding it.

“You’re wasting your screams, Will. No one can hear you.” Lena stayed there guarding him. “If I let you out, will you not bother Cathy?”

He didn’t reply.

“Very well. You can just stay in there.”

He pushed on the door. She was still holding it shut.

He stayed quiet for a while. "Lena, can I come out?"

"Only if you'll promise to stop teasing Cathy."

Silence.

That went on until he shouted. "It stinks in here. I can't breathe!"

She paid no attention.

"Lena?"

She didn't answer. Maybe she had gone away? He tried the door. She was still holding it.

"Lena? Are you there? Please. Mama!!!"

"Mama's asleep and can't hear you."

He was silent again. A war of wills began. She would not speak again until he surrendered.

He pounded on the door, crying, "Let me out! Let me out!"

"Not until you promise."

He cried and pounded and screamed, but Lena ignored him. "No one is listening, Will. You're wasting your screams."

Finally, realizing that no one would come to his aid, and Lena meant business, he relented. Lena let him out.

That evening during dinner, whenever Will began to torment Cathy or Dan, Lena leaned over and asked him, "You want to go back into the privy, Will?"

"What did you say to Will, Lena?" Her mother asked later that evening when they were cleaning up.

"Nothing, Mama."

Lena didn't mention the incident to her mother, and neither did Will. He may have realized that if Mama was too busy to notice when he got into mischief of

his own making, she was also too busy to notice Lena's mischief-making, so if he could get away with things, so could Lena, including shutting him in the privy.