

Colleen Mills

Palimpsest

It is impossible to conceive of a creature more wholly beautiful and fantastical than Laurel when she opens her eyes from sleep. Her mother's hopes and expectations of what Laurel would accomplish all combined to create a sense of warmth and nurturing that was exclusive to Laurel. By giving her the best part of everything she had ever known herself capable of, Laurel's mother gave her freedom and protection from the dangers she had suffered to avoid. Giving more to her than any of her other children seemed natural.

Then there was her son, the very image of his father—the face she had fallen in love with, the glance under which she had swooned, the voice that she had heard in the evenings of happier, youthful days. Now her aging, mournful husband—even as he lay in sickness, lingering weakly, seemed to look reproachfully on her, and asked her with his eyes how she could neglect him in his last hours as she did in order to give Laurel more than her fair share nursing.

But more desperate than all was her self-love, brought on by the realization of mortality of her husband. Her son was old enough to spend time by himself, and, in any case, she would only contribute to his dependence by spending more time with him. The thought of having held him to her breast made her shiver, and she expelled all thoughts of him with a convulsive shudder, as she turned her mind back to Laurel.

Original

It is impossible to conceive of a human creature more wholly desolate and forlorn than Eliza, when she turned her footsteps from Uncle Tom's cabin.

Her husband's suffering and dangers, and the danger of her child, all blended in her mind, with a confused and stunning sense of the risk she was running, in leaving the only home she had ever known, and cutting loose from the protection of a friend whom she loved and revered. Then there was the parting from every familiar object—the place where she had grown up, the trees under which she had played, the groves where she had walked many an evening in happier days, by the side of her young husband—everything, as it lay in the clear, frosty starlight, seemed to speak reproachfully to her, and ask her whither could she go from a home like that?

But stronger than all was maternal love, wrought into a paroxysm of frenzy by the near approach of a fearful danger. Her boy was old enough to have walked by her side, and, in an indifferent case, she would only have led him by the hand; but now the bare thought of putting him out of her arms made her shudder, and she strained him to her bosom with a convulsive grasp, as she went rapidly forward.

—Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*