

In the Great City

By Devin Poore

Note: this is a rough approximation of the publication in Sybil's Garage #1. I don't personally know anyone who still has a copy of that first hand-printed and stapled issue that Matt did. My copy was loaned out to family some years ago and has since disappeared. Nice to know a piece of my work is in what is now a collector's item!



Hand in hand in the shadows of
the Great City we walked.

Spring was about, a breeze
weaving down between the
buildings, bracing our winter-
weary spirits. The crowds and
carriages had begun to thin; a
purple tinge above our head told

of the coming of night. We turned for home, suddenly very alone, my cane keeping
hollow time with our steps on the stones.

The old church stood stiffly on guard along our route. The cobbled streets parted
in respect of the larger stones, erect and bearing names, and of the renewing greening
grass of the yard and its charges. An old woman, the story of her life etched in the lines
of her face, patted one of the stones and turned to go.

My Elizabeth stopped at the sight and turned to face me, both of her hands
capturing mine.

“Do tell me that we shall never be apart,” she said. “I don’t think I could bear being separated from you.”

“Never,” I said resolutely. I smiled at my young bride, her sharp nose turned up at me with pleading eyes; eyes dark within the shadow of her new hat.

“You think me silly to ask such a thing, don’t you?” She asked with wounded words.

“Not at all,” I replied. “I think it admirable that you do. I love you too much to ever leave. I have to wonder, though,” I added with a sly sideways glance at her softening face, “why you do not make such a promise to me? Am I to be the one chasing you about this earth, with no hope of you returning the favor?”

“Oh silly,” she said with a hand at her mouth and a giggle, “Of course I promise it as well. You won’t be able to get rid of me, even if you wish!”

Taking her up into my arms I lifted and twirled her about in the shadow of that church, our promises there for it to witness. She squealed with delight and grasped at my hat as it threatened to fall.

The sky now seeping to darkness, we continued onward, as street lamps sparked to life and lead the way.

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We stood with heads bowed in the Great City. We stood in the lot, staring at the fading green of the grass, at the testifying stones, and at the mound of fresh, dark earth. We stared unbelievably at the wooden box that held my Elizabeth.

The priest in his robe stood, not unlike as he had at our wedding. Arms stretched upwards, face pointed downwards, not seeing the ground, but seeking something higher up. His words once promised hope and love, now they offered nothing.

“Stephen, you have our love,” her mother said to me at the closing of the service, the sentiment at odds with the look upon her face. The words were as hollow to me as the echo of the clods of dirt falling onto the wooden box.

Her eyes, and those of her husband, told the story. Told of how it was my fault. If not for me, their daughter would have stayed in the country. She would not have contracted the disease. She would still be with them. She would still be their loving daughter, not an innocuous stone among the scores the City held.

They left me to my vigil. The brown leaves of the fall rattled on the cold and damp mound of dirt; against the cold unfeeling stone. Her name and time upon this earth etched there, and the simple promise, “Never to be apart”.

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The blackness of the night threatened to even extinguish the street lamps. People moved quickly with coats pulled close against the chill of the coming winter. My hat and scarf were powerless to keep the night at bay.

Entering my home, still fully furnished but now empty, a gust of wind stole the door from my hand, banging it against the jamb and bringing litter from the street tumbling inside. Wrestling against the rising wind, I muscled the door closed.

With two candles on the bare wood table – only two, as no number of flames could now chase the darkness from my home - I took my dinner cold and quickly. The wind continued to buffet the windows, and whistle through the keyhole. With each exhalation through that lock, I thought I heard my name foggy and pained – Stephen.

Hurrying to bed, the candles extinguished with a huff, I closed the bedroom door, and pulled the covers tight to keep out the memories. I lay in the bed too large for only

one, in a room that had lost all of its life on the day she had lost hers. Soon, the lock to that door as well whispered to me faintly. Stephen.

The wind rose and rattled the windows violently, the door and very walls shuddered, and over this cacophony of sound, still came that whisper. Stephen.

The blankets failed at their task, and the memories flowed over me, taking me under. Had I been to blame? What if I had taken her to the doctor sooner? What if we had moved to the country as her parents – and even she – had suggested?

Tears stung my eyes and the rattling of the windows and doors agitated my soul. I leapt from bed and dressed quickly, intent on making the cemetery and asking forgiveness at that now slightly sunken plot of land before the stone.

Distracted I wrestled the front door open, it in mid-whisper (Steph-) and plunged into the street. The horse's hooves on the street clumped out of the dark as I whirled quickly enough to lose my hat and glove, both falling meaningless to the cobblestones. The lantern on the side of the carriage flashed bright in my eyes, the flame of it coalescing into the face of my Elizabeth, and she whispered once more my name, and then the horse and the pain was upon me.

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The old church stood stiffly in the Great City, keeping watch over the yard and those who lay within it. The people parted company, leaving the two stones to stand together. Together for all time. I watched over it all not knowing how it was possible, but doing it all the same. The gray and barren trees swayed over our graves, hers sunken and mossy, mine dark and tinged of frost.

The impossibility of it all left me as she took my hand. I looked upon my love's lucent face, now somehow unfamiliar and yet recognizable, and remembered our vow.

Were the promises made by the living, while wrapped in breathing flesh, to hold sway as the desires of that flesh deterred as quickly as the contents of the grave?

I gripped her hand as tightly as purposeless fingers would allow. Without sound we ebbed off together – my understanding of the mortal world leaving as well - to walk the streets of the Great City together, always together, ever more.

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