

The Angel Joy

By Elizabeth Stuart Phelps

Oh, was it a death-dream not dreamed through,
That eyed her like a foe?
Or only a sorrow left over from life,
Half-finished years ago?

How long was it since she died—who told?
Or yet what was death—who knew?
She said: “I am come to Heaven at last,
And I’ll do as the blessed do.”

But the custom of earth was stronger than Heaven,
And the habit of life than death,
How should an anguish as old as thought
Be healed by the end of breath?

Tissue and nerve and pulse of her soul
Had absorbed the disease of woe.
The strangest of all the angels there
Was Joy. (Oh, the wretched know!)

“I am too tired with earth,” she said,
“To rest me in Paradise.
Give me a spot to creep away,
And close my heavy eyes.

“I must learn to be happy in Heaven,” she said,
“As we learned to suffer below.”—
“Our ways are not your ways,” he said,
“And ours the ways you go.”

As love, too wise for a word, puts by
All a woman’s weak alarms,
Joy hushed her lips, and gathered her
Into his mighty arms.

He took her to his holy heart,
And there—for he held her fast—
The saddest spirit in the world,
Came to herself at last.