

Mindfulness Stories of Life

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April Healey

Schrijver: April Healey
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On Your Way

Elke vrouw kan er tegenwoordig over meepraten: door je drukke leven van werken, moederen en netwerken, blijft er weinig tijd over om te werken aan jezelf. Even rustig ergens zitten en je afvragen wat jij nu precies wil, is er niet meer bij. Terwijl het eigenlijk zo makkelijk is. Je hebt namelijk geen yogalessen, goji-bessen of andere prijzige en tijdrovende middeltjes nodig om rust in je leven te creëren, je kunt heel makkelijk hetzelfde bereiken met literatuur. Literatuur is zoveel meer dan de saaie lessen die je je herinnert van school, het is een verzameling van voorbeelden die je veel vertellen over de wereld en jezelf. Of je nu last hebt van een burn-out en op zoek bent naar meer zingeving in je leven of je nu je kinderen het huis uit zijn meer over jezelf wil ontdekken, boeken kunnen je alle antwoorden geven die je nodig hebt. Alleen al het lezen zelf brengt ontspanning met zich mee. De wetenschap heeft aangetoond dat wanneer je leest je hartslag daalt en je ademhaling rustiger wordt, waardoor je lijf vanzelf ontspant – en je geest automatisch volgt. Lezen is dus de meest

toegankelijke vorm van mindfulness die er is, want iedereen kan het, en het enige wat je ervoor hoeft te doen, is te gaan zitten en een boek te pakken.

Om de beginnende lezer(es) op weg te helpen, is deze bundel samengesteld. Het is een bloemlezing van bekende en minder bekende verhalen uit de Britse en Amerikaanse literatuur van de 19e eeuw: dé verhalen die je het meest over jezelf en de wereld kunnen leren. Daarnaast zijn deze boeken vaak onbekend bij een Nederlands lezerspubliek, waardoor het makkelijker is om je aan de tekst over te geven, omdat het een eerste kennismaking is. Al snel zullen deze teksten echter heel persoonlijk en vertrouwd voelen, omdat ze je, als goede vriendinnen, helpen om te gaan met thema's als ontspanning, relativering, zelfvertrouwen en relaties tot anderen. Na het lezen van dit boek zal je verstedd staan van wat je over jezelf geleerd hebt, en hoeveel overzichtelijker je leven is geworden. Ook jij. Want literatuur is er voor iedereen.

Index

On Your Way.....	5
Content.....	8
Beauty.....	8
Lonely Places.....	9
Comparison.....	34
Conscience.....	34
The Sphinx Without A Secret.....	35
Cowards.....	45
Players.....	45
Nature.....	45
The Nice People.....	46
The Innocents Abroad.....	63
Action.....	72
Adversity.....	72
To Be Read At Dusk.....	73
Portrait of a Lady.....	95
The New Catacomb.....	102
Prometheus.....	128
The Tempest.....	131

Content

My crown is in my heart, not on my head;
Not decked with diamonds and Indian stones,
Nor to be seen; my crown is called "content;"
A crown it is, that seldom kings enjoy.

King Henry VI., Part 3d - III. 1.

Beauty

The hand, that hath made you fair, hath made
you good: the
goodness, that is cheap in beauty, makes
beauty brief in goodness;
but grace, being the soul of your complexion,
should keep the body
of it ever fair.

Measure for Measure -- III. 1.

Lonely Places

She was not quite forty years old, but so aged was she in appearance that another twenty-five years would not find her perceptibly older. And to the people of Almont she was still Abbie Snover, or "that Snover girl." Age in Almont is not reckoned in years, but by marriage, and by children, and grandchildren. Nearly all the young men of Abbie's generation had gone to the City, returning only in after years, with the intention of staying a week or two weeks, and leaving at the end of a day, or two days. So Abbie never married.

It had never occurred to Abbie to leave Almont because all the young men had gone away. She had been born in the big house at the foot of Tillson Street; she had never lived anywhere else; she had never slept anywhere but in the black walnut bed in the South bedroom.

At the age of twenty-five, Abbie inherited the big house, and with it hired-man Chris. He was part of her inheritance. Her memory of him, like her memory of the big house, went back as far as her memory of herself.

Every Winter evening, between seven and eight o'clock, Abbie lighted the glass-handled lamp, placed it on the marble-topped table in the parlor window, and sat down beside it. The faint light of this lamp, gleaming through the snow-hung, shelving evergreens, was the only sign that the big house was there, and occupied. When the wind blew from the West she could occasionally hear a burst of laughter from the boys and girls sliding down Giddings's Hill; the song of some young farmer driving home. She thought of the Spring, when the snow would disappear, and the honeysuckle would flower, and the wrens would again occupy the old teapots hung in the vines of the dining-room porch.

The things that made the people of Almont interesting to each other and drew them together meant nothing to Abbie Snover. When she had become too old to be asked in marriage by any one, she had stopped going to dances and to sleigh-rides, and no one had asked her why. Then she had left the choir.

Except when she went to do her marketing, Abbie was never seen on the streets.

For fifteen years after Amos Snover died, Abbie and Old Chris lived alone in the big house. Every Saturday morning, as her mother

had done before her, Abbie went to the grocery store, to the butcher shop, and to "Newberry's." She always walked along the East side of Main Street, Old Chris, with the market-basket, following about three feet behind her. And every Saturday night Old Chris went down-town to sit in the back of Pot Lippincott's store and visit with Owen Frazer, who drove in from the sixty acres he farmed as a "renter" at Mile Corners. Once every week Abbie made a batch of cookies, cutting the thin-rolled dough into the shape of leaves with an old tin cutter that had been her mother's. She stored the cookies in the shiny tin pail that stood on the shelf in the clothes-press of the downstairs bedroom, because that was where her mother had always kept them, to be handy and yet out of reach of the hired help. And when Jennie Sanders's children came to her door on their way home from school she gave them two cookies each, because her mother had always given her two. Once every three months "the Jersey girls," dressed in black broadcloth, with black, fluted ruffles around their necks, and black-flowered bonnets covering their scanty hair, turned the corner at Chase's Lane, walked three blocks to

the foot of Tilson Street, and rang Abbie Snover's door-bell.

As Old Chris grew older and less able, Abbie was compelled to close off first one room and then another; but Old Chris still occupied the back chamber near the upstairs woodroom, and Abbie still slept in the South bedroom.

Early one October afternoon, Jim East, Almont's express agent and keeper of the general store, drove his hooded delivery cart up to the front steps of the big house. He trembled with excitement as he climbed down from the seat.

"Abbie Snover! Ab—bie!" he called. "I got somethin' for you! A package all the way from China! Just you come an' look!"

Jim East lifted the package out of the delivery cart, carried it up the steps, and set it down at Abbie's feet.

"Just you look, Abbie! That there crate's made of little fishin' poles, an' what's inside's all wrapped up in Chinee mats!"

Old Chris came around from the back of the house. Jim East grabbed his arm and pointed at the bamboo crate:

"Just you put your nose down, Chris, an' smell. Ain't that foreign?"

Abbie brought her scissors. Carefully she removed the red and yellow labels.

"There's American writin' on 'em, too," Jim East hastened to explain, "'cause otherwise how'd I know who it was for, hey?"

Abbie carried the labels into the parlor and looked for a safe place for them. She saw the picture-album and put them in it. Then she hurried back to the porch. Old Chris opened one end of the crate.

"It's a plant," Jim East whispered; "a Chineese plant."

"It's a dwarf orange-tree," Old Chris announced. "See, it says so on that there card."

Abbie carried the little orange-tree into the parlor. Who could have sent it to her? There was no one she knew, away off there in China!

"You be careful of that bamboo and the wrappings," she warned Old Chris. "I'll make something decorative-like out of them."

Abbie waited until Jim East drove away in his delivery cart. Then she sat down at the table in the parlor and opened the album. She found her name on one of the labels—ABBIE SNOVER, ALMONT, MICHIGAN, U. S. A. It seemed queer to her that her name had come all the way from China. On the card that said

that the plant was a dwarf orange-tree she found the name—Thomas J. Thorington. Thomas? Tom? Tom Thorington! Why, the last she had heard of Tom had been fifteen years back. He had gone out West. She had received a picture of him in a uniform, with a gun on his shoulder. She dimly recollected that he had been a guard at some penitentiary. How long ago it seemed! He must have become a missionary or something, to be away off in China. And he had remembered her! She sat for a long time looking at the labels. She wondered if the queer Chinese letters spelled ABBIE SNOVER, ALMONT, MICHIGAN. She opened the album again and hunted until she found the picture of Tom Thorington in his guard's uniform. Then she placed the labels next to the picture, closed the album, and carefully fastened the adjustable clasp.

Under Abbie's constant attention, the little orange-tree thrived. A tiny green orange appeared. Day by day she watched it grow, looking forward to the time when it would become large and yellow. The days grew shorter and colder, but she did not mind; every week the orange grew larger. After the first snow, she moved the tree into the down-

stairs bedroom. She placed it on a little stand in the South window. The inside blinds, which she had always kept as her mother liked them best—the lower blinds closed, the top blinds opened a little to let in the morning light—she now threw wide open so that the tree would get all of the sun. And she kept a fire in the small sheet-iron stove, for fear that the old, drafty wood furnace might not send up a steady enough heat through the register. When the nights became severe, she crept down the narrow, winding stairs, and through the cold, bare halls, to put an extra chunk of hardwood into the stove. Every morning she swept and dusted the room; the ashes and wood dirt around the stove gave her something extra to do near the orange-tree. She removed the red and white coverlet from the bed, and put in its place the fancy patch-quilt with the green birds and the yellow flowers, to make the room look brighter.

"Abbie Snover loves that orange-tree more'n anything in the world," Old Chris cautioned the children when they came after cookies, "an' don't you dare touch it, even with your little finger."

The growing orange was as wonderful to the children as it was to Abbie. Instead of taking