

**TWO WOMEN:
1862. A POEM**

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Two Women: 1862. A Poem by Constance Fenimore Woolson

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1862.

A P O E M.

BY

CONSTANCE FENIMORE WOOLSON.

Univ. of
California

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UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

TWO WOMEN.

1862.

O N E.

THROUGH miles of green cornfields that lusty
And strong face the sun and rejoice
In his heat, where the brown bees go dusty
With pollen from flowers of their choice,
'Mong myriads down by the river
Who offer their honey, the train
Flies south with a whir and a shiver,
Flies south through the lowlands that quiver
With ripening grain—

Fair wheat, like a lady for fancies,
Who bends to the breeze, while the corn
Held stiff all his stubborn green lances
The moment his curled leaf was born;
And grapes, where the vineyards are sweeping
The shores of the river whose tide—

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TWO WOMEN.

Slew moving, brown tide—holds the keeping
Of War and of Peace that lie sleeping,
Couched lions, each side.

Hair curlless, and hid, and smooth-banded,
Blue innocent maidenly eyes,
That gaze at the lawless rough-handed
Young soldiers with grieving surprise
At oaths on their lips, the deriding
And jestings that load every breath,
While on with dread swiftness are gliding
Their moments, and o'er them is biding
The shadow of death!

Face clear-cut and pearly, a slender
Small maiden with calm, home-bred air;
No deep-tinted hues you might lend her
Could touch the faint gold of her hair,
The blue of her eyes, or the neatness
Of quaint little gown, smoothly spun
From threads of soft gray, whose completeness
Doth fit her withdrawn gentle sweetness—
A lily turned nun.

Ohio shines on to her border,
Ohio all golden with grain;

The river comes up at her order,
And curves toward the incoming train ;
"The river! The river! O borrow
A speed that is swifter— Afar
Kentucky! Haste, haste, thou To-morrow!"
Poor lads, dreaming not of the sorrow,
The anguish of war.

THE OTHER.

WEST from the Capital's crowded throng
The fiery engine rushed along,
Over the road where danger lay
On each bridge and curve of the midnight way,
Shooting across the rivers' laps,
Up the mountains, into the gaps,
Through West Virginia like the wind,
Fire and sword coming on behind,
Whistling defiance that echoed back
To mountain guerrillas burning the track,
"Do the worst, ye rebels, that ye can do
To the train that follows, but *I* go through!"

A motley crowd—the city thief;
The man of God; the polished chief
Of a band of gamblers; the traitor spy;
The correspondent with quick, sharp eye;
The speculator who boldly made
His fifty per cent. in a driving trade
At the edge of the war; the clean lank clerk
Sent West for sanitary work;
The bounty-jumper; the lordling born
Viewing the country with wondering scorn—
A strange assemblage filled the car
That dared the midnight border-band,
Where life and death went hand-in-hand
Those strange and breathless days of war.

The conductor's lantern moves along,
Slowly lighting the motley throng
Face by face; what sudden gleam
Flashes back in the lantern's beam
Through shadows down at the rearward door?
The conductor pauses; all eyes explore
The darkened corner: a woman's face
Thrown back asleep—the shimmer of lace,
The sheen of silk, the yellow of gold,
The flash of jewels, the careless fold
Of an India shawl that half concealed