

FRIENDS: A DUET

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649588978

Friends: A Duet by Elizabeth Stuart Phelps

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

ELIZABETH STUART PHELPS

FRIENDS: A DUET

FRIENDS: A DUET.

FRIENDS:

A DUET.

BY

ELIZABETH STUART PHELPS, *and*

AUTHOR OF "THE GATES AJAR," "THE STORY OF AYS," ETC., ETC.

"Either Death or a Friend." — PERSIAN PROVERB.

"May it be mine to keep the unwritten Laws." — SOPHOCLES.



BOSTON:
HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN AND COMPANY.
The Riverside Press, Cambridge.

1881.

AS

PS3142
F7

Copyright, 1881,
BY ELIZABETH STUART PHILPS

All rights reserved.

RIVERSIDE, CAMBRIDGE:
STEREOTYPED AND PRINTED BY
H. O. MOUNTON AND COMPANY.

FRIENDS: A DUET.

I.

"Whatever 's lost, it first was won."

ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING.

It was a February day in Boston. It was going to rain. Though only four o'clock in the afternoon, the sense of night already overpowered the sense of day on the "morning side" of Mt. Vernon Street, whence the color of the sun had long since crept down the hill and lay low across Charles River and the intervening street, thrusting apart the gathering clouds with slips of light, long and pale, like slender hands.

A woman thought of this. She stood at her drawing-room window, looking up and down the hill. She held the curtain back from her figure with uplifted wrist,—a delicate wrist. She had stepped between the curtain, which was lace, and the window. Looking in, therefore, from without, as one passed through the darkening street,

she showed real and human. But looking at her from within, across the warm and silent room, the curtain swaying on her outline, she made a lovely ghost.

In either aspect of the watcher — for she was a watcher, that was plain enough — an observant person would have said of her, It is a wife, — a happy watcher, a happy wife.

Beyond those trifling signs of individuality in household art which creep into the homes of most people of character, there was nothing to distinguish this from other parlors on Mt. Vernon Street. It was not necessary to look twice to see that the lady behind the curtain had a luxurious and light-hearted home.

Something — was it in her attitude? was it in her expression? — would have indicated her to the sensitive eye as a woman deeply loving and deeply loved. Certainly she bore that beautiful and modest self-consciousness which belongs to no other creature and to no other condition, and which is as radiant and as regal as the look that the sea gives to the sunrise.

A gentleman came over the hill, walking slowly; he came from the direction of the State House and Tremont Street, and therefore held his

face turned towards the swiftly departing light. Drops were falling. They ran together on the window and thickened ; the pavement was growing wet. It was a muggy night, and betokened either a prolonged thaw, or the sudden surrender of nature's forces which precedes a deadly chill. The gentleman walked languidly, as people do in weak weather ; possibly he looked pale.

She had turned rapturously on hearing his step ; then all her attitude fell. He passed beneath the window, she watching him. He glanced up once before he rang the bell, and saw her, between the curtain and the window, nodding down to him. She looked very near. She was still standing there, when he came into the room ; only the pale lace now fell over her. He could but notice her contour on it, even then, with the high, fine crown of hair and the wrist turned back, — a beautiful wraith !

But when she came to meet him she saw how grave he was.

" Mr. Nordball ! I — thought you were John. I mean when I heard your step — at first. Sit down. I am glad to see you. But you look ill. John is late. I was watching for him."

" Yes, Mrs. Strong, John is late."

Nordhall said this clumsily enough. He too sat down. He felt faint. But she smiled up at him fondly ; she had always known Charles Nordhall.

" You will stay to dine with us, now. John will soon be here. We were to read together this evening, early ; I ordered dinner an hour sooner. We are reading — of all things, what do you think ? — Paul and Virginia ! We had never read it before, — together. John will be in very soon."

She laughed at herself, blushing a little, but thinking that it was only Charley Nordhall. She had a low and happy laugh. Yet he could see that she listened towards the pavement with the intensity by which only the very happy or the very miserable attend.

It had grown dark. Servants came in. Nordhall dimly saw the gas flash, and the colors of the room leap out ; the hearth-rug where the dog lay, — listening, too. The rug was Persian ; the dog a setter, brown and white. The tête-à-tête was of a garnet shade, and lustrous ; it was rolled towards the grate, with a generous plump hassock before it, such as a tired man likes. An old copy of Paul and Virginia lay on the cushions of the tête-à-tête.