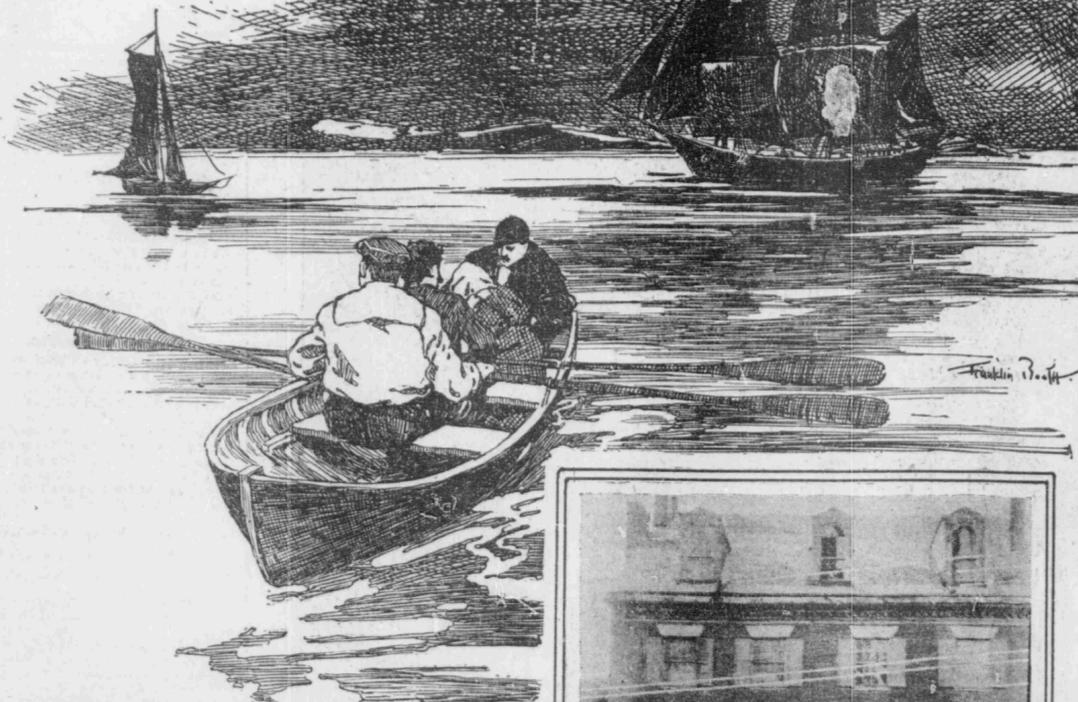


# The Grave Of the Stranger: A Story of Alexandria



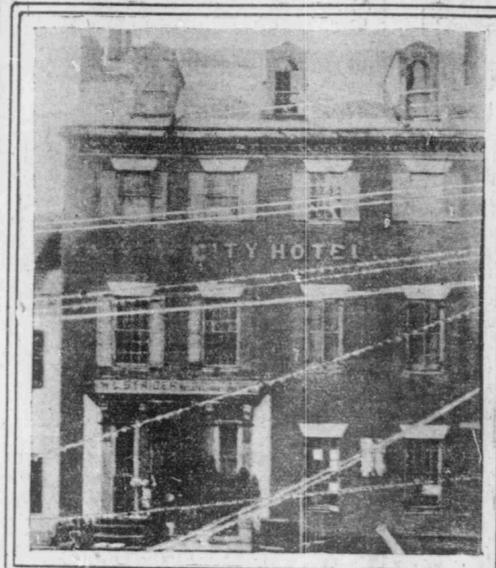
Sarah Curran.



Theodosia Burr.



The Grave Of The Stranger.



The Old City Hotel, Alexandria Va.

### Identity of a Woman Who Rests Beneath a Handsome Monument in the Old Graveyard Is a Secret That Is Well Kept.

ALEXANDRIA, Va., one part of the District of Columbia, then reverting back to the Old Dominion; Alexandria, whose dates hark back two centuries; Alexandria, child of history and mother of legend; Alexandria, whose venerable piles of brick and stone are covered equally with moss and tradition; Alexandria, the town which Prince Fushimi, the personal representative of the Mikado, insisted upon visiting when in Washington recently, because in far Japan he had learned its prominence in early American history—Alexandria possesses one relic, one curiosity, one romantic spot, which has escaped the prying eye of the historical writer, and whose mystery has never been penetrated.

#### TO THE MEMORY OF A FEMALE STRANGER.

Whose Mortal Sufferings Terminated on the 4th day of October, 1816. Aged 23 Years and 8 Months.

This stone is erected by her disconsolate husband in whose arms she breathed out her last sigh, and who, under God, did his utmost to soothe the cold, dull ear of death.

"How loved, how honored once, avails thee not,  
To whom related, or by whom begot;  
A heap of dust alone remains of thee,  
'Tis all thou art, and all the proud shall be."

"To whom gave all the prophets witness, that through His name, whoever believeth or Him shall receive remission of sins."

#### TO SARAH CURRAN, EMMET'S SWEETHEART.

By THOMAS MOORE.

She is far from the land where her young hero sleeps,  
And lovers around her are sighing;  
But coldly she turns from their gaze, and weeps,  
For her heart in his grave is lying.

She sings the wild song of her dear native plains,  
Every note which he loved awaking;  
Ah, little they think who delight in her strains,  
How the heart of the minstrel is breaking.

He had lived for his love, for his country he died—  
They were all that to life had entwined him;  
Nor soon shall the tears of his country be dried,  
Nor long will his love's stay behind him.

Oh, make her a grave where the sunbeams rest  
When they promise a glorious morrow.  
They'll shine o'er her sleep, like a smile from the West,  
From her own loved island of Sorrow.

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There remained the problem of the burial. Once more he called to his aid Mrs. Wise and Mrs. Herbert. Both these estimable women were members of St. Paul's Episcopal Church. Bishop Clagett, the first American bishop of the Episcopal Church, chanced to be in Alexandria. To the bishop the two women went, told him they knew the secret of the woman's life and death, and that she was worthy of Christian burial. This notwithstanding the inscription on the stone which clearly implies that the woman had sinned. The good bishop took them at their word, and himself officiated. As he died suddenly a few weeks later in Prince George county, Md., this is thought to be the last funeral at which he acted. The hour of the funeral becoming known, a great concourse followed the body to St. Paul's graveyard, where it was interred under a large cedar. The man remained only long enough to give directions about the monument, and to indicate the inscription to be placed thereon, and then he disappeared, leaving his unsolved mystery behind him.

#### Who She Might Have Been.

With so little known, conjecture has been rife as to who the beautiful stranger might have been. Several district legends have grown up about her. You will find many in Alexandria who will tell you that the woman was the beautiful and gifted Theodosia Burr Alston, daughter of Aaron Burr and wife of the governor of North Carolina. It will be remembered that, forty years after Theodosia Burr had been given up as lost at sea, in a storm off Cape Hatteras, two men, about to be executed in Norfolk, Va., confessed that they had been members of a gang of shore pirates, who, by means of a false light, had lured the ill-fated "Patriot" on the rocks, and had then forced all on board, including Mrs. Alston, to walk the plank. A year or so later a dying sailor, in New Orleans, confessed to complicity in the same crime. Those who hold that the stranger who died in Alexandria was Theodosia Burr argue that no pirate would have been at the same time so brutal and so impervious to female charms as to have caused the death of Theodosia Alston; would it not have been more probable that the woman would be saved as a prize, and brought ashore with as much secrecy as possible? This would account, they maintain, for the insistence on secrecy after death.

Unfortunately for the romance, facts and dates discredit this theory. It was on December 30, 1812, that Mrs. Alston left Norfolk to join her father in New York. The storm which enabled the shore pirates to lure the "Patriot" on the rocks of Nag's Head occurred on January 1, 1813. Even if she escaped the fate of all others on board, a woman of Mrs. Alston's refinement would not have lived through the horror of more than three years in such captivity. Moreover, this gang was composed of the lowest elements of humanity; the man who brought the dying stranger to Alexandria was to all outward appearances a gentleman. Again, the inscription on the stone manifests complete familiarity with the age of the dead woman, which is set down as twenty-three; if she had lived to that time, Theodosia Burr would have been ten years older. Through the mute eloquence of the stone, the man claims to have been the dead woman's husband; Governor Alston of North Carolina could not have entered Alexandria unknown.

#### Was it Emmet's Sweetheart?

Others, with more reason, think the stranger was Sarah Curran, the broken-hearted niece of Robert Emmet, the martyred Irish patriot. It was to her that Thomas Moore, friend both to her and to Emmet, addressed those beautiful lines beginning—  
She is far from the land where her young hero sleeps.

There is reason to believe that the man who came to Alexandria was an officer in the English army. It is known that Sarah Curran, though still pining for her Robert, was, two years after his execution, forced to marry Major Sturgeon, of the British army staff corps, and that soon after the couple left England. Might it not be she, grieving for her lover, who died in the arms of a husband she did not love, and who, to protect her from the comments of the curious, withheld her name?

Again the dates—always prosaic—step in to controvert this hypothesis. The girl died in 1816, at the age of twenty-three. Robert Emmet was executed

#### THE HUSBAND'S CONFESSION.

"Never had I loved her more than at that hour. The glow of fever grew upon her cheek and sparkled in her eye. At once I offered to induce the captain to return to Martinique, and to assist in securing the forms necessary to invalidate the matrimonial contract.

"She seemed to consider this a moment; her eyes danced with a wilder brilliancy, and the color of her cheeks deepened beyond all hues of health. Then suddenly her features contracted, as though some horrible thought convulsed her brain, and crying, 'Oh, the shame, the shame!' she fell forward upon the floor in a swoon.

"For days her life hung lightly balanced. Fortunately one of the missionaries aboard added a knowledge of medicine to his other acquisitions, and to his skill and attention she owed her life. Her reason, however, felt the shock, and at times she would kneel before me and beg me to murder her. When the vessel reached its destination, St. John, N. B., the physicians declared that to remain in that climate was certain death for her, so we re-embarked, and in due time were put ashore in Alexandria, and were safely lodged at the City Hotel. The ladies of the hospitable town were doubly kind to her; they never asked her name or family, for, said one of them, 'She is a stranger, and sick—two letters of introduction from heaven.'

"All help, all sisterly ministrations, were vain. One night she woke me, who never left her bedside, but had nodded into a light slumber. 'I shall soon be away,' she said very softly, 'far from living fears and evil tongues.' I strove to interrupt, but she placed her finger on my lips and continued:

"'You have dearly loved me, John; promise me that no one here shall know my name or even from whence I came.'

"'As God lives, I promise,' I replied.

"'Then that is all over. John,' she continued, taking my hand, 'when I am dead, marry some one worthy of you. Kiss me.'

"Our lips met, but death came between the bridegroom and the bride, for Blanche was dead."—From the "Narrative of John Trust," by William F. Carne.

thirteen years before. If she were Sarah Curran, daughter of the distinguished Irish lawyer, she would have had her romantic attachment for Emmet at the tender age of ten.

Most widely current is the story that the stranger was one of four children, born of distinguished parents, whom reverses forced to place the children in an English almshouse, whence they were taken by guardians from the four quarters of the globe, growing up, unknown to each other, under different names. Years after, so the story runs, with many details—two brothers and a sister met in the island of Martinique, West Indies. Ignorant of their relationship, both men fell in love with the girl—their sister. One of the brothers, by means of the then little understood science of hypnotism, stole the girl away from the island and fled to the States. When he went to board the ship which was to carry them from the island, a party of Jesuit priests aboard insisted on a marriage ceremony before they were allowed to climb the gangway, so the brother and sister were married in the rocking boat alongside the ship, while the girl was in a hypnotic trance.

#### Brother and Sister Married.

Later, through a chance revelation, the fact that they were brother and sister became known to the newly married pair, and the shame for one and remorse for the other wrecked both their lives. The revelation came while they were in Halifax. Immediately the girl began to pine away. The conscience-stricken man sought to take her back to her friends in Martinique, where it was his intention to have the marriage set aside, but her health declined so rapidly that it was found necessary to take her ashore at Alexandria. Knowing she was to die, the girl required of her husband—brother the promise that he would prevent her identity becoming known. How well he kept his promise, we all know. This story is supposed to have come to light through the memoirs of the other brother, who wrote them in Spanish after he had entered a Catholic cloister. These memoirs are said to have come into the hands of an attaché of the Spanish legation at Washington, who employed Mr. William F. Carne, of Alexandria, to translate them.

Mr. Carne did publish "The Narrative of John Trust" in 1867, in which this story is told. Today Mr. Carne says the story is a romance of his own, though he admits there is some foundation in truth, and maintains that all that is known of the girl is contained in his narrative. Just what was his source of information he declines to state, preserving the same reticence that all maintain who have stumbled on to any clue to the mystery.

So much for conjecture; let us see what the fountains and jetsam of fact, innuendo, and whispered hint, gathered from a hundred sources, reveal of the life story of the mysterious stranger.

#### Husband Revisits Grave.

It is a fact that on October 4, 1817, the first anniversary of the girl's death, her companion was again seen in Alexandria. He stopped at no hotel, spoke to no one, but, ferrying across from Washington, went directly to St. Paul's graveyard, where he spent the day by the tomb of the unknown. This was repeated for a dozen years, and always when he left the tomb was fresh with flowers, the grass and green shrubbery neatly trimmed. Some visitor to the town, who saw him on one of these pilgrimages of devotion, recognized him as an officer in the English army.

At last, however, his visits ceased, and gradually the grave fell into decay, the heavy stone sinking on one side till it threatened to topple over. Then, one spring morning, as Emanuel Webb, still superintendent at St. Paul's, was planting some flowers on a new-made grave, he was approached by two handsomely gowned elderly women, who, pointing to the then dilapidated grave of the stranger, with its toppling stone, demanded to know why it had not been better cared for.

"Who is to pay me for caring for that grave?" demanded Superintendent Webb.

"What! have you not received a regular stipend for doing so?" indignantly asked one of the ladies.

"No, indeed!" said Mr. Webb.

"Why, that is incomprehensible," exclaimed the woman. "There must have been some serious oversight."

"Tell me," said Webb. "Do you know who she was?"

"We are relatives," replied the woman.

"Who was the man?"

"He was an English officer."

"Where did he go from Alexandria?"

"To France."

At this juncture, when Webb flattered himself that he was about to obtain a solution to the mystery of a century, a distinguished looking old gentleman, who had been standing by the stranger's grave during this conversation, hurried up to the ladies, took them by the arm, and led them quickly away. On this assurance the quaint grave was embellished anew with flowers and shrubs and the stone propped into place, but Webb heard no more from his mysterious callers.

Can we gather aught from the inscription on the stone? First, the care taken to preserve the secret of identity, and the faithfulness with which those who knew the story preserved it in their own consciousness, argues a personage of such rank and so well known to the world that the very whisper of her name would set the world a-pace. Again, the second line of the stanza from Pope, "To whom related, or by whom begot," clearly implies a parentage and family of consequence. Then, too, the Scripture quoted would seem to imply that the woman was one of Eve's erring daughters, whom a forgiving husband sought to shield from the consequences of her folly. Is this not the most reasonable hypothesis?

But who was she? Poet or peasant, princess or pauper?

The answer to this question shall be known—when the Archangel Gabriel sounds the summons which shall call the dead to their tombs, when the sea gives up its dead, and when all secrets are revealed. Until then, mystery involute will surround "The Grave of the Stranger."

#### WHAT HE TOOK IT FOR.

Stern Mother—Willie!  
Willie Getback—Yes'm.  
"There's a whole lot of the contents of this jar missing. What did you take it for?"  
"I took it for jam, mamma; what was it?"—Baltimore American.