



Women
OF
POWER

THE INFLUENCE OF
Mother & Daughter

SUSAN EVANS McCLOUD

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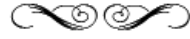
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LUCY BIGELOW
YOUNG



CHAPTER ONE

Life is uncertain. That was one of the first things she had learned back in Nauvoo, and before.

Lucy walked down to the river, where the evening shadows were beginning to gather and the air had already grown still. She tried to picture David, but only living images would come to her mind, and these were more indistinct than she wished them to be. She could hear his voice playing over and over in her head. She felt herself tremble. There had been other men interested in her—both young and old. Her parents always maintained that she was the prettiest girl in the family, which was intended to mean something, she supposed.

She had always felt pretty when David looked at her in that intense, gentle way. He loved her; he had told her he loved her, even in Nauvoo, before they journeyed to Winter Quarters. They were to be married as soon as he returned from Wisconsin, where his mother owned some property and he was being sent to ascertain conditions there. His going seemed a bit vague to Lucy, as did her promise to marry him upon his return. She was young still, and she felt young. And after the terrors her family had suffered in Nauvoo, Winter Quarters did not seem much better. There were still so few homes, only tents that the winds tried to blow down. There was so much mud, so much sickness, and so little food. And yet, she tried to remind herself, at least here there was peace.

David was given a blessing before he left, and that had been a comfort. But why did he tease and halfway distress her by saying, “When I get back, Lucy, I’ll probably find you married to some old man.”¹

He knew what she had asserted over and over again: she would never give herself to a man who was older and already married—to one woman or more.

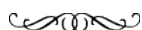
Lucy bent down and picked a small bunch of half-wilted mint, loosening it from the moist soil, pressing the greening leaves between her fingers, and drawing in the strong, clean smell. Against her will she remembered another thing from David’s blessing. He had been told he would serve a mission preaching to spirits in prison. No one thought much of the words when they were spoken, with their minds on other, more immediate things. But the world of spirits—that could mean but one thing. And was that truly where he was supposed to go?

Oh, David! Why? Why did you have to go now? Did you know you would never come back to the Saints, back to me? Lucy cried the words within her own heart, but she made no sound. *Measles!* What a useless waste of a young life whose promise was like the fresh wind that swept over the muddy streets and fields of the quarters, Winter Quarters, crowded with weary, struggling, disposed Saints.

She sighed. It was time to go back to help prepare a frugal meal and do chores that were waiting. Lucy did not mind work, and right now work would be for her a salvation of sorts. She liked being helpful. She liked having something of real purpose to occupy her hands. Suddenly, against her will, her mind began stubbornly drawing pictures out from the dark, jumbled memories of their last days in Illinois. It was difficult for her to

forget the fear that had tightened her body with every breath and the expression of horrified disbelief that seemed permanently stamped on her father's features.

But her father had not died. And, save for the little children whom the Lord had taken from them, all the family were safely here with the Saints. No matter what the challenges and conditions, this was a good place to be. She was grateful; she would be as grateful as she could be. That would help.



Lucy was born at Charleston, which sat in the backwoods of Coles County, Illinois, on October 3, 1830, only a few short months after Joseph Smith had organized The Church of Jesus Christ in Fayette. Her mother was Mary Gibbs, born on June 26, 1809, in Lisle, Broome County, New York, and her father Nahum Bigelow, who had been born on February 19, 1785, to parents who were farmers in Brandon, Vermont. She was the second daughter to enter the family, after Mary, who had been named for their mother. Their home was a modest cabin consisting of two rooms.

The history of her parents is nearly as captivating as fiction, and both proved themselves to be distinct individuals who knew their own minds.

Nahum, with what Susa called “Yankee restlessness,”² decided to see something of the world before settling down. He traveled light, with little more than a backpack, enjoying the experiences and people he met. At length he found himself in Lawrenceville, Illinois, where he unexpectedly met a girl, a very young girl only twelve years of age, who, without warning, entirely entranced him. Her face was intelligent, yet the lines were sensitive, too, and her eyes were the darkest, deepest blue he had ever seen. He said, “If ever I marry, that’s the girl I want for my wife.”³

Mary was twelve, and Nahum was thirty-six years old, certainly old enough to have been her father! A variety of things must have attracted her to him and convinced her that she was safe, and would be happy placing her life in his hands.

She certainly was not afraid of either work or responsibility, a trait which her daughter, Lucy, most definitely inherited. When she was ten, Mary’s mother spent months going about, boarding from place to place, doing weaving for the households where she temporarily stayed. Mary was left to see to things in her absence: cooking, candle dipping, washing, and even planting and caring for a garden and preserving the produce as the summer months waned. What is more, her baby brother was only a year and a half!

She was able, however, to ease into her relationship with Nahum, through a period of boarding school, as well as during the trauma of her fifteenth summer when she was extremely ill with whooping cough and scarlet fever. Nahum came over, usually once a month, to visit her, until she was nearly sixteen when he finally proposed marriage. He had surely meant what he had said, that this was the one he wanted to have for his wife. They were married on December 2, 1826.

By the time Lucy was born, they had moved to Coles County. Shortly after their fifth child, Lovina, was born in March 1834, they were visited by missionaries from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Much Bible reading and thoughtful prayer ensued, though Mary was the first to accept this new doctrine and hold it patiently in her heart. It took four years before they moved, in 1843, gathering with the Saints just eighteen miles outside Nauvoo.

Their years of persecution would be a story in themselves. But they culminated in an unusual way. To escape the keen eye of the mobsters who were constantly watching and harassing them, Nahum left the farm for a season in the care of his son, Asa. As the harvest approached, he returned to help the boy gather in their crops.

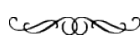
His friends warned Nahum, but he took no heed and was pleasantly surprised by the apparent kindness he encountered when he went back. A non-Mormon neighbor by the name of Sam Porter invited him to breakfast, and Nahum foolishly accepted. He noticed the unusual bitterness of the coffee but thought little of it, until his return to his own house when he was suddenly overcome with an excruciating pain.

Asa, terrified, drove his father into Nauvoo. His granddaughter Susa later described the horrifying scene:

His distress was beyond description. His screams were heard at a great distance, and scarcely could the people about him hold him in his terrible struggles for life and breath. Medical skill acknowledged itself powerless. Again and again was he administered to by the Elders of the Church, and at length the evil was in part rebuked, and he began to be more able to endure his suffering. All winter, however, he was very ill and “knew that it was God, and the power of God only, which gave him back his life for a little season.”⁴

They went on, as did so many others, one step, one hope, and one prayer at a time. A son was born to Nahum and Mary on the Fourth of July, only a week after the Prophet and Hyrum were killed in Carthage. They named the child Joseph Smith Bigelow, but his sweet, promising life lasted scarcely over nine months, and the grieving family had to prepare for his body a small, lonely grave, which soon they would be leaving behind.

All this and more was in Lucy’s memory and heart as she left the quiet bank of the Missouri and walked back to where her loved ones waited, struggling with her own questions and sorrows, but somehow comforted and strengthened, though she was not certain quite how.



Though Winter Quarters served the Saints as headquarters for the Church, this role was to last for a little less than a year. But organization was always a gift with the Latter-day Saints, and by the end of 1846 a large stockade had been built, as well as seven hundred houses of various quality and design, from dugouts hugging the bluffs, to homes with roofs and floors, some of these even boasting two stories and wooden floors. Yet, much of the suffering endured by all came from the wretched conditions the Saints endured while crossing the state of Iowa. They faced terrible winds and merciless exposure to the elements, along with lack of sufficient food and needed nutrition—only to meet the devastation of malaria on their weakened systems once they arrived in camp. Consequently, several hundred Saints, many of these babies and young children, perished during that winter of 1846–47.

At this time the Bigelow family had a snug cabin into which Brigham Young was welcomed by Nahum, who was anxious for the President’s counsel concerning his daughters. Apparently a Brother Wicks had approached him, wanting both of his girls for wives. Lucy, being somewhat impetuous and outspoken, re-confirmed her oft-stated stand that she would never marry a married man. And Mary hung back from accepting such a proposal, as well, despite his unrelenting persistence.

Brother Wicks happened to be working for the President at this time, and Brigham's response was interesting. "Well, so far as anything I know, brother Wicks is a very good man, but his wife is a high-strung piece. Let the matter rest awhile, and I will come up and see the girls about it before long."⁵

The busy prophet went out of his way to spend evenings in the Bigelow home, getting to know the girls. Mary was complacently there, but Lucy was generally absent. Though both girls were somewhat reticent and shy in the great man's presence, at last Mary warned Lucy that he wanted her to make up her mind. "So what do you say?" she pressed.

"I don't know. I'll tell you what it is, Mary. I don't feel as if I could marry him. He's got such lots of wives now, and it don't seem like he could ever be my husband."

Yet, according to Lucy's daughter Susa, when Brigham appeared the next Sunday and asked outright whether she wished to be sealed to him, the following occurred: "'Y-es sir,' faltered the little coward, and her fate was sealed forever, thank God!"⁶

In the evening of March 14, 1846, President Young, along with Elders Kimball, Willard Richards, and Ezra T. Benson arrived at the Bigelow cabin. Mary and Lucy stood solemnly to be sealed to this tall, genial man, while Elder Kimball officiated in the sacred covenant, perhaps seemingly out of place in the low-roofed cabin, lit only by the warm flames of tallow candles and a low fire place. First Brigham took Mary's hand, then Lucy's, as the sisters were sealed to him, "clad in dark homespun, and decked only in the sweet, faint blushes of innocence."⁷

Reality quickly set in. Brigham was preparing to lead the first hand-picked company of Saints to the Rocky Mountains. Lucy was restless. She was always happiest when she was busiest. Without having details, we do know that she, her mother, and a brother traveled to St. Louis, where they were able to find employment and where Lucy learned to do hand-turned work on fine ladies' gowns.

When Brigham returned from the Salt Lake Valley and learned that his young wife had gone off to St. Louis, he responded that "he would rather have given the last coat off his back than to have her down there."⁸

The three dutifully returned, bringing a large amount of much-needed supplies and a determination to make this trip only as a visit to Winter Quarters, for they wished and intended to return. But when President Young asked Lucy if she would not rather return to the Valley with him, she replied rather meekly, "If you wish me to."

"I would much rather you would," was his forceful reply. But then he added, "I am very thankful to say that I have heard a very good report of you while you stayed in St. Louis, but I don't wish you to go down there again."⁹

Brigham, required to use his own teams and wagons for Church business, arranged for Lucy to travel with this same company that was soon to leave, starting out in May of 1848. He had found place for her in the wagon of Brother McMullen, where she would be able to assist his wife, who was an invalid, and in doing so help to pay her way. President Young also contributed a quantity of flour and a yoke of oxen to add to the bargain.

Lucy parted from her loved ones and, alone with strangers, was now, she realized, to be the first of her family to make the journey through desert and hazardous mountain reaches to an unknown valley somewhere in the distance, which was to become her home.

NOTES

^{1.} Susa Young Gates, "Sketch of Nahum Bigelow," *Juvenile Instructor*, 15 April 1891. Edited by

- Dan Forward, 1997, 1.
- [2.](#) Ibid., 1.
 - [3.](#) Ibid., 5.
 - [4.](#) Ibid.
 - [5.](#) Susa Young Gates, "From Impulsive Girl to Patient Wife, Lucy Bigelow Young," *Utah Historical Quarterly*, vol. 45, number 3, 1977. By *Utah State History*, 1.
 - [6.](#) Ibid., 2.
 - [7.](#) Ibid., 2.
 - [8.](#) Ibid., notes, 2.
 - [9.](#) Ibid., 3.

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