

Washington June 1st 1853

My dear Jeanie,

The pleasure of writing to you is too great for me to give it up because Will Adams "cross over you," brings out of reach of his teasing (I don't believe it is very bad) I may be selfish, but too little from him is only fair after the years of plague given him by you – how he has stood it all is hard to understand, certainly had it been me I should have got mad or returned it with similar coin. By this beginning you will know that yours of yesterday has been recd. You have struck upon the true secret of letter writing to those are known are interested in or love you, thoughts as they come to the mind will always supply subjects particularly when they are as active as yours – letters to persons who you love & who love you are more every to write once a day, than monthly ones would be to those with whom one is obliged to keep up a correspondence; Father opened my mind to this fact many years ago & since then I have never found any difficulty in filling page after page, no doubt there is much not worth reading now still they gave pleasure at the time & at least showed that my mind was often occupied with Home, sweet Home – how much there is in that little word none sounds more sweetly in the English language what a volume it conveys, pleasure, affection, consolation of our ideas however crudely [sic] expressed – all way [sic] thing is fact – what a man I should have become had not that little word often crept into my mind when none other would have brought me back to the path from which I should never step [sic] aside – In a moralizing mood this evening – partly caused by a headache, partly by conversation with Mr. Nile [sic] (who with his son & two daughters) passed the evening here; he has been disappointed in his application for a diplomatic appointment, & now swept out innuendoes against the powers that be, & everything else, thus disappointment acts on some minds – wonder how it affects mine, not that way certainly, for though I have a good deal of vanity \* know my own place pretty well, the love of one little Jeanie Smed has given me so much pride that I hardly think any disappointment could pull me down – "foolish as we," so I am, but if such a letter is no sufficient cause, what can be? "So it is all your fault" as you seem determined to bear all the blame.

After I came up to my room last night & arranged myself comfortably to get some information about Gas & its manufacture. These different schemes & plans are putting a good deal of valuable knowledge into my noddle, the fire bells began to ring, so down went the book & on my clothes, off I was like a lamplighter towards Georgetown the blaze rising in two columns separated some distance from one another – after a longer run than expected found the stable of Mr. Crampton's House was on fire & one occupied by negro hack drivers two spaces distant – at the former a lot of men were working far from the fire but not doing anything to prevent it catching a smoke house which if once on fire would have made the house certain to go – seeing several looking on with axes, asked (not imagining the scrape I was getting into) "why they did not use them" – "use them Yourself" was the prompt reply so not to back out I caught hold & facing the blaze was soon hard at work being kept cool by buckets of water occasionally soused over me instead of the fire being joined by others, who felt rather ashamed of themselves, soon cleared away the connection – when I left & on arriving at home found a big tear in my coat, my pantaloons, pretty well ruined, & hands & face like a chimney sweeps – shall stay away next time. The work of turning out goes bravely on & this morning I had to walk to the Post Office to get my letters, my friend the Penny-post having had head cut off yesterday, was rewarded by yours though one or two more such walks would lay me up – the weather is getting excessively hot. I am delighted to hear that your Mother is so much better, make her keep quiet, but am sorry to see the day of departure for the country hastened on many accounts. First while we have so much business to do in New York I may

have a chance to see you before the moving – and then if I go abroad it will not be till the 25th at soonest & I shall miss you altogether, don't suppose from my naming a day that there is any more probability of it now than there was when I last wrote – nothing has transpired since except Mr. Sibbald's expressed anxiety to secure me as his Agent – think of anyone wanting me to transact business for them – so good a joke that I had better stop, that they see how naturally I fell into lazy habits while last in New York their opinions of my business capabilities would be much depressed. God bless you my dear little Jeanie.

June 2nd Had no time today to fill this up, so am again to have a talk in the evening, though not much in the humor, feeling "quietly happy" as you would say. Why more so at this time than any other I know not, have been reading no book that would cause such a mood. The weather, that unusual resource, has its effect probably – delightful it really is and while sitting on the sill of one of the low windows, back against one side & just firmly braced by the other I wished for you, dear Jeanie, you would have enjoyed it after the noise & bustle of New York, it hardly seemed possible that we are in the midst of a city, but day dreams must be broken & Mr. Crosby with his big moustache (how detestable they are) was the ogre that broke up my meditations, loving us till nearly ten by conversation akin to nothing, from Mr. Crosby, my mind jumped to Miss Lynch & from her to your old friend Doty, who I had a walk with two or three evenings ago, he is the only mortal that will acknowledge his powers of far-seeing not to be great – remarkable to relate he is the only one that is surprised at our engagement, every other person saw it long ago & best of all Sam, your escaped member of society, my John Jones at times last winter, writes that he thought we had been engaged when you first came to Washington, carrying on his attentions, that worried her much at times, on the safe principle I suppose. Doty was in a terrible way, Miss L. has got hold of him, volumes, volumes, and were it not that he has just received orders to sea. I really believe she would take him by the collar to drag up to Mr. Pyne, poor Doty submitting as he always does, good humouredly [sic]; his kindness to me on board the Delaware I shall never forget & only wish he was not so unsociable, caring for ladies society as much as he does it is surprising that his modesty & bashfulness has never been thrown aside – under a rough exterior a heart beats that anyone might be proud to own, but I am going off upon a tack that I had no intention of following. Today I recd a short note from Paul Jones written just before he went to sea in the Schooner Crawford, full of warm wishes for our happiness – his affairs is running smoother than it was some time ago, and before long hope he may be as happy – but no he cannot be – there are few men so blessed as I – & not another Jeanie Smed in the world I know – truly, my own dear Jeanie, was the path into which God, in his great mercy, has led us bright over – it makes me tremble to think of what my life might have been – even then, my dearest, I loved you the very love driving me into ways from which alone I was saved by His guardianship, and then I myself came near building up a barrier that would have ruined my happiness, - perhaps yours – how little did either of us then know the deep feelings treasured in our hearts – how truly & humbly do I thank Our Maker for his loving kindness to us then & now. "praise the Lord, oh my soul," t'is strange how the words of that Psalm ring in my ears, my mind, my heart oh that I could always remember them, they would serve as a bulwark to repel the attacks of my terrible passions. Little do you know of them Jeanie, may your knowledge never be extended is one of my anxious prayers.

You ask why I did not leave your dear Mother's letter with you – why – because, dear Jeanie, when I sometimes ask myself the question "of what have I done to deserve all this" it does me good to read it, assuring me that it is not all a dream, telling me too that I am valued by one whose opinion I have always looked up to since my own dear Mother's death. Did I ever tell you of her welcome to me at Devasego, when I came heartbroken & seeking consolation from those who loved her & me – she (your dear Mother) folded me in her arms & said "poor boy" her words – how much they conveyed enough to tell

me that she felt for and with me. Little even then did I know how great the loss was – but God has ordered it “Thy will not mine be done.” Oh, Jeanie, you loved her but how little did you know of her. She was all in all to me. Father & Mother, brother and sister, not a boyish pleasure that she did not enter into – not a foolish desire that she did not grant, even while doing so, giving me a lesson that prevented me from making the wish as second time. How did I repay her kindness – by ingratitude, by carelessness – by grief never ending for her loss – oh that she would know of my repentance, of my love for her – she may know it & even now may be looking down from above, smiling one of those bright cheerful smiles that her face always wore when she saw me happy. She never knew how well I had kept a promise or rather carried out a desire of hers made after she obtained my Midshipman’s warrant much against her will, & will never know how blessed I know am – Writing the above has carried me back years, so to revive my recollections or rather to drive away sad thoughts (my memory is very bright in everything connected with her) I have been reading over old letters, what a pleasure it is to feel that I was so well remembered while far away, how many hours those books show were devoted to me – if I had followed all the advice then given – hold on I shall be again sad, & her love is not the thing to make me so – in one of her letters speaking of a report that one little Jeanie was so foolish as to believe, she says “however my dear Jack may laugh & talk he will think before he takes the “irretrievable leap,” “with modesty, religion, sweet temper, sense, youth & a moderate share of beauty” those are the qualities she desires my wife to possess, and my dear little Jeanie has them all, if living she would have welcomed you as quickly, more gladly than your dear Mother has me, for to her it would have been a gain whereas to yours it must appear as a loss – not that either for you will not love her less but me more. I am really vain, so please don’t give me a lecture Jeanie I can’t help it, for it is all your fault. Good night.

June 3rd This morning a long letter from Father giving new plans and new ideas in other words another iron is in the fire for my benefit, could all the different ideas that have sprung up in the last three months be collected in a volume it would have as great success as Fanny Fern’s new book – supposing of course that the world at large were as much interested as we are in them. I tell you nothing now my dear Jeanie, for I hardly know whether the letter is a confidential one or not, he speaks of as hurried a return here as his departure was sudden – so be on the lookout for him if you have anything to send Janey. The weather is getting very warm & the hole in which the house is building is about the hottest place I have been able to find – it gave me a regular headache the other day, but a little medicine has made me all right again, & the raining thus given I shall not neglect an umbrella hereafter will be my constant companion. Bring in a working behavior for the last three or four days I have driven ahead pretty fast & piles are disappearing apparently only to make way for others that spring up in their place, but there is an end to everything. Give my best love to dear Mother & all the family and think of me always dear little Jeanie Smed as your own devoted & attached

Jack

- Possibly Nathaniel Niles, who served as the Chargé des Affaires to Turin from 1848-1850.
- Noddle is an antiquated term for a person’s head.
- Eight volunteer fire engine companies protected the homes and businesses in the capital until 1864 when the Washington City Fire Department formed. In Georgetown, a number of volunteer companies came and went until 1866 when one professional, part volunteer company remained until in 1871 when

the merger of Washington and Georgetown fire companies formed the District of Columbia Fire Department.

- The phrase “Praise, the Lord, oh, my soul” appears in Psalms 103:2 and 104:1.
- As previously stated, Jack’s mother, Jane Renwick Wilkes, was the sister of Isabella Renwick Smedberg. The Renwick’s appear to be a very tight-knit family, and there was only a four year age difference between the two sisters with Jane Wilkes being the younger of the two. So, it seems only natural that Isabella would extend herself to comfort her sister’s oldest son.
- Jack’s condemnation regarding his youthful actions contributed to his grief over the loss of his mother. I believe his guilt lies in the fact that he entered the Navy at the age of fourteen against his mother’s wishes even though she helped him to obtain his commission. Jack Wilkes could not realize until later that his youthful zeal for adventure brought considerable pain to his mother. For by then, the long periods of separation across such vast distances could not be imagined by someone so young, but his mother knew only too well what the cost would be.
- Fanny Fern was the pseudonym used by the American columnist, humorist and children’s author, Susan Willis (1811-1872). The latter turned to writing shortly after her second marriage to provide for herself and her two daughters. In 1853, the same year Willis divorced her second husband, Samuel P. Farrington, her publishers, Derby and Miller, released Fern Leaves from Fanny's Portfolio, the first in series that follows the exploits of young Fanny Fern, a widow residing in a boarding house. Willis’s income from her books enabled her to purchase a home in Brooklyn and later one in Manhattan. Willis’ salary of a \$100 at the New York Ledger made her the highest paid columnist in the city.

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