

09 THE CHILD OF THE STREET

Through the silent thoroughfares
Of a city rich and great,
Shivering in the pitiless blast,
Walked a poor child, desolate.

Bright and cold the stars looked down,
Glittering in a field of blue;
But they brought no warmth to her
Whom the winds pierced through and through.

Hugging tight her ragged shawl,
On she hies with hurried feet,
Gliding like a phantom form
Through the darkness-shrouded street.

Cheerful homes are very near;
Happy firesides hem her in;
And she hears from many a window
Careless childhood's merry din.

No warm fireside her awaiteth;
On no couch her limbs shall lie:
For the cold street is *her* dwelling;
And *her* chamber's roof, the sky.

Fiercely blows the northern blast,
Penetrating every fold
Of her thin shawl; and she whispers,
Shivering, "I am very cold!"

Hark! the bells with brazen clanger,
Rising every moment higher,
Peal upon the startled city
The terrific cry of "Fire!"

O'er the child's face, wan and weary,
Comes a quick flush of delight,
As she marks a lofty steeple
Wreathed in spires of lurid light.

Onward with the hurrying crowd
 Pressed the child through wind and storm,
 With one thought to cheer her bosom, --
 She would once again be warm.

Once again! Through every fibre
 Creeps a warm, reviving glow,
 As with outstretched hands the maiden
 Standeth in the street below.

Little reck the gallant firemen,
 As their saving task they ply,
 Of the poor child who is standing
 Where the burning cinders lie.

"Stand from under! stand from under!"
 Rises high the voice of all,
 As the swaying steeple totters,
 Slowly totters, to its fall.

One there was that did not heed it,
 One there was that did not stir,
 Till too late! The blazing rafters
 In their fall enveloped *her*.

Child of want and heir of sorrow,
 Chill and famished, weak and faint,
 Thou hast passed from out the shadow;
 Thou *no more* art desolate.

Sources:

Boston Transcript, April 18, 1855. (With introduction)

True Flag, May 12, 1855.

Bertha's Christmas Vision, 1856.

Alger Street, 1964.

Newsboy, October-November, 1981. (With introduction)