

**Mary Ann Sate**  
**9 October 1887**  
**Imbecile**

**A novel by Alice Jolly**  
*(Extract for Good On Paper)*

### Note

This manuscript was found at a house called Mount Vernon that is at the top of Butterrow Hill, just outside the town of Stroud, in the county of Gloucestershire. My husband and I purchased this house earlier in this year from a family named Greylord. We were told that the grandmother of that family, Mrs Isabella Harbingham, nee Greylord, whose recent death brought about the sale of the house, inherited Mount Vernon in her youth from her great uncle.

Upon arriving at the house, my husband and I ascertained that some maintenance works would be necessary. So it happened that a few weeks ago, I found myself in the lower tower room assessing some damage to a wooden panel beneath a window. My husband being away from home, and I myself being a person who enjoys practical tasks, I set out to sand the edges of that broken panel, so that the carpenter might more easily repair it.

It was in this way that I realized that certain papers were enclosed behind the panel. Seeing that these papers were a recollection written in this house, I sat down and started to read. My intention was to read but a few pages, as I had many others tasks to complete, but when I finally laid down the dusty and tattered manuscript, I remarked that dawn was but an hour away.

Initially I thought to edit the manuscript I had discovered before typing it out. To this end, I marked in the geographical location of certain sections of the story so as to reduce some confusion that might otherwise arise. Having done that, I then considered how I might improve and correct the text itself but, after some reflection, I decided to type it out just as I found it, without revision.

Sarah Jane Moffatt

July 1938

If you tell a story oft enough  
So it become true

Words like the twisting grain of wood  
Or the course of a slow running river  
Have ways they must evr go

Who might I be to wield the axe cross the grain  
Or try to untwist the flow of water

Yet I take up this my pen  
To set down here my story  
Bone blood brain

What does a soul look like  
If you write him on paper  
Yes soil also how may he be held  
Within this fragile mesh of words

Yet so tis certain  
Soil hisself must find his tongue  
My story being but one speck of grit  
In the swelling ballad of these valleys

Oh how I do love to see them once again  
The light brush cross their emerald edges  
As the sun bloom and wither day on day

Soil soul and sin too  
Soon all one  
The hours hurry at my shoulder  
The words will not wait

Yea these valleys were my beginning  
I come here first on the black ridge of the night  
A coach tumbling falling many clattering mile  
I know nothing afore

I sit on the back next a basket of chickens  
The coach roll and pitch stars unspool behind me  
Through a banner of black

The coach cut through all  
Chickens screaming feathers poking out  
Through the thick twist basket weave  
My hand numb as I grip tight head nodding

Not a house a tree a man a beast or a devil  
Only the road  
Slap of the horses hooves creak of a wheel  
Tear and drag of a wind  
Tips and tussles distant trees  
Til sudden the coach falls forward into Stillness

A man come round lamp light furrows of his face  
He reach up lift me down  
My skirt catching in the chicken basket  
So wood stiff I can barely stand  
From above a man cries out  
You not leave a child here  
Tis well knowd the history of this place

These are my instructions  
No No the voice above says  
Then many on the roof nodding their heads  
Saying Nay  
One splutters and coughs  
A thick hand waves down

These are my instructions  
She must be left

The door the coach open  
A fat whisker man pale britches call out  
What is the delay We must drive on  
Other on the roof  
They say No Yes You cannot Cough cough Hurry up now

Another say You must go on to The Bear  
In the name of Christian Charity  
You may not leave her

The furrow face man say to me close  
Only you wait Wait He will come

Left with my one cloth bag  
On the high shelf of the night  
Though old man the coach call  
Shame on you

Still the coach grow narrow  
Small the light flicker

Flicker smaller and smaller  
Flicker again is gone

Around me nothing flat land only nothing  
Not a hedge or a tree but as my sight clear I see  
Here the place many roads meet

The wind does sweep in now  
From somewhere close  
Creak creak creak like door grate on rustd hinge

Above the stars sway and pray God his mercy  
This place many ghosts and ghouls  
Gather thick the air  
Their hiss and spit their foul smell  
Tether my throat

I would turn out my pockets to protect myself  
Yet my hands are too froze  
So I cruck my thumbs in my fists instead

Fall upon my knees in the grass fix my eyes  
On that shadowd line far in the distance  
Black on black  
Feel my fears calm

Were it not for that moment I look up see  
Some dark shadow hang overhead  
Black and spreading but also fragile  
Maybe some girt dark bird  
Moves with clanks and whistles

I know not what  
But the devil is certainly in it

My bones shudder cold fingers tight at my throat  
Mercy mercy on my soul

I know well the Bible does say  
That you call and He come  
Even though you be no one and nothing

I never know if this be right  
But now can only call and call  
Hope and faith

Is the Lord there Does he hear  
For many a long moment it seems not  
Still I believe

Then gradually it begins  
A sound comes from far away  
High up in the Heavens  
A swishing and rustling  
The drawing back of fine cloth

The flickers of whiteness small  
Like light touching  
The wings of flock of geese  
A coming always closer

Then gathering round You cannot see them clear  
Only their wings white curvd on the darkly grass

Gentle and still gathering softly  
The sound a soft beating as of many hearts

Angels many Angels  
Drive out legion of devils dwell here

Such is his majesty and mercy  
With them come girt certainty  
Ease and courage I feel sure my hour has come

I go with them gladly to meet my Maker  
Only instead the sound of horses hooves  
Echo the same road the coach departd

The Angels wings fold away  
Yet still I am in their care  
So watch the horseman swell  
Out through the shadows  
The bridle of the horse clunking  
As he snuffles and chomps

There the horse stops The man looks down  
His face in the shadow of a tall hat so he barks  
You are Mary Ann Sate

I say yes Sir that is I

Then he reaches down  
Grips tight the bone of my arm  
I see his black knottd hair and wide cut lips  
A red and white spottd kerchief tied his neck

He swings me up heels knees kicking struggling  
My legs come to rest  
Either side the horse waxen withers

Then all swings round the shape of the hill turn  
The horse is striding out brisk the way he come  
My hand twistd tight in his greasy mane

The mans arm round me not warm but rootd firm  
In this way we travel on  
Soon passing a coaching inn

This The Bear of Rodborough  
Though I know it not at the time  
Lights sway in the windows  
Scrape of boots in the yard  
A sudden shout of laughter  
Smell of log fire hay and goose fat

But we stop not there  
Dive down deep into trees  
Then behind me feel the swell of lungs  
The man begins to sing  
Not loud but his voice is fine  
It rolls and swoops carries all round

Heres a health to the barley mow my brave boys  
We drink it out the jolly brown bowl

Sets the heart spinning I would sing too

When he stops for a moment laughs to himself  
Wraps his arm tighter round me  
Only then I find heart tongue say  
Sir where are we head

The man say only

The Heavens