

**MARY
MACLANE**

**MY FRIEND
ANNABEL
LEE**

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Mary MacLane

My Friend Annabel Lee

EAN 8596547156499

DigiCat, 2022

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My Friend Annabel Lee

I THE COMING OF ANNABEL LEE

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BUT the only person in Boston town who has given me of the treasure of her heart, and the treasure of her mind, and the touch of her fair hand in friendship, is Annabel Lee.

Since I looked for no friendship whatsoever in Boston town, this friendship comes to me with the gentleness of sunshowers mingled with cherry-blossoms, and there is a human quality in the air that rises from the bitter salt sea.

Years ago there was one who wrote a poem about Annabel Lee—a different lady from this lady, it may be, or perhaps it is the same—and so now this poem and this lady are never far from me.

If indeed Poe did not mean this Annabel Lee when he wrote so enchanting a heart-cry, I at any rate shall always mean this Annabel Lee when Poe's enchanting heart-cry runs in my mind.

Forsooth Poe's Annabel Lee was not so enchanting as this Annabel Lee.

I think this as I gaze up at her graceful little figure standing on my shelf; her wonderful expressive little face; her strange white hands; her hair bound and twisted into glittering black ropes and wound tightly around her head.

Were you to see her you would say that Annabel Lee is only a very pretty little black and terra-cotta and white

statue of a Japanese woman. And forthwith you would be greatly mistaken.

It is true that she had stood in extremely dusty durance vile, in a Japanese shop in Boylston street, for months before I found her. It is also true that I fell instantly in love with her, and that on payment of a few strange dollars to the shop-keeper, I rescued her from her surroundings and bore her out to where I live by the sea—the sea where these wonderful, wide, green waves are rolling, rolling, rolling always. Annabel Lee hears these waves, and I hear them, at times holding our breath and listening until our eyes are strained with listening and with some haunting terror, and the low rushing goes to our two pale souls.

For though my friend Annabel Lee lived dumbly and dustily for months in the shop in Boylston street, as if she were indeed but a porcelain statue, and though she was purchased with a price, still my friend Annabel Lee is exquisitely human.

There are days when she fills my life with herself.

She gives rise to manifold emotions which do not bring rest.

It was not I who named her Annabel Lee. That was always her name—that is who she is. It is not a Japanese name, to be sure—and she is certainly a native of Japan. But among the myriad names that are, that alone is the one which suits her; and she alone of the myriad maidens in the world is the one to wear it.

She wears it matchlessly.

I have the friendship of Annabel Lee; but for her love, that is different.

Annabel Lee is like no one you have known. She is quite unlike them all. Times I almost can feel a subtle, conscious love coming from her finger-tips to my forehead. And I, at one-and-twenty, am thrilled with thrills.

Forsooth, at one-and-twenty, in spite of Boston and all, there are moments when one can yet thrill.

But other times I look up and perchance her eyes will meet mine with a look that is cold and penetrating and contemptuous and confounding.

Other times I look up and see her eyes full of indifference, full of tranquillity, full of dull deadly quiet.

Came Annabel Lee from out of Boylston street in Boston. And lo, she was so adorable, so fascinating, so lovable, that straightway I adored her; I was fascinated by her; I loved her.

I love her tenderly. For why, I know not. How can there be accounting for the places one's loves will rest?

Sometimes my friend Annabel Lee is negative and sometimes she is positive.

Sometimes when my mind seems to have wandered infinitely far from her I realize suddenly that 'tis she who holds it enthralled. Whatsoever I see in Boston or in the vision of the wide world my judgment of it is prejudiced in ways by the existence of my friend Annabel Lee—the more so that it's mostly unconscious prejudice.

Annabel Lee's is an intense personality—one meets with intense personalities now and again, in children or in bulldogs or in persons like my friend Annabel Lee.

And I never tire of looking at Annabel Lee, and I never tire of listening to her, and I never tire of thinking about her.

And thinking of her, my mind grows wistful.

II

THE FLAT SURFACES OF THINGS

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T “HERE are moments,” said my friend Annabel Lee, “when, willy nilly, they must all come out upon the flat surfaces of things.

“They look deep into the green water as the sun goes down, and their mood is heavy. Their heart aches, and they shed no tears. They look out over the brilliant waves as the sun comes up, and their mood is light-hearted and they enjoy the moment. Or else their heart aches at the rising and their mood is light-hearted at the setting. But let it be one or the other, there are bland moments when they see nothing but flat surfaces. If they find all at once, by a little accident, that their best-loved is a traitor friend, and they go at the sun’s setting and gaze deep into the green water, and all is dark and dead as only a traitor best-beloved can make it, and their mood is very heavy—still there is a bland moment when their stomach tells them they are hungry, and they listen to it. It is the flat surface. After weeks, or it may be days, according to who they are, their mood will not be heavy—yet still their stomach will tell them they are hungry, and they will listen. If their best-loved cease to be, suddenly—that is bad for them, oh, exceeding bad; they suffer, and it takes weeks for them to recover, and the mark of the wound never wears away. But with time’s encouraging help they do recover. But if,” said my friend Annabel Lee, “their stomach should cease to be, not only would they suffer—they would die—and whither away? That

is a flat surface and a very truth. And when they consider it—for one bland moment—they laugh gently and cease to have a best-loved, entirely; they cease to fill their veins with red, red life; they become like unto mice—mice with long slim tails.

“For one bland moment.

“And, too, the bland moment is long enough for them to feel restfully, deliciously, but unconsciously, thankful that there are these flat surfaces to things and that they can thus roll at times out upon them.

“They roll upon the flat surfaces much as a horse rolls upon the flat prairie where the wind is.

“And when for the first time they fall in love, if their belt is too tight there will come a bland moment when they will be aware that their belt is thus tight—and they will not be aware of much else.

“During that bland moment they will loosen their belt.

“When they were eight or nine years old and found a fine, ripe, juicy-plum patch, and while they were picking plums a balloon suddenly appeared over their heads, their first delirious impulse was to leave all and follow the balloon over hill and dale to the very earth’s end.

“But even though a real live balloon went sailing over their heads, they considered this: that *some other kids would get our plums that we had found*. A balloon was glorious—a balloon was divine—but even so, there was a bland moment in which the thought of some vicious, tow-headed Swede children from over the hill, who would rush in on the plums, came just in time to make the balloon pall on them.

“But,” said my friend Annabel Lee, “by the same token, in talking over the balloon after it had vanished down the sky, there would come another bland moment when the plums would pall upon them—pall completely, and would appear hateful in their eyes for having kept from them the joy of following the divine balloon. That is another aspect of the flat surfaces of things. And they must all come out upon the flat surfaces, willy-nilly.

“And,” said Annabel Lee, glancing at me as my mind was dimly wistful; “not only must they come out upon the flat surfaces of things, but also you and I must come, willy-nilly.

“And since we *must* come, willy-nilly,” added the lady, “then why not stay out upon the flat surfaces? Certainly ’twill save the trouble of coming next time. Perhaps, however, it’s all in the coming.”

II

MY FRIEND ANNABEL LEE

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MY FRIEND Annabel Lee never fails to fascinate and confound me. Much as she gives, there is in her infinitely more to get.

My relation with her never goes on, and it never goes back. It leads nowhere. She and I stop together in the midst of our situation and look about us. And what we see in the looking about is all and enough to consider.

And considering, I write of it.

IV BOSTON

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YESTERDAY the lady was in her most amiable mood, and we talked together—about Boston, it so happened.

“Do you like Boston?” she asked me.

“Yes,” I replied; “I am fond of Boston. It fascinates me.”

“But not fonder of it than of Butte, in Montana?”

“Oh, no,” said I, hastily. “Butte in Montana is my first love. There are barren mountains there—they are with me always. Boston doesn’t go to my heart in the least, but I like it much. I like to live here.”

“I am fond of Boston—sometimes,” Annabel Lee observed. “Here by the sea it is not quite Boston. It is everything. This sea washes down by enchanted purple islands and touches at the coast of Spain. But if one can but turn one’s eyes from it for a moment, Boston is a fine and good thing, and interesting.”

“I think it is—from several points of view,” I agreed.

“Tell me what you find that interests you in Boston,” said my friend Annabel Lee.

“There are many things,” I replied. “I have found a little corner down by the East Boston wharf where often I sit on cold days. The sun shines bright and warm on a narrow wooden platform between two great barrels, and I can be hidden there, but I can watch the madding crowd as it goes. The crowd is very madding down around East Boston. And I do not lack company—sometimes brave, sharp-toothed rats