

FEAR LEFT ME

Introduction: this extract is set about mid 1841. Caroline Chisholm had been attempting to persuade Governor Gipps to provide suitable premises for a Sydney home for female emigrants without money and family in the Colony. He had yet to agree and had given no undertakings. Also, although a Committee had been formed and newspaper and public opinion was generally in favour, Mrs Chisholm was not receiving consistent – or even, any – encouragement from quarters where that might have been expected. This extract from Mrs Chisholm’s book, Female Immigration, begins after she has expressed her dismay at a number of personal attacks by those opposing the establishment of a female emigrants’ home. Note: Lavender’s Ferry went to Lavender’s Bay on the North Shore of Sydney Harbour.

I felt a dreariness of spirit creep over me, and [I became] confirmed in my opinion that to leave Sydney for a few days would be prudent; but it was the will of God to prevent this, and those who believe in Special Providence may take the following as an instance: – I started in good time, as I thought, for the Parramatta steamer; indeed, I was so certain of this that though a friend overtook me in King-street with a conveyance, and told me he should be only just in time, I refused: I wished to be alone for a few minutes; I was aware I had been much tried, and I knew a few minutes alone would give me time to smooth my feelings, and meet my friends at the steamer with spirit – perhaps I did not walk as quick as usual, at all events I was too late.

I then made for the Flagstaff, a favourite walk of mine; and as I had promised, if I had remained in Sydney, to spend the evening with _____, I knew there would be many there, and, as my plan would be alluded to, I must appear in spirits – I must not let them know that during the day my feelings had been used as a door-mat. Near Petty’s Hotel, I caught sight of a frail beauty [Flora]; her dress told her fate; she evidently knew me, and wished to avoid me; I was determined to overtake her; I was able to do this, for I hurried on; I laid my hand on her arm, and the wreck of my Highland beauty stood before me. Alas, how different from the lovely girl she once was! – the ruddy rose of the Highlands was changed for the tinge of rum: she had been drinking, but well knew what she was about. “Tell me where you are going?” “To hell!” was her answer. I continued to walk by her side; she became insolent; but I was determined not to leave her.

She made for Lavender’s Ferry, and said, “my mistress lives over there.” I said, I will go to the other side with you, as I want to say a few words to you. She was unwilling; but I persisted: we crossed over; I felt certain, from her manner, she meditated suicide; I passed to the left and bade her sit down. I knew the circumstances of her family well, and my first question was of her mother – “Did you see your mother die?” (I knew she did not, for her mother had consented to her remaining in service in Sydney.) “No.” “She died happy.” – No reply.

“Are you a mother?” She seized my hand and placed it on her heart. “God is merciful!” – she shook her head. I saw a letter in her bosom; I drew it out with her nodded consent. It was from her brother; he *felt* her disgrace; he taunted her with being the first in the family who had known shame. – “I loved **** better than any, save _____.” And again she shook her head. “Your brother loves you even now.” “No, no.” “Were there any in your family that ever committed murder?” She shook with horror. “Then why will you?”

“It’s there I meant to drown myself,” pointing to a distant spot; “It’s there we met often, and *there I would die!*” I did not leave the place until, with subdued feelings, I heard her vow never to attempt self-destruction. I procured her lodgings; and though I had been much tried and fatigued, I was able to join the promised party. My spirits returned; I felt God’s blessing was on my work. From this time, I never thought of *human help*; I neglected no steps to conciliate; I increased my exertions; but from the hour I was on the beach with Flora, fear left me.