

CLASSICS TO GO



**THE JOURNAL OF
ARTHUR STIRLING**
(THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW)

UPTON SINCLAIR

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

The matter which is given to the public in this book will speak with a voice of its own; it is necessary, however, to say a few words in advance to inform the reader of its history.

The writer of the journal herein contained was not known, I believe, to more than a dozen people in this huge city in which he lived. I am quite certain that I and my wife were the only persons he ever called his friends. I met him shortly after his graduation from college, and for the past few years I knew, and I alone, of a life of artistic devotion of such passionate fervor as I expect never to meet with again.

Arthur Stirling was entirely a self-educated man; he had worked at I know not how many impossible occupations, and labored in the night-time like the heroes one reads about. He taught himself to read five languages, and at the time when I saw him last he knew more great poetry by heart than any man of letters that I have ever met. He was the author of one book, a tragedy in blank verse, called *The Captive*; that drama forms the chief theme of this journal. For the rest, it seems to me enough to quote this notice, which appeared in the *New York Times* for June 9, 1902.

STIRLING.—By suicide in the Hudson River, poet and man of genius, in the 22d year of his age, only son of Richard T. and Grace Stirling, deceased, of Chicago.
Chicago papers please copy.

Arthur Stirling was in appearance a tall, dark-haired boy—he was really only a boy—with a singularly beautiful face, and a strange wistful expression of the eyes that I think will haunt me as long as I live. I made him, somewhat externally and feebly, I fear, one of the characters in a recently published novel. That he was a lonely spirit will be plain enough from his writings; he lived among the poverty-

haunted thousands of this city, without (so he once told me) ever speaking to a living soul for a week. Pecuniarily I could not help him—for though he was poor, I was scarcely less so. At the time of his frightful death I had not seen him for nearly two months—owing to circumstances which were in no way my fault, but for which I can nevertheless not forgive myself.

The writing of *The Captive*, as described in these papers, was begun in April, 1901. I was myself at that time in the midst of a struggle to have a book published. It was not really published until late in that year—at which time *The Captive* was finished and already several times rejected. It was an understood thing between us that should my book succeed it would mean freedom for both of us, but that, unfortunately, was not to be.

Early in April of 1902 I had succeeded in laying by provisions enough to last me while I wrote another book, and I fled away to put up my tent in the wilderness. The last time that I ever saw Arthur Stirling was in his room the night before I left. He smiled very bravely and said that he would keep his courage up, that he was pretty sure he would come out all right.

I did not expect him to write often—I knew that he was too poor for that; but after six weeks had passed and I had not heard from him at all, I wrote to a friend to go and see him. It developed that he had moved. The lodging-house keeper could only say that he had left her his baggage, being unable to pay his rent; and that he “looked sick.” Where he went she did not know, and all efforts of mine to find him were of no avail. The only person that I knew of to ask was a certain young girl, a typewriter, who had known him for years, and who had worshiped him with a strange and terrible passion—who would have been his wife, or his slave, if he had not been as iron in such things, a man so lost in his vision that I suppose he always thought she was lost in it

too. This girl had copied his manuscripts for years, with the plea that he might pay her when he “succeeded”; and she has all of his manuscripts now, except what I have, if she is alive. All that we could learn was that she had “gone away”; I feel pretty certain that she went in search of him.

In addition, all that I have to tell is that on Monday, June 9th last I received a large express package from Arthur. It was sent from New York, but marked as coming from another person—evidently to avoid giving an address of his own. Upon opening it I found two packages, one of them carefully sealed and marked upon the outside, *The Captive*; the other was the manuscript of this journal, and upon the top of it was the following letter:

MY DEAR —: You have no doubt been wondering what has become of me. I have been having a hard time of it. I wish I could find some way to make this thing a little easier, but I can not. When you read this letter I shall be dead. There is nothing that I can tell you about it that you will not read in the papers I send you. It is simply that I was born to be an artist, and that as anything else I can not live. The burden that has been laid upon me I can not bear another day. I have told the whole story of it in this book—I have kept myself alive for months, sick and weeping with agony, in order that I might tear it out of my heart and get it written. It has been my last prayer that the struggle my life has been may somehow not be useless. There will come others after me—others perhaps keener than I—and oh, the world must not kill them all!

You will take this manuscript, please, and go over it, and cut out what you like to make it printable, and write a few words to make people understand about it. And then see if any one will publish it. You know more about all these things than I do. If it should sell, keep part of the money for your own work and give the rest to poor Ellen. As to *The Captive*—I all but burned it, as you will read; but keep it, sealed as I have sealed it, for two years, and then offer it to some publishers—to others than the nine who have already rejected it. If you can not find any one to take it, then burn it, or keep it for love, I do not care which.

I am writing this on Thursday night, and I am almost dead. I mean to get some money to-morrow, and then to buy a ticket for as far up the Hudson as I can go. In the evening I mean to find a steep bank, and, with a heavy dumb-bell I have bought, and a strong rope, I think I can find the peace that I have been seeking.

The first thing that I have to say to you about it is, that when you get this letter it will be over and done, and that I want you, for God's sake, not to make any fuss. No one will find my body and no one will care about it. You need not think

it necessary to notify the newspapers—what I'm sending you here is literature and not journalism. I have no earthly belongings left except these MSS., upon which you will have to pay the toll. I have written to M—, a man who once did some typewriting for me, asking him to use a dollar he owes me in putting a notice in one of the papers. I suppose I owe that to the people out West.

I can't write you to-night—before God I can't; my head is going like a steel-mill, and I'm *so* sick. You will get over this somehow, and go on and do your task and win. And if the memory of my prayer can help you, that will be something. Do the work of both of us if you can. Only, if you do pull through, remember my last cry—remember the young artist! There is no other fight so worth fighting—take it upon you—shout it day and night at them—what things they do with their young artists!

God bless you, dear friend. Yours, ARTHUR.

The above is the only tidings of him, excepting the extended accounts of his death which appeared in the New York Times and the New York World for June 10 and 11, 1902, and several letters which he wrote to other people. There remains only to say a few words as to the journal.

It is scrawled upon old note-books and loose sheets of paper. The matter, although a diary, contains odd bits of his writings—one of two letters to me which he had me send back, and some extracts from an essay which a friend of mine was offering at that time to magazines in the hope of placing it for him. There is a problem about the work which I leave to others to solve—how much of it was written as dated, and how much afterward, as a piece of art, as a testament of his sorrow. Parts of it have struck me as having been composed in the latter way, and the last pages, of course, imply as much.

Extraordinary pages they are to me. That a man who was about to take his life should have written them is one of the strangest cases of artistic absorption I know of in literature. But Arthur Stirling was a man lost in his art just so—so full of it, so drunk with it, that nothing in life had other meaning to him. To quote the words he loved, from the last of his heroes, he longed for excellence “as the lion longs for his food.”

So he lived and so he worked; the world had no use for his work, and so he died.

S. </>

NEW YORK, *November 15, 1902.*

READER:

I do not know if “The Valley of the Shadow” means to you what it means to me; I do not know if it means anything at all to you. But I have sought long and far for these words, to utter an all but unutterable thought.

When you walk in the forest you do not count the lives that you tread into nothingness. When you rejoice with the springtime you do not hear the cries of the young things that are choked and beaten down and dying. When you watch the wild thing in your snare you do not know the meaning of the torn limbs, and the throbbing heart, and the awful silence of the creature trapped. When you go where the poor live, and see thin faces and hungry eyes and crouching limbs, you do not think of these things either.

But I, reader—I dwell in the Valley of the Shadow.

Sometimes it is silent in my Valley, and the creatures sit in terror of their own voices; sometimes there are screams that pierce the sky; but there is never any answer in my Valley. There are quivering hands there, and racked limbs, and aching hearts, and panting souls. There is gasping struggle, glaring failure—maniac despair. For over my Valley rolls *The Shadow*, a giant thing, moving with the weight of mountains. And you stare at it, you feel it; you scream, you pray, you weep; you hold up your hands to your God, you grow mad; but the Shadow moves like Time, like the sun, and the planets in the sky. It rolls over you, and it rolls on; and then you cry out no more.

It is that way in my Valley. The Shadow is the Shadow of Death.

PART I

WRITING A POEM

The book! The book! This day, Saturday, the sixth day of April, 1901, I begin the book!

I have never kept a journal—I have been too busy living; but to-day I begin a journal. I am so built that I can do but one thing at a time. Now that I have begun *The Captive*, I must be haunted with it all day; when I am not writing it I must be dreaming it, or restless because I am not. Therefore it occurred to me that in the hours of weariness I would write about it what was in my mind—what fears and what hopes; why and how I write it will be a story in itself, and some day I think it will be read.

I have come to the last stage of the fight, and I see the goal. I will tell the story, and by and by wise editors can print it in the Appendix!

Yesterday I was a cable-car conductor, and to-day I am a poet!

I know of some immortal poems that were written by a druggist's clerk, and some by a gager of liquid barrels, but none by a cable-car conductor. "It sounds interesting, tell us about it!" says the reader. I shall, but not to-day.

To-day I begin the book!

I did not write that on April 6th, I wrote it a month ago—one day when I was thinking about this. I put it there now, because it will do to begin; but I had no jests in my heart on April 6th.

April 10th.

I have been for four days in a kind of frenzy. I have come down like a collapsed balloon, and I think I have had enough for once.

I have written the opening scene, but not finally; and then I got into the middle—I could not help it. How in God's name I am ever to do this fearful thing, I don't know; it frightens me, and sometimes I lose all heart.

I suppose I shall have to begin again tonight. I must eat something first, though. That is one of my handicaps: I wear myself out and have to stop and eat. Will anybody ever love me for this work, will anybody ever understand it?

I suppose I can get back where I was yesterday, but always it grows harder, and more stern. I set my teeth together.

It was like the bursting of an overstrained dam, these last four days. How long I have been pent up—eighteen months! And eighteen months seems like a lifetime to me. I have been a bloodhound in the leash, hungering—hungering for this thing, and the longing has piled up in me day by day. Sometimes it has been more than I could bear; and when the time was near, I was so wild that I was sick. The book! The book! Freedom and the book!

And last Saturday I went out of the hell-house where I have been pent so long, and I covered my face with my hands and fled away home—away to the little corner that is mine. There I flung myself down and sobbed like a child. It was relief—it was joy—it was fear! It was everything! The book! The book! Then I got up—and the world seemed to go behind me, and I was drunk. I heard a voice calling—it thundered in my ears—that I was free—that my hour was come—that I might live—that I might live—live! And I could have shouted it—I know that I laughed it aloud. Every time I thought the thought it was like the throbbing of wings to me —“Free! Free!”

No one can understand this—no one who has not a demon in his soul. No one who does not know how I have been choked—what horrors I have borne.

I am through with that—I did not think of that. I am free! They will never have me back.

That motive alone would drive me to my work, would make me dare *anything*. But I do not need that motive.

I think only of the book. I thought of it last Saturday, and it swept me away out of myself. I had planned the opening scene; but then the thought of the triumph-song took hold of me, and it drove me mad. That song was what I had thought I could never do—I had never dared to think of it. And it came to me—it came! Wild, incoherent, overwhelming, it came, the victorious hymn. I could not think of remembering it; it was not poetry—it was reality. *I was the Captive, I had won freedom—a faith and a vision!*

So it throbbed on and on, and I was choked, and my head on fire, and my hands tingling, until I sank down from sheer exhaustion—laughing and sobbing, and talking to God as if He were in the room. I never really believe in God except at such times; I can go through this dreadful world for months, and never think if there be a God.—Here I sit gossiping about it.—But I am tired out.

The writing of a book is like the bearing of a child. But every birth-pang of the former lasts for hours; and it is months before the labor is done.

It is not merely the vision, the hour of exultation; that is but the setting of the task. Now you will take that ecstasy, and hold on to it, hold on with soul and body; you will keep yourself at that height, you will hold that flaming glory before your eyes, and you will hammer it into words. Yes, that is the terror—into words—into words that leap the hilltops, that bring the ends of existence together in a lightning flash. You will take them as they come, white-hot,

in wild tumult, and you will forge them, and force them. You will seize them in your naked hands and wrestle with them, and bend them to your will—all that is the making of a poem. And last and worst of all, you will hold them in your memory, the long, long surge of them; the torrent of whirling thought—you will hold it in your memory! You are dazed with excitement, exhausted with your toil, trembling with pain; but you have built a tower out of cards, and you have mounted to the clouds upon it, and there you are poised. And anything that happens—anything!—Ah, God, why can the poet not escape from his senses?—a sound, a touch—and it is gone!

These things drive you mad.—

But meanwhile it is not gone yet. You have still a whole scene in your consciousness—as if you were a juggler, tossing a score of golden balls. And all the time, while you work, you learn it—you learn it! It is endless, but you learn it. In the midst of it, perhaps, you come down of sheer exhaustion; and you lie there, panting, shuddering, your hands moist; you dare not think, you wait. And then by and by you begin again—if it will not come, you *make* it come, you lash yourself like a dumb beast—up, up, to the mountain-tops again. And then once more the thing comes back—you live the scene again, as an actor does, and you shape it and you master it. And now in the midst of it, you find this highest of all moments is gone! It is gone, and you can not find it! Those words that came as a trumpet-clash, burning your very flesh—that melody that melted your whole being to tears—they are gone—you can not find them! You search and you search—but you can not find them. And so you stumble on, in despair and agony; and still you dare not rest. You dare not ever rest in this until the thing is done—done and over—until you have *nailed* it fast. So you go back again, though perhaps you are so tired that you are fainting; but you fight yourself like a madman, you

struggle until you feel a thing at your heart like a wild beast; and you keep on, you hold it fast and learn it, clinch it tight, and make it yours forever. I have done that same thing five times to-day without a rest; and toiled for five hours in that frenzy; and then lain down upon the ground, with my head on fire.

Afterward when you have recovered you sit down, and for two or three hours you write; you have it whole in your memory now—you have but to put it down. And this forlorn, wet, bedraggled thing—this miserable, stammering, cringing thing—*this* is your poem!

Some day the world will realize these things, and then they will present their poor poets with diamonds and palaces, and other things that do not help.

I wrote this, and then I leaned back, tired out. My thoughts turned to Shakespeare, and while I was thinking of him—

But, look, the morn, in russet mantle clad,
Walks o'er the dew of yon high eastern hill!

April 11th.

I have not done much to-day. I spent the morning brooding over the opening speech. It is somber and terrible, but I have not gotten it right. It must have a tread—a tread like an orchestra! Ah, how I wish I had an orchestra!—I would soon do it then—“*So bist nun ewig du verdammt!*”

The secret of the thing is iteration. I must find a word that is like a hammer-stroke. I have tried twenty, but I have not found the one.

—I spent the rest of the day thinking over the whole first act, mapping it out, so to speak.

I have often fancied a resemblance between *The Captive* and the C-minor symphony; I wonder if any one else would have thought of it. It is not merely the opening—it is the whole content of the thing—the struggle of a prisoned spirit. I would call *The Captive* a symphony, and print the C-minor

themes in it, only it would seem fanciful.—But it would not really be fanciful to put the second theme opposite the thought of freedom—of the blue sky and the dawning spring.

All except the scherzo. I couldn't find room for the scherzo. Men who have wrestled with the demons of hell do not tumble around like elephants, no matter how happy they are. I wish I could take out Beethoven's scherzos!

My heart leaps when I think of my one big step. I have put those pages away—I shall not look at them again for a month. Then I can judge them.

April 13th.

A cable-car conductor and a poet! I think that will be a story worth telling.

I have tried many and various occupations, but I have not found one so favorable to the study of poetry as my last. I should have made out very well—if I had not been haunted by *The Captive*.

With everything else you do you are more or less hampered by having to sell your brain; and also by having to obey some one. But a cable-car is an unlimited monarchy; and all you have to do is to collect fares and pull the bell, both of which duties are quite mechanical. And besides that you receive princely wages—and can live off one-third of them, if you know how; and that means that you need only work one-third of the time, and can write your poetry the rest of it!

This sounds like jesting, but it is not. I have only been a cable-car conductor six months, but in that time I have taught myself to read Greek with more than fluency. All you need is good health and spirits, a will of iron, and a very tiny note-book in the palm of your hand, full of the words you wish to learn. And then for ten or twelve hours a day you go about running a car with your body—and with your mind—

hammering, hammering! It is excellent discipline—it is fighting all day, “*Pous, podos*, the foot—*pous, podos*, the foot—34th Street, Crosstown East and West—*pous, podos*, the foot!”

And then when you get home late at night, are there not the great masters who love you?

April 15th.

Thou wouldst call thyself Artist; thou wouldst have the Eternal Presence to dwell within thee, to fire thy heart with passion and dower thy lips with song; canst thou go into thy closet, and alone with thy Maker, say these words:

“O Thou Unthinkable, source of all light and life, Thou the great unselfish One, the great Sufferer; Thou seest my heart this day, how in it dwells but love of Thy truth and worship of Thy holiness. Thou seest that I seek not wealth that men should serve me, nor fame that they should honor me, for the glory that is Thine. Thou seest that I bring all my praise to Thy feet, that I love all things that Thou hast made, that I envy no man Thy gifts, that I rejoice when Thou sendest one stronger than I into the battle. And when these things are not, may Thy power leave me; for I seek but to dwell in Thy presence, and to speak Thy truth, which can not die.”

That prayer welled up in my heart to-day. There are times when I sit before this thing in my soul, crouching and gazing at it in fear. Then I see the naked horror of it, the shuddering reality of it. I see the Soul: motionless, tense, quivering, wrestling in an agony with the powers of destruction. It is so real to me that my body stiffens into stone, and I sit with the sweat on my forehead. That happened to me to-day, and I wrote a few lines of the poem that made my voice break—the passionate despairing cry for deliverance, for rest from the terror.

But there is no rest. The mountain slope is so that there is no standing upon it, and once you stop, it breaks your heart

to begin again. And so you go on—up—up—and there is not any summit.

It is that way when you write a book; and that way when you make a symphony; and that way when you wage a war.

But my soul hungered for it. I have loved the great elemental art-works—the art-works that were born of pure suffering. For months before I began *The Captive* I read but three books—read them and brooded over them, all day and all night. They were *Prometheus Bound*, *Prometheus Unbound*, and *Samson Agonistes*.

You sit with these books, and time and space “to nothingness do sink.” There looms up before you—like a bare mountain in its majesty—the great elemental world-fact, the death-grapple of the will with circumstance. You may build yourself any philosophy or any creed you please, but you will never get away from the world-fact—the death-grapple of the soul with circumstance. Æschylus has one creed, and Milton has another, and Shelley has a third; but always it is the death-grapple. Chaos, evil—circumstance—lies about you, binds you; and you grip it—you close with it—all your days you toil with it, you shape it into systems, you make it live and laugh and sing. And while you do that, there is in your heart a thing that is joy and pain and terror mingled in one passion.

Who knows that passion? Who knows—

“With travail and heavy sorrow
The holy spirit of Man.”

Prometheus Bound, *Prometheus Unbound*, and *Samson Agonistes*! And now there will be a fourth. It will be *The Captive*.

Am I a fool? I do not know—that is none of my business. It is my business to do my best.

Horace bids you, if you would make him weep, to weep first yourself. I understand by the writing of a poem just this: that the problem you put there you discover for yourself;

that the form you put it in you invent for yourself; and, finally, that what you make it, from the first word to the last word, from the lowest moment to the highest moment, you *live*; that when a character in such a place acts thus, he acts thus because you, in that place—not would have acted thus, but *did* act thus; that the words which are spoken in that moment of emotion are spoken because you, in that moment of emotion—not would have spoken them, but *did* speak them. I propose that you search out the scenes that have stirred the hearts of men in all times, and see if you can find one that was written thus—not because the author had lived it thus, but because somebody else had lived it thus, or because he wanted people to think he had lived it thus.

And now you are writing *The Captive*. You do not go into the dungeon in the body, because you need all your strength; but in the spirit you have gone into the dungeon, and the door has clanged, and it is black night—the world is gone forever. And there you sit, while the years roll by, and you front the naked fact. Six feet square of stone and an iron chain are your portion—that is circumstance; and the will—*you* are the will. And you grip it—you close with it—all your days you toil with it; you shape it into systems, make it live and laugh and sing. And while you do that there is in your heart a thing that is joy and pain and terror mingled in one passion.

Yes, sometimes I shrink from it; but I will do it—meaning what those words mean. I will fight that fight, I will live that life—to the last gasp; and it shall go forth into the world a living thing, a new well-spring of life.

It shall be—I don't know what you call the thing, but when you have hauled your load halfway up the hill you put a block in the way to keep it from sliding back. That same thing has to be done to society.

Man will never get behind the Declaration of Independence again, nor behind the writings of Voltaire again. We let Catholicism run around loose now, but that is because Voltaire cut its claws and pulled out all its teeth.

April 16th.

I was thinking to-day, that *The Captive* would be an interesting document to students of style. Read it, and make up your mind about it; then I will tell you—the first line of it is almost the first line of blank verse I ever wrote in my life.

I have read about the French artists, the great masters of style, and how they give ten years of their lives to writing things that are never published. But I have noticed that when they are masters at last, and when they do begin to publish—they very seldom have anything to say that I care in the least to hear.

—My soul is centered upon *the thing!*

Let it be a test.

I am trying to be an artist; but I have never been able to study style. I believe that the style of this great writer came from what he had to say. You think about how he said it; but he thought about what he was saying.

It seemed strange to me when I thought of it. With all my trembling eagerness, with all my preparation, such an idea as “practise” never came to me. How could I cut the path until I had come to the forest?

All my soul has been centered upon *living*. Since this book first took hold of me—eighteen months ago—I could not tell with what terrible intensity I have lived it. They said to me, “You are a poet; why don't you write verses for the magazines?” But I was not a writer of verses for the magazines.

It has been a shrine that I have kept in the corner of my heart, and tended there. I have never gone near it, except upon my knees. There were days when I did not go near it at

all, when I was weak, or distraught. But I knew that every day I was closer to the task, that every day my heart was more full of it. It was like wild music—it came to a climax that swept me away in spite of myself.

To get the mastery of your soul, to hold it here, in your hands, at your bidding, to consecrate your life to that, to watch and pray and toil for that, to rouse yourself and goad yourself day and night for that; to thrill with the memory of great consecrations, of heroic sufferings and aspirations; to have the power of the stars in your heart, of nature, of history and the soul of man; *that* is your “practise.”

April 17th.

It is true that my whole life has been a practise for the writing of this book, that this book is the climax of my whole life. I have toiled—learned—built up a mind—found a conviction; but I have never written anything, or tried to write anything, to be published. I have said, “Wait; it is not time.” And now it *is* time. If there is anything of use in all that I have done, it is in this book.

Yes; and also it is a climax in another way. It is my goal and my salvation.—Ah, how I have toiled for it!

April 19th.

I saw my soul to-day. It was a bubble, blown large, palpitating, whirling over a stormy sea; glorious with the rainbow hues it was, but perilous, abandoned.—Do you catch the *feeling* of my soul?

Something perilous—I do not much care what. A traveler scaling the mountains, leaping upon dizzy heights; a gambler staking his fortune, his freedom, his life—upon a cast!

I will tell you about it.

It began when I was fifteen. My great-uncle, my guardian, is a wholesale grocer in Chicago; he has a large palace and a large waistcoat.

“Will you be a wholesale grocer?” said he.

“No,” said I, “I will not.”

I might have been a partner by this time, had I said Yes, and had a palace and a large waistcoat too.

“Then what will you be?” asked the great-uncle.

“I will be a poet,” said I.

“You mean you will be a loafer?” said he.

“Yes,” said I—disliking argument—“I will be a loafer.”

And so I went away, and while I went I was thinking, far down in my soul. And I said: “It must be everything or nothing; either I am a poet or I am not. I will act as if I were; I will burn my bridges behind me. If I am, I will win—for you can not kill a poet; and if I am not, I will die.”

Thus is it perilous.

I fight the fight with all my soul; I give every ounce of my strength, my will, my hope, to the making of myself a poet. And when the time comes I write my poem. Then if I win, I win empires; and if I lose—

“You put all your eggs into one basket,” some one once said to me.

“Yes,” I replied, “I put all my eggs into one basket—and then I carry the basket myself.”

Now I have come to the last stage of the journey—the “one fight more, and the last.” And can I give any idea of what is back of me, to nerve me to that fight? I will try to tell you.

For seven years I have borne poverty and meanness, sickness, heat, cold, toil—that I might make myself an artist. The indignities, the degradations—I could not tell them, if I spent all the time I have in writing a journal. I have lived in garrets—among dirty people—vulgar people—vile people; I have worn rags and unclean things; I have lived upon bread and water and things that I have cooked myself; I have seen

my time and my strength wasted by a thousand hateful impertinences—I have been driven half mad with pain and rage; I have gone without friends—I have been hated by every one; I have worked at all kinds of vile drudgery—or starved myself sick that I might avoid working.

But I have said, “I will be an artist!”

Day and night I have dreamed it; day and night I have fought for it. I have plotted and planned—I have plotted to save a minute. I have done menial work that I might have my brain free—all the languages that I know I have worked at at such times. I have calculated the cost of foods—I have lived on a third of the pittance I earned, that I might save two-thirds of my time. I once washed dishes in a filthy restaurant because that took only two or three hours a day.

I have said, “I will be an artist! I will fix my eyes upon the goal; I will watch and wait, and fight the fight day by day. And when at last I am strong, and when my message is ripe, I will earn myself a free chance, and then I will write a book. All the yearning, all the agony of this my life I will put into it; every hour of trial, every burst of rage. I will make it the hope of my life, I will write it with my blood—give every ounce of strength that I have and every dollar that I own; and I will win—I will win!

“So I will be free, and the horror will be over.”

I have done that—I am doing that now. I mean to finish it if it kills me.—

But I was sitting on the edge of the bed to-night, and the tears came into my eyes and I whispered: “But oh, you must not ask me to do anymore! I can not do any more! It will leave me broken!”

Only so much weight can a man carry. The next pound breaks his back.

April 22d.

I am happy to-night; I am a little bit drunk.

To-day was one day in fifty. Why should it be? Sometimes I have but to spread my wings to the wind. Yesterday I might have torn my hair out, and that glory would not have come to me. But to-day I was filled with it—it lived in me and burned in me—I had but to go on and go on.

The Captive! It was the burst of rage—the first glow in the ashes of despair. I was walking up and down the room for an hour, thundering it to myself. I have not gotten over the joy of it yet: *“Thou in thy mailed insolence!”*

I wonder if any one who reads those thirty lines will realize that they meant eight hours of furious toil on my part!

Stone by stone I build it.

The whole possibility of a scene—that is what I pant for, always; that it should be all there, and yet not a line to spare; compact, solid, each phrase coming like a blow; and above all else, that it should be inevitable! When you stand upon the height of your being, and behold the thing with all your faculties—the thing and the phrase are one, and one to all eternity.

April 24th.

I was looking at a literary journal to-day. Oh, my soul, it frightens me! All these libraries of books—who reads them, what are they for? And each one of them a hope! And I am to leap over them all—I—I? I dare not think about it.

I have been helpless to-day. I can not find what I want—I struggled for hours, I wore myself out with struggling. And I have torn up what I wrote.

Blank verse is such a—such a thing not to be spoken of! Is there anything worse, except it be a sonnet? How many miles of it are ground out every day—sometimes that kind comes to me to mock me—I could have written a whole poem full of it this afternoon. If there are two lines of that sort in *The Captive*, I'll burn it all.