

FADE IN:

EXT. POWDERHOUSE HILL, SOUTH BERWICK, MAINE (1863) - DAY

Sprigs of grass poke up through the ice as winter gives way to spring. Snowmelt rushes down a wash. A small caravan of BOYS trek down off the slope after their last sled run of the day. Oblivious to the signs that their sledding days are numbered, they recount their death-defying feats of downhill navigation.

Two stragglers on the hill, CONRAD and NICK, spot an unclaimed HORSE tied to a tree nearby. A mangy-looking DOG digs nearby for gophers. Puzzled, the boys scan the area in search of who owns these creatures.

TOP OF HILL

High above the boys' view, SARAH ORNE JEWETT, 16, sled under her arm, checks downhill to make sure the coast is clear. She drops her sled down on the snow, secures her bonnet and petticoats, and plunges off on the wings of gravity.

BASE OF HILL

Conrad and Nick spot the mystery sledder accelerating across the powder.

NICK

Who's that?

SARAH'S SLED - BOYS' POV

She steers right to catch a precariously steep grade. Her sled lifts off into the air, then lands smoothly.

CONRAD (O.S.)

Wow!

CLOSE ON SARAH

The trees pass by her in a blur as she negotiates her way through jagged, rock-laden terrain.

HILL SLOPE

The sled goes airborne again, causing Sarah's loosened skirts to catch the breeze. The boys are amazed and delighted, but not sure about the skirts.

NICK

Criminy, he's got a sail!

THE SLED

skids around a boulder, almost collides with a rock outcrop but manages to skirt by without incident.

SARAH

wonders how she does it. Just one more corner before the straightaway. She can see that she's going too fast.

THE SLED

takes the corner too close, swerves out of traction and turns into the wrong direction.

THE BOYS

are mortified.

CONRAD

He's going to crash into  
that rock!

SARAH

cannot hope to avert disaster. So she adeptly rolls over the side and into the snow just as -

THE SLED

slams into a boulder and splits spectacularly into two.

BOTTOM OF HILL

The boys start running towards the crash site.

CONRAD

Boy, what a ride. Did you see who it was?

NICK

I don't care, he's the captain of the treehouse. Alright?

CONRAD

But what if he's dead?

SARAH

now lies motionless on her back in the snow. Her face is framed in white ice as she peers up into the sky. A robin alights on her forehead.

SARAH'S POV

Suddenly startled, the bird SHRIEKS and flies away. In its wake, two round and surly heads stare down at her.

CONRAD  
Cripes, it's Sarah Jewett.

HILL SLOPE

The boys grab fistfuls of snow and start pelting her. Fortunately, help arrives in the form of KATE BIRKHEAD, 16, pretty and petite. She dashes over, knocks the boys aside with a healthy burst of feminine angst.

KATE  
Heathen! Why don't you go  
gnaw on some bark?

Unfazed, the boys cast her into the snow and resume their barrage. But not for long. The mangy hound we saw earlier now leaps INTO FRAME, taking a slice of flesh from Conrad's leg. The boy YELPS. Then he and Nick scam down the hill. Sarah continues peering upward, oblivious to all.

KATE  
Sarah, are you hurt?

SARAH  
I am a drop of quicksilver on a  
quivering white mass.

KATE  
I'm getting your father.

Before Kate can stand, Sarah clamps down on her arm, stares into her eyes with intensity.

KATE (CONT.)  
Sarah, he's a doctor. And  
you may have cracked your  
skull. In fact, I'm sure of  
it.

If Sarah's head requires examining, it's for other reasons. She touches Kate's blushing face, smiles.

KATE (CONT.)  
Don't start that. It's  
shameless.

SARAH  
Why do you say that?

KATE  
You're not a boy. You shouldn't  
even be up here.

SARAH  
Guess what?

KATE  
What?

SARAH  
I finished my story. And I sent it to  
someone.

KATE  
Who?

SARAH  
*The Atlantic Monthly.*

KATE  
My god.

SARAH  
My father found out where the  
publisher lives. Someday,  
I'll be famous like the  
Brontë sisters.

At this inopportune moment, the mangy dog returns and  
slobbers all over Sarah's face.

KATE  
Well, there's your first  
admirer.

Kate stands up. Sarah reaches out a hand. Kate pulls her  
to her feet. They head down the hill, holding hands.

SARAH  
I thought you were my first.

KATE  
You know very well I haven't the  
slightest interest in personal  
attachments.

Sarah disregards the slight, wraps an arm around Kate, and  
pulls her close, as they saunter over to Sarah's horse. As  
they saddle up together, a crow CAWS twice from a nearby  
tree. Sarah takes note of the bad omen, then tweaks the  
reins and heads down the hill. The mangy dog darts over,  
dead gopher in mouth and runs alongside the girls. The  
broken sled is visible on the slope in the background.

CUT TO:

INT. DRAWING ROOM, 148 CHARLES STREET, BOSTON - DAY

On the same day, a hundred miles to the southwest (as the crow flies), a stormy fellow by the name of NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE, 63, paces before a bay window. The window looks out on the Charles River. The brooding author is in a lather about something. An intriguing, forbidden something lures him to the window, but he resists the urge to peak.

At the center of the room, publisher JAMES T. FIELDS, 50, sips teas at his cherry wood desk. A stack of "ATLANTIC MONTHLY" magazines are within reach. Around him are bookshelves, paintings on the walls, a piano, and a glass display case. Two other Boston Brahmins, OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES, 55, and THOMAS HIGGINSON, sit before Field's desk.

THOMAS HIGGINSON (O.S.)

This discovery has restored for us the legend in its artistic phase.

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES (O.S.)

Tell us again the location of the dig.

HIGGINSON

In the sacred precinct of Demeter.

HOLMES

I take it that's somewhere north of Beebe's Block?

HIGGINSON

On the coast of Asia Minor, Professor Holmes. The excavators found a volcanic disturbance at the site.

HOLMES

How exciting. Was anyone hurt?

HIGGINSON

It seems these temples were deliberately built over deep fissures in the earth.

FIELDS

So, I've heard. They were used for various types of rituals, prophetic visions and the like.

HAWTHORNE

finally gives into to temptation and goes to the window. He glances down into -

EXT. A WALLED GARDEN,

where the windswept figure of MRS. ANNIE FIELDS, 30, transplants seedlings in the soil. A beehive swarm of dark hair is loosely contained in its bun, as Annie digs, wearing a work smock over her dress. Her slim figure, tranquil countenance and delicate touch are the antithesis of the hard-featured, emotionally-intense Hawthorne.

FIELDS (CONT. O.S)

And what about this larger statue you mentioned?

HIGGINSON (O.S.)

Possibly a priestess, or it may be Demeter herself, depicted in her human aspect.

Annie stops to rest. She looks out over the river and the city of Cambridge in the distance.

HOLMES (O.S.)

Yes, as she pauses from her restless wandering in search of the lost child. Persephone, isn't it, Mr. Higginson?

INT. DRAWING ROOM

Fields grabs the stack of magazines and wraps them in paper and string, then addresses the package.

FIELDS

Yes. The girl Hades hauled down to the underworld. What does this have to do with the next number? Another one of your rambling articles, I presume.

HIGGINSON

Why Mr. Fields, it's a milestone in the study of archaic history!

HOLMES

So they've dug up another obese figure in marble. Sound the trumpets.

The sound of Hawthorne grumbling to himself at the window briefly derails the conversation. They all look in his direction momentarily. But they know better than to bother him. Fields empties the last drops from his teapot as Holmes wanders over to look into a glass display case.

HIGGINSON

We've long suspected that our  
Christian mythology was  
appropriated from a far more  
ancient tradition.

HOLMES

(staring into the case)  
Of course it was, there were no  
copyright laws in those days.  
Good God, is that a lock of Keat's  
hair?

HIGGINSON

But now we have proof of it.

HOLMES

Where did you get it, Fields?

FIELDS

Well, what are you proposing,  
Higginson? Something in the way of  
thirty pages?

HIGGINSON

Really, I don't think I could  
cover this in a single  
installment.

HOLMES

Touché.

Holmes gives up on the lock of hair, returns to his seat.  
Still roiling at the window, Hawthorne finally decides to  
act. He roars across the room like a freight train.

HAWTHORNE

Won't you excuse me, gentlemen.

HOLMES

Yes, Hawthorne, I was about to  
suggest a trip to the privy.

HIGGINSON

But won't you give us your opinion  
of the marbles?

HAWTHORNE

I have no views on religion.

FIELDS

Really? Oh, Nathaniel, when you  
find my wife, could you ask her to  
send Lucy up with more tea?

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

Stepping outdoors, Hawthorne forgets how deceptively cold it is on this sunny day. His body involuntarily shivers from head to foot. Embarrassed, he retreats behind a rose bush to collect himself.

SEEDLING PLOT

Annie notices her stalker. She's flattered, but keeps troweling. After a few moments:

ANNIE

Have you run out of refreshment or has court ended early?

HAWTHORNE

(stepping out of the hideout)  
Actually, I was distracted from a riveting discussion of how the past constantly interferes with the present.

ANNIE

And what was the distraction?

HAWTHORNE

Only this crisp, vibrant first day of a New England spring.

He shivers again. Annie notices his distress. She rushes over to him.

ANNIE

Let's get you out of the draft.

They retreat to a Roman-style stone bench surrounded by a vine-covered trellis farther back in the yard.

ANNIE (CONT.)

Here.

They sit. Like a mother hen, Annie turns up Hawthorne's collar. Buttons up his jacket. Warms his icy hands.

ANNIE (CONT.)

You should be inside.

HAWTHORNE

To the contrary, this garden is a refuge, like an ark retreating from the flood of babble.

He glances up at the window he was staring down from earlier.

ANNIE

It's a refuge to me as well.

Their eyes meet. For Annie, Hawthorne's intensity is invigorating and scary at the same time. She looks away.

ANNIE

How is the Dolliver story coming?

HAWTHORNE

A senseless plundering of ink. Whatever propelled me to start a romance in my decaying state - delirium, I suspect.

ANNIE

The chapters you showed us are delicious. There is just one line that troubles me, where you say pleasure is only pain greatly exaggerated.

HAWTHORNE

No, you couldn't possibly appreciate that concept.

He stares down at the ground and broods. Annie touches his arm gently, reassuringly.

HAWTHORNE

If only it were not so wretchedly breezy in Boston, I should make a point of...

He can't finish the sentence.

ANNIE

Visiting more often? Oh, I wish you would.

She did not mean this in a romantic way. But Hawthorne's buoyed by the comment and leans toward her, ready to kiss her. At this moment, FOOTSTEPS beat up the walk.

FIELDS

Are we keeping America's man of letters safe from the elements?

Annie alights from the bench, out of Hawthorne's reach, like a jack-in-the-box. The author clutches his empty hands in the air, seething with frustration. Whether he is or not, Fields acts oblivious as to what has just transpired.

ANNIE

So, you are out of tea. Shall I go fetch Lucy?

FIELDS

Don't give it a thought. Holmes and that other chatterbox are up there debating the ulterior motives of the Hebrews. But don't you think we should take our friend into the parlor, where it's warm?

ANNIE

Yes, that's just what I suggested.

They each offer an arm and Hawthorne reluctantly gives in. They stroll back towards the house.

FIELDS

I meant to tell you, your paper on Lincoln's view of the war was a revelation.

HAWTHORNE

Pity you chose to omit the only part of it worth publishing.

FIELDS

Now we can't be describing the President as a sallow, unkempt man so tall and loose-jointed he's a spectacle to watch whenever he sits down and folds up his legs.

HAWTHORNE

Why not, if true?

Lapsing into a reverie, Annie twirls a sprig of parsley and savors America's greatest author having a crush on her.

FIELDS

And to think you were educated abroad. The rest of the article's running in the next number.

HAWTHORNE

Yes, on the immaculate page of the Atlantic. Think I'll head back to the station.

INT. FIELDS' HOUSE (CONTINUOUS)- DAY

As the Fields and Hawthorne step inside, the author strides ahead through the house at breakneck speed. Annie and her husband trade a worried look, hurry after him. LUCY, the Fields' Irish maid, dashes up with his coat and cane.

FIELDS

Are you sure you won't stay for luncheon?

HAWTHORNE

I'll miss the train.

FIELDS

I believe there are several going your way. Oh, did Mrs. Fields explain her reservation about your new work? The line where you say pleasure is heightened pain, or something to the effect.

HAWTHORNE

To hell with it, then. If you expect me to approximate the same rosy-cheeked flavor of the witless petticoat legions from which you draw most of your current stock, you are mistaken.

FIELDS

No. Of course. I wouldn't dream of it.

A small, perturbed voice weighs in on the subject.

ANNIE

Actually, any one of their books has outsold the combined collections of Emerson, Longfellow, Melville..

EXT. 148 CHARLES STREET - CONTINUOUS

They all step out onto the landing.

FIELDS

Yes, and I'm afraid even Hawthorne.

HAWTHORNE

Damned mob of scribbling women. They've corrupted the marketplace. As for Dolliver, the next time you go rummaging through my bureau, perhaps you'll find another manuscript collecting dust.

The Fields look at each other again as Hawthorne descends the steps.

ANNIE

Do give our love to Sophia.

HAWTHORNE

Naturally. And Fields, when you put the new article and the others we discussed into book form, I will dedicate the volume to Franklin Pierce.

FIELDS

Please, Nathaniel. Perhaps after the war, but today, with all the bad blood that's been created..

HAWTHORNE

Regardless.

The moment Hawthorne reaches the street, the Fields see TWO PANHANDLERS ambush Hawthorne, begging for coins. He shoos them away, crosses the street and strides off.

FIELDS

Well, I guess we won't be showing him any of your poetry.

Annie takes this remark as a putdown and curtly quits the landing. Coming up the steps, the POSTMAN tips his hat to Hawthorne, not recognizing him. Fields watches Hawthorne plod down Charles Street as the postman saddles him with a pile letters and manuscripts.

POSTMAN

Keeping busy at the bookstore, aren't you?

FIELDS

(rifling through the mail)  
I think I liked things better before home delivery.

POSTMAN

(retreating)  
March of progress. Can't stop it.

FIELDS

No, I suppose not.

INT. DINING ROOM, JEWETT HOUSE, SOUTH BERWICK, MAINE - DAY

A few months later. A bouquet of flowers sits at the center of the table. DR. THEODORE JEWETT (50, underweight for his height) eats breakfast, surrounded by females. They include his wife, MRS. CAROLINE JEWETT, a stern woman in her fifties, and their oldest daughter, MARY, 19. Mary's hair is wound absolutely tight as a top, and below that is a smug, know-it-all face. Next to her is CARRIE, 10, who's adorable in a macabre sort of way.

STEPS bounce down a stairwell O.S. and presently, Sarah strides up to the table. She plops a riding crop down beside her as she sits by her father. Oblivious to the awkward silence around her, she digs right into her cold bacon and eggs.

DR. JEWETT

I suppose congratulations are in order, Sarah. Your mother thought she might never see this day.

MARY

No one in South Berwick thought they should.

CARRIE

I wish I could hurry up and graduate.

The family HOUSKEEPER enters the room with a pitcher of fresh milk and starts filling their glasses.

MRS. JEWETT

Mrs. Tolland's daughter says she spent the study hour every day writing letters to Katherine Birkhead.

DR. JEWETT

Fortunately, her composition skills have excelled. I dropped your manuscript at the post office.

SARAH

Do you really think Mr. Fields will like it?

DR. JEWETT

I suppose that depends on the competition.

As the housekeeper fetches Sarah's glass, she gives the young author a wink. Sarah drinks up with gusto. When she lowers her glass, we discover a white mustache.

CARRIE

Sister's going to be a celebrated author.

MARY

Sarah told her that.

MRS. JEWETT

Herman.

DR. JEWETT

You might extend our best wishes to Miss Birkhead when you meet her train.

SARAH

Of course, but whatever for?

MRS. JEWETT

Didn't she tell you? She's marrying that young man from Newport.

SARAH

What are you talking about?

MRS. JEWETT

Her mother's been bugling about it all over town. I'm surprised you don't know.

CARRIE

Sister's going to a wedding!

MARY

Hard to picture, is it not?

A BEAT. For Sarah, the news is coming out of right field. She is completely devastated. She grabs her riding crop and bolts from the room.

MRS. JEWETT

You remember your bonnet, young lady.

Sarah strides through the house, grabs the bonnet hanging on the front door, and hurries out.

EXT. MAIN STREET, SOUTH BERWICK - DAY

Sarah gallops at breakneck speed into town. Past the general store. Past the gaping TOWNSPEOPLE. Her bonnet flies off her head and she doesn't care.

A little girl, AMY GILBERT, waves to her from a wagon parked at the store. Sarah doesn't notice her. A retired old shipmaster, CAPTAIN DAN, squints as the equestrian goes by in a blur.

CAPT. DAN  
Why, it's Paul Revere come to warn  
us of the redcoats.

Loitering on the corner, the sled boys Conrad and Nick pick up rocks and hurl them at Sarah's horse, miss.

EXT. SOUTH BERWICK TRAIN DEPOT - DAY

Sarah walks her panting horse up to the tracks as a locomotive brakes into the station.

TRAIN CAR

After the other passengers disembark, Kate cautiously appears in the passageway and spots Sarah. She considers going back inside the car. Alas, she resigns herself to the inevitable confrontation and steps off the train.

TRACKSIDE

The two young women and horse come face to face. All are breathing heavy, for one reason or another.

MRS. BIRKHEAD (O.S.)  
Katie, I'm right here.

OPPOSITE SIDE OF TRACKS

An approaching chaise transports a hefty matron, MRS. BIRKHEAD, 45, towards the depot. But the departing train temporarily cuts off her advance.

TRACKSIDE

KATE  
I meant to tell you, Sarah, but I  
wasn't quite sure how. You'll  
come to the wedding, won't you?

SARAH  
Tell him you've changed your mind.

KATE  
It isn't mine to change.

SARAH  
Funny, that sure looks like your  
head to me.

KATE

Of course, it's my head. And my brain's thought this all out.

SARAH

And yet you said nothing.

KATE

He's lucratively employed. And he just bought a house.

SARAH

I wouldn't care if he were the King of Siam.

The argument generates a SMALL CROWD who witness this exchange as if it's an onstage play. When the train clears the station, all eyes turn toward Mrs. Birkhead as her chaise rattles across the tracks.

KATE

No, of course you wouldn't care. No one's pressuring you to grow up, Sarah Jewett. Tomorrow you'll be down at the fish pond by noon, or out on a drive with your father out to York to see a patient. And your rich grandfather and inlaws. Other girls don't have such freedom to "unfold".

SARAH

Then come live with us.

Hearing this offer, Mrs. BIRKHEAD catapults from the chaise to quickly grab Kate and the luggage.

MRS. BIRKHEAD

Welcome back, darling. Ooh, we better get you on home and into the bathtub.

KATE

Please, Mother, must you treat me as a cow to be auctioned?

MRS. BIRKHEAD

Wait till you see the announcement we've gotten up. Sarah, I think you dropped your bunnet back up the road a piece.

Mother and daughter board the conveyance and it lurches away. Kate looks back at Sarah like a damsel in distress. Sarah remains frozen on the spot. The village women shake their heads -- some in sympathy, others in disgust.

Sarah's horse has to nudge his crestfallen rider to snap her out of her trance.

INT. FAMILY PARLOR, JEWETT HOUSE - DAY

Pins in mouth, Mrs. Jewett tailors a blue silk gown on Sarah. The latter sheepishly sits on a stool, resigned to a cruel fate. Her mother seems to be aiming for a snug fit. When Sarah tries to move, a pin jabs her.

MRS. JEWETT

That's what you get.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

Small white hall with steep gables. We can hear the service going on inside.

MINISTER (V.O.)

If any man here believes there's a reason these two should not be joined in the holy sacrament of matrimony, speak now or forever hold your peace.

A BEAT. Suddenly, Sarah explodes out a back door, dawning in the blue silk. Riding crop in hand. Tears streaming down her face, she walks toward the parking lot of carriages and riding horses. She tears her dress as she swings up on her horse takes off up the road. A COW grazing in a pasture looks up as she passes.

MINISTER (V.O.)

Therefore, by the power invested in me, I now pronounce you man and wife. You may kiss the bride.

EXT. VAUGHN WOODS - DAY

Sarah gallops into a thick patch of cottonwood trees with low-hanging branches. She ducks until she reaches the pines, where she again breaks into a gallop. Finally, she reigns in the horse before an ancient pitch pine that towers above the rest of the grove. She unsaddles, rips off the gown completely, and climbs the tree.

TOP OF PITCH PINE

Sarah pokes her head through the new growth and steadies herself on a branch. By now, her undergarments are soiled with sap. At least she's got an incredible view. Mt. Agamenticus rises to the northwest, and beyond that, the White Mountains. To the east, the Atlantic Ocean shimmers.

While Sarah imbibes this healing panorama, an elusive WHITE HERON lands in the next tree. Sarah marvels at the rare bird. And the heron marvels back, not expecting to see a human in that particular spot.

*(end excerpt; for info, contact [rregello@thecityedition.com](mailto:rregello@thecityedition.com))*