The illness which culminated in an operation came upon me when I was not looking. It seemed that life stopped. Identity blurred. One hung up his personality with his clothes in a closet and became a case—the patient in room number 12. No longer quite a man, but a condition, a problem, stretched out there for daily examination, looked down upon, peered into, charted on paper with graphs like the rise and fall in the price of wheat.

It was this indignity, even more than the pain and the weakness and the boredom, that made the experience difficult for me to bear. To be something, and then to be nothing! One is singled out for suffering. He goes alone; he takes no one with him.

While it was true that every thing that had constituted a pleasant and satisfying life for me—my robust physical health, my interesting work, and all my books, my letters, my friends—while all these had been stripped away, I was still possessed of my own mind and my own thoughts. I had, after all, my own inner life. I had my life!

I began to reflect that so many men have owed their lasting contributions to the wealth of the race to some unhappy adventure of health or of fortune, some catastrophe of imprisonment or banishment where they, having mastered their own spirits, were at length able to live a complete life. I think it was in prison that Cervantes wrote *Don Quixote*; and Paul addressed some of the best of his letters from Roman jails.

The present moment, this burning instant of time, was all that I or any man could ever really possess or command—and I was allowing it to be ruined by anxieties of my own making. It came to me powerfully, that if I could be content at this moment, I could be content.

—Charles Grayson

I never knew a night so black, Light failed to follow on its track. I never knew a storm so gray, It failed to have its clearing day. I never knew such bleak despair That there was not a rift somewhere. I never knew an hour so drear Love could not fill it full of cheer!

—John Kendrick Bangs (1862–1922)