

*Acclaim for a Woman of Spunk*

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THE MOST ELABORATE ATTEMPTS to make Helen Jewett a worthy murder victim appeared in a set of small pamphlets published within two to four weeks of the crime. None of the anonymous authors offered a defense of prostitution; that would have been too great a breach of propriety. Rather, they focused on the character of Jewett herself, making her out to be a noble and spirited young woman who somehow miraculously transcended the inevitable degradation of her occupation. One pamphlet also accented illuminating moments in Jewett's career, which, when corroborated with and augmented by other fragments of information from the newspapers and police reports, reveal much about her practice of prostitution in New York City and in particular her spunkiness in the face of various dangers.

A small number of copies of three pamphlets have survived in twentieth-century library collections: *Authentic Biography of the Late Helen Jewett, a Girl of the Town, by a Gentleman Fully Acquainted with Her History* (New York); *The Life of Ellen Jewett; Illustrative of Her Adventures with Very Important Incidents, from Her Seduction to the Period of Her Murder; Together with Various Extracts from Her Journal, Correspondence, and Poetical Effusions* (New York); and *A Sketch of the Life of Miss Ellen Jewett, Who Was Murdered in the City of New York, on Saturday Evening, April 9, 1836, with a Portrait Copied from Her Miniature* (Boston).<sup>1</sup> Three other titles were published and advertised in the spring of 1836 with no copies known to survive.<sup>2</sup> For an ephemeral popular literature hastily produced for an eager but very time-limited market, it is amazing that copies survive at all.

Jewett's friends had already made considerable progress elevating her status through their connections with the penny press in New York. As different as the stories were in the *Sun*, the *Transcript*, and the *Herald*, they all represented Jewett as an unfortunate victim of seduction who succumbed to prostitution due to forces beyond her control. Personal friendships no doubt played a big role in this, as in the case of the young lawyer William Wilder, who toured 41 Thomas with James Gordon Bennett, or the *Transcript* court reporter William H. Attree, who had been smitten by Jewett in 1834.<sup>3</sup>

The pamphlets expanded on Jewett's childhood and seduction, and while none of their accounts was accurate, two of them took their material from the stories Helen had told friends and so more fully reveal her flair for self-invention. (The third, the *Sketch*, published in Boston, was a total and complete fabrication designed to cash in on the Jewett-mania.) One of them, the *Authentic Biography*, is of particular interest because internal evidence suggests its author knew Helen well during her New York days. Written by "a gentleman fully acquainted with her history," the *Authentic Biography* announced its purpose in a brief preface:

Public curiosity has been much abused by the numerous misrepresentations respecting the adventures and character of the late Helen Jewett. The object of this publication is to satisfy the public curiosity upon this subject, and rescue the character of an unfortunate girl from the odium which has been attempted to be cast upon it. It is true, she was a girl of the town; but she was far removed from the degraded, ignorant, vicious beings generally known as such; and the misrepresentations in a Boston paper, in which she is designated as a common thief, a girl naturally depraved from her childhood, deserve the severest reprobation of every honest member of the community.<sup>4</sup>

Ordinary prostitutes were vicious and degraded, but not Jewett, this author insisted; his goal was to demolish the Weston-inspired article in the *Boston Post* that had been circulated nationally. One-third of the sixteen-page pamphlet recounted her background in Maine in a variant story from the three renditions in the penny papers. Another third presented revealing vignettes of her life in New York showing her to be charming, witty, spirited, authoritative, imperious even, and certainly unafraid of and undeferential to men. The final section of the pamphlet, mostly lifted from the *Sun*, recounted Rosina Townsend's discovery of the body along with some added speculation about motive in this inexplicable and sensational crime.

The girl's history introduced interesting variations on the Maine orphan story. Her real birth name, the author insisted, was Maria Benson (a name reported as only a pseudonym by the *Herald*); she was born in Hallowell, Maine, in January 1812. (This advanced Jewett's real age by twenty-one months.) Maria's father, cheated in the lumber business by a dishonest partner named Caleb Talbot, died when Maria was one. Her beautiful widowed mother took up schoolteaching to support her daughter and instructed her as well. By age five, Maria "had made more progress in the usual studies, than the generality of children at twice her age." The child's beauty and brightness gained her the mentorship of Judge "Western" and his family, who sent her to "a select school" in Augusta, "at which she made the most astonishing progress in her studies." Unfortunately, the mother then died, and the "Western" family took her in, treating her "in every respect as a member."

In the summer of 1826, the pamphlet continued, the judge sent Maria and his daughter to a boarding school in Portland, Maine. "It was her fifteenth year, although in appearance she was somewhat older." The school was short on dormitory rooms and so boarded some girls out, and in this unprotected environment she met a young law student named Lemuel Lawton, who attended her constantly at church and at social gatherings, took her for walks and rides, and flattered her. The clever Lawton "directed her taste for reading into new channels." Lord Byron's *Don Juan* finally and fatally weakened her: "Its vivid images of the grossest licentiousness, half veiled in the charm of the poetry, worked upon her active imagination, excited her naturally ardent temperament, unsettled the principles of virtue, and disposed her, in an evil hour, to fall a prey to her seducer's arts." After a year of bookish tutelage, Lawton finally administered a "medical preparation" to remove Maria's last shred of resistance. "These facts speak strongly, considering her extreme youth, for her natural strength of mind," the pamphlet writer reasoned. In no time the unfortunate girl became pregnant and in shame ran off to Boston with her seducer. Judge Western implored her to return home, but she wrote him back (in a letter the pamphlet author assured his readers he had actually seen), "I was dead to virtue—I am now dead to society, and it is my most earnest wish that I may soon be dead to nature." The infant died, the scoundrel took off for Alabama, and Jewett had no choice but to settle into her ordained life of prostitution. "How deeply it is to be regretted that a girl of her extraordinary mental powers should not have had the watchful guardianship of a mother, at a time when the passions are bursting forth in their full strength," the author lamented. "Had she been saved from the first false step, no one who knew her will hesitate to believe, that with her clear, sound judgment, brilliant and glowing imagi-

nation, and her quick yet profound sensibility, she might have made an American *De Staël*."

As in the story Jewett told Attree, the *Authentic Biography's* version of the girl's seduction excused the girl from nearly all responsibility. The Boston boarding school named in the 1834 *Transcript* column was relocated to Portland, and the scoundrel this time was a law student, not a merchant's son (or a bank cashier, as in the *Herald's* version). But it was essentially the same story, the kind Jewett found good for a prostitute's business: a charming rake could sexually awaken a beautiful, bright, and virtuous girl. Lawton was slow and deliberate, warming Maria's passions and building her desire through his strategic deployment of injurious books. Once ruined, Maria could not go back to the respectable Western family; dishonor was permanent, even though the judge tried to retrieve her. A sensitive woman like Jewett *especially* realized her moral debasement and nobly declined to try to pass as a good woman again, even when given the opportunity. And for this gesture of sacrifice, so splendidly feminine in its renunciation of self, the "gentleman" author of the *Authentic Biography* admired her all the more! Helen Jewett clearly knew how to craft a seduction story to gain admiration from men.<sup>5</sup>

The reason to credit Jewett with this Portland seduction story is that it so closely resembled the stories told to Attree and to James Gordon Bennett's informant on Doreas Dorrance, even as it departed from those in factual particulars. Several fixed points anchor them: the elevated age, the orphan status, the precociously educated mind, the kindly and forgiving judge, the ardent young man in training for a professional job, the intimacy and dangers of shared reading. The pamphlet titled *The Life of Ellen Jewett* also featured these plot points, stretching the Attree story of the Boston seduction out to fifty-two pages of small print. The author of this version both admired and pitied Jewett and was far more inclined to describe her as a "polluted" and "degraded wretch," suggesting that its author was not of like mind with Attree or the *Authentic Biography* author on the evils of prostitution. But running underneath all the versions is the voice of Jewett, concocting her autobiography to suit her circumstances.

Comparing Jewett to Madame Germaine de Staël was a lofty claim indeed, but not totally groundless. De Staël was a formidable Frenchwoman, intellectually and romantically active during the French Revolution, up to the 1820s. Her unconventional life—essayist, novelist, lover of a half dozen of the leading men of her day—was precisely the sort of career the ambitious Jewett could dream of, supported by stories of her own exceptional mental acuity and given life by demonstrations of her forceful personality.<sup>6</sup>

The *Authentic Biography* next outlined Jewett's life in New York City and gave examples of her forcefulness in action. The author listed her early residences, at brothels run by Mrs. Post, Ann Welden, and Rosina Townsend; the newspapers had only mentioned Townsend. She also lived with men as a "regular kept mistress," and she communicated with lovers via letters, two of which the pamphlet printed in full. And then the author recounted five incidents in which Jewett bested cloddish men by using "her powers of bitter, biting sarcasm." One of these incidents can be corroborated in three other sources, so it is not unreasonable to presume that the other four vignettes also had some basis in Jewett's life. Which is not to say that these events happened as reported in this pamphlet: almost nothing in Jewett's self-generated stories can be taken as literal truth. Her penchant for self-dramatization is perhaps the truest thing about them.

Rowdies who invaded brothels presented one form of threat to women like Jewett; another more insidious threat might arise from men admitted to the premises who then failed to play their role as gentlemen. Getting rid of them delicately and without provoking an ugly reaction took skill and tact. The author of the *Authentic Biography* claimed that despite her youthful age Helen acted as an assistant to Ann Welden at number 55 Leonard Street, where her duties included reprimanding boorish guests in the parlor. To one "poor devil" who uttered offensive witticisms, she reportedly snapped, "Your conversation is as silly as it is disgusting. There is the door, Sir, and I beg you to do me the favor never to call here again, as you will save me the trouble of ordering the servant to kick you into the street."<sup>7</sup> Whether or not she said these words, the point is that the pamphlet author believed her capable of saying them. Giving orders to men was consistent with her general character.

This story meshed with another one illustrating her command over men. Again according to the *Authentic Biography*, she once subdued with considerable courage a man brandishing a pistol:

Without being in the least agitated, she instantly struck the pistol from his hand, and with her bright eyes flashing fire, in tones calm and clear, indicative of the strongest contempt, she said to him, "You poor contemptible libel upon manhood! You have done what would disgrace the meanest coward that walks the street. You must see therefore, the necessity of making an immediate apology for such brutal conduct [*sic*]." Her opponent declared he would do no such thing. "Then," said Helen, "You must see the necessity I am under of pulling your nose." Suiting the action to the word, she took the gentleman's proboscis in her fingers, and tweaked it in no gentle style.<sup>8</sup>

Nose tweaking may sound faintly ridiculous to modern ears, capping a paragraph that sounds like nothing so much as a scene from a cheap adventure thriller of the period, down to the cliché of the bright flashing eyes. But pulling the nose was in fact a well-known, highly dramatic, and effective gesture of contempt in the 1830s, part of the repertoire of insults available to men (and only men) who accounted themselves too dignified for fisticuffs. When decisively accomplished, it amounted to an unauthorized invasion of personal space and a commanding and painful affront. The son of President John Q. Adams had his nose tweaked by an angry journalist under the U.S. Capitol dome in 1827; President Andrew Jackson's nose was once grabbed and twisted by an irate citizen.<sup>9</sup> Apocryphal or not, this Jewett story furthered a public construction of a fearless and feisty woman who could insult and emasculate men when the occasion required. She not only disarmed her antagonist by knocking his pistol aside, she impugned his masculinity both explicitly and symbolically. The story illustrates one way of dealing with ungentlemanly behavior in the parlor. But it only worked if the man in question could lay claim to being a gentleman subject to the conventions of honor.

The dangers to prostitutes illustrated by this story were real enough, even if Jewett's response was melodramatically invented. Difficult, unpleasant, or potentially violent encounters with men might emerge of a sudden. There always had to be a measure of uncertainty about men in this playacting world who presented false credentials as nice fellows. Out-of-town men, arriving under the auspices of the drummers, posed a special risk, for they might take advantage of freedom and anonymity to behave in ways they felt they could not be held accountable for. A prostitute had to be able to size up a client swiftly, take her measure of him, and decide how close to let him come. Safety in a brothel depended on sound appraisal of potential clients at the theater and on the street and on careful gatekeeping at the front door, which was always kept locked, as well as on winnowing out men already admitted to the parlor whose behavior began to turn worrisome.

Another story of Jewett's courage in confronting an ill-behaved man also dates from her time at Ann Welden's house. Jewett told the story of Captain Burke and the cutup dresses several times, to the author of the *Authentic Biography* and also to William Attree, who put it in his 1834 *Transcript* column. It also appeared in the fifty-two-page pamphlet (*The Life of Ellen Jewett*), and again, in even more detail, in an 1849 novella on the murder case by George Wilkes. Jewett told Attree the salient facts: one evening at the brothel a British officer named Burke presented in payment for wine a three-dollar bill that she challenged as counterfeit. The ensuing dispute so enraged Burke that he "cut to pieces several of

her dresses." The next day Jewett went to the Police Office to swear out a warrant against Burke. When Burke was hauled into court, he brought a friend, a Colonel Morris, who vouched for Burke's respectability and upheld his claim that he did not know the bill was counterfeit. (In Wilkes's 1849 version, the colonel claimed his friend had had too much wine when he cut the dresses.) Burke was then made to pay Jewett one hundred dollars for the dresses, and she withdrew her complaint.<sup>10</sup> When the *New-York Transcript* resurrected this early column and reprinted it, in the wake of Jewett's death, the editors faithfully included the anecdote but with one omission: they snipped out the half-sentence reference naming Colonel Morris.<sup>11</sup> (Morris was very likely George Morris, the prominent young editor of the *New-York Mirror*, a literary weekly Helen subscribed to in 1836, known to all his friends as General Morris.)<sup>12</sup>

The *Authentic Biography* pamphlet pumped up Jewett's role in the drama to show again how she could upbraid a man—a military man, no less, in the daunting setting of an official court proceeding.

She appeared, upon one occasion, before the Police, to make a charge against a man by the name of Burk, an officer in the British army, who, out of revenge, had cut and destroyed her dresses. She walked into him at the examination in great style. "You," she said, "pretend to be an officer in the British army! What a calumny upon his Majesty's service. You, an officer! It is impossible. The men holding his Majesty's commissions have generally some pretensions to the character of gentlemen."<sup>13</sup>

The author was no doubt retelling the story as Jewett preferred to tell it, conjuring a picture of an outspoken young woman holding her own in a courtroom, smartly dressing down a British officer. The story has an air of retrospective triumph, of what Jewett wished she had said in court and what she probably told friends back at Ann Welden's that she had said.

A fourth story in the *Authentic Biography* had Helen rebuking a "dandified jackass" who was "attempting to do the amiable to Helen in the most extravagant style"—in other words, pressing sexual attentions on her. She made a cutting remark, not reported, to which he replied, "Now really, Miss Helen, it is too bad in you to be so hard upon me." "You are right," returned Helen; "it is wrong in me to be hard upon so soft a subject—we never use diamonds to carve geese." Calling a man soft in a brothel setting was probably an effective way to insult or discourage him.

The final vignette in the *Authentic Biography* consisted of a dialogue between Jewett and an attorney identified only as E.J. supposedly uttered during a court appearance when Jewett was a witness for a brothel

keeper. The lawyer inquired about the nature of the business of the house; did men visit, and why did they come? A hostile witness, Jewett finally replied, "I believe there is no one better qualified than yourself to answer that question, as I have observed you frequently among our visitors; will you be so kind as to save me the trouble of answering the questions, and communicate to the Court your own experience upon the subject."<sup>14</sup> The story again speaks to her outspokenness, her willingness to expose hypocrisy and embarrass men who would normally count on deference from women well below their station in life. Whether or not she fired such a snappy reply to a lawyer in court cannot ever be known. But she did appear in the Court of General Sessions at least once, when her brothel keeper Mary Berry was charged with keeping a disorderly house, in April 1835. The district attorney who prosecuted that case was Ogden Hoffman, so this was not F.J. A year later Hoffman headed the defense team for Richard P. Robinson.

These five vignettes in the *Authentic Biography* produced a portrait of a woman who was hardly a victim. She had fallen prey to the law student Lemuel Lawton, but even there, her resistance lasted a year and still required some medical potion to clinch it. The episodes of spunk portrayed her as her friends in New York knew her to be: a clever and haughty young woman, able to stand up to men who ranked far above her in social status—lawyers, military officers, and the generality of traveling merchants and jackasses who found their way to expensive New York brothels.

Two final incidents of Jewett's audacity appear in other records but were not part of the *Authentic Biography's* list. Jewett filed charges in Police Court in 1834 the morning after a young man kicked her in the Park Theatre; this was the day she entranced reporter Attree with her story of seduction. According to Jewett, she was going up the stairs of the theater to the second tier when she dropped a ten-dollar bill; as she bent over to pick it up, John Laverty accosted her, kicked her, laughed at her, and then ran off with a male friend. Jewett knew who the young man was and entered a formal complaint against him the next morning. Attree's news item spared John Laverty no embarrassment, identifying him in print as the son of the wealthy Henry Laverty of the firm Laverty and Gantley on Pearl Street.

Jewett refused to let men get away with abuse. Not many New Yorkers, male or female, would have reported such an incident to the police as an assault. A man might have answered such an insult with a challenge to fight or duel; a female victim might have relied on a male protector to defend her honor with a threat or a punch. But Jewett was on her own

and therefore chose to use the police as her protectors and avengers. That some New Yorkers saw a kick in the rear as trivial, especially if directed at a woman of ill repute, was demonstrated by the *New York Sun*, which made light of the whole event:

*Insult with intent to kiss*:—A lady of the third tier of boxes in the Park Theatre named Helen, a perfect representative, no doubt, of her who caused the Trojan War, lodged a complaint at the police office, against one of her admirers named Laraty [*sic*], who, conceiving himself to be a second Paris, indelicately assaulted the fair Helen by throwing his arms around her neck and endeavoring to perpetrate a kiss in the public lobby of the establishment. This the fair Helen resented with becoming spirit, and gave the rude assailant an appropriate rebuke for his indelicacy towards her. This was modest and commendable, and we are pleased to find that the ladies of the third tier dare to assert their rights, and entertain so high a respect for their own character and standing, as to resent every assault calculated to cast contempt upon their virtue.<sup>15</sup>

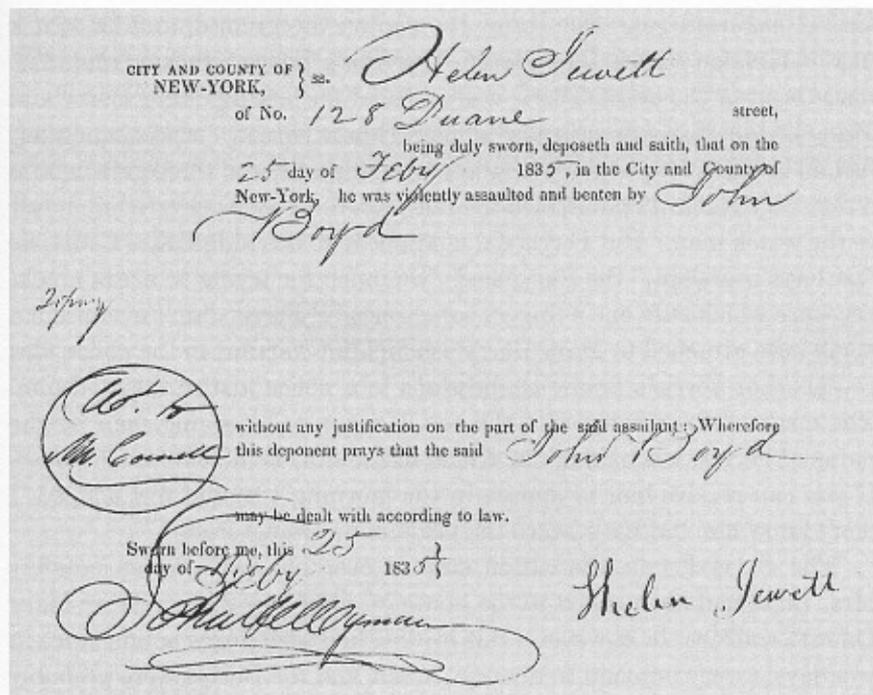
Did the *Sun* reporter misunderstand the charge as a kiss instead of a kick? Or was this a willful misrendering of the incident, suggesting that kicking and kissing were all the same, harassments fully permissible to men wanting to tease or bully prostitutes? Perhaps Laverty made an unwanted advance and then, rebuffed, followed with the indecorous kick. The *Sun*'s version pays less attention to Helen and Laraty (her surname omitted, his conveniently distorted and thus somewhat disguised) than to the surprising idea that a prostitute might defend her own honor by seeking remedy from a court. Prostitutes went to court all the time, to report serious assaults and thefts; at issue here was whether an unwanted kiss or a boot in the rear justified going to the police. The *Sun* story does at least confirm the Attree account in its broadest stroke: Helen did swear out a warrant against Laverty for an assault in the Park Theatre in 1834, even though no warrant remains in the boxes of Police Office records stored in the New York Municipal Archives. Most likely Laverty's father managed to have the complaint withdrawn and removed from the record, just as Captain Burke had done with the aid of Colonel Morris.

A second and more serious incident led Helen to file charges in the Police Court in 1835 against one John Boyd, a barber who lived on Barclay Street who was associated with the Chichester Gang, the same group that stomped into Eliza Ludlow's brothel and a dozen others in the mid-1830s. Boyd testified that he and his friend John Spencer went to 128

Duane Street, "a notorious house of prostitution," on February 25, 1835. Jewett was living there at the time, under the management of Mary Berry and her partner, Frank Berry. Boyd sought his wife, after being "privately informed" that she was enticed to frequent the house by Mary Berry. From the door he caught a glimpse of his wife as she ran downstairs, but Mary and Frank Berry barred his entry and insisted the wife was not there. When Boyd persisted, he said, the Berrys and Helen Jewett seized him, tore his clothes, and ejected him from the house. Only the aid of Spencer saved him from serious injury.

Or so Boyd testified on March 13, defending himself against an assault complaint swiftly filed by Helen Jewett. Of five people involved in this February altercation, only Jewett rushed to the Police Office to file a complaint on the very day it happened. Probably it took her just a few minutes to get there: the Police Office occupied a first-floor room in an old three-story brick building on Chambers Street, behind the City Hall, just two short blocks from the Duane Street brothel. The structure was built as city almshouse around 1800; in 1815 it was leased to the American Academy of Fine Arts and the New-York Historical Society; and in 1831 it reverted to city use as the Police Office and the Court of General Sessions. The successive uses of this building—from almshouse to art museum to lower courtrooms—suggest that the first-floor Police Court was probably a large but fairly ordinary room, a room where Jewett and other prostitutes evidently felt comfortable taking their complaints. (In contrast, the grand marbled and pillared courtrooms located in the City Hall implicitly commanded awe from citizens.)

Jewett's warrant contained no specific allegations on the printed police form beyond a standard assault-and-battery charge. When the case was heard before a judge, on March 13, her version of events was reported in the Police Office column of the *Transcript*, certainly written by her reporter friend William H. Attree. "Barber-ossa brought to his bearings" ran the satirical heading, implying that the raging barber was at fault. According to the *Transcript*, Boyd's wife made a living for both of them as a hairdresser for prostitutes. (This amounted to a gratuitous dig at Boyd's masculinity: his wife supported him.) In a "drunken or crazy fit," Boyd went to the brothel shouting loudly for her. The wife, aided by sympathetic prostitutes, slipped out the back door, "whereupon, he fell afoul of an unoffending female, and tore her dress, threatening to cowskin her, but was ultimately put out of the place." (Attree declined to put Helen Jewett's name in the paper, but the assault warrant makes it clear she was the "unoffending female" in question.) Boyd was portrayed in print as a drunken lout, his friend Spencer as an insolent goon. But the judge hearing the case chose to believe Boyd and Spencer, dismissing Jewett's



An assault-and-battery warrant sworn out by Helen Jewett against John Boyd, 1835. Her signature at the bottom clearly shows the H in "Helen."

assault charge and indicting the Berrys for keeping a disorderly house. The *Transcript* printed a cautious retraction the next day: "We have been informed that the case of Mr. Boyd, the barber, was somewhat misrepresented in yesterday's police report" for possibly "he was the injured party and that petty malice and envy have prompted the present prosecutions against him."<sup>16</sup> Boyd convinced the judge he was the injured party, injured because he could not regain "possession of his wife" (who did not come home until late at night, according to his deposition) and because both Frank Berry and Helen Jewett assaulted him, he claimed. Boyd's assault case and the disorderly house charge appear on the docket of the Court of General Sessions in April 1834, but there is no record of the disposition of either case.

The Duane Street brothel had seen violence the day before Boyd knocked on the door, in an incident possibly indirectly related. On February 24, a man named Benjamin Ferris caused trouble, leading Mary Berry and another girl of the house, Mary Daton, to swear out assault-and-battery warrants against him. In his usual light style, Attree wrote in the *Transcript*: "She [Daton] was going out to a party, and had her hair dressed—he came to the house, and put his cap on her head, and dis-

turbed her head gear. She threw the cap on the ground, and he struck her."<sup>17</sup> He also struck Mrs. Berry. The *Sun's* Police Office column also made light of the event: Ferris was arrested for beating Mary Berry and Mary Daton, "lady prostitutes" at 128 Duane Street, "whose sanctuary he had invaded for purposes best known to himself, and there getting into a row, very gallantly pummeled the fair ones until they delivered him over to the watch man." But Ferris did not appear in morning Police Court; he "perhaps overslept," the *Sun* joked. "So much for trying to break crockery ware which cuts one's fingers sometimes."<sup>18</sup> Ferris didn't oversleep; a small note attached to Mary Berry's complaint warrant in the police files reveals that Ferris's family connections to a police justice released him. The clerk of the court wrote the watch captain: "A young man by the name of Ferris (a cousin of our friend of the 6th) is in your watch house. If you can receive bail to appear in the morning I should feel obliged. I don't know him but have heard the particulars from a friend."

The Berry-Ferris altercation started over mussed hair, so possibly Mrs. Boyd had been called to the house on February 25 to restore Mary Daton's coiffure. In any event, this brothel had seen police action twice in two days, a very unusual frequency. Jewett and the Berrys were probably nervous when Boyd and Spencer, known bullies, came knocking at their door.

The incident with John Boyd and John Spencer was probably the closest Helen Jewett came to getting in serious trouble with violent men—until her murder. Boyd was something of a hothead; he appeared in the Police Office and General Sessions Court records at least four other times from 1834 to 1836 on various assault charges.<sup>19</sup> His most chilling attack on record occurred in New Jersey: Boyd stalked William Attree and knifed him in the face. His motive was revenge for a humorous column Attree wrote about Spencer in May 1835, in which Attree reported that Spencer cowered in a privy in a futile attempt to hide from police. Boyd trailed Attree and a young lady on the Hoboken ferry and shadowed them into Sybil's Cave, a popular romantic spot carved into the New Jersey palisades. When the couple went inside the cave to sip water from the spring there, the ruffian jumped Attree, knocked him down, and stabbed him viciously in the face with a dirk. The woman's screams brought help, and several men carried Attree to a nearby public house and summoned medical aid. His condition was reported to be grave, but within three weeks he had recovered. He thereafter wore a brace of pistols to be ready for self-defense. Boyd was arrested and held on \$3,500 bail.<sup>20</sup> Luckily for Jewett, Boyd did not brandish a weapon when he accosted her at Mary Berry's brothel; he was clearly capable of cutting flesh as well as fabric.

In all the various stories of Jewett's challenges to men, the constant theme was her brazenness and her strong sense of herself as a woman who could challenge men and demand justice. To the author of the *Authentic Biography*, this made her an admirable character. But to most of the rest of the literate public, the ideal of virtuous womanhood brought quite different attributes to mind: acquiescence, submission, piety, self sacrifice. And Helen Jewett had none of those.

THIS IS A BORZOI BOOK

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