

successful literary career. It was instead a precursor of tragedy. Shortly after the sale of that novel, the tuberculosis that had plagued Tom Davis since the Civil War resurfaced, and after battling the disease for several months, he died. Mittie's marriage had lasted less than two years and ended in disaster, but her sorrows were far from over. Within a month of her husband's death, Mittie's infant daughter died, leaving her bereft of both husband and child.

Though it seemed she had little left to live for, necessity forced Mittie to find some way of making a living. Unwilling to return to her father's house where she felt she would be a burden, she remained in Washington. The steadiest work she found was writing summaries of Congressional sessions for various newspapers at \$5.00 each. Barely able to survive on her earnings, Mittie found solace writing poetry in her spare time. Her efforts yielded a piece she later considered her best poem, *Beside a Grave*:

*“Did you speak to me, dearest?  
A passionate, yearning fancy whispers, It may be so.  
that you may have pierced the shadows that mantle the  
Spirit-Land,  
And reach through my life's great darkness a vaguely  
comforting hand*

*Ah, no 'twas the breath of summer went whispering past my cheek;  
So like the voice of the human, it seemed I heard you speak;  
And the sense of a presence touched me, myself and yet not I,  
As though my lost twin-spirit had softly floated by....*

Still grieving for her husband and daughter, and struggling to earn a living, Mittie's health suffered. Her poetry increasingly reflected the fatigue and misery of her solitary existence: *“I have been so tired—so tired, many times my heart has beat wildly, like a frightened child's, lost amid the busy street.”* Her exhaustion climaxed in a physical breakdown that soon drove her to return to her father's house in Richmond. There Mittie experienced a “nervous reaction” to all she had endured after the deaths of her husband and child, and several months passed before she recovered her physical and mental health.

As Mittie's strength slowly improved in Richmond, she eventually felt compelled to begin writing again. *The Temperance Advocate* still needed authors and soon Mittie was filling its pages with romantic yarns about charming young maidens and handsome gentlemen struggling to meet the challenges of a cruel world. Predictably, the “villain” in these stories was alcohol. Though *The Temperance Advocate* sold fairly well, its editor abandoned it for a better opportunity, and Mittie was asked to take over as manager and editor of the journal. She refused, even though the position offered a small salary, because she had recently taken a trip to West Virginia, where she had met Alexander McVeigh Miller and had fallen in love.