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A STORY AND A HISTORY

I'm Nobody! Who are you?

Are you—Nobody—Too?

—*Emily Dickinson*

Midwinter 1881, Ellen Merrill received a letter. It came from the West Indies, written by a man Ellen didn't know, and the news was bad. That was clear from the second sentence, in which the stranger spoke of "the late Mr. and Mrs. Connolly." When Ellen reached the end of the letter, she read it again, and then again, before she took out a sheet of paper. "My Dear Brother," she wrote to Henry Richardson, "I have at last succeeded in learning the fate of Mrs. Connolly and family." She asked Henry to impart the news to their mother and to their sister Ann McCoy. As Ellen signed off, she thought about dangerous weather. "We had a Storm here last week which blowd the tide in and nearly washed us away for three days." She posted the letter from Mississippi to Massachusetts.

THE HURRICANE that swirled off the Miskito Cays of Central America in September 1877 took the life of an American woman named Eunice Connolly. Eunice was an ordinary woman who led

an extraordinary life by making momentous decisions within a world that offered her few choices. Eunice Richardson Stone Connolly was born white and working class in New England in 1831. She married a fellow New Englander who took her to the South and fought for the Confederacy in the Civil War, while Eunice's two brothers fought for the Union. After the war, Eunice married a well-to-do man of color and went to live in a settlement of former slaves on the British Caribbean island of Grand Cayman. This book tells her story.

I discovered Eunice in a box full of letters. Loving and hostile, revealing and mundane, the Lois Wright Richardson Davis Papers, preserved at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina, span the 1850s to the 1880s. Archivists named the collection for Eunice's mother because much of the correspondence flowed to her. Of the five hundred family letters saved from the trash heap or the fireplace, Eunice wrote about a hundred of them. Others were composed by her mother, sisters, brothers, brothers-in-law, children, second husband, and a few miscellaneous relatives and acquaintances. From all that Eunice wrote, it's clear that she received at least as many letters in return, yet the family papers contain fewer than ten pieces of correspondence addressed to her. Most of Eunice's mail was left behind somewhere, thrown out, or deliberately destroyed.

I first met Eunice in the course of researching relationships between white women and black men in the nineteenth century, but at the time I was concerned exclusively with the history of the South. Years later, with a dissertation finished and a book published, I decided to go back to Duke and look again. There were many more letters than I had remembered, hundreds more, in that brimming box, the words evenly spaced or crowded onto mostly white and cream-colored pages, the black ink long ago faded to brown. I had forgotten just how faded and hard to decipher some of Eunice's

letters were, but seeing them again renewed my sense of her presence: the paper she had creased and folded, the ink she had blown dry. I transcribed forty-one letters onto my laptop that first day, and that wasn't even one folder's worth. Eunice's sister Ellen had just moved to Alabama when I had to leave. I returned later that summer, staying until Eunice, alone and poor, began to worry about the approaching New Hampshire winter of 1863. I visited again in December and stayed until Eunice's sister Ellen imparted the terrible news to their brother Henry in 1881.

Poring over the collection, I understood how unusual it was that these letters had been preserved. The middle and upper classes wrote to one another voluminously in the era before telephones became commonplace. With a ready supply of paper and ink, men and women closed deals, courted lovers, debated politics, and charted travels. Ordinary folks wrote letters too—especially in New England, where literacy rates were high—but less frequently kept their mail. Poorer families like Eunice's moved often, from one cramped set of rooms to the next, scratched on cheap paper with inferior ink, and seldom imagined their daily rounds to be of interest to anyone else. But Eunice's brother Henry, who became a successful businessman in the Appleton Mills of Lowell, Massachusetts, after the Civil War, cared about family history. He carried wartime mail back to New England, then harbored the family papers and passed them down, until the bundles of envelopes came into the possession of a great-granddaughter. One day, almost a century after Eunice's death, a gentleman knocked at her door. The young mother had fallen on hard times and called a collector who bid on valuables from old New England families. That day, she traded the letters for cash. Soon she regretted the sale, but the documents had swiftly changed hands and already proved untraceable. Twenty-five years later, I was able to tell Eunice's great-grandniece that the let-

ters rested in the Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library of Duke University. Purchased for their value to Civil War researchers, the Davis Papers are today preserved in optimal conditions of temperature and light, neatly arranged in that single sturdy archival box.

To write Eunice's story, I followed her from New England to the Deep South and across the Caribbean Sea, searching for clues to her daily life and changing sensibilities in the different places where she lived. Like hundreds of thousands of working-class women in the nineteenth century, Eunice rarely appears in formal historical records beyond the most commonplace documents: a birth certificate, a marriage registration, a census listing. I gleaned everything I could from vital records, city directories, and village maps, then pieced together context from town records, newspaper reports, and regimental histories. The writings of others who worked in northern mills, who visited the South from New England, or who traveled to the Caribbean in the nineteenth century shed further light, as did nineteenth-century novels about race and romantic love. Studying the Civil War, labor history, the history of women and gender, and African American and African Caribbean history also filled in the contours of Eunice's life. Finally, and unexpectedly, conversations with descendants contributed to the unfolding of Eunice's story and enriched the search for meaning within that story.

THE WORLD CHANGED enormously over the course of Eunice's life, offering her occasion to ponder the grand themes of American history: class and opportunity, faith and religious practice, slavery and freedom, politics and war, racism and equality. As the cotton mills of industrial capitalism grew denser along the riverbanks of New England in the years just after Eunice was born, the residents of rural hamlets boarded steam-powered railroad cars to visit once-

remote cities. President Andrew Jackson neared the height of his popularity during those years, riding the crest of an expanding democracy that nonetheless excluded white women and all African Americans. The Protestant religious revivals of the Second Great Awakening held out spiritual equality to those who lived on the margins, inspiring both righteous and self-righteous Americans to think hard about problems like poverty and immigration. Most especially in 1831, the year of Eunice's birth, the problem of slavery loomed in the nation's consciousness. On January 1, a radical white Bostonian named William Lloyd Garrison published the first issue of the *Liberator*, echoing the call of black abolitionists for the immediate emancipation of slaves in the southern states, thereby fueling a growing debate in the young nation. That summer, a Virginia slave led the most successful and alarming uprising the South had ever known, killing fifty-five white people and citing the Bible as justification. That autumn, Nat Turner was executed. Eunice was born in December.

When Eunice toiled in the New England mills or labored as a servant, the details of her life echoed those of many other women in the nineteenth century. Her story is conventional too, in that she strived for the stability of marriage and ultimately found great comfort in the domestic sphere. But Eunice also realized her visions of happiness in a way that cast her far from conformity. In its barest outlines, hers is a story of a woman who descended into poverty and then climbed out. What makes Eunice's version of that tale unusual is that she was a white woman who rescued herself from destitution by marrying across the color line.

Eunice's story and the choices she made expose the complexities of racial classification across geographical borders. Her family traced their lineage back to England and France, but as Eunice worked in the mills and labored as a servant, she came precariously close to the

degraded status of impoverished Irish and black women. Later, when she married a “man of color” (that was the phrase invoked at the time), she found out that reputation also counted in a person’s racial status and that for women, whiteness depended upon specific ideas about purity. Then, when Eunice took up residence on a West Indian island, she realized that labels like “white,” “black,” “mulatto,” and “colored” carried different meanings in different places. Eunice’s story illuminates the complexities of racism too: Her unusual experiences make clear just how mercurial racial categories could be in the nineteenth century, but her life also proves just how much power those mercurial markers could exert to confine—or transform—a person’s life. In her voyages from New England to the Deep South to the British Caribbean, Eunice also made a journey from the life of an impoverished white woman in the United States to the life of an elite woman of color in the West Indies.

TO GIVE READERS a sense of Eunice’s voice, each chapter that follows, save the final two, opens with a single letter that she composed. A great deal was at stake in the production of a letter in Eunice’s day. In mid-nineteenth-century New England, a young man could board newly inaugurated rail lines to find work elsewhere for a season or forever, a bride could follow her new husband aboard a steamship sailing for the South, a father could take advantage of increasingly well-surfaced routes to scout out land far to the west. Where dirt roads, passable only in dry weather, had once kept communities fairly insular, the transportation revolution put great distances between loved ones. In a world that permitted the fast and efficient separation of people, writing a letter often became the sole means of maintaining intimacy. But writing a letter was also a formidable enterprise. For working-class people like Eunice and her

family, the endeavor of sending a single piece of communication brought both frustration and satisfaction.

To begin with, time for literary production was brief. *I cant rock the cradle and write too*, Eunice warned. Or as her mother sighed, though each passing day brought the resolve to write the next, “when tomorrow came it brought its work and cares,” leaving not an extra hour. The Sabbath was the most common day to repay epistolary debts, and one Sunday Eunice owed letters to her mother *and Henry and Ann and Williams folks and some of my acquaintances*, while on another, she had before her *seven unanswered letters*. With her sons in the Union Army, Eunice’s mother wrote “evry sabbath,” first to Luther, then to Henry, “in turn.” Indeed, the Civil War years became a historical moment in which families and friends wrote unprecedented numbers of letters—to and from the battlefield but also to and from those on the home front who lived too far apart for daily or weekly get-togethers.

Before pen could be set to paper, supplies had to be gathered. For wageworkers, paper itself constituted a luxury, and space on each sheet became precious. *Dont think because I send you my refuse paper that it is any lack of respect to you*, Eunice made clear to her mother, *but I had rather send it to you than to strangers, for you know the circumstances*. As soldiers in the Union Army, Henry and Luther sent messages on whatever stock came their way: stationery distributed by northern charities, “a leaf from an old account Book,” even Confederate notepaper. Ordinarily a letter ended only when the blank page ran out (“well I have about finished my paper so must close”); by the same token, filling only part of a sheet demanded an explanation (*It is a shame to waste so much paper, but I have no more sence or nonsense*). More commonly, margins and corners came crammed with messages. Sometimes Eunice resorted to cross-

hatching. She first filled the page, then turned the paper ninety degrees and wrote across the lines just set down. Once, in a pinch, she turned the paper upside down and filled the spaces in between each line.

Pens were always superior to pencils, though never a guarantee of flowing narration. One day, Eunice tried out a variety of implements in an effort to *find one I can write decent with but guess I shall not succeed*, she lamented, while soldier Henry rejected the steel pen his mother sent from the home front, reasoning that it was “too coarse pointed.” Ink, homemade from powder mixed with water, shaken and strained, could turn equally fickle, with blotting and spilling a constant threat. From the barracks, Luther confessed that “one of the boys tipped over my ink and I have not got much left.” Eunice’s trials with a bottle of dark liquid were exacerbated one New England day when her tenement mate’s young son *came in and turned my ink over into my lap and all over the side of my dress*. With the vessel nearly emptied, Eunice’s vexation rose, then turned to wrath when the boy’s mother shrugged off the mishap with *it aint as if your clothes were nice ones*. A crestfallen Eunice had dressed in a *delaine shirt that I think every thing of*, and the cruel remark *provoked me more than all the rest*, she wrote, as she tried for an hour to get the stains out. After all that, the final ingredients were envelopes, wax and gum for sealing, and postage. At mid-century, the writer paid three cents for a half ounce. *It costs a little every letter you know*, Eunice reminded her correspondents.

Every letter left unwritten for want of an hour, a candle, a sheet, or a pen edged Eunice’s family closer to silence and invisibility, for only with time and supplies at the ready could one compose a record of a day or a week, of a successful or failed endeavor, an important opinion, a pressing sentiment. Yet the very act of writing could prove discouraging for those of little schooling. Eunice’s insis-

tence on calling the contents of her letters *nonsense* echoes a common refrain of female self-effacement in the nineteenth century (Lois sometimes characterized her own attempts as “insipid”), but Eunice also cared about the literary quality of her letters. *She writes very pretty indeed*, she once commented wistfully of a family friend. *I like her style of writing.*

In happier times, Eunice produced more skillful prose, but bitterness diminished her mastery over composition, and agitation bred the poorest grammar; that was when the *ain'ts* crept in. Even in their most careful narrations, Eunice and her family employed far from perfect English, and abundant misspellings are matched by a dearth of punctuation. All too brief intervals of idle time were an added obstacle to fluent prose, not to mention fine handwriting. As Eunice's stepsister, Addie Davis, summed it up, “excuse this miserably written epistle for I have scratched it off as fast as I could.” No doubt seated by meager candlelight, Eunice's aunt Martha requested simply, “do excus my writing it is evening.” Of course even the most learned have been known to decry the unsatisfactory nature of words on paper. *O Mother there are so many things I want to say to you, but how can I?* Eunice wondered, echoing countless letter writers across time. *If I could see you I could talk so you would understand me better.*

Writing was more arduous for some family members than others, and brother Luther's letters proved the worst, with the sloppiest handwriting, most convoluted phrasing, and relentlessly creative spelling. But since Luther tended to write out words just as he pronounced them, his pages drop clues about the family's manner of speaking. Although Eunice wrote about doing the *washing*, she probably pronounced it the way Luther spelled it, “worshing.” From Luther, we know that a watch was a “worch,” citizens were “citersons,” and someone who agreed with his “polerticks” was a

“Simperthiser.” He even spelled “was” as “wors.” Eunice’s spelling improved upon Luther’s, but every so often she gave away her pronunciation too, as when she wrote of *surporting* her children. She probably delivered the words “at all” as “a-tall” (rendered by Luther as “atall”), just as she would *try afinish* her work and her son, Clarence, went “a Fishing.” All the sisters nearly always wrote “prehaps” for “perhaps,” and that too may have reflected their articulation. All in all, such imperfections inadvertently breathe sound into the family’s written record.

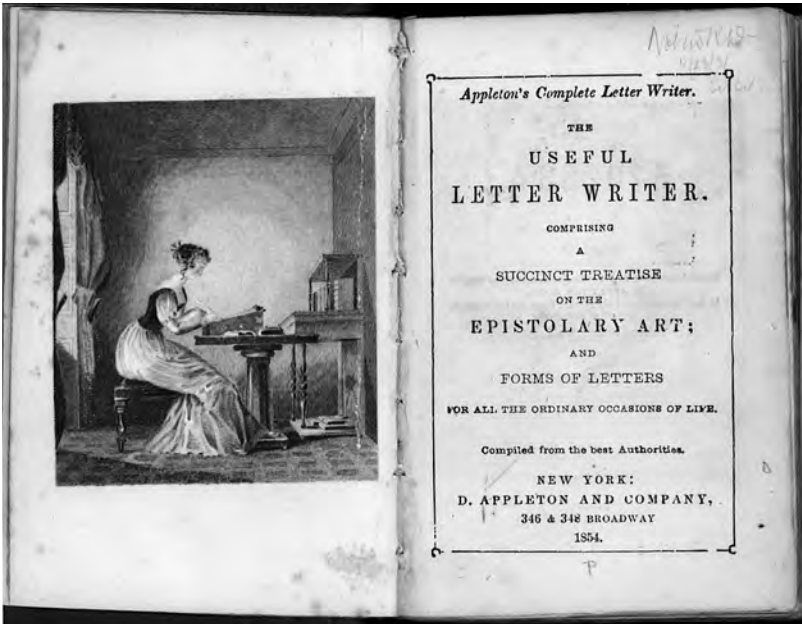
As for the content of the letters, all writers are influenced by what they read, and working-class men and women in Eunice’s day consumed popular fiction in the form of dime novels and serialized stories marked by sentimentality and sensationalism. Henry’s wartime letters make clear that soldiers in camp devoured whatever came their way (he requested “story papers” to “help to pass off the long nights when I am on guard”), but the women in Eunice’s family hardly ever mentioned the act of reading, beyond the Bible. It’s hard to imagine when they would have found the time, but Sundays after church and railway journeys with sleeping children might present moments of opportunity.

One Sunday evening, sister Hattie had been reading before she sat down to write to her mother, and the letter she produced faithfully imitated the pages in which she had just immersed herself. “A Lonely Hour,” Hattie entitled the letter, as if composing a story herself. Glancing at the foot-high February snow, she thought of her traveling husband and crossed out the words “for he has gone with a horse & sleigh,” replacing them with “& it seems to add to the loneliness of the hour.” She guided her readers into “the family sitting room of a large old fashioned house,” introducing them to two people singing hymns at the piano, a purring white cat, and popcorn crackling on the stove. “Hark! the outer door opens who can be

coming this stormy day," she continued, as the minister arrived to join in the music making. After that, Hattie resumed more ordinary narration, and although no other letter in the Davis Papers mimics popular fiction so self-consciously, scattered words and turns of phrases across the decades likely echo contemporary literary material.

Handbooks for letter writers counseled Hattie and the others to invoke the language of conversation instead, insisting that correspondence was akin to "talking on paper," if a bit more "carefully and elegantly." Books like *How to Write: A Pocket Manual of Composition and Letter-Writing*, published at midcentury, were directed toward the middle classes, and even if Eunice and her family had skimmed such pages, they would soon have found the rules impossible to follow (choose "the best white letter paper" and leave "a broad margin on the left-hand side"). Quality and margins aside, however, few of the letters in the Davis Papers would pass muster, since spelling and punctuation mattered a great deal, the misuse of capital letters constituted a severe "blemish," and underlinings or writing in between lines were simply "objectionable." Moreover, content and mood were to be carefully controlled; those who wrote to family members were to give "warm affections their natural expression in words," a directive that assumed such affections existed or could be easily fabricated. It was "best, generally, to refrain from writing when in a gloomy or desponding state of mind," one manual instructed, for a letter should be "a storehouse of bright and happy thoughts." Fortunately Eunice and her family ignored those kinds of imperatives, leaving sadness, anger, anxiety, and foul moods unconcealed in their correspondence, at least some of the time.

Forthright as the family could be, letters are nonetheless peculiar historical documents that must also be read for what is evaded or unspoken. People's lives, and the ways in which they remember and



This 1854 letter-writing manual advertises itself as suitable for “the ordinary occasions of life,” but the accompanying illustration of a well-dressed lady and her elegant stationery does not represent the experience of working-class correspondents like Eunice and her family.

record those lives, can never be perfect reflections of one another. The act of recounting always involves the selection of observations, the editing of emotions, even the omission of entire experiences. By choosing which episodes to dwell upon and which sentiments to impart, Eunice continually crafted a particular account of her life. Sometimes, after recording her innermost thoughts, she would destroy the evidence—maybe her words didn’t ring true upon rereading, or maybe their accuracy struck her as overly indulgent. *I write you a good many letters that I dont send*, she once admitted to her mother. *When I feel lonesome and bad as if I must see you, I set down and write, then the next day burn them up*. If Eunice sometimes

incinerated an evening's chronicles, other times she hoped the recipient would consign her pages to the oven, like when she imagined meddlesome relatives *poking over* a recent letter and instructed her mother to *burn it up*. Although Lois disregarded those wishes, it's likely that others faithfully carried out similar orders.

Time stolen, supplies gathered, sentences composed: After that, an unreliable postal service could render all such efforts in vain. Whereas the well-off could place their envelopes in the hands of traveling merchants or touring acquaintances for personal delivery, families like the Richardsons had few such connections. For everything it took to ready a letter for the post office, it might never arrive. As Eunice's grandfather wrote from Massachusetts to New Hampshire, "This day received a letter from you . . . wherein you say that you have repeatedly written to me, but I have never received a single line from you." During the Civil War, communications sent north were apt to be unsealed by Confederate authorities and relegated to the dead letter office. *I have written so many times since I have heard from you*, Eunice appealed from the South to New England, *but I presume you do not get them, or if you do and answer them, I never receive yours*.

Waiting only fostered anxiety. "Have you heard from the boys or Eunice lately?" sister Ann inquired of their mother. "I want to hear so, I don't know what to do." Lack of word could mean anything, from bad weather to death. "Dear Sister," Aunt Martha wrote to Lois with greater frankness, "I received your letter in due time, very glad to know that you are living." Even those whose survival was imperiled on the battlefield worried about relatives at home. "Another Mail has just come in and not one word for me from any one," Henry cried from the war. "What in the world does it mean, are you all sick or dead?" Once, when Ellen received a letter after a very long interval, she "spoiled several sheets of paper with tears in

the attempt to answer.” Even a promptly delivered letter might end up lost, since house-to-house delivery came only after the Civil War and only to big cities. Indeed, writers often signed family correspondence with their last names in order to increase the odds of their efforts landing in the right hands (as Ellen discovered in Manchester, there was “another girl here by my name and she takes all my letters”).

When anxiety ran its course, ire rushed in. Finding mail at the post office contributed substantially to a person’s contentment, and Eunice consumed valuable paper and ink if she believed that fact forgotten. *All this long, long time I have waited, and watched for a letter from you, but I have waited in vain*, she declared from down south. *Put yourselves far away from home and friends, in conflicting times like these*—the word “friends” in nineteenth-century parlance referred to family members as well as to close acquaintances—and *see how dear, and how cheering a message from the distant loved ones at home would be*. Steamships that brought mail to Union soldiers were greeted with a similar swirl of emotions. “There never has been such a wide awake time,” Luther wrote from Mississippi, “as there wors larst night when the mail came in.” Yet too often there followed the same betrayed expectations. “It is provoking to keep writing and waiting for the mail to come in so you can hear from home,” Henry scolded, “and then when the mail comes in have every other man in the Company get letters and papers while we have to stand around looking on and asking what the news is.”

Part of the problem was that working people moved around so often, from one tenement to the next, from one job and one town to another. “How is Mother this winter & where does she live,” Ann queried Henry. Or as Henry told his mother, “I would write to Eunice but I dont know where to direct a letter for her.” Unknown

whereabouts inevitably meant belated tidings. When Eunice's aunt offered news of a death two years' past, she explained, "we could not write you because we did not know where you was." When one of Eunice's sisters died of tuberculosis, another sister was at a loss to tell the dispatch office where to go. "I knew you had moved and did not know where," she later informed their mother. When letters did arrive, they were often shared commodities. One method was to copy over the lines ("I will write it word for word as she has rote it"); another simply to enclose the pages (Clarence *recieved a letter from Henry last week. Mother got it first and sent it to him*) or to orchestrate its forwarding (*You may send this letter to Ann if you have a chance for I shall not write particularly to her now*). From the West Indies, where postal service was most undependable, Eunice explained that a single long letter *must answer for you and Ann & Harriet & Henry and all that want to hear from me*.

Letters, like visits, did not always bring dispersed family members closer together. A piece of correspondence took so long to arrive, it took so long to answer, and return mail could be so slow that the wounds of misinterpretation had weeks or months to fester. *If you see Ann tell her that if I said any thing in any of my letters that displeased her to over look it*, Eunice once directed. Sometimes it was easier just to take back the outbursts of an honest moment. After Henry had proclaimed his feelings hurt, he ordered his mother to burn the pages "and forget the contents." Alternatively, a perfectly clear assertion might spark disagreement and conflict, even if correspondents didn't necessarily challenge one another directly; for Eunice's mother the Emancipation Proclamation was "hailed with joy," whereas Henry disdained the "accursed Abolitionists." And what did Eunice make of Henry's sarcastic boasting toward the end of the war that he had hired "a nigger—beg your pardon—a colored citizen of African descent" to shine his shoes and sword? As a one-

sided conversation, a letter always posed risks. Where relationships were forced to thrive in ink, tension always lurked.

As nineteenth-century Americans journeyed from village to city, across state borders, regions, and oceans, letters both retraced their paths and trailed after them. Ideally, supplies were handy, time cooperated, and good news traveled swiftly in both directions. In reality, the stationery might be handsome, but the news bad, or the news might be happy, but the letter so belated as to have already precipitated terrible dread. Nonetheless, the ability to communicate across great expanses was often an endeavor that sustained families in the face of rapidly changing communities. "It gives me new courage evry time you write," Eunice's mother told one of her sons in the Union Army. Or as Martha reassured her sister Lois, "What a comfort that we can write to each other, and how the distance has been shortened between us." Eunice too expressed such happiness. *I recieved your kind letter Thursday Evening*, she wrote to her mother one winter day during the war. *I was very glad to hear from you*. It had been so long, she added, *that it began to worry me to know what so long a silence could mean*. Eunice didn't intend to dilute her appreciation; rather, her words alluded to the well-understood brittleness of everyday life.

The fragility of life and the hardships that precipitated that fragility constitute a theme running through the family's correspondence, apparent in their constant efforts to find work, stay warm, or visit one another across distances that today seem small. Following the birth of her daughter Clara in 1862, Eunice wrote, *If nothing happens I shall go down stairs next Sunday*. And about her new baby, *If nothing happens she will be large enough to help me some time to pay for all the sacrifices I have to make*. Those three words, "if nothing happens," oft repeated in the letters, point to a sense of pervasive peril in the lives of struggling people in the nineteenth century.

Indeed, countless mundane activities merited reflections on the proximity of disaster. On knitting a pair of stockings, Eunice wrote, *I shall get them done if nothing happens*; on making a dress, *shall try to finish it to day if nothing happens*; on determining holiday plans, *if nothing happens I shall be with you*. Other times, the hazards of human existence were noted with yet greater candidness. When Eunice contemplated a visit back north from the Deep South, she planned to travel, she wrote, *if I live till another summer*. Even the most prosaic circumstances might prompt reflections on one's demise. When Eunice asked her mother to save an old black hat for her, she added that she would wear it for another winter, *if I live*. Over and over, Eunice's ink leaked that conventional phrase of nineteenth-century correspondence. On her son, Clarence: *He has got to get used to disapointments in life if he lives*. On where to reside: *I can spend the Winter with you, if I live*. And then, doubting that decision: *I dont know yet what I shall do if I live*.

THE DAVIS PAPERS seemed so promising at first, yet like so many historical documents thick with words, they proved also, in many ways, resolutely mute. In each phase of Eunice's life, it turned out, one pivotal question remained unanswerable in any definitive way. How did she judge the Irish immigrants who worked alongside her in the New England mills? What opinions did she formulate about slavery when she lived in the Deep South? What did it mean to her that her husband fought for the South during the Civil War? How did she make sense of race in the British Caribbean? Eunice's letters never expounded, in any concerted manner, upon any of those issues. As for the details of her life, the greatest mystery remains where and how she met the West Indian man whom she married after the Civil War, for the historical sources are entirely unyielding on that point.



A Richardson family descendant labeled this photograph “Gm. Davis?/63?,” but the woman is too young to be grandmother Lois Davis, and the archivist at Duke University relabeled the photograph “Eunice Stone? ca. 1863” (the middle-parted hairstyle, plain calico dress, and band collar fastened with a brooch date the photograph to the 1860s). Either an ornate frame was placed in front of the subject, or the tintype photograph was placed inside a decorative mat.

Before I left Duke University after transcribing the last letters in the collection, I looked again at one of the photographs. Sometime in the past, someone had written on the back, “Gm Davis?/63.” Whichever descendant believed this to be a likeness of Grandmother Davis, the archivist understood that the woman was too young to be Eunice’s mother, Lois Davis, in 1863, and so added in pencil, “Eunice Stone? ca. 1863.” Taken in a professional studio on Merrimack Street in Lowell, Massachusetts, the vignette or gem portrait (likely a tintype, resilient and cheap to produce in multiple copies) displays a woman with dark hair parted in the middle and wearing a band collar fastened at the throat with a

brooch. The long exposure time of early photography required one to sit immobile, so that the camera appears to have caught Eunice in a blank stare. Or maybe she simply wished to guard her thoughts and emotions before the lens.

Indeed, not once did Eunice—or anyone in the family—imagine that a scholar in a university library would study her letters or reconstruct her travels more than a century after her death, much less that readers would find her words and thoughts printed in a book. In the course of researching Eunice's life, I therefore came to understand that secrets of circumstance and sentiment are as important to Eunice's story as everything revealed in the historical documents. Eunice told her own story in the letters she wrote, her voice growing bolder across the years of hardship and loss. Then, from the West Indies, she narrated her life with newfound confidence, even as others hoped that her scandalous actions would be erased from the record and forgotten in family history. Although I set out to learn as much as I possibly could about Eunice, I also wanted to respect the archival record that she and her family helped to create, including all that they intentionally omitted or purged, for the consequences of those actions are also part of Eunice's story. Although at times I have extrapolated beyond the most literal evidence of the letters, I have invented nothing; instead, I invoke words like "perhaps," "maybe," and "probably" where it is impossible to know precisely what came to pass or how people felt. In place of fiction, I offer the craft of history, assisted by the art of speculation.

I open the text of each chapter that follows, again save the last two, with a brief act of historical imagination, conjuring Eunice's surroundings when she lived in the towns and villages of northern New England, the southern city where she was sojourning when the Civil War broke out, and the remote Caribbean island where she ultimately found a measure of happiness. Historical actors know

more about their own lives than those who write about them ever can, yet historians often grasp more about the context and meaning of those lives than can the actors themselves. Because I have fashioned out of Eunice's life and letters a significance beyond her own vision, I can claim only that this is the story of Eunice Connolly as I have understood and distilled it. In the pages that follow, I have tried always to be faithful to Eunice's presentation of experience, even as I have discerned a deeper historical significance for her life.