

The Life and Times of Lucretia Coffin Mott

By Thomas Leverett

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LUCRETIA MOTT (as an adult)
LUCRETIA MOTT (as a child)
JAMES MOTT (Lucretia's future husband)
THOMAS COFFIN (Lucretia's father)
AMICUS (Philadelphia Orthodox Quaker)
WILLIAM LLOYD GARRISON (Abolitionist)
ELIAS HICKS (Liberal Quaker)
LUCY STONE (Friend of Lucretia)
NARRATOR
STREET MERCHANTS
BABY

[Let woman then go on — not asking as favour, but claiming as right, the removal of all the hindrances to her elevation in the scale of being . . .]
[Truth for authority, not authority for truth.]

NARRATOR:

It's 1806: Lucretia is 13. Her father, Thomas Coffin, takes her to school in New York State.

[enter LUCRETIA and THOMAS]

LUCRETIA:

Father, when we lived on Nantucket Island, you always said it took some money and some courage even to get to Boston.

THOMAS:

Yes, and now we're going all the way to Dutchess County, New York. Nine Partners Friends' Boarding School.

LUCRETIA:

Father, why did you give up whaling?

THOMAS:

You're so full of questions, no wonder your mother calls you "Long tongue."

LUCRETIA:

You didn't answer my question.

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THOMAS:

I lost my whaling boat off the coast of Chile. Spain took the boat. I fought it in court, but it took years. Finally I came home. I walked across the Andes, and caught a ride in Brazil. Somehow I lost my will to keep whaling.

LUCRETIA:

You walked across the Andes! You were so brave!

THOMAS:

Some of the whalers were slave traders. But I never took part in that.

LUCRETIA:

So, why did we move to Boston? You were doing well on Nantucket with your merchant business And I sure miss those Nantucket Indian dumplings!

THOMAS:

Stewed cranberry and cod fish, I miss them too!! I moved the family because the schools in Boston are better than those on Nantucket. I came to believe that education is very important. And I've come to believe that a Quaker education would be better than a public school education. You deserve more than even the Boston schools can offer. And you have younger sisters and brothers. I'm taking you to Nine Partners, in Dutchess County New York. But I'll tell you where a person can get a good Quaker education ... Philadelphia, that's where. Someday I might move there, mark my words.

LUCRETIA:

I'm tired, father, I'll take a nap.

THOMAS:

Go ahead. It's a thirty-hour ride from Boston to New York. You're lucky we're on the fast route!

[they exit]

NARRATOR:

Nine Partners boarding school, two years later.

[enter JAMES and LUCRETIA]

JAMES:

I understand you are our new teacher.

LUCRETIA:

Yes, I used to go to school here, but I was hired last month to teach.

JAMES:

Aren't you a little young?

LUCRETIA:

Fifteen. That's old enough to know my way around. By the way, when do we get paid?

JAMES:

Tomorrow. I've already spent my hundred pounds, though, on a ticket back to Philadelphia and some gifts.

LUCRETIA:

A hundred pounds? That's more than twice what I'm getting!

JAMES:

It is?

LUCRETIA:

Why, it's because you're a man and I'm a woman. And we paid the same tuition as the boys! It just isn't fair!

JAMES:

I quite like your spirit. Perhaps we can meet again sometime?

[they exit. Enter STREET MERCHANT, AMICUS, and ELIAS]

STREET MERCHANT:

Pepper pot, smoking hot! Pepper pot, smoking hot!
Philadelphia's best!

AMICUS:

Hello Friend!

ELIAS HICKS:

Hello! What news do you have? As you know, I have just returned to Philadelphia.

AMICUS:

William Lloyd Garrison, abolitionist, was thrown in jail and has just been released!

ELIAS HICKS:

What else?

AMICUS:

You have heard, of course, that Lucretia Coffin was married with James Mott?

ELIAS HICKS:

Indeed, Lucretia is a friend of mine. An independent woman, I think!

AMICUS:

Has she shared with you her thoughts on marriage?

ELIAS HICKS:

That man and woman are equal? It strikes some as revolutionary, but it does not surprise me.

AMICUS:

And have you heard of the case of Rebecca Paul? She is being censored by her meeting for allowing her daughter to marry a non-Quaker!

HICKS:

I believe that is wrong!

AMICUS:

And so does Lucretia! It seems there is an increasing rift between us Orthodox Quakers, of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, and the more liberal-minded.

HICKS:

And I don't mind associating myself with the second group.

AMICUS:

Or having them associate themselves with you?

[they exit. Enter WILLIAM LLOYD GARRISON, JAMES and LUCRETIA]

WILLIAM LLOYD GARRISON:

Greetings, friends! Congratulations on your marriage!

JAMES:

Thank you!

WLG:

And how is life in Philadelphia?

JAMES:

Just fine! Lucretia's father has moved down here and gone into the nail business, and Lucretia has grown quite fond of scrapple! We expected your visit. And of course you will be staying with us here on Arch Street. You have come for the Philadelphia Anti-slavery Convention!

WLG:

Yes. But I was unable to persuade them to allow women to enter, as you requested in your letter.

JAMES:

Well, we support your efforts nonetheless!

WLG:

Prejudice against women should not be allowed to make a mockery of the effort to secure freedom for the slave!

LUCRETIA:

We have already started the Female Anti-Slavery Society.

WLG:

James, I have heard that you stopped selling cotton!

JAMES:

Indeed I have. Although I made good money selling cotton, I could not continue it in good conscience, since it is made on the backs of slaves!

[exit WLG and LUCRETIA. JAMES stays – date changes][knocking on door]

JAMES:

Yes?

AMICUS:

I have come from the Philadelphia Friends' Meeting, Cherry Street, Orthodox, as you know, and I wanted to talk to Lucretia.

JAMES:

Lucretia is away, at Harper's Ferry, but I'd be glad to tell her whatever you'd like.

AMICUS:

Well, as you know, there's been a split among Quakers...we

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[exit AMICUS. JAMES]

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Orthodox Quakers don't approve of the liberal ways of Elias Hicks and his followers. He goes on about the Inner Light, but we believe more strongly in scripture and the ways that were handed down to us. But we're great admirers of Lucretia's speaking ability, and we would be very unhappy if Lucretia were to join the Hicksites. So we've come to ask that she remain with us.

JAMES:

Well, of course, I couldn't persuade Lucretia to do anything she didn't want to do...

AMICUS:

But we'd be obliged if you'd try—good evening!

[exit AMICUS. JAMES stays – date changes. Enter LUCRETIA holding BABY]

JAMES:

How was your trip to Harper's Ferry?

LUCRETIA:

I am more convinced than ever that slavery must be abolished.

JAMES:

Let's open our house and make it part of the Underground Railroad, as we discussed earlier. We can provide room and board for escaping slaves.

LUCRETIA:

I shall. With six children, I always have enough dinner on the stove!

JAMES:

Someday all men will be freemen!

LUCRETIA:

And all women will have equal rights too!

JAMES:

I am afraid that society is not ready to both abolish slavery and grant women full and equal rights!

LUCRETIA:

Well, society will have to get ready!

JAMES:

By the way, Amicus was here, trying to get you to remain with the Philadelphia Orthodox meeting, rather than align yourself with Elias Hicks.

LUCRETIA:

The less said, the better. My heart is with Hicks, but I have many things to say to people as I speak at meetings around the country. I don't want to alienate anyone.

[they exit. Enter AMICUS]

AMICUS:

(to audience) We were unable to persuade Ms. Mott to join us. We can't disown her, but at least we can refuse to give her traveling minutes. Wherever she goes, she will be treated coldly, turned away.

[he exits. Seneca Falls-1848: enter STREET VENDOR]

STREET VENDOR:

Extra, extra, read all about it! Women's convention, here in Seneca Falls today! Famous people arriving! Lucretia Mott! Lucy Stone! Elizabeth Cady Stanton!

[exits. Enter LUCRETIA, LUCY and JAMES]

LUCRETIA:

We have come a long way to have this convention. It is sure to be the beginning of a new day for women in America. This group is much larger than we expected!

LUCY:

We need someone to give the first speech, welcoming everyone and starting it. Lucretia, you are famous! You have spoken everywhere around the world! You should do it!

LUCRETIA:

But I am representing the Friends, and can't. Why don't you do it?

LUCY:

I have a very important speech to give, but can't give it first. I asked Elizabeth Cady Stanton; she said that if a woman opened the convention, there would be so much opposition to that act alone that nobody would hear any of the following

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speeches!

JAMES:

I'll do it! I don't mind being the one who opens this convention!

*[they exit. Enter **STREET VENDOR, WLG, and LUCRETIA**]*

STREET VENDOR:

Scrapple here! Philadelphia's best!!

WLG:

Lucretia, we have remained friends for many years. I've enjoyed your letters.

LUCRETIA:

I appreciate your steadfast bravery in the cause of abolitionism.

WLG:

And I appreciate yours, in the cause of equal rights for women! We have had our problems, in the abolitionist movement, what with John Brown and all.

LUCRETIA:

You can tell that we are heading for a civil war.

WLG:

Indeed we are.

LUCRETIA:

Once again I am torn. I have spent my life fighting slavery. But I also do not approve of war.

WLG:

You are a Quaker to the end. But if war is required to end slavery, then I favor it. One more thing I must ask you: why do you start all of your letters by commenting on the weather? Storm from the east, clear skies to the west!

LUCRETIA:

You forget. I'm a mariner's daughter!

*(they exit. Now 1860. Enter **LUCRETIA and LUCY**)*

LUCRETIA:

I understand you are scheduled to come to Philadelphia, to speak on the Kansas border problems.

LUCY:

I have cancelled it.

LUCRETIA:

Why?

LUCY:

Because the hall does not permit blacks in the audience.

LUCRETIA:

I can scarcely believe it. And, I hear you are about to be married!

LUCY:

Yes, to Henry Blackwell, an abolitionist and the brother of Elizabeth Blackwell, first woman physician in America.

LUCRETIA:

So you will be Lucy Blackwell?

LUCY:

No, I'm still Lucy Stone. Why should a woman change her name?

LUCRETIA:

That will cause a stir. You are the first woman ever to do that.

LUCY:

You will attend the wedding, I trust?

LUCRETIA:

Of course. I just have two comments to make...

LUCY:

I know, I know. First, no vow of obedience...and second, not "man and wife," but "husband and wife..."

LUCRETIA:

I've said it for years and I'll say it again: In the true marriage relationship the independence of the husband and wife is equal, their dependence mutual, and their obligations reciprocal.

LUCY:

May I ask you, have you enjoyed your married life?

LUCRETIA:

Oh, yes. I've had six children, and many grandchildren; my husband has supported me in all my activities. We are in our eighties, still active, and still in love. It has been wonderful.

[exits. Enter NARRATOR]

NARRATOR:

Sensible grandmother, radical reformer, gentle nonresistant, militant advocate of women's rights, Lucretia Mott was a leading figure in nineteenth-century America. She died in 1880.