The Beaded Bag

(♫ Spooky organ music plays. ♫)

Mary Hamilton: In eighteen hundred and eighty nine, one October evening, a gentleman was traveling in his buggy in New Albany, Indiana. He was driving down Main Street and he was just about at the corner of Main and Vince Ends, and that was where he was going to turn and cross over the Kentucky and Indiana bridge so that he could get back to Louisville, Kentucky.

But just as his horses reached that intersection they bolted and he had to struggle to calm them, “Whoa! Whoa!”

And he was so busy trying to calm his horses that it wasn’t until he had his horses settled that he noticed that standing right beside his buggy was young woman. She was elegantly dressed. And she looked at him and she said, “Please, sir, please. Take me to Louisville. I must return this beaded bag.”

Well, he looked and she was holding a loft a purse. A fancy beaded bag like what women of that day carried. And I have to tell you it was a very elegant beaded bag. The top of it was green velvet. It shut with a green velvet drawstring. Below the green velvet was a band of burgundy beads, and then a band of white beads, with blue and burgundy flowers, and then another band of burgundy beads, and then the bottom was green beads but fringe that hung off the bottom of the bag. It was an elegant bag.

And she was holding it aloft, “Please, please, sir. You must take me to Louisville. I must return this beaded bag.”

He wasn’t sure what to do. For you see, back in eighteen hundred and eighty nine, a young mand and a young woman would never have traveled together unless they had an adult relative of the woman’s along as a chaperone.

But she seemed so desperate, “Please, I know it isn’t proper but please. You must take me to fourth. I must return this beaded bag.”

And so he helped her into his buggy. And he turned and he rode across that bridge. It was cool. And so he offered her the lap robe from his buggy and she accepted it graciously. And it covered her lap. And the robe reached down and covered her feet on the floor of his buggy.

They rode on into Louisville together. And outside an elegant home on fourth she said, “Stop here please.”

He stopped, he got out of his buggy, he tied his horses to the hitching post, and then he turned back to his buggy to help her and she was gone. And the lap robe from his buggy was gone as well. And he thought, “Strange, I didn’t hear the buggy creak. It should have creaked as she got out. I didn’t hear her footsteps coming up the walk.”

But he was so worried about her that he walked on up to the house and knocked on the door and the door was answered by a servant. And the man said, “I’m worried about a young woman. I brought a young woman here in my buggy. She said she needed to return a beaded bag.”

And he saw the servant’s face changed and he couldn’t quite tell what she was thinking. But the servant said, “Wait here.”

The servant walked across the hall, stepped inside a room, and from the door the man could hear the servant say, “Miss, I’m sorry but another one as come.”

And when the servant returned to the door there was a woman with her. Still a young woman but older than the woman who has asked for a ride. And the woman coming to the door resembled the woman who had asked for a ride enough that the man was quite certain this was a relative. And when that woman arrived at the door she said, “Oh, sir, thank you. Thank you for trying to bring my sister home.”

The man was confused he said, “Trying? Trying? I brought a young woman here in my buggy. What do you mean trying to bring your sister home?”

“Sir”, she said, “My sister is dead. She died three years ago. This is the anniversary of her death. And every year a gentleman, such as you, comes to our door and says that you have brought her home. So, I thank you. I thank you for trying to bring my sister home.”

Well, the gentleman could not believe what he had heard. He said, “No, no. I brought her here. She was in my buggy. She wanted to return a beaded bag. She even took my lap robe. She was here.”

And the young woman said, “Sir, come into the parlor. I’ll explain.”

And as the young man walked into the parlor he saw that sitting on a small table was a beaded bag. It was green along the top, it had a band of burgundy beads, white beads with blue and burgundy flowers, another band of burgundy beads and green beaded fringe. And he said, “That’s the beaded bag. She was here. She returned that beaded bag.”

The woman said, “No, sir. You see, my sister was engaged to be married. And her fiancé was invited to a party at the Colbertson’s in New Albany. And I was jealous. The Colbertson’s have such elegant parties. I was jealous that he invited her to go but of course he did. They were engaged to be married. And my sister, my sister, asked if she could borrow my new beaded bag. I had not yet carried it on any social occasion and I hated the idea that she would use my beaded bag first. And at first I refused but then she begged and begged and she pleaded. And finally I relented. And I told her she could borrow my beaded bag but, I said, if you do not return it unharmed I will loath you forever.

Well, they attended the party and on the way home they were riding in our carriage with my aunt as their chaperone. And no one knows exactly what happened. But they were crossing the Kentucky and Indiana Bridge and people think perhaps it was because a train came by and that spooked the horses. You see, carriages have been going across the bridge for several weeks but trains had only begun to cross that bridge.

But somehow a train came by, the horses bolted, the carriage driver lost control, and the carriage tipped into the side of the train. All were killed.

The first year after my sister’s death a gentleman came, as you have, trying to bring her home. The second year it was the same. And so I had that beaded bag made. I thought perhaps if I had an identical beaded bag my sister would know I had a beaded bag. She would no longer try to return it. But now it’s the third anniversary and you are here. But thank you. Thank you for trying to bring her home.”

Oh, the gentleman could not believe what he had heard. He said, “No, no. I brought a young woman here and she had that beaded bag. She must be in this house somewhere.”\

“No, sir, she is not. I am telling you that she is dead. Her name was Julia Wyatt and she is buried in our family plot in Kayfield Cemetery. Good evening.”

And the servant took the gentleman to the door. He returned to his buggy and he went home. But he could not stop thinking about what he had heard. So, several days later he went to Kayfield Cemetery. He found the Wyatt family plot. And in the Wyatt family plot he found the grave of Julia Wyatt. And right against the foot of her tombstone he found the lap robe from his buggy.