**Battle Hymn Of The American Republic**

Julia Ward Howe in her room on the second floor of the Willard Hotel gathers the sheets around her. She sings softly, cupping her pale hands around her mouth in case the sleep of the man next door is disturbed.

When she heard the song at the parade and her companion suggested she re-write it- “something deeper, my dear, less of the doggerel and more like an anthem”- her blood grew warm and the words began to form immediately.

There is a phrase she must check in the bible: “A terrible swift sword.” She breathes in. Her unconscious belongs to the gospel tellers and the red-faced priest of her childhood who was as solid as the mountain and possessed of a certainty now beginning to crumble everywhere.

She gets up and takes out her writing paper, for it is time to record her creation before it seeps away. She walks across the room to find her blouse. Almost shamefully she scribbled phrases on the cuffs as they came to her, out of sight of the companion.

That soldier who sang “John Brown” at the parade had such a rich voice...the night is calm, but she can hear the music, louder now, thunderous. Her pen is quick and still she sings, raising a palm in apology to the man next door who may be turning distractedly in his sleep. She cannot stop for anything.

When the first draft is finished she goes to the window. Julia Ward Howe is intoxicated, full of the world outside this room of drying petticoats and stale flowers. She closes her eyes and puts her ear to the glass to hear the sound of battlefields and churches and the soldier in the distance singing her new words.