

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow · *Ann Struthers*

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and Fanny Appleton
were separated only once in their marriage
when he spent two days in New Hampshire. They slept
in the narrow country sleigh-bed
of their wedding night, had six children;
Frances died of a fever; Charles shot off
his thumb with the gun he had begged to buy.
The others were healthy.

They gave dinners and dances—he chose the crystal,
Bohemian goblets for wine, ruby-red with gold grape vines
for Jenny Lind, Charles Dickens, William Makepeace Thackeray.

On the 9th of July, 1861, Fanny worked at her desk,
fixing packets of the children's curls, and sealing
them with melted wax from a lighted candle.
Her gauzy sleeve caught fire; the flames swept
her dress in a whirl like no dance
she had ever known. Trailing an orange train,
she ran to her husband (taffeta had never crackled
like this), pressed her face
against his chest. He tried to beat out the fire
with his hands. She died the next day,
and Longfellow thought he'd go mad.