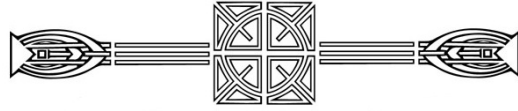


# Tales of An English Garden

By Josephine Hymes



Carmelhill Villa<sup>1</sup>

## Tale 1: Two Hawks in the Air



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When the Grahams arrived in Southampton in the summer of 1925, it had come as a surprise that Edward Perkins, with his customary striped suit and bow tie, was waiting at the piers to welcome them. Terrence had informed his father about his moving back to the UK, but had neither disclosed the date of his arrival, nor the name of the liner in which he and his wife would be traveling. So, it was with a mixture of reserve and surprise that he greeted his father's secretary.

"Welcome back to England, your lordship," Perkins said first, and then moved to greet Candy, "your ladyship, it is a pleasure to meet you again."

"The pleasure is mine, Mr. Perkins," Candy immediately answered with her usual affability under the shade of an orange-peach cloche hat.

"I suppose that if I ask you to drop formalities, my pleas won't be heard, is that so, Perkins?" asked Terrence with an ironic tone.

"I'm afraid you're right, sir," Perkins replied lowering his eyes, unable to handle the young man's sarcasm.

Candy, seeing the poor's man predicament, had softly squeezed Terrence's arm.

"Oh well, lord me around as much as you wish then. How is His Grace doing?" The young man asked changing the subject, following his wife's silent cue.

"I dare say he is in an unusually good mood and perfect health, sir. He sends you his warmest welcome and extends an invitation for you, sir, and Lady Candice to visit him in London."

"Really?" said Terrence in an arching manner, "Does he seriously think I will set a foot at Saint James' Square?"

"His Lordship also specifically instructed me to tell you that the duchess and her children are now in Cheshire. His Grace has remained in London waiting for the Lords . . ."

". . .to close sessions, yes, yes, I should have guessed that<sup>3</sup>," Terrence interrupted dismissively, "But his lordship presumes too much if he expects me to pay him a visit right away," said Terrence beginning to walk towards the exit of the piers, with the porters who carried their luggage following his lead. "You see, Perkins, I am not a gentleman of leisure," he continued most emphatically. "There are plenty of responsibilities waiting for me in Stratford at the beginning of August, and this coming week I have plans with my wife. We're spending a few days in Edinburgh. You must tell His Grace that we might have to wait for some time in the autumn to see each other, if he is available, of course."

Perkins looked visibly shocked by the young man's open rejection to his father's invitation.

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<sup>3</sup> The Parliament usually closes sessions by the end of July.



“Lord A\*\*\*, is a pleasure to see you again,” the old man in an impeccable black tailcoat and matching waist coat said as a manner of greeting.

Terrence’s jaws cringed at the appellation, but the reassuring pressure of his wife’s hand on the crook of his arm eased his tension, if only a tiny bit. So, making an internal resolution to be patient with the old servant, he finally responded to the greeting.

“It’s been a long time, Daniels, but I swear you haven’t changed in the slightest,” Terrence replied handing his tanned homburg hat to the butler.

“Thank you, my lord, but I’m afraid I cannot return the compliment. The last time I saw your lordship, you were just a child, and now I see a man in front of me,” Daniels explained with a smile appearing in his otherwise wrinkled, serious face.

“And a very happy one, for that matter,” Terrence responded while resting a hand on his wife’s shoulder, “This is my wife, Candice,” he added with pride.

The tall Daniels turned then to see a young lady in a loose white dress with lavender flower print. Her head was crowned with a wide garden party hat; under the brim, shone a pair of unaffected green eyes. The old butler was not used to seeing such affable frankness in the face of a member of *the family*.

“My Lady, I’m honored,” Daniels declared with a ceremonious bow.

Candy would have preferred shaking hands with the old butler in the usual American style, but she understood well that such a gesture would only embarrass and bewilder the good old man. So, she only gave him a gracious nod.

“It’s nice to meet you, Mr. Daniels. My husband has told me a lot of good things about you.”

“Has he? I’m glad to hear it, your ladyship,” the man replied and then with almost hesitant voice, he added, “And only Daniels will do, madam”, added the man with a slight tension barely visible in his neck encumbered by an impossibly starched wing shirt.

Candice was already expecting that. Despite all her willingness to tolerate the customs of the land, she was not going to address a senior person in a familiar way just because protocol ordered it as a distinction of rank. Not in vain had Ms. Pony instilled in her a profound respect for her elders.

“Would it be fine for you if I asked you to call me Candice?” The young woman asked tilting her head graciously.

“Oh . . . of course not, my lady. I could never address you so disrespectfully!” The old man responded, astounded at Candy’s suggestion.

“I understand, you must do as your sense of etiquette demands, but then accept my own sense of respectful address and allow me to call you Mr. Daniels.”

The old butler who was beyond astonishment at that point did not know how to reply.

"I think you must make some concessions here, Daniels," joined Terrence enjoying Candy's display of character, "my wife is American, you see. Democracy is far too ingrained in her veins. Now, could you take us to His Grace? We must not make him wait."

"Certainly, sir," Daniels assented, walking ahead to lead the visitors across the luxurious marble halls. As they walked, Terrence could not avoid the memory of the last time he had walked through the same rooms, angry and resentful, after his father had denied his help to save Candy from being expelled. Things had changed so much ever since, he thought. Terrence's chest expanded as he considered how the same person his father had refused to help was now entering the duke's home as a guest of honor. In an instinctive gesture of affection, Terrence rested his left hand over Candy's own, clung to the crook of his right arm. He was proud of his heart's choice.

When they reached the library's doors, a young footman took over the responsibility of conducting the visitors to the master of the manor. Daniels took his leave of the Grahams and returned to attend to his many pending tasks.

"Democracy!" He muttered to himself in shock before disappearing into the intricate corridors of the downstairs world.

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The green room was the duke's favorite place in his London's townhouse. The hand painted lacquered wood paneled walls made a fine contrast with the deep green hues in the Persian carpet and the leather upholstery of the buttoned tub chairs. Strategically placed as a sitting area adjunct to the library, the room was a sort of private haven, which the duchess rarely dared to trespass.

Lord N\*\*\*<sup>5</sup> was sitting on a leather wing chair of a rich burgundy shade, which stood out as opposed to the cold tones that dominated the rest of the furniture. Apparently, his Lordship was reading the newspaper with great attention when the footman pompously announced the arrival of Lord and Lady A\*\*\*<sup>6</sup>.

Immediately putting the paper aside on a nearby table, Richard Grandchester stood up to greet the callers. When his eyes encountered those of his son, and then jumped to discover his daughter-in-law's pregnant figure, an unusual smile spread on his face, giving his countenance a rare, warm glow. Terrence had never seen such an expression on his father's face. There was something like true affection in it that somehow contributed to lowering his guard.

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<sup>5</sup> Richard Grantchester's title will be abbreviated in these stories.  
<sup>6</sup> The duke's subsidiary title (second in rank) that is used, as a courtesy, to address his eldest son and his wife.

“Terrence! Candice! I’m so glad to see you here,” the man told his children, his voice giving away the powerful feelings that seized his heart. Then, acting completely out of character, the duke stepped forward and, without warning, opened his arms and hugged his son.

Terrence, who could not recall the last time that his father had held him so, stood motionless for a second or two. Slowly, as if reluctantly warming up to dormant filial emotions, Terrence’s arms responded to his father’s gesture.

The two of them remained locked for just brief instants, but when they finally parted, something in Terrence’s chest that had been aching for many, many years, began to experience something akin to relief.

“We must thank you for your invitation, sir,” Terrence spoke with a slightly throaty voice, “Candy, especially, wanted to see you.”

The duke turned again to see the young woman.

“I am very happy to meet you again, sir,” curtsied Candy.

“No more than I am, dear girl,” Lord N\*\*\* nodded acknowledging his daughter-in-law, “but will you not sit down?” he offered, realizing that the visitors were still standing up.

The young couple sat at the dark green French style loveseat, next to the duke’s chair, and the host rang for tea.

Soon, the footmen came in with the service. While the servants were at their task, father and son kept the conversation at the neutral topic of the recent journey from America to England. Used to having servants around them, they instinctively left more personal issues to be dealt with later.

While they were on the safe ground of small talk, Terrence had the opportunity to observe that his father was making great efforts to recover his usual nonchalance. However, it was obvious that Candy’s condition had caught him unawares.

“So, tell me, am I right to suppose that congratulations are in order?” The duke finally asked when the footmen left them alone, after serving the tea.

“If you refer to the fact that we are expecting a child, then you’re right, sir, thank you,” Terrence responded solemnly.

“Now, Terrence, you have been very sly with your father,” the duke replied with a tone similar to his son’s when nobody could tell if he was in jest or in earnest, “You never mentioned a thing about it in your correspondence.”

Terrence remained silent, unreadable. He really did not know why he had not revealed such good tidings to his father. Did he fear that the news would trigger a new war or wills between him and his father? After all, if the child were a boy, he would mean so much for the house of N\*\*\*. Wouldn’t

he? No doubt that the duke would feel with rights over the child. . . “if it is a boy . . .”, Terrence heart jumped at this last thought.

“We wanted it to be a surprise for you, sir,” Candy intervened, noticing that Terrence was hard-pressed to respond to his father’s question, “I knew you would be happy with the news and wanted to tell you personally.”

“Well, you did succeed in that. I supposed then that you, young lady, forbade Perkins to spoil your surprise. He did not say a word when he phoned me yesterday.”

“It seems that you begin to understand my wife’s taste for the dramatic,” said Terrence, letting Candy get away with her white lie.

“Do I?” asked the duke archly, and then finally produced the question he had been aching to ask since Candy had entered in the room. “And when exactly will I have the pleasure to meet *my* grandchild, may I ask?”

Terrence felt that the hair on his neck stood on end at hearing his father talk about the unborn baby in such possessive terms.

“We expect it to happen sometime around the first week of December,” responded Candy, her eyes shining in maternal happiness and pride, as if oblivious to her husband’s fears.

“If you needed to find a good physician to assist you when the time comes, I could recommend you a few names,” Lord N\*\*\* suggested.

“Thank you, sir,” the young woman replied with genuine appreciation, “If you knew someone located in Stratford, I would appreciate it a whole lot.”

“I thought you would rather be in London for the event,” the duke said disconcerted.

“My job is in Stratford, and it is there where we’re going to live; so, the most natural thing is for the child to be born there,” responded Terrence beginning to lose his patience at his father’s insistence on the topic.

“I see. Then, if Candice allows me, I will ask Perkins to make some inquiries about reputed doctors in Stratford,” said His Grace, looking at his daughter in law while trying to ignore Terrence’s slightly hostile tone.

“I would like that very much, sir, and again, I appreciate your interest. As soon as we get there within a week, I would like to see about the issue,” Candy responded, truly glad that she could have someone to help her with such a delicate matter.

“Oh yes, I heard that you are not travelling to Stratford right away. Where are you staying in Edinburgh? The duke asked then, seeing a good opportunity to change the subject.

“At the N.B. <sup>7</sup>,” responded Terrence also happy of having the sensitive topic of his child out of the conversation, “We are planning on staying there as a way to rest a few days before I start working for the Royal Shakespeare Company.”

“Why don’t you stay at *Carmelhill Villa*<sup>8</sup>, then?” The duke suddenly proposed as he slowly left his empty Royal Copenhagen cup on the tea table. “It is away from the noise of the Royal Mile<sup>9</sup>. If you’re searching for a respite, the place is perfect for that, especially now that Saint Paul Academy’s Summer School, which used to be hosted in the nearby parish, moved to another location. Moreover, the nearest neighbor, the Baronet of S\*\*\* will be touring in Italy this summer. So, you would enjoy of outmost privacy. On the other hand, if you want to see the city, or visit the Castle, you can always use the car I left there the last time I visited.”

“Did you stay in Carmelhill?” Terrence asked, obliterating his father’s invitation, his curiosity and surprise winning over his good manners. As far as he knew, his father had not visited the place since the young actor was just a child.

“Well, yes,” replied Richard Grandchester lowering his gray eyes, eluding his son’s questioning look, “I went there last summer for just a few days.”

Terrence made a great effort to keep his usual collectedness, but still could not refrain from asking further questions.

“Did *your lady* go with you?” he inquired, mentioning his stepmother in the most oblique way possible. He simply couldn’t believe that Beatrix had set a foot on the site where the duke had once stayed in the company of another woman.

“No! Of course not!” Terrence’s father responded, this time sounding as if the simple idea of having his wife staying at the Edinburgh villa were a sacrilege to the place, “She and her children spent that summer in Windermere<sup>10</sup>. . . I,” he hesitated, struggling to explain his motives, “I needed some time on my own . . . uh, to reflect on a number of issues. The solitude of the place inspires to meditation.”

“Oh, I absolutely agree, sir, it is a most peaceful and beautiful spot,” Candy interposed in a clear attempt to reduce her father-in-law’s sudden uneasiness.

“So, you know Carmelhill too, Candice?” was the immediate question of Lord N\*\*\*, visibly intrigued by the sparking light of enthusiasm in the young woman’s expression.

“Oh yes, your lordship, Terry and I have some very endearing memories of that house. I spent a summer in Scotland for summer school, when I was a student at Saint Paul, you see. Terry stayed at Carmelhill that same year and invited me, this is, with some of our friends, to visit him,” Candy

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<sup>7</sup> The North British Hotel, today known as the Balmoral Hotel

<sup>8</sup> That is the name of the duke’s villa in Edinburgh within the universe of this fanfiction series.

<sup>9</sup> The main Avenue in Edinburgh.

<sup>10</sup> The place where the duke’s main summer house is located, in the Lake District (North England)



narrated, and Terrence smiled inwardly when he noticed that his wife had edited the story to make it appropriate for his father’s ears.

“Interesting, I never thought of Terrence as one that would enjoy entertaining visitors,” commented the man; it was clear he was reading something more between the lines in Candice’s narrative.

“Well, it seems that the house has a claim in the heart of more than one person in this family, then,” he added in almost a whisper, as if talking to himself, but then recovered his usual self-assured tone and added: “What do you say, Terrence? Shall I announce the Codd family that you will be staying there?”

The young man was torn between his desire of keeping his relationship with his father at a friendly but distant state, and the temptation of staying with his wife in a site that was so intimately connected with their common past.

“We already have reservations in the hotel,” he resisted.

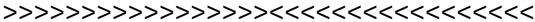
“Reservations can be cancelled, son,” was the duke’s immediate response in the tone of a man that was used to do as he pleased and whenever he pleased.

“Oh yes, Terry! I would like to stay there very much!” Candy entreated her husband with a pleading expression in her big green eyes that could have made a glacier melt.

The duke’s eyes smile beneath his serious demeanor as he observed how this little woman could twist the will of his stubborn son with just the flutter of her long eyelashes.

“All right, if you are so enthused by the idea, Candy, I’ll be glad to accept His Grace’s invitation,” Terrence had finally agreed. His desire to please his wife obviously had a stronger hold of his will than his fears of being unduly obliged to his father.

The young man turned then to look at his father in the eye and, for a fleeting moment, he saw something there that looked like empathy. It was as though the older man spoke to his son, in his own silent way, telling him that he also knew what it was to be so hopelessly besotted by a pair of bright eyes.



Carmelhill Park was the least important property of the Dukes of N\*\*\*. It was situated some 30 miles West of the center of Edinburgh, neighboring the grounds of Dundas Castle, owned by the Baronet of S\*\*\*. The Italianate mansion had been erected on the South end of Carmelhill Woods, which extended around the property’s private lake. The higher position of the property commanded an imposing view of the lake, especially from the Roman enclosed balcony, on the west wing of the building. The duke had purposefully abandoned the place to the care of his one single tenant in the property, leaving the house unstaffed. It had been an almost unconscious attempt to blot out the painful memories of his final break up with Eleanor, when Terrence was a young child. However, Mr. Codd and his family had been faithful to their landlord, maintaining the house in the best

conditions possible during the years of great neglect and more recently, after the duke had ordered major repairs. So, now the place looked as charming as in the good old days, with its stucco walls painted in pastel colors and its impeccable white marble hearths.

Lord N\*\*\* had offered his son to send some members of his London staff to take care of him and his wife during their sojourn, but the young couple had expressed their desire to stay on their own. If his son's desires appeared as too "middle-class" to the duke's eyes, he did not make comments on that. Terrence was thankful for his father's respectful silence on that score. Therefore, the following evening, when the Graham's arrived in Edinburgh in the Flying Scotsman<sup>11</sup>, only Mr. Codd was waiting for them in the station, with the duke's car and a bag full of groceries.

It was already dark when Candice and Terrence got to Carmelhill Villa. Nevertheless, as soon as they opened the doors of the blue drawing room, it unleashed, with its Adamesque style, a host of tender recollections. Terrence noticed that his wife's face was beaming with the loveliest glow in her rosy cheeks. They had been travelling for over 9 hours, and a woman in her condition could rightfully feel moody, or simply little inclined for activity. But true to her bubbly nature, Candice wanted to do everything at once, from taking a boat ride on the property's lake, to trying the piano in the music room. Once again, Terrence had to remind her that it was past 10 pm and she should not exceed her limits, if only on account of the baby.

"Well, you're probably right, Terry," she had admitted while softly squeezing his hand in hers, "Perhaps I'm a bit too happy to be here with you after so long. But promise me that we will take some of the cakes that Mrs. Codd made for us . . . and perhaps some berries, so we can have a picnic in Carmelhill Woods tomorrow. You owe me that, don't you think?"

Terrence chuckled softly, pleased by his lady's request. When other women would be complaining about having been dragged in a tiresome journey for almost two months, and perhaps demand for more extravagant rewards, she only asked for a patch of forest and some comfort food.

"I'm a man of my word, Freckles. It won't be difficult to arrange a pic-nick if you want it so badly. Yet, you must remember that the weather is particularly rainy this time of the year in Edinburgh. I will not be held accountable if a thunderstorm breaks out tomorrow," he warned her whilst gently leading her to the master bedroom.

The young man had been particularly looking forward to their first night in the villa. The sight of the old house had awakened in him such delightful memories that he could hardly wait for the opportunity to be alone with his wife. Unfortunately for him, when he came out of the bathroom, after refreshing himself, he had found that his enthusiastic wife had fallen asleep before he could join her in bed. So, resigned to chastity for a day, he had pulled a book from his toiletry bag, and read for a few minutes before he also succumbed to Morpheus, with Candy softly held in his arms.

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<sup>11</sup> The luxurious passenger train that still in these days runs from London to Edinburgh

Contrary to Terrence's reserved forecast, the following morning had been blessed with the most radiant of suns, and a temperature that was already warm, before 9 am. He woke up to the feeling of tickles, as Candice brushed the tip of his nose with one of her hats' feathers. She had got up at dawn and had prepared everything for a long outing that would include breakfast and lunch in the open air. Terrence, who had never been a morning person, would have rather stayed in bed till noon, but there was no way Candy was going to let a bright summer day go by without being outdoors.

While Terrence was still stretching out his limbs, reluctant to leave the bed, he saw how his wife packed their swimming suits and bath robes in one basket. Suddenly, a wicked smile appeared on the young man's face. When Candy left the room in search of an item she wanted to include in her basket, Terrence got up as if poked by a needle. When Candy came back into the bedroom; she was pleased to see that he was already half dressed. So, as soon as they were ready, off into the Woods and down the Lake they went.

They took the same AC Royal Roadster that Mr. Codd had used to pick them up at the railroad station, taking the top off, to enjoy the breeze. Terrence wondered once again at his father's strange behavior. What had prompted the duke to return to Edinburgh the year before, leaving one of his cars in the garage, as if intending to return there soon? The young man concluded that his father's unexpected changes were proving to be more intriguing than he could have predicted. However, he reasoned, it was not necessarily the case that such changes would be unwelcome.

"You look happy, my love," his wife suggested, while brushing off from his forehead the short bangs that the wind was blowing out of place.

Instead of a dressier summer walking suit, Terrence had chosen a more relaxed look, with just flax trousers, and a cricket sleeveless sweater over a cotton shirt. His whole being transpired a layback air that Candy loved.

"Am I smiling without my own notice?" he asked with his eyes fixed on the road.

"You don't need to smile for me to know it, Terry," she replied, "There is something about your eyes that tells me you're pleased; and why wouldn't you be pleased? The day is glorious . . . and we have so many great memories at every step of the road. Look, that's the lake down there. Do you remember when Eliza was drowning in that spot?"

"And that is a good memory because . . .?" He cued her with a sardonic expression.

"Because you were very gallant and sweet to rescue her, although I still think she was just pretending," Candy said in a giggle.

Terrence nodded his head, inwardly acknowledging that he had been deceived by Eliza's tricks.

"For many years I regretted my gallantry, believe me," he said to his wife, "I should have let her drown right there and then. I would have done the world a great service!"

They both laughed out loud at that, but their laughter was suddenly interrupted when the car reached the spot that they had been looking for. The beauty of the lake embraced by the woods caught them unawares.

“Oh Terry, I had almost forgotten how unique this place is!” declared Candy in almost a whisper, being the first to break the silence.

The young man parked the car near the shore and took his time to take in the view. They both remained in silence as Terrence gently squeezed Candy’s hand into his. “The most ancient color of the World, shade of sky and water”<sup>12</sup>, suddenly invaded their senses with memories of the sweetest feelings they shared.

“I was beyond myself when I realized that you had come to me that summer,” he confessed, “I had wished for it so much,” he uttered with just a figment of his usually powerful voice, and his wife understood his meaning at once.

“I supposed that you had invited me, I mean, in your very own underhanded way, of course,” the young woman replied admiring him as the morning light caressed his countenance, “So, I chose to be with you that summer, Terry, and I’ve always been glad of my decision. For many years, the memory of those days remained in my mind as the happiest, most perfect time of my life.”

“For many years?” he asked with a cheeky look. “Should I understand that our time here does not rank as the happiest moment in your life anymore?”

An enigmatic smile hinted on Candy’s face. Then, she rested her head on his shoulder, in an affectionate gesture.

“We have made sweeter memories in the last year, my love,” she explained.

Terrence did not reply to that. He only took a deep breath, like in a quiet sigh, and rested his right arm around her. They stayed for a brief while in that position, until they tacitly decided that it was time to get out of the car.

The morning then ran in a lazy, smooth mood. They enjoyed a light breakfast of oatcakes, honey, assorted cheese, fruit, and tea, letting their bodies slowly digest the meal as they lay over a red checkered blanket. Before leaving on their journey to England, Terrence had bought a new edition of *Leaves of Grass*. It was an attempt, he had said, to take a piece of America and keep it near his heart. So, it was from Whitman’s free poems that he read aloud some selections that morning. As in the past, Candy sat near him, listening to the music in the verses. In the woods, purple heather spikes and yellow buttercups danced softly to the rhythm of the breeze.

*“Consider, you who peruse me,  
whether I may not in unknown ways be looking upon you;  
Be firm, rail over the river, to support those who lean idly,*

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<sup>12</sup> Poem by Nagita Keiko

*yet haste with the hasting current;  
Fly on, sea-birds! Fly sideways, or wheel in large circles high in the air;  
Receive the summer sky, you water,  
and faithfully hold it till all downcast eyes have time to take it from you!"*

Terrence's voice rang into the midsummer zephyr.

"It is as though he was singing to everything and for everyone . . . as if he was talking to me, in this very moment," Candy ventured to comment when Terrence paused for breath.

"That is the effect Whitman has in people who are sensitive enough to hear him. Yet I don't wonder at your ability to understand this poetry, which has been so terribly misunderstood by many."

Candy laughed softly.

"And where, do you think, do my powers as a literary critic reside?" she asked mockingly.

"Oh well, laugh if you want, but I'm being serious here," he began. "Allow me to elaborate. You see, for many people I am a sort of a riddle," he began in a wistful tone, "I know that I'm not the kind of man that people feel inclined to like, let alone understand. However, you have always read me like an open book. Then, if you can see past my moodiness, you can also see good old Wally's heart between his lines," Terrence explained.

Candy raised her yes, as if weighing her husband's words.

"I don't know much about poetry, but this I know well, Terry," she finally said, "the stern persona that you show to the world is not the real you. Nevertheless, if you think that I always understood this, you are mistaken. I was only lucky to bump into you over and over at school, so I could finally start getting you. But you took great trouble in sending me all kinds of contradictory messages. At times, I thought that you would drive me crazy!" she laughed then, tossing her head sideward, her blond curls falling on a cascade over her temples.

"Then it all worked out as I planned," the young man added with a smirk that she knew was the harbinger of one of his impertinent remarks.

"Pray tell, what exactly did you plan, dearest T.G.?" she asked for clarification with a challenging tone.

Terrence's eyes shone in a mixture of playfulness and desire.

"Well, you just said that you 'bumped into me' quite a good deal in that time," he started, rising from his more relaxed position to lay propped on his right elbow.

"And . . ."

"Do you honestly think that all those encounters were always coincidental?" He insinuated.

“You’re saying that you purposefully,” she was interrupted in the middle of the sentence by the man’s sudden movements that captured her cheeks in his hands, and her lips in his own. The kiss started tempestuously, just in the style he would use when within their bed chambers. It was an unapologetic invasion of her mouth, a heated motion to savor in one single thrust the warmth of her tongue.

In over six months of married life, Terrence had always left such uninhibited displays for the moments in which they would be confined within four walls. To feel such a kiss in the open, and let it linger for slow, delicious seconds, was something Candy was not prepared for.

“Surely,” he murmured to her ears, when his mouth finally liberated hers to breathe, “surely you understand it was I who sought for you; no, lurked after you, at every one of your steps, Freckles.”

“Did I have a stalker without realizing it?” she asked stirring up his fire.

“More effective than that, I believe,” he went on kissing the lobe of her left ear, “A stalker forces himself over the object of his obsession, but I intended to attract you. Even if I was rather clumsy at my attempts, as the inexperienced pup that I was, I must have done something right, because I did obtain what I wanted.”

“Which was?” she insisted on talking, starting to fear that her husband was getting her in a mood that was not meant for outdoor settings.

“You’ve just admitted it . . . to drive you mad, mad about me, of course,” he replied then, just to insist on a second kiss right after his last racy words.

By now, they were both lying down. Candy was nested in his left arm, and his right hand was perilously sliding downwards her throat and threatening to go below.

Within the heat of the moment, the young woman could scarcely think. Nevertheless, she forced herself to gather her wits to realize that something had to be done. If they didn’t stop soon, things would get to a point at which neither of them would care.

“Don’t you think it would be great to take a swim in the lake right now?” she suggested the first second that he liberated her lips to grasp some air.

Terrence tried to refrain from smiling. Wasn’t she getting just to the point he wanted? Still, he faked initial resistance to the idea.

“Won’t the water be a bit too cold?” he asked, brushing her cheek with his index finger.

“Perhaps just a little cool, but the sun is well up now. I’m sure it will be pleasant,” she replied getting up from her place on the blanket, to search for the swimming suits that she had packed.

Still lying on the blanket, Terrence stretched his arms and leisurely crossed them behind his nape. With usual nonchalance, he started to whistle an old Scottish air (Loch Lomond). He patiently

waited until his wife searched through the two big baskets she had brought for the picnic, without being able to produce the suits.

“I don’t find the suits,” she finally said visibly disappointed.

“Oh, dear! Shall we miss our swim, then?” he asked in a resigned tone, as if not paying attention to her pouting lips.

“I don’t understand. I clearly recollect packing the suits,” she insisted scratching her short blond ringlets.

He continued whistling his tune for a few more seconds, ignoring his wife’s frustration. Yet, after a while of silence he said calmly, as he observed the nails in his right hand as though they were the most interesting thing in the World: “We could take our swim anyway. After all, one is never sure about Edinburgh’s changing weather. Today is so fine, but we cannot tell how it will be like tomorrow. You know well this is the rainy season.”

“You’re not suggesting that we go skinny-dip, Terry!” she gaped scandalized.

“Why ever not?” he asked with a sideward smile, “You’re not going to act shy with me now, are you? Do I have to remind you that we’re man and wife?”

Candy’s flabbergasted expression was so comic that Terrence was tempted to burst into open laughter, but always a good pretender, he kept seriously quiet.

“But . . . but . . . someone could appear any time while we’re swimming!” she resisted.

“This is private property, Candy, there’s none but you and I in about 15 acres of forest,” he replied.

“But there must be tenants at some point of the grounds,” the young woman argued turning her head right and left, as if searching for some hidden prying eyes.

“The Cods are the only tenants in Carmelhill Villa, but their farm is at the North side of the property. They never venture to this side unless they are summoned to do some service in the house. So, that being considered, I’m going to take a good swim,” he declared matter-of-factly, standing up from his place on the blanket.

“But aren’t there any neighbors? What if they are shooting in their grounds and accidentally come into your dad’s property chasing their game?” She tried a last argument, even though she knew it sounded terribly weak.

“Nonsense!” He riposted. “Didn’t you hear what His Grace said? The Baronet and his wife are in the Continent this summer; and even if they were here, they would never trespass into the duke’s land. Besides, look at those clouds coming from the East, it might be raining in an hour or two. Come on, Freckles, stop being such a ninny!” he dared her, swiftly taking off his own clothes.

Seeing that her husband had a point, Candy took a deep breath, beginning to consider the charm of Terrence's proposition. The heat of the day was at its peak, the water looked cool and inviting, and the view of her husband, who was already half nude, was tempting. However, Candy had not been raised into strict Catholic morals for nothing. So, it took her a moment of silent debate with herself to come to terms with the idea.

From the shore, Terrence observed her face, wrestling in thoughts. He knew that Candy had felt a bit awkward with his daring advances and had proposed swimming as a way out. That her subterfuge had only led her into an even more scandalous situation diverted him to no end.

"I've never thought that you could be a funk<sup>13</sup> of the likes of Neil Lagan," Terrence said before letting slip his last garment and getting into the water.

This last cutting remark struck the right chord in Candy's combative nature. Therefore, getting over the task as fast as she could, the young woman stripped and dived into the lake at the snap of a finger.

Despite her swiftness, Terrence had plenty of time to enjoy the view as he lazily swam with a slow sidestroke. Candy's pretty figure, already showing the swell of a five-month pregnancy, reminded him of some paintings that his father owned. In his childhood, he had often sneaked into the duke's private gallery where he kept a few of Courbet<sup>14</sup>'s forbidden works. He remembered that his young mind had first awakened to eroticism at the sight of those sensual oil paintings. The bright summer light, glistening over the skin of his wife, had exactly the same translucent effect that Courbet had achieved in depicting the generous curves of his models. With such pleasing associations, by the time Candy's rounded silhouette submerged into the water, Terrence's body had already responded, anticipating the warmth of an intimate embrace. The young man hinted an impudent half smile. It had taken some persuasion and a little trick to convince his wife to bathe in the nude. It would surely take some additional seduction to reach his original end. But he was at leisure to seduce away all that would be necessary.

Oblivious to her husband's naughty plans, Candy was beginning to enjoy her swim. She was invaded by a sensation of freedom and decadent bliss never experienced before. Feeling playful, she dived into deeper waters moving towards her husband who was simply floating and staring at the sky.

"Are you going to dogpaddle all day long?" she said when she emerged right in front of him.

"And you surely think your swimming style very elegant, right?" he replied before disappearing under the water, only to surface again behind her.

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<sup>13</sup> British slang for *coward*

<sup>14</sup> Gustave Courbet



He snappily gathered her in his arms, as he swam towards the ford. She shivered at the contact of her back on his chest but did not resist his lead. Both moved in coordinated backstrokes, Terrence's hand carefully holding her belly.

*"When I heard at the close of the day<sup>15</sup>,"* he recited to her ears the same verses they had been reading a while before, *"how my name had been receiv'd with plaudits in the capitol, still it was not a happy night for me that follow'd, but the day when I rose at dawn from the bed of perfect health, refresh'd, singing, inhaling the ripe breath of autumn, When I saw the full moon in the west grow pale and disappear in the morning light,"* he paused then, as his feet touched the shallow bottom of the lake. His other arm now came also around her.

*"When I wander'd alone over the lake,"* he continued, twisting the verses at his convenience, *"and undressing bathed, laughing with the cool waters, and saw the sun rise, and when I thought how my dear friend, my lover, was on her way coming. Oh, then I was happy! Oh, then each breath tasted sweeter, and all that day my food nourish'd me more, and the beautiful day pass'd well, and the next came with equal joy, and with the next at evening came my friend."*

He then stopped, his mouth searching for the soft skin of her nape with ardent fervor. Under the cool water, he softly caressed her left leg with his. By this moment, Candy fully understood Terrence's intentions. How he had managed to convince her to contradict her idea of decency, she knew not. In fact, even locked in a blissful nude embrace, something inside her head told her she ought to stop him. Oh, but the feelings he was awakening in her were so enticing that she couldn't find the energy to oppose. . . yet she ought to!

"Terry, wait," she feebly said.

"Why should we?" he asked between kisses, "Don't you feel just like in a poem? Aren't *'two hawks in the air, two fishes swimming in the sea not more lawless than we<sup>16</sup>* are today? Let us live this freedom that at last we can enjoy, Candy."

And with his saying, the young man gave free reign to passion, with his now expert hands searching the secret spots that lit her fire. Soon, the water surrounding their bodies felt much warmer, and she could not gather the willpower to resist him. Every inch of her skin seemed to have found the perfect counterpart in him, her back sensing the heat of his chest, her thighs feeling the steaming pulse of his body finding his way into her. Then, for some intense moments, the shivering ripples of the lake, the fragrant woods, and the clouds that began to hover in the sky disappeared from their conscience. The universe was reduced to the sound of their voice and the incandescent heat that emanated from their bodies. The fire reached a white, glowing peak, and then slowly descended. Their bodies floated together, as if they weighed no more than a dandelion seed suspended in the

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<sup>15</sup> From Leaves of Grass, Book V: *When I heard at the close of the day.*

<sup>16</sup> Leaves of Grass, Book IV: From Pent-Up Arching Rivers.

breeze. Then, while still locked in one flesh, Terrence's hands holding Candice's belly felt for the first time the movements of their child.

"Do you feel it, Terry?" she told him softly.

"Is it? . . . my son?" he asked in confused delight.

"Our child," she corrected him, internally smiling at Terrence's *faux pas* that gave away his unconfessed desires. "We cannot tell whether it is a boy or a girl."

"I know," he admitted chuckling at his blunder, "How long have you been feeling this?"

"The kicks started just last week. It was about time," she explained and then they submerged again in a pleasant silence.

At that moment, Terrence felt certain of having achieved a new level of bliss. The feelings of loneliness that had once been so pervasive in his heart seemed now alien . . . distant. Embracing his wife's body, embedded in her, with their own child growing inside her, there was no room for insecurity, jealousy, or lonesomeness of any kind. He was, without question, the steward and protector of his own family. He wished his loved ones could remain encased in his embrace, as they were now, forever. But he was fully aware that such desires are only wishful thinking. Soon, the intimate connection of their bodies was lost, and only the spiritual bond remained.

When Terrence judged that their corporal temperature had descended too low to tolerate the cool water, he gathered his wife in his arms to return to the shore. There, they lay together over the blanket, covered by the bath robes Candy had packed in the morning. As they descended into a sweet, peaceful slumber, a pair of sparrowhawks ploughed the sky over their heads.

That afternoon, they returned to the house earlier than planned because the clouds kept piling and turning grayer. When the thunderstorm finally broke out late at night, they were lying together over the fur carpet in the blue room. The crackling noise from the hearth mixed with the sound of heavy rain drops crashing on the window glass. In their heads, they could still hear Whitman's soothing words:

*"And that night while all was still, I heard the waters roll slowly continually up the shores,  
I heard the hissing rustle of the liquid and sands as directed to me whispering to congratulate me.  
For the one I love most lay sleeping by me under the same cover in the cool night,  
In the stillness in the autumn moonbeams his face was inclined toward me,  
And his arm lay lightly around my breast - and that night I was happy."<sup>17</sup>*

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<sup>17</sup> Walt Whitman: When I heard at the close of the day.