Tales of An English Garden

By Josephine Hymes





Graham Cottage at 150 Tiddington Road, Stratford-upon-Avon¹

Tale 2: Three Generations



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When Candy and her husband arrived in Stratford that summer, a letter from Richard Grandchester was already waiting for Mrs. Graham. As Candy had never received written communication from her father-in-law, she was more than happy to find him willing to correspond with her. It had only been a brief note with the contact information of a trusted physician she could consult. However, never one to be intimidated by the Grandchesters' impassive ways, the young woman had seized the opportunity to begin an epistolary relationship with the duke.

Terrence warned her that she should not expect that his father would take the time to write back with the same assiduity as her relatives and friends in America did. In fact, she could only get a reply written by his secretary instead of a real personal response. Despite this reserved forecast, not only had the duke written back directly, but he had also done it in the most amiable terms and in his own handwriting:

August 25th, 1925 Arundel Park, Cheshire

Dearest Girl,

You should not worry about addressing this old man with the right protocol. I would like to think that if you write to me, you do it as my daughter and soon mother of my grandchild. So, I do not feel offended by your omission of some tiresome formalities that are unfamiliar to you. On the contrary, I find your manner of address both respectful and fresh. Please, feel free to keep our correspondence in the way you feel most comfortable.

I was pleased to know that you approve of Dr. Monroe. My own physician recommended him as a man of both skill and integrity. I would not have less than that for one of my own family. Since you possess more medical knowledge than I will ever have, I trust that you can be a better judge of Monroe's work. If you feel at ease with him, I can only congratulate myself on having been the means of your finding him.

It also pleases me greatly that you enjoyed your time in Carmelhilll so much. Through the years, I have considered selling that property on

more than one occasion. However, something always got in the way, and I kept putting off listing the place. Now that I know that the property is so dear to you, I am happy that my plans were thwarted.

It should also go without saying that I feel glad that you replied to my letter so warmly. I would like to keep this channel of communication open with you and be informed of your health as well as that of my son and grandchild.

Being the perceptive person that I know you are, you surely have noticed that my relationship with my son is still at a delicate stage. I am aware that the many mistakes I've made cannot be erased overnight with just a few interviews and letters. So, it is obvious that my goal of repairing our deteriorated bond will require a great deal of effort and patience. In this endeavor, that I assure you is in my son's best interest, I would like to count with your assistance. If I were as arrogant and blind as I was in the past, I would perhaps hesitate to request guidance from someone who is so much younger than I am. However, life has taught me a few bitter lessons to understand that wisdom is not the exclusive lot of the elders, and it is certainly often a stranger to the powerful. On the other hand, as a man, I can easily see that my son's heart is in your hands. Moreover, while I find Terrence hard to read in many ways, it is clear to me that you are privy to his most inner thoughts. Therefore, I would like to appeal to you for advice in my dealings with him.

That being said, I would like to give you carte-blanche for you to offer me your opinion on the following: Bo you think it would be wise for me to visit you sometime in September? Although last time you two came to London, Terrence and I spoke vaguely of such a visit, he has not issued an invitation so far, and I would not like to impose. Until I receive a response from you on this subject, I will not press the case before my son.

Richard Grandchester

With such a reply coming from His Grace, Candy, who was already more than predisposed to foster familiar harmony, began one more of her conciliatory campaigns. It was by her suggestion that Terrence finally issued an invitation for his father, and it was under her influence that the duke had surprised his son by accepting a visit to a place so beneath his station. That Richard Grandchester had condescended to dwell for three nights under a Middle-Class roof, without his French cook was already astonishing. That he had disdained the company of his peers in the middle of the hunting season, preferring the company of his wayward son, was beyond Terrence's wildest dreams. Perhaps for this reason, the young man had relaxed a little bit more and even managed to enjoy his time with his father. Even more so, by the end of Lord N***'s visit, Terrence had confessed to his wife that he was not opposed to repeating the experience some time in the future. Candy was obviously delighted with the results.

However, even when a great deal had been accomplished, Candy knew that many edges were still left to smooth, and many new bridges had to be erected before the filial bond could be fully repaired. In fact, the impeding birth of her first child could be the occasion for the building of a new bridge. Ironically, it could also be a cause for reopening old wounds. Candy was not so naïve to ignore that the child represented a great deal of things for the duke, the least important of which was the succession of the Dukedom. And that was not a small thing. Yes, Richard Grandchester was naturally eager to see a new heir of his line coming to the world, but that was just the surface. At a deeper level, Candy understood that the child could signify a new hope, a new opportunity to finally become something close to a father, and perhaps succeed where he had previously failed so shamefully. For that purpose, the gender of the child was irrelevant, and the succession inconsequential.

As good as Lord N***'s intentions towards his grandchild could be, Candy had observed that her husband was especially reserved on that score. At such a juncture, the child could bring him closer to his father, or represent the beginning of a new duel of wills between the two of them. The last thing Candy wanted for her family was that. Therefore, she openly addressed the subject with her father-in-law through a letter that was especially difficult to craft. She might not be much of a writer, in the most technical or artistic sense of the term, but she put her heart at the service of her pen in the following way:

Stratford-upon-Avon

October 3rd, 1925

Dear Sir,

I am really glad to know that your journey back to Arundel Park was pleasant and uneventful. I must thank you, again, for your visit. I know that you had to deprive yourself of some of your usual comforts during your stay, but I believe the sacrifice was not in vain. I assure you that a certain person you and I care about a great deal was really pleased with your company.

Our life here in Stratford continues at its usual pace. Terry's work in preparation for his new tour has intensified, and the baby keeps growing at great speed, but not as fast as I would like it. In fact, it is regarding this child that I would like to talk about in this letter.

I am aware, sir, that you are happy with the prospect of a grandchild. As the mother of the baby, of course, I am honored by your sincere regard for my child. However, perhaps you noticed that Terry seemed rather uncomfortable every time you brought up the topic of the child to your conversations with him. I must admit that at the beginning his attitude puzzled me a great deal. Terry is a naturally reserved man, and often, in his desire to protect me, keeps his worries to himself. Therefore, noticing his awkward behavior, I put myself to observe him more carefully, paying attention to the possible hidden meanings in his unfinished sentences and in his silence. Gathering hints from here and there, I think I have been able to decipher by now the cause of his discomfort. I believe my husband is afraid that in your enthusiasm for having a new heir in the family, you could, in the future, attempt to override his right to raise the child in the way that he dims best. I know well that you have no such intentions, but Terry tends to suspect the worst from others, often without evidence.

Furthermore, as a father yourself, you surely understand that this child means the world to Terry. I suppose that he is afraid of being torn between his love for the child and his growing fondness for you. I also imagine that the prospect of having to battle with you is not appealing to him,

especially now that he has realized that he could have a friend in you. As much as I would like to reassure Terry on this subject, I am afraid that he may take my words as mere wishful thinking. On occasions, he has playfully teased me for what he calls "my stubborn tendency to attribute kindness and good will where there is none". It is only you, sir, who can relieve him from this preoccupation. For this reason, I entreat you to talk to him on this subject as soon as you have the chance to see him again.

Finally, regarding your request to be informed as soon as I feel that my time has come, I promise you I will make sure to contact you even before I leave for the hospital. I appreciate your interest in being with me at such a time. However, I am afraid that if you choose to come to Stratford for the occasion, you will find out that I will have an additional guest staying with me during those days. You see, sir, even though Terrence will not be in Stratford for the birth of the child, I will not be all alone. Ms. Baker will be with me from the beginning of November. She has leased a house near ours, but she will be spending a great deal of time in our home, especially while Terry is touring. This, of course, does not mean that I would not welcome your visit, but I will leave the decision of what is best to do in this case to your discretion. Apart from that, I am thrilled with the prospect of having the two grandparents of my child by my side at the time of this birth. Being an orphan, I won't be able to contribute with a set of grandparents for my children. My adoptive father will be more like an uncle, as he is like an older brother to me. For that reason, it is a comfort to know that the baby will at least enjoy the presence of the only set of grandparents that he or she will ever have.

Looking forward to hearing from you I remain as always,

Yours faithfully,

Candice W. Grandchester

Candy had been rather uncertain of His Grace's response on more than one level. She knew that her letter had been full of news and challenges for the still proud man. Would he take her hint and reassure his son by promising not to interfere in his grandchildren's education? Would he reconsider his initial idea of visiting Stratford knowing that Eleanor Baker would be present?

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Justin McNichols was going over his checking list for the third time. He would glide his thick index over the items in the list, whilst his dark olive eyes looked at the boxes right in front of him. He had always been punctilious in his trade, and today, more than ever before, he did not want to make a mistake. His new employer had a reputation for being fastidious and Justin was determined to show him that he was up to his high standards. McNichols was not a rooky, and yet, he felt pretty much like a novice this time. After all, working for a man such as his new boss was not the kind of gig that one gets every other day. When Justin had first applied for the job, he had already heard a great deal about the man's talent. Yet, it was only after he had got the position, when Justin discovered the outgoing rumor about his boss being related to a peer of England.

A man of experience, McNichols had first paid no heed to what he thought was only idle gossip. Something that was not scarce in a small town such as Stratford. However, he had been but a month in his employer's service, when Justin had seen a luxurious Rolls-Royce with a family crest parked at his employer's door. Justin was not a connoisseur of English Heraldry, but he knew enough to understand that the symbols in the car announced the presence of an aristocrat of the highest rank. However, once inside the house, Justin had not seen the distinguished visitor; whoever that might have been. Instead, the housekeeper had hurriedly conducted McNichols right to the studio, where he had been told to wait until his boss joined him. A couple of hours after, when his conference with his employer was over, the automobile was already gone. Needless to say, that evidence had been enough for Justin to start thinking that there was more to his employer than met the eye. Therefore, the secretary believed that there were good reasons to be overzealous in his preparation, for he could be serving a man close to the peerage. In fact, he was so absorbed in these considerations that did not hear the light steps that announced the presence of a second person coming into the foyer.

"Mr. McNichols," said a female voice right behind him, "I believe you should include this in the bag you're going to take with you in the train."

Startled, the man turned his head, crowned with a sandy patch of neatly cropped straight bangs, to see the woman who had called him. Next to him, a young blonde dressed in a teal loose maternity dress was holding a box of Darjeeling tea.

"It's a box of my husband ´s favorite tea blend," explained the young woman, seeing that the man was not registering her meaning, "he usually dislikes the tea they serve in the trains; so, you will be in his good graces if you take this with you. . . and remember, always lemon, not cream," concluded the woman with a smile.

"Goodness, thank you, Mrs. Graham," replied Justin, "I truly appreciate your help, madam."

"Not at all, Mr. McNichols," said the young wife, "I wish I could do more to ease your load, but as you can see, my condition will not allow me to travel with him this time, I'm afraid," she elaborated, as she rested her right hand on top her belly, which showed a rather advanced pregnancy.

"You should not worry for your husband, madam," replied the man with a shy smile, "I'll do my best to take care of him. I'm only sorry that we will be away when you are so close to your time."

"Oh well," responded Mrs. Graham rolling her eyes playfully, "as much as I wish that my husband could be with me for the birth of our child, I have dismissed such a scheme since we knew the schedule of this tour. But do not worry on my account, Mr. McNichols, you see, uh. . . a friend of the family, Miss Baker, will be arriving tomorrow, to stay with me when the time comes, and I'll always have Mrs. Leveridge with me as well," she concluded, referring to her new housekeeper.

"I'm certain you'll be in capable hands, yet I wish I could be of more help," the man said sincerely. There was something in that petite young woman that inspired him sympathy and trust, although he had known her but for a few weeks.

"Oh, but there is something you can do to help," said Mrs. Graham with a spark in her light green eyes, and for a moment McNichols thought that there was something like mischief in her expression.

"Tell me, madam."

"Well, you see, Mr. McNichols," began the young woman lowering her head, as if about to pass a confidence, "my husband has been trying to quit smoking for the past months, and so far, he has been successful, but I'm afraid that the stress of the tour, and his being away when I am about to give birth, may be conducive to his feeling weaker, you know. After all, they say old habits die hard."

"And you want me to take care that he is not provided with occasions to fall into the habit once again, isn't it?" asked McNichols.

"I see that we understand each other pretty, well, Mr. McNichols," responded Mrs. Graham with a smile that showed her dimples, "I'm certain we'll make a wonderful team, you and I."

"I'll be honored, madam," replied Justin, happy to be regarded as an ally.

The front door then opened wide, and the decided steps of the very man who had been occupying McNichols' thoughts entered the room. The young wife turned her head and right in front of the new secretary, her face lit up when her eyes met Terrence's.

"There you are, Terry," she said affectionately, and Justin noticed how his employer's countenance also changed in his wife's presence; although he couldn't exactly say where the difference lay, "Mr. McNichols is here to make sure that your entire luggage is properly packed, but before he's finished, I need you to go over the suits I have selected for you. I have them all in the bedroom, could you please go with me to check if everything is all right?" the woman asked.

"Well, I came here hoping for something like lunch, but if the *general* says that I need to see the suits first," Graham responded with twisted pout on his lips, "I'm afraid that I must obey, mustn't I, McNichols?"

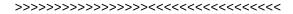
"Oh, sir, it wasn't intended as an order," responded the secretary alarmed by his boss' remark.

"Good Lord, McNichols, who said you're ordering me around? In this house the only *general* is Mrs. Graham, of course. Heavens protect us from disobeying!" concluded Terrence with a swift half grin, which was followed by his wife's giggles.

"Oh, Mr. McNichols, you still have to learn how to deal with my husband's sense of humor, but do not worry, I took a long time to get used to it as well. Now if you excuse us," the young woman added, as she took Terrence's arm to lead him upstairs.

"Surely madam, sir," answered Justin, making a mental note to remember that his boss was strangely prone to teasing when in his wife's company.

The young couple soon disappeared from the man's sight, and he went back to his task, taking care of packing the tea box, jotting down the tea blend and the brand name for future reference.



A pair of feminine feet in a black leather pump stepped vigorously on the dark-expresso hardwood floor. Terrence's toe-cap Oxfords followed suit. Next to a wax walnut vanity table, stood a clothes rack with a dozen bespoken suits and a couple of overcoats. The young woman walked straight to the rack, decided to conclude her mission as soon as possible.

"Please, check if this selection is to your liking. I estimated you would prefer to stick to dark shades, since we're practically in winter. What do you think?" said Candy in almost a business-like manner, while her fingers caressed the jackets' fabrics.

Terrence smiled inwardly. Although he had travelled the world for over eight years, managing on his own pretty well, his sense of independence was not offended when his wife took over the preparations or his tour. On the contrary, he had to admit that he was not impervious to the charm of being spoiled to the core by his loving wife.

"Terry!" she called him again, seeing that he didn't reply to her question, "Are you paying attention?"

"Of course, but I don't see what is there for me to say, madam Freckles. It seems you have already figured out what needs to be packed," he said jokingly, while standing right behind Candy's frame, "I'm sure I can trust in your good taste."

"Can you be serious?" she insisted, doing her best to refrain from laughing. He had begun toying with her blond ringlets, just on the spot of her neck where she was most ticklish. "I also included a dinner jacket, just in case any semi-formal commitment arises, and a dress coat for the London dinner," she went on, doing her best to ignore his fondling.

"My little monkey seems to forget that I don't intend to attend that insipid dinner," Terrence retorted, still in a playful mode.

"Terry, you know very well you cannot do that!" Candy scolded him, trying to turn towards him to look him in the eye. However, as he had already gathered his arms around her belly, reducing her mobility, she resigned herself to assessing his irk expression on the swing mirror over her vanity.

"If you're not going with me, I don't think I'll be able to survive the first five minutes of that dreadful party!" he said sheepishly.

"My love, I wish I could go with you, but . . . "

"I know, I know," he interjected, muffling his voice on the top of her head, "I should not be going away on this tour, in the first place. You and the child need me here."

Candy's mouth tweaked in a sad smile, but regaining composure in a second, the young woman continued:

"Terry, we have gone over this before. This is your first tour with The New Shakespeare Company as a regular; you simply cannot miss this Season. If something bad happened . . ."

"I would never forgive myself for it," he interrupted her, his voice getting a tone or two below his normal pitch.

"I was going to say that if any problem comes in the way, your mother will be with me to help me sort things out. Please, Terry, stop fussing about my pregnancy and promise me you'll do your best to face your commitments with the Company. After the Season you can always take some time off and be with us full-time."

The young man knew well that reason assisted his wife, but his heart still resisted to hear it.

"And your commitments include this dinner party," Candy went on. "You understand that the event is being held in honor of the Company and that Mr. Bridges-Adams needs to gather funds for the

Festival³. Don't you?" she asked, finally managing to disentangle herself from Terry's grip, to see him right in the eye.

"I hate it when you're right, Freckles," he sighed in annoyance, "but the mere thought of seeing the Earl of C*** makes me loath to oblige William."

"Goodness gracious, Terry, surely the man is not such a bore as you depict him."

"Even worse! He is one of my father's best and oldest friends. They met in their youth, while they were at Trinity College⁴. He saw me many times during my childhood and adolescence. I'm sure he will recognize me at first glance... and after that, there will be no end to the rumors. Tabloids gossip is already bad enough as it is right now."

"Rumors?" She chuckled while raising her eyebrows, "This time you must accept that there's a lot of truth in those so-called rumors, Terry. This is England! You cannot live here, be in friendly terms with your father, and still expect that people ignore who you are."

Terrence did not respond to his wife's argument. He only gave a little grimace of disgust, while falling heavily on the Maurice Dufrene's chaise lounge near the fireplace. The young woman moved to the back of the chaise, softly placing one hand on the man's left shoulder, while using the other to caress his hair.

"I like to think that I'm just a self-made man, Freckles," he still resisted.

"And you are, my love, but you're also your father's son. Even if the world ignored it, you'd still be Richard Grandchester's child and everything that is attached to it. Denying it will only hurt your father, and you know it. I don't think you want to do that."

"I suppose I don't," Terrence conceded, gradually giving in to the slow massage that his wife was applying on his temples.

"Which also reminds me . . ." Candy added. "You know, as soon as your mother gets here tomorrow, I will have to discuss with her about her irrational insistence in hiding who she is to you."

This was Terrence's turn to nod his head in disapproval of Candy's plans.

"That is something I would like to witness, Mrs. Busybody. I have already had that conversation with the lady more than once. I even proposed her to give a press conference to reveal the whole issue in a proper way once and for all, but she always opposed to the idea."

"I'm not talking about going public in a press conference, Terry. "This is not New York, after all," Candy said with a smile, "I'm only concerned about our baby. I don't want our children having to

³The Stratford-on-Avon Festival that William Bridges-Adams directed for over one decade. It represented the main activity of the Company extending over two seasons, one in Spring and one in Fall.

⁴ One of schools of the University of Cambridge.

hide who their grandmother is in front of their friends or the people who are part of our intimate circle. Children should never be burdened with family secrets."

"You do have a point, madam, but I still believe this will be a bone hard to pick with Ms. Baker. I wish you well . . . Now, don't you think luncheon is overdue?" he added, raising his left eyebrow.

"Not until you promise me that you will attend Lord C***'s dinner party and be civil with him for your boss' sake."

"By George, Freckles, you're a manipulative little witch!" He frowned, half diverted, half frustrated by her unwillingness to drop the subject.

"As if you didn't know that before you married me, my dear Lord A***," she said mockingly moving as swiftly as possible to dodge the bolster cushion that her husband threw at her. Whenever she called him by his courtesy title, Terrence knew that he had to stop resisting, or else she would keep on annoying him to no end.

"All right," he surrendered, "you can tell McNichols to pack the white tie!"

"Good! Will some cheese and pickle sandwiches with chicken salad do for you?"

"Now you're talking."

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The house, which would eventually be known as Graham's Cottage, was a typical three storied English Tudor home with steeply pitched maroon gables. The façade was half-timbered and stuccoed on the second floor, while the ground level and the front porch were covered with brick. There was a bay of windows with diamond-shaped leaded glass on the right wing of the house, making contrast with the more modern casement windows featured in the rest of the rooms. Two attic windows at each side of the red-brick roof and a clustered chimney stack in the left wing gave the final renaissance look to the composition.

The cottage was located northeast of Bridge Foot, on Tiddington Road, and the backyard, which was really large, had a view to the riverside. More recent owners had added a garage on the right side of the property but had paid little attention to the landscaping.

The stone-framed front door gave way to a foyer flanked by the dining room on the right and a small library on the left. A wooden staircase led to the bedrooms on the second floor, while the gallery conducted to the grand room. A small sitting room was on the left of the main living area, and the kitchen was on the right, connecting to the dining room and a breakfast sunroom by small corridors. On the ground level, the walls were partially covered with stone and stucco, all framed by well-polished hardwood floors.

When the Grandchesters had first settled in the place, the house was decorated in the colonial style, with pastel-colored wallpaper in the bedrooms and maple furniture. However, as soon as the new dwellers had time to turn the house into their home, a mixture of Tudor antiques and Art Deco accents replaced the less sophisticated pieces that the landlord had provided. The walls in the second level were freed from the flowery wallpaper, allowing the wood panels and tanned stucco to shine in their own right.

When Eleanor Baker arrived in Stratford in the first week of November, she found that some of these changes were in the making. The master bedroom had already been remodeled and the carpenters were working on the final touches in the nursery. Candice thought that there was still plenty of time to finish each detail of the nursery's decoration with the help of her mother-in-law. Concurrently, the grandmother-to-be was glad to join Mrs. Graham in the happy preparations.

Both women had leisurely sat around a cup of tea to discuss the nursery decor during the third evening of Eleanor's visit. It was then, while casually talking about the fashionable colors for the baby's room that Candy had unexpectedly addressed a most delicate issue:

"Eleanor, I'm afraid there is something I would like to discuss with you that is more important than choosing Nile green or soft peach," the young woman suddenly said, reaching for her mother in law's hand.

"And what would that be, my girl?"

Candy lowered her eyes, still unsecure of how Terrence's mother would receive her words.

"Perhaps I'm troubling myself with things that may not be of immediate concern now . . . but still, I can't help it," Candy began. Eleanor understood then that her daughter was about to disclose a serious matter. So, she instinctively set aside the color catalogue she had been browsing.

"I know that you have always insisted on keeping your relationship with Terry in secret," Candy finally began, "...and I respect that ..."

"But?" cued Eleanor now suddenly preoccupied by the direction the conversation had taken.

"I'm worried about how we are going to handle your relationship with the baby, Eleanor. I want to honor your desires, but I wouldn't like to lie to this child when he or she starts asking questions . . . I . . . "

Eleanor sighed heavily when she realized what exactly Candy was trying to say. In a reflex movement, the woman began to play with her dark burgundy sleeve cuffs.

"I understand what you mean, Candy," Eleanor finally replied with her expression turning thoughtful, "I gave some thought to the matter during my trip, but . . . to be honest with you . . . I have not yet decided what is best to do."

"Isn't telling the truth the best option, Eleanor?" Candy blurted in her usual frank manner, "This child ought to know who you are . . . I mean, Terry's children should have the right to address you without having to hide their connection with you from the rest of the world. Dn't you agree? Terry thinks that you resist to the fact because you still feel too young to fit in the role of a granny, but I am sure that you are not as vane as that."

Eleanor nodded; a sad smile appearing on her lips.

"I wish that only my vanity was at stake, Candy, but I have other reasons, reasons that are not only mine to disclose."

Candy paused a second, wondering what exactly Eleanor was referring to. Nevertheless, respecting Eleanor's silence, she hurried to add:

"And I won't force you into a confidence that you are not ready to make, Eleanor, but it wouldn't be fair for this baby to see you just as a family friend, or, even worse, to burden the child with the weight of a family secret. You know well how such a thing hurt Terry when he was little."

"And what exactly do you suggest?" asked Eleanor suddenly horrified by Candy's allusion to Terry's troubled childhood.

"I don't know exactly," Candy hesitated, "I had thought... that perhaps... we could take one worry at a time... I mean, let's begin by letting the baby know you as his or her grandmother from the start. Of course, that would imply that we will have to trust in our housekeeper but I think she is a discrete lady."

"And then what, Candy? When this child and any other you and Terry can have in the future get old enough to go to school? What will they say about their family to their friends and teachers?"

"They will tell them that their mother is an orphan who was adopted by an honest man, and their father is the son of a talented and independent woman. I will teach them to see those facts with pride, no matter what others may think."

"Dear Candy," Eleanor feebly replied, lowering her eyelids, "You know children can be cruel, don't you?"

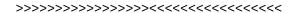
Candy's lips pursed into a knowing smile.

"I had my good share of cruelty from snobbish tongues at school, Eleanor. Surely, I, like any mother, will try to protect my children as much as I can . . . yet I know well it is impossible to shield them from all sorts of dangers and pain. Instead of that, I'll give them enough love at home, so they don't really care about the attacks of prejudiced minds when they come," Candy spoke with such vehement tone that made Eleanor's heart skip a beat.

"Oh Candy! It doesn't cease to amaze me how well suited you are for my son! . . . I see your point, but again, the decision is not entirely mine. But I can promise you right now that I will consider

things carefully. Of course, I will first have to consult with . . . people . . . those that may be affected by my coming out openly as Terry's mother. Then, I will let you know what it is to be done in the child's best interest. Is that all right to you?"

"Thank you, Eleanor!" Candy responded by kissing Eleanor on the cheek.



Some people say first pregnancies last longer. Candy did know that this was not always the case, but based on her experience as a nurse, she estimated that the happy event could happen somewhere around the first week of December. Such timing had been particularly unfortunate since The New Company had planned a series of presentations in London and other important cities from November to January.

It goes without saying that the young couple was reluctant to be separated on such a momentous occasion. Sadly, the commitment could not be avoided. So, perforce, Terrence would be leaving the following week as planned. As the day of his departure approached, sleep began to evade him during the wee hours of the night. Such restlessness did not come as a surprise to him. To the natural frustration caused by the impending parting, the young man had recently added the uneasiness of several days of sexual abstinence. He was fully aware that he and his wife had been especially blessed with a healthy pregnancy, which had allowed them to prolong intimacies well advanced in the gestation. Nevertheless, the previous week the mother-to-be had felt a little bit under the weather, since her body was getting heavier and over-sensitive. Thus, they both had decided that it was best to wait until Candy had recovered from giving birth. Of course, Terrence was not one to shy away from making a sacrifice for his wife's sake, but it did not follow that it was easy for him, especially with the prospect of an extended separation.

It was a little bit after 1 am. when the young man, who had been struggling with a recurrent nightmare once again, left the bed to rekindle the fire in the hearth. Crouching in front of the chimney, as he poked the fire, he wondered how come his war-time memories had managed to resurface in the recent weeks, hunting him in dreams once again. He had thought the distant sound of shell blasts and blurred images of that awful fire were all forgotten. After all, it had been almost seven years since . . . Perhaps his current anxiety and concerns about his wife and child were triggering the dreams, he mused:

"Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased, pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow, raze out the written troubles of the brain⁵", he recited to himself in a whisper.

In an effort to fight his somber thoughts, he closed his eyes to conjure the healing powers of his more recent and much more pleasant memories. As he did that, in his imagination, he flew back to

⁵ A quote from Macbeth in which the protagonist begs his doctor to give his wife, the queen, some relief from her mental torments.

the warm memories of the previous summer. He stayed in that dreamy state for some time until he heard Candy's voice calling him.

"Terry," Candy's hushed voice called him in the darkness.

"I'm coming, Freckles, I was just stirring the fire," he responded, guessing his wife was calling him to get back into bed.

He then stood up from his place at the hearth, and slowly walked towards the large four-posted bed they shared. To his surprise, his wife was sitting at the side of the bed, her face suddenly pale.

"Are you all right, Candy?" he asked, worried.

"Well, Terry . . . I think . . . I think it's time," she replied with a soft pant.

"What are you talking about?" the young man inquired, his mind unable to register Candy's meaning.

"I believe the baby is coming tonight, Terry."

The blood drained from Terrence's face immediately.

"But it is not time yet! Are . . . are you sure of this?"

"I've been having contractions since earlier this evening, Terry...," she paused as if having difficulty to talk, "I...I thought it was a false alarm...but...I've been monitoring the contractions ever since, and they are becoming more and more frequent. I have no doubt now that this child is coming very soon!"

Terrence had heard stories about premature babies and the slight chances they had of surviving. His heart came to a halt at the thought. He knew he had to keep his composure now that Candy needed him, but too many emotions began to pile in his chest, threatening to explode any time. So, despite his being aware that he had to move fast, his mind and body were paralyzed.

"Terry!" Candy screamed, feeling a new contraction, stronger and more painful than the prior ones, "call your mother and get the car!"

He then stood up, and nervously began to dress as fast as he could.

"Don't . . . don't worry, Candy . . . we're going to get through this . . . we're going to have this baby . . . and everything is going to be all right," he mumbled unconvinced, as his fingers struggled to button his shirt up.

"Terry . . . please . . . ," his wife responded with almost an angry tone. "It is I who is having the pain; I am who is having this baby . . . now get your mother, PLEASE!"

Sprung by his wife's scream, Terrence suddenly recovered control over his body movement, grabbed his overcoat and came out of the bedroom. When Candy found herself alone, her eyes darted to the

right end of the room. She needed to get dressed too, but the distance from the bed to the closet seemed too large in her present state. She feared that her water would break any time if she strained herself. So, she decided to remain seated until her mother-in-law arrived. Then, reminding herself of the many times she had assisted women in labor, she started to take her own advice and concentrated in her breathing.

As her mind focused on the movement of her lungs pumping air in and out her body, her excited state began to subside. The last contraction had been hard, but according to her calculation she would have at least ten minutes of rest before a new one came.

A bit more focused, the young woman suddenly remembered there was something that she needed to do before going to the hospital. She looked at her dressing table, where she had kept her old wooden box with all her correspondence and clippings. Right on top of her most recent letters, there was one that was calling her to act, and to do it fast. With the swift speed at which memories and thoughts can travel in one's mind, Candy revisited the events of the last few months that related to her father-in-law.

The young woman suspected that her words, no matter how she had tried to choose them carefully, might have made an impact on the gentleman, because it took him more than usual to reply, but replied he had by the end of two weeks. Surprisingly, not only he had responded with the promise of talking to Terrence as Candy had suggested, but also confirmed his desire to be in Stratford for the birth of his grandchild. However, of course, he had kindly declined Candy's invitation to stay at her home again, for *it might be more comfortable* for Candy and *her guest* to have the house just to themselves. He would only stay during the day to make sure his daughter-in-law was all right, meet the child, and travel to London in the evening. That was more than enough for Candy to feel grateful.

In fact, Candy could do nothing but revel in the little victory she had won. Nevertheless, now that she knew that the baby was on the way to this world, she wanted to keep her promise to the duke and call him before leaving for the hospital. Unfortunately, her desk seemed so far away from the bed where she was sitting. If she wanted to make that call, she needed to get His Grace's last letter from her wooden box. He had sent her a series of phone numbers in which she could contact him at any time. Why on Earth hadn't she minded learning by heart any of those numbers? Could she walk towards the vanity table? She raised her hand to search for the support of the bed's solid headboard with the intention of getting up.

"Don't you dare to get up alone, young lady," said the sweet but firm voice of her mother-in-law entering the bedroom at that very instant, "I'll help you to get dressed and grab your overnight bag for you."

"Eleanor!" said Candy, startled, "I was uh, I needed . . . this is . . . where's Terry?" mumbled the young woman wondering how she was ever going to call the duke if Terrence was around.

"Don't you worry, Candy, Terry went to start the car and get it out of the garage for us. He'll be here in no time to take you downstairs," responded Eleanor taking the anxiety reflected in Candy's face as a natural consequence of her being about to give birth.

"Oh well," Candy interjected, uncertain if she should reveal her plans to her mother-in-law, "I wanted to uh... get something from my dressing table," she finally said.

"Can I get it for you? What is it?"

"A letter, inside that wooden box . . . it should be right on top of the pile."

With fast reflexes, Eleanor moved towards Candy's vanity table. The said box, which was rather old, and a bit worn down, rested on top of the vanity. Eleanor opened the lid, and her eyes almost went out of their orbs when they saw the letter Candy was referring to. The envelope had been sealed with a family crest that she knew very well.

"This is . . . a letter from Richard!" Eleanor blurted, giving away her surprise, but after the initial shock had passed, she managed to recover her usual composure within a second. "I . . . I didn't know you maintain correspondence with him!" She added in a more collected tone handing the infamous letter to Candy.

"Uh, yes, just recently . . . I just want to call him, to let him know that the baby is coming," Candy explained.

"At this time! But it's past midnight, Candy!"

"I know, Eleanor, but if I don't do it now, I doubt Terry will take care of that . . . and the duke was very interested in being here for the birth, you see . . . I promised him I would let him . . . "

Candy couldn't finish the sentence. Her knuckles went white as she tightened her grip on one of the bed's posts. Although the young woman did not scream, just by looking at her frowning brows, Eleanor understood that Candy was having a new contraction.

"Goodness, girl! Breath in . . . come on . . . breath out now . . . Terry's coming in a second or two," the older woman said in a soothing tone as she held Candy in her arms, sitting with her at the edge of the bed. The young blonde concentrated again in her breathing and after a couple of minutes that seemed like hours, the pain began to subside, "Are you Ok now?" Eleanor inquired.

"It's passing."

"How often are you having the contractions?"

"Often enough, Eleanor, the baby will be arriving at some point this day, I'm sure . . . but I must call," insisted Candy taking the letter from Eleanor's hand.

Eleanor observed quietly as Candy dialed the numbers. Internally, she wondered what the duchess would think if she found out that her husband was receiving a call from an unknown woman during

the wee hours of the morning. A thousand questions piled in her head in a confusing tangle. After a few seconds of tension, her feminine nature won over her dignity, and she dared to ask.

"Where is Richard now? At Arundel Park?" Eleanor said, unable to hold her curiosity.

"No, he's in Town," replied Candy while waiting on the line. "He said that he had some business to deal with these days and he also wanted to see Terry, since he's going to be in London this week, you see. I'm calling at his secretary's home first."

Nobody answered the phone on the other side of the line, although Candy tried three times.

"Nobody is picking up the phone in Mr. Perkins' home. . . I'll try another number, then. . . . Ouch!" Candy instinctively took her free hand to her belly. It seemed that another contraction was on the way.

"Candy, let me help you get ready to go to the hospital first, sweetheart. We'll do this really quick. Where's your overnight bag?" Eleanor proposed, seeing the need to speed things up.

"In that closet, but I haven't finished packing . . . I was not expecting the baby so soon," explained Candy, while Eleanor was on her way to the closet. "You can grab the first dress you find . . . and my coat," suggested the young woman while dialing a different number this time, but with the same bad luck, "Goodness, nobody is taking the call downstairs in N*** House. Mr. Daniels must be a heavy sleeper," Candy muttered while biting her lower lip.

Eleanor came back with the necessary garments. With expert hands, she helped her daughter in law to dispose of her night gown and get dressed. While they were still at that, they both could hear Terrence's decisive steps climbing the stairs.

"Eleanor...Terry's coming" Candy began trying to think as quickly as she could, "... Eleanor, I know this may be too much to ask, but... could you stay behind to call his father?"

Candy could not see Eleanor's countenance because she was right behind her, helping her to put on her overcoat. If she had been facing Terrence's mother, she could have noticed how all the colors drained from the actress' cheeks in a second.

"This last number in the list is the one in his chambers," whispered Candy handing the paper to her mother-in-law, "We can tell Terry that you'll stay behind to prepare the overnight bag, which, by the way, I would also appreciate if you finished packing for me."

"Are you ready?" Terrence's voice erupted in the room at that moment.

"Sure, Candy. I'll take care of that," responded Eleanor without looking at her son, while she swiftly tugged the letter in the pocket of her nigh robe."

"Thank you!" said Candy to her mother-in-law and then turned to her husband, "I'm ready Terry, but your mother will stay here to prepare my overnight bag. Could you come to pick her up later?"

"Of course! Now, do you think you can walk down the stairs?" Terrence asked doubtfully.

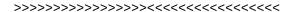
"I think it's best if you carry her. She could break her water if she makes that effort," suggested Eleanor feeling that the letter burned inside her pocket.

Candy was going to protest, but before she could say anything to object, Terrence was already lifting her in his arms. Looking at her annoyed expression, the young man, who had had time to cool his nerves down in the previous minutes, cast his wife a playful look.

"You see Freckles? This is when having a *mini-wife* comes handy. You're not that heavy, even if you are about to burst," he teased her with a wink.

"Very funny!" Candy said to him with a faked offended pout, but then, remembering about the duke, she turned to see her mother-in-law again, ". . . Eleanor!"

"Don't worry, Candy . . . "I'll take care of . . . your bag," was the last thing Eleanor said before Candice and Terrence came out of the bedroom in the direction of the stairs.



Eleanor Baker was a worldly and sophisticated woman of nine and forty years of age; nevertheless, when her son and wife left her alone in the bedroom, she felt as though time had turned back by some sort of magic art. All of a sudden, she felt reduced to the nineteen-year-old Eleanor Le Breton, who did not know what to do with her emotions. How and when had this happened? . . . She could hardly understand.

With faltering steps, the woman walked towards the bed and sat down for a while, trying to digest the surrealistic situation in which she now found herself. With her blue eyes lost at some imaginary point in the void, Eleanor's lips pursed into a sad smile. Coming from one of the recesses of her mind, a line from a well-known play echoed in her ears as clearly as the violent pounds of her heart.

"In this world there are only two tragedies," she recited aloud, "One is not getting what one wants, and the other is getting it. The last is much the worst; the last is a real tragedy!" ⁶

Eleanor's uttered a soft chuckle, feeling the utmost truth of Wilde's witty line. For all the years in which her son had remained as Susannah's fiancé, Eleanor had hoped against hope that something would thwart Terrence's intentions to marry Marlowe. Then, as a blow of poetic justice, the young woman had died, leaving Terrence free to search for true love right in the place his heart had chosen. It goes without saying that Eleanor had been beyond herself when her son had finally married Candice, and her delight had reached even higher levels when they had announced to her that she

⁶ From Lady Windermere's Fan by Oscar Wilde

was with a child. Perhaps having a grandchild at an age when she still felt herself attractive would have hurt her pride if she had been a little bit vainer, but that type of vanity was not her weakness. On the contrary, she had been happier than a lark! Without even a second thought, she had cancelled all her professional commitments and rushed to England with her head full of sweet expectations regarding the baby. However, it was precisely this innocent unborn child who was undermining all the certainties she had painfully erected to make sense of her own life.

Eleanor sighed once again. Her hand was now holding the auricular with a tight grip, her resolution hanging from a very fine thread.

"Indeed, Wilde was right," she thought, for even one of the happiest events of her life, the birth of her first grandchild, was throwing her in a twirl of undesired emotions . . . and she suspected that this was only the beginning or a string of similar challenges.

With uncertain fingers she dialed the third number in the list that Candy had given to her. Although Candy had already called the downstairs phone system at Saint James' Square, Eleanor decided to give it a new try. When the phone began ringing at the other side of the line, Eleanor stood still, hoping that an unknown servant would pick up the phone once and for all.

"There's no reason to fret," the actress told herself, while twisting the phone cord nervously, "I just have to leave a message . . . that's all."

Unfortunately, the phone kept ringing for a long while without any reply. Irritated, the woman hung up the auricular, her anxiety mounting even more. She darted her eyes towards the clock on the night table. It was 2 in the morning. Perhaps the servant in charge was too deep in sleep to answer.

Eleanor's blue eyes ran down to the last number on the list. Next to the number, penned in a handwriting Eleanor knew too well, there was a note in brackets that simply said:

(My chambers).

Eleanor rolled her eyes in exasperation. That was the last straw! If someone had told her just the night before that she would be calling Richard Grandchester's private chambers the following evening, she would have taken it as a poor taste joke.

"This is not happening," she told herself, nodding in disbelief.

She had not heard Richard's voice since Terrence was five years of age. The few times they had communicated after their final break-up in Scotland had been only through letters. Even when the duke had been in New York the previous year to see his son, his path had not crossed with hers. Eleanor was glad that it had been so . . . but now she was supposed to dial his number and wake him up at such an hour.

"What if he is not sleeping alone? What if it is *her* who picks up the phone?" At that last thought, she nodded in disbelief. She doubted that Richard and the duchess still sustained marital

relationships when the matter of procreation was not on the table anymore. That, of course, did not mean that the duke's bed was empty all the time. However, whoever was with him was not likely to pick up the phone in his chambers. Wasn't it so? . . . the mere idea was half sickening, half strangely humorous. But, if something so bizarre happened, what was she to do?

Suddenly, Eleanor saw the face of her aunt Gladys, who had a sort of wicked sense of humor, smiling mischievously at her predicament.

"What are you supposed to do, silly girl?" Aunt Gladys seemed to tell her with her bright blue eyes, "You're not a lass anymore, Eleanor, just pick up the phone and deliver the message; it's as simple as that!"

Eleanor cleared a lock of hair that had fallen on her forehead and the image of the long-gone Gladys disappeared from her mind.

"All right," she said to herself, "if *His Grace* has an argument with his current paramour tonight, it'll be all on account of the good news . . . after all, if we didn't care for proprieties twenty-nine years ago . . . we're not going to start being missy now. Are we?"

And with that final thrust of resolve, Eleanor dialed the dreaded number and waited for the ring once . . . twice . . . thrice.

"Umm?" A deep voice mumbled after the typical click of the phone announced that the call had been taken, "Who's this?"

Eleanor took a couple of seconds to gain composure before she could finally reply:

"Richard," she said with a voice that her histrionic powers rendered much more secure than she truly felt, "This is Eleanor."

Two or three seconds of disconcerting silence ensued. At the other side of the line, Richard Grandchester feared that he was having one of his recurrent dreams.

"I'm sorry to disturb you at this ungodly hour, Richard," Eleanor went on, "I'm calling on Terry's behalf, this is, of his wife."

Then reality poured over the duke's still half-asleep head.

"Candy?" he asked.

"Yes, Richard. She is in labor."

Pull by an invisible string; Richard sat on his bed, pushing away the heavy covers.

"In labor? But wasn't she due by the beginning of December?"

"Apparently the baby is coming sooner than expected. Things like this happen, you know," Eleanor replied beginning to sense the man's sudden nervousness.

"By George! This be could dangerous, Ella!" Richard went on raising his voice, unaware that he had used the pet name that once had been his special way of calling his lover.

"Do not distress yourself. She's a sturdy kind of girl despite her small frame. She'll be fine. She asked me to let you know that the child is coming."

"May I speak to Terrence?" requested the duke with a hint of his characteristic authoritarian intonation.

"He's taken Candy to the hospital."

"I see," he responded, his voice now lowering to almost a whisper. All of a sudden, he had realized that he was indeed talking to the mother of his son at 2 am in the morning. Unexpectedly, he felt tongue-tied.

"Well," Eleanor continued, noticing that her interlocutor had gone silent, "I had promised Candy that I would call you . . . and so I did."

"Wait, Ell – Eleanor," Richard managed to say, "Where are you?"

Eleanor was surprised by this abrupt change of subject.

"I'm at Terry's home right now. He will come back to pick me up and take me to the hospital as soon as he can. Why do you ask?"

"Uh, I, I think I'll see you tomorrow then . . . I mean . . . I'll go to Stratford right away. I will be there before breakfast, I believe."

Eleanor scratched her beauty spot in a characteristic gesture. If Richard had been there to see it, he would surely have read its meaning. But miles away as he was, he only felt the silence on the other side of the line.

"All right! Have a good journey then, Richard," Eleanor managed to articulate with the frail remains of self-control she could master.

"Good! . . . urh . . . I appreciate your calling."

After the duke had uttered the last phrase with a rather hesitant voice, Eleanor hurried to hang up. It took her over half an hour to gather her wits and get used to the idea that in a few more hours she and Richard Grandchester would finally meet again.

The trip to the hospital was fast since the town was small and the roads lonely. However, Terrence could hardly remember the details. His mind had just registered Candy's right hand slowly clutching the car upholstery from time to time. He understood she was in pain just by the look of her whitened knuckles and it drove him mad.

Of course, he knew that labor pain was to be taken as a normal thing. Yet it was not until he saw it appear on his wife's face, even if masked by her self-control, that the realization of what a woman has to go through to give birth truly hit his mind. Then, something akin to helplessness started to form within him. Nevertheless, aware that his wife depended on him to get to the hospital, he managed to keep his cool all the way.

Unfortunately for the young man, when they finally arrived in their destination and the nurses had taken Candy away from him, his fears slapped him with full force. He stood motionless in the middle of the corridor, looking at the closed doors that led to the obstetrics ward, as if trapped in a whirl of bad memories. Unable to stop his thoughts, a flood of images of hospital halls, voices of people in pain, and cold nights in the waiting room came back to him from the dark alleys of his past. The seemingly unending chain of days and nights spent next to Susannah's sick bed came back as if conjured by the smell of antiseptic pervading the atmosphere. But this time it had been Candy, his always healthy and cheerful wife, who had been taken in a wheelchair, as if she had been an invalid . . . how could that be?

"Sir?" a female voice called him for the third time.

Terrence finally turned his head to see the nurse that was by his side.

"Yes?" he replied barely acknowledging her presence.

"Could you fill in this form for me?" The woman requested giving him a series of registration papers and a pen, which Terrence absentmindedly took in his hands.

Fighting his feelings to focus on the task, the young man managed to return to the front desk counter and filled in the documents. When he finally turned the papers back to the nurse, she took the time to check if all the information had been properly entered. Instinctively, the nurse frowned when she saw the name he had written on top.

"Grandchester?" she asked the actor whom she had fully recognized since the beginning.

Understanding why the woman was puzzled, Terrence gave her an arch look under his raised eyebrow.

"Graham is only my middle name. Grandchester is the true surname," he explained and immediately turned his back to the woman. Instead of lingering to see her reaction, he started moving away in search of a solitary spot to sort out his agitated thoughts.

It took him just a few seconds to find his way to the hospital's waiting room, where he sat down, in an attempt to regain his sanity. With a tired gesture he rested his head on the wall behind his seat and closed his eyes. Inwardly, he repeated to himself that there was no reason to be so apprehensive.

"She's not ill; she's just having a baby," he silently recited. "There's nothing to fear . . . "

However, no matter how hard he tried to stabilize his mind, a second voice from within reminded him that women also die in labor, especially if the child comes before time. The sole idea sent his heart into a wild race once again. His fingers began to nervously tap the chair's armrest, frustrated at his inability to regain control over his emotions.

"How come she's the one having all the pain, and it's me here fretting in panic?" he told himself, losing his patience with his own fears.

He stood up from his seat and walked in circles along the empty room a few times. Although he was doing his best to avoid the dreaded "What if she . . .", the gloomiest possibilities played over and over in his head. He longed for a cigarette, but knowing well that resorting to nicotine at that moment would only increase the hold of his addiction, he decided against the strategy. So, he simply kept walking in circles for about half an hour, until he remembered that his mother was still waiting for him at his home. Happy to find something useful in which he could employ his time, he took the coat he had left on the nearby chair and walked decidedly towards the exit.

When he returned home, his mother was already waiting in the parlor. A cup of tea was keeping her good company, and she suggested he sit down with her and drink some before going back to the hospital. Terrence looked at his mother as if appalled by her offer.

"Don't look at me that way, Terry," the woman said collectedly, "It is your wife who is busy having the baby, you may as well calm down a bit and get something in that empty stomach of yours. I'm sure Candy would suggest the same if she were here. After all, by the frequency of Candy's contractions, I imagine she might still take some time before we can actually meet the baby."

Seeing that reason was on his mother's side, the young man sat down next to her without saying a word. He let the woman serve him a couple of toasts and a generous amount of the strongest tea, even if he was not really hungry. Strong emotions usually made him lose his appetite, but he understood that this could be the only breakfast he was going to have that day.

As he was drinking, or rather gulping the tea down his throat, he vaguely observed his mother attire. She was wearing a Schiaparelli's dark purple velvet suit with black embroidery on the lapel and cuffs that made a dramatic contrast with her pale hair and blue eyes. Not a crease on her skirt, not a stray hair was there to ruin the perfect harmony of her appearance. "How did she manage to be so composed in such a moment?" Terrence wondered. What is more, it was incredible that in less than two hours she had had time to dress up so meticulously and do her hair as if she were going to

have breakfast with the Queen. But Eleanor Baker had always been a most elegant woman; so, he reasoned that his mother was just being herself, even if it was 3 am in the morning.

"You look really pretty this morning," he ventured a compliment leaving his empty cup aside.

"Thank you. I thought I should be at my best to receive my grandchild," Eleanor explained.

If Terrence had not been seized by his darkest fears at that moment, he would have noticed that apart from her tasteful apparel, his mother was set in her public-persona mode, as if she were ready to give an interview. Of course, he would have found this odd, since they were alone in the room, and they were not expecting any contact with the press at such an ungodly hour. But Terrence was not himself; so, his mother's preparations to enter 'into character' did not render him suspicious. After the frugal meal was over, mother and son headed for the hospital, both silently lost in their own thoughts.



Incapable of saying or doing something that could calm her son, Eleanor had simply decided to ignore Terrence's nervous fret. Even though such an approach had worked well for the first, the second, and even the third hour, her patience reached its limit when the light of the new day entered the waiting room. Unable to concentrate on her book with Terrence's walking up and down the room, she had given him one of those threatening looks that mothers use in extreme situations. Even if Terrence had not been raised by his mother, he knew well how to interpret Eleanor's silent language when required. So, before she could say a word, he offered to get her some tea from the hospital's cafeteria. She did not accept, but he left anyway, on the pretense of getting the tea for himself.

Eleanor watched him leave the room knowing well that he was not going to drink a drop of any tea that would not meet his standards. However, she did appreciate his leaving her alone at least for a moment. Once on her own -for there was no one else in the waiting room that blessed morning-Eleanor shrank her shoulders and re-opened her book. The volume was an anthology of contemporary poetry showcasing a number of newly published authors. Without any other distraction, it was easy for the woman to focus on her reading. About twenty minutes later, Eleanor was already drowning in the flamboyant images penned by a novel poet, William Faulkner, when she suddenly felt a presence more overwhelming than the words on the page. For a second, she stopped breathing. It was like feeling her blood paralyzing within her veins. She immediately knew that it was right there and then that she was going to prove to herself what a good actress she had become. She imperceptibly breathed in, preparing her mind for the performance . . . and then she slowly raised her eyes. When Eleanor finally looked up, she found an older but no less attractive version of a man she once had known. In fact, dressed in a dark wool cashmere suit that she suspected had been cut by his usual tailor in Savile Row, it almost seemed that the man had hardly changed. Yes, even with pepper-and-salt mustache, beard, and sideburns, Richard Grandchester was still able to stop her pulse.

"How do you do, Eleanor?" the deep voice of Lord N*** formally greeted her in his impossibly composed Received Pronunciation.

"Pretty good," she replied with a gracious nod, looking straight to her interlocutor's light gray eyes with a nonchalant air, "considering that I have been up since midnight."

"You look quite fresh for one who did not sleep well, if I may say," rejoined His Grace, taking off his felt Homburg as he nodded too as a matter of greeting. Since the lady did not show intentions of extending her hand, he understood that neither a handshake nor a kiss on her hand was welcomed.

"Thank you," continued Eleanor in the same civil but distant tone. "I'm amazed at how fast you got here. I trust you had a good journey."

"As good as one can have on such occasions . . ." the duke responded as he rested his two hands on the silver handle of his walking cane, "seeing you here, I suppose that there is no news yet."

"You're right," the actress responded, wondering if he was waiting for her to invite him to sit down next to her. He could wait all day long, she thought, for she had no intentions of giving him such courtesy.

"Don't you think it has taken quite a while, by now?" The duke went on, discreetly sweeping with his eyes the elegant figure of his former lover. He thought she looked regal in that dark velvet dress.

"Nothing extraordinary, I suppose. Candy began having pains around eleven last night. That was about eight hours ago; so, I guess we'll be seeing Dr. Monroe very soon."

The duke raised his left brow, while internally assessing the lady's words, and her cold tone.

"You speak quite matter-of-factly. I take that you don't see any chance for complications," he added.

"Not at all! She was a bit ahead of time, but just for a couple of weeks or so. It's nothing a healthy, young woman like her cannot bear."

"Good!" The man exclaimed, wondering if Eleanor would oppose to his company while they both waited for the arrival of the expected news, "And where is Terrence?" he suddenly asked, realizing that his son was not around.

"He should be in the cafeteria, wherever that may be. He's been quite restless."

"That is not surprising. In moments like this a man does not really know what to do of himself."

"Really?" The woman asked a bit amused with the sudden display of masculine solidarity implied in the duke's words. "Perhaps you are more qualified to offer Terry some sort of support right now. I declare myself incapable of dealing with his present foul mood."

"I can see he was getting right under your skin," Lord N*** hinted with a lopsided smile, happy to discover that he was not the only parent to struggle with Terrence's moody ways.

"Tell me about it," Eleanor told him rolling her eyes, "Anyway, you really should try to talk to **your** son, Richard."

"All right, I'll go find him then," he said taking her rather direct hint, but before he actually turned his back to exit the waiting room, he addressed her once again adding: "It's nice seeing you again, Eleanor."

As a reply, the woman only nodded and perfunctorily half-smiled for just a fraction of a second before lowering her eyes to continue reading. Understanding that such was his cue to exit, the duke turned on his heels to search for his son.

In the hall, John Samuels stood up from his seat when he saw his employer coming out of the waiting room. A brief sign from his lordship's hand made him understand that his services were still not required. So, Samuels sat down again, lowering his head. This gesture did not allow him to perceive the brief sigh that the duke let escape as he paused for a fleeting second.

He was glad that his first encounter with Eleanor was over. The four long hours of dusty road that he had travelled had not been enough to prepare him for the moment. Even if his mind had long toyed with the possibility of meeting her once again, even if his daughter-in-law had warned him of her imminent visit... nothing could really make him feel sufficiently confident to face her. How could he? After all that had happened between them, no matter how many years had passed, he would always feel disarmed under that blue gaze. And now, as never before, those blue eyes that had once seen him with adoration were loaded with indifference that almost bordered on disdain.

"It is all as it should be," he thought, as the clinking of his walking cane resonated with his every step, "When I was young, my pride and anger saved me from sinking in remorse . . . but now I know better. I must pay the toll for my mistakes. To be honest, she has plenty of reasons to despise me . . . and yet I had hoped for less coldness. What a fool I can be!"

The duke stopped when he finally saw the entrance of the hospital's café. Sat at a solitary table with his back turned to the door, Terrence could not perceive the presence of his father until his voice called him, almost startling him.

"Terrence?" Richard said, lowering his voice, slightly conscious of the presence of another patron on the opposite side of the room.

"Father! . . . How come?" Terrence mumbled in surprise, unknowingly calling Richard "father" for the first time in many years. The duke's heart swelled in silent joy.

"I received a message from Candy," His Grace replied as he sat near his son.

For a brief second, a furtive sign of surprise sparked in Terrence's eyes, but was soon replaced by a light of recognition.

"I see . . . that is so much like her," he responded without questioning when and how such a message had reached the duke. Instead, he lowered his head, his eyes lost on the surface of the cold cup of tea in front of him.

"Your girl is an angel," commented the duke slowly extracting his gold cigarette case from his pocket.

"I know . . . " Terrence assented while he pursed his lips in a nervous gesture.

Lord N*** then remembered that, as a child, no matter how sad or angry Terrence could be, he would very seldom burst into tears. Instead, he would only purse his lips, and very likely clench his teeth to judge by a visible tension in his jaws.

"Son, she will be all right." The duke said as he opened his cigarette case in front of the young man who refused the offer.

"It's just . . . I don't know what I would do if . . ." Terrence stopped, not daring to finish his sentence.

"Don't let your mind go on that road, Terrence," Richard warned him while he realized, at a deeper level, to what extent his son's heart was seized by a debilitating passion.

"It's been hours . . . and she was not due yet!" Terrence said huskily, his voice almost breaking.

"Has the doctor come out to talk to you?" His Grace asked behind the first smoke puff of his cigarette.

"No . . . not a single bloody word!" Terrence replied with visible exasperation.

"Then it means that things are evolving as they should. Otherwise, the physician would have come to discuss the situation with you," explained the duke with his usual phlegmatic tone.

"How do you know?" Terrence asked, beginning to feel irritated by his father's calm demeanor.

"Well, in case you haven't noticed, I have been in your shoes before."

"Did . . . her Grace ever have complications?" The young man questioned with a sardonic tweak in his lips when referring to his stepmother.

"Once . . . but my previous allusion was not with respect to Beatrix's children. When they were born, I must be honest, I could hardly experience anything remotely close to your present predicament," the duke admitted with disdainful tone, "You know very well they are not my children. I was talking about your birth. You certainly made a rather dramatic entrance into this world and scared the dickens out of me."

"My mother has never mentioned anything about that," Terrence replied, surprised by his father's revelations.

The duke's mouth tweaked in lopsided smile for only a fraction of a second.

"Perhaps it was because she was rather too busy at that very moment to consider the circumstances. It was back in the old days; so, you were born at home. This is, in the house in New Jersey where your mother and I lived back then."

"Didn't you believe in hospitals?" The young man asked slightly relaxing the eyebrows he had been unconsciously frowning.

"Before this child who's being born right now, no Grandchester was ever born in a hospital," Lord N*** explained, "But even if I didn't have to take your mother to the doctor, I needed to make the doctor come to the house, and that was the rub."

Terrence looked at his father questioningly.

"Well, it happened that you chose the foulest, stormiest night to make your entrance to this world... and," the older man paused, reorganizing his memories of that occasion, "... and the telephone lines were not working because of the thunderstorm."

"So, your driver had to go to New York to get the doctor," Terrence said unemotionally.

"Not really," The duke responded with a rare smile, "Because of the secrecy that I had foolishly imposed on us, I had made the mistake of keeping the house almost un-staffed. We just had a live-in housekeeper and a footman that only worked from 8 to 5."

"You mean you didn't have a driver?" The actor questioned him in disbelief.

"Well, I was young and foolish," Lord N*** admitted shrinking his shoulders, "The rest of my staff was divided between the Long Island cottage where Beatrix was lodged and my townhouse in Manhattan, drivers included. In the New Jersey's house, I kept a carriage that the footman would usually ride if your mother required it, and I moved on horseback whenever I needed to go to Manhattan. I thought that having a telephone installed, which was sort of a novelty in those days, we would have access to call the doctor if necessary. Of course, I didn't consider that phones can fail during a storm. So, when your mother told me that you were coming, we were alone with the housekeeper, and using the carriage was a very bad idea considering it had been raining for hours. Hence, I had to ride to New York to get the doctor."

"In the rain?" Terrence asked frowning, as if he simply couldn't picture his dignified father riding under a thunderstorm.

The duke only assented to respond to his son's question and then continued after butting his cigarette on the ashtray that the waiter had brought at his request.

"It was certainly not my favorite ride. At times, I thought it would take me forever to get to the doctor's place in Manhattan, but I finally got there. To my dismay, not only did the stupid man take his time to get ready, but he also insisted on bringing his carriage. Of course, we had hardly ridden a few miles when the blooming heavy thing got stuck in the mud, just as I imagined it would. At the end, we had to leave the carriage on the road and continue the journey on horseback."

"I imagine . . . had I been in your place, I could have murdered that man just right there and then," Terrence ventured a smile imagining the picture of his young father swearing under the rain.

"Believe me, I would have done it myself, if your mother's life and your own had not been in that preposterous man's hands... Ironically, that was the easiest part of the feat."

"Could things have gotten worse?"

"Well, son, while I was riding or pushing the doctor to gallop faster, I had something in which I could employ my time and energy. Once we got to the house, I had to spend the rest of the night hearing your mother screaming without being able to do a thing to help her. That almost drove me to the point of madness!"

"How do people do this?" Terrence wondered almost rhetorically, crushing one of his hands with the other.

"I suppose a man just has to find the way to bear his own feelings of impotence. In reality, the true bravery act falls on the ladies' court in cases such as this."

"... and ours is all the blame ..."

"I know what you mean, son; but, in reality, there is none to be blamed here."

Terrence gave a brief, suffocated chuckle of disbelief at his father's words.

The duke sighed, beginning to lose his patience at his son's stubborn despondency.

"I wish you could one day see yourself with your wife's eyes, son," the man said nodding.

"What do you mean?"

Seeing that he had regained his son's attention, Richard Grandchester left his cigar on the ashtray before he continued.

"When that young lady looks at you," he began, the tone of his voice suddenly softening, "often when you're not even aware, one can easily read on her face how she dotes on you, as if you were the most wonderful creature on earth . . . By George, one only must observe the way she is always fussing about you, searching for the most minimal opportunity to please you. . . do you think that a woman so madly in love can regret having given herself to the object of her affection? Do you think she's having second thoughts about bearing your child just because of the pain?

Terrence silently nodded his head as a way of reply.

"So, there's no blame to be placed anywhere," the duke insisted, "Pain and danger are part of life just as much as pleasure and joy. We have to take and even embrace them all as they knock at our door. Very soon you'll find out that both extremes of the continuum often touch our hearts in a contingent manner. When you see your family for the first time, you'll soon forget about your present distress, and the following second you'll feel the burden of the new responsibility resting upon your shoulders as you never have felt it before . . . But that will be all right."

Terrence did not say a word, but his eyes eloquently told his father that he appreciated his words.

"And speaking of responsibility," Lord N*** continued, daring to brush the pending subject, "I have no intentions of taking attributions that do not correspond to my rightful role of a grandfather."

Terrence blinked, looking at his father as if he hadn't understood his words. Richard Grandchester read his son's confusion and explained.

"I mean that this child will be yours only. I cannot lie that I wish I were now in your place, having the opportunity to start all over, trying once again my luck at parenthood . . . but life seldom gives us second chances. I'm fully aware this is not my turn to enjoy such an opportunity. So, do not fear that I will try to interfere with the decisions you need to make about your children's education and care."

The young man was stunned by the deep sincerity in his father's voice. However, his mistrust in the duke was so deeply rooted that he still resisted believing his ears.

"I appreciate your words," Terrence said out of politeness, "yet how could I be sure that you will honor them. I'm not a fool, sir; I know very well what is on stake for the Grandchester family."

"Then you surely know that, if you disdain your birthright when the time comes, you only need to disclose that you're not Beatrix' son. If you do that, neither you nor this child could never become my heirs . . . "

"Unless I die before you, sir," Terrence interrupted, his tone growing in insolence.

"This is not a Greek tragedy, Terrence. Not even a bad father, as I have been, would consider such a possibility as a solution! That was not my point here!"

"Then, what was your point?" The young man questioned, confusingly feeling half guilty for his sidetracking remark and half amused for his succeeding at exasperating his father.

"The truth is that the destiny of our house is in your hands," the duke responded, forcing himself to recover his collectedness, "So, even if you don't believe in my promise, you can still rest assured that it is you who has the reins of the situation, not me."

"Is my father truly speaking to me in such terms?" Terrence wondered inwardly, dumbfounded at the duke's unexpected sincere words.

"You should not fear my interference, son. If my good will does not keep my possessiveness in check, then my lack of power to persuade you of saving our house from its downfall will keep me humbled."

"Let me get this straight, sir. You're saying that, even if I decide to raise my children in ways that you don't approve, you will not try to interfere?"

"I know that I'm acting out of character here," the duke admitted, "See it this way, Terrence. A whole decade of estrangement between the two of us taught me that attempting to impose my will upon yours is counterproductive.... I" here the duke's voice faltered for a brief instant but gathering courage he finally finished saying in a lower tone: "I have learned to value your friendship more than honor and lineage. So... I will keep my word...son."

The young man was going to open his mouth to reply when the square figure of Dr. Monroe appeared at the entrance.

"Mr. Graham," the physician called in a rather tired voice to which sound the young man stood up brusquely.

Monroe gave a brief look at the distinguished older man who had remained seated, but more professional than curious about the stranger's identity, he only acknowledged his presence with a nod. Then, the corpulent doctor addressed the young man immediately, seeing his anxiety evident in his every feature.

"I think congratulations are in order, sir," the physician said with a quick smile appearing on his pale face, "you have a healthy boy of 7.5 pounds."

"My wife . . ?" was the first thing Terrence could utter once his throat allowed him to articulate a sound.

"Oh, she's as good as any healthy lady can be given the circumstances," Monroe replied naturally, "The delivery was a bit longer than usual, but your wife is a sturdy sort of girl for one so petite."

"I must see her . . . and the baby," said Terrence releasing the breath he was unconsciously holding . . . his voice sounding more like a brazen command.

"Oh, yes, sure you will, sir... but the nurses are now helping them to get refreshed, we must give them a few minutes to finish the task. In the meantime, there are a few bureaucratic details I should discuss with you to issue the birth certificate," Monroe responded in his usual placid manner.

"Of course," replied the young man doing his best to master his emotions in front of the doctor.

With the ease of one that had done the same thing for many years, Monroe produced a series of papers which he laid on the restaurant table.

"You see, Mr. Graham, I think there is some kind of confusion here with your surname," the physician stated pointing to the form that Terrence himself had filled some hours before.

"There is none, Dr. Monroe. Grandchester is my real surname," Terrence said recovering his usual business-like tone, "I use Graham, which is my middle name, only for the stage."

"Oh, I see. I had never worked for an artist, hence my ignorance of these details. My apologies."

"Not at all, sir. Is there anything else you need to know?" Terrence asked, not noticing that his father, who was still standing behind him, had gone pale and recovered his color in just a few seconds.

"Oh, yes, of course, the name for the child. Would you like to leave that information slot in blank until you discuss it with your wife? If that were the case, you could ask for the form to the nurse whenever you are ready."

"There's no need to wait. Candice and I have already decided on the name way in advance. The child's name will be Richard Douglas," he said as he took the form to fill in the blank slot.

The duke did not utter a comment at the disclosure of such an unexpected piece of information. The young father did not say anything about it either. Instead, Terrence focused on filling the form in the utmost silence, under the quiet guidance of the physician. However, amid that silence and deep down in his chest, Richard Grandchester, 14th Duke of N***, felt that his heart was about to burst.

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Candy felt as though her body had split into two halves. It was humid, and cold, she was shivering, and she also had the most excruciating headache of her entire life. And then, she heard the cry of a baby, her baby, as though it were coming from far, far away. The rest of the room seemed to have gone silent. It was just the cry, in the distance, and her own breathing, heavy and difficult. A second later, however, the sound of her own heart began to pound inside her temples, her lips, her cheeks, and the rest of the world reappeared again to be perceived by her senses.

"It's a boy, Mrs. Graham," said the doctor whose voice had suddenly come back to ring in Candy's ears.

Next, Candy broke into tears and nervous laughter, unable to control herself. No matter how many deliveries she had witnessed in her professional life, nothing could compare to the intense emotion that took hold of her when she finally realized that her own child had arrived in this world. It was now more certain than certainty! She was a mother, and that tiny warm body that the doctor had placed on top of her chest was also Terrence's child.

Candy's let her head fall heavily over the bed, exhausted by the exertion of the last few hours. She was indeed a mess, and she was pretty aware of it, for she had seen many new mothers right after childbirth and none of them, even the most elegant Annie, had ever looked pretty at such a moment. However, as she held her son in her arms for the first time, she felt indeed such an unparalleled joy, that she couldn't care less about her appearance.

She moved a bit to the right, and it seemed that her whole body was sore.

"God, having this baby really hurt an incredible lot," she thought, laughing inwardly at her own sorrowful physical state, as she kissed Richard's head for the first time. Then, feeling on her lips the warmth of that new life, the young woman told herself that she would gladly take all that pain again, if necessary. After all, she trusted her body could be repaired soon.

"But for the time being," she thought, "I think I could use an aspirin", but a second later, remembering that she had planned on nursing her child, she resigned herself to bearing her headache and her soreness. She guessed that this was not going to be the only headache that she would have to take for the sake of her son⁷. For, you see, against destiny, against her own mistakes, against the world, and all odds, she was now the mother of Terrence's child, and she was up to facing the task with all the might of her young, brave heart.

. . . .

When he finally entered the room, the young woman lying on the bed seemed to have fallen asleep. Terrence approached the bed, and in an impulse kneeled down, resting his arms on the mattress. His eyes anxiously inspected the dormant face of his wife.

"Why is she looking so pale?" he first thought, a pang of panic sweeping across his chest. Then, with almost trembling fingers, he brushed Candy's cheek that was indeed white as alabaster because of the significant loss of blood she had suffered. However, when his skin touched hers, he could feel again her usual warmth, if only a degree or two lower than usual. She was inhaling and exhaling normally. . . She was alive . . . Terrence released a breath he had been holding for God knows how long.

Candice's short locks had been refreshed by the nurse that had taken care of her after the delivery, but when Terrence caressed them, he could perceive that they were slightly wet, as if she had been sweating. No doubt her effort had been strenuous. As he timidly stroked her forehead, her eyebrow slightly arched in a reflex movement and her chest raised with a subtle sigh. The next second his eyes met hers, and he noticed that Candy's irises had turned light green, like polished jade stones.

"Terry!" she said with a tired voice.

⁷ In 1925 the only non-opioid painkiller in the market was aspirin but consumption is not recommended during lactation unless consumed in a very small dose as in today's baby-aspirin form.

He felt as though his tongue were glued to his palate. What could he say in such a moment? His feelings were way too intense and shockingly contrasting to be put into words, and asking cursory questions about how she was feeling seemed totally out of place. It was painfully obvious that the young woman was exhausted and battered after the effort.

"Goodness, Terry," she said with a faint smile, as she reached to brush that usual bang that always fell out of place over his forehead, "you look as though you didn't sleep well, sweetheart."

Terrence chuckled at the irony. She was there lying on a hospital bed after hours of labor, and all she cared about was his having missed a night of sleep. That was his sweet, selfless Candy!

"Surely, you didn't expect me to go home and sleep peacefully while you were giving birth to our son", he finally responded holding her hand and taking it to his lips.

"Oh, yes!" She replied with a bright smile that for a second made him forget how pale she was, "We do have a son! How do you like being a dad, Terry?"

He wanted to say so much, but his chest was numb from the multitude of emotions he had experienced during the previous hours.

"I...I don't know," he mumbled, "I have not even had the chance to meet him yet. The nurse told me she would bring him in soon."

"If that is the case, I must sit up. Could you help me?" she asked naturally.

Terrence stood up from his kneeling position and helped her to change her posture. While doing it, he noticed that her brow creased a bit for a second.

"Are you sure you can sit like this?" he asked, visibly uneasy with any sign of discomfort that could be read on her face.

"Of course, I know what I'm doing!" She replied, smiling at her husband's overprotectiveness.

It was then that the nurse entered the room with the baby carefully wrapped in a blanket.

From that moment on, Terrence could hardly utter a word. It was as if the surrounding reality had vanished, and his soul had taken leave from his body. All he could see for some suspended minutes that he couldn't count was the image of his wife holding their son.

Understanding his feelings, for she was experiencing equally intense emotions, Candy extended her free hand inviting him to sit next to her. He followed her lead in a trance, while the nurse eclipsed herself leaving the room without making noise.

As if the baby understood that both of his parents were intently looking at him, he opened his eyes and immediately locked them with those of his father. The young woman observed how a new hue appeared on Terrence's eyes, one that she had never seen before. Other than that, the young man was still nonplused by the emotion to translate them into coherent phrases. However, even in the

fog of his overwhelming feelings, a vague thought began forming in the back of his mind: The duke was right. One look at that tiny creature that was his son was enough to make him forget about the night of emotional distress he had just suffered. And yet, at the same time, along with the most incredible joy, came the heaviest load he had ever felt over his shoulder: He was a father.

Still thunderstruck by this sudden realization, Terrence extended his arm to hold his wife, and kissing her forehead he could finally utter a very throaty and shaky "Thank you". Candy, with teary eyes, smiled at him and then to the baby in her arms.

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The unacknowledged grandmother was summoned to meet the young Richard once his parents recovered their presence of mind to remember about the rest of the world. For Eleanor, the experience was beyond her powers of self-control. When she took the baby in her arms, Richard had his eyes closed, though his movements showed that he was not asleep. Then, as soon as the infant felt that he had been moved to a different set of arms, his eyes opened to meet the new character that had just entered his young life. Eleanor was ecstatic for some delirious moments. Having the son of her son in her arms, looking right at his innocent face, had awoken in her a flood of powerful memories. For a second, she imagined herself holding her own son, as if time had turned back, over twenty-eight years before that day. However, just a second after, the baby battered his long eyelashes in a way that made her realize that this baby was not her own son.

"His eyes are blue now," said the young mother, "but only time will tell if they would remain that color. You know, babies' eyes can change color as they grow older. Do you think Richard's eyes look like his father's when he was a just-born baby?" Candy asked curious.

"I, I couldn't tell, uhm," mumbled Eleanor still absorbed at contemplating her grandson, "the chin, the nose, are just like Terry's, that's for sure. Yet, the shape of his eyes, there's something about them . . . I guess . . . or perhaps".

Eleanor couldn't finish her sentence. Lost in her thoughts, she raised her eyes, as if searching for the answer to a difficult question. A second later, she looked again at the child, and suddenly she felt, rather than knew, that the child in her arms would someday look a great deal like the father of his father. She then sighed, whilst her lips twisted in a sad smile. It seemed that she was not getting rid of Richard Grandchester any time soon. On the contrary, it was evident that right in her arms lay a new powerful reason that would link her to the Duke of N*** for the rest of her life. This last thought was all too disturbing, and Eleanor had to fight hard to dispel it. Nevertheless, always a good pretender, she regained her composure trying to concentrate on the happy fact that she was now holding a new link in the chain of life. Yes, a link that was an extension of her own family line, indeed! The child in her arms was *her* grandson and that was all she should care about.

A noise coming from the door behind her made Eleanor realize that someone else had entered the room. Behind her, the grandfather of the child stood in silence contemplating the view of his former lover holding a baby in her arms. Feelings of great loss coupled with feelings of bright new hope

invaded his heart in that instant. If the decisions made so many years before had been different, the present moment could have been one of absolute, untainted joy. As things stood, the duke had to accept that what was lost was indeed lost forever, but amidst that loss, the tiny child in Eleanor's arms represented the dawn of new possibilities. He was glad that life had allowed him the opportunity to witness this day despite the gloomy prognoses he had received. He could count his blessings.