

# Book 2

## Section 2

### Chapter 9

Candy sat on the hard wooden bed and looked up at the small and only window in the punishment room. A beam of light was filtered inside through the glass, falling just upon her. That moment all her worries were concentrated on one thought.

*I wonder if Great Uncle William has the intention of coming to the May Festival..*

Then, after letting out a deep sigh one more time, she said:

“Surely, when he finds out that his adoptive daughter has ended up in the punishment room and has also been forbidden to take part in the May Festival, Great Uncle will be angry...Oh, I beg you, don’t come...”

With her eyes towards the light that was coming through the small window, Candy prayed with all her might. Miss Pony always said that God was merciful; surely He would not grant her wish if she only called upon Him in her moments of need.

“This room is really very gloomy...”

The girl looked around her. The room was small and had the stink of mold. Apart from that austere bed, it had only a miserable writing desk. The heavy door had been locked.

“If the punishment room is such a horrible place, I wonder what the cells reserved for the students really look like,” she murmured, shivering at the mere thought of it. “Thank goodness, despite everything, they didn’t get rid of you. Isn’t that true, Hughley?”

Hughley was inside an old worn out bucket, determined to take a little nap.

The night before, Sister Gray had demanded of her to get rid of the animal, but thanks to Sister Margaret, the kindest nun in all the college, there had been found a way out; assuming full responsibility to deal with this matter, Candy had asked to be allowed to bring it with her. The nun had taken on a thoughtful expression, but she had seemed unwilling to leave the turtle in her hands.

“Candice, you must make sure that you will dispose of it, do you understand?” she had warned her repeatedly, while she was delivering it to her.

From the bottom of the bin Hughley opened her little eyes, similar to black seeds. Smiling, the girl lifted her, observing her while she was shaking her short legs.

The warmth of a living being...Candy could understand very well the feelings Patty had for this creature. In moments of sadness, just having someone to talk to, even if that someone was incapable of answering, was a great comfort.

“Outside seems to be a wonderful day, Hughley! Come, let’s sneak away from this dismal place and go somewhere else more cheerful,” she said, sliding her in her pocket.

The small window was high above, but moving the bed and using the desk too, it wouldn’t be so inaccessible. Carrying out her plan, Candy grabbed the window frame. That opening had also been locked, but being of an old structure, both pushing and pulling managed to open it easily. She didn’t even find it difficult to remove the rusty iron grate.

“Piece of cake! Did they really believe they could stop me with a window like this? In these cases it’s an advantage to be small like me! Come on, Hughley! Let’s go straight to the Blue River Zoo!”

Candy passed through the window and, pressing the turtle against her, she jumped to the ground.

The night before, due to the darkness, she hadn’t been able to get a good idea of the punishment room’s location, but now she noticed that it was on the first level of the north tower. Almost nobody ever passed by the back garden, and besides, the gate was near.

Thanking her lucky star, she nimbly sneaked away from the college.

Candy headed towards the Blue River Zoo; in fact she intended to entrust Hughley to Albert. After their miraculous encounter, the young girl had been informed where the zoo was. Consulting the map she had been convinced she could go there walking, but she realized now that it was further away than she had imagined.

“Don’t worry, Hughley. Albert is a wonderful person! I know it’s sad to have to be separated from Patty, but you’ll see her again,” Candy said to the turtle as she was holding it in her arms.

When she arrived at Blue River, it was enough for her to say her friend’s name to be able to enter without a ticket. They told her that Albert had taken a break and he was in the room reserved for the staff in charge of the mammals. The girl hurried towards the building which they had indicated to her. She was so happy she could finally see him again!

The college she attended prohibited entering and leaving freely, even on holidays. Candy really wanted to see Albert again; she even wanted to ask him a lot about Lakewood, but she also had to apologize and

explain to him that, despite inviting him to the May Festival, she couldn't take part in it anymore.

When she arrived near a small hut, she heard Albert's laughter. Her heart began to beat loudly, overwhelmed by nostalgia, hearing that sound again.

"Albert! Albert! I have sneaked out again from..."

She opened the door wide shouting at the top of her voice, but suddenly she was out of breath. The person who turned around to look at her along with Albert was the last she had hoped to meet there.

*Terry...*

The boy opened his eyes wide with surprise.

"What? You know each other?" asked Albert amused, observing both of them as they stood petrified.

Then he continued, laughing:

"Of course! Candy, you attend St. Paul's too, don't you? I can't believe it! Apparently the two most troublesome individuals of the institute have escaped at the same time!"

"Albert...Do you refer to me too as *troublesome individual*?" asked the girl, pointing out to herself incredulously.

"Don't tell me that you really thought you were a model student, eh, Candy?"

When she saw her friend burst into laughter again, the girl's cheeks were red with anger.

"Well...You, Candy, are the same as always. While you, on the contrary, go out there all night to get drunk and search for a fight," he said to Terry, with a sly laugh.

"Get drunk? Get into a fight? So that night..." said Candy, turning finally her eyes to Terry.

He quickly looked away.

"Right...If Albert hadn't intervened that night to stop me surely you would have found me with much more serious wounds. He also accompanied me to the students' dormitory, but I was so drunk and so in pain, that I lost my sense of orientation. I groped into a room and, to my great misfortune, it was precisely her room..." explained the lad to Albert with a low voice.

Albert burst again into a cheerful laughter and said:

"That's incredible! Do you mean that the injured friend Candy was so worried about was *you*? Without even knowing that, I also ran with her to the drugstore to buy medicine, you know."

Terry turned immediately towards Candy. His hard expression softened, being replaced slowly by a smile. Suddenly, the girl felt a warmth flaring in her heart. It was perhaps the first time that she saw his eyes so serene.

*Thank God...He doesn't seem to think about that incident anymore...*

Relieved now, she smiled too.

Whenever her mind went back to the night she had discovered Terry's secret, the remembrance of his disconsolate expression pierced her heart. She hadn't done it on purpose, but she knew she had hurt him.

"Tell me, Candy, what are you doing with that turtle?" asked Albert scrutinizing Hughley, concentrated on blinking her eyes.

Candy came back at once to reality:

"Oh, yes! I had almost forgotten! Albert, this is Hughley, and she's a friend of a friend. A classmate of mine had her inside the college, but we are forbidden to keep pets and now they have discovered her. They have ordered her to get rid of her, so I thought that you could take care of her..."

"I see...a friend of a friend, eh? No problem. Nice to meet you, Hughley!" nodded the man without any hesitation.

After taking the turtle from Candy's hands he lifted it and greeted it rubbing his nose against the animal's snout. No, Albert hadn't changed at all.

"Thank you so much, Albert...And also...I have to talk to you about the May Festival..." said Candy, but she hadn't time to finish her sentence.

The hut's door opened and a boy, peeking through it, announced:

"Hey, Albert, the shift has already begun."

Probably this was some co-worker who, just like him, took care of the animals.

"I got it, I'm coming right away," replied Albert quickly, preparing to take his working uniform that was hanging on the wall. "I apologize, but I have a work to attend to. I'll finish in two hours. Why don't you stay and entertain yourselves a bit seeing the animals? Candy, later I would like you to come and see Poupe too."

Holding the turtle against him, almost as if he had always been its owner, Albert left hurriedly.

For a while the two young people remained silent, avoiding even looking at each other. The bright afternoon light illuminated the interior of the untidy room. It was awkward to be alone with Terry, and Candy kept looking at the floor. Suddenly, the boy proposed cheerfully:

"There is an animal that I think should get along very well with you. Do you want to see it?"

With a sigh of relief, Candy followed him outside. She had hoped that it would be him who would speak first.

“The first time I came was just to thank Albert, but then I discovered that this place isn’t bad at all. So, once in a while, I come on the sly. And to think that I have always thought zoos were unnecessary...”

Nodding, the girl continued walking along with him. She didn’t know how to talk to him and she was bewildered by the tension she was feeling.

Giraffes, lions, tapirs...On working days like these, even animals seemed quieter.

“There it is! A friend of yours, identical to you!” cried Terry suddenly. They had arrived in front of the cage of the monkeys, and he was pointing to one of them clinging from a branch. His gaze was mischievous. All of Candy’s tension was diluted in a moment.

“*What?* Do you refer to that monkey? You are really rude! And in what way are we identical?”

“Oh, excuse me! Of course you are much more attractive,” apologized Terry, but talking to the animal.

“You are horrible!” said Candy, who couldn’t refrain from tapping her foot on the ground.

“There, you see? Even in these gestures you are identical!”

“Terry!”

“Not to mention about when you put on that angry expression!”

“Oh, for God’s sake!”

The girl jokingly raised her fists and Terry escaped laughing. While chasing him, she felt the fog that had invaded her heart for a long time clearing up. Now she could see Terry’s heart. Now she could really understand his feelings.

*I believed what I told him...*

She had promised him: she wouldn’t reveal to anyone the secret about his mother.

“Terry?”

The lad, who had disappeared for a moment, appeared again holding in his hand a parcel of popcorn. On his face there was a smile that Candy had never seen inside the college.

Sitting on a bench bathed in the sunlight, they started eating with pleasure. Candy launched the popcorn flakes into the air to catch them later skillfully with her mouth: she had no rival in that game she had learned at Pony’s Home. Terry was watching her squinting his eyes.

“So today you have escaped for that turtle?”

The girl was extending her hand to catch more popcorn flakes, but she stopped.

“You know...Today I escaped from the punishment room.”

“The punishment room?” asked Terry, straightening up in his seat.

Candy then began telling him the events of the previous night and how Sister Gray and the other nuns, during an unexpected inspection, discovered the presence of Hughley, Patty's turtle. She also told him about the riot that had been unleashed and about the fact that she had called the director "stubborn old woman".

That moment Terry began to squirm with laughter and exclaimed:

"Did you really call her *stubborn old woman*? Unbelievable! Not even I would have got as far as that, Miss Freckles."

Candy made a grimace instead of replying, and then continued:

"However, this expression suited her perfectly. How cruel to lock me up in the punishment room and forbid me to take part in the May Festival for something so little..."

The girl sighed.

"Ah...So she has also forbidden you to go to the festival..." murmured Terry, turning for an instant his eyes to the sky.

A May Festival without Candy...

*I had thought to participate too, just once, but if she's not there...I think I'll give up...*

Surprised at his own disappointment, the boy hurried to change the subject.

"By the way, how did you meet Albert?"

"Oh, I met him in America. We met in a place called Lakewood."

Remembering the Lakewood forest, the girl's face darkened suddenly.

"I...I had left the orphanage to go and work for the Leagan family. I took care of the horses...But something very unpleasant happened one day, so I sneaked away. Later I fell down a waterfall...and that was when I ran into Albert. He was the one who saved me."

"You're telling this incredible story as if nothing had happened..." remarked Terry, looking at the ground.

"Lakewood was a wonderful place..."

Her eyes were filled with the image of the Sweet Candy roses. She recalled the time when Anthony had given them to her inside the stable.

"Right now Anthony's rose garden will surely be in full bloom..." she murmured thoughtfully.

"Anthony?"

Terry frowned. *Anthony...* Now that he thought about it, Candy had also pronounced that name when she had fainted.

"And who is this Anthony?" he asked, noticing that his own voice had become more harsh.

The girl was now looking at him with moist eyes.

"A boy that looked like you...Or rather, at first I *thought* he looked like you... but you are different in every way..."

Terry felt a burning anger and couldn't do anything to prevent that.

*Whom do you see now? What memory are you reliving?*

“You know, Anthony was very good at cultivating roses...The first time we met we were at his Gate of the Roses and...”

“Then I’m very happy to be ‘different in every way’ from someone like him,” Terry interrupted her cynically. “I would be really annoyed to resemble a weak guy who likes cultivating roses. No, thank you!”

“You say terrible things!” said Candy, and she felt rage rising inside her: she couldn’t bear it if someone spoke badly about Anthony.

“He...He wasn’t a weak person at all! He was a strong and brave boy!”

“Oh, yes? And what did that Anthony do in the end? I bet he preferred roses to you! Have I guessed right?” he declared getting up immediately, imitated right away by Candy, who was determined not to give in.

But, a moment later, the girl’s shoulders sank, almost as if she had lost all of her energy.

“Anthony...died...falling off a horse.”

She bit her lip to keep from crying. That scene she wanted so much to forget revived in her mind and she felt faint.

Terry looked away, silent.

*Did she say that he died? Falling off a horse?*

That moment he understood the girl’s reaction that day.

“Poor boy. That means I’ll pray for his soul to rest in peace,” he said turning his back on her.

Then he started walking away.

“Terry! How dare you speak in that way?” cried Candy with her voice faltering and full of indignation.

But the boy didn’t turn around. Terry didn’t understand why he felt so furious.

*Whoever is dead can’t come back anymore.*

He murmured these words angrily in his heart.

“But what does *he* want?”

Even after she returned safe and sound to the punishment room, Candy couldn’t quench the rage she felt inside her. How had he dared say that Anthony was weak?

After the altercation, Terry had gone.

“I didn’t even know him myself...Anthony was such a gentle person...”

Candy always tried not to think about him, but that moment, more strongly than ever, her heart vibrated with the memory of that smile and that voice. She sat on the bed and, shaking her head, she tried to chase away those painful thoughts.

“And as if that was not enough, Albert was speechless when I confessed that I couldn’t take part in the May Festival...But at least he could take Hughley. So it hasn’t been such a bad day...”

After a long and deep breath, Candy realized that in a corner of the room there was a dented box. When she lifted it, full of surprise, she discovered a note.

“Dear Candy,

This parcel arrived for you, so, without being seen by the nuns, I came to bring it to you. But you’re not here...I’m very worried. I’m so sorry that all this happened because of me...”

Patty must have climbed the wall and then thrown the parcel through the small window that remained open. Who knows how frightened she had been...

*Thank you, Patty! Who could it be from?*

When Candy saw the contents, she couldn’t contain a little joyful cry: inside the box there were two costumes in medieval style.

“That’s marvelous! They look like the costumes of Romeo and Juliet...They’re really beautiful! Both the male and the female costume!”

At the bottom of the box, the girl also found a white envelope.

“Sir William is grateful for your kind invitation, but due to his many commitments he can’t attend the festival, and begs you to forgive him.

Sir William is also very happy to know that you are becoming a real young lady.

George”

“So this is a gift from Uncle William...”

Candy lifted up the magnificent Juliet costume and held it against her body.

“Say...There are also the wigs and the masks! Uncle must have confused the festival with a masquerade ball...”

The girl took in her hand one of the wigs and smiled with satisfaction: an idea had come to her.

*But of course! Thanks to this...*

“Dear Uncle William...I don’t really know if I’ll succeed in becoming a real young lady...Forgive me!” apologized the young girl bowing her head, as if she were actually before her benefactor.



## Chapter 10

The May Festival. On that occasion, for a single day, the regular and sombre atmosphere of the institute took on a rose color. The building was embellished everywhere with a lot of flowers, and the students, elegantly dressed, enjoyed the festival along with their guests.

One of the reasons they were so happy was the opportunity they had to reunite with their families; in fact, a rule of the school established that normally they couldn't even receive a visit from their own parents. On the other hand, May was the month in which romances bloomed and all hearts were overflowing with romantic expectations. After all, that was the only day the girls were allowed to talk and dance freely with the boys. During the festival, even the nuns left the regulation aside, presuming a serene expression. All except Sister Gray and Sister Kreis, of course.

After the magnificent parade of the Fairies of May, the festivities continued in the hall of ceremonies, converted into a ballroom. The orchestra had started playing a gentle waltz. With so many splendidly dressed people, the atmosphere was so hot that it was almost suffocating. Laughter and murmurs could be heard. The eyes of the girls were sparkling with eagerness and emotion, not knowing who would invite them to dance.

“Look, it's Terry! He's not dancing...he's so handsome...”

With a sigh, all the girls turned around at the same time to look at the boy, who appeared formally dressed. Eliza's eyes were illuminated.

“Surely he's looking for me! Go away!” she said, separating from Louise.

Then, approaching him, she exclaimed:

“Terry, I give you the honor of dancing with me.”

The boy, hearing suddenly those words, stopped in surprise and was in front of Eliza, who was looking at him with a confident smile, very sure of herself.

Smiling politely at her, he replied:

“Thank you very much, my young lady, but I'm not an expert dancer. I would very much regret stepping on your feet. I hope you can forgive me.”

And after an elegant bow, he left her. Eliza was looking delighted at him while he was walking away. As Terry was moving, he attracted the eyes of those around him, and certainly their friendly talk hadn't escaped anybody.

*Terry called me “young lady”... And he was worried about stepping on my feet... This is proof that he likes me!*

A smile of satisfaction appeared on her face.

Terry, for his part, had already forgotten the meeting with Eliza. Passing through the crowd, he started looking for Candy. He had gone to the punishment room with the intention of helping her escape, but he had found it empty.

*Where has she gone? I was already hoping that someone like her wouldn't stay in there willingly...*

Thinking about Candy, the boy grinned and continued his search.

*But even if I had helped her get out of there? What would I have done next?*

He couldn't explain his own behavior. He just wished to be able to observe closer that face on which emotions paraded one after another.

*Certainly she can't take part in the festival...she might have gone to the zoo...*

He recalled that quiet and sunny afternoon they had spent together. He hadn't been able to compete with her in catching popcorn while throwing it into the air. He could hear again her laughter and his face softened. Only an instant later his expression hardened. Anthony. Just pronouncing that name had transformed Candy into another person and her eyes had filled with tears. That memory really irritated him.

*I won't let you tell me again about that Anthony!*

Terry was surprised at this thought he had murmured to himself. What had possessed him? Why couldn't he get out of his mind that girl who was full of freckles and had a snub nose?

*That's not me...*

With a bitter smile, he left the room.

The orchestra resumed playing. Some couples, with flushed faces, were spinning on the floor. In a corner of the room, an excited Romeo was nimbly making his way among the guests.

*How many people! I wonder where the others can be...*

That Romeo was Candy, of course, wearing the mask and the costume she had received. Not even Sister Kreis, standing at the door to check who entered and left the room, had recognized her. The same thing happened with Neal, rejected just at that moment by a girl he had invited to dance. Inwardly, Candy gave a cry of victory. What a wonderful gift Great Uncle William had sent her. She had to give up the parade, but thanks to the disguise she could at least enjoy the May Festival.

*Oh, there is Stear...He's very elegantly dressed!*

The girl smiled slyly and approached her friend, who was absorbed in watching the dance with a bored expression.

"Will you give me this dance?" she whispered, lowering the tone of her voice.

Stear turned around and fell back, taken by surprise.

“Ah...that...Well...to be honest, I would prefer to dance with a girl...”

“Don’t be so troubled. It’s me,” she confessed, lifting the mask cautiously.

“What...*Candy?* But...but...”

The girl silenced him by putting a hand on his mouth, and Stear looked at her incredulous. They sneaked into a corner of the room.

“Since even you haven’t recognized me, then this disguise is a real success!”

“You have left me simply speechless, Candy,” remarked Stear, taking a handkerchief out of the pocket of his black suit and wiping the sweat on his forehead. “When we found out that they had locked you up in the punishment room, Archie and I were worried...What a relief...Well, certainly we didn’t expect that you were going to stay quietly in there,” he confessed, cheering up again suddenly.

“It’s all thanks to that gift I received from Great Uncle. To apologize for not being able to attend the May Festival, he sent me the costumes of Romeo and Juliet! He must have thought that it was a masquerade ball.”

“What? So there was also Juliet’s costume?” exclaimed Stear, with a light in his eyes.

And he went on:

“Then you should go and put it on, Candy. We definitely can’t have a dance between *boys...*”

Stear turned his eyes to the centre of the ballroom; among a multitude of people, there were Archie and Annie, in an attempt to dance a waltz.

The girl, with her cheeks rosy, was looking at her partner and looked more beautiful than ever.

*It’s wonderful...It’s such a long time that I haven’t seen Annie so happy...But...*

Patty was there, leaning against a dark wall. Her friend was looking down and had a disconsolate expression.

“Hey, Stear, while I’m going to change my clothes, could you dance with that girl there in that corner? She’s a friend of mine, and her name is Patricia. Patty is really a nice girl.”

Stretching his neck, Stear finally managed to see her.

“Oh, the pretty one with the glasses? Fine, I’ll try to ask her.”

Apparently he liked Patty at first sight. He went to her immediately. In the meantime, Candy slipped away from the room.

The meadow in the thick of the forest was covered with bluebells.

Candy had hidden Juliet’s costume and accessories in the hollow of a large tree. She didn’t trust to leave them in the room where she was forced to stay, and she was sure that in a place like this she could

change away from prying eyes. In the shadow of a robust trunk she put on the female costume. She would change from Romeo to Juliet; for that reason she also needed to walk in a more elegant manner. She tried lifting one leg. She wanted to make sure that the dress would not get tangled in her feet, in case she was discovered and was obliged to run away.

“Perfect! I can even run! Come on, let’s go back to the ballroom and have a good time! Let’s free ourselves from all the negativity experienced in the punishment room!”

She raised a hand to accompany a cry of enthusiasm, and then started running. Suddenly someone held skillfully her wrist, dragging her through the foliage.

“Who...who is it?”

“You are in a very good mood, Miss Juliet...Who would have thought that the phrase ‘the habit doesn’t make the monk’ would apply to the nuns too? What do you think, Freckled Tarzan?”

“Te...Te...Ter...”

Terry was laughing out loud, while Candy, surprised, couldn’t even speak. Dressed in his formal suit, the lad went on laughing, but she was feeling as if her heart was about to stop.

“Terry...have you seen *everything*? Were you spying on me while I was changing?”

“Unfortunately for you, I’m only interested in girls with a nice figure. You may have entered my field of vision, but no, actually I didn’t see you,” he provoked her, squinting his eyes.

“You are...you are...you are really a...”

“...A brute? Is that perhaps what you wanted to say, Miss Juliet?”

Candy realized that he was still holding her wrist and, before releasing herself from his grasp, she cried:

“Exactly!”

“Of course that scene was a nightmare...” continued the boy impassive, still laughing.

Irritated, Candy took on a threatening expression. She wanted to get away from there as soon as possible.

That moment, the wind brought to them the soft music of a waltz played in the ballroom. It was a music that she had heard before, an unforgettable melody. She tried to listen more carefully.

*That music...it’s that one played when I danced with Anthony...in Lakewood...Yes, on that occasion...*

That day, Anthony was wearing the traditional Scottish costume and he was smiling at her. His sweet gaze was incredibly clear...

It was then that Terry took delicately her hand.

“Princess, will you allow me to be your dance partner?”

His voice sounded refined, just like Anthony's. Carried away by that invitation, Candy began to dance in the middle of the forest. The light was shining through the branches, and it almost seemed to her that she was going back in time, to the moment she was dancing with Anthony...

"What's wrong?" Terry asked her gently, scrutinizing her face while they kept spinning.

Without realizing it, Candy had begun to cry. The girl shuddered and looked at the boy in front of her. Even through the tears that had filled her eyes she could see a decided gaze, so different from Anthony's. Her lips were trembling.

"Well... I remembered something...This music accompanied my first dance with Anthony."

Suddenly, Terry stopped.

"What's the matter? You seem..."

But she couldn't finish her sentence. Terry drew her violently towards him and pressed his lips on hers.

Terry's lips...For a moment Candy wasn't aware of anything else.

"Stop it!"

Releasing herself forcefully, she drew away from his arms. Her eyes were flooded with angry tears. She raised her hand immediately and gave him a slap on the cheek, with all the strength she had in her body.

"What do you think you are doing? A cad, that's what you are! A playboy and a cad!"

Terry gave her an exalted look.

"Do you think you know me?" he murmured angrily.

A moment later it was Candy's cheek that was hit. The girl put a hand to her face, shocked. The place where he had slapped her was sore.

"...How could you? You are a savage! Hitting a woman is horrible!"

Overwhelmed with rage, Candy slapped him again. Terry's body staggered.

"It was the first time for me...I...If it had been Anthony... If it had been him..." she screamed, crying now.

That moment, Terry held her firmly by the shoulders and said:

"If it had been Anthony, *what?* He would have been more delicate? But he's *dead*, isn't he? How can you know what a dead man *would have done?*"

Almost pressing his nails on her, he continued shaking her forcefully.

"You're hurting me...let me go..."

But he didn't leave her.

"Am I hurting you? Did it hurt you when I hit you? Why don't you ask for help? Ask your Anthony to come and save you! You can cry all you

want, but he *won't come!* He is dead! He fell off his horse and *died!* Am I wrong?"

"That's enough! Stop it now, Terry!"

Crying, Candy shook her head. Terry's eyes seemed like fire and were fixed upon her.

"I'll make you forget him! I'll make you forget that Anthony!"

As soon as he cried those words, the lad took hold of Candy's shoulders and started walking with big strides.

"Stop, Terry! I beg you!"

Even though she was struggling, she couldn't fight him. In the thick of the forest, she could hear the horses neighing. It seemed to her she would go crazy. Horses...Did Terry maybe intend to force her to ride?

The boy entered his personal stable.

"Terry..."

Tears prevented her from opening her eyes. No, it wasn't the tears: it was her fear for horses.

"Don't move."

Terry spoke to her in an unexpectedly gentle tone and put her on the animal's back. Then he rode behind her.

"Go, Theodora!"

Being spurred, the horse darted outside and Candy, trembling, clung to Terry.

The horse was running at full speed through the trees. The sound of hooves, the scent of the forest: everything was like that time, but she didn't want to remember. She didn't want to think about Anthony turning around while his horse was galloping...No, he shouldn't go there!

"Stop! Anthony, help me!"

Candy screamed and shut her eyes even tighter.

"All right, scream! Call Anthony! He won't come! He won't!" cried Terry, without stopping. "Forget him! You have to forget him! Dead people can't come back anymore. They don't feel pain any longer, they don't feel anything! Open your eyes! Candy, open your eyes and look around you!"

That voice, so full of pain, seemed like forcing a closed door, and she suddenly opened her eyes.

"Take a good look! It's the forest in May, everything is coming back to life."

The girl took a deep breath, inhaling the aroma of the green leaves on the trees and of the moss.

Slightly decreasing its speed, the horse continued running among the vegetation. The light that was passing through the branches seemed to wrap the forest in a golden veil. The foxglove flowers were shaking

as if surprised by their passing. Birds were flying, while butterflies were dancing in the air.

Watching that landscape flowing before her, Candy felt that, little by little, her heart was calming down. She breathed in the fresh fragrance of the bluebells and the wild roses.

*Anthony...*

Beyond the light passing through the trees it seemed to her she saw something. She tried to sharpen her vision. Was it maybe Anthony, trying to smile at her?

*Oh, Anthony, come here...*

Although she was whispering those words, he wasn't approaching.

Candy's eyes were flooded with new tears.

"You have to forget him, Candy..."

Hearing Terry's quiet voice behind her, Candy looked up with moist eyes.

The lad was holding strongly the reins and was looking defiantly in front of him. Clinging to his chest, Candy felt his warmth and his heartbeat. Terry's body gave off an aroma similar to that of fresh grass.

*We are alive...Terry and I...*

Suddenly, that revelation pierced strongly through her.

Dead people can't come back anymore.

She heard again the words Terry had shouted at her.

*Anthony...I knew it...I know it...*

Beyond the light, she saw him nodding.

*Yes, Candy, I can't come back to you anymore. Forget me...*

She realized that Anthony and his smile vanished in the light. She wanted to call him again, but she restrained herself.

## Chapter 11

*May*

*I don't know what's happening to me.*

*Since the May Festival it's as if a water spring has formed in my chest.*

*My heart can't contain its frozen waters and I always want to cry.*

*Without realizing it, I have started looking for Terrence and that makes me angry. I can't accept what's happening to me, but I do nothing else but think about him.*

*Until now, Anthony's memory almost completely occupied my mind. No matter how hard I struggled, it was impossible for me to drive away the memories we lived together. But now...*

*Please, Anthony, forgive me. I can't forget you; tears are coming to my eyes even now. I felt something so great for you...*

*However, I understand now. From the bottom of my heart, I understand that you are dead and that we'll never be able to see each other again. Now you are where I can't touch you, nor can I hear your voice. I've always known it, but I didn't want to accept it.*

*I always think of how much I would like to be able to make time go back. If only they hadn't organized that fox hunting...If only I hadn't been adopted...These thoughts are never leaving me, but still I have to go on living, don't I?*

*Terrence G. Granchester. Terry...It was him who made me understand. He forced me to recognize what I was trying to avoid. I don't know if I should thank him or hate him, but now I'm no longer afraid of horses, and not of memories either.*

*Terrence is changing me more and more. How much I would like someone to tell me if this is right...How much I would like someone to bring peace to my restless heart...*

The girl closed the diary and sighed deeply. Later, she gently opened a drawer of the writing desk and pulled out a white silk tie.

That afternoon, when he helped her off the horse, Terry realized that Candy had a scratch on her arm and, without saying a word, he bound it up, wrapping his tie around it.

Both of them had remained silent. Then, when he finished, Terry got up casting his shadow over her.

"I know I've treated you rudely, but I will not apologize."

After having spoken those words in a low voice, he turned his back and walked away.

She kept watching him absentmindedly. The rays of the setting sun painted golden yellow the boy's white silk shirt.



*Until now I haven't even been able to give it back to you...*

Holding tightly the tie in her hand, Candy went to the window. The forest was wrapped in the darkness of the night, but she knew that beyond all that darkness was Terry.

*I wonder what he's doing now...*

She had hardly approached her face to the window, when she stepped back immediately. The glass returned the blurred image of her face and Candy brought delicately her fingers to her lips; the same lips that Terry had kissed. In that reflected figure, her mouth seemed to her as if it were a little imaginary flower that had just bloomed. She looked away, embarrassed.

Her chest hurt as if it were oppressed.

It had been more than a week since the May Festival, but the students were still full of excitement. Even that day, during the recess, gathered near the windows which were flooded by the sunlight, the girls did nothing but talk.

"It has been a wonderful festival! Hasn't it, Louise? Not to mention the delicious banquet!"

Being close to Candy, Eliza didn't miss the opportunity to bring up that subject again.

"Oh, you are absolutely right! The parade and the ballroom were splendid, Eliza."

"There were so many boys who wanted to dance with me! I'm really in a big trouble," added Eliza in an affected manner, with a fleeting glance in Candy's direction.

"Oh, what a pity I haven't been able to participate..." remarked the latter.

Shrugging her shoulders in an exaggeratedly desolate manner, she tried to behave according to Eliza's expectations. Then, secretly, she made a funny grimace of understanding to Patty. Her friend suppressed a giggle. The May Festival had become an unforgettable day for her too.

"Candy! Stear is really a nice boy! Do you know that his dream is flying?"

Both of them had liked each other very much, and Patty was anxious to talk about her dance partner.

"Flying? Do you mean he wants to become a bird?"

"Of course not, Candy! Don't you understand? He wants to build an airplane! He said that one day he will build one! Do you understand? Not only does he want to fly, he wants to *build* it himself! Don't you find it wonderful?" remarked Patty fascinated.

"An airplane? Let's hope he'll make it fly..."

“Of course it will fly! How could it not fly since Stear is the one who’s going to construct it?”

Candy looked tenderly at her friend who, as if in a dream, had brought her hands to her chest.

*How beautiful...Patty can be the best confidant for Stear to share his dreams with.*

Patty was still talking about the boy, but suddenly, Candy jumped up startled with her heart fluttering. Looking out of the college window, she had seen a glimpse of Terry’s figure.

The lad was walking slowly, with his hands in his pockets, towards the so-called False Pony’s Hill. Her heart started beating uncontrollably.

*Surely he wants to skip lessons again...*

She hadn’t returned the tie to him yet. Since the May Festival, this was the second time she happened to see him, but she tried to control the urge to run after him.

“Listen, Candy, I wanted to ask you a favor...Hey, Candy!”

“What...? What’s the matter?” exclaimed the girl breathless, detaching her eyes from the window and turning to look at her friend.

“Don’t tell me you were not listening! Well, look...I wanted to ask you to help me arrange matters to speak to him again...” confessed Patty, blushing slightly.

“Of course! Leave it to me!” said Candy slapping her chest, but she did it so strongly that she started coughing.

Laughing, her friend patted her in the back.

The bell that marked the end of the recess was already ringing. Who knows if Terry had gone to False Pony’s Hill to smoke...Absently, Candy returned to her seat in the classroom, when she noticed a note stuck among the pages of the textbook. Opening it, she was breathless for a moment.

*Annie!*

“After lessons, I really need to talk to you about something. Let’s meet behind the library.

Please, don’t let anyone see you.

Annie”

Candy read that simple message again and again. Her chest was flooded with hope at the thought that maybe her childhood friend had finally decided to open her heart to her.

She threw a fleeting glance towards Annie, who was absorbed in reading. Every day they met in the students’ dormitory or in class, but Candy had never talked to her. She was even careful not to meet her eyes.

Annie, the little girl that had been abandoned on the same day with her. They had grown up side by side, and for that reason Candy could understand very well what she felt. Just being able to spend time together again was a wonderful gift for her.

When lessons were over, the girl sneaked towards the back of the library. That wall of the building, always in the shadow, was completely covered by a vivid green morning glory.

She would have the opportunity to talk with Annie: that was enough to make her happy.

Time seemed to pass extremely slowly, but suddenly, Candy moved away from the wall against which she was leaning: careful not to be seen, Annie was approaching fast.

“Annie!” she cried loudly, repenting immediately afterwards.

Annie looked around her in a frightened manner.

“Forgive me, Annie...I was so happy that I just couldn’t contain myself,” she apologized, running to meet her.

However, Annie lowered her head. Her shoulders were stiff with tension.

“Oh, Annie, thank you for writing to me. What did you want to talk to me about?” Candy asked her, trying to look cheerful.

She knew well that her friend, since they were little girls, had a difficulty in expressing herself.

“Maybe there’s something that worries you? You already know that for any problem you can count on your Candy with the Thousand Solutions!” she encouraged her and continued talking in a cheerful tone, just as she did during their childhood.

That moment Annie recovered and lifted her head suddenly. Her eyes were wet.

“Candy, I beg you! Don’t take Archie away from me!” she cried with a trembling voice and an imploring look.

Surprised, Candy said:

“Why do you tell me something like that?”

“Archie...I have always loved him...since the first time I saw him...before we met in Lakewood...before you knew him...”

“I understand very well your feelings, Annie...How can you think that I could take him away from you?” she asked her looking straight into her eyes, almost offended by that accusation.

“Because Archie...loves you, Candy!” exclaimed Annie, beginning to cry.

“But what are you talking about? Archie and I are only friends. We became friends in Lakewood...as well as with Stear...and Anthony...There is nothing more between us, Annie,” Candy hastened to explain.

“That’s not true!” shouted the other girl, abruptly pushing away the hand that her friend had affectionately placed on her shoulder.

That behavior was unusual for Annie, and Candy opened her eyes wide with surprise.

“He loves you, Candy! I have noticed that...Every time we meet he does nothing but talk about you! Even at the May Festival he was worried because you had not participated. Even when we were dancing together...”

“Annie...”

“It has always been like this! Also at Pony’s Home, Miss Pony and Sister Lane were much more affectionate with you! Although we were abandoned on the same day, we are not the same!”

“Annie!” cried Candy firmly.

Exactly at that moment, Eliza and the others appeared suddenly behind the library. Seeing them, Annie went pale. Laughing with superiority, the girls came closer.

“Haven’t I told you? Annie Brighton had always something that didn’t convince me. Finally we have caught her red-handed!” said Eliza with her arms crossed, observing her triumphantly from top to bottom.

Annie was about to collapse and Candy hurried to support her holding her arm. She noticed that her friend was trembling imperceptibly.

“So, that’s how things are. Who would have ever thought that you are an orphan, just like her? And on top of all that, you have also grown up in the same orphanage! I wonder how surprised Archie will be when he finds out.”

Annie emitted a small groan and, releasing herself from Candy’s grip, she went away running.

“You’re just a poor orphan, but you have concealed it very well until... Ay!”

Candy pushed Eliza with all her strength and then ran after her friend.

“Annie! Annie, wait!”

She could hear the roar of thunder in the distance. All day long the clouds had been alternating with the sun, but now the sky was dark grey, almost black.

Running, Candy bit her lip.

*Annie, you are a crybaby as always! You’re still the same as when we were little girls!*

Annie was heading at full speed towards False Pony’s Hill. Seeing that she knew that place, Candy wondered if her friend too, the first time she was on that elevation, had felt the same nostalgia with her. Rain drops began to fall.

Candy could run faster than Annie and, before they reached the top, she finally managed to grab her shoulder.

**“Annie! Wait, Annie!”**

**“Leave me, Candy! I...I can’t go back to the college anymore! If Archie finds out...I...I would rather die...”**

**“You are such a stupid girl!”**

Under Candy’s strong and sudden push, Annie lost her balance and fell on the grass, in the middle of the clovers.

**“Enough with this, Annie!”** screamed Candy in tears.

The rain was slowly becoming stronger. Soaking wet now, Candy was so full of rage and sorrow that she couldn’t distinguish the tears from the raindrops. Annie was also soaked, and she had abandoned herself in an inconsolable cry.

**“What’s wrong with the orphanage of Pony’s Home? What is it that embarrasses you so much? We grew up with much love from Miss Pony and Sister Lane! Even now they worry so much about us! I... I have resisted until today...I have never spoken to you because that’s what you had asked me...But do you have any idea how much all this has made me suffer? I really considered you as a sister...Haven’t we always been together? In sad moments...and in happy ones...”**

**“Candy...”** murmured Annie, lifting her wet face.

Candy went on talking, with such a loud voice that it overcame even the sound of the rain:

**“Think about it, Annie! Why are you so frightened that Archie might know the truth? He is definitely not a person that would avoid someone just because they originate from an orphanage! Are you in love with him without even knowing him?”**

**“Candy...”**

**“Do you really believe you’re in love with such an insensitive person?”**

**“Oh, Candy...”**

Annie got up suddenly and hugged her tightly. Under the rain, the atmosphere had been impregnated with the penetrating aroma of the white clover flowers.

Of course, Archibald Cornwell was not that kind of a person. He purposely whispered sweet words to the girls, almost for fun, but he was not a Don Juan. If Annie had become so attached to him, it was because she had perceived the loyalty and the kindness he was hiding in his heart.

**“I don’t want him to despise me...I wouldn’t know what to do if that happened...That’s just what I’m afraid of...”**

Annie looked at Candy with her eyes moist, revealing a bright light in her gaze.

**“Forgive me, Candy...I’m so ashamed...”**

**“That’s the real Annie I remembered.”**

The two girls hugged each other under the rain, as they did when they were little.

“Annie, you mustn’t change...I’m sure Archie will accept you just as you are.”

“You are right...it’s true...you are right...” replied the other girl, nodding through her tears.

Then she continued:

“I want to speak to him. I’ll tell him that I was adopted by the Brightons...I’ll confess to him that I actually grew up with you at Pony’s Home...”

“That’s right!”

The girls clasped their hands together tightly.

“You haven’t changed at all, Candy!”

“Neither have you, Annie!”

Holding hands, they smiled. They were soaking wet, but the smile of both reminded one of a cloudless sky.

## Chapter 12

The warmth of the sunrays made one think of summer, and the college was now immersed in a lush forest.

Admiring the shimmering stained-glass windows, Candy imagined that, if she had arrived in that season, that place would have surely given her a much different impression. In all that green, even Sister Gray's stony expression seemed a little softer.

During the recess the students spontaneously grouped together in the shadow of the trees and the atmosphere was filled with their voices and laughter. The topic of conversation was always the same: how to communicate with the boys. As usual, the festival had effectively given life to several "loves of May".

"What are those three up to? Lately they walk together even more than usual!"

Eliza took a look towards the interior garden, near the forest. In the shadow of a tree with leafy green foliage, Candy, Patty and Annie were laughing cheerfully.

"Listen, Louise, I wouldn't want Patty to be an orphan too. How could we get along with people grown up in an orphanage?"

"They wouldn't intend to form an orphan club!"

"With this increase of students of low level the prestige of an illustrious institute like St. Paul's is destined to disappearance!"

Eliza was talking loudly, intending to be heard.

Under her tree, Candy tilted her neck and said:

"But why does she need to always shout like that? We can hear her perfectly anyway."

"Oh, you're absolutely right!" responded Annie.

Candy almost felt dazzled by her smile.

*Annie...You have become much stronger...and you are even more beautiful...It's wonderful to love someone...*

As it had been anticipated, even though Annie was shattered by anxiety, as soon as Archie knew the truth, he tenderly reassured her. Willing to endure the most terrible of punishments in case the nuns would have discovered her, she had asked to speak to him. Annie had told that, when she finished her confession, the boy said to her gently: "No matter where you come from, nothing can change what you are." Seeing for the first time such an honest expression on Archie's face, Annie hadn't been able to hold back her tears.

"I...I don't even know why I've been worried like that all this time... Candy, Archie has been really tender...I don't pretend that he fell immediately in love with me...But I want to become a girl whom some day he can love truly from the bottom of his heart..."

Pronouncing those words, Annie seemed almost glowing, confident in her hope of being able to love deeply the boy of her dreams.

To love. To love from the bottom of your heart.

True love. That was an expression which Candy didn't feel she could use yet. When she thought about that, she felt confused and noticed inside her a sensation that made her think: could she use these words so lightly? She had loved Anthony, but perhaps not even for him...

*I... Will I be able to love really someone?*

"I know I've treated you rudely, but I will not apologize."

Remembering those words, Candy felt again disoriented and sighed bewildered.

"There, you're in the clouds again!" said Patty, waving a hand in front of her eyes.

"What...? What's the matter? What happened?" exclaimed Candy, coming back to herself and blinking her eyes.

"We were talking about summer vacation. I should go back to America..." confessed Annie, looking down in an almost guilty manner.

"Really? Your parents will be anxious to see you again! I think Archie and the others will return home too," remarked Candy cheerfully, teasing her friend.

There was little time left for the beginning of the long summer holidays.

"And what about you, Candy? What will you do?" asked Patty, looking at her.

"Well, I...I think I'll attend the summer activities of the college."

The summer courses of St. Paul's Institute were held every year in Scotland, but they were not very popular among the students: in fact, the rules applied were not far from the rigid ones which were imposed throughout the year.

"You know, that seems a terrible experience. Candy, why don't you come with me? Oxford is a very beautiful place."

"Thank you so much, Patty, but I'm a little curious to discover what's really hidden behind that *terrible summer college*," replied Candy smiling.

The truth was that she wanted to visit Scotland. That was the Ardlay family's place of origin, a site linked to Anthony and Prince on the Hill.

"Besides, don't you think that when the vacation starts we'll be able to have a little more freedom? Before everybody returns home, why don't we go to the Blue River Zoo? We could also invite Stear and Archie,"



she proposed winking at her two friends and turning her eyes vividly from the one to the other on purpose.

The other two girls burst into a cheerful laughter, breaking the melancholic atmosphere that had been created.

“It would be fantastic! That means I could see Hughley again!” cried Patty joyfully, bringing her hands to her face.

“Is it just about Hughley that you are so happy, Patty?”

“Oh, Candy, stop that now!” implored Patty and, embarrassed by the sarcastic question, she became as red as a poppy.

*Stear and Patty...Yes, they really make a beautiful couple.*

Candy looked up. Between the green leaves, the flashes of the clear sky seemed almost like blue drops, ready to fall on the ground. Her beloved summer was about to begin.

That afternoon she headed to the forest that was illuminated by the sunset light. Everything was so wonderful that she had not resisted, and she had slipped out of the students' dormitory before the bell announced dinner. In the sky the tones of light pink, orange and violet had been delicately fused. The trees were glowing under the rays of the sun, similar to golden columns that extended towards the sky. From time to time the leaves were gliding to the ground, as if they were sighs.

She picked up one of those leaves that had fallen prematurely. It had a vivid green color and Candy thought that in the world there were leaves that, although they were not yet dry, were destined to fall. She kept it in her pocket.

The colors of the sunset were changing every moment. Suddenly, as if those tonalities had become musical notes, she heard the sweet sound of a piano coming from the other side of the forest. Candy stopped.

*What a beautiful melody...Is it coming from the music room?*

Attracted by that sound, similar to the perfume of roses, she advanced among the trees and headed towards a brick building. The closer she was getting, the clearer the music was becoming.

When she got there, she looked up. The melody seemed almost to descend dancing from a classroom on the second floor.

*It's really a very sweet music...I wonder who's playing it...*

She noticed a branch extending precisely to the window of the room she had located, so she decided to climb that tree. But, when she almost got there, she was out of breath.

*Terry...*

Sitting in front of a grand piano located near the window, there was indeed Terry, absorbed in elegantly playing upon the keys with his long fingers. The music that continued flowing under his hands

seemed almost like a beam of light that, while shining, was spreading outwards through the window.

Holding her breath, Candy leaned silently against the stout trunk of the tree.

When that melody had reached her ears, for some strange reason her heart had begun to flutter. She had sensed that it could be Terry playing, and she hadn't been mistaken. Leaning against the trunk and sitting on a branch, the girl was listening to him entranced.

The boy who was now looking down at the piano was completely different from the Terry she had the opportunity to know until that moment: in front of her was Terrence G. Granchester, wrapped in an aristocratic atmosphere. That young man of evident high social class seemed incredibly distant to her...But suddenly the music stopped.

"I would never have imagined that monkeys listened to music," remarked Terry, looking up with his usual sarcastic expression.

Having been spellbound until a moment ago, Candy came back to herself and got up from the trunk. For how long had he noticed her presence? It was since the May Festival that they hadn't looked each other so directly and the girl on the branch felt intimidated. She was so embarrassed that she wanted to go back down to the ground immediately, but she couldn't take her eyes off him.

"If you want to keep listening to me, take a jump and join me. It must be a piece of cake for a little monkey like you."

Laughing as if he had completely forgotten their last encounter, Terry made a gesture with both hands for her to come closer. He almost seemed as if he were calling a puppy and Candy got angry, forgetting all the embarrassment she felt.

"Stop calling me like that! You are really rude!" she reprimanded him, jumping instantly into the room.

"Good heavens! Now that I see you better, you are a *freckled little monkey*. You must belong to a really rare species," he continued teasing her, while he was laughing and pressing the sharpest keys on the piano.

"Terry!"

Really losing her temper, Candy took hold of the curtain, with the intention of leaving. She felt stupid because all this time she had allowed herself to be affected by what had happened at the May Festival.

"No, wait," the boy stopped her with a sincere tone.

Then he continued:

"I was playing...and thinking of you."

Maybe embarrassed by his own words, Terry looked down at the keyboard.

It was true. For a long time he hadn't felt like playing. Then, when he looked up by chance, he had seen her on that branch.

*I thought I was dreaming with my eyes open...Candy...*

But Terry didn't confess these thoughts to her. He just watched her silently while she had still her hands on the curtain, with a confused expression on her face.

"I wouldn't have thought either that a rascal like you could play the piano..." the girl finally managed to murmur, answering him back.

Terry smiled and resumed his playing. Listening to that sweet melody that could melt a heart, Candy finally began to calm down and leaned distractedly against one of the walls of the classroom.

"You are very good, Terry..." she said in a low voice, sighing with admiration, when the part was finished.

"Yes, but only as far as this lullaby by Mozart is concerned," he replied, closing again the piano delicately.

"Is this a lullaby? That's why it made me a little sleepy before."

"She used to play that same piece...I remember that she was also humming it to me, when she was putting me to bed..."

With his gaze lost in the distance, Terry half-closed his eyes, as if he were listening to her.

When he said *she*, he certainly meant Eleanor Baker. Candy held her breath and looked at him. She was happy to see that, while he tried to evoke his memories, there was no sign of rage, hostility or violence in the boy. She felt relief in her heart.

"Well, not that there are other memories connecting me with her..."

"I envy you so much..."

Candy couldn't refrain from saying that to him.

Terry turned to her surprised.

"Even if it was the only memory, at least you have that...I have none," she confessed with sincerity.

*That's true, Candy...you don't even know what your parents looked like...*

Almost as if she had heard the boy's heart murmuring those words, Candy shook her head slightly and smiled.

"But I was abandoned in the most beautiful orphanage in the world. My childhood memories at Pony's Home represent a real treasure for me...I'm grateful to my parents for leaving me there. I'm sure they chose it very carefully."

Listening to her while she was talking so cheerfully, Terry was watching her almost dazzled.

*Tell me more about yourself, Candy.*

Of course the girl didn't need to be begged for that. She told him about generous and friendly Miss Pony and about Sister Lane, so serious and yet sometimes so funny.

“Imagine that there was nobody at Pony’s Home more skilled than myself at throwing the lasso or at climbing trees!”

“And what about your quantity of freckles? You were unsurpassed in that too?”

“Well, of course! Don’t tell me that you still envy me, Terry,” she said jokingly, laughing.

“Yes, I really envy you...I like freckles.”

As if a terrible confession had escaped him, Terry coughed and changed the subject quickly:

“By the way, will you return to America for the summer vacation?”

“No...I haven’t been told to go back, so I will probably attend the summer college.”

“So, you’ll go to Scotland.”

Terry leaned on the piano and lowered his head, as if he were absorbed in some thought.

“My family’s villa is also in Scotland.”

That moment the bell rang. Without them having noticed, the sunset hour had passed and the classroom had taken on a dark blue color with orange reflections. If they didn’t hurry to be on time for dinner, they would get demerit points.

“I have to go,” said Candy, breathlessly holding on to the window ledge.

“I like freckles...”

That phrase had been enough to trouble her. But there was something else she wanted to tell him. She took a deep breath.

“You know, Terry, I...I’m no longer afraid of horses.”

She pronounced those words hurriedly and then, without turning, she threw herself out of the window and grabbed a branch. She felt her body burning up.

“Come and see me to the villa.”

Had she really heard him murmuring that phrase behind her?

## Chapter 13

“To Miss Candice White Ardlay.

Dear Miss Candice,

I suppose you are striving daily in your studies. I am writing to you at Sir William’s request. In fact, he wishes you to spend your summer vacation in the Scottish property of the Ardlays.

In the same period, all the other members of the family too, including Madam Elroy, should move in that villa. This year, the provision applies also to the Cornwell brothers.

Now regarding the letters you have sent me, I can assure you that I always take care of delivering to Sir William the messages addressed to him. As I may have told you many times, regrettably the master is very busy and for that reason I ask you not to expect any letter from him in reply.

I take advantage of this occasion to wish you a happy summer.

George”

*June*

*I am in Scotland!*

*Since I arrived yesterday at the summer school students’ residence, on the outskirts of Edinburgh, emotions are continuous!*

*The meadows full of blue lace flowers and buttercups swaying in the wind, the lakes scattered here and there, the lovely stream that flows resplendent...It almost seems to me I have returned to Lakewood! In the middle of this setting there is also a church that reminds me very much of that one in the village where my beloved Pony’s Home is!*

*Just as I arrived, I let out a cry of joy and climbed impulsively on a branch of the tree that grows in front of the church. Sister Margaret was so frightened!*

*It’s wonderful! This year neither Sister Gray nor Sister Kreis participate in the summer activities since they have to attend some meetings or something like that!*

*I had intended to face the “terrible summer college”, but now I feel quite relaxed.*

*Another positive thing is that Great Aunt Elroy objected to my presence in the family villa. She says she refuses to spend the summer with a person of low social class like me.*

*If I had to choose between spending the holidays with Great Aunt, Neal and the rest of them, and attending the summer courses, no doubt I would take the second option, even if the strictest rules in the world were in force!*

*But there is another thing I'm happy about: Annie and Patty have also decided to attend the summer college! Of course, they don't do it for me. Yes! They discovered that Stear and Archie would spend that time in their Scottish residence, within a short distance from our students' residence.*

*And then...I have discovered that T. G.'s villa is around here...I heard Eliza say so...*

"Come and see me to the villa."

"T. G.". It almost seemed to Candy that she heard again Terry's words. Holding her breath, she closed the diary. Maybe it was just a product of her imagination...

Suddenly, the door swung open.

"Come on, Candy, let's go to the lake!"

Patty and Annie came into the room. The girls were full of life, completely different from what they seemed to be inside the college. That afternoon they would go to the shores of the lake with Stear and Archie, who had settled in their villa a few days ago.

"Sure! But I'm going to get there sooner from here!" replied Candy laughing and raising her hand to wave goodbye to them.

She jumped nimbly from the large wooden window and reached the branch of a tree that grew right there. It looked so inviting that the girl simply couldn't contain herself.

"Oh, Candy!" said Annie, with the same high-pitched laughter she also had as a little girl.

Candy slipped down the trunk and ran away from the large grounds of the college. Then, reaching a path that was moving along through the meadows, she stopped to wait for her friends. At the end of the path she could see the sparkling of the water, similar to the reflection of the sun on a crystal.

When her friends reached her, the three of them started running, while teasing each other.

The boys had already arrived and were waiting for them by the shore.

"Sorry we kept you waiting! It's been such a long time since we could be all of us together, hasn't it?" Candy greeted them enthusiastically.

They were forbidden to bring boys into the girls' dormitory, but outside, once their homework was finished, there were not rules prohibiting the meetings between boys and girls, even in their free time.

Candy and her friends hadn't seen Stear and Archie since the beginning of the vacation, when they had gone to the Blue River Zoo to visit Albert and Hughley. Patty and Annie were thoroughly blushing.

“We had intended to be all of us together, but...”

Looking towards the dock, Archie shrugged his shoulders:

“Eliza and Neal have taken the biggest boat we’ve got. There are only the boats for two persons.”

“But they’re just two of them! In that case, Annie can go with Archie and Patty with Stear!”

Laughing, Candy instantly formed the couples.

“Yes, but...” interposed Patty.

From her expression, Candy understood that her friend was anxious to spend some time with Stear, but she was also afraid she would hurt her.

Laughing again, she assured her:

“I’ll have many other opportunities to take a boat trip! And besides, I would like to explore around a little, so don’t worry about me!”

Walking backwards, she continued smiling and shrugged her shoulders with a carefree gesture. Archie was looking at her as if he wanted to apologize.

“Later we’ll take a ride together, Candy!”

“Forget it, Stear! When I find myself near a lake with you, terrible things always happen to me. So, I’ll see you later!”

When he heard her talking that way, Archie began to laugh, while Stear put his hand on his head, embarrassed. After smiling at them, Candy went away running towards a hill in the vicinity of the water mirror. She had observed that elevation since she arrived at the students’ residence. It was much smaller than False Pony’s Hill and, even if it might seem only a mound of earth, it was covered by colorful summer vegetation, similar to a hat’s floral decoration.

Standing on which she decided to baptize “Small Pony’s Hill”, she observed that blue lake with greenish reflections, on which three boats were outlined. That picture was so beautiful that it seemed like a painting.

Eliza and Neal’s large boat was moving with difficulty. Annie greeted her with her hand and Patty, likewise, noticing her presence, greeted her with big gestures. Even Stear, leaving the oars aside, waved his arms towards her, causing the boat to swing. Then, the two little boats continued moving slowly towards the middle of the lake.

Under the rays of the summer sun, the water mirror was sparkling like golden marble. Candy took a deep breath, inhaling the fragrance of the water and of the lush trees.

*It is the first time I see this place, but it seems to me I have always known it. It’s so familiar to me... Terry must be already in his villa...*

In an absent manner, her thoughts had flown to Terry.

Realizing it, Candy was startled and smiled embarrassed.

*Oh, no! I'm thinking about him again... Oh, Anthony, I'm very strange lately, don't you think?*

She lay down on the grass, among the buttercups and the little blue flowers swayed by the wind. It almost seemed to her that this blue, cloudless sky could embrace her and lift her in the air.

"I like freckles."

She had really heard that phrase; it wasn't the product of her imagination.

Terry had simply talked about her freckles, but, whenever that moment returned to her mind, she felt her heart fluttering.

*Oh, God, I'm grateful for having my face full of freckles... although they had been afflicting me all the time, until now.*

She closed her eyes. It was pleasant to feel the warmth of the sun on her eyelids.

*I wonder what Terry is doing now...*

Drowsing, she began to think about the boy. Suddenly, something tickled her face.

"If you stay here to sleep, you'll end up being bitten by a poisonous snake."

"Aaah!"

She got up frightened and found herself in front of Terry. The lad was laughing and looking down at her, waving the seed of a spike.

The girl stood up instantly. How strange, just a moment ago she was thinking about him and now...

"Well, really! You always scare me..."

Containing the emotions stirring in her, Candy made a grimace and took from the boy's hand the twig with which he had tickled her cheek.

"It was me who got scared. Who would have thought that Tarzan was afraid of snakes? Actually I think they are much more afraid of you."

"Terry!"

It was useless to look at him in a threatening manner; she couldn't make her gaze hard. On the other hand, Terry was still smiling.

"What brings you here by the lake? Oh, I know! You were looking for me?"

Candy's happiness perspired even in the tone of her voice. The girl was forced to regain her control.

"Oh, please! Since I arrived, I always come here to read. It's my favorite place. I had never thought that today someone would come to disturb me."

Terry lifted the thick book he had brought with him to slightly tap Candy's head. Actually he had been waiting for the girl to arrive. He



forced himself to hold back the muscles of his face, ready to relax into an uncontrollable smile.

“Well...So you are a great reader. Seeing you, who would have thought that of you?”

After regaining her composure, Candy threw a sidelong glance at Terry’s book.

“What is it about?”

“Shakespeare.”

The boy gave her the book, bound in a hard cover of dark brown leather.

“Shakespeare...Oh, of course! He’s the one who wrote *Romeo and Juliet!*” she said innocently.

Both looked away at the same time. Candy realized that Terry had remembered too the May Festival and she started going through the leaves of the book to conceal her embarrassment.

“This is *Macbeth*...I didn’t know you loved tragedies.”

“Actually I don’t like them,” he retorted, with a voice that had suddenly become hard.

“Really? Not even this passage?” asked Candy, sarcastically showing him one of the pages.

The text had been underlined in several places, and there were even annotations. Terry narrowed his eyes as if he were troubled and snatched the book from her hand.

“To be honest...I like them...although it’s hard for me to admit it.”

Smiling, Candy nodded and felt her heart becoming warmer. Terry was really Eleanor Baker’s son. Although he had rejected her, perhaps his heart also pursued the same passion with his mother.

Just at that moment, seated in her boat, Eliza saw Terry and Candy standing on the hill.

“What...? How can that be? What are those two doing together? What does he want...”

The moment she abruptly stood up, she lost her balance and, with a scream, fell into the lake. Neal was splashed with large drops of water.

“It’s...it’s very cold! Help me, quick!”

Even breathing with difficulty in the middle of the lake, she didn’t stop ordering people around.

“Hey, Archie! Come and give us a hand!” her brother shouted breathlessly towards the boat of Archie, whose intention was to come close.

“Neal, can’t you help her yourself?”

“Archie, Neal can’t swim. But maybe Eliza can.”

Approaching him, Stear began a placid conversation with Archie.

“Is it so hot that you felt like taking a bath? Does it feel good to have a dip, Eliza?”

Waving her hands, the girl appeared and disappeared under the surface of the water. Of course, she didn't have time for insults.

That moment, a noise was heard: from the shore, Terry had jumped into the water. Swimming in freestyle, he reached Eliza and, to the general astonishment, he helped her climb into the boat.

“Move on!” he told Neal, and started rowing quickly to the shore.

The other two boats also hurried to follow him.

Eliza remained lying, pretending to be unconscious and wondering if it would be best to simply continue acting as if she had fainted. She smiled inwardly and, even on the shore, she kept her eyes closed, leaning languidly on her savior. When Terry lifted her up and put her on the ground, she had to restrain herself with all her might from smiling.

Archie and Stear left hurriedly their boats and, with pale faces, went towards her. Even Candy approached quickly. She had run down the hill with Terry and she had waited for the rescue from a distance.

“Are you idiots? It may be midsummer, but the water in this lake is frozen! And if I had had a heart attack? Have you thought about that?”

Reprimanded sharply by Terry, Stear and Archie began to get agitated too.

“We are sorry...Eliza, are you all right?”

The girl opened her eyes slightly.

“No...I'm not all right...Terry...”

Instead of answering Stear's question, Eliza called Terry with a weak voice.

“You...you have risked your life to save me...Take me home...I can't walk...”

“If you can say all that, I'd really say there's nothing to worry about,” replied Terry dryly, moving away from her and willing to leave.

“Terry, you'll catch a cold; you'd better change your wet clothes immediately...” interposed Candy suddenly.

Pushing back his soaked hair, he replied:

“It's nothing. I have been swimming in this lake since I was a child.”

After giving them a smile, he ran up the hill.

Eliza lifted her head to look at him and watched him delighted as he was moving away.

“Bah! That fellow is putting on such airs!” remarked Neal sulkily, with his face distorted with rage.

When she heard him talking like that, his sister came back to herself and threw him a murderous look.

“Neal! Don’t stand there! Go immediately to tell the servants to prepare towels and blankets for me!”

Her brother was startled and went away running.

“And you! You would have let me drown, wouldn’t you? How could you? You won’t get away with this! Archie, Stear, help me get up! Go on! Annie, you will bring my shoes! Patty, my purse!”

Shouting hysterically, Eliza turned to Candy and gave her a look of flaming hate.

“It’s your fault that I almost died of drowning! I’ll tell everything to Great Aunt and the nuns!”

Held by the two boys, who were disgusted by that behavior, Eliza began to walk. Annie and Patty turned around troubled and Candy gave them a little smile to reassure them.

When all that commotion finished and the others went away, the girl let out a deep breath.

“Eliza has really a lot of energy...I don’t think her heart has suffered any damage. She’s definitely not even going to catch a cold.”

In the villa there would certainly be the servants, Great Aunt Elroy and Mrs. Leagan too. No doubt Stear and Archie would be severely reprimanded.

*Thank God I didn’t have to go with them...*

Candy felt relieved and evoked the beautiful image of Terry swimming in the lake.

She began to climb Small Pony’s Hill, when she noticed that in the meadow, along the shore, was the book with Shakespeare’s tragedies. Terry must have thrown it on the ground before jumping to rescue Eliza.

*You are really a nice person, Terry...*

Candy had been almost touched to see the boy getting suddenly pale and rushing to the lake. He would probably have done the same thing for anyone, regardless of who would have been in danger of drowning. Without realizing it, she brought that book to her chest. She had still some free time before dinner.

“But of course! I’ll take it to him!”

She felt full of life again and started running.

She immediately recognized the Granchester estate.

Half-hidden in a dense grove, there stood an imposing iron gate, rusted and invaded by grass. In the middle, the emblem had the family’s name engraved on it, but even those letters were rusty and had a brownish color. Just a look was enough to realize that the lock was broken. Spying inside through the entrance, it was still not possible for her to take a glimpse of the villa.

Armed with courage, Candy opened the gate and crossed it. She walked along a path invaded by the summer vegetation, but the villa still seemed distant.

“This is really a noble’s estate. It’s enormous...but it’s been left in a very poor condition...”

The pond that was seen beyond the vegetation was already dry and even the garden hedges were growing freely. It didn’t look like an inhabited place at all, and Candy began to wonder if she would really find Terry there.

After crossing the dense grove, she finally could see an old building with an antique appearance. The broad bases of the towers seemed the right place for witches to rest. Close to the building, hidden in the shade of the trees, she noticed a red car. She was happy to see traces of human presence and she approached the striking-colored automobile.

“Go! Get out of here!” resounded suddenly Terry’s angry voice, and a large door was opened wide.

At the same time a very beautiful woman came out, almost pushed forcefully. She was wearing a dress in a forget-me-not color and she had blond hair. When she saw her, Candy remained still as if she had turned into stone.

*Eleanor Baker!*

In flesh, that woman didn’t look as young as she appeared in her pictures. The loaded make up had run through her tears, and a great fatigue was on her face.

“Please, I’m only asking you for a few moments! Terrence, listen to what I have to tell you! Terry!”

“Shut up! I have nothing more to say to you! You didn’t want to talk to me either, did you? You sent me back because you didn’t want them to know about me, am I wrong? Do you...do you have any idea what I felt while I was crossing the ocean? Go away!”

The lad’s eyes were wet and his cries seemed like a cry of pain. Candy held her breath.

“I beg you, forgive me...Terry...I know I was wrong...In my heart I was so happy to see you again...it’s only that...I...”

She extended a hand as if to cling to her son, but he jerked away from her.

“Let’s finish that once and for all! I don’t have a mother anymore! I don’t want to see your face ever again! Go!”

Candy couldn’t hear any longer.

“Stop it!” she screamed with a groan, almost inadvertently.

Terry and his mother were startled and turned around to look at her.

“Terry...Stop it now...That’s not what you really think. Be honest...you love your mother very much...that’s why on the ship...your sad

expression, the first time we met, impressed me so much...and now, instead, you want to throw her out...This is terrible...Terry, please, listen to what she has to say to you...If I...If I had a mother who would come from so far away to find me, I..."

She suddenly stopped. Carried away by her thoughts, maybe she had said improper things. The book with Shakespeare's tragedies slipped from her hands.

"Forgive me...I don't know what happened to me...I shouldn't have interfered...But don't send your mother away...I beg you!"

Shouting those last words, Candy turned and ran away. Her vision was clouded and she noticed that she was crying.

The Edinburgh summer changed color from one moment to the other: the morning was wrapped in green and it was full of light, the afternoon was rainy and grey, the sunset was filled with white mist. Maybe wishing to relax too, the nuns of the summer college gave many free moments to the students and that allowed Candy to join Stear and Archie almost every day.

There were moments when, as in a mirage, it almost seemed to her that she had returned to Lakewood. However, Anthony wasn't there with her. There was Annie's and Patty's cheerful laughter now...and Candy didn't feel any longer that sadness that oppressed her until it prevented her from breathing.

Relentless, time never stopped running.

*I wonder how Terry is doing...I couldn't help intervening...maybe he's angry with me now...*

But, in spite of everything, Candy hadn't been able to remain silent. Whatever had happened between them, Eleanor Baker and Terry were mother and son. Eleanor Baker was a world-famous actress. Hiding from prying eyes, she had come all the way to Scotland to find him.

*She must have done it...because she loves her son very much.*

Near the window, Candy sighed.

## Chapter 14

The cold wind announced the end of summer. The summer college was about to finish and soon everybody should go back to the institute in London and to the days which were marked by the rigid rules.

That afternoon, taking advantage of free time, even the nuns had left and Candy was alone in the students' dormitory. After finishing her homework, the girl jumped from the window to reach a branch of her tree. She always used to stop halfway, but the knowledge that there was nobody around to observe her reassured her, allowing her to climb to the top. When she sat down, the branch bent underneath her. The higher she came, the fresher the leaves seemed to be. Looking up, she realized that even now the color of the sky foreshadowed the arrival of autumn. The white clouds were moving and seemed so near as if she could touch them with her hand.

"The clouds seem to be made of marshmallow...I wonder if the others are moderately eating white cupcakes at this moment..."

At that thought, Candy smiled. In fact, Annie and Patty had been invited to the White Party of the Ardleys and, dressed completely in white, had gone reluctantly to the villa. Not even Stear and Archie had managed to get away from that commitment: since the boat incident, Eliza seemed to have control over them.

"How lucky I am not to have been invited!"

Just imagining a party in which everything, from the tablecloths to the dishes, would be of an immaculate color, took her breath away. In addition it had been established that the guests should also wear clothes that would fit to that theme.

"I wonder why Eliza got it so suddenly into her head to organize such an elaborate reception..."

Thinking that Great Aunt Elroy might have dressed in white too, she started laughing.

"It's not bad to be alone once in a while! Come on, it's been already a long time since I have jumped from one branch to another!"

After descending a little, she moved over some overlapping branches that grew nearby. Then, oscillating like a pendulum, she jumped to the next tree. Everything was in order, she hadn't lost her ability.

*Of course...no wonder someone calls me little monkey...*

Flying fast in the air, the girl smiled. In her attempt to become a real lady, she had tried to refrain from behaving like Tarzan, but that really represented an irrevocable activity for her. Those trees seemed to have been created on purpose to allow her to jump from one branch to another.

“Oh, what a fantastic feeling!”

Maybe she could go in that way to the villa of the Ardlays and enjoy the view from above...Reflecting on what to do, Candy threw herself towards her next objective.

Some crunches. Suddenly, accompanied by a crash, she fell to the ground: the branch to which she had clung had in fact split in two. However, she was used to falling. Precisely because making mistakes had happened to her many times, she had learned the right technique to avoid getting hurt. Rubbing her back, she got up slowly. When she stood up, she heard the snort of a horse behind her.

“How shocking! A monkey falling from the sky!”

Terry had stopped his white horse and was looking amused at her from above.

“It’s really the first time I see a wild monkey in these places.”

Candy screamed to hide her embarrassment, and puckered up her nose, imitating a little monkey. Terry began to laugh and his laughter sounded clear and cheerful.

Since that day they had no longer met, neither on the hill nor at the lake, and not even in the old chateau. However, during all that time, she had continued thinking about him. Dressed in his white suit and riding a horse with the same color, Terry seemed a real gentleman.

“Well? Haven’t you been invited to that stupid White Party or whatever in hell it’s called?” he asked, laughing still.

“Imagine about that! Obviously I haven’t!” she replied proudly.

“Fine...then I won’t go either.”

“What did you say?”

“Why do you seem so happy? I think it’s evident, isn’t it? I meant to go because I thought you would be there. So, you see how honest I am,” he said with narrowed eyes.

Candy nodded several times.

“Well, so it’s decided.”

From above, the boy offered his hand to her.

“But...”

“Would you like to come and see my villa? You could even meet the ghost of a knight.”

“Really? It sounds so romantic...” she answered with a happy smile, and then she grabbed Terry’s hand and got on the horse.

In the meantime, on the large terrace of the Ardlays, Eliza kept turning anxiously towards the door.

*What has happened to Terry? Everybody else is already here...*

On the porch there was a large table covered with a white tablecloth. On top of it there had been placed flowers of the same color and a

banquet of white fruit, already peeled, and of many kinds of desserts decorated with whipped cream.

“How hungry I am! Eliza, can’t we start now?” asked Stear, as he was about to extend his hand to reach a sandwich filled with cream.

“No!” she replied with a piercing look. “Evidently I haven’t prepared all this for you!”

“How wicked you are!” exclaimed Stear, and he sneaked a white cookie into his mouth.

With a sly laugh, Archie imitated him. Annie and Patty, on the contrary, were sitting without even moving a muscle. If it had helped to become invisible in Eliza’s eyes, they would even have stopped breathing.

Sitting between Mrs. Leagan and Great Aunt Elroy, comfortably reclining on a sofa and with a glass of white wine in his hand, Neal was trying to win the favor of the two women.

*They all look so satisfied... What fools!*

Eliza began to walk nervously.

*It’s very strange! Something must have happened to him!*

It could be said that this party had been organized especially for Terry. To thank him for saving her life, Eliza had invited him to dinner, but he had politely rejected her. Therefore, she thought of inventing a more special occasion, hoping that would please him. She was also sure that, when he saw her in her white dress, similar to a wedding gown, he would be fascinated.

*He must have got suddenly sick, otherwise I’m sure he would have come. I gave him the honor of receiving the invitation from my own hands! He accepted it smiling... He must have been very happy at that moment. And there don’t seem to be very good servants in that villa. I’m sure they’re not even capable of delivering flowers.*

Eliza nodded to herself confidently. That moment Great Aunt looked at the sky and got up from the sofa.

“Eliza, the sky is darkening and the wind is rising too. I think we’d better move the party to the salon.”

“Of course, Aunt. We’ll move the table ourselves,” replied Eliza with a wide smile.

Then, as soon as the women and Neal left the porch, she ordered authoritatively:

“Archie! Stear! Move the table! Annie, Patty, you too!”

“All right, all right...”

The two boys exchanged a glance, but Eliza turned her back on them haughtily and left.

“The reason for all this anger must be that gallant noble,” remarked Archie astonished, following her with his eyes.



“He accepted the invitation, didn’t he? I suppose Eliza organized this extremely annoying party because he confirmed to her that he would be there.”

Disobeying the instructions, Stear reclined comfortably on a chair and sank a spoon into the rice pudding.

“However...I think Terry won’t come. Not when he finds out that Candy hasn’t been invited...” murmured Patty, standing with an embarrassed expression on her face and a white ceramic teapot in her hand.

“What did you say?”

Archie stopped surprised and his face hardened. Annie watched him alarmed.

“What do you mean? What has Candy got to do with that noble?”

A thunder was heard from a distance.

“Forget it and help me carry the table. The sky isn’t at all promising,” Stear admonished him, getting up with the pudding still in his hand.

Terry’s villa was enormous, dark and silent.

In each part of the hall, there were swords and armors that seemed to be able to move at any moment. On the walls hung grim portraits of the ancestors of the Granchesters, generation after generation. In fact, after seeing the atmosphere that reigned in that place, it wouldn’t have been so strange if the ghost of a knight had actually appeared. Although at first it had seemed a romantic experience to her, now Candy was afraid.

“Oh, my God, a tiger!”

Upon entering a spacious room, the girl screamed: in a corner, there was indeed a huge tiger that was looking at her showing its fangs.

“It’s stuffed. I bet you’re actually scared of ghosts too. Watch out, there is a snake behind you!”

“Aah!”

Impulsively, Candy clung to Terry.

“To make a girl embrace you, the best thing is to know what she is afraid of.”

“Oh, Terry...”

Hearing the lad’s triumphal tone, the girl turned away from him immediately.

“Is it really a stuffed animal? It seems almost ready to move at any moment...”

Cautiously, she tried to touch it. A tiger. Ti...Ger...T. G. At that thought, Candy smiled.

During summer college she had been lost in her thoughts inside the students’ residence once and she had written “T. G.” on the

condensation that was formed on a window. Evidently those were the initials of Terrence G. Granchester, as she referred to him in her diary.

“What are you writing?”

Surprised by Patty, she had hurried to erase the letters.

“Oh, well...tiger...Yes, I was writing *tiger!* You know what? It’s an animal I like very much...it’s so strong and powerful...”

She had invented that story right at that moment, but maybe her friend had understood everything.

“It looks like a storm is about to break out,” murmured Terry, beginning to gradually close all the window shutters.

The wind that came from outside was getting colder.

“This villa is old and half of the shutters are damaged.”

“Where are the servants?”

While she was helping him close the numerous windows, Candy finally expressed the doubt she had had for some time.

“The Cods, the family that had worked in the villa in the past, live nearby. They are in charge of everything when I come here. Even our horses live with them now. Nobody uses this place any longer, because the new second residence is in Windermere. However, I have never been there.”

Terry turned to look and smile at her. In the dark room, his eyes glowed with a tender light.

“You know something? I simply can’t forget the summers I spent here when I was little, with the duke of Granchester and an American actress.”

Surprised, Candy looked away. Terry began to light the candles that were scattered in the room and everything was enveloped in an almost unreal atmosphere.

Suddenly a thunder was heard and then the noise of the rain resounded, similar to the waves crashing against the rocks. A gust of wind opened wide the shutters that had been closed, making them beat and letting in the rain and the wind. The air became suddenly cold and Candy put her hands on her arms.

Terry disappeared for a moment and reappeared out of a room at the end of the hall, holding a white robe in his hand.

“Take that...” he said, and, slightly embarrassed, he placed that white silk garment on her shoulders.

Candy sensed a soft and sweet perfume.

“It belongs to my mother...” he revealed to her almost with difficulty, looking away.

Candy turned around, surprised. Their eyes suddenly met and, at the same time, both hurried to look away.

“Terry...But...that day...?”

“Eleanor Baker told me to give her regards to a little girl full of freckles.”

“Did she, really? Then...then...Oh, Terry...”

She didn't need to know more. Terry and his mother...Eleanor had been able to speak to her son with sincerity. Happy, she tightened the sleeves of that robe, which was too big for her, and she felt her eyes getting moist.

Terry didn't go into any more details on the subject and he started to light a fire in the fireplace. He must have been accustomed to doing that, because the flame ignited immediately and the warm color of the fire began to vibrate in Candy's eyes.

“Come closer to the fireplace.”

In other words, that phrase meant “come closer to me”. At that thought, Terry felt unusually nervous. Candy obeyed meekly and sat on a fur rug. Then she extended both hands towards the fire.

“How warm it is...” she murmured.

The flames were dancing behind the girl's profile. Terry kept looking at her.

*That day too, at nightfall, we lit the fireplace. She and I stayed here until dawn, looking at the fire. We didn't talk about anything in particular, but I understood...If only she could, she would have stayed with the duke of Granchester...and with me. That's what she really wanted...much more than becoming an actress. Without Candy, I wouldn't have understood any of this. I was almost ready to throw my mother out. I was almost ready to do something which I wouldn't have been able to remedy later.*

Suddenly, Candy smiled at him and he smiled back at her with all his heart. Sometimes even a single smile is worth more than a thousand words. The girl's chest was filled with a sensation of warmth: she liked Terry. That thought was almost painful and she wondered if he also felt the same thing. Time seemed to stop for an instant and the boy instinctively extended his fingers towards her. But suddenly he stopped, as if he had come back to himself.

With a sigh, Candy slowly turned back to watch the fire.

“There is a fireplace at Pony's Home too...The teachers always prepared marshmallows.”

“Your conversations are often about food.”

Time went on and Terry, as if tension had finally dissolved, smiled at her and extended his legs on the rug.

“The fact is that every day I couldn't wait for the time of snack and dinner...I also liked to have bread and cookies along with the teachers...they were delicious! How I wish you could taste too Sister Lane's raisin cookies!”

"I would like to go some day...I would be curious to see the apple tree on which you learned to act like Tarzan."

"Would you? You have to promise me!" she exclaimed, turning to look at him with shining eyes. "But maybe the moment has come for me to stop acting like Tarzan... When autumn comes I have to strive to become a real lady."

She had spoken with the utmost seriousness, but he started laughing.

"A lady, *you?* I really can't imagine you like this!"

"How rude you are!" cried Candy inflating her cheeks in order to look angry, but she started laughing too. "I'm not sure yet how a real lady behaves, but when I meet Great Uncle William, I don't want him to be disappointed. I want to become a girl he can be proud of."

"You're talking about the person who adopted you, aren't you?"

"Exactly. In the letters George, his secretary, sends me, he always writes that Great Uncle can't wait for me to be a splendid young lady."

"How stressing!" remarked Terry laughing.

"But I have no other way of showing him my gratitude...If I try, I think I can have results in my behavior, in my way of thinking and even in my studies, but..."

When he saw that her expression had become serious, Terry stopped smiling.

"...I simply can't keep up with the rest when it comes to the piano...and other instruments."

Indeed, all the students in the institute could play some instrument. The piano, the clavichord, the harp, the violin. Annie, for example, played the piano as well as the flute.

"You have to study without haste, taking your time."

"But if I don't hurry, Great Uncle might die."

"Is he that old?"

"Nobody has ever seen him, so there are just rumors, but it seems he is already very old."

"In that case, I see why you are in such a hurry."

"Of course, if there was a good teacher willing to give me private piano lessons, it would be a great help for me," said Candy, slyly scrutinizing his face.

The boy began to laugh and gave her a light tap on the forehead.

"If you agree with me, I would be available. Is that what you wanted to hear me say?"

"Exactly!" she replied with a radiant smile.

Containing the impulse to pull her towards him and hold her tight, Terry got up. The fire in the fireplace was already going out and, without them having noticed, the sound of the rain had stopped too.

The bright rays of the sun were filtered now through the damaged shutters.

“If it’s all right with you, I would be happy to give you a hand, *Freckled Tarzan*,” said the lad, making a great bow to her.

“I don’t like the end of the sentence very much, but the important thing is that you have offered to help me,” said Candy, and while rising she ended up stepping on the robe’s hem.

Chuckling, Terry remarked amused:

“Definitely you don’t feel well at all.”

“You’ll see that one day I’ll become a girl who can wear even a magnificent robe like this!” she retorted in an affected manner.

“That is impossible,” he said laughing and headed towards a room at the end of the hall.

Worried about spoiling Eleanor Baker’s white silk robe, Candy took it off and carefully folded it.

“Here is the music room. There is a piano as well as a harp.”

Terry put his hand on a door surrounded by various bookshelves. Standing behind him, Candy examined them.

“Terry, they’re all books about theatre! There are even all the works of Shakespeare!”

“Yes...”

The boy stopped and took one of the volumes, but he put it back in its place a moment later.

Before leaving, his mother, Eleanor Baker, had proposed to him to go with her to America to study acting. Maybe that woman had felt in her heart that her son was deeply interested in that world.

*My old self...would have ended up following her. Before meeting you, Candy...*

He was looking at her while she was absorbed in admiring those countless books with fascinated eyes. He felt he had found something capable of captivating him more than acting.

“The piano is here,” he said.

Terry promised himself he would relive fully that beautiful summer they had spent together.

“It’s fantastic! It really looks like the music room of the college!” exclaimed Candy joyfully as soon as she crossed the threshold of the room.

Near a grand piano there was a harpsichord, a harp and several cases of violins of different sizes, placed here and there.

“They must be full of dust; it’s been a long time since anybody came here. Candy, would you mind opening the window?”

Shaking off the dust, Terry opened the piano, while the girl opened both shutters wide. The room was flooded with the scent of grass after

the rain and with the blue of the sky that had cleared after the downpour. Suddenly, Terry started playing a cheerful and rhythmic melody.

“What is this piece called?” asked Candy, standing behind him.

While continuing to run across the keys with his fingers, the boy turned around and answered sarcastically:

“It’s an improvisation. The title is *Freckled Tarzan and the little monkey!*”

“Oh, stop it, Terry!”

Candy only gave him a slight push, but he reacted theatrically and threw himself on the floor, taking the chair along with him. The atmosphere was filled with their laughter.

Hidden behind the wide open door, Eliza was watching them with eyes flaming with rage.

Worried about Terry’s condition, Eliza had decided to go to the villa and see him. She thought that surely the boy must have had a sudden fever, otherwise he would never have missed the party without even warning.

The iron gate of the residence was half-closed and she had crossed it without hesitation. On the other side of the uncultivated garden, she had seen among the summer vegetation a white horse, tied in the shade of a tree. That detail had left her no doubt.

*I knew it! Terry intended to go to the White Party riding that horse!*

She smiled vainly.

*Who knows how happy he’ll be to see that I’ve come personally to find him.*

It almost seemed to her that she could see the lad’s excited expression.

She had knocked hard and called several times, but nobody had come. However, the entrance door was open and she convinced herself that she would be forgiven for having passed without permission. Moreover, she would sneak in precisely in order to surprise him! So, she walked triumphantly down the dark hall and, from one of the last rooms, she had heard the sound of a piano and some joyful laughter. She headed to that direction.

At first, she couldn’t believe the scene that had developed in front of her. Hidden in the shadows, she was overwhelmed with such anger that it almost seemed to her that her heart was going to burst out.

*Candy! I’ll never forgive you for this! What has a ragged girl like her got to do with Terry? How impertinent! Don’t even dream about it! I’ll never let you have him!*

The girl bit her lip hard.

## Chapter 15

*September...*

*Finally, this summer vacation has also come to an end. It has flown away...*

*Summer college isn't terrible at all, quite the contrary! Every day it seemed to me that I lived in a wonderful dream...I'm still full of memories. The wind and the light of Scotland...how many images are crowded in my mind whenever I close my eyes...*

*I even managed to improve my piano performance a little. Thank you, T.G.! In this college, so full of rules, I don't know when we'll have again the opportunity to have lessons together, but I promise you I'll keep practising the fundamental notions you have taught me!*

*The vacation has been so amusing that at this moment I can endure even Sister Gray's severe face.*

*However...something pretty sad has happened too. When I came back I found in the students' dormitory a letter written by Albert. He has gone again...This time it seems he's in Africa...He always laughed saying he was not meant to sit still in one place, but...how I would have liked to see him at least once more...I wonder when we will meet again...*

Evoking her friend's smile, the girl read again the letter she had kept among the diary's pages.

“Dearest Candy,

At this moment I am in an African country called Kenya. Well? Have you remained speechless?

I apologize for leaving without warning you. When you came to the zoo with Stear and the others, I wanted to talk to you about this, but seeing you all so happy, I couldn't do it. I knew I would have made you sad.

Apparently I don't even have the talent to work at a zoo. I couldn't bear to see those animals in cages every day and I always had a great desire to let them free. Before actually falling into temptation, I decided to leave with Poupe and immerse myself in nature.

Right now I'm helping at a clinic (for humans). There are people who have come from all over the world and among them there is also an American nurse who is almost twenty years old. She looks a little like you.

Dear Candy, there can never be any goodbyes between us. I know we'll meet again.

Until then, I wish you are always well and keep being yourself!

Albert

P. S. I forgot, don't worry about Hughley, I entrusted her to the care of a co-worker. Patty can go and visit her whenever she likes."

"I see...So, even if I escaped from college, I wouldn't have anyone to visit..." remarked Terry disappointed, looking up at the sky when he finished reading the letter.

During recess for lunch, they had met on False Pony's Hill.

"Africa is so far away...From the way he's talking, it almost seems he's just around the corner, but he's not..." sighed Candy.

"Certainly that's just like him...to be able to leave freely and go wherever he wants..."

"You are right, Albert likes freedom...I suppose he'll be much happier to be able to spend his time among the animals that live in nature."

"I know we'll meet again."

If it was him who affirmed that, Candy thought, surely they would see each other again some day, just as they had met again by chance that night at a corner of London.

The girl looked up too. In that pale blue sky, autumn had already come and even the wind carried with it, mixed with other odors, the aroma of that season. The flowers that had filled the elevation with color were now completely deflowered and their seeds had begun to change color.

Since they had returned to the institute, the two of them had been meeting secretly every day at the same hour and in the same place. Not that they kept seeing each other, but during the summer vacation, on the last day of their secret piano lessons in Terry's Scottish villa, he had said:

"I think that from now on I'll just be spending the lunch recess on the hill."

The boy had murmured those words in such a way that Candy could hear them.

"I think I'll do the same thing too," she had replied indifferently, pretending to talk to herself.

At the mere thought that she would also be able to see him again once she returned to the college, Candy's heart had begun to beat louder. She would have been content even with a few moments; she just wanted to be close to him and hear his voice.



“I wonder about that nurse who looks like you. No doubt she’ll be a girl full of freckles, with a snub nose, and getting from one problem into another.”

“Imagine about that!”

Terry’s jokes amused her.

“But she’s working in Africa. I have to admit that she’s really an admirable girl. I think being a nurse is a very important job...”

Candy’s gaze was lost far away in the distance.

“At Pony’s Home, where I grew up, when someone was taken ill, there was always a great concern. In fact, there was no doctor in the village and we had to go to a rather distant town to find one. If a child had a high fever in the middle of the night, the teachers seemed desperate. Those moments Sister Lane always repeated that she should have studied nursing...At that time I was just a child and I was left there overwhelmed by anxiety, without being able to do anything to help her...”

Watching the girl’s profile, Terry narrowed his eyes.

*Since you were a child...You’ve grown up having to worry about so many things...*

On the contrary, he had grown up in a world where the family doctor and his trained nurse appeared immediately even before the first cough, a world where the servants were those who thought about everything. For the members of an illustrious lineage like his own, it was assumed that people should bow before them. Their acquaintances were based on flattery and falsehood, which was just what the duke of Granchester did, just what his stepmother and her children did, without ever having even the shadow of a doubt.

*It’s precisely because they are that kind of people that they are not even capable of truly loving!*

His father hadn’t been able to love Eleanor Baker forever. Those times he was an aristocrat and she was an American actress, still at the beginning of her career. The duke had hidden their relationship from everyone, and when she gave birth to Terrence, he took the child and abandoned her. For his father, Terry symbolized the stain of a past that he didn’t even want to remember. So he had grown up under the gaze of people who looked at him almost as if he were something dirty.

“If you found it so annoying, why did you take me with you?” he had shouted at his father more than once.

“I’m sorry for you, Terrence, but the blood of the Granchesters runs in your veins and this is an undeniable reality. I could never have given you to anybody else. However, if you hate your name to this degree and you don’t mind ending up in the middle of the street, you can also deny it. I know very well that it won’t be you who will

continue the good name of the family. Well? Do you have the courage to do it?"

He could still hear his father's loud laughter reverberating in his ears. *Until now I haven't had the courage...but I don't want to become like him! I'll take care of the person I love...I'll make her happy...for as long as I live.*

Terry continued looking seriously at the girl's profile, feeling in his heart that he had found that person. Conscious of that gaze fixed upon her, Candy could almost feel a pain on her cheek. As intoxicated by an uncontrollable sensation of a bittersweet taste, she began to gather the seeds of the spikes around her. She would have liked to keep feeling that pain on her face forever.

Almost every day, until the lights went out, Patty and Annie spent their evenings in Candy's room. The two girls were never tired of talking about Stear and Archie and often, while listening to them, Candy started thinking about Terry. That day was no exception either.

"Lately, when lunch recess arrives, you immediately disappear somewhere, don't you, Candy?"

With a chuckle, Patty scrutinized her friend's enraptured face.

"Well, that..."

"You don't have to pretend with us, Candy," said Annie, nodding gently.

"You meet someone, don't you? A certain Mr. T..."

"But how? Have you noticed?"

Seeing that Annie and Patty were looking at each other, Candy shrugged her shoulders in a troubled manner. She would have wanted to hide anywhere because she felt ashamed.

"Of course we have, since we were at the summer college. Haven't we, Annie?"

"Yes...But, Candy, try to be careful," said Annie, lowering her voice.

Patty also took on a serious expression.

"I think Eliza is watching your movements."

"Sometimes she looks at you with such a threatening gaze...it makes me shiver," added Annie, frowning.

"I hadn't noticed...But certainly that's not a novelty, is it? Eliza has always been meddlesome and has always been looking at me that way," remarked Candy cheerfully, trying to put an end to the fears of her friends.

"I hope it's only that..."

Candy understood well what Patty referred to.

*Eliza likes Terry too.*

The fact that there is someone you like. Surprised, Candy brought a hand to her chest.

*I like Terry. I really like him very much...*

It was the first time she experienced a similar sensation. She had felt for Anthony something very strong too, but the emotions she felt now were slightly different. It was as if her chest were burning with all the warmth it enclosed...Whenever she thought about Terry, she felt sad and happy at the same time. It almost made her breathe with difficulty.

Patty and Annie were now silently staring beyond the dark window. On the other side of the forest were Stear and Archie. Behind them, Candy also looked at the vegetation which was wrapped in darkness.

On the other side of that darkness, Archie was also staring at the window.

“What are you looking at, Archie?” his brother asked him without turning, while still working in front of his writing desk.

“No...nothing...”

Archie hurried to close the curtains.

“Archie...Candy won’t come anymore,” murmured Stear.

“I know. I was only thinking about Candy...and that gallant noble!”

“Oh, you mean Terrence? It seems they get along very well,” remarked Stear cheerfully.

The boy didn’t turn and remained absorbed in his work, even when his brother leaned thoughtfully on the divan.

“I wonder if Candy...has already forgotten Anthony.”

“I hope so.”

“Stear!” exclaimed Archie harshly.

Stear turned slowly. Unlike his cheerful tone, a calm and melancholy light was shining in his eyes.

“Archie, Candy has to forget him. It’s time for her to let go of that memory, don’t you think?”

“Perhaps you are right, but...”

“I’m sure she’ll never really forget him, but the pain goes away with time...That gallant noble...Well, he can do something we can’t.”

Archie’s only answer was to shrug his shoulders and look down with affliction.

“I’ve told you already, haven’t I? The best thing we can do is to watch over her from a distance. Don’t you have your faithful and lovely Annie?”

“I don’t want to hurt Annie, but...” murmured Archie, who kept staring at the floor.

“I’ll take care of Patty. She’s a special person and she’s capable of understanding my inventions.”

“Oh, in that case, she’s surely a special person,” agreed Archie. Then he lifted his head and finally a smile showed on his face. “On the other hand, she has a great personality and she’s pretty! Look, even at this moment I’m doing something for her.” Stear pointed to the object he was working on: a pair of glasses with a drawstring. “What’s that thing?” “Glasses with small built-in brushes, so that you don’t have any problem when the lenses blur! You’ll see how happy she’s going to be!” Putting on his prototype of anti-blurring glasses, the lad smiled proudly.

Autumn was coming quickly, coloring instantly the trees of the college.

As time passed, Eliza’s hatred towards Candy had been growing. The winks Terry and her rival exchanged so naturally whenever their paths crossed inside the college didn’t escape her. With the idea that they could meet somewhere previously agreed upon, she felt she couldn’t breathe because of jealousy.

*What does he see in someone like her? Definitely something is wrong with Terry! She’s just a miserable orphan! On the other hand, mama and Great Aunt Elroy have always said that persons of low social status are good at ingratiating with people! The same thing happened with Anthony; everybody ended up being fooled by her! Certainly they don’t know her real character!*

Eliza was fully convinced that she was right: if Terry realized what kind of person Candy was, all the affection he felt for her would definitely vanish into thin air. For the rest, Terry was a noble and the suitable girl for him could only belong to an illustrious family, just as he did. An evil smile appeared on her face.

That same day she waited for Terry to come out of the stable. She had already been informed about the hours he practised in horse riding.

“Terry!”

The boy appeared pulling the reins of his horse and Eliza hurried to meet him.

“Hello, young lady. What’s the matter?”

“I...I have to warn you about something.”

She tried to pronounce those words with as much docility as she could muster, and she looked down.

“You have to warn me about something?” he repeated rather indifferently, caressing Theodora’s snout.

“I have to talk to you about Candy.”

For the first time, the boy turned to look at her.

**“I hope you know who she really is. She originates from an orphanage and she has worked for my family. She had always behaved so badly that we put her to take care of the horses.”**

With a hard expression, Terry continued to look at her without saying a word. Imagining that he was shocked, Eliza’s eyes shone triumphantly.

**“You must know that Candy is extremely skilled at winning anyone’s favor. That’s how she managed to be adopted! She even has the habit of stealing. You should have seen her innocent face when she stole my mother’s jewels!”**

Terry was still keeping silent and Eliza continued saying even more.

**“She’s good at pretending to be a saint; even my family no longer knew what to do with her. Terry, I want you to be careful: if rumors are spread about her and you, your good name will be tainted.”**

As if everything she had already said hadn’t been enough, the girl went on listing all of Candy’s bad deeds.

When Eliza finished at last, Terry rode Theodora and said sharply:

**“Thank you very much for the warning. Since you are here, can I ask you to warn her too about me? Tell her that Terrence has no rival in smoking, drinking, stealing and fighting. Tell her that I’m an inveterate delinquent who has broken the rules thousands of times.”**

Eliza raised her head and gave him a piercing look.

**“Now I’d really like to go for a ride,”** he said and, pulling the reins, he prepared to leave.

**“Oh, and one last thing. You should see in the mirror the expression you have right at this moment. You have exactly the typical horrible face of someone who speaks badly of the others. I bid you farewell.”**

The horse went away galloping.

*How...how did he dare?*

Eliza almost fainted with rage. It was the first time in her life that someone mocked her in such a way.

*How can he defend someone...someone like Candy?*

The girl’s body almost seemed to give off a black fury, ready to throw itself with increasing force, not towards Terry, but towards Candy.

*But, why? Candy! I really won’t forgive you for this!*

A dark flame lit up in the depths of Eliza’s eyes.

## Chapter 16

It was a dark night, with no moon or stars.

At that late hour all the trees in the forest were wrapped in darkness and the world seemed like a dark endless swamp. From somewhere resounded the lugubrious song of an owl.

Candy was walking quickly among the trees, holding tight in her hand a lantern. Her only concern was that something might have happened to Terry. Running in the dark, she went towards the stable, full of anxiety. She even found it difficult to breathe, and certainly her heart wouldn't have peace as long as she couldn't see the boy. As soon as she arrived, she dashed to the door, throwing herself inside. In the darkness she spotted the twinkling glow of another lantern.

"Terry! Terry, are you there?" she murmured softly, with a tense voice, lifting up the light she had brought with her.

"Candy!" exclaimed the lad emerging from the back of the stable and he approached her, holding in his hand his own lantern.

Maybe awakened by their presence, Theodora snorted.

"What happened to you? What is so urgent? Why did you want to speak to me at this hour?"

"What do you mean?"

Suddenly Terry's expression, illuminated by the light, hardened.

"Wasn't it you who wanted to speak to me?"

"What are you talking about? Under the door I found a message from you, saying that you had something urgent to tell me..."

"I found the same message too, Candy..."

For a moment they were out of breath, but immediately afterwards Terry cried:

"Quickly! We have to get out of here right away!"

In Terry's voice there was an apprehension she had never noticed before. Just at that moment, both of them perceived some steps approaching. They were not from one or two persons: there must have been a lot of people out there. With a loud noise, the stable door was forcibly opened and instantly they were surrounded by the light of several lanterns.

"What...what an indecency! Nothing so shameful has ever happened in our institute! How did you dare dishonor the college's good name in that way?"

Sister Gray's voice was trembling with rage, and the other nuns were also staring coldly at Candy, as if they had a repulsive act before their eyes.

Behind them, came Eliza's strident voice:

“I knew those rumors were true! Candy has been asking Terrence to meet her at night!”

“This is shameful, Candy!” remarked Louise harshly, turning her face away.

Candy was so upset that she couldn’t believe what was happening to her. That’s why she had felt that anxiety oppressing her heart until a little while ago: this was a trap. That note...it was all Eliza’s doing.

“This is a discreditable behavior!” exclaimed Sister Gray, looking away from them.

Terry stood resolutely in front of her:

“Sister Gray, this is a mistake! It’s all a misunderstanding! We have been deceived! We have been brought here by a false note and...”

“Be quiet, Terrence! This time you have done something unforgivable! And that goes for you too, Candice!” shouted the director, looking at the girl with burning eyes.

“Sister Gray, truly, we have done nothing wrong! Please, listen to us!”

“Don’t say another word, Candice! It’s useless to try to justify yourself! Sister Kreis, I wish you and the other sisters to lead Terrence to his room. You mustn’t leave him alone for any reason! Candice, you will come with me!”

“Stop! No, I beg you, Sister Gray, wait! It’s a trap! But why don’t you want to listen to me?” cried the boy, beginning to struggle, but the nuns stopped him. “Let me go, I tell you! Listen to what I have to say! Stop! What are you planning to do to her?”

While Sister Gray was holding her strongly by the shoulders, Candy couldn’t even turn around. Terry’s voice, as he was dragged by the nuns, became more and more distant. Trying to contain the tremor that invaded her body, she lifted her face firmly. She couldn’t deny that she had left in the middle of the night, and she knew very well that she had broken the rules in that way. She could accept that accusation, but she was equally aware that she hadn’t done anything dishonorable.

“Sister Gray, I beg you to believe me! If I came here it’s only because I’ve been deceived! Let me explain to you how things have happened!” she implored with all her might.

However, the director remained silent and left the stable pushing her from behind. When they were outside, she stopped in the darkness and ordered Sister Margaret coldly:

“Lead Candice White Arday to one of the cells reserved for the students!”

*The cells reserved for the students?*

Candy opened her eyes wide.

“Tomorrow morning I will personally inform your guardian about what happened.”

As if she had received an unexpected blow, the girl turned around immediately to look at the nun's face, illuminated by the light of the lantern. Had she spoken about her guardian? So she wanted to tell everything to Uncle William?

The woman answered to those imploring eyes with a threatening look and Sister Margaret pushed brusquely Candy from behind.

Already completely without the strength to be able to react, the girl was almost ready to cry. In front of her eyes she saw clearly Eliza's image, standing nearby and looking at her with a satisfied smile on her face.

In front of her there was the flickering flame of a consumed candle, which was almost ready to go out. The walls were so rugged they seemed to crumble. Candy leaned her back on one of them and curled up hugging her knees. Her shadow, projected on the wall, was wavering.

She had been locked up in the cell reserved for the students and it was impossible for her to believe that she was really in there. Even what had happened in the stable seemed to her just like a horrible nightmare, but unfortunately everything was real.

The room was completely empty. Inside there was only a tattered blanket, almost nibbled by mice. She had already heard that in the basement of the college were the prison cells and now she knew that those rumors were true. The flame of the candle, getting smaller and smaller, was ready to die out. Actually, not even that little light had been granted to her. Sister Margaret, full of contempt, hadn't spoken a single word to her, but later, for some reason, she had sneaked that candle to her. However, Sister Margaret believed too she was guilty, and when Candy had tried to apologize, she had coldly refused to listen to her.

To the limit of her resistance, the girl bit her lip. She tried to resist, but the tears began to flow from her eyes, falling on her knees. She couldn't imagine the disappointment Great Uncle William would feel when he would receive the news about what had happened. She didn't want him to think badly about her: she could bear to be expelled from college and even to see her adoption by the Ardlay family annulled, but it was important that her benefactor should know the truth.

"It was Eliza...Why did she come to that?"

"I'll wait for you tonight at nine in the stable. I must talk to you about something very important. Promise me that you will come.

T."



She had really been a fool to believe immediately that message, but her worry about Terry must have been too great. Her anxiety to know if something had happened to him surpassed even her desire to see him. And then, how could she ever have imagined that both of them had received that note?

Suddenly, Candy looked up with her face stained by tears: it wasn't time for crying.

"What has happened to Terry? If...if he is here too?"

She got up and put her ear against the wall. She didn't know how many cells were in the basement, but on the other side of the cold wall there was only silence.

"Terry...Terry..."

She called that name over and over, but her voice was absorbed by the stone walls of that narrow room. The candle had been almost completely consumed, but Candy wasn't crying anymore and now she was staring at the little flame, about to burn out.

In the meantime, Terry was in his bedroom and he was looking intensely at the darkness beyond the window. Anxious, he clenched his fists.

*Candy...What did they do to you?*

The punishment he had received was to be secluded in his room. The door had been locked and there was a nun outside to watch over him.

"Damn! But what kind of punishment is this? They haven't even heard our version of the facts...I only hope Candy hasn't received a harder punishment than mine..."

The lad simply couldn't remain quiet and kept walking nervously in the room. Until that moment he had never worried about breaking the rules. In fact, the Granchesters always made generous donations to the institute, and besides his ancestors had collaborated for the foundation of the college. Even the church had been built by his family. At first he had expected that the director would have the courage to expel him, but instead of that any fault of his had always been forgiven with extreme lightness. He despised that woman for the way she treated him, but at the same time he knew very well that Sister Gray was not a very indulgent person.

*And what if Candy has been blamed for both of us?*

At that thought, he felt he must do something. He had to save her.

*It won't be difficult to escape from this room...*

Already determined, he slowly opened the glass door that led to the balcony, but just at that moment a black shadow appeared suddenly.

"Curse you! You bastard!"

With a gasp, Archie threw himself on Terry.

"What have you done to Candy?"

Archie hit him suddenly, causing him to stagger. Then he held him by his lapels and dragged him into the room. Immediately after that, his brother also appeared on the balcony, with pale face and clenched fists.

Terry looked at Archie with his eyes full of anguish and asked:

“What happened? How is Candy?”

Ignoring the blow he had received, he could only think about that girl’s fate.

“What happened to Candy? Tell me!”

“Don’t play the fool! She has been locked up in one of the cells for the students! Because of you!”

Archie was about to throw himself against him, but Stear stopped him.

“That’s true. Tonight’s commotion has awakened everybody in the dormitory. We’re anxious to know what will happen...to you...and to Candy too...” said Stear, almost grinding his teeth.

Terry kept listening in an absentminded manner.

“The cells for the students...”

“It’s not only that! When the news gets to the Ardlay family...she’ll be expelled from college.”

“Candy...Expelled?” murmured Terry staggering.

“That’s right, because of you! Why did you ask her to meet you in the stable?”

As if to escape Archie’s intense gaze that was hovering over him, Terry turned his face away and leaned against the wall.

“It wasn’t me...”

“What did you say? Do you still dare...”

“It wasn’t me who asked her to go to the stable! I also received the same message,” retorted the lad, taking the note out of his pocket.

“Please, meet me in the stable tonight at nine. I have to talk to you about something very important. Don’t miss it for any reason.

Candy”

“But this...this is not her handwriting!” exclaimed Stear surprised, fixing his glasses after reading those lines.

Silently, Archie also stared at those words.

“I was really reckless...If I had thought about it calmly, I would have realized that she could never have slipped this paper under my door. But...I barely read it...I thought something had happened to her and...”

Archie looked away. It seemed to him he could understand what Terry had felt upon receiving that message. That simple piece of

paper would have been enough to push him too to do something stupid.

*This noble...he's really interested in Candy...*

Terry was full of confusion and even Stear was looking at him steadily.

“Evidently it’s a forgery!”

Terry took the paper from Stear’s hands and rumped it with rage. Then, lifting his head, he said:

“I know who it was.”

Surprised, Stear held his breath for a moment.

“Those relatives of yours!”

“Eliza!” moaned Archie furiously.

“I suppose that fellow Neal collaborated too.”

“So...we have something with which to defend ourselves. Tomorrow morning, let’s ask Sister Gray to receive us! We’ll take this note to her as proof,” suggested Stear decidedly, clenching his fists.

As much as they were objectionable, Eliza and Neal were part of the Ardlay family and they would always be their relatives. However, the boy was absolutely determined to go through with that accusation.

“I’ll also testify about the despicable nature of both of them,” interposed Archie, nodding impatiently.

Terry remained silent for a while, trying to think.

“Do you believe...that this will solve things?” he murmured seriously, looking down. “Those relatives of yours...those vipers, they’re not so easy to be cornered. I’m fully convinced that this message is their work, but do you believe that this piece of paper is proof enough? When that viper tells she knows nothing, the matter will be closed there...The director has much more confidence in her than in Candy... I wouldn’t want us to just end up making the situation worse.”

“So you suggest that we abandon Candy to her fate? You are really a heartless fellow! You’re nothing more than a noble aware that you’ll always get away with anything!” shouted Archie, getting closer to him.

“What did you call me?”

Stear stood between the two boys, who were focused on looking at each other threateningly.

“Granchester isn’t totally wrong. Archie, as long as Candy is the victim of the schemes of those two, there is nothing to be done. You have seen this until now, haven’t you? You know well how skilled they are at inventing ingenious lies.”

“But if we don’t do anything, Candy will be repudiated by the Ardlay family. Even when there was no reason, the others were always opposed to her adoption.”

“Repudiated?” exclaimed Terry with a broken voice.

Stear nodded and said:

“When he receives Sister Gray’s notification, maybe this time not even Great Uncle William will forgive Candy. Granchester, you know she has no family, don’t you? Her life...has always been full of difficulties. The Leagans even tried to send her to Mexico to work...But I have never heard her complaining, not even once, and moreover, we were the ones who were strengthened by her smile. We...we only want her to be happy some day.”

“We only want her to be happy some day.”

Hearing those words pronounced by Stear’s low voice, Terry looked up with his eyes wet.

*They want her to be happy some day? I won’t stay here praying for this to happen. I...I want to be the one to make her happy!*

As if he had made an important decision, the lad took a deep breath.

“Don’t worry about her...I’ll protect her!”

As soon as he said those words, Terry dashed towards the balcony.

“Hey!”

Archie and Stear hurried to stop him, but he descended nimbly to the ground and was lost immediately in the darkness of the forest.

The boy ran among the trees, overwhelmed by a burning rage. However, at the same time, his mind was perfectly clear. He would like so much to laugh at himself!

*I’ve always behaved rebelliously, but what have I done actually? I’ve used my father’s money for fun and I have grown up enjoying his protection...I’ve been angry every time someone has called me a noble, but haven’t I always taken advantage of my position? Candy, I will save you!*

He arrived at the northern tower. The students’ prison was wrapped in a disturbing silence, similar to that of a cemetery. Maybe frightened by that place, even the owls had stopped their singing.

*Why are they keeping her in a place like this? Why didn’t they put me in here?*

The wooden door that led to the basement and the cells was locked tightly. Terry struck it with his fists, as strongly as he could.

“Candy, can you hear me?” he cried in vain, while his words were lost in the darkness. “Candy...I can’t get in...but I’ll stay here. I’ll stay here all along, do you understand me?”

Leaning against the stone wall, he closed his eyes. He felt sorry for his own impotence. If only he were an adult...if he had the power...he wouldn’t have hesitated to take her with him and leave that institute.

*And yet there is nothing I can do...*

**Terry bit his lip until he almost made it bleed.**

## Chapter 17

The following morning, in every corner of the college there was nothing else but talk about Candy and Terry.

Full of curiosity, the girls had gathered in the classroom much earlier than usual.

“Is it true that Candy asked him to meet her in the stable?”

“It seems that she is locked up in the cell reserved for the students.”

“After such a shameful behavior, she will definitely be expelled from college.”

Every time they heard those whispers, Annie and Patty looked at each other, on the verge of tears. The two girls didn't really believe those rumors, but they didn't even have the courage to contradict Eliza who, even at that moment, was loudly explaining the scandalous event that had happened the night before in the stable.

“Since I realized that Candy had set her eyes on Terrence, I continued observing her attentively. She is of a humble origin...How her eyes must have been shining since she heard that Terry was a noble!”

Eliza was talking deliberately in a loud voice, while Louise and the others accompanied her words nodding with conviction. Seeing Annie even more depressed, Patty put an arm around her shoulders.

“Look, there is Terry! Apparently his punishment is already over,” exclaimed Louise cheerfully.

Indeed, she had seen from the window the boy's figure, absorbed in crossing the garden which was flooded in the morning light.

“I think it's obvious that he hasn't done anything wrong. He was just *encouraged* by Candy.”

With a giggle, Eliza watched the virile image of the lad who was walking straight in front of her. She narrowed her eyes. Terry had been forgiven and Candy was in a cell: surely this time she would be thrown out of the Ardlay family. This was something that should have happened a long time ago. Eliza smiled to herself.

Observing that behavior, Annie felt a slight tremor inside her. What had happened to her friend?

“So Terry has been forgiven...and...Candy?”

Looking for comfort, she turned to Patty.

“I'm sure everything will be all right, Annie...No doubt Candy will be forgiven too...”

Patty murmured helplessly those words, trying also to convince herself.

As he walked down the corridor, Terry drew the eyes of everybody present. He didn't care about being surrounded by whispers and

mocking smiles: his only concern was Candy. He had already made his decision. When he reached the director's door, he knocked.

"Come in," answered Sister Gray.

The boy slowly opened the door. Sitting in front of the desk, the nun opened her eyes wide with anger and exclaimed severely:

"Terrence! Shouldn't you be in the dormitory at this moment according to your punishment? Return immediately to your room! Haven't you been locked up? I think I had placed someone to watch over you!"

"Sister Gray, it was absolutely necessary for me to speak to you and I escaped from my room. The nun who had been placed on guard is not to blame. Please, grant me a minute of your time."

The director narrowed her eyes with distrust: it was the first time that boy was talking to her so politely. She remained silent for a moment, but she recovered immediately and continued:

"No, this is inadmissible, Terrence G. Granchester! It is against the rules when punished students leave their room without permission!"

She pointed to the door firmly and severely, making a gesture to him to return to the dormitory, but Terry was not dissuaded and approached her.

"I don't want to bother you, Sister Gray. This is the first and the last favor I ask of you."

The lad had a power capable of making even a person like Sister Gray hesitate. The director lowered her extended hand.

"Don't delay," she said, lifting her head and turning her face away.

"Candy has been expelled?"

"It could not be otherwise," replied Sister Gray coldly.

"Then why haven't I been punished in the same way? Why haven't I been locked up in a cell?"

Surprised by Terry's fury, the nun suddenly looked at him.

"Candice has always been a source of problems...She doesn't have the modesty that behoooves a girl."

"I have also been a continuous source of problems! I don't have the modesty that behoooves a boy either! Am I wrong, Sister Gray? Why don't you say it clearly? Why don't you say that you need my father's generous donations? Say that you want to take advantage of this incident to ask even more money from him!"

"Terrence! You should be ashamed of what you have just said!"

The director raised her voice suddenly and got up from her chair:

"For many years our institute is linked to the duke and the Granchester family with a deep sense of gratitude! But even though you are his son, I can't accept such offensive words!"

"And you shouldn't actually do it!" exclaimed Terry point-blank, still holding Sister Gray's threatening gaze. "I wish to receive the same

punishment with Candice. Moreover, before that, I'd like you to make sure of our guilt. Sister Gray, we have been trapped; we have both received a false note...Please, verify what I'm telling you!"

Getting even closer with a grave expression on his face, the boy lowered his head.

Remaining silent, the director didn't look so severe any longer. After several minutes, as if she had made a decision, she straightened up her back and looked at Terry steadily and calmly.

"The question here is not the fact that you have been deceived or not. Whatever has been the reason, you have been discovered meeting at night in a stable. This is an undeniable fact."

Those words were heavy like rocks. Realizing the facts, Terry moved back and went pale. Behind Sister Gray, through the glass of the large window, he could see the bare trees swaying in the cold wind. The director was right: they had been found in the stable. If it had been Candy who had asked for it, he would have met her, no matter what would have happened.

*Surely this applies to her too...*

The boy's shoulders sank. Terry realized instantly that there was nothing else to be done and he took a deep breath.

"Sister Gray, if you have really decided to expel someone, I want to receive the punishment myself instead of Candice," he said quietly.

"What did you say?" she asked, opening her eyes wide.

"I want to be expelled. Everyone knows already what happened, and if one of us doesn't receive the suitable punishment, the matter won't be closed."

Terry knew that the institute's reputation was at stake.

"But...but your father..."

"He has nothing to do with this. From this day I'm no longer a Granchester," said the boy in a decided manner and a firm voice.

"Terrence!"

"I beg you not to report this incident to Candy's guardian...This is the only thing I'm asking you."

Saying this, he bowed his head.

"Sister Gray, thank you for everything you have done for me until today. I hope you can forgive me for my rudeness on so many occasions."

When Terry left the room, Sister Gray kept watching silently the closed door. She didn't know if lessons had already started, but the college was wrapped in silence.

Terry was telling himself over and over that he had made the right choice.



*At this moment there is nothing else I can do...Candy...In the end, I will also have to limit myself in hoping that one day you will be happy...*

Without hurrying, he left the institute.

*Before I met her, my life here was practically like living in a cemetery...But then, one day, I saw her in the forest...*

“And besides, this is False Pony’s Hill!”

“And stop giving yourself airs! My name is Candice White Ardlay!”

Candy’s voice sounded in the depths of his mind, and her smile appeared in front of his eyes.

*No, actually we met even before that, on the deck of that ship immersed in the fog...It was a very cold night.*

Terry stopped and frowned, almost wishing to contain the pain that oppressed his chest.

*My youth...my love...Everything is going away, not to return anymore...*

He turned around to look at the school building of St. Paul’s Institute, the garden and the forest. Then he went on walking ahead, with the intention of leaving everything behind.

“Oh, the light! The wind! The fresh air! A fluffy mattress!”

Candy threw herself on the large bed of the special room and stretched herself as much as she could. From the open window came the cold wind and the rays of the autumn sun, close to sunset. Lying down, Candy took a long and deep breath.

“Freedom is such a beautiful thing! I was really grateful to be free. This must be the way people feel when they leave prison! Yes, this has been truly an instructive experience.”

With a big smile, Candy gave a somersault on the bed and glided to the floor. She slowly approached the window. Everybody must have already returned to the dormitory, since there was not a soul in the garden.

“I would never have imagined that Sister Gray was such an understanding person. She changed my punishment in the cell to a seclusion in my room. Maybe Terry has explained to her the matter about the false messages with which they tricked us...”

Sister Margaret had also informed her that, as an exception, what had happened would not be reported to her guardian. Relieved, the girl had almost jumped for joy: the last thing she wanted was to displease Great Uncle William. Surely he was an old man or maybe he even had some problem with his heart.

*I wonder how Terry is...*

More than anything else she wanted to make sure that the boy was all right, but she was even forbidden to speak to Annie and Patty. They had imposed on her the obligation of silence, the door had been locked and, once in a while, a nun charged to watch over her came to check on her. But compared to the experience she had lived in the prison that was nothing. She had spent a whole night locked up in a damp cell with no windows. Immersed in darkness and frightened, she had curled up to protect herself from a cold so bitter that her heart was frozen. While she was facing that darkness without moving, she had slowly begun to calm down. Once you get used to it, even darkness becomes something pleasant. When her heart had calmed down, darkness became a screen on which her own feelings were projected. With a sigh, the girl had reproached herself for her own imprudence. How could she believe that message and hurry to the stable? It would be impossible for Terry to put that note under her door.

*I was worried about him...I couldn't think of anything else. That's because I...*

She was in love with Terry! That moment she realized clearly how strongly she felt that.

*This feeling...I can't fight against it. No matter what people say or do...*

To be in love with someone. Candy had always been convinced there was only one way for that, but for the first time she realized that, like a prism illuminated by light, that emotion was able to produce a range of different colors according to the person in front of you.

What she had felt for Anthony, colored in a beautiful and delicate hue, hadn't lost its intensity even at that moment. But now, the vivid color emitted by Terry took her breath away.

*I really hope they haven't locked him up in a cell...After all I have been forgiven, so I'm sure he has been forgiven too...*

Her desire to see him was irrepressible. Surely he was also worried about her.

Candy got under the blankets and made sure that the rope made out of sheets was still in its place. She had only to wait for the nun's checking on her after the lights went out. How she would have wanted time to go faster...She was even forbidden to exchange a single word with the nun who came to bring her dinner. Under her gaze, Candy finished her meal, showing a praiseworthy expression. Later, when she got into bed, she was finally alone.

The girl was determined to go to Terry's room. If they discovered her, this time she wouldn't receive a punishment in her room; so she had to prepare carefully and not make any mistake.

When the inspection round had ended, after the lights went out, Candy placed a pillow under the blanket to simulate her presence. She didn't know when the nun on guard would pass again, but she couldn't resist her wish to see Terry. It would be enough for her to observe him through the window and see that he was well. After going out on the balcony, she threw the rope of sheets to a tree and jumped.

There was no moon illuminating the sky, not even in that cold night, but Candy was grateful for that darkness. All lights in the boys' dormitory were out. From the top of a tree she checked again the location of Terry's bedroom and glided to his balcony. His room was also dark and silent. From outside, the girl stood listening. Nothing was heard and nobody seemed to be there.

*It's too silent...Is it possible Terry wouldn't be here?*

Her heart was harrowed with anxiety. Armed with courage, she put her hand on the glass door and she found out it was open.

"Terry..." she whispered, entering the dark room.

Not getting any answer, she began to tremble. She went to the writing desk, which was near, and turned on the light. The room was empty.

*Why is everything so neat?*

She noticed a white envelope, illuminated by the lamp on the table. Candy was out of breath.

"To anybody who has the heart to care for my request, I ask to deliver this letter to Candice White Ardlay."

*A letter for me?*

With trembling hands Candy opened the envelope.

"Dear Candy,

I have decided to leave college and go to America. There is something I wish to do. Wherever I am, I will always pray for you to be happy.

Terrence"

They were just a few lines and, as much as she was reading them again and again, he hadn't written anything else.

*Terry has gone to America? Why? Why so suddenly?*

Suddenly, the paper fell from her hands. The excessive ease with which she had been taken out of the cell, the fact that she had avoided expulsion, that her guardian hadn't been notified...how many times Sister Margaret had repeated to her that this was an absolutely exceptional measure taken by the director?

*That's not possible...Terry...*

She extended her hand to take the letter and realized that her fingers were trembling. Just at that moment, the door of the room vibrated: someone was forcing it violently.

“Damn! It’s locked!”

Recognizing Neal’s voice, Candy held her breath for a moment.

“He deserved that! I’m glad they have thrown him out.”

Yes, that was Neal talking.

“It seems he has also been abandoned by his aristocratic father. And now he’s escaping to America with his tail between his legs!”

“Yes, that’s what I heard. They say he’s leaving at dawn on a ship. He sacrificed himself instead of that girl who took care of the horses at your house, is that true, Neal?”

“That’s true! It’s incredible...For someone like her...”

Neal kicked the door.

“There’s nothing to be done, it doesn’t open. They told me he’d left his things here; I really hoped to have a look at them.”

The footsteps of the two boys went away.

Covering her face with her hands, Candy collapsed on the floor. Tears were streaming from her eyes one after another. Trying not to make any noise, she abandoned herself in crying.

*Terry...he has been expelled...he has been expelled for me...and now he’s going to America...*

“They say he’s leaving at dawn on a ship.”

Candy suddenly lifted her face. She couldn’t stay there crying; she should run after him and tell him not to go.

The girl jumped up and, holding tightly the letter against her heart, she leaped from the balcony to a tree. Her vision was clouded and she ended up hitting against the branches, hurting her knees, but anyway she managed to return to her own room.

The port...the same port where she had arrived too from America. It was far, but if she left immediately, maybe she would get there until dawn.

She quickly picked up the savings she had managed to put together, and then she jumped again outside. She no longer cared if anyone might see her.

Once outside, she searched in the street for a free carriage, as if in a terrible nightmare.

“To the port! Take me immediately to Southampton!”

“What?”

Crying, Candy begged the surprised coachman. Although she tried, she couldn’t hold back her tears.

“I really have to prevent someone from getting on a ship! Please! Let’s hurry!”

Impressed by the girl's firmness, the man nodded seriously and whipped the horses. The carriage quickly sped up through the night, and the rattling of the wheels sounded along the road.

Candy was absorbed in praying.

*Please, please, help me get there on time...Help me find Terry...I haven't yet...*

Her eyes were flooded with more tears, preventing her even from praying. It was true: she hadn't opened her heart to him yet. She hadn't told him yet that she was in love, very much in love with him.

The carriage continued to run along the deserted road, and the sky was slowly becoming white. Praying for dawn to be late, Candy looked up. She hoped the sun would rise slowly, at least until after she would arrive to the port. She went on repeating Terry's name to herself. The carriage, driven at full speed, progressively began to slow down.

"Sir, I beg you!"

With the intention of reiterating her urgency, Candy peeked out to speak to the coachman. The man, thin and kind-eyed, turned to look at her with a distressed expression.

"Miss, we won't make it. I know I have promised you, but the sun will rise before we get to the port."

"Sir...I really have to..."

Candy's eyes were filled again with tears.

"You have to meet someone, I know...But no matter how hard we try, an impossible thing will remain impossible."

With a grieved look, the man wiped off his sweat. The horse was also panting with exhaustion. Candy lowered her eyes.

"Forgive me...you are right..."

Wiping her tears away, she lifted her head.

"Then, I beg you, take me to a place where it is possible to see the sea. I would like to see...at least the ship."

"Very well! I know the right place!" nodded the man, and the carriage regained its speed.

When they reached the top of a hill, the sun was already rising. In the distance the sea could be seen, covered in fog. Candy left the carriage and looked at those waters wrapped in a grey silk cloak. The sea seemed to be so close, but it was too far away.

That moment, advancing slowly through the morning mist, appeared suddenly a large passenger ship. Candy gave a little cry: Terry was certainly there.

"Terry!" she screamed.

The girl started running towards the edge of the elevation. If she could have floated in the air, she would certainly have reached the ship, but unfortunately she didn't have wings to fly.

"Terry! Terry!"

The tears were falling on her trembling lips. The wind was blowing hard and her voice broke, but she didn't stop calling that name.

*Terry, why have you been expelled in my place? You thought...that you would make me happy that way?*

She would have wanted to hit him hard on his chest. But suddenly it seemed to her she heard the lad's words echoing in her ears.

"There is something I wish to do."

In the short message he had left for her, he had written exactly that phrase.

*Did you really mean it, Terry?*

Little by little, the fog dissipated and it was as if the sea were singing with a loud voice a melody for the rising sun. The ship was glowing now, as if it were covered in a golden dust, while on the vast ocean there was a path so bright that it was almost blinding. Terry's ship continued moving in that direction.

Candy took a deep breath.

*Oh, Terry...You have started going your way...there is something you wish to do...You didn't lie to me when you told me that...*

The girl wasn't crying anymore. Terry's ship was moving towards the light and she was sure that future had an even brighter tomorrow in store for the boy. Without blinking, with her eyes moist, she continued looking steadily at the ship that was going further and further away.

*I want to find my way too.*

And some day, she promised herself, she would see Terry again.

*Of course! I'm sure we'll see each other again! We are alive...one day we'll meet again!*

Even when the ship disappeared, Candy remained standing on that hill, whipped by the cold wind.

*As much as I write, I can't express what I feel about Terry.*

*T. G. has left me so many memories...But I wouldn't like to speak about memories or the fact that he's gone, because some day we'll meet again! T. G., until that moment comes, I will continue keeping and cherishing what I feel about you.*

*However, T. G., I hope you won't be angry. You have tried to protect me sacrificing yourself in my place, but I'm going to leave college. I*

*feel that I won't find my way here. If I stay, I know I'll have a future already secure, but I realized that this won't bring me happiness. I have to find my way on my own and if there is a person that has taught me that it's you, T. G.; thank you! And then I would like to shout at you at the top of my voice these words: Terrence, I'm in love with you, as I have never been with anyone...*

Those words filled the last blank page. Candy closed the diary and let out a long sigh. When she arrived in that institute, that diary was still new, but now even the golden words were slightly worn out. The girl wrapped carefully the diary in a white paper and left a note on it.

“I beg you to deliver this diary to Sir William A. Ardlay.”

Candy was confident: when Great Uncle would read those pages, surely he would understand the reason she was leaving college.

The girl took out of a drawer of the writing desk the white tie that Terry had tied around her arm at the May Festival.

*Terry...I'm sure that some day I'll give it back to you.*

She put it in a bag. There were only two other important things she wanted to take with her: the cross of Miss Pony and the badge of Prince on the Hill.

She looked for the last time at the sumptuous furniture of her room. She hadn't deserved anything of all those things around her.

“Thank you, Great Uncle!”

Candy bowed, as if she was really in front of her benefactor, and then she left silently the room. It was still early and the corridor of the students' dormitory was silent. Certainly Annie, Patty, Archie and Stear were still asleep.

*Forgive me for leaving without saying anything to you.*

Outside, she smelled the scent of fresh air.

Saying goodbye in her heart to Sister Gray, Sister Kreis and Sister Margaret, she started walking slowly towards the main iron gate. The gardeners, who were already working very early in the morning, didn't notice her presence and they continued picking up the leaves that were scattered on the ground. At that hour, even the gatekeeper was focused on cleaning the facade, leaving the entrance open and unguarded. Candy headed to that direction.

*Goodbye, forest of the college, stable, Theodora...and goodbye to you, False Pony's Hill.*

She stopped in front of the great gate and pushed it without hesitation. As she had imagined, there was nobody around and the gate opened, emitting a dull sound.

*Goodbye, St. Paul's Institute.*

When she turned around, the building seemed to her dark and sad. The road that was waiting for her, on the contrary, seemed bright and full of light.

Candy took a deep breath, and then she began to walk.