

# Section 2

## Introduction

If my heart was a lake, it would be permanently covered with undulating waves. And since I received the letter announcing Miss Pony's recovery, instead of calming down, these ripples threaten to turn into a real storm. The nostalgia for the past days is so strong now that it almost prevents me from breathing.

I would like so much to visit Pony's Home.

To see again the villa of the Ardlay family in Lakewood which has a new owner now...Even the house of the Leagans makes me nostalgic...

Stear's portal of water, Archie's stone gate...and finally Anthony's gate of the roses. Are they still there?

Does the new owner continue to cultivate the Sweet Candy roses in the rose garden?

The Sweet Candy roses...I have never seen a rose with such a soft color. They looked like the cheeks of a blushing fairy.

The variety of roses created by Anthony.

I am so far away now. I can no longer smell their fragrance.

That morning Anthony died in front of my eyes.

And I couldn't do anything about it.

The memory of that fateful moment becomes more vivid every time it returns to my mind.

In order to calm down, I go out on the large terrace.

The Avon river flows quietly under the light of the early spring.

The cool wind coming from the river knows how to calm the ebb and flow of the emotions stirring inside of me. The scent of the daffodils spreads from the garden. I breathe deeply that sweet perfume. There are so many daffodils that a golden light seems to filter through the trees in the garden.

In the rose garden – which is small but I still have one – the buds are opening. I don't want the gardener to take care of that. He can take care of the rest but I have asked him to leave the roses to me.

I remember my departure from the Ardlay house. I had left a letter for Stear and Archie.

I had reached Pony's Home like a sleepwalker. When I arrived late at night, Miss Pony and Sister Lane welcomed me with open arms without asking me any questions.

They told me I slept like a log and I woke up only when Sister Lane gently shook me because I was moaning in my sleep. I was probably

whispering Anthony's name many times.

However, neither Miss Pony nor Sister Lane ever asked me what had happened.

They waited for me to talk to them.

I had dreamed so many times that Anthony was still alive. I must confess that I still sometimes dream of that today.

Anthony is still here, and I am so relieved.

"Oh...Anthony, I was convinced you were dead."

And, with a smile on his lips, Anthony invariably asks me the same question:

"Candy, you will always keep smiling, won't you?"

"Of course, Anthony, since I live with the man I love..."

While I say those words, my eyes fill with tears. Somehow I know this is just a dream.

Those who have died never change. For them, time has stopped forever.

It was as he had told me in a whirlwind of rose petals.

Those who have departed will live forever inside of me. But I will never see them again.

I have experienced many painful separations in my life.

But I have learned that as long as we are alive, there is always the opportunity for us to meet again.

That's why I'm no longer afraid of separations now.

It's early spring, of course, but as I stand on the terrace, the cold wind lashes my cheeks. Shivering, I go back into the living room.

Here I am again, in front of Slim's painting.

*Slim... Where are you now? I hope you are still alive.*

I had searched for him, but in vain.

There was the Great War. And the world situation had not yet stabilized.

Whatever happened to him, I know Slim was happy when he painted that picture.

Pony's Home of the old days.

Since then, it has been expanded and renovated. Only the small adjoining church has remained as it was.

Thanks to Great Uncle William's help, even Mr. Cartwright has given them a piece of land.

One thing that hasn't changed is that Pony's Home is always full of orphans.

I would like to be more useful to Miss Pony and Sister Lane.

But right now there is something even more important to me. I can't leave *him* who, more than anything, wants me to be by his side at all times.

Once I was back at Pony's Home, after leaving the Ardlay house, I immediately became the naughty Candy again, as before.

Jimmy was an orphan boy who had arrived there during my absence. He didn't know me or what I was capable of. For a while we had been fighting over the title of the "Chief", but he finally had to give it up to me...

Even today, if I returned to Pony's Home, I'm sure nobody would climb trees or handle the lasso better than I do, to the great despair of Miss Pony and Sister Lane.

Moreover, whenever I tried to impose myself on Jimmy, Sister Lane would sigh and blink her eyes, just like Miss Pony.

"Candy, when will you grow up? How long are you going to squabble with Jimmy who is younger than you? Really, I don't know what to say to you anymore..."

But I know they were relieved to see me getting back on my feet again.

Even so, I had inevitably changed. Nothing was really as it was before.

It was as if frozen water had seeped into a corner of my heart and sometimes a cold pain pierced through me.

I never spent a single day without thinking about Anthony.

And Stear and Archie too.

Whenever my memories overwhelmed me, I somehow got rid of Jimmy and the other children who were always following me and I climbed alone to the top of Pony's Hill.

As winter was coming, a cold wind swept through the place and the dead plants rustled.

Finally the wind brought the smell of snow.

But I always held back my tears.

I had promised Anthony to keep smiling.

And I hadn't forgotten Prince on the Hill to whom I had promised the same thing.

I had written a long letter to Great Uncle William.

I had apologized to him for acting on my own and had thanked him for everything he had done for me. I expected my adoption by the Ardlay family would be annulled.

But Great Uncle William's answer never came.

Then I told myself that I should not be considered as "the adoptive daughter of the Ardlay family" any longer.

That was until one afternoon a black car which I had seen before came to pick me up.

It was the day of the first snow.

# Chapter 1

A thick fog had wrapped the deck of the ship.

“It’s so cold...”

Candy had said those words without really thinking about them. She put her shawl back on her shoulders.

As she was standing on the deck, the joy that reigned in the grand parlor of the ocean liner seemed unreal to her.

Darkness and fog. The sound of the waves breaking against the boat. The white foam that rose in the darkness of the night like small drops of silver.

Candy couldn’t believe what was happening to her. But she was indeed on board a luxurious ocean liner heading to England.

Everyone in the grand parlor was celebrating the New Year. Candy had discreetly slipped out. She had left behind the orchestra, those who were dancing, the bottles of champagne and the drunk people who were laughing happily. That was too cheerful for her.

*A new year...Anthony is dead, but the new year has come anyway.*

Candy let out a soft sigh and clung to the deck railing which was moistened by the fog.

A steam whistle sounded.

How many days had passed since they had left America? Every moment the ship was getting closer and closer to England.

*It seems that my destiny is always to leave in a hurry.*

Candy laughed a little and looked up at the night sky. It was covered in fog. There were no stars to see.

On the day of the first snow, the man who was in the black car which she knew well was obviously George.

Still as impassive as he had been when he had rescued Candy while she was leaving for Mexico, he had merely informed her about what was necessary.

“This is an order from Sir William. You are going to attend a prestigious college in London, England. All the preparations have already been completed. We are leaving immediately.”

The snow had kept falling, and Pony’s Home was covered in white.

“I...I thought I was no longer his adoptive daughter,” Candy had said to George, somewhat embarrassed.

He didn’t reply.

Candy didn’t know what to do. She was just looking at Miss Pony and Sister Lane.

The two women nodded silently. Then Candy understood that they were already aware of everything.

“But...I, going to a college in London?”

England was so far away. And she only knew that village and Lakewood.

Candy couldn't hide her anxiety, when George gave her two letters from Stear and Archie.

“Candy,

*I hope you are well.*

*I escaped from the villa with my brother so we would come and see you but George caught us immediately. I was so naïve to believe that old ramshackle car which Stear had constructed could be of any use to us.*

*So, I'm going to London ahead of you. I can't wait to see you again there.*

*Archie”*

*“Without you, life in London will be full of darkness. Finally we're going to be free from Great Aunt Elroy's supervision! Candy, come and bring me your light!*

*I've entrusted some gifts for you to George; some small inventions of my own.*

*First of all there is a doll that looks exactly like you (pull the string and you'll see!). There is also an automatic lifejacket. You just put it in the water and it inflates on its own. With that, you'll have nothing to fear during the boat trip! So, I'm waiting for you in London!*

*Stear”*

Candy pulled the string attached to the wooden doll. Mouth was lifted, eyes were raised, and the doll smiled.

*Stear, I don't have such a flat nose...*

Candy hugged the doll, smiling through her tears.

“Miss Candice, you are still the adoptive daughter of the illustrious Ardlay family.”

George had just spoken in a calm voice. There was even a touch of emotion in that voice, which was hardly like him.

“I hope you won't let Sir William down.”

Candy was surprised and looked at George again.

*I am indebted to Great Uncle William, and I haven't done anything yet to pay him back.*

Yet she had wanted so much to become a young lady worthy of that name, and honor the Ardlay family.

“Candy, this is a unique opportunity. Not everyone is so fortunate. Accept this proposal and be grateful. We'll be watching you with a

smile as you will be leaving. We are convinced that, wherever you go, you'll never forget who you are."

Next to Miss Pony who was saying those words, Sister Lane nodded in approval.

That was when Candy made her decision.

The sound of the waves and the noise of the engine were mixed until they were jumbled up together.

In the parlor the music had changed to tango.

"Miss Pony...Sister Lane...Anthony..."

Candy murmured those names.

Immediately tears came into her eyes. She blinked quickly to drive them away.

The wind was getting more and more frozen. The ghostly fog still covered the deck like the translucent white mantle of a nymph of the night. Candy was about to return to her cabin when she stopped startled.

She had the impression she had seen a silhouette in the fog.

Then the view became clearer, and she could distinguish the figure of a boy from behind, standing on the deck.

He was leaning on the boat railing and watching the dark sea, as if he were ready to jump into the water.

Candy felt suddenly worried and moved closer to him.

She gasped. Her heart started beating as if it were about to burst out of her chest.

"Anthony..."

Her lips were trembling slightly.

He looked like him. From behind, that silhouette made her think of Anthony.

He seemed absorbed in his thoughts. His soft hair was caressed by the wind...

Candy was irresistibly attracted to him and moved a little closer.

The fog was becoming dense, only revealing intermittently the boy's profile. The closer she was getting, the more she felt her heart was constricted.

How could he look so much like Anthony?

Certainly, he was taller than him. And his build was also more imposing.

But he resembled Anthony so much that she wanted to cry.

The fog cleared up again for a moment. The boy's features could be seen more distinctly. Candy couldn't help flinching as she was looking at him.

*He's crying!*

It was the reflection in his eyes that made her think that; a glow that

was sparkling as he was looking into the darkness that spread far out beyond the sea, as if he were defying it.

Candy was bewildered. She felt that she had witnessed something she shouldn't have seen.

But now she couldn't go anymore.

From time to time, Anthony also used to look far away with the same sad expression.

Candy was beginning to get overwhelmed by her emotions when the boy turned around.

"Who's there?"

His voice was firm. Who could have imagined such a voice by looking at that boy from behind, when he seemed so dejected?

"I'm sorry...But you looked so sad. I was afraid you intended to jump into the sea," murmured Candy, agitated.

"Me? Sad?"

The boy pointed at himself and suddenly burst out laughing as if he had been told some joke.

"That was good! So I looked sad? And I might jump into the sea?"

The boy couldn't stop laughing. Candy was getting irritated.

From behind she had thought she had seen Anthony but now she was facing a completely different person.

If the glow she had seen in his eyes a few moments ago was not tears, what could it be? Had she been mistaken?

"And what about you? While the New Year's Eve party is in full swing in the parlor, the young lady is walking by herself in a place like this?"

The boy seemed inclined to tease her.

"I don't care much for parties," replied Candy sullenly, still vexed.

The boy burst out laughing once more.

"You don't say! Come on, tell me the truth. Actually you don't have a dancing partner, right?"

"That's not true!"

"Don't be angry, Miss Freckles. The more you sulk, the more freckles you get."

Without warning, the boy brought his face close to Candy, and then let out a soft whistle.

"Look at that. That's incredible; there's still a face under those freckles! I feel sorry for you."

Candy's look became more severe.

"I'm the one who feels sorry for you! You see, I love my freckles. I even wonder how I could get more of them! And since you don't have a single one, you must be jealous."

"Well, how about that!"

The boy pretended to be surprised in an exaggerated manner. He brought his face even closer to her.

**“In that case, I imagine that you are also proud of your flat nose.”**

**His mocking look didn't look at all like Anthony's anymore.**

**“Of course! I try to crush it a little more every day, like that!”**

**He had pointed out exactly what was bothering Candy. Offended, she deliberately pressed her nose.**

**“Well, what a spirit!”**

**The boy laughed and started walking along the deck.**

**“I'd better run away, before you bite me. Happy New Year, Miss Freckles. That was very amusing.”**

**He raised his hand in farewell and then he disappeared whistling in the fog. Candy made a grimace, watching his silhouette from behind. She had been wrong to believe, even for a moment, that he looked like Anthony, and to be so much fascinated.**

**“Miss Candice! I was looking for you everywhere.”**

**George appeared just as the boy was disappearing in the fog. Candy quickly hid her grimace and assumed again an expression worthy of a well-bred young lady.**

**“The fog is so thick tonight; if you accidentally fell into the sea that would hardly be a valid excuse to give to Sir William.”**

**“I'm sorry...”**

**Candy apologized with sincerity and started walking along the deck with George.**

**“Tell me, George, didn't you come across a boy earlier?”**

**“Do you refer to Mr. Granchester?”**

**As Candy had suspected, George knew that boy.**

**“So his name is Granchester.”**

**“Yes. It is an illustrious and noble English family, as far as I know.”**

**“What? Is he a noble? But I've never seen anyone so insolent. He was such a viper!”**

**“Has Mr. Granchester bothered you?”**

**“No...I just thought he looked a little like Anthony.”**

**“Like Mr. Anthony...”**

**George stopped. His grieved look hurt Candy. She gave him a smile which soon turned into a small pout.**

**“I can't believe that! He is the complete opposite of Anthony...And you're telling me he's a noble? Anthony was much more of a gentleman, don't you think?”**

**Without saying a word, George lowered his eyes.**

**Candy also remained silent.**

**They didn't say anything more until they reached her cabin.**

**Then George said to her, without looking into her eyes:**

**“We'll arrive in England in three days. Have a good rest.”**

**“Thank you. Good night, George,” she murmured.**



George was already leaving. Candy spoke to him again, but more cheerfully this time:

“Happy New Year, George! I hope a lot of nice things will happen to us!”

George stopped and turned slowly.

“I hope the same for you too, Miss Candice. I wish you the best of everything.”

She perceived a certain tenderness in his voice. Then he bowed.

The beginning of a new year.

And also the beginning of a new life for Candy!

## Chapter 2

St. Paul's Royal College.

Candy looked up at the imposing iron gate of that huge building. The gate extended as far as the eye could see, as if to completely isolate the college from the outside world. It was adorned with the most varied engravings, true works of art. At the mere sight of them, Candy had the impression she had come to a museum.

On the other side of the gate extended a well-kept garden. On both sides of a big lake in a geometrical shape, round-shaped topiaries were lined up, guiding the visitors to the central building which was made of brown stone. Around it, rows of several solemn statues completed the picture. Candy was enchanted.

“Oh! It looks like a castle straight out of the Middle Ages! How beautiful it is! You scared me with your nonsense! You exaggerated; it's not at all as you said!”

Laughing, Candy looked at Stear and Archie a little severely. Whatever she said, whatever she did, no matter where she was, she was so happy to see the two brothers again that she couldn't help smiling.

Stear and Archie had gone to pick her up at a port near London.

Until the moment of their reunion, Candy had been troubled, tormented by mixed feelings.

Of course she had been looking forward to seeing Stear and Archie again. But when she thought of Anthony...

Maybe the nightmare of that day was just waiting for that opportunity to haunt them again. What could she say to them when they would meet?

All those thoughts flew away in an instant when she saw Stear holding a sign surrounded by artificial flowers.

*“Welcome, Miss Candice!”*

That creation couldn't be anybody else's but Stear's. There was even a portrait of “Miss Candice” which he must have drawn himself, judging from the flat nose in the portrait and the questionable clothing taste it displayed.

They rejoiced in their reunion by falling into each other's arms. Of course, immediately afterwards, Candy laughingly protested against that picture of herself.

“You are so mean, Stear! Well, the nose is one thing but do I really have such short legs?”

She could say whatever she wanted, but it made her so happy to be so

close to them again that she wanted to laugh and cry at the same time.

“Do you think so? However, I’ve made you look prettier in the drawing than you are in reality.”

As usual, Stear was cheerful and careless.

“Stear can’t draw. I knew I should have taken care of that myself,” added Archie, as if it didn’t have any importance.

He was wearing a tweed coat with brown fur which suited him very well.

They were visibly emotional too.

A little later, in the car that was taking them back to London, the three of them didn’t stop talking for a moment.

While Stear was chattering, Archie kept interrupting him, and Candy was trying to get a word in edgewise.

Most of Stear’s and Archie’s conversation concerned the infernal life at college. Apparently the classes of torture succeeded one another. A daily regime of a number of absurdly strict, far from sensible, rules and regulations.

“The college teachers are more like ‘harpies’ than nuns.”

Stear let out a deep sigh while Candy burst out laughing.

“From what I hear, we’re going to the Royal College of Harpies.”

“We couldn’t say it better.”

Archie agreed with his most serious expression, and the three of them started laughing at the same time.

*They haven’t changed...*

It was just like their first meeting in Lakewood. Except that Anthony was no longer there.

Candy suddenly felt sadness overwhelming her.

St. Paul’s College was on the outskirts of London.

Stear and Archie had said a lot of terrible stories and had made Candy feel a little nervous. But the boarding school was revealed to be so sumptuous that the girl’s anxiety was simply swept away.

“When we go inside you’ll see for yourself if we have exaggerated so much, right, Stear?”

Archie intentionally kept a little further away from the main entrance of the building. Next to him, Stear pretended to be trembling in fear. Candy couldn’t believe it.

George didn’t pay any attention to them.

“Well, young gentlemen, let’s go.”

With the same impenetrable expression, he asked the gatekeeper to open to them.

The great iron gate started creaking.

Archie made a grimace and asked the girl:

“Candy, let’s stay outside a little longer. Our permission lasts another twelve minutes!”

Stear implored George, clasping his hands.

“Please, George, don’t be cruel! You’re not going to separate us like that when we have just met!”

George didn’t seem to be any more touched by that, and crossed the gate.

“Come on, you two, you know very well that you will be able to see Miss Candice at any time.”

Candy followed George.

“He’s right! Come on, let’s go.”

Stear couldn’t help shouting:

“No, I don’t want to! You say that because you don’t know what this prison is really like!”

Archie pushed back the hair that fell on his forehead and glanced at his watch.

“I also intend to take advantage of the eleven minutes of freedom I have left!”

“Candy, come back!”

Stear grabbed the iron bars and called Candy who was already in the courtyard. He looked just like a prisoner. Seeing this, Candy couldn’t stop laughing.

*Oh, they haven’t changed...Neither Stear...nor Archie!*

Laughing, Candy waved her hand at the two brothers behind the gate. Then she followed George with small quick steps. Beyond the garden she could see a dense forest of evergreens.

“This college is so beautiful...How strange, there is even a forest inside of it.”

“Indeed, this establishment has everything you need. It also has a riding ground, an archery building and an observatory.”

“Still, on second thought...this forest looks different from that of Lakewood.”

Candy thought that the trees in the Lakewood forest seemed more welcoming.

She recalled that dear familiar place, and that immediately made her nostalgic.

There was of course the huge Ardlay mansion. She had heard that Great Aunt Elroy had left it and moved to the main residence in Chicago, and that nobody lived there anymore. Then she thought of Anthony’s rose garden and wondered what had become of it. Knowing that George used to have his lips sealed, as if to avoid any unnecessary questions, she didn’t bother to ask him.

At the top of the stone stairs, a nun with a gloomy expression, dressed in grey, was waiting for her in front of the great entrance of the main

building.

“The director, Sister Gray, is expecting you,” the middle-aged nun simply told them.

Then she started walking down the hall, without even waiting for George to greet her. In the great hallway, armors and old paintings were aligned as far as the eye could see.

“Oh, inside it’s the same! This corridor also looks as if we were in a castle!”

Without really thinking about it, Candy had expressed her amazement out loud. The nun turned immediately and gave her a cold and hostile look.

*You must walk in silence. Speaking is strictly forbidden.*

The order was silent, but very clear. Candy shut her mouth and tried not to make any more noise.

*Maybe Stear’s and Archie’s stories weren’t so exaggerated...*

A heavy silence reigned throughout the building. It was cool and only the winter light which entered the hallway through the glass stained windows provided some warmth.

The nun stopped in front of an imposing double-leaf door. She knocked lightly before opening it, and then she bowed.

“Sister Gray, the visitors from the Ardlay family have just arrived.”

As soon as the nun announced them, a grave and powerful voice resounded:

“You are three minutes and twenty eight seconds late. Punctuality is the first sign of respect towards the others!”

Candy looked in front of her and couldn’t help being startled. She refrained from letting out a little cry.

She had thought someone had left a big rock in the middle of the room; but no. She made sure of that. She had a hard time telling herself that Sister Gray could be anything but an imposing rock in a nun’s habit.

“Please excuse us for this unjustifiable delay. I am coming on behalf of Sir William, Miss Candice’s guardian...”

“That is sufficient. We are aware of everything. You may leave.”

Sister Gray had interrupted George with a gesture of her fat hand which looked like a stone.

“Certainly, but...”

“It is Candice who will be a part of our establishment. Therefore it is with her that I will speak. As you know, from the moment a student becomes a boarder of our honorable institute, guardians are exempt from any intervention. Let us take care of her education with complete peace of mind.”

“Very well.”

George threw a worried glance at Candy for a moment, and then he

bowed and left the director's office.

Candy followed him with her eyes.

She had hardly said anything to him. She hadn't even thanked him for bringing her to London.

*This time I would have liked to ask him about Great Uncle William.*

"Candice White Ardlay!"

It was not a thunder that resounded, but a voice.

"What are you looking at? Straighten your back and look directly in front of you! An integral mind begins with a correct posture, is that understood?"

Sister Gray also straightened up in front of her desk. Candy had the impression that the rock had become even bigger than before.

"I will tell you a little about the prestigious history of St. Paul's College, as well as the discipline that exists here. Is that understood?"

The director began to talk in a manner that indicated she was accustomed to making speeches. Candy was listening attentively to her, but her mind was rambling elsewhere.

*This is not going to be easy...If it's like this, it might even be difficult for me to see Stear and Archie. I'm beginning to regret not having listened to them. If we had taken advantage of the remaining twelve minutes, we could have had some tea and a muffin in a coffee shop...*

Candy was absorbed in her thoughts, not only of the muffin, but also of a scone and a banana cake.

The director's speech seemed it would last forever. The regulation of the boarding school consisted of a hundred articles. She could never learn them all at once. As a matter of fact, she had already given up after the fifth one.

"Is everything clear, Candice White Ardlay? Try to prove yourself worthy of the honor that is done to you!"

"Yes!"

Candy was at least good at giving that clear answer. Upon hearing that energetic confirmation, Sister Gray nodded without smiling. She rang a bell on her desk. Immediately the gloomy nun who had guided them into the office appeared.

"Call Patricia O'Brien for me."

A little while after the nun left, someone knocked on the door.

A rather small and chubby girl, visibly nervous, bowed while entering the office. She was wearing a pair of blue-rimmed glasses that suited her very well. Candy thought she seemed to be a very nice girl.

"Patricia, this is Candice, our new student. Take her to the special room."

"Yes, Sister."

Patricia had replied like a mechanical doll. Then she nodded towards Candy in order to greet her.

Once they were out of the director's office, Candy stretched herself in a casual manner.

"Oh... It was so tiring to stand there for so long."

"You shouldn't say that in the corridor...If they overhear you they will strike your hands with a stick as a punishment."

Frightened, Patricia glanced quickly around.

"Well, in that case, so much the better. I won't be able to use the pen any longer, and that will be a good excuse for me not to study."

Candy had replied in a cheerful tone, but that was not enough to relax Patricia's tense expression. She crossed the corridor which led to another building.

"This is the girls' dormitory."

The girl pointed to a very elegant building.

"Oh, how beautiful!"

"Its appearance may be beautiful. But when you get inside, it's suffocating...We can't even go out whenever we want."

With her head still lowered, Patricia didn't even dare to meet Candy's eyes.

"Well, it's true that there are not many windows...But there must be some way of sneaking out when we want to."

Candy smiled mischievously at Patricia who finally relaxed and smiled back at her.

She opened a heavy door and entered the girls' dormitory.

"That's a relief. I'm glad to see you are like this. I had been worried about what kind of girl would come to the special room. Not very long ago, there came such a wicked girl..."

Patricia left her sentence unfinished and remained silent, stopping suddenly. Candy imitated her and her eyes widened when she discovered who was in front of her. Who was that walking haughtily along the corridor? Yes, none other than Eliza Leagan.

Stear and Archie had warned her that Eliza and Neal had also come to study in London. Candy wouldn't have liked to meet them again so soon.

Annoyed, Eliza immediately looked away from Candy. But Candy was accustomed to that kind of attitude.

"We haven't seen each other in a long time, Eliza."

Candy approached her spontaneously, suddenly filled with a strange nostalgia.

"Keep your distance! You're disgusting me!"

Eliza had literally screamed. The other girls who were in the corridor turned around.

"Patty, why are you with her? You'll get dirty too! Don't you know she grew up in an orphanage? Our family took her in as a maid of all work! She had been taking care of our horses! I don't know how she

managed to coax our Great Uncle but she didn't lack the nerve to do that. This little schemer even managed to be adopted, even if nobody in the family has really accepted her. Patty, I warn you, if you go around with that girl, nobody will speak to you anymore!"

Candy had been impressed by Eliza. Her mouth didn't stop and poured out an endless stream of words.

Patricia was deeply embarrassed and barely dared to answer.

"Eh...But the director told me to take her to the special room..."

"Pardon?"

Eliza raised her eyebrows.

"This tramp is going to stay in the special room?"

Eliza's voice became shrill. It seemed as if the boiling rage inside her had no choice but to come up to her throat. She gave Candy the most murderous look she was capable of.

"You don't have to take her there. Come with me, Patricia!"

With her face distorted by anger, Eliza grabbed the shy girl's arm.

"But...I..."

"Don't worry about me, I'll be fine."

In a cheerful voice, Candy reassured Patricia who was being dragged away.

*Oh, Eliza, you haven't changed either, no matter where you are...*

Candy sighed. In that place too, Eliza would certainly do her best to hurt her as much as possible.

*If only she used all that energy to study, she could become a remarkable scholar.*

Candy felt sorry for her.

But where could that special room be?

Candy tried to ask those she met, but the girls who were talking to each other in a low voice turned away from her quickly when she was about to speak to them. She gave up, determined to find her way all by herself.

*That's natural, considering how Eliza introduced me at the top of her voice: an orphan, someone who took care of horses...*

It didn't take more than that for her to be marginalized and for all those girls from good families to avoid her like the plague.

*Yes, this is not really surprising, after all...*

At the end of the corridor, there was a door larger than the others. It had no number, and the engravings on the wood were more delicate than those on the other doors.

"I wonder if it's here..."

Candy opened the door carefully and a little fearfully, and her eyes widened.

"How lovely!"

She disappeared inside the room, as if she were being sucked.



That place was worthy of a princess!

Everything was furnished in pale pink, although slightly darker than the color of the Sweet Candy roses.

It was a beautiful bedroom with an elegant bed. The bookcase was full of books. Several perfume bottles were lined up on a small dressing table.

Candy opened gently the closet and saw that it was full of dresses. In spite of herself, she let out a little cry of joy, but immediately she felt some anxiety.

*Is this really the special room? Haven't I been mistaken?*

But yes, that was really her room.

There was a heavy desk near the window. She saw a thick diary carelessly placed on it. She tensed immediately. On the brown leather cover it was written in golden letters:

*"Candice White Ardlay"*

*"Thank you, Great Uncle!"*

Candy's voice was trembling with emotion. She held the diary tight in her hands. She started flipping it, and the white pages passing in front of her eyes seemed to be smiling at her.

On those pages she could narrate all that would happen to her every day.

*"Whatever happens, never be discouraged. And don't do anything that you may be ashamed to write about on these pages, Candice White Ardlay!"*

She almost felt she heard Great Uncle saying those words to her. She nodded so as to make sure she had understood that message.

*"Don't worry, Uncle. I will write every day, and I will be quite sincere. I will make sure that during my stay here I will live in such a way so that some day I can show you this diary without having to be ashamed of anything!"*

Candy was still holding the diary in her hands and speaking in a loud voice, as if she wanted to convince herself.

## Chapter 3

“Oh, what a blinding sun!”

Candy opened with force the burgundy velvet curtains and was immediately dazzled by the wave of light that flooded the room.

She went out onto the large balcony and took a deep breath.

The morning air had the faint scent of the city of London.

But while the birds were gathering on her balcony to sing, she had the impression she was at Pony’s Home.

Candy was relieved to see that the college was surrounded by trees. All of them had branches that promised an easy climbing. The courtyard was well maintained. And beyond that extended the dense forest. Further than that she could see the tower of the boys’ dormitory. That was where Stear and Archie were staying.

Candy looked intensely at that brick-colored building, as if she resented it. The day before, Sister Gray had solemnly warned Candy that the college strictly prohibited any relationship between boys and girls. Talking to a boy was out of the question, let alone visiting Stear and Archie in their dormitory. Apparently, even two students of opposite sex crossing paths at random inside the building could be punished if they talked to each other.

“And to think I have finally been able to see Stear and Archie...I had so much to tell them. I can’t believe we found Great Aunt Elroy’s spitting image in London.”

In Candy’s mind, the images of Sister Gray and of Great Aunt Elroy appeared simultaneously, before she hastened to chase away both of them.

“At least the special room’s balcony is wonderful! It makes me think I’ve become a queen here. ‘Good morning, good people of England. Good morning, good mor...’”

Candy was making elegant gestures while greeting her imaginary subjects, when suddenly she retreated.

From the courtyard, a nun had seen her and had given her a threatening look.

*Why did she look like that? It was just a joke! Oh...I hope the nuns of this college are not all grim and frightening monsters.*

With a grimace, Candy put on her grey uniform.

“For the common prayer tomorrow we have to wear the regular grey uniform...”

The evening before, Patricia, although frightened, had come on purpose to give her that advice.

*Patricia is shy, but she seems to be a nice girl.*

The bell of the church adjoining the main building was ringing.

Candy winked at her image reflected in the mirror and left her room cheerfully. She was thirty minutes earlier than the time Patricia had told her, but Candy was true to the lesson Miss Pony had taught her. That is, to give herself enough margin when she went to a place for the first time.

Once a month, all the students of that college met at church early in the morning. That was called “the common prayer”. A religious ceremony, from what Candy understood, but for her it was a valuable opportunity to meet the two brothers, and that was enough to make her happy.

The girls’ dormitory was very quiet and no student was in the corridor. Were they all still sleeping?

In a carefree way, Candy arrived at the piazza. It was then that she was startled, as she looked around her. Some students were running towards the church, and they were all wearing black uniforms!

Then she saw Eliza, who was also dressed in black, walking with Patricia in front of her. The latter turned around and saw Candy. She looked down in surprise. Of course, she was wearing the same uniform too.

Eliza glanced over her shoulder and made a disdainful grimace.

Candy immediately understood.

*Oh! They have played a joke on me, after such a long time. Eliza has forced Patricia to lie to me.*

Candy was accustomed to Eliza’s bullying, but the fact that she had used Patricia made it more difficult for her to accept it. Eliza had just come to the college, and she had already established such an authority among the girls that they couldn’t refuse her anything.

*I have to change!*

Candy was about to turn back when the bell rang again.

Everyone was heading to the church, hurrying their steps a little more. The common prayer was about to begin. She couldn’t waste any more time! Patricia had also lied to her about the time, so she was late.

Candy made a decision. If she had left her room without recalling Miss Pony’s words, she would have been late and in the wrong uniform too. So she preferred to be punctual at the prayer and keep the grey uniform on. After all, she hadn’t done it on purpose.

Candy entered the chapel, very straight and sure of herself. The students already seated looked at her, astonished. Stear and Archie, sitting in the front seats which were reserved for the boys, turned around too. They frowned, looking worried. That gave her to understand how inappropriate that “grey uniform” was.

Candy smiled furtively at the two brothers to reassure them, and then

she sat down.

The intractable voice of Sister Gray who, from the altar in the middle, was watching severely the students as they took their seats, was heard immediately.

“Candice White Ardlay! You are kindly requested to keep that uniform for the weekdays!”

Candy held her breath and jumped up, bowing her head.

“Oh...Yes...Forgive me. I realized it on my way here. I thought about going to change but I would have been late...I’ll pay more attention from now on.”

Candy apologized sincerely. She couldn’t talk about Patricia. Right now the girl must have been so scared that she was about to faint.

Sister Gray stared at Candy for a moment, probably wondering what she was going to do with her. Her voice resounded solemnly:

“Since you have just arrived in this establishment, this time as an exception I will be lenient. I will leave it to Sister Iris, the supervisor of the boarding school, to decide on the appropriate punishment later. Now, sit down.”

There was complete silence again in the chapel. Candy felt that all the students were holding their breath. She bowed before sitting down again on the hard bench.

“Well, let us start the morning prayer...”

Sister Gray closed her eyes and clasped her hands together. Everybody did the same.

Candy closed her eyes too. She was ready with every fiber of her body to receive the prayer spoken by Sister Gray. Oh, yes, there were so many things she wanted to pray for.

*My thanks to Great Uncle William...And may Anthony rest in peace...*

She didn’t go any further. A crashing noise had resounded throughout the church. Everyone looked up, startled.

Sister Gray interrupted her prayer and when she opened her eyes, she looked angry.

“Terrence G. Granchester!”

Sister Gray’s face had turned pale with anger.

“Not only do you arrive late for the service but also you prevent others from praying with your noise. It is inadmissible!”

*Granchester?*

Candy turned around. It wasn’t Sister Gray’s threatening tone that had surprised her, but the name she had spoken.

The boy was reclining on one of the pews of the chapel and was looking at the other students, with his arms crossed and with a mocking expression. It was him! It was the boy Candy had met on the deck of the ocean liner that foggy night. He was standing in front of her.

That boy called Terrence was looking at the nuns with an insolent smile.

“What is so funny, Terrence G. Granchester?”

Sister Gray gave him a piercing look.

“Nothing. Except maybe that I see everyone praying like this. They all look so pious, but deep down I wonder what they’re really thinking about.”

“Terrence G...”

“ ‘Get out immediately’? You don’t need to tell me, I’m leaving right away. After all, as far as I’m concerned, I don’t see anything I could pray for.”

With an affected gesture, Terrence threw over his shoulder the grey jacket he had taken off, and then began to walk towards the door of the chapel. The other students remained silent, following him with their eyes.

“Terrence...”

“You must like my name to be repeating it like this. But I know what you’re going to tell me. ‘Come to my office later’, right? I’ll accept that invitation with great pleasure!”

Terrence turned around slowly.

“So, farewell, my dear comrades.”

He bowed gracefully, and then left the chapel for good. Immediately, a tumult stirred that holy place, which spread to all the students.

“Say, who is this Terrence G. Granchester?”

Candy heard Eliza whispering from the back seats, apparently excited:

“He’s the son of the duke of Granchester, a noble.”

“A noble? Him?”

“He’s attractive, don’t you think? We call him Terry! Even though everyone admires him, they say he actually doesn’t like girls much. He’s terribly sarcastic and behaves like a hooligan. However, his grades always rank him among the best students...”

All the girls completely forgot they were in the chapel, in the middle of the prayer, and started chatting about Terrence.

*So he’s called Terry...*

Candy remembered her meeting with him on the foggy deck of the ship, and how his silhouette from behind had reminded her of Anthony.

“Silence!”

Sister Gray struck the altar. The conversations immediately died down, and there was silence again.

“Distracted at the slightest nonsense. This is the proof, young people, that you are lacking discipline and severity on a daily basis! To remedy this, today’s sermon will last twice as long as usual. And I do

not want to see a single flicker from any of you!”

If Candy could endure Sister Gray’s long sermon that morning, it was because she remembered Anthony the whole time.

*Terrence G. Granchester.*

Candy had never thought that she could meet him again.

If the other night she had had the impression, even for a moment, that Anthony had resurrected, was it due to the mysterious powers of fog? Normally, this kind of situation is quite impossible, and yet...

The girls were only talking about Terrence all day long.

“This Terrence has never come out with a girl before, right?”

Once the morning lessons were over, Eliza, with her eyes sparkling, kept asking for information from the small group of girls that had formed around her.

“Apparently he doesn’t like girls, does he? Let’s rather say that he has never been lucky enough to meet an attractive girl.”

Candy discreetly slipped out of the main building, being careful not to be noticed by Eliza and the other girls. Then she went towards the forest.

Fortunately for her, Eliza was absorbed by other subjects.

*Maybe even thanks to that Terry, Eliza will forget about me for a while.*

The winter forest was invaded by the smell of wet wood. Candy took a deep breath. That scent was pure nostalgia. In that season, the forest of Lakewood must have been covered with a dazzling blanket of snow. She would hear the sound of snow falling from the branches, no longer supporting the weight of the accumulated snowflakes.

*If only Anthony was alive...*

That thought suddenly captured Candy’s mind and she stopped, as she was stepping on the dead branches.

If those disastrous events had not occurred, no doubt she would be taking a walk with him in the middle of the winter forest at this very moment.

If none of this had happened...

A trampling of hooves coming from the depths of the forest brought her out of her thoughts.

Candy held her breath.

No, her imagination wasn’t playing any tricks on her.

The sound of those hooves was the one she had heard that day; the sound of horse galloping during that hunting!

Instantly, the sunlight that was filtered through the trees of the forest froze. It became dull and grey. The sound coming towards her was getting louder and louder, faster and faster. Candy could no longer escape it. She was brought back to the past at full speed.

*No, be careful! Don't go so fast!*

Then she spotted a grey horse coming towards her. Who was the rider? It was against the light, and she couldn't see.

*Stop! Don't come over here! There's a wolf trap... There's a trap on the ground! Anthony!*

Candy held out both hands in order to stop the silhouette on the horse galloping towards her.

But it didn't slow down for a moment.

"No, don't come this way!"

It was the moment Candy screamed that she lost consciousness.

What had happened to her? Her mind was clouded...as if she had plunged her head into cotton. She had the feeling she was dreaming. Someone was looking at her anxiously. Oh!

"Anthony!"

Not completely awake yet, Candy opened her eyes as she pronounced that name. The next moment she got up startled.

In front of her there was Terrence G. Granchester who was looking at her insistently.

"Well, actually, my name is Terrence."

He looked away ironically.

"Would you please stop calling me Anthony? That's a very common name!"

After saying that in a dry tone, he nimbly jumped back onto the saddle of the grey horse which was shaking its mane.

Candy stood up at once. Hearing him make fun of Anthony's name had at least brought her back to her senses and, at the same time, she felt anger rising inside her.

"What do you mean, a common name? It's the most beautiful name there is! As for the name Terrence, it's silly in comparison!"

"That's a funny way to thank the one who has come to your rescue."

From above his steed, Terrence smiled mockingly.

"To my rescue?"

"You fainted just now. I took care of you with so much tenderness."

"You took care of me?"

Candy held her breath for a moment.

Actually, everything had suddenly turned black. And afterwards...

Sitting on his horse, Terrence was still looking at Candy as if he wanted to tease her.

"Well, yes. And you must have been exhausted, judging from the way you collapsed in my arms. Luckily I was there to catch you."

"Eh? Oh, no, that's not possible!"

Candy immediately turned red as a poppy. She waved both hands violently so that he wouldn't say another word. Terrence burst out laughing.

“Don’t worry, I was joking. My principle is to reserve this kind of favors only for pretty girls.”

Still laughing, Terrence kicked his horse in the flanks and the animal resumed its galloping.

The horse and its rider were absorbed into the light that was filtered through the trees. Candy, still shocked, could finally take a deep breath.

“So much the better that I’m not pretty if it can prevent you from being nice to me! I prefer that a thousand times!”

That’s exactly what she should have told him, but it was too late.

How long had she remained unconscious?

Anthony...

The sound of the hooves continued to trouble her. Her heart was heavy.

It was Terrence G. Granchester who was on that horse.

*I confused him again with Anthony...I was convinced that it was him.*

*I felt the same when I came to my senses...*

But come to think of it, it seemed that Terrence didn’t remember at all having met Candy on the ship. In the fog, it had seemed to her that his eyes were gleaming, as if he were on the verge of tears. So she told herself that that moment might also have been an illusion.



## Chapter 4

*January*

*It's been only ten days since I entered St. Paul's College.*

*And yet, I have the impression six months have already passed.*

*The days are all the same.*

*It's as if I have become a puppet that moves only at the sound of the bell, and only according to regulation. And whenever I see Stear and Archie inside the college, I can't even speak to them.*

*Eliza is adjusting more and more.*

*Eliza...*

*I wish she didn't use me to get over her frustration caused to her by the gloomy life at the boarding school.*

*The hardest part is that I don't have any friends. Eliza has built a good reputation for me.*

*So everyone is aware that I grew up in an orphanage. What is wrong with that? A real young lady from a good family should not judge someone's value by their origins, in my opinion. And although they say that all men are equal before God, the nuns are also particularly cold with me...*

*Well, that may be because I keep messing around.*

*I'm confused. What should I do to become a real lady as Great Uncle William wants me to be?*

*Fortunately, there are also positive aspects here.*

*We eat very well at the boarding school. The other girls complain and say their cook at home is much better, but as far as I'm concerned, I enjoy myself every day. I'm going to study hard, but I also need to take a little breath from time to time!*

The bell announcing the beginning of morning lessons rang.

Candy quickly closed her diary and headed to the main building. Since she had homework to do every day, she made sure to write in her diary in the mornings. She had promised Great Uncle William, in her heart at least, that she would write honestly her thoughts there every day. She couldn't allow herself to be lazy.

She intended to write everything in that diary, without hiding anything, good things as well as bad things, even if she would have to be reprimanded later.

She started running at full speed.

If anyone of the nuns saw her, her grades in "Good manners for well-educated young girls" would be lowered. But if she was late, not only

would her points in “Principles of daily life” be removed, but also her final results at the end of the year could suffer. That was why Candy took the risk of running.

Regulation was very clear. For every class, students should take their seats before the bell stopped ringing.

That morning, Candy took a sprint and...did not arrive on time. She stormed into the classroom, out of breath, and almost fell over. All the students were already seated, reading their textbooks.

“I thought I had been clear: in my class, we have to be seated before the bell starts ringing.”

Sister Kreis, already seated in her chair, gave Candy a malicious look. It was the first time she was attending that teacher’s French class.

She was one of the most terrible nuns of the college. Her face was completely impassive, like a funereal mask. Yet Candy had made everything possible so as not to make the slightest mistake.

“I’m sorry. I’ll be more careful next time.”

Candy apologized to her teacher, enduring the cold and unkind looks of the whole class.

Another instruction that her classmates hadn’t considered necessary to pass on to her.

Suddenly she was keenly aware of what had happened.

“That will affect your grades, Candice. Go immediately to your seat. The lesson has already started.”

The bell finally stopped ringing.

“Well, since Candice has arrived late, we will ask her to give her recitation. Stand up.”

“Yes...”

Candy, who had just sat down, stood up abruptly.

Recitation? What was she talking about? Now she realized that all the other students had a textbook on their desks; a little textbook she had never seen. Candy understood in a flash. Another bad trick from Eliza and her gang.

“Well, what’s the matter, Candice? Begin!”

“Eh...When you mentioned recitation...What recitation are you talking about?”

Candy had asked that question fearfully.

“What?”

Sister Kreis’s cold voice sent a shiver down Candy’s spine. She took a deep breath, resisting the temptation to cower, and said in a loud and intelligible voice:

“Actually, I don’t know which recitation we are talking about!”

“But this is strange. It is a text by Louise Labé, a French poetess. It was supposed to be distributed to you so that you could memorize it.”

Candy held her breath, astonished. No one had informed her about that either.

She looked straight at the nun's face. She really knew nothing.

She had to be very clear about that fact.

"Sister Kreis, I was not given that text! I was not informed of anything at all!"

Candy tried desperately to defend herself. Little mocking laughter was heard discreetly throughout the classroom. It was the nun's turn to be astonished. She shook her head.

"But this is not possible. Louise, you have distributed the text to everybody, haven't you?"

"Yes, Sister Kreis."

Louise stood up and her cheeks flushed with indignation.

She had immediately become Eliza's friend. Outwardly, Louise was an excellent student, very serious, but there was an evil glimmer deep in her eyes, exactly the same that was in Eliza's eyes.

"You're lying!"

Candy couldn't help that. She looked intensely at Louise who took a step back.

It was then that Eliza took the opportunity to intervene.

"This is horrible! She wants someone else to be accused in her place!"

"What a coward! Poor Louise!"

The whole class started blaming Candy.

Only Patricia had lowered her head.

"Silence!"

Sister Kreis hit her desk.

"Candice, come here."

With her face still impassive, the nun ordered Candy to stand in front of the blackboard.

"Yes."

Without hesitation, Candy walked to the blackboard with her head held high. Why should she be afraid? When Candy came forward, Sister Kreis took a piece of chalk.

She wrote with large letters, just above Candy's head:

**I AM A LIAR**

"Louise has never been late. She has always respected the rules. Candice, are you trying to blame another student for your faults? You should be ashamed! You will stay there under that inscription and reflect on what you have done."

Candy turned and looked steadily at the inscription that was right above her.

**I AM A LIAR**

"But I have never lied!"

Candy immediately grabbed a sponge and erased the inscription.

“What kind of manner is that, Candice?”

Sister Kreis’s tone became sharper. Candy looked straight into her eyes.

“Sister Kreis, I swear before God that I have not lied! If I had known about it and forgotten to study my lesson, I would accept my punishment without saying anything. But all my classmates know better than anyone that I am not lying!”

Candy looked at the whole class, making everyone feel her anger.

“What a nerve!”

“When people have no manners, they won’t stop at anything!”

Of course, Candy had heard that. It was the particularly high-pitched voices of Eliza and Louise. But she held on. Sister Kreis looked steadily at her. Candy met her gaze. A few moments later, the nun nodded, without looking away. No expression seemed to penetrate her icy cold face.

“Very well, Candice. Since you insist so much on your own version, you will recite from the third to the fifth sonnet by Louise Labé in the next class.”

“Yes, Sister,” answered Candy with a voice that surprised even herself.

After all this, it was established now that the entire class was against her.

That day, after the lessons were over, all the girls avoided looking at Candy and nobody spoke to her.

“In any case, they had been ignoring me from the beginning...There’s nothing surprising about that. I still hope that some day they’ll understand it’s no use bothering me all the time...”

Anyway, she would have to recite an old poem in French. And she didn’t know a single word of it. Sister Kreis was testing her to decide if she was a liar or not.

“I have to do it, whatever it costs me! I’m going to render Eliza and the others speechless. A recitation can be learned by heart, even without understanding its meaning. But it would be easier if I knew that language...”

Sitting on a bench in the courtyard, Candy sighed as she looked at the text Sister Kreis had given her. She would have understood better a geographical map of a foreign country.

“Well, if ‘S. Project’ works tonight, they’ll explain it to me. I’ll find a way to get out!”

Candy smiled. She suddenly felt that everything would be fine.

S. Project was a top secret plan which Candy had devised herself.

Three days ago, after lessons, during a walk in the forest, Candy had found a small card attached to a branch and fluttering in the wind. A pair of glasses was drawn on that card. A little further away, at the end

of another branch, there was a new card with the drawing of a hat. Considering the quality of the drawings, Candy had immediately understood they were done by Stear. The “glasses” were those Stear was always wearing. The “hat”, green as a cabbage, belonged to Archie. It was that French hat he was so proud of. Candy had jumped for joy. That was a riddle the two brothers had sent to her, urging her to look for more cards.

Now that she thought about it, Candy had seen them in the main building a few days ago. Stear had wriggled his fingers while Archie had pointed elegantly towards the forest. She had wondered what those funny gestures meant, but now she understood.

*Candy, go for a walk in the forest and you'll find some cards.*

She had found three more of them.

“Stear’s motor car”, “Archie’s boat”, and the last one was... “a stomach”.

“However, I’m sure you actually intended to draw a bagpipe, Stear.”

Candy had burst out laughing after noticing that in front of a large tree. She stopped immediately and glanced around her.

All she heard was just a few birds singing.

Under the drawing of the “stomach-bagpipe” there was a small arrow. Following the indicated direction, she had found a small hole on a tree. In that hole there was a folded note. Candy had gently unfolded the small wet brown piece of paper, being careful not to tear it.

*“When you find this...”*

That delicate handwriting...No doubt it belonged to Archie.

A sweet warmth had spread immediately in Candy’s heart. As a reply, she had left her handkerchief into the hole. She had had nothing to write on.

*Stear, Archie, thank you! Now we have found a way to secretly communicate.*

Since then there had been many exchanges of notes, until they developed their secret plan with the code name “S. Project” which they would finally carry out.

It was to be that night.

Still sitting on a bench in the courtyard, Candy closed the small textbook. She sprang up with all her strength. She hadn’t climbed a tree in a long time. She had to do some warm-up right now.

Candy was walking in the courtyard, almost hopping, when someone behind her pushed her violently. She almost lost her balance.

“Neal!”

Neal Leagan had obviously collided with her on purpose. Surrounded by his friends, he was looking at Candy, his eyes barely open, but full of contempt.

“I was wondering which idiot could be walking in such a ridiculous

way, and of course it was the orphan brat. What a nerve to come here. What business have you in London?"

"I could ask you the same thing."

Candy answered him quietly.

"What did you say? You know, boys, this girl was taking care of our horses. She has no business in a college like this. After all, she's just an abandoned child who used to work for us!"

Neal was explaining all this to his friends with an incredible vigor.

Candy then gave Neal some advice, with a half-serious expression:

"You know, you keep repeating yourself. I'm getting tired, always listening to the same tune. Why don't we get this over and done with?"

"What? You're just an orphan and you think you can talk to me like that? Orphans have to stay in their place!"

At that moment, a figure appeared without warning from the shadow of a tree. Quickly as lightning, it grabbed Neal by the collar and lifted him, tightening its grip.

"What do you have against orphans, newcomer brat?"

Terrence, dressed in a riding suit, kept Neal under his grip, with a piercing look. Candy held her breath.

"I don't think this girl chose to be born an orphan just because she liked it. It's not her fault, and only a coward could accuse her or criticize her for that! You're disgusting me!"

Terrence didn't give Neal the chance to fight back, and tightened his grip a little more around his neck. Neal was gasping for breath.

"I...I'm suffocating!"

Terrence pursed his lips, glared at Neal, and then loosened his grip.

"Go on, get out of here!"

"One day you'll pay for this!"

Even though Neal threw a threatening look with that last bravado, he didn't stay there and ran off at full speed, along with his friends.

Everything took place in the blink of an eye. As if nothing had happened, Terrence resumed walking towards the riding ground, deep in the forest. He didn't even turn back.

Candy followed him hurriedly.

"Wait!"

Terrence finally stopped.

"What?"

He reluctantly turned to Candy.

"Thank you...I..."

"I've done nothing to deserve your thanks."

The boy answered her so sharply that Candy stammered.

"But...You protected me..."

"Don't get me wrong; it was not you in particular that I defended."

Terrence interrupted Candy again.

“It’s just that I hate guys like these; that’s all.”

“Oh...”

Candy no longer knew how to react to the boy’s indifference. She ended up looking into his eyes, without really knowing why. Suddenly, Terrence’s expression softened.

“Why are you looking at me like that all of a sudden? Do you want to make a love declaration to me, Miss Freckles?”

“What?”

Surprised, Candy opened her eyes wide.

*Miss Freckles?*

So Terrence did remember their meeting on the ship...

“What is it now? Do you want to see me on horseback so you can faint again?”

“You...you wish!”

Terrence was amused to see Candy so upset.

“Good. I’ve got better things to do in my spare time than taking care of a girl with a snub nose and a lot of freckles. So...”

Terrence touched his riding cap with his hand, and started walking again.

As she saw him going away, Candy got more and more angry with him.

“Who do you think you are? My name is Candice White Ardlay! Or else Candy! If you call me ‘Miss Freckles’ again or call my nose ‘snub’, next time we meet you won’t have fun!”

Candy had screamed with all her might in Terrence’s direction. However, he didn’t turn back.

“...Candy, is it? I think ‘Miss Freckles’ suits you better...” murmured Terrence.

Candy, of course, couldn’t see that a smile had just appeared on the boy’s face.

## Chapter 5

*S. Project, let's go!*

That night, Candy held her breath and threw herself into Stear and Archie's bedroom, in the boys' dormitory. Carried away by her enthusiasm, she overturned the sofa with a crashing noise.

Archie was standing on the balcony, with a candlestick in his hand, to give her the signal. In front of that disaster, he put a hand over his eyes and quickly closed the large glass door of the balcony.

"Couldn't you have tried to be a little more discreet?"

Archie seemed annoyed, and very amused at the same time. He put out the candles and helped Candy get up.

"I'm sorry! I put too much force, and I didn't manage to stop..."

She gave a little laugh to hide her embarrassment. Then she pulled towards her the makeshift rope she had made.

"Fortunately the sheets were of good quality; this rope is strong!"

S. Project, S for "sheets", was a clever ploy which consisted of making use of sheets to make a rope, a kind of lasso that would allow her to move from one tree to another in the forest to get to the window of the two brothers.

Archie smiled, putting his hands on his chest with relief.

"I agreed to try this experiment which would allow me to see you, but I still had the jitters."

Candy relaxed now too.

"Now that we know how to do it, life in this college will become a little more pleasant."

She looked around the room.

"But where is Stear?"

"Over there..."

Archie pointed at the ceiling with a tired expression.

"Stear!"

Candy couldn't help laughing.

The boy was stuck to the ceiling thanks to four suckers, one on each hand and each foot.

"Hello, Candy. Do you see that? It's called "the spider man"! Eddison himself would have never imagined he could walk on the ceiling one day!"

Stear proudly began to walk with his head thrown back, taking off the suckers one after the other.

"That's great! It looks funny! Let me try it!"

Candy stood on tiptoe.

"The thing is..."

Stear let out a cry.



“...that there’s a weight limit.”

He had just fallen to the floor with a crash.

“Stear!”

This time it was his brother whom Archie helped stand up.

“Did you see? Even my fall was under control! Thanks to these suckers I have no trouble...Ouch!”

Candy didn’t seem convinced. She pouted as she removed one of the suckers from her friend’s foot.

“Stear, I’m not sure I’ve heard it right...Did you say there was a limit to your invention? What was that?”

“Oh, nothing important. Say, Miss Candice, you have such a beautiful figure, such elegance! Right, Archie?”

“I’ve always believed Candy was endowed with a remarkable elegance.”

Then Archie took a box with chocolates from a drawer. He ceremoniously handed them to the girl.

“Oh, Archie, what is so remarkable about me?”

Candy purposely took a chocolate with her little finger raised up, a gesture worthy of the most refined ladies.

“About you? Eh...Well, you are remarkably pretty, obviously!” replied Archie.

All three of them burst out laughing at the same time.

For a moment Candy had the impression she was back in Lakewood. It was then that a wave of emotion washed over her. Someone was missing. If only Anthony could have been there, with them..

She was sure that Stear and Archie were thinking the same thing. They just avoided saying it out loud.

“Well? What about those French chocolates? Do you like them? I had hidden them on purpose so that you could taste them.”

As the atmosphere was turning melancholic, in an attempt to make everybody relax, Archie smiled cheerfully and took a chocolate himself.

“Actually, who could respect the rules and be satisfied with the meals? We’re all eating in our rooms! Well, Candy, do you understand now why we told you there was a real prison here?”

As Stear was complaining, Candy nodded several times, so that one would wonder if she had momentarily transformed into a mechanical doll.

Stear continued:

“And do you also understand why we called the nuns ‘harpies’?”

Archie frowned, suddenly anxious.

“Stear, you’ve been talking too loud the whole time. Don’t forget there are spies.”

“You’re talking about Neal? Don’t worry! I have installed an invention

of my own on the door. The 'Secret Eavesdropping Prevention Device'! It diffuses a sound wave which immediately causes a headache if an indiscreet ear comes close to the door. You can see it; look!"

All three of them turned their heads towards the door. Stear approached it in panic.

"Oh, no! It's been disconnected."

"Another brilliant invention from my brother..."

Candy laughed softly when she met Archie's look. Suddenly, a serious expression appeared on his face.

"Candy, we're not joking when we say that this college is a real prison. Of course, the environment is perfect, and everything is done so that we can study seriously, but it seems there's really a dungeon for disobedient students."

"No one has ever seen that dungeon. I've never even heard of anyone having been locked up there."

Stear had put back in place his "Secret Eavesdropping Prevention Device", a machine in the shape of a small hat, before joining the conversation carelessly.

"Maybe, but with such rumors, I don't know if it's a good idea to let Candy get involved in such an adventure..."

"Archie, don't worry about me! It was not yesterday that I learned to climb trees or use a lasso, even if it's made of sheets," replied the girl cheerfully, throwing a piece of chocolate in the air and immediately letting it fall back into her mouth.

Stear applauded that performance, but Archie remained anxious.

"Don't worry so much, Archie. You seem very sensitive tonight."

Candy tilted her head as if she didn't understand, while Stear nodded, amused.

"Actually, he's been like that for a while. Mr. Archie is on the clouds. Something is troubling him. 'Tell me, what should I do? Can I rejoice? Should I be satisfied? Why does my heart beat so fast?'"

"What are you talking about, Stear?"

"'Oh, dearest Annie, say you're going to join this college soon!'"

Stear continued his recital, bringing both hands in front of his chest. When she heard that name, Candy immediately froze.

"Stop it, that's not funny...It's really annoying."

"Liar! It's been a while since Annie Brighton has been trying to convince her parents to send her to St. Paul's. And all this just to be by your side! In vain did you write to her saying that this place was unbearable to live in and far too strict. It was of no use! How can you help being touched by such a story?"

"Be touched yourself if it suits you and leave me alone, will you?"

Archie turned his eyes away and looked discreetly at Candy, who was

still frozen in her place.

“Candy, don’t you remember her? You may have an unpleasant memory of Annie Brighton...”

“Oh, not at all, I assure you!”

Candy reflexively shook her head.

On the contrary, she only had good memories of Annie. She was just trying to hold back her tears.

“Oh, yes, that’s right. You had the opportunity to meet her at the garden party of the Leagans. I’m sorry I got carried away, Candy.”

Stear frowned.

“Don’t worry about it, you two! Annie...Miss Annie was charming as far as I can remember. I’d like to have the opportunity to become friends with her...”

While talking, Candy recalled Annie as a little girl.

Annie was coming there! That brought back so many memories.

At the thought of being able to spend time with her again, Candy felt her heart warmer.

Moreover, she was no longer the servant who took care of the horses at the house of the Leagans. She had become the adoptive daughter of the Ardlay family.

But would Annie be happy to see Candy again?

When Candy opened her eyes, suddenly awakened by the song of the birds, a few rays of the soft morning light entered the room through the curtains. She stretched out. She must have fallen asleep when she had put her head on her writing desk for a moment. She opened the window to let in the fresh air. It was a pleasant morning. Even though she hadn’t slept much last night, her mind was clear.

“Good morning, dear little birds of London! If you’re going to America, could you deliver this message from me? ‘I am very well!’”

She had spoken to the little birds that were peeping on the branches in the same tone as the French poetry she had to recite. She had fought against the old sonnets all night.

Even if she didn’t understand those old poems until then, she had somehow managed to memorize them.

Thanks to some kind person.

Candy recalled the face of shy Patricia, who had a tendency to keep her eyes downcast.

The night before, she would have liked to count on Stear and Archie to help her, but when Annie’s subject was brought up, she had lost that chance.

After returning to her room safe and sound, Candy had found herself in front of an unsolved problem.

Sitting at her desk, she didn’t know where to begin.

On the verge of tears, she had taken out a French dictionary but she had hardly opened it when she heard a light knock on her door.

She told herself that she had probably made a mistake. She went to check anyway, and found a paper bag in front of her door.

Nobody was there.

Suspiciously, Candy opened the paper bag and gave a little cry of surprise.

In the bag, there was a manual on French language and another one on pronunciation.

There was also a classic poetry notebook. And the sonnets by Louise Labé which Sister Kreis had asked her to learn had even some annotations by someone to make pronunciation easier.

Candy immediately understood who her savior was.

Patricia O'Brien.

She had come to bring her all these in secret, without the nuns or, even worse, Eliza and the others noticing.

Then a glimmer of hope illuminated Candy's heart.

*Thank you, Patricia! You must have been very scared coming here.*

Patricia had been all the time with Eliza and her entourage. That's why Candy hadn't spoken to her since their first meeting.

"Patricia will surely be happy if I manage to recite my poem perfectly..."

At that thought, Candy had been more motivated than ever, and had studied the sonnets all night.

*"Oh, great desires, oh, vain hopes..."*

Candy had started humming Louise Labé's third sonnet on the balcony, when suddenly she hid behind the glass door.

*Terrence...*

She had just seen the boy in the garden as he was walking absently towards the forest. With his hands in his pockets, he was moving along the path, under the morning light.

He was like the other time, on the ship. From behind, in the fog, she had perceived a certain sadness emerging from him. And now, once again, she felt she was witnessing a scene she shouldn't have seen. And once again, she was troubled.

Had he stayed up all night too? Had he come out early in the morning after being unable to sleep...? Terrence was walking with his head down. His whole body expressed his depression, his weariness and a great sorrow that seemed to surround him.

"I don't think this girl chose to be born an orphan just because she liked it."

Terrence's voice echoed in her ears again. That was the first time she had been told that; the first time someone had tried to defend her like that.

*But no, what am I saying? He didn't specifically try to defend me. He has laughed at my freckles and my nose...He was not at all kind! He didn't care about how I might feel.*

She recalled how much that boy had irritated her, but she couldn't take her eyes off his figure.

Candy didn't understand why the sight of him from behind, as he was walking, about to disappear in the morning mist that still enveloped the forest, touched her so much.

The bell announcing the lunch break was ringing. Unfortunately, Candy was going to skip lunch that day.

With the textbook of the poems in her hand, she left the classroom before the others. She ran without stopping towards the backyard of the main building. At the other end of it she had found a small hill which she had baptized "False Pony's Hill". She intended to repeat her recitation one more time. The first class of the afternoon would be that of Sister Kreis.

That morning Eliza had teased her about it:

"I can't wait for today's French lesson. I want to see how ridiculous you're going to be when you fail."

"Oh, don't worry; I'm very good at failures."

Candy had not let herself be disconcerted and had answered back to Eliza.

Patricia, a little further away, was looking at them anxiously. Candy would have liked to rush to her and thank her, but she preferred to play innocent. She didn't want to cause trouble to the shy girl.

Candy climbed on False Pony's Hill reciting Louise Labé's sonnets.

*"But it's not that he favors us in any way, he who despises gods and men...And then how does it go? Really, that Louise Labé has written such complicated stuff."*

On False Pony's Hill, her favorite place was a bush made of dry grass which had a particular form. When she got there, she was panic-stricken.

"Ah, fire! Fire!"

A cloud of smoke was coming out of the vegetation.

"My God! Water! Water, quickly!"

Candy was about to run back to the school building when a familiar voice was heard behind her.

"Well, Tarzan Girl, why do you have to scream like that?"

Candy turned around and almost fell down.

Terrence stuck his head out of the bush, pushing aside a few branches with one hand. He held a lit cigarette between his fingers.

"Terrence!" exclaimed Candy.

**“You can call me Terry. There’s not a single worthwhile person among those who call me Terrence. Actually, I’m not sure you’re worthwhile either.”**

**Terrence smiled at her with his usual mocking air, and then put the cigarette back in his mouth.**

**“You dare to smoke in such a place?”**

**Candy walked over to him without hesitation, snatched the cigarette from his mouth and crushed it underneath her shoe.**

**“Oh...That was my last one.”**

**Terrence complained for a moment, before he smiled immediately, amused.**

**“What were you planning to do if you had caused a fire? Besides, it’s against the rules!”**

**“Do you think you’re in a position to lecture me, Tarzan Girl?”**

**“What does that mean?”**

**She remembered that Terrence had already called her like that a little while ago.**

**His mocking smile became a little wider.**

**“Well, I thought I saw someone swinging at the end of a white rope and jumping from one tree to another in the darkness of the night. Or have I confused you with a monkey?”**

**Terrence swung the tip of his finger from side to side.**

**“Oh!”**

**Candy couldn’t say anything else. She was amazed.**

**He had seen her the night before as she sneaked into the boys’ room, using her improvised rope.**

**“ ‘Miss Freckles and Tarzan Girl’ is getting a bit too long. How about ‘Freckled Tarzan?’”**

**“Excuse me?”**

**“Your name. Which one do you prefer?”**

**Candy straightened her shoulders and looked into Terrence’s eyes. She didn’t have to submit herself to his behavior all of a sudden just because he had witnessed S. Project.**

**“I’ve already told you! My name is Candice White Ardlay. I won’t respond to any other name. Understood? Candice White Ardlay!”**

**“Yes, Freckled Tarzan.”**

**“Stop that!”**

**Candy was beginning to sulk when Terrence looked at her, amused. He narrowed his eyes, as if trying to listen carefully.**

**“Tell me, isn’t that the bell for the afternoon lessons? Are you staying with me to skip class?”**

**“What? Oh, no, I can’t believe it!”**

**Candy remained motionless for a moment. She looked at her textbook which she was still holding, and then at Terrence.**

“That’s not true! I wanted to study my recitation one last time. If I fail, it will be your fault! So, how did it begin?”

Candy started running while reciting very quickly. Then she turned around and walked back to the boy.

“One last word! My name is Candy, Candice White Ardlay! And this place is *my* False Pony’s Hill, and this is *my* bush! So don’t hide here any longer without asking me, and above all don’t ever smoke here! And don’t forget to pick up your stub and throw it away before the nuns see it!”

Candy had said this in one breath before running down the hill, as fast as a bullet.

“What a nerve...”

Grumbling, Terrence picked up his cigarette.

*False Pony’s Hill? This is her bush? I wonder if she has any idea how long I’ve been here. So her name is Candy...*

Terrence lay down again, and looked up at the sky.

For Sister Kreis’s class, she was supposed to be sitting in her place even before the bell started ringing.

“Oh, I’m late!”

Candy rushed into the classroom, out of breath.

Against all odds, Sister Kreis hadn’t come yet. Relieved, Candy took her seat and immediately felt the malicious looks of Eliza and her entourage falling upon her. She straightened up.

That was when Sister Kreis entered the classroom.

Suddenly, Candy’s heart started beating hard.

Behind the nun stood a girl with her head lowered. It was Annie.

“The lesson will start a little late, because we are welcoming a new student who has just arrived a little earlier than expected. She is joining us today.”

Sister Kreis’s voice sounded very distant to Candy. Her eyes became wet. Annie...She had missed her so much and now she was here, very close to her. She was looking down timidly but she hadn’t changed: her long smooth hair, her fair complexion, her eyebrows...And her angelic countenance which suggested a demure girl.

*Annie...I had never thought we would see each other again so soon.*

As the students began to fidget, Sister Kreis silenced them with a cough.

“Let us make the introductions. This is Annie Brighton, and she comes from America. Please be kind to her.”

The nun turned to Annie so that she would greet them.

“Nice to meet you...”

Annie looked up and saw Candy who never took her eyes off her. Annie gasped slightly and blinked several times. Her face seemed to

lose its color. She turned her eyes away.

Candy suddenly came back to herself, and lowered her head. Her heart was heavy and she felt low-spirited.

*I thought as much...Annie doesn't want to have anything to do with me...*

Candy almost heard Annie's silent complaint:

*But...Why is Candy here?*

The orphanage. The fact that she was an abandoned child.

The past Annie wanted to forget, to bury, to renounce...

She was reminded of all that by Candy's simple presence.

*I had almost forgotten, Annie...But I'll keep our promise, whatever happens. I'll still pretend I don't know you...*

Still with her head lowered, Candy sent her that message with all her might.

"Moreover, we have just received two new students from America. Eliza, Candice, you will take care of Annie. And her seat will be...Ah, there it is; an empty place next to Candice."

"Excuse me..."

Annie looked up at Sister Kreis with a desperate expression.

"If it is possible...I'd like to sit next to Eliza...It's that we know each other, so..."

"Don't be capricious, Annie Brighton. I understand that you feel lonely, but the seat beside Eliza Leagan is already..."

"Sister Kreis, I'll sit next to Candice."

A low voice which couldn't hide its tension was heard. Candy turned to see who it was, and noticed that Patricia O'Brien had got up, visibly awkward.

Full of surprise, Candy looked at Patricia. The latter immediately blushed.

"Patricia, it is very kind of you to give up your seat. Therefore, I grant your wish as an exception."

Sister Kreis nodded. Candy felt a little relaxed.

Patricia sat down next to Candy.

"Thank you...Patricia."

Candy spoke in a low voice. Patricia shook her head slightly.

"You may call me Patty," she said reservedly, with a smile.

That smile penetrated deeply Candy's shattered heart. She smiled back at her, although she was almost on the verge of tears.

Sister Kreis's severe voice resumed and drew the attention of the whole class again.

"Well, Candice, you may recite your sonnets as we have agreed."

"Yes!"

Candy pulled herself together and stood up.

She started reciting Louise Labé's old poetry.



Since the beginning of Candy's recitation, giggles were heard throughout the classroom. No doubt her pronunciation was approximate. Candy was not ashamed of it. She had never studied French, and it was natural that she didn't pronounce it well. She just had to go on reciting and keep her dignity.

The students couldn't hold back any longer; discreet chuckles turned into real laughter.

"Silence!"

Sister Kreis raised the tone of her voice. In her eyes they could see that they had better listen to her.

When Candy finished the recitation of the three sonnets, the nun nodded solemnly.

"At least I recognize your efforts, Candice. From now on, be sure to apply yourself more to your studies," Sister Kreis said to Candy without the slightest smile.

A week had passed since Annie had arrived at St. Paul's college.

Annie and Candy lived in the same dormitory. They saw each other every day.

Candy made sure to keep out of her friend's sight as much as she could.

But as they also had their meals in the same room, they were forced to cross paths. Every time, Annie couldn't restrain a little shudder. That was the hardest part for Candy.

*Don't worry, Annie...*

But she hadn't even managed to say those few words to her.

Eliza and her entourage were always close to the newcomer. Unless it was Annie who always made sure to join the small group.

However, it was obvious that Eliza and her friends would never be kind to her.

Candy was constantly worried that Annie might be persecuted by the other girls, even though there was nothing she could do about it.

*Annie is more relaxed when I'm not around her...*

Candy understood very well how her friend was feeling. It was almost painful.

She had probably never thought that Candy could study in that college too.

And Candy had a hard time imagining that Archie might have mentioned that in one of his letters.

He didn't even know that Candy, a servant of the Leagan house, and Annie, from the prestigious Brighton family, had been childhood friends.

How could Candy reassure her?

Those last days, it was to Annie that Candy was talking to all the time

in her diary.

*Annie...*

*One day we'll finally be able to talk as we did before, won't we? I'm convinced of that.*

*Together we'll recall Pony's Home, Miss Pony and Sister Lane...*

*All those times we used to pick flowers on the hill.*

*We were inseparable.*

*Annie, I haven't changed. And I remember our promise very well.*

*You don't have to avoid me. I hope we can become friends again here...*

*Now, next to White, I could add a new last name: Ardlay.*

*This may be the only great change.*

*After all, you and I are not the same. Annie, you have your father and mother. For my part, it's true that even if I was adopted, I have nobody else, as usual. There is Great Uncle William, my guardian...*

*But, you know, I've never met him. That's astonishing, isn't it?*

*I hope I can see him one day...*

Suddenly, a loud noise was heard on the balcony and the glass door opened.

"Who's there?"

Candy put down her pen and got up startled. A black figure clung to the curtain, before collapsing to the floor.

"Terrence..."

Candy held her breath and ran to him.

## Chapter 6

The blurry light of the street lamps illuminated the cobblestone streets.

Candy was running at full speed in the London night.

She had just climbed the wall and slipped away from St. Paul's college with the help of her makeshift rope which she had made of sheets.

*I've managed to get out of the college; that's fine. But that doesn't mean I'll be able to find a drugstore.*

Since her arrival at the college, that nocturnal expedition was her first outing.

She knew nothing about that city.

While running, Candy was scanning her surroundings. Most of the shops were already closed. In any case, she had to get some medicine in order to get back to her room as quickly as possible.

Candy recalled Terrence curled up on the sofa in pain.

His shirt had been torn, and his lip was cut. His arms and legs were bleeding. For all she knew, he might even have one or more fractures.

*What can I do?*

First aid didn't seem to be sufficient. That was natural, since she didn't have any necessary medicine in her room. Furthermore, Terrence smelled slightly of alcohol.

*Still, I can't warn a nun under these circumstances.*

Candy had made a decision.

"Terrence, I'm going out to buy some medicine."

"No...Stop!"

Terrence forced himself to get up, holding his arm.

"I was mistaken, that's all...I didn't know where I was. Let me rest a little...I'll leave right away..."

"Don't talk!"

Candy applied a towel to his wound, and then forced Terrence to lie on the sofa.

"You just have to wait for me, all right? I'll be right back."

"No...No, there's no need...Don't meddle with..."

"Shut up for a while, you drunkard unable to follow the rules! You're going to stay here quietly until I return, and that's final!"

Candy placed a cushion behind Terrence to support his back. Then she took out her makeshift rope which she had hidden under her bed.

The boy was about to try to say something, when Candy put a finger on his lips and silenced him, with a mischievous expression. She went out onto the balcony the door of which was still open. She looked cautiously around her and threw her rope to the nearest branch.

Terrence tried to get up in order to stop her but she was already gone.

Candy had grabbed the rope with both hands and in the blink of an eye she had thrown herself into the darkness of the night.

“Can’t she just mind her own business?”

Terrence made a grimace which ended up forming a bitter smile on his face. He made another effort to get up from the sofa.

*Anyway...I was right. She is more of a Tarzan than the real one. But why the devil did I enter her room?*

Terrence let out a deep sigh, and walked staggering to the balcony. Well, he was all right; he could still walk. He didn’t want to cause trouble to that girl.

Meanwhile, in the streets of London, in the middle of the night, Candy was walking quickly, seized by a certain anxiety. Someone was following her. She heard the sound of footsteps behind her, in the deserted streets.

*Who is it? What does that person want from me? I don’t have much money...*

The footsteps were getting closer; they were now right behind her.

Her pursuer was about to reach her. Then Candy stopped. She knew what she had to do. She put on the most threatening expression she could muster, and turned around firmly.

“Well, listen to me carefully; stop bothering me, is that understood?”

She screamed in a deep voice. The person in the darkness behind her, a dim silhouette, was startled and stopped.

“I’m not rich! And besides, I’m in a hurry, so stop following me!”

Candy said all that in one go and started running, but the mysterious silhouette exclaimed:

“Candy! It’s really you! I was sure of that!”

The voice was full of nostalgia. Candy stopped short.

She had already heard that voice somewhere...

She turned around.

Under the light of the streetlamps, Candy saw a man wearing sunglasses and a Saharan jacket. He was also wearing stained working trousers.

And that kind of mouth which didn’t agree with his general appearance...

*Albert? No, I must be dreaming; it’s impossible. We are...we are here, in London!*

The man approached Candy who was lost in thought.

“Have you forgotten me?”

He took off his sunglasses, smiling.

“Oh! Yes, it’s really you, Albert!”

With a cry, Candy threw herself to his neck.

“I’m not dreaming! Albert, is it truly you? I’m not going to wake up soon, am I?”

“I can assure you that you’re not dreaming.”

Albert lifted Candy up and spun around, as if they were on a merry-go-round! The streets of London, covered by the night, were swirling. She had just met Albert there, in England; she couldn’t believe it! She was convinced that an ocean separated her from him and she had given up all hope of ever seeing him again.

“I saw your face when you looked at me, and I really thought you didn’t remember me.”

Albert put Candy back on the pavement before putting his index finger on her forehead.

“I’m sorry. It’s that...I could never have imagined I would meet you in such a place...And then you have shaved your beard!”

Candy scrutinized Albert’s face. Looking a little closer, she also noticed that his hair was carefully trimmed.

“Oh, yes, that’s true. I had to do it because of my job.”

Albert put his hand on his chin, a little embarrassed.

“A job? Here in London?”

“You look surprised, Candy. I still have to earn my living! At the moment, thanks to an acquaintance of mine, I’m working at the Blue River Zoo. Poupe is with me, of course.”

“Poupe...Oh, yes, I remember her!”

Candy brought her hand to her chest.

“I was convinced that I would never see you again...”

She felt tears coming to her eyes. When he saw that, Albert, who was also moved, scratched his head.

“I have to say the same thing, especially in such a place...By the way, Candy, where were you running to at this hour?”

Candy immediately came back to reality.

“Oh, that’s true! I was looking for a drugstore. A friend of mine is seriously wounded...”

“Wounded? Definitely this is the night of injuries. So you’re looking for a drugstore, right? I know one that must be still open. Come on, let’s hurry!”

Albert led the way. Right behind him, Candy resumed her frantic run through the night of London.

A little later...

“Terrence, I’ve brought you some medicine,” announced Candy.

She had landed on the balcony, out of breath. She had spoken to Terry in a low voice.

But there was no answer.

“Terry...”

Candy ran to the sofa. The boy was no longer there! He wasn’t anywhere in the room, for that matter. As she turned on the light, she

noticed a few stains of blood that led to the balcony.

“Oh, that can’t be! Yet I had told him not to move!”

Angry, Candy threw the medicine on the sofa.

“Does he realize the risks I have taken to get that for him? How rude! He’s gone without even saying goodbye to me. Not to mention his wounds that looked serious...”

She went out on the balcony. Suddenly, she felt her strength completely gone.

Beyond the forest, the boys’ dormitory was covered in darkness.

The two buildings, the dormitory of the boys and that one of the girls, had exactly the same aspect. Terry had said he had been mistaken and lost his way. No doubt that meant he also stayed in the special room of that building.

*I hope he could get back safe and sound...*

Candy looked carefully beyond the forest, but she couldn’t see anything. Finally she closed quietly the glass door of the balcony and sat down in front of her desk. She was tired, but she couldn’t help writing in her diary what had happened.

*I have met Albert!*

*It happened a little earlier this evening.*

*I still have the impression it was a dream...But it was real.*

Candy added those few lines to the ones she had already written in her diary, and then she let out a deep sigh.

*I would never have imagined I could meet Albert again under these circumstances. In London...And above all on the street in the middle of the night!*

*Thank you, God.*

*From what Albert told me, after being discovered by the forest ranger who worked for the Ardleys, he was driven away from the cabin.*

*Later he secretly embarked on a ship bound for England. Does that mean he traveled as a stowaway? Luckily he managed to do it...*

*The cabin...The deafening sound of the waterfall...The forest animals. Just thinking about it, I feel a lump in my throat...*

*As he was thrown out, he didn’t know what had happened in the forest and in the villa.*

*All those I had met back then have now left Lakewood.*

*The place was so alive and the atmosphere so bright when Anthony was still with us...*

*I’m going to stop here.*

*Enough with painful memories.*

*I prefer to be happy about my reunion with Albert.*

*The Blue River Zoo! Albert, I'll come and see you! We'll be able to talk more quietly next time.*

*Even though it pains me to admit it, it was thanks to that gruff Terrence G. Granchester that I could see Albert again. How did Terry manage to be wounded so badly?*

*Oh, I'm so sleepy. It's been such an eventful day.*

A month had passed since that crazy night, but Candy hadn't had yet the opportunity to see Terry again.

That night when he had broken into her room...That night when she had seen Albert again...

As proof that all this was not a dream, she still had the paper bag with the medicine on her desk.

Candy was worried about the boy's wounds...

*If he had been dead, the girls would have made such a fuss...So I think he must be fine.*

She decided not to think about it anymore.

It was the beginning of March. The morning light and the wind became warmer day after day.

The main building also became brighter. Candy felt peaceful.

Annie stuck to the same attitude and kept avoiding Candy.

Eliza might have been happy to see that Annie completely ignored Candy and she didn't seem to be too mean to the newcomer. Anyway, Candy didn't worry about that. That said, Annie was totally under her control.

*Annie...I hope this is not too hard for her. She has always hated girls like Eliza.*

At that thought, she felt her heart heavy. Maybe she was the one whom Annie hated right now.

Without Patty who spoke to her in secret whenever Eliza or Louise were not around, Candy would have suffocated so much that she would have collapsed.

Moreover, even if it was only from time to time, she could see Stear and Archie.

That day, during lunch break, Candy went to the forest.

She loved that place because Eliza and the others would never approach it under any circumstances. There were too many insects and snakes...

However, in the forest, snowdrops and daffodils were already beginning to bloom and spread a sweet scent around.

Candy whistled in front of the big tree deep in the forest, her secret place.

She heard another whistle that mingled with the song of the birds. It was the answer she was waiting for. Candy looked around carefully to

make sure nobody was there, and climbed up the tree.

“Welcome, Candy!”

Stear, sitting astride a large branch, helped Candy climb. That tree had still a lot of leaves, which kept them out of sight. Moreover, it had several branches wide enough for them to sit on. One would have sworn that everything had been done deliberately, just for them. It was Candy who had discovered that place, and lately the three of them had made it their hiding place in which they held their secret meetings.

Stear was alone at the top of the tree.

“Candy, look at this!”

Without any preambles, he proudly showed her the object he carried in his arms: a model ship equipped with wings.

“Oh! Is that the flying ship you had been working on for quite some time?”

“Exactly! I have finally finished it, Candy! This is the flying ship messenger that will keep us in touch!”

Stear presented enthusiastically his new invention.

“Oh, we put a letter at the bottom of the ship, and it just has to fly in the air, from our room to yours...”

“The power of imagination! We can do anything!”

That moment Archie’s face emerged from among the branches.

“Archie, it has taken you a long time to come.”

“I bet he was delayed by Miss Annie’s pleading eyes.”

Stear crossed his hands in front of his chest and imitated Annie:

“This is the kind of look that can never deceive anyone: ‘I would like to speak with you, Archie, if only for a moment.’”

“Stop it, Stear!”

Archie looked sincerely embarrassed; it could be seen in his eyes.

“This is very annoying...Even ‘a moment’ would be enough for the nuns to reprimand me. I consider myself lucky that we haven’t been caught yet. This is proof that miracles can still happen. However, Annie should realize that regulation is no joke around here.”

“‘I don’t care. I still want to speak to you, my darling Archie.’”

“Stear!”

“Yes, that’s what you say, but you don’t look unhappy anyway.”

“Stop it! Candy will end up believing your nonsense!”

“Will she? So what? If Candy believed it, how could that bother you?”

“All right, that’s enough. Have you shown her your worthless invention?”

Archie tried to change the subject of conversation.

“What a way to speak about my inventions!”

Candy laughed softly.

“He probably meant your ‘testing’!”



Stear caressed gently his flying ship.

“I’d like to try it tonight. Candy, do you think you can come to our room?”

Stear’s eyes were shining. Archie added seductively:

“I also have my supply of chocolates.”

Candy crackled her fingers and answered immediately:

“I’ll come! Of course I’ll come! And it’s been so long since I have used my fantastic rope that I long for some exercise!”

Stear and Archie burst out laughing.

The bell started ringing.

Candy nodded to them and quickly descended from the tree before they did.

The quickest way to get back to the school building was to cross the forest and then pass through the meadow. Daffodil buds were sprinkled all over the place, ready to bloom. Candy was thinking of Annie.

*She is so much in love with Archie...*

Annie had joined that college after gaining the hard-won approval of her parents, the Brightons. And even though she knew that a severe punishment might come at any time if she didn’t respect the rules, she still wanted to talk with the person who owned her heart. Yet Annie had been such a wise child...

With her head high, Candy tripped over something and went sprawling on the ground.

“Hey, I know you’re crazy about me but seeing you so audacious is surprising all the same.”

It was Terry, lying on the grass. He suddenly put his hand behind her back.

“What are you doing?”

Candy pushed away Terry’s hand and straightened up, embarrassed. She had stumbled on his foot while he was taking a nap. And she had just fallen on top of him...

“What do you mean? I should have asked that question.”

Amused, Terry got up too. Candy blushed immediately and got to her feet with a jump.

“Anyone could have stumbled! And besides, you were right in the middle of the road, as if you were a stone or something!”

“A stone that can recognize the scent of daffodils.”

Terry had got up. There was no more trace of wound on his face. Even the cut on his lip was completely healed.

“What? Why are you staring at my mouth like that? Are you expecting a kiss from me?”

Terry was smiling mockingly. Candy felt her blood rush to her head.

“I can’t believe it. I was simply glad to see you were doing better and

your wounds were healed!”

Angry, she had answered him with a certain vehemence.

“You know, I went out to buy you medicine the other night!”

“But...That’s against the rules! You went out without permission? And at night too? You deserve that I report you to one of the nuns.”

Candy knew very well that he only wanted to provoke her, but she fell for it and was even more angry. She had been really worried sick about him.

“Terry! It was because you were seriously injured that I...”

“As far as I know, I asked nothing from you, and now am I supposed to thank you?”

Terry became suddenly tense. His voice had turned cold. Candy was about to reply to him once more, but words failed her. No, she couldn’t let him have the last word without saying anything; that would be very frustrating.

“Don’t worry, I don’t want your thanks, and I’m not going to be nice to you again. Once was enough for me.”

With those words, Candy started running again. The bell would soon stop ringing.

*That boy is crazy!*

Every part of her body was tense with anger.

Terry had narrowed his eyes amused, watching Candy as she was running away furiously.

*It is the first time she calls me Terry.*

A spontaneous smile appeared on his lips.

That night...

Taking advantage of the clouds that hid the moon, Candy began to jump from branch to branch through the forest. The flame of the candlestick Archie brandished on the balcony of the boys’ dormitory was flickering. She only had one last jump to do in the direction of that glow. That thrill of adventure was really too good. The moment she tightened her makeshift rope, there was a sudden gust of wind and the flame, her only landmark, was put out.

That was not enough to discourage her. She still knew fairly well where she should go.

*Come on, let’s go!*

Candy jumped.

She had exerted too much force! She overstepped the balcony and went directly inside the room through the double-leaf glass door which fortunately was open.

She landed rolling and immediately noticed from the different atmosphere that something was wrong.

She looked around her in the dark room. The furniture was wonderful.

The room seemed larger than that of Stear and Archie; actually, it was as spacious as her own in the girls' dormitory. Candy began to panic. She was in the wrong room!

*I have to get out of here quickly...*

She was about to get up when she noticed a picture that had fallen on the floor, close to her feet. She picked it up by reflex. It was more an artist's portrait than an everyday photograph. She immediately had a strange feeling when she saw it, but it took her a few moments to understand why. There was a large cross on the face of the person in that picture.

"But this is Eleanor Baker!"

She was a great American actress at the height of her glory. Everyone knew the "fascinating Eleanor".

Who could have crossed out the actress's face like that? And why?

That was not all. A word had been scribbled on the picture in wild writing: "Die!"

Turning the picture over, Candy let out a spontaneous scream.

*"To my son, Terrence. With love, Eleanor Baker"*

It was the dedication written on the back of the portrait.

*My son? That means Terry is...*

That moment Candy heard the creak of a closing door.

She turned around startled.

Terry, leaning against the door, was staring at Candy with a cold and empty look. There was no emotion in it.

She froze as if she had been spellbound.

She had the impression that an eternity had passed. Or maybe it was only a moment?

Terry abruptly approached her and snatched brutally the portrait from her hands. Then he began to tear it up with visible resentment. He continued until there was nothing left of the picture.

Its fragments were scattered on the carpet. Candy watched them, holding her breath.

Eleanor Baker. Everyone thought she had always been unmarried. Candy couldn't believe it. That world-famous actress was actually Terry's mother...

"I..."

Candy took a deep breath.

"Shut up!"

Terry had barked those words roughly.

He was still looking at Candy with blazing eyes.

"If you tell anyone about it..."

Terry suddenly grabbed her by the shoulders and shook her forcefully.

**“I’ll smash you! Do you understand?”**

Shaken violently, Candy did her best to hold back her tears. It was as if Terry’s sadness was infused into her through his fingertips. She looked up at him with trembling lips. There were tears in her eyes now. When their eyes met, Terry stopped, as if he had come back to himself.

As fast as he had started, he suddenly let his arms drop, as if all his strength had just abandoned his body. He turned his back on Candy and murmured:

**“Get out, please...”**

His voice was weak and slightly trembling. He was no longer the same person he was a few moments ago...Candy lowered her head and went back to the balcony. She would have wanted to say something, but no words came to her. She turned around.

**“I’m sorry...”**

She could only articulate those few words in a husky voice. Terry, motionless, stood with his back to the window. One might have taken him for a stone statue.

## Chapter 7

That night, back in her room, when she said her prayers as she did every night...

*Oh, Lord, please, don't leave Terry in such turmoil...Don't let him worry about the fact that I've found out his secret...*

She had gone to the wrong room...

As soon as she had left Terry's room, she had taken her rope and had finally reached the room of the two brothers without any incident.

They had been anxiously waiting for her on the balcony, holding up the candlestick.

"Candy, is everything all right? Did that aristocrat find you in his room?"

"No...No, everything is all right," Candy replied cheerfully to Archie. She tried as much as she could not to let them perceive her embarrassment.

"That's good. We can't stand that fellow. Under the pretext of his father's authority, he thinks he's allowed to do anything. He doesn't respect the rules and he doesn't care. He's aware that whatever he does, he'll never be expelled. That is an injustice!"

Obviously Archie was not fond of Terry.

"He doesn't seem so bad."

Candy couldn't help defending Terry in a low voice, which surprised her.

Actually she couldn't imagine that the boy might be necessarily dishonest.

*Terry's eyes are so clear...*

Yes, she knew that the real Terry was the one she had seen that night on the ship, in the fog.

From behind, he had seemed so sad to her that she hadn't managed to speak to him.

When he had held her by the shoulders and shaken her in his room, Candy had noticed the expression on his face. He hadn't been kind to her at the time, but his sad, grave eyes were so crystal clear that they had taken her breath away.

Even though it was due to a combination of circumstances, she had discovered Terry's secret...

"Oh, dear, with all this, I can't sleep."

Candy got up and sat in front of her writing desk. She opened her diary.

She wanted to write so many things in it...

For instance, that Stear's "flying ship messenger" had crashed a few

seconds after it had taken off. Her friend had been so dejected!  
He had shown her the plan of his invention, and she had understood nothing.

And Archie was wearing a new hat.

Oh...She couldn't put her thoughts in order.

Terry's look immediately came back to her mind.

His voice had been so full of pain...

Candy sighed before closing her diary. Then she went out on the balcony.

The night breeze was caressing her hair.

On the other side of the forest there was the room of the one who occupied her mind. What could he be thinking?

*I won't tell anyone...You can rest easy.*

Candy had whispered those words in her heart, looking into the darkness.

At the same time, Terry was on his balcony too.

He was looking at the trees of the forest.

It was dark outside, and he couldn't see anything.

The only thing he perfectly distinguished was the poor fellow standing out there, in the dark night: himself.

She had discovered his secret.

Still, that was not what bothered him the most. Why had he kept that picture, anyway? Yet he had crossed out his mother's face and had written that horrible word underneath it...

He hated himself for being still so attached to her.

Terry clenched his fists.

Throughout his childhood, the wife of the duke of Granchester, his so-called stepmother, had never stopped mocking and belittling him whenever she had had the opportunity, as if that had been her reason for living.

"Look at you! You are the typical vulgar offspring of that American woman..."

His stepbrother and stepsister had the same father with him, yet they treated him as if he had the plague.

The duke of Granchester, on his part, never gave him a look. He had never taken the responsibility for his terrible mistake.

*Duke of Granchester! Is your family lineage so important to you that you only think about defending your honor?*

At the end of the day, his own interest was still the most important thing to him.

And "she" had the same opinion.

When Terry recalled that winter day when he had embarked to cross the ocean, urged by an impulse that he had not been able to restrain,

he wanted to let out a contemptuous little laugh while judging himself.

*What an idiot! What could I expect?*

And what had that woman told him, after he had spent so much time and money to go and see her?

Eleanor Baker hadn't concealed her embarrassment.

She had frowned her pretty eyebrows and had pulled Terry by the arm.

While he had obtained the opportunity to meet the actress with great difficulty, she had taken him discreetly behind the set of one of her films, away from prying eyes. Then she had given him an envelope containing a large sum of money.

"Please go back to London immediately! You must not come to see me again! Nobody knows my past, including my agent. Terrence... Oh, I should have never left you that picture of mine...Terry, you mustn't show it to anyone! And never tell anyone I'm your mother. I'm supposed to be unmarried!"

"You can all go to hell!"

Terry threw a white porcelain vase against the wall, just as he had thrown the envelope with the money at Eleanor Baker's face.

The vase was shattered to pieces, letting the red roses it contained fall on the carpet like drops of blood.

In early April, St. Paul's college was adorned with delicate colors, with its budding trees, its flowers and its green grass. A real painting. Even the main building, usually so austere, became lovely again. What a rejuvenation for that historical boarding school! It was like an old witch who had rediscovered her features as a young girl by some spell.

With the arrival of spring, laughter could also be heard resounding more often within the establishment which seemed to come back to life.

Annie was always with Eliza, even if the latter thought she was there to give in to her every whim.

Candy had stopped worrying about her.

She kept her distance from Annie and never spoke to her. However, she was convinced that Annie understood very well how she felt.

Sometimes their gazes met and in those moments Annie took on a contrite expression, as if she wanted to say something to her.

*I'm sorry, Candy...I would like so much to talk to you too...But I can't. Forgive me for being so weak.*

Candy almost had the impression she could hear her murmuring those words.

Taking advantage of that wonderful season, the girls didn't return immediately to the dormitory after lessons and remained chatting in the inner courtyard which was covered with flowers and roses of all colors, ready to bloom.

Candy didn't like that place very much.

It always made her think of Anthony. She couldn't help remembering the Sweet Candy's fragrance.

One day, Candy let Patty go to the library and she headed to the forest.

Eliza, surrounded by her usual friends, followed Candy with her eyes, pouting.

"She goes to the forest a little too often on her own, don't you think?"

Sitting on the ledge of the courtyard fountain, she seemed to suspect something.

Louise tilted her head before adding:

"I have the impression she doesn't make so many stupid things lately."

Eliza glared at her.

"She manages to hide them better, that's all! That orphan has still a lot of nerve."

"That's true! She looks as if she thinks she has always been here. And recently she even managed to become friends with Patty. Have you noticed they often talk to each other?"

"Patty's stupidity leaves me speechless. Louise, we won't speak to her anymore, is that understood? Anyway, who would want to be friends with an orphan? What do you think, Annie?"

Eliza turned her eyes to Annie.

"What? Eh..."

Annie blushed and shook her head.

"Nobody would want that. There's no need to say it..."

Louise and the other girls nodded. Annie did the same.

The orphanage...

Every time she heard that word, Annie trembled. And every time she got a little more flustered. She still wondered if Eliza and her friends had realized something. Once more she felt her blood freeze in her veins.

Suddenly, Eliza got up.

"I know! I'll follow her in secret. Knowing her, I'm sure she's up to something in that forest."

"We'll come with you!"

Louise and the other girls stood up too.

Eliza stopped them with a severe look.

"Certainly not! You would be noticed for sure; you don't know how to



move with the proper discretion.”

Then she started running, making a great noise.

Eliza was almost sure she was right.

*It's impossible for that girl to keep still! Surely there's some reason she goes to the forest so often. I'm certain I'll catch her red-handed...*

*If only that silly fool could be kicked out of this college...*

That girl was so annoying!

She hated the idea of Candy having been adopted by the Ardlay family; she hated the idea of her joining that establishment; she hated the fact that she slept in the special room...

Where could Terry be?

Candy had looked for him everywhere and was beginning to get tired. She leaned against a tree.

He was neither on False Pony's Hill nor on the riding ground, not even in the forest...

Since that night, Candy had seen him several times without finding the courage to speak to him.

Even so, she wanted to tell him what she was thinking of. She also wanted to apologize to him.

That night, although accidentally, she had rubbed salt into his wound...

She had found out the secret of Terry...and of that great actress.

*Terry...Believe me, I'll never tell anyone.*

“If you tell anyone about it...”

She remembered Terry's voice at that time. He had sounded tired. And his dark gaze had also been engraved in her memory.

What was Terry feeling that moment? Candy could very well imagine it.

*Actually, maybe...Terry and I are a little like each other...*

Terry was the son of an illustrious family, while Candy had been abandoned and didn't even know who her parents were. Was there some common ground where soulmates came from? A place where social background or upbringing didn't matter?

Wind had just picked up; Candy moved away from the tree against which she had been leaning and straightened up.

She had just noticed something in the distance, hanging on a branch and fluttering in the wind. Wasn't that Terry's riding jacket? She had already seen him wearing it once.

*I bet he's lying again on the ground and taking a nap, ready to trip people up.*

Candy was about to go to that tree from which the jacket was hanging

when she sensed some threat approaching behind her. She turned around.

Immediately a tuft of grass rustled distinctly. Then Candy furtively saw a yellow ribbon that disappeared behind a tree.

*Eliza...I suspected it.*

Candy sighed, tired but hardly surprised. She knew that Eliza and the other girls didn't know how to spend their time. They had ended up spying on her.

*I imagine she's watching the slightest of my movements so that she can use it against me later.*

She was aware of what Eliza was looking for, but at the same time she couldn't give up seeing Terry. She already met him so rarely!

For a moment she squirmed in her place, not knowing what to do. Then she took a deep breath, and in order to arm herself with courage, she raised both hands, crossed them behind her head, and began humming.

♪

*I'm sorry, will you forgive me?*

*I didn't know!*

*I'm soooorry, but you mustn't worry!*

*I won't say anything, I promise!*

*Trust me, I give you my word as Freckled Tarzan!*

She had invented the lyrics all of a sudden. It was the only way she had found to deliver her message. If Terry wasn't far, at least he could hear her and understand how she felt without Eliza realizing what was really going on.

Candy repeated her tune several times before leaving the forest.

The melody she hummed varied with each verse but after a while she managed to find a recurring tone. She even began telling herself that it was pretty good and started again, singing louder.

"She can't hold a tune to save her life..."

Another pair of eyes was following Candy. Only that Terry was watching her move away from the top of a tree, and not hidden behind a bush.

" 'Trust me, I give you my word as Freckled Tarzan'! Really, you didn't need to trouble yourself singing like that. After all, I already trust you..."

Terry had whispered this to himself with a smile.

At that precise moment, he heard the sound of heavy footsteps underneath him. Terry grabbed a branch to take a look at the foot of the tree. Eliza, annoyed, vented her frustration by kicking furiously the grass.

"I can't believe it...How stupid she is! There's definitely something wrong with her! It must be because she has grown up in an orphanage. And after walking aimlessly, she ends up singing rubbish. I've wasted my time following her."

After letting off steam, Eliza started walking again with her eyes turned to the sky, still very annoyed.

"Aaaah!"

There was a sound of broken branches, and the girl suddenly disappeared.

"Quickly, help me! Help!"

"This is what happens when we don't watch our step."

Terry descended nimbly from the tree and came to look at the hole covered with vegetation into which Eliza had just fallen.

"Who's there? Well, it doesn't matter, after all! Get me out of here quickly!" she stormed.

"We can't really say you are polite..."

Terry crouched down anyway and extended his hand to Eliza.

"Come on, hold my hand! Oh! You are too heavy."

Terry pulled Eliza out of the hole, laughing.

Back to the surface, the girl smoothed out her uniform before glaring at Terry.

"I hope you won't tell anyone about my accident?"

"We'll see about that; I'm not sure yet."

Terry played innocent.

"Anyway, nobody would believe the stories of a delinquent like you, but I warn you, if you ever speak of it, you'll be sorry!"

"Oh, these words of gratitude for pulling you out of there go straight to my heart! Well, the important thing is that you were not hurt."

Without paying any more attention to her, Terry got back his jacket from the branch and walked away.

*Who does he think he is?*

Eliza watched Terry with shining eyes. The boy didn't even look back.

*He could at least take me back to school.*

She had put her hand to her cheek without even thinking about it and that surprised her. She still felt Terry's firm grip on her fingers.

*Terrence...No doubt he's a noble. He behaved like a gentleman, much more than they say about him.*

Suddenly she began smiling.

While she still feared his side of a rascal, Eliza had the impression that now she understood why all the girls swooned over him.

She returned to the dormitory and even there, remembering the boy, she smiled despite herself.

What a revelation to see that he could be so nice. She immediately convinced herself that Terry must be in love with her.

That evening it wasn't only Eliza who was in a remarkably good mood.

Actually, in the recreation room of the dormitory, the nuns had just made an announcement concerning the May Festival.

In vain did they reprimand the girls as usual. This time their excitement didn't seem to subside, and everyone was chirping cheerfully like little birds.

"Oh, we had been looking forward for that festival!"

"The only day of the year when we can relax a little!"

The voices of the girls were getting shrill.

Candy was won over by the atmosphere and asked:

"Tell me, Patty, what kind of festival is that?"

"It's wonderful, Candy! We're going to elect the 'fairies of May', and they'll be able to get on a float decorated with flowers which will parade all around the college. In the evening, there will be a ball... This is the only time we have the right to dance with the boys!"

"Really? That's great!"

Candy suddenly visualized Terry's face and was troubled.

"Besides, Candy, we can invite anyone we want to the festival! Our families, of course, but also our friends!"

Patty's words were enough to make Candy's embarrassment fly away.

"Really? Anyone we want? Even our friends..."

Candy felt the desire to jump for joy. She immediately thought of Albert.

And then...She didn't know if she really had the right to do it; it was intimidating, but she also thought of Great Uncle William, of course.

*I don't know if he would come, but still, I'll send him an invitation!*

It might be an opportunity to meet him...

Candy's heart was suddenly filled with hope.

## Chapter 8

*Make Albert and Great Uncle William come to the festival!*

Candy said a prayer before leaving the two invitations in the room of the postal service, inside the boarding school.

Within the college, all letters that were received or sent had to pass through the hands of the nuns.

The May Festival...

Just those few words were enough to make Candy brighten up.

“Well, have you decided what you are going to wear for the festival? I have asked papa to buy me a dress made in France!”

“Me too! I have asked for a scarlet one, what about you?”

All the girls she came across along the corridor talked only about that subject.

*I would be so happy if I could invite Miss Pony and Sister Lane too...  
But it's too far away for them.*

In the letters to the orphanage, Candy wrote the truth.

She had made progress in French. She had refined her good manners thanks to the strict regulation of the college...

After all, those were the facts. In their replies, they told her that the lupines had started to bloom.

*I imagine that soon Pony's Hill will be covered with yellow buttercups  
and black-eyed-susans.*

Candy looked at the garden through the window of the main building. The roses were in full bloom.

The wind brought her a sweet scent...

“Have Anthony's roses blossomed? The gate of the roses must be wonderful right now...”

After Anthony's death, she had believed that spring would never come again.

But seasons always kept their promise. Just as one turned the pages of the calendar, seasons passed by too, always with exemplary regularity.

*If only people could come back like seasons...*

Prince on the Hill, Anthony... There were so many people she would have liked to see again.

“At least I could see Albert again... I'll try not to be too demanding.”

Back in her room in the dormitory, Candy opened her closet.

“What am I going to wear for the festival?”

In her wardrobe, the dresses Great Uncle William had given to her were pressed against each other. There were not only dresses, but also shoes, purses and flower corsages.

Every time Candy opened that closet, her heart filled with gratitude.

She hesitated for a long time among several outfits, and finally grabbed a light green dress. She held it up in front of her, and put it lightly on her chest.

“After all, a fairy of May must be in green.”

Candy winked at herself in the mirror.

“Well? Does it suit me? Do I look like a real young lady from a good family? As long as I don’t look like a Freckled Tarzan...”

Candy had barely whispered those words when she quickly looked away from the mirror. She was thinking of Terry again!

*Maybe Great Uncle William will come to the festival to see me...After all, I told him I had been chosen as a fairy of May, and that’s why I was going to parade in a float decorated with flowers! How lucky I am!*

Candy began to spin around, still holding the dress tight.

### *April*

*Today, Sister Kreis announced to us in a solemn tone:*

*“The role of the fairies is assigned every year to the students who have been born in a particular month. Last year, the students born in April assumed that role. Therefore, this time it is the turn of those born in May to be, as the name indicates, the ‘fairies of May’.”*

*When I heard that, I was so happy that I almost threw myself into the arms of Sister Kreis! Yes; Annie and I were born in May! We can participate in the parade, in the float decorated with flowers! I’ll be a real flower princess!*

*Eliza was so jealous that she tried to undermine my morale by retorting that an abandoned girl could never know when she was born. How did she dare say that in front of Annie? I discreetly looked at her and as I suspected, she had turned pale.*

*Annie, why do you try so much to hide the fact that you grew up in an orphanage? Are you so ashamed of it?*

*It’s not our fault that we were abandoned.*

*She seems to fear that Archie will find out...But Archie is not that kind of person.*

*Oh, if only I could tell her that...*

*During the ball, Archie will surely dance with Annie.*

*And what about me? With whom am I going to dance? Stear? T. G.?*

After writing this, Candy struggled to keep calm. She put down her pen.

T. G. Terrence G. Granchester.

She used his initials whenever she spoke of him in her diary.

According to rumor, Terry had never participated in the May Festival,

nor in any event organized by the college, for that matter. The boy had no friends. And he avoided the other students. Candy remembered his dark gaze, but she immediately drove it away from her mind.

In May, the forest was full of fragrances, even in the middle of the night.

Stear and Archie were on the balcony. A light breeze caressed their hair.

For a while now, Archie had been looking through an oddly shaped device, similar to a telescope. Finally he turned to his brother, disappointed.

“Stear! You said that this telescope could magnify things a million times... But I don’t see anything at all!”

“What? No, that’s not possible!”

Stear took a look at his invention, twisting his neck back and forth to examine the instrument.

“It’s always the same with your inventions,” concluded Archie.

He entered the room again with a tired expression, continuing to complain:

“Oh, I’ve wasted my time. I was hoping to be able to take a look into Candy’s room.”

“Hey, I remind you that I didn’t make this telescope to spy on her,” replied Stear, slightly annoyed.

He followed his brother inside.

Archie just whispered, as he was lying down on the sofa:

“It’s been a few days since she hasn’t come...We don’t have any news of her.”

“Yeah,” added Stear with a nod.

He sat on the sofa. He was thinking of their friend too.

“Maybe she’s busy with the preparations for the festival. It seems she’s going to be one of the fairies of May this year.”

Stear took on a cheerful expression in order to give himself courage, as he felt rather sentimental.

“You are well informed about it, Alistair.”

Archie sat up on the sofa. He called his older brother by his full name whenever he wanted to talk to him in a ceremonial tone.

“I’m also well informed about Annie! She’s going to be a fairy of May too, from what I’ve heard.”

“Oh, yes...Annie was born in May too.”

Archie looked away. That subject didn’t seem to interest him.

“I’d like to dance with Candy at the ball.”

“You are heartless! Poor Annie Brighton would be in tears!”

Stear threw a cushion at his brother.

“Come on, that’s enough, stop making fun of me!”

Archie threw the cushion back at him with a very serious expression. The cushion missed Stear and ended up hitting a painting on the wall.

“I’m not saying...Annie is a nice girl, but...”

Archie got up from the sofa to fix the position of the painting which was now tilting. Then he turned his face towards his brother.

“Oh, I just got it! You want to throw me into Annie’s arms so that you can keep Candy to yourself, right?”

“Archibald!”

Suddenly, Stear’s voice grew more serious than ever.

“Candy...You know, she hasn’t forgotten Anthony yet.”

“Of course I know.”

The boy looked away, angrily.

“Even so...You know...Since the first time I met Candy, I...”

“Don’t say another word, Archie.”

Stear warned his brother in a stern voice.

“Keep the end of your sentence to yourself!”

His tone softened, and he was even moved.

*Actually I’m saying this to myself..*

Inwardly, Stear gave a bitter laugh. He would probably never say the end of that sentence out loud.

“As far as Candy is concerned...the best thing for us would be to protect her by watching over her from a distance.”

Stear had whispered as if he were talking to himself.

Archie didn’t seem to have heard him.

He lay down on the sofa again, and stared at the ceiling.

“Hey, wait a minute!”

That moment, Stear gave a shrill cry.

“What’s the matter?”

“I understand now why we couldn’t see anything! The lens of my ‘infinity observing telescope’ is over there...”

Stear frowned, looking dejected, and picked up the lens of the telescope which had fallen on the carpet.

“Your inventions always end tragically...You can admit it now. That invention serves to watch, doesn’t it?”

“Not at all, Archie! It was really made to observe the wonders of the universe which are offered to us...”

Stear began to justify himself with a little too much ardor, which made his brother burst out laughing.

He was soon joined by Stear.

They continued to show their merriment by looking at each other.

That same evening, in the girls’ dormitory, someone knocked lightly



on the door of the special room.

It was Patty. Candy opened the door.

“May I come in?”

After looking quickly around her in the corridor, Patty hurried to enter the room.

“My family sent me some confectionery. Would you like to share them with me, Candy?”

The girl was holding a small parcel tight in her arms.

“That’s great! You are lucky the nuns haven’t confiscated them!”

“Apparently my family asked permission.”

Patty smiled and sat on the sofa. She opened the parcel and revealed chocolates, toffee and many other bonbons of several colors.

“How pretty! They all look so appetizing! I envy you for having such a caring father and mother! Thank you for everything. I’ll taste this one!”

Candy took a chocolate with a cheerful look.

Seeing that her friend looked a little pale, Candy gave her a nudge to cheer her up.

Patty looked up. She was about to cry. Candy stopped nibbling. She looked at her anxiously.

“It’s just that they want me to forgive them once again...”

With her fingertips, Patty wiped the tears that were flowing from the corners of her eyes, under her glasses.

“What do you mean, to forgive them?”

Candy discreetly swallowed the chocolate she had in her mouth.

“My parents won’t be able to come to the May Festival. They’re sending me this confectionery instead...But that doesn’t make me happy at all...Lately I don’t even go home during the holidays. They are so busy with their work that there is never anyone at home.”

As she had her head still lowered, the tears finally fell on her palms. Patty’s father was a lawyer, and her mother was a journalist for a magazine. They were regularly on the move for a business trip or a reportage. That’s why Patty had been entrusted to a governess at a very young age.

“The few times a year we have eaten together are so rare that I could probably count them. If they sent me here, it’s because this is a boarding school and I can be supervised. They come very rarely to see me.”

“But...They’re sending you confectionery, at least...I don’t even have any parents to think like that about me. All they just did was abandon me. This is horrible, isn’t it?”

Not knowing what else to say, Candy put a bonbon in her mouth. Seeing her inflated cheek, Patty finally smiled.

“You are right...Actually, I may be too much spoiled. But I’ve always

felt so lonely. And in these moments only one thing can comfort me, and that is..."

Patty squirmed, unable to control herself any longer. Finally she raised her head, as if she had made a big decision.

"Candy, I have a secret..."

"What? A secret?"

"Yes...And I'm going to show it to you, only to you. Wait a minute."

All of a sudden, the girl left the room. Candy let out a little sigh.

*Having parents can cause problems too...Patty feels so lonely...*

What was her secret?

She hadn't come back yet.

As Candy was about to eat another toffee, she heard Sister Gray's severe voice resounding in the corridor.

"Patricia O'Brien! Don't you know that regulation forbids you to keep animals in the dormitory?"

*An animal? Patty?*

Surprised, Candy rushed out of her room.

There was another nun beside Sister Gray, but that was not all.

Eliza, Louise and other girls who must have heard the commotion, were also gathered around Patty who had lowered her head. Then Candy noticed that Patty was clutching a small turtle in her hands.

"Go on, get rid of it immediately!"

Sister Gray's order was indisputable. But Patty remained motionless, holding the turtle against her as tight as she could.

"Patricia O'Brien! Didn't you hear me?"

"Sister Gray, I beg you."

Usually so shy, Patty looked up at the nun with eyes full of tears.

With her whole body trembling, she tried to plead her case.

"I care about Hughley more than anything in the world! She is the only one to give me comfort and courage to hold on."

"Take it out immediately! The more times I repeat that, the heavier your punishment will be."

There was not the slightest hint of compassion in her voice.

Candy could no longer stay idly by.

"Sister Gray! Why does she have to abandon her turtle?"

The woman frowned and turned towards the one who had just spoken to her.

An icy look came into her eyes.

"I am very sorry that you cannot understand, my child. Regulation strictly forbids keeping animals, especially a turtle as disgusting as this one."

"What you say is horrible! For Patty, this turtle is like her only family, don't you understand? Regulation, regulation. You do nothing but say that word. Don't be surprised when we say that this college doesn't

have any warmth!”

“Patricia, what are you waiting for?”

Sister Gray ignored Candy and turned to Patty. She reiterated her order severely.

“Stubborn old hag!”

Candy had let herself be carried away by anger, and her words had come out on their own.

She put her hand over her mouth immediately.

But it was too late.

A heavy silence fell over the corridor.

Sister Gray had changed color. The rock seemed to have suddenly turned pale and stared at Candy. Her lips trembled imperceptibly with anger.

“Candice White Ardlay...”

Nevertheless, Sister Gray’s voice was surprisingly calm, which made it even more frightening.

“You will go to the punishment room. And you will not participate in the May Festival!”

Those words sounded like a death sentence.