

Section 3

Letters

Narrative – Part 1

If I close my eyes, I can still feel the bright light of that morning on my eyelids.

Leaving St. Paul's Institute behind, there was only one place I could return to: Pony's Home.

United States and England. I knew very well that between the two countries there was an immense ocean, but that moment there was no room for doubt in my heart: I would go back home and, no matter what it would cost, I would see Terry again.

When I told him about all the events that plagued my trip to the United States, *he* initially laughed, but then he suddenly took on a serious expression and hugged me tightly. He was relieved that nothing bad had happened to me.

In fact, my actions could be defined as reckless. I had used almost all of my savings to pay for the carriage with which I had tried to stop Terry and I had nobody to ask for help, but I felt as light and calm as I had not felt for a long time.

I had my powerful amulets with me: the badge of Prince on the Hill, Terry's white tie and, of course, the cross I was always wearing around my neck and which Miss Pony had given to me. I had these three objects to protect me and that was enough to instill security into me and make me believe that I would be able to overcome any adversity.

And everything came out just as Miss Pony always said: if you go forward with conviction and with a pure heart, surely your path will open before you.

During the trip I met many people and got help from them. All these experiences also helped me understand what I wanted to do with my life.

From the bottom of a closet I take out a large encrusted jewelry box. This voluminous object, decorated with mother-of-pearls and small gems, is inherited from generation to generation in the family of the man I love. I tried to tell him that something so beautiful and valuable didn't suit me, but *he* only started laughing and didn't give up his intention, saying that I could do whatever I wanted with it.

This jewelry box, too luxurious for me to use, contains only the things that are really important to me: my memories. Inside there are clippings from magazines and newspapers. And also a bundle of letters.

I place the jewelry box on the writing desk and open it.

The first letter that greets me with a smile contains the evaluation obtained by Susie Ann Carson at nursing school and at the same time represents a gift, full of gratitude for me. Susie graduated with honors and she claims to have become a nurse thanks to my example.

Two months ago I received a singular-looking postcard sent by her from Calcutta, in India.

1. Letter from Susie

“My dear, dearest Candy,

It’s been two weeks since I arrived in Calcutta and I’m finally starting to get used to my new life.

Everything I see and feel continues to astonish me. I’m sure this city would conquer you too. However, every day there are many sick people who need looking after, so many that I hardly have enough time to eat. I want to study to be able to help every one of them even more!

Working at this clinic, I find myself thinking about how many things you could teach me if you were here with me. Despite everything I’m fine, so you don’t have to worry!

I’ll send you more postcards. Who knows when we’ll be able to see each other again...

Always take care, don’t forget it!

Susie”

Looking at this postcard, it seems to me I can see her smiling, full of energy. Every time I read her words again, my face breaks into a smile.

This world is really traversed and joined by resplendent threads.

The first time I thought about becoming a nurse was when I took care precisely of Susie during my trip back to America. She was the youngest daughter of the Carsons, a family who had been very kind to me, and she was only three years old at the time. That little girl, still too young to understand her mother’s death and capable of filling my heart with tenderness, has now become a nurse full of vitality.

Yes...All the people I met along my way after leaving St. Paul’s Institute.

Meetings are like the branches of a big tree: a meeting can give life to a following meeting, just like a branch gives life to other branches, and then others again. In that way, thanks to the Carsons I met Mr. Juskin, Cookie and Captain Niven. I continue expanding my branches, making them more numerous and filling them with fresh leaves.

I can feel nothing but gratitude for all of them: if I have become the person I am now, it’s thanks to the kindness with which they helped me. However, at the same time, I also know that I have been a source of great concern.

When somehow I managed to return to Pony’s Home, I felt I had to write letters to a lot of people: to Great Uncle William, to Stear, to Archie, to Annie, to Patty, to Sister Gray and to the teachers of St.

Paul's Institute. And, of course, to all those who had been close to me during the trip.

2. Letter to Mr. August Carson

“Dear Mr. Carson,

How are you? After many vicissitudes (I’m serious!) I managed to return safe and sound to the United States!

My beloved Pony’s Home is in Michigan and it seems a miracle to me that I have arrived here. But, after all, it’s not such a great achievement: I did everything thanks to the help I received from the people I met, starting from you. I feel an immense gratitude for each and every one of you.

Pony’s Home is my birthplace, the orphanage where I was abandoned and grew up. The teachers, surprised by my unexpected return, were breathless! They welcomed me in tears, but they also said that, since they took me in, worries never seem to end. They let out endless sighs. I don’t like that, but unfortunately they are right.

Anyway, I’m quite well and I would like to thank you for everything you have done for me.

A complete stranger like me, coming from God knows where, dared to sneak into your cart and eat the apples you had kept especially for your children! I beg you to forgive me for that!

When I did that I was dominated by a hunger I had never felt in my life. I had no money to pay for the train to go to the port and I had spent the previous night in the barn of an abandoned house.

I had already had to sleep in a much darker place (although I prefer not to talk about it) and it wasn’t the darkness that worried me (by the way, I have the great ability to sleep anywhere!), but the lack of food really made me lose control.

When you discovered me you threw me out, but Sam, Jeff and Susie, despite the fact that I had devoured the snack intended for them, sneaked me into the shed.

Dear Mr. Carson, you really scared me (although it was normal for you to be angry!), but seeing how well you had raised your children I immediately thought that you were a good father. And as a matter of fact, I was not mistaken! Although reluctantly, you allowed me to stay with you at your house, and for that I’m very grateful to you!

You didn’t ask me any questions and I even feel an immense gratitude for your deep sensitivity towards me. At that time I had many reasons to be sad and I couldn’t tell you anything. If you had asked me, maybe I wouldn’t have been able to contain myself and I would have begun to cry, putting you in a big trouble...

Actually, I was one of the students of the prestigious St. Paul’s Institute and I had just escaped from college. It seems impossible

that someone like me should really study in such a wealthy place, doesn't it?

As I have already written to you, I'm an orphan, but there is a person who was so kind that he adopted me. Leaving college, unfortunately I betrayed the trust of the man to whom I owe everything, but I wanted at all costs to return as soon as possible to the United States. In fact, there is someone here I want to meet with all my heart...But before doing that I desired, if possible, to find my way. When the time comes for us to meet again, I want to be able to look into his eyes with pride, making him also happy and proud of me.

Oh, Mr. Carson, it's at your house that I found what I was looking for! When Susie got sick with measles and I took care of her, I began to see clearly what I wanted to do: be useful to others. I want to become a nurse! I want to be able to study depending only on my efforts and to live with courage.

Until some time ago, my dream was to be adopted by a rich family and lead a comfortable life, but apparently luxuries don't suit me!

Mr. Carson, you realized my urgency to return to the United States and you introduced me to Mr. Juskin, the ship builder. Thank you for that and also for the small sum of money you gave me when I was leaving: you don't know how useful it has been. It was difficult for me to be separated from your children, but I couldn't stay with you forever...

In brief, thanks to your help I managed to get safe and sound to the United States and now I can even write you a letter! It would seem a happy end for me, but it isn't so yet.

My adventure begins now!

I'll send you some more news soon.

Dear Mr. Carson, for the sake of your children, try to get along with the other villagers. Keep your stubbornness only for good things, don't forget that!

Remember that your smile is really vivid and wonderful!

Candy''

3. Letter to Samuel, Jeffrey and Susie Ann Carson

“Sam, Jeff, Susie!

How are you? Thank you for the beautiful letters and drawings you have sent me! Susie, you have become very good at writing!

Reading your letters, I remember your little faces when you sneaked a little bread for me into the shed, late at night. I was so rich!

Dear Sam, I always talk about you to the boys at Pony’s Home, and I tell them how much you struggle to be a good big brother. There are children without parents here, but none of them will manage to be an older brother as they should, ready to protect their younger brothers and sisters, as you do! Even when Susie got sick with measles, you were my brave assistant and, to be honest, you were much more helpful than your anxious father. I also remember that, at the cost of giving up your share, you never let Jeff and Susie miss their snack. On the contrary, the children at Pony’s Home, when they are called to have their snack, fight trying to seize the biggest cookie! When I see them I know they just follow the example of their chief (that would be me). Do you realize that?

Dear Jeff, forgive me for leaving before teaching you the tricks in climbing trees...The most important thing you have to remember is to be careful not to fall, do you understand? I started from that too, and practised in climbing quicker every time. Until now, my record of climbing the big tree in front of Pony’s Home in three minutes and twenty seconds remains undefeated!

Dear Susie, the beautiful portrait you sent me is now exhibited on the wall. However, next time remember to make me prettier (Sam, Jeff, are you laughing?).

Your Candy”

4. Letter to Mr. Dan Juskin

“All right, Mr. Juskin, here is a riddle for you: you have to tell me the name of the girl I will describe to you.

Question: she has a lot of freckles, but she is friendly, very pretty and sweet. Whom are we talking about?

Juskin: It's Candy!

Correct answer! Din don dan! 🎵

I'm joking, of course! It seems to me that I can see you laughing perplexed...

It's been such a long time; do you remember me? It's Candy!

It took me so long to be able to contact you, due to the fact that my letters were returned so many times. Not knowing your whereabouts anymore, I asked for Mr. Carson's help and finally I had news from you. I heard that you were worried about me too! Mr. Carson wrote that to me in a letter. Thank you! As you can realize, I'm fine.

I'm sorry to hear that your shipyard ultimately failed...I had been worried, since it had seemed to me that business wasn't going very well. But I learned that you and your colleagues opened a bar in the city called Harbor Light...And I'm a little worried about that too!

Mr. Juskin, please don't drink with your customers anymore! It's not good to tipple so much!

I know I'm lecturing you, but right now I'm studying hard to be a nurse. I would like to be able to enter a school where I could learn by practising (in order not to pay even for the tuition), but even so, basic knowledge is still required. Therefore, in the manual I'm using to prepare myself, I ran into an alarming chapter that talks about alcoholism! While reading it, I immediately thought about you. If I managed to get on board (?) a ship bound for the United States it was also thanks to your help, and I certainly don't want to see you becoming an alcoholic.

I haven't yet confessed to the teachers at Pony's Home that I have boarded as a stowaway, hidden in a large box containing cans...I fear they might faint. The teachers are like parents to me. As a matter of fact, I'm an orphan girl who had the honor of being blessed with a good fortune (I'm convinced of that!) and they brought me up in this orphanage. I just told them that I had managed to return thanks to the help of some kind people. After all, that's exactly how things happened!

We met thanks to Mr. Carson and you, Mr. Juskin, have fulfilled my wish...I'm really a very fortunate person!

I stayed in the cellar, hidden among all those big boxes and trying not to make any noise...but that phase lasted very little. You want to know what happened later? You'll find out in my next letter! I'm joking again; I won't keep you in suspense any longer! In fact, I'm anxious to tell you everything.

Who would have ever imagined that there was another stowaway on board? I thought that we were the only ones who could conceive such a plan, but someone had surpassed us! I'm talking about Cookie. Doesn't he have a delicious name? Candy and Cookie, traveling as stowaways on a ship. A strange pair, isn't it?

That boy was accustomed to traveling like this and he knew well the inside of the ship. He seemed quite at home and moved nimbly around like a little mouse.

However, things don't always come out perfectly. As a matter of fact, Cookie was quickly discovered by the sailors and I believe he had never experienced a similar fright. Imagine that they even threw him into the sea, saying that this time they were not going to let him get away with it.

Cookie had been discovered and sent back several times, so, even when they were punishing him, they were all laughing! But a joke is good only when it lasts for a little while! And what if he had had a heart attack? Overwhelmed with rage I jumped out of the cellar...and that was how they discovered me too.

Nevertheless, thanks to that incident I met Captain Niven and I was able to receive his help.

Captain Niven is a taciturn man, but he's very friendly and kind-hearted.

Thank you, Mr. Juskin. Did you perhaps choose deliberately a ship led by a captain notable for his virtue? According to what my traveling companion told me, the captain used to lead a luxurious passenger ship before. When he took the responsibility for a mistake made by one of his subordinates, he was transferred to his current position. Cookie also seems to admire him a lot.

My new friend's father was a sailor and he had always dreamed of becoming one day the captain of a large ship bound for a foreign country but, because of an accident, he didn't succeed. Now his son wants to continue this dream.

Captain Niven seems to understand very well Cookie's wish.

Always thanks to you, I could go back to the United States safe and sound, back to my country.

Mr. Juskin, I want to thank you and all the others from the bottom of my heart.

I really hope this time my letter won't be returned! I hope Harbor Light will be a great success in the city and bring you a lot of money!

And I hope you won't become an alcoholic! And I also hope to become a very good nurse!

Candy”

5. Letter to Miss Candice White Ardlay (from George Villers)

“Sir William was very much relieved to know that you are well.
I assure you that the master has received all the letters you have sent him.

In relation to the wish you expressed to enter Mary Jane Nursing School, that proposal has been approved.

Sir William is willing to take all the expenses, but first of all he wishes to respect your provisions.

Whatever happens, remember that you will always be a part of the Ardlay family.

I hope you do honor to this name and commit yourself to it with all your being.

George Villers”

6. Letter to Captain Edgar Niven

“Dear Mr. Niven,

I hope you are well. This morning I went for a walk in the forest with the children of Pony’s Home and collected with them some forget-me-nots that had early bloomed. In the afternoon I’ll leave this place to enter Mary Jane Nursing School. The principal Mary Jane is a friend of Miss Pony’s, the woman who has brought me up and has been like a mother to me. The institute is attached to St. Joseph’s Hospital and that will allow me to work while studying. In that way I’ll be able to avoid paying for the tuition. Don’t you think that’s wonderful? My ship is about to set sail! I’ll try my best! While I’m writing to you, I have in front of me a glass in which I have put the forget-me-nots. Their color makes me think of the tonality of the sea that day when you said to me: ‘As we sail, the only thing we can see is the sea. I imagine you find that pretty boring.’

At that time I shook my head and declared that it was not so, because every time the water showed a different color to me. Hearing my reply, you nodded several times. Now I have the impression that the sea, with its different shades, resembles the imperceptible passage of time. It seems that nothing changes; however, no doubt something does change. Captain Niven, I wonder which sea you are looking at right at this moment...

Every time I receive a letter from the various ports where you tie up, it seems to me I’m transported to those places. There are more countries in the world than I have ever imagined!

The children of Pony’s Home have never left even our small village and I have the impression that they think that only the United States exist in the world. So, your letters are a great study material for them. Obviously, that applies to me too!

During our trip I learned many things. Not only did you forgive me for my scheme, but you even offered me your help, and I’ll never get tired of expressing my gratitude to you.

Cookie told me that you have a daughter about the same age with me and that you are worried about the pain you cause her due to your multiple sea voyages. When I found out that I looked a little like your daughter, you can’t imagine how happy I felt. I also felt like you were my father. It would be wonderful if Great Uncle William, the man who adopted me, resembled you (although you are certainly much younger)...

Occasionally I remember your words and they cheer me up: ‘You know, Candy, the sea isn’t always calm. It’s like life: there are peaceful and turbulent moments. But in any situation, the ship must

try with all its forces to control the waves and to continue straight by its trajectory.'

I am about to face a new stage in my life and, just like a ship, it doesn't matter what terrible storms I'll find on my trip: I want to follow my own path devoting myself to resisting the waves with all my strength.

I'm writing my new address to you. I'm very curious to know where your next postcard will come from!

Oh, when you return to England, could you make a quick visit to a bar which is located in the port area and is called Harbor Light? The place is run by Mr. Juskin, the man who helped me hide in the cellar among the boxes with cans (in other words, he is the person who allowed me to embark underground...). When you meet him, I'm sure he'll be surprised and happy.

I'm also enclosing you a forget-me-not. I always pray for your sea voyages to be calm.

Candy"

7. Letter to Miss Candice White Ardlay (from Cookie)

“Candy, do you really have such a long name? I got tired just by writing it! Actually, my name is Cricket Dix! Well?

Have you seen all those letters? Do you want a competition?

You know, Candy, I wanted to send you my best wishes. Your journey to become a nurse has finally started!

During all this time we have been sailing to the south, so I have read all your letters at once.

Thanks to Captain Niven I started working on the ship, but you have no idea what fuss he’s doing over me! ‘Cookie, if you want to become a captain, you have to study properly!’ Do I imitate him well? Oh, curse! I forgot that this is a letter! That’s why I hate writing!

In short, the Captain always repeats to me to save money in order to go to school. He also added that, if I try, he’ll consider helping me. I’ll try my best! I told him I would be a captain and that’s what I’m going to do! My father always said that too, so I’m determined to do the best I can!

Candy, try hard too! Of course, even if you become a nurse, I’ll just not let myself be injected by you. I would be terrified...You are always daydreaming! But I’m sure you’ll be very good at looking after the sick. The Captain said that when I was thrown into the sea, your care of me was very meticulous.

Of course, I still have with me the ribbon you gave me in exchange for my cap. When we had to say goodbye, we exchanged them to encourage each other, remember? Please, don’t give it to your little minions, even if they offer you a huge sum of money! And anyway, you shouldn’t think that it cost only fifty cents; you see, I had to spend a lot of money to buy it!

Dear Candy, I don’t like letters much and I almost never write, but I love receiving them. Send me as many as you like!

In three days we’ll go back to sea!

Imagine, I suddenly grew by twenty centimeters (you’re jealous, aren’t you?).

Cricket Dix, alias Cookie”

8. Letter 2 to Samuel, Jeffrey and Susie Ann Carson

“Dear Sam, Jeff and Susie,

Thank you for your letter which was full of beautiful news! I was so happy that I almost started crying. Congratulations on your new mama! You have written to me that she’s called Victoria; what a wonderful name!

I believe you when you say that even a man like your father has always a smile on his face! Imagining that scene made me want to laugh too.

Looking at the drawing in which Susie has portrayed mama Victoria, I perceived that she is a sweet person. And, of course, I understand the same thing from Jeff’s letter too.

Jeff, Susie, your hands are still so small, but you have always helped your father and Sam do the laundry and chop wood. You have really been very good.

Susie, do you remember what we said? Your mama hasn’t died, she has just gone to the other side of Mount Rodney. Surely over there, your mama and mama Victoria talked: ‘I entrust to you my beloved children, Sam, Jeff and Susie...’ I’m sure your mama said exactly these words to her.

Sam, you’ve been so good taking care of so many things until now. I hope now you will start devoting time to yourself too. For the moment, I am studying to be a good nurse some day. Tonight it’s my turn for the night shift. I’d better start...

I’ll write to you again when I have more quiet. Give my regards to your father and to Mrs. Victoria!

With a little hurry,

Your Candy”

9. Letter to Terry

“Dear Terry...

I still don't know where to address my letters and, as much as I try to write, all these words remain in my hands.

Oh, Terry...I have returned to the United States almost wanting to chase you, but time only passes by. How I wish I could make it turn back...If only I could have reached you at the port before your departure...And if only I had been at Pony's Home when you came to visit...

I remember that time when you told me that you would have liked to see some day the place where I grew up. And I also remember your smile.

Thank you for your visit...I know you were there only for a short time, but the teachers told me that you went to see the great oak tree where I always climbed, the apple tree where I learned to throw the lasso and my Pony's Hill. Those trees you may have touched and the elevation on which you have stopped are now even more valuable to me.

You know, Terry, I enrolled in a nursing school, and my days are always very busy. I imagine that you are following your way too, somewhere in the United States.

When we get to meet each other, and I know for sure that we will, I'll tell you something, and I'll do that proudly.

Until then, I promise you that I will live my life with courage.

Freckled Tarzan”

10. Letter from Archie

“Dear Candy,

Today I intend to send you this letter getting ahead of my brother. Actually, I never liked writing on behalf of both of us.

What a surprise to know that you are striving to work and study in a nursing school! To be honest, since I have met you surprises never end!

Maybe Annie has already written that to you, but we’re returning to America too. A war wind blows in Europe, although I hope my bad presentiment is wrong.

I would like to tell you so many things, but I can’t write to you any more...

Anyway, before going back to our residence in Chicago, I intend to come and see you.

Archie”

11. Letter from Stear

“Dearest Candy,

So Archie has already spoiled the surprise of our returning to America?

When I suggested, with complete propriety, that we should write a letter together, he replied to me that he had already done that! And to think that I had planned a triumphal entrance in order to leave you with your mouth wide open!

But let’s forget that matter...How I want to see you again!

London is wrapped in a very tense atmosphere, but I think you can say the same thing about other countries too. The Ardlay family quickly perceived the danger and they ordered us to return home... but, to be honest, Archie and I couldn’t be more excited! Hurray! We can’t bear all these rules anymore!

And then there’s nothing to do; the college without you is really sad and gloomy...Has Archie written the same thing too? Not to mention that I just don’t like London much. As a matter of fact, I hoped to attend university in the United States.

Certainly Annie will return to Chicago too, and I believe Patty will follow us. She really can’t stay without me...Of course I’m joking, but this will make you understand how serious the world situation is.

Patty’s parents have relations with the world of politics and journalism, and they are probably well informed about what’s happening. Patty seems a little worried about going to America and leaving her parents here in England, but in Chicago there will be Annie, you and also me. This will certainly cheer her up.

You know, Candy, I do nothing but think about how to create a virus of peace and spread it from the sky, so that, by breathing it, people would stop feeling all that desire to fight.

Actually, no: just now, more than anything, I count the days until our college life comes to an end and I cheer up thinking of the moment when I’ll see you again, this time dressed as a nurse.

The day of our return is a secret. Archie at least kept that information to himself...after all, that’s not so bad for a younger brother.

Stear

P.S. I’m sorry, but I haven’t yet been able to get any information about Albert and his life in Africa. I hope to discover something before my return.”

12. Letter to Sister Gray

“Estimated Sister Gray,

I hope you are well. Sometimes I think I can hear with nostalgia the sound of St. Paul’s Institute’s bell.

Dear director, I know I’ve been a bad student and I’ve only caused you problems. So I never expected that you would ask the Cornwell brothers, upon returning to America, to bring me a Bible from you. I feel really touched and I’m deeply grateful to you.

I want you to know that the habit of praying before going to bed and the practice of reflecting on my mistakes, both learned during my stay at your college, are now a part of me.

I’ll take care of the Bible you have given me and I pray that, whatever is the future that awaits us, God protects you and the college.

Candice White Ardlay”

13. Letter to Principal Mary Jane

“Dear principal,

I’m grateful (and I sincerely mean it!) for the scoldings I received from you every day. However, never finding a moment to talk to you, I’m forced to write you a letter.

When you shouted at me to take a vacation, I was scared, convinced that you had fired me. But, when I returned to Pony’s Home, I realized how good you had been to me. I’m really a clueless girl, who always jumps to conclusions, aren’t I?

Just a single day (and that’s not a complaint, believe me!) with Miss Pony and Sister Lane allowed me to catch my breath.

The thought that you and Miss Pony were childhood friends filled me with joy. I have been told so many stories about the time when you were little girls: I heard that you were so thin you looked almost transparent, that you were agile and running fast, and also that, when they discovered you had done some mischief, you completely hid yourself behind Miss Pony’s broad back (who would have ever imagined that Miss Pony was a notable mischief-maker too?). All this helped me feel closer to you, principal Mary Jane.

I’m aware that you already know the reason why I was so attached to Mr. William McGregor.

It’s just as I told Miss Pony: I had never had the opportunity to know Mr. William A. Ardlay, the wealthy gentleman who had been so kind as to adopt me and who, besides saving me, had always been so magnanimous in forgiving all my faults.

The rumors about him have always described him as an eccentric, obstinate and capricious man. Don’t you think that profile matches perfectly Mr. McGregor? Even his age seemed to me that it could match...I know that Great Uncle is very old, that’s why I have always felt inside me the anxiety of having to hurry to meet him, before it was too late.

If I convinced myself that Mr. McGregor was Great Uncle William... well, it’s always due to my rash character! However, even when I found out the truth, I continued to feel for him the affection that could be harbored for a relative.

His rough expression seemed like that of a man’s who kept all pains of his life to himself, but when he was talking about his Mina, his face became radiant, transforming him into an adorable grandfather. I bet that even you couldn’t have imagined that this famous Mina, who was capable of causing Mr. McGregor to lose his head, was a pretty, big fat dog!

I was so happy that our patient was showing signs of improvement... but he died so suddenly...

I know you were right when you scolded me saying: 'Mr. McGregor certainly didn't come to the hospital for fun! He had an incurable disease!'

In the same way, all your other affirmations were also true: 'If a nurse is depressed for every patient who dies, she won't be able to work! The only one who has the right to cry is the sick person!' And then again: 'Try to control yourself! One can leave a hospital healthy or dead, there is no other alternative!' I still think I hear your hard words in my ears. However, your voice didn't sound frightening but echoed encouraging in my heart.

A very important person departed in front of my eyes. He was smiling just a moment before, but when I realized it he was already gone. People can die like that, in a moment. I know this is the reality, but I just can't accept it yet. But now my heart has calmed down.

Miss Pony said to me: 'Without any distinction, Lord puts death at the end of each road.'

Mr. McGregor lived all the life he was destined to live. And it's like that for everybody, isn't it?

It will be difficult...but I think I have found the strength to face bravely the different ways in which death will appear on my way. I won't forget any of your scoldings, dear principal.

'Whatever the future holds for us, the important thing is that there are people with the ability to heal the body and the soul! Humanity has no borders!'

The words with which you have stimulated us are engraved in my heart.

If they have to send me to St. Joanna's Hospital in Chicago, I'll try my best to learn the surgical techniques, in order to be useful to patients and become soon a real and competent nurse!

I promise you that some day I'll be a student you can be proud of!

Your frivolous Candy

P.S. I swear I have nothing to do with the fact that the children called you 'plucked hen!'

14. Letter from Annie

“Dear Candy,

How are you doing? Are you always so busy?

I had hoped that, since you returned to Chicago, I would see you more often, and instead of that...As I know how full your days are, I have decided to write to you.

Archie insists that it is not necessary to communicate this news to you, and that I can perfectly wait until we meet in person, but I don't even know when that will happen and I want you to know that as soon as possible.

I'm even sending you a newspaper clipping. Oh...But maybe you already know everything, don't you?

Oh, Candy, even I feel so happy!

Annie”

“A great new talent!

A new star shines on stage: Terrence Graham!

An unprecedented choice for the King of France in ‘King Lear’, staged by Stratford Theatre Company!”

Narrative – Part 2

That day, when I took in my hands the newspaper clipping Annie had sent me, my feelings overwhelmed me like an avalanche, preventing me from even standing on my feet.

Collapsing on the floor, I looked at Terry's photograph. My vision was blurred and, fearing that I would wet that picture with my tears, I put it away from me. However, it almost seemed to me I was pushing Terry himself away, and immediately afterwards, I held it tightly against my chest.

I take from the jewelry box a thick envelope in which I have kept that newspaper clipping. For a long time, the photograph accompanied me wherever I went, so it's quite faded, but Terry's virile image has remained intact until now.

Terry had become an actor who had left his mark on the stage, but I wasn't surprised. I remembered the words he had written to me before leaving, and I hadn't forgotten the enthusiasm with which he had read and recited Shakespeare's tragedies in Scotland.

The article quoted the phrase "An unprecedented choice", but I was sure that even his appearance alone at the auditions had been enough to attract the eyes of all present. His deep voice, neither particularly sharp nor particularly low, his audacity and his smile, so soft and sweet, capable of shaking any heart...

In the article there was no trace of Eleanor Baker's name. If Terry had managed to reach so high in that short time, he had done it only thanks to his charisma and his efforts, carried out in secret.

Terrence Graham. I repeated that name countless times. He had renounced the Granchester family to start going his own way alone. I was very happy for him.

Terrence G. Granchester. I had wondered many times what that "G" stood for.

I finally knew where he was, and that was enough to make me believe that a bright path was outlined in front of me. The hope of being able to see him again had been transformed into a certainty, and I was wondering if, by sending a letter to Stratford Theatre Company, I could be in touch with him. Anyway, the company was about to go on a tour and maybe they would make a stop in Chicago. More than anything, I wanted to let him know as soon as possible that I had returned to the United States, which he probably ignored.

Maybe I was a fool, but that moment I felt I was in the seventh heaven and I was full of hope, sure that everything would be fine. I

didn't even imagine the turns and difficulties that were waiting for me.

But...I don't want to think that everything was destiny's work: I want to believe that all the paths we have taken were the result of a choice. That applies to me, to Terry...and to Stear too...

I close my eyes tightly for a moment and try to calm my agitated heart.

I take over another newspaper clipping: it's the article in which Frannie Hamilton, my classmate, receives recognition for her work as a Red Cross nurse.

15. Letter to Frannie Hamilton

“Dear Frannie,

I imagine you will be surprised to receive a letter of mine so unexpectedly. Actually it's been so long since we have met!

It's Candice; we shared the same room in the student residence while we attended Mary Jane Nursing School and we also went back together to St. Joanna's Hospital.

I hope you remember me.

The reason I felt the need to write to you is because yesterday I read an article that talked about the recognition of your work in the Red Cross.

I was so happy that I read it several times! I wanted to send you at least my congratulations, so I've decided to take the pen.

How nostalgic I felt when I saw you again...When I found myself in front of your photograph, I thought you hadn't changed at all: you always have the appearance of a very effective person. Seeing you as you were back then, I felt happy.

It's been a long time since we took our separate ways. I thought that the war would be over soon but it hasn't. During all this time you have worked hard to become a Red Cross nurse, and I can do nothing but admire you.

I still remember the time when they came to St. Joanna's Hospital to look for volunteers for the Red Cross. You got up straight away decisively, but I didn't...I lacked the courage. I have no family, yet I couldn't resign myself to the idea of losing everything, and I thought only of myself.

Later, repenting of my behavior, I offered to take your place, but even at that moment your firmness was admirable and you replied to me that you weren't afraid to die.

Yes...I remember you also told me about your family. You said it's not important to have a family if they're not united, because in that case it's like being alone in the world. That moment, for the first time, I felt very close to you.

At that time I still had a romantic view of a nurse's work and of life on the battlefields. I'm ashamed of not having the firm determination you showed, and I still regret upsetting you with my behavior.

I quickly take everybody into my confidence. Whoever appreciates this part of me has no problems, but there are also some people who simply can't stand it. Without thinking about your feelings, I was impertinent and convinced myself that we would soon become friends. However, people have different ways of living, thinking and expressing their opinions...

I learned a lot of things from you: taking my job seriously, respecting the schedules, keeping everything clean and in order! I say I learned a lot of things, but in the end I'm still the same as always...

Frannie, I just wanted to let you know that there is someone who has always admired you very much.

Well...I intended to write you just a few grateful lines, but as you can see I'm still the same old chatterbox. Forgive me for this long letter.

Frannie, keep trying in your work as a nurse!

I will always pray for you to be well.

Candice"

16. Letter to my dear Candy (from Patty)

“Dear Candy,

How are you? Finally the day of my leaving for Chicago has been fixed.

I hardly ever lived with my parents, but now that I have to go alone to a foreign country, we are all a little melancholic.

England is at war too and a part of me thinks that the right thing would be for me to stay...But my family doesn't agree.

Stear is worried and invites me to come soon...and I also want to be close to him. And above all you are in Chicago too! When I found that out, suddenly everything became rose-colored! Oh, Candy, I can't wait to see you and tell you so many things! I also wanted to talk to you about something Stear wrote to me. Is it true that Albert was brought to the hospital you are working? I heard he has lost his memory...

Here also came the news of the train that exploded in Italy. Who would have imagined that our friend was traveling exactly in those wagons? We were all so sure that he was in Africa...And then I can't believe that a gentle person like him is suspected of being the alleged culprit of the explosion!

They also told me that in Italy he wandered through several countryside hospitals and shelters for fugitives. I can't help believing that it was the Lord who guided him to you. I'm happy that the suspicions about him have been proved unfounded, but I also know that he hasn't recovered his memory yet. Stear is very worried too about his condition.

War is really something appalling. It destroys the bonds that unite people and inflicts deep wounds in their hearts. I suppose that you are even more shocked than I am. From now on all of us will try together to help Albert's memories come back!

Thank you for being also worried about my little turtle Hughley. I would have wanted to take her with me, but finally I have decided to entrust her to the care of the Blue River Zoo.

I will anxiously count the days that separate us until we meet again, and I hope the war ends soon...

With all my love,

Your friend Patty”

17. Letter to Dr. Frank Campbell of St. Joseph's Hospital

"Dear Dr. Frank,

A thousand thanks for your letter and for the volume of *Introduction to Medical Texts* you've sent to congratulate me!

I believe you were very astonished to see that I managed to be among the first in the nursing examinations, but when I try I get great results! I'll concentrate to the maximum on studying conscientiously the book you have given me!

From a letter of Sister Lane's, I also heard that you were so kind as to drop by Pony's Home during a business trip. Thank you very much for that too!

And you were so worried about Mina, the dog Mr. McGregor loved almost as a daughter! Since she has been under the care of Pony's Home she has gained enough; have you noticed that?

A first-rate nurse (that would be me) has warned them not to give her too much food in order to safeguard her health, but...Apparently Miss Pony simply can't resist whenever Mina puts herself in pose asking for something to eat. And to think that she is so strict with the children (and particularly she was with me!).

However, on this occasion, I'm writing to you to ask for a consultation. Have you ever attended a patient suffering from amnesia?

A person to whom I practically owe my life has suddenly lost his memory and has been hospitalized in St. Joanna. I really want him so much to be cured, and I'm willing to do anything to make this happen.

Please, give me your opinion about it.

Your great apprentice nurse Candy

P. S. Dr. Frank, the person I wrote to you about is now in the Room Number 0 of the hospital. He definitely won't be able to receive any adequate medical attention there since, as you may already know, in this section they abandon patients with no family or connections. I'm sad and angry because I can do nothing about it."

Narrative – Part 3

At St. Joanna's Hospital the Room 0 doesn't exist anymore. It was eliminated by Dr. Leonard, when he was promoted from deputy director to director.

Even after the United States entered the great world conflict, the hospital must have regained its true spirit. Hospitals and patients don't have any frontiers, and our duty is to care for people: the director Mary Jane's convictions lived also in that man's heart.

For a long time I had considered him an insensitive doctor. When I proposed taking care of Albert until he recovered, he fired me. As a chief doctor, his decision was absolutely correct: even fully understanding my feelings, the rules of the hospital had to be respected.

On the other hand, I believe that it was thanks to his severe words that I tried with all my might to pass the nursing examinations. In fact it was him who, even before becoming director, told me that it was unthinkable to leave a patient in the hands of a student.

I have ascertained so many times how wrong it is to judge people by their appearance, but even today I continuously make this mistake. Until today the man I love is always laughing at this weakness of mine.

Albert...At that time I didn't even know his full name. He was Albert; I didn't need to know anything else. Inexplicably his mere presence was enough to reassure me. Now I can understand the meaning of that invisible bond that united us.

The sun begins to set and the shadows grow longer on the carpet. In the same way, my heart also begins to grow darker as I evoke the innumerable and sad events that followed...

Unable to keep looking at the letters and the newspaper clippings, I slowly close the jewelry box.

Inside there are also Terry's letters and the articles about him. I have kept them all, both the positive ones and those that were difficult to bear, since all of them were related to him.

And there is also my little precious music box...

After having closed the jewelry box, I let out a deep sigh trying to recover and I head towards the room next door, used as a study.

The walls of this room are covered with leather-bound books with the complete works of Shakespeare, novels of French and English literature, medical publications...

In one corner, instead of portraits, several small framed photographs have been placed. Of all, I think one has a special value: the picture

portraying the Leagans, one of the Ardlay family's clans, and their employees.

Listening to Eliza's arrogant words, I learned that her family was running hotels and tourist activities on a large scale. Taking advantage of the Ardlays' support, the Leagans were progressively expanding their business. The cold and skillful Mr. Raymond Leagan and his son Neal, who had become an unscrupulous entrepreneur, were not affected in the least by the financial crisis and, on the contrary, they came strong out of it.

This photograph was taken on the occasion of the opening party of the most elegant of their hotels: the Miami Resort Inn. I never expected to be invited. Even leaving Eliza aside, is it possible that her brother hadn't opposed to that?

I remember on that occasion Neal did everything possible to avoid me, and I perceived a strange sensation. Our gazes met only for a moment and his eyes were extremely penetrating. I can't forget that sombre and piercing look, which seemed to harbor a deep and singular tone, impossible to be seen in Eliza's eyes.

Neal and Eliza. I had always considered those two siblings as one being, but that day I realized that Neal had feelings completely different from those of his sister's. It was something so obvious, yet something which I had never noticed.

In the middle of the photograph there are Great Uncle William (!), Mrs. Leagan, Neal and Eliza. At the time the photograph was taken, Great Uncle (!) proposed laughing that I stand next to him, but I politely refused. Naturally, I felt much more comfortable close to my dear friends Stewart and Mary. Beside me is George, usually so reluctant to be photographed, with a funny expression of embarrassment on his face.

Great Aunt Elroy hadn't been able to attend due to health problems and even Archie wasn't present because of a sudden commitment, but I knew very well that he had never intended to be there.

The Leagan family...The Lakewood villa where I had been when I was still a girl with my heart full of hope, leaving Pony's Home behind.

The countless tears I had shed those days are now a bright memory.

18. Letter to Mrs. Sara Leagan

“Dear Mrs. Leagan,

I hope you are well. Thank you for having invited me to the opening party for the Resort Inn. Thanks to you I had the opportunity to visit a splendid hotel and to meet again people whom I hadn't seen for a long time.

More than anything else, I would like to thank you for having denied in front of the whole family the fact that I have the habit of stealing. Actually this is an accusation which for many years has cast a shadow in my heart, and I can assure you that I am completely innocent.

When I expressed my gratitude, you answered me that you had simply obeyed Great Uncle William's orders, but even so, I imagine it cost you a lot to pronounce those words.

I take advantage of this opportunity to thank you again and I hope your Resort Inn Hotels increase in number more and more.

Candice W. Ardlay”

19. Letter to Mr. Stewart Lux

“Dear Stewart,

I would never have imagined that you were still working for the Leagans! I was sure that even Mary had already gone long ago! How brave you are...You have managed to endure all this time despite the way they’ve treated you! But now you are not their private chauffeur anymore but head of the reception at the Miami hotel. So the Leagans watch over their employees!

You might very well be presented in your new uniform, but instead you came to pick me up in exactly the same clothes you used to wear the days we first met! You are really a man who likes to make jokes! You brought me back to the past, and for a moment I was breathless! It was the same suit you were wearing when you came to Pony’s Home...

You know, that day I was on Pony’s Hill, watching your car while it was approaching, raising clouds of dust. I was so happy that someone had come to take me as his adopted daughter! While I was overwhelmed with enthusiasm, you looked at me with an apologetic expression, remember? I realized that, even though you were a quiet man, you were trying to comfort me with your whole being, that’s why I had managed to be happy again.

It’s a shame that when I met Eliza I was greatly shocked! I’ll never forget the disappointment I felt at that moment. But maybe it was that experience that gave me strength and allowed me to endure the blows that life had in store for me.

However, if I was able to endure the days I spent in that house it was thanks to the kindness of all of you.

I still remember that morning when they tried to send me to work in Mexico. In the morning mist, you, Mary, Doug and Mr. Whitman showed up to say goodbye to me, holding back your tears.

It was so long ago...All of us have overcome the turbulent waves of war and we have been able to meet again. I couldn’t be happier! A lot of things happened to me too, you know. After I returned to Chicago, I would have wanted to come and see you immediately, but it was very difficult for me to present myself in the Leagan house...I’m glad I have attended the opening party and I have had the opportunity to greet Mary too.

When I apologized at the party for calling you simply Stewart, given our age difference, and I proposed to rectify the error from now on, you started laughing and said it was all right. As you see, in this letter I have faithfully followed your instructions. Even Mary laughed at me because I still thought about such things. Therefore, dear Stewart,

please don't forget the promise you have given me: next time I go to the hotel, without Mrs. Leagan knowing about it, I expect a special treatment!

Candy”

20. Letter to Miss Mary Darcy

“Dear Mary,

When I saw you giving orders during the opening party with the same energy that had always characterized you, it seemed to me I had gone back in time.

The head house-maid of the Leagans! Without you it seemed that nothing was working! You laughed saying that you were practically the lady of the house, but you and Stewart should really receive an official recognition: the Leagans have a terrible way of treating people.

So Doug quit his job and opened a bakery? When I heard that his business is called *The glutton* I got hungry too! Next time I really hope to go and make a surprise visit to him.

Oh, Mary, I had so much fun listening to your stories! I can't believe that, when Neal decided on his own about our engagement, you put laxative in his tea! It makes me want to laugh just thinking again about it! And it didn't even work! I was so touched when you told me that you couldn't appease your anger in any way regarding this matter.

Even when I was relegated to take care of the horses, you always sneaked something to me. Doug, on the other hand, was bringing to me freshly baked bread...That's why I don't want you to think you did nothing to help me! If I could appreciate my life in the stable, I really did it thanks to you! The bag of chips you cooked for me allowed me to have quiet dreams, and that is something I'll never forget.

Apparently it is said that if Neal still doesn't have a girlfriend, it's all fault of a curse of mine. This is simply typical of Eliza. It makes me laugh...Now I am a sorceress too?

It was wonderful to see you and I look forward to the day when we can talk again!

Next time I go to the main residence of the Ardlays in Chicago, I will let you know (in secret).

Thank you for giving me Mr. Whitman's address! I'll write to him immediately!

Candy”

21. Letter to Mr. Jacob Whitman

“Dear Mr. Whitman,

I don't even know how to begin this letter...

It's Candy! It's been a very long time, but I've always kept thinking about you, Mary and all the others.

Some time ago I was invited to the opening party of the Leagan hotel in Miami. You will be surprised to know that I received an official invitation from them, won't you?

That occasion gave me the opportunity to see again Mary and Stewart.

It was exactly Mary who told me about your moving to California and gave me your address. However, I just couldn't decide to take up the pen...Memories were too intense to bear...I believe you can understand me.

Dear Mr. Whitman, I want to thank you for having taken care of the rose garden with so much devotion. Even Great Uncle William has informed me about your kindness.

I was sad to know that the Lakewood residence had been abandoned and now it's no longer used, but when I found out that, every time you went there, you took care of ventilating the rooms and watching over that immense garden, I felt a great emotion. I really thank you from my heart.

I visited Lakewood after a long time and I found it the same. The Gate of the Roses, the Stone Entrance and the Water Portal...and then the forest...

You know, wherever I go, the images of those trees and of the rose garden have never left me. I always wondered if the Sweet Candy roses were still in bloom, and when I was told that every spring they came back to life, even increasing in number, I remained speechless for a moment.

Since that day I left Lakewood, so many things have happened.

I suppose that you have already heard about Stear. There are events so painful that they can't become memories yet.

Maybe the villa's three gates are still waiting for their respective owners to return.

At this moment I'm back in my hometown, where Pony's Home is, and I'm working as a nurse at Dr. Martin's Happy Clinic. Of course, I'm also helping at the orphanage, and my days are busy enough.

Mr. Whitman, you must know that during my visit in Lakewood, I asked to be given a Sweet Candy rose bush. I intend to cultivate it with dedication near Pony's Home and make it increase in number. I

have improved a little in gardening, seriously! Imagine that now I can also distinguish weeds from flowering plants!

I hope that even in sunny California, surrounded by the affection of your children and grandchildren, you continue to make many flowers bloom. In the hope that some day I can see you again, I wish you the best of everything.

Candy”

22. Letter to Mr. George Villers

“Dear George,

I’m glad to know you’re recovering from the flu. A person like you couldn’t possibly fall ill! I wouldn’t like you to have contracted any powerful virus at the Leagan party! In any case, even Great Uncle William, knowing how rarely you get sick, is very worried.

You are my hero in a shining armor, my White Knight (that’s perfect for a girl whose last name is ‘White’, don’t you think?), the strong man whom I can always count on! You should always be healthy! Every time I’ve been in trouble you have come to my rescue, but until this moment I believe that I have never thanked you in an appropriate manner.

The letters you sent me always contained only serious and formal messages from Great Uncle and just receiving them put me in a state of agitation. However, now I know why you behaved in such a rigid manner and almost made me want to laugh. You were trying to stop my questions in any way, weren’t you?

I always asked you to tell me anything about Great Uncle; I did nothing but insist on the subject and I was so anxious to meet him. But you never gave me even the smallest clue! You are really trustworthy! Now I understand why they say that the Ardlay house would be nothing without George!

All of us had always believed that Great Uncle William was an old and sick man! I was also convinced that he was a kind of a centenarian hermit who could barely breathe, but his mind was still perfectly clear! Or rather, that’s what you wanted me to believe!

Now that the mystery has been solved, I *intentionally* address him as if he were a very old man and never stop calling him Great Uncle, and he no longer knows what to do to make me forgive him. It’s a small revenge that I’m entitled to take, don’t you think?

Dear George, I remember our first encounter as if it were yesterday. I can never forget the trip to Mexico, the country where I had had to live and work.

Suddenly, someone put a hand on my mouth and kidnapped me! I fought with all my strength, but you weren’t at all upset (I think I gave you some small scratches...and also forgive me for that bite on your arm)!

But then you told me that I could rest assured because you didn’t want to hurt me. Inexplicably, that moment your warm and sincere voice calmed me down. Even your clear eyes reassured me, and I convinced myself that you couldn’t be a bad person. What happened afterwards seems even now like a dream to me, and the very

memories are vague. I couldn't believe I had been adopted by the Ardlays, but I was even more ecstatic with the idea that I would see Anthony and the others again. I couldn't contain my joy.

And later...a single word spoken by you, even though you are so taciturn, was enough to make me decide to go to England. Please, teach me how to do that! How do you motivate people's hearts without speaking? I speak at least a hundred times more than you, but the children at Pony's Home simply ignore me.

Well, at this point I would say that it's time for you to take your temperature. Well? If it has come down, you can go on reading! Great Uncle William is so kind in saying that there is no better nourishment than my chatter, so you'll see that it will be good for you too!

Dear George, you never revealed to me anything about Great Uncle, but on the contrary he is pretty talkative and has told me a lot of things about you.

I found out that you are an orphan too (this made me feel even closer to you) and that, although it seems impossible to me by the way I know you, you were a very troublesome boy, at least until you met Sir William C. Ardlay, the previous head of the family. What a wonderful incident! During a journey in France, his suitcase, which contained some important documents, was about to be stolen...And that's how you met! Maybe Sir Ardlay saw something in your eyes, and instead of getting angry, he took you with him and brought you to the United States. He is really the most worthy Ardlay predecessor I have ever known. He was not only sensible in business but he also knew how to properly value people.

That man was concerned about giving you an education (in which of course you achieved excellent results!) and he raised you and loved you as a son. You answered and surpassed all his expectations. Then, shortly before dying suddenly while engaged in work, he entrusted to you his beloved William A. Ardlay.

Oh, George, don't be angry with Great Uncle for talking too much: It happens to people of a certain age to become more talkative! Of course, I'm joking...

While he was telling me all this, Great Uncle's eyes were moist. He said that you have been by his side since his childhood, that you were always taking his part and that you are the person he's always been able to trust. He also confessed to me that it was precisely thanks to your presence that he was able to lead the free life he wanted. He regretted having given you so many worries...and he is right.

I can very well imagine your pain when you knew he had disappeared. Suddenly there were no more messages from you...And when I think that, in order not to make Great Uncle William worry, I avoided writing to him about what had been happening to me, I simply want

to laugh. But a serious person like me could never have told anyone that they owed their own life to a strange man who lived in the forest of Lakewood and occupied without permission a cabin belonging to the Ardlays!

And you, of course, couldn't possibly imagine that it was *myself* who had been taking care of him! People's lives are really such amazing stories!

When they were going to force me to accept the engagement with Neal, you, the emblem of fidelity, disobeyed Great Uncle's orders for the first time. You had an expression of anguish, but you were so kind to reveal to me the place where I could meet him. He was there, in Lakewood. I'm truly grateful to you! Do you understand now why I call you my White Knight?

I hope that some day I'll be able to pay back all that you have done for me. If we were closer I would have taken care of you without leaving you alone for a moment (And don't tell me now that you feel relieved! I may not look like it, but I'm a wonderful nurse!).

I forgot; have you taken your medicine? I recommend you, at least now you're sick, not to think about work and to rest as much as you can!

What do you think? With such a long letter, haven't I let you rest properly? You are right! Well, I'd better stop here. Next time we see each other, I'll have you try an excellent piece of cheese made with my own hands. Now rest, and may your dreams be wonderful.

Candy"

Narrative – Part 4

In the half-dark study, I shift my gaze from the photograph of the party celebrated by the Leagan family to a small sepia-colored picture located next to it, with a blackened silver frame. The photograph is out of focus, and everything looks a little fuzzy, giving the feeling that it's actually from another world. In front of us there is a kind of rudimentary airplane, clearly built by hand. Archie, Annie, Patty... everybody looks happy. Even I, located at the centre, the only one wearing a helmet on the head, am laughing graciously.

This photograph was taken shortly before the maiden flight of the airplane constructed by Stear. They had all refused (even Patty!) and there was only me left to offer as a volunteer along with its creator. The only one missing is Stear, the artist of the picture.

The image turned out to be so moved precisely because the camera had also been constructed by my friend. Many photographs came out of that device of his, all of them out of focus. Archie remarked:

“My brother's inventions, all the same...”

Later, with his eyes red, he gave me a photograph.

As it was expected, the motor of that device exploded in the air and we had to abandon it using the parachutes prepared for any possibility, but Stear didn't seem surprised and even claimed that everything had turned out exactly as he had expected. And to think that I had trusted him, although not completely, and had accepted to accompany him...

I remember that war was becoming worse and worse at that time, but on the outskirts of Chicago there was still a peaceful atmosphere.

Looking at that photograph taken by Stear and in which he is absent himself, it seems to me I can see the world through his eyes. That day he was the most enthusiastic of all.

I'm still wondering if he had already made the decision to enlist in the army as a volunteer. The photograph, already out of focus, has become even less clear.

I remember it was an afternoon full of light. Although only for a moment, we had seen from the sky the immense residence of the Ardleys and the beautiful extending countryside. A bird that was flying in complete tranquility had been frightened by our presence and had suddenly changed its route, making us laugh. An instant later, the motor had abandoned us.

I turn my eyes away from the photograph and feel the tips of my fingers trembling.

I am the one who seems the happiest of all, and that's exactly what I can't forgive myself for. That day I couldn't perceive in the least the

worries Stear had in his heart; I was too absorbed in myself. I was concerned about Albert, but above all I was happy with the thought that I could see Terry again. Yes, soon I would see him again!

Terrence Graham had been selected to play the male leading role in *Romeo and Juliet*, while the female part had been given to a beautiful rising actress, Susanna Marlowe. The gossip magazines had already begun to be curious and to insinuate that there was a relationship between them, but that didn't disturb me, because I was sure about Terry's feelings.

When he had come to Chicago for a charity performance of *King Lear*, we ran one after the other without being able to meet. Just to see him, I had abandoned my night shift to watch the performance, a behavior certainly unworthy of a nurse. At the same time, he had waited for me in front of the hospital until dawn. When we understood how things had happened, our feelings became clearer. I didn't need to explain to him the motive that had pushed me back to the United States; Terry already knew everything.

Later I tried to write to him addressing my letters to the theatre company, but almost none had reached its destination. Or rather, they hadn't been delivered.

The reason was Susanna Marlowe. At that time, the anger I felt towards her almost made me want to cry, but now I think I can understand how she felt. When you love someone from the bottom of your heart, your thoughts can no longer remain clear.

Romeo and Juliet was a title that reminded me of the May Festival, and Terry had promised to invite me to the performance, assuring me that he had also considered the tickets for the train. I couldn't have been happier and I was sure that this time I would see him again. I simply couldn't think of anything else. When I got on the first morning train leaving for New York, strangely Stear appeared alone to say goodbye to me. I remember his image on the platform, wrapped in the morning mist...It's the last memory I have of him.

It was there that he gave me that music box which was capable of producing such a wonderful melody. How many times its music had comforted me...

I bite my lip trying to hold back my tears and hurry back to the living room.

The encrusted jewelry box is still on the table. I open it once again, taking into my hands that small object, the Candy Happy Maker music box, which Stear made up for me.

23. Letter 2 from Archibald Cornwell

“Dear Candy,

I was very happy to receive your letter. At this moment there is only one person with whom I can speak freely about my brother, and that person is you.

How I would like to shout at you with all my might that I’ve been a fool! Certainly you are the only one who is capable of understanding such a reproach on my part.

Our parents are dejected, and do nothing but cry over Alistair’s death. They keep repeating that they should have lived with us for many more years. Even Great Aunt Elroy seems she hasn’t touched her food for several days.

How could Stear have done this to all of us? And then, what can I tell Patty? If he cared so much about her, he should never have gone to war. Hadn’t he returned to Chicago exactly to escape the conflict?

We were only two years apart, and I had always been convinced I knew everything about my only brother, but now I discover that I didn’t know him at all. Whenever he tried to talk to me about the war, I wasn’t paying any attention, but now I know that I should have listened to him.

Since he was little, he had never endured confrontations. No doubt Anthony was a quiet boy, but with him, who was the same age as me, I had the opportunity to fight, which never happened with Stear. Now I understand how foolish Anthony and I had been to believe ourselves to be the only ones who had inherited all the fervor that characterizes the Ardlays. We considered Stear too quiet, but among all of us he was probably the purest and the most capable of great outbursts.

But why did he enlist as a volunteer? America hadn’t even entered the war...

You know, Candy, thanks to your letter I think I have understood something more about him. Probably he couldn’t stay here surrounded by amenities, while in the world many boys like him were fighting. Maybe it’s like you said, and he really believed he could spread from the sky a kind of ‘peace virus’.

However things may have happened, I’ve been left alone.

Anthony had lost his mother when he was little, and we spent a lot of time together. The three of us grew up next to each other, playing and fighting like brothers.

Stear was an exemplary older brother and undoubtedly, even if we had not been related, I would have loved him as a friend. I lost both a brother and a friend at the same time.

Oh, Candy, how much I miss Lakewood, the place where we met. Anthony's and Stear's lives were so brilliant those days. And I could say the same thing about my own life...

Your Miss Pony is right: we continue our lives walking on a road full of turns. That doesn't mean there is no room for hope in the end.

Stear certainly didn't regret it. If you say so, I'll believe it too.

My thoughts aren't completely clear yet, but I'm beginning to discover what I want to do with my life. From now on I'll dedicate myself seriously to studying: as a member of the Ardlay family, I have a job waiting for me. I'll do my best, and I'll do it for Anthony and Stear too.

Annie comes every day to visit me because she's worried about me. She doesn't force me to talk about anything in particular, but she is close to me with subtlety. To be honest, I really appreciate very much such consideration on her part.

Candy, I put you in charge of Patty. When the war is over we will all meet in Lakewood for Stear's memorial!

Stop worrying about me and think more about yourself! You know, I've seen you a little thinner (won't you be happy about that?).

Always take care of yourself, all right?

Archibald Cornwell"

24. Letter to Miss Candice White Ardlay (from Rolf Baughmann)

“Dear Miss Candice,

I am in a war zone and I’m afraid I have received your letter with some delay. I can only hope that this answer of mine reaches you, entrusting it to God’s mercy.

If I can express myself sincerely, speaking of Alistair Cornwell is something very painful to me. He was a valuable and excellent subordinate for me. Also in the army we all called him Stear, using his nickname, and I imagine it won’t be difficult for you to believe that everybody loved him very much. In such a claustrophobic situation, his smile, so radiant and pure, doubtless brought a great comfort to many of his companions, including me.

He was defined as a great inventor, but most of the time his creations became a source of laughter. To give you some examples, once he designed a device to make water out of the trumpet that was played to wake up the soldiers, while on another occasion, during flight exercises, he managed to draw a rainbow in the sky.

However, his ability in flying and in the maintenance of the aircraft was great, so much so that it made me wonder where he had acquired all that knowledge. My only regret is that I haven’t had the opportunity to praise him even once.

Probably Alistair Cornwell was a man very far from the reality of the war.

Before reading your letter, I didn’t know that he had a girlfriend, and that she was wearing glasses. But now I understand why he had drawn a pair of glasses on his plane. Stear had gone away with his beloved, disappearing in the setting sun.

Especially now that he’s gone, I suppose it’s difficult to understand the feelings that push someone to go voluntarily to the battlefield and come face to face with death, but there are things against which a man can’t throw back. I think fighting was like a prayer to him. According to the news we received, his plane was shot down after an intense battle in the sky. It seems there was an opportunity to beat the enemy, but Alistair Cornwell decided to sacrifice himself.

War is cruel and inhuman. Certainly he was aware of that.

I have been informed that his plane, rather than rushing, was as if it had immersed itself into the sun. I want you to know that on that day the evening sky was illuminated by an intense light, wonderful and sweet, that I had never seen since I arrived in France.

Encouraged by the hope that this war will end soon, I'll continue to devote my strength to the allied countries. I pray every day for Alistair Cornwell's soul to rest in peace and for his family to find serenity.

Rolf Baughmann”

25. Letter 2 from Patty

“My dearest Candy,

Thank you! Thousands and thousands of thanks! Thank you!

I went to the residence of the Cornwells and Archie gave me to read Captain Baughmann’s letter. I read it again and again, but every time the tears clouded my vision, preventing me from going on. I had to blow my nose, I wanted to cry and smile at the same time...Archie joked saying to me that apparently I had many things to do.

Stear’s mother never leaves that letter, so Archie gave me a copy. That made me cry again.

Candy, did you know that Stear’s handwriting resembles Archie’s? On the other hand, they’re brothers...

You don’t have to worry about me anymore. Since you slapped me through your tears, my mood seems to have calmed down a little. You certainly hit me hard! It hurt me...

That moment I was really thinking to follow Stear in death. He enlisted without saying anything to anyone. If I had known, I would have stopped him with all my strength, but he didn’t say anything even to me...so I was convinced that he had never loved me, and I felt very sad and distressed...

I loved him! I was really in love with him and I considered him my fiancé...then I lost all the certainty I harbored in the feeling that united us, and I couldn’t bear it.

However, the Captain’s letter has cleared all my doubts. I have understood that, even when they are alive, there are moments when people are forced to separate...But maybe you know that better than I do...

He is dead and I have to accept it. I’ll never forget him, but unfortunately we’ll never meet again...

How strong you are, Candy. I’ll take your example and become stronger too. I imagine that also at the Happy Clinic, your new working place, your days are very busy. But are you sure that Dr. Martin is qualified? I wonder if Albert can really improve in the hands of that doctor who seems an alcoholic and does nothing but play with that wire puzzle. Are you at least getting a salary worthy of being called so?

Annie and I are worried about you. Our friend seems to me a little annoyed and says that, at least in such cases as this, you could use the Ardlay family’s help.

Dear Candy, apparently America is going to enter the war too.

My mother is coming to Chicago next week. She must collect material for her work, but maybe both she and papa will settle here. With all probability, I'll leave the house of the Winstons, the family with whom I have been staying until now, and I'll go to live with her.

Stear introduced me to Mr. and Mrs. Winston, and they are also distantly related to the Ardlays. They're always talking about him and that's not easy for me, but the thought of leaving that comfortable and elegant house makes me a little sad.

When you have a day off, Annie and I want to prepare a chicken pie and come to visit you at the House of Magnolia. Albert appreciated that very much the other day.

I forgot, I asked my mother to go to the Blue River Zoo and bring me a lot of Hughley's photographs. Perhaps if he saw them, Albert could remember something...

I hope to see you again soon.

With all my friendship,

Patty"

26. Letter 2 from Annie

“Dear Candy,

The sky has a greyish color, as if it were going to start raining at any moment.

I have always hated this kind of days. They make me feel some anxiety inside of me. On days like these, when we lived at Pony’s Home, you always acted like an older sister and read to me happy books with illustrations.

The last time Patty and I brought you the chicken pie we had prepared, you couldn’t even finish it, and that alarmed me. You were so proud because its taste was becoming similar to that of Miss Pony’s recipe...You normally eat even my share, but instead...

Patty and I know that your concern is not only about Albert.

Stear’s death...there are no words to describe what it means to all of us. I have never had many chances to talk with him, but through my relationship with Archie I always felt he was someone close to me. I also know that he continuously supported us.

Whenever I think of Patty, I really don’t know what to do. It’s enough for me to imagine myself being in her place and having lost Archie to understand her pain. She’s doing everything she can to keep going, and I truly admire her very much.

However, if I decided to write to you today, it was not to speak about her. I’m extremely worried about you.

I know you don’t want me to ask you anything, that’s why I refrain from doing it, but I can understand what you feel, Candy. I know how much it cost you when you had to be separated from Terry.

Even to just remember how you looked that snowy day is terrible for me. You returned so quickly from New York and you were devastated...It wasn’t because of the flu that you had such a high fever, was it?

You left full of joy to reunite with Terry, and when you came back you told me calmly that you had returned earlier just because several circumstances had occurred and you had decided to never see each other again. But I perceived your enormous effort in saying those words, and I felt very sad for you.

I was abandoned along with you and we grew up together, Candy. I think I can understand you better than any other person, just as you can read in my heart!

Since that day I started looking for information in newspapers and magazines, even in those gossiping about celebrities. So I think I have understood more or less how things are.

During the stage rehearsals, one of the scene lights crashed to the floor, hitting Susanna Marlowe and causing her very serious injuries that will force her to spend the rest of her life in a wheelchair. All this happened because she threw herself on Terry in an attempt to save him...

But I don't believe a single word about the alleged romance between those two! From what they write, it almost seems that she sacrificed herself in his place, but she certainly didn't think in the least about taking such a risk!

I think I can imagine how distressed Terry is and that he feels responsible for the injuries that girl suffered. In fact, she must give up her promising career as an actress. Certainly Terry isn't inconsiderate, otherwise you would never have fallen in love with him.

But I'm angry, Candy! Very, very angry! I can't help imagining what would have happened if Archie had been in Terry's place. I would never give him up, even if Susanna was in the middle, never!

To be honest, I think Archie is still in love with you. You don't need to deny it; he is an open book to me. Despite being aware of this, I have never been able to give him up. Yes, I even came to hate you for this. However, little by little, I feel that Archie is beginning to notice me.

But you, Candy, why did you come back immediately and let Terry go so easily? Surely you know what happened next...There is even a rumor of an engagement, but above all they say that Terry's performance has been terrible. There are only negative reviews about him. His interpretation is totally devoid of energy, and it seems that even the theatre company, unable to support him anymore, will soon abandon him. Terry's suffering has come as far as that, and I can never forgive Susanna who, in spite of everything, keeps him tied to her!

You have always listened to my problems, haven't you? Then why don't *you* confide in *me*? I beg you, don't give up Terry as if he were nothing! I can't accept that!

I'm not good at talking, but I can't stay on the sidelines either, and that's why I've written this letter to you.

I pray every day for you and for Albert. I pray next time I see you that you can be again the Candy you had always been, full of life!

Annie"

Narrative – Part 5

When I received that letter from Annie, I couldn't hold back my tears. I was happy to feel her so close to me.

I continued to behave with my usual cheerfulness, but my friend had well sensed my true state of mind. Whenever I was alone, I actually burst into an endless crying. I was almost irritated by my own behavior, but no matter how many tears I shed, my eyes seemed like a fountain intended never to dry.

I could only think of the fact that I would never see Stear again and that, in the same way, I couldn't ever see Terry again too.

At that time there was something Annie didn't know, something about Susanna Marlowe. As a matter of fact, I had realized that girl loved Terry more than her own life.

Susanna was not a bad person.

The day I went to visit her at the hospital it was snowing. Terry hadn't even informed me about what had happened, and I was sure that her physical condition was not serious.

I found out about her at the theatre. I had sensed there was something strange, because I knew that Juliet's role should be played exactly by Susanna. Then, in the lobby, I had heard people talking about her and the accident in which, in order to protect Terry, she had suffered grave injuries. According to what they said, as a result of what had happened, she was pressing him to announce their formal engagement. Completely shocked, I fainted.

I hated her. It seemed incredibly wrong to me to try to keep Terry tied up with those tricks, and I was trembling with rage.

I had gone there to watch Terry playing the leading role, but the play was now the last thing I was thinking about, so I went straight to St. Jacob's Hospital, where I knew she had been hospitalized. It was snowing and it was a very cold night.

I had finally managed to see Terry again. Before that, when his theatre company had spent a night in Chicago, I had tried to find him at the hotel where he was staying, but Susanna had sent me away. I knew she had hidden the letters I had sent him, and I was determined to make sure she would never again come between us.

I had absolutely decided to talk to her directly, but then I discovered that her condition was much more serious than I had thought, and even that the love she felt for Terry was much deeper than I had believed.

Saying that her very existence would only be a burden for us, that snowy night, Susanna even tried to jump off the hospital rooftop. If I hadn't stopped her, no doubt she would have done it.

I understood instantly that everything was lost.

He was there on the rooftop, astonished. We had been united under the incessant snow after the end of the performance. Without saying a word, he took in his arms that devastated girl who was crying. I can still remember that expression, so full of pain, on Terry's face... Unable to bear it, I lowered my head.

Then I made my decision: I had to give him up. I had to do it so as not to cause him any greater suffering. Susanna and myself. How could I compare the strength of love we both felt for the same boy? I would have wanted to scream that *I loved him too...*but neither Terry nor I would ever have been able to move on forgetting about her. I understood in a moment that, if we had abandoned her, none of us would ever have been happy. I just wanted to leave. To leave as soon as possible.

That night Terry and I didn't exchange more than a few words. While I was crossing the threshold of the hospital, ready to leave, he unexpectedly caught up with me from behind and hugged me suddenly, holding me tight.

'Please...let's stay like this...only a moment longer...'

His voice...that deep voice I loved so much. I had never wished so intensely that time would stop. I remember his cold tears on my neck. And then...

The warmth of that chest that is still beating inside me.

The music box is playing its melody.

That foggy morning, when I was leaving for New York, Stear gave me the Candy Happy Maker music box, saying:

'Every time you make it play, you'll get closer and closer to happiness.'

You were right, Stear: that snowy night you saved me. Without that calm and happy music, I wouldn't even have managed to get back to Chicago.

Since that day, every time I felt sad, I listened to its melody until one day it broke. I was very depressed, and it almost seemed to me that I had lost the last thing that kept me united with my friend, but some time later *he* easily managed to repair it. Since then I have always been afraid that it would be ruined again, that's why I've kept it in a safe place as a valuable object.

It's been so long since I've heard that soft music of which I don't even know the title. Possibly it was Stear who composed it. I lean on the chair and listen to it entranced. I don't want to remember anything else; I just want to listen to this melody which makes my heart

vibrate. However, little by little, the notes become slower, until they completely stop.

Suddenly, I turn my gaze to a portrait peeking out of the jewelry box. I can't help smiling, and I reach out my hand to take it.

It is Albert's portrait drawn by Dr. Martin. It was made when my friend suddenly disappeared and we all started looking for him. I tried to draw one too, but that was too childish and didn't look like him at all.

Later, however, that portrait was especially appreciated by Great Uncle William, and now it's hanging on a wall in his office. It seems that even George defined it with the utmost seriousness as 'an invaluable masterpiece'.

After he was discharged from the Room Zero of St. Joanna's Hospital, Albert and I started living together.

Due to my decision I had been dismissed, but that did not affect me because I had promised to be by his side until he recovered.

That was what I wanted, and I would never have imagined that one day, unexpectedly, he could disappear without saying anything to me, still without memory and in a precarious physical condition.

When he left I started looking for him everywhere, without having the slightest idea of where he might have gone. There were days when I felt oppressed by a deep feeling of anguish.

The landlady of the House of Magnolia, Mrs. Gloria, had informed me that she had seen him secretly talking to a suspicious looking man dressed in black. She even suspected that he had connections with the mafia, and he was pressured to leave me.

However, I never believed those rumors.

Albert and I had promised to share everything, good things and bad. It had been himself who proposed that to me. I could talk to him about anything: about Terry, about Susanna...things I didn't confess even to Annie. In the same way, I was convinced that he also would share everything with me, but...

I was really worried that something bad might have happened to him. Before leaving, he had left me a large amount of money to apologize for the 'trouble' he was sure he had caused me, but actually that was the last word I would have liked him to use. Besides, I didn't know where all that money came from.

How many sleepless nights I spent, full of anxiety, not knowing where he was...When we met again, many doubts were clarified in an instant, but at any rate, I was angry. I remember shouting at him:

'I was so worried it seemed to me I had grown old all of a sudden!'

And he replied laughing:

'I prefer that you look a little older instead of being taken for my little sister.'

However, at the same time, he said that with great seriousness. Then he narrowed his eyes, as if he were making fun of me.

Albert has always been very good at confusing my thoughts.

We lived together pretending to be brother and sister.

At that time I was wondering if our life was like that one in a normal family, but probably that was not true. I wouldn't know how to explain it, but deep in my heart I knew that he was someone special. I wonder what he was thinking about it...

He's a really exasperating man...

27. Letter 3 from Archie

“Dear Candy,

I’m in a hurry, that’s why I’m leaving this note under your door. I’ve heard some disturbing rumors. Be careful with Neal Leagan. Since childhood he has always been inclined to intrigues, and it’s better not to underestimate him. Not to mention that, this time, I believe his intentions are serious.

He’s not one to give up, and you have to be on guard!

We are also doing everything to find Albert, so try not to worry too much.

A quick greeting,

Archie”

Narrative – Part 6

Up to this day I still can't believe that Neal Leagan wanted to be engaged to me.

Archie affirmed that Neal Leagan's intentions were serious, but that is simply not possible: just like his sister Eliza, he despised my origins from the depths of his heart. There were certain things that couldn't change just because I had been adopted by the Ardlays, and a proof for that was Great Aunt Elroy's invariable attitude towards me.

Probably Neal was annoyed by the fact that I didn't bow to his desire. He threatened those around him saying that, if I didn't accept his proposal, he would enlist as a volunteer.

On hearing that the engagement was Great Uncle William's order, I was absolutely dejected. More than anger, I was overwhelmed by a great sadness: I was not a puppet on a string! Was Great Uncle just an eccentric old man, a wealthy gentleman willing to play with people's lives?

However, I have to be grateful to Neal. If it hadn't been for that whim of his, George would never have disobeyed Great Uncle William's orders! Besides saving me, in fact he revealed to me where I could find him.

Certainly life has still many great surprises in store for me, but I really don't believe that what I consider to be absolutely the most amazing event that has ever happened to me will be so easily displaced from the podium. In Lakewood I could finally meet Great Uncle William! And that's how I discovered that Sir William A. Ardlay was none other than Albert...

28. Letter to Dr. Donald Martin

“Dear Dr. Martin,

I can only assume, now that I’m gone, how much you miss the presence of an expert nurse like me! You certainly reproach yourself for not having treated me better when we worked together, but it’s not too late! Christmas is coming...I’m joking, of course...even though I’m pretty serious! (You have fallen off your chair, haven’t you? I’m a clairvoyant!)

In any case, I’m very happy my premonitions have been fulfilled! I was sure that, when you would overcome the problem with alcohol, patients would appear massively at your door! After all, you are the best doctor in Chicago (those were your words)!

Even Sir William A. Ardlay fully agrees to recognize your great abilities. The person who bears this influential name is obviously Albert, to whom you gave your medical care.

The only one who said that Albert would soon recover his memory has been you, doctor. On the other hand, at St. Joanna’s Hospital, he had been forcibly placed in the horrible Room Zero, and certainly he didn’t receive the proper care.

Remains the fact that you were the only one who agreed to attend, without any prejudices or preconceptions, to a complete stranger, penniless and even suspected of having detonated a bomb.

Therefore, besides congratulating you, I send you my sincerest thanks!

What did you say, Dr. Martin? You want a bottle of first quality whiskey as an expression of gratitude? No way! You are done with alcohol!

I know I do nothing but make fun of you, but I really miss the days when I was working by your side. You always seemed concentrated on playing with your wire puzzle, but actually I have learned a lot and now, at Pony’s Home, I’m putting all my knowledge in practice!

Therefore, in the name of the great confidence I have in you, I ask you to accept Albert’s proposal.

He’s really grateful for what you did for us: you held out your hand to us in a moment of great despair. While he was coming back from his work as a dishwasher, Albert was involved in a car accident and he was taken to the Happy Clinic. You not only took care of him quickly, but you did several examinations for free...

I had lost my job at St. Joanna’s Hospital and you immediately hired me. I suppose you did that because you sensed at once my great skill as a nurse, didn’t you?

Nevertheless, doctor, although you are defined as the best physician in Chicago, your talent is wasted as long as you insist on working at that clinic that looks like a pigsty (forgive my frankness, but that's how it is!). It doesn't even have an operating room or a place for medication!

If I try so insistently to persuade you, it's because I want you to quietly accept Albert's proposal and decide to build a new clinic! If you really don't think so, when your activity is well on track you can also return a part of the amount each month.

Everybody needs a doctor like you, Dr. Martin.

Please, consider this offer seriously!

Candy

P. S. It's nineteen days before Christmas!"

29. Letter 2 to Dr. Donald Martin

“Dear Dr. Martin,

I really thank you for the many gifts you have sent us! Actually...I was just hoping you would do it (you have fallen off your chair again, haven't you?)!

You have even sent little gifts for the children...But the real gift for me was your enthusiastic reply. Miss Pony, Sister Lane and I read with tears in our eyes the letter in which you said that you would be more than happy to accept the offer, on the condition that Dr. Martin's New Happy Clinic would be built here, and not in Chicago.

You have given us wonderful news! So you remembered when I told you that in our village there is not even a doctor, let alone a hospital! And to think that you were still an alcoholic at that time...

Villagers and immigrants died due to medical attention that came too late, children and old people who have passed away without even having been seen by a doctor...I grew up listening to countless stories like these. If I had a more receptive mind, I would like to start studying medicine even today, but I'm sure I'm more apt to be a nurse (you think I'm absolutely right, don't you?).

I want to tell you that Albert is also enthusiastic about your proposal.

I hope I can work again by your side one day.

In a separate package I have sent you a new wire puzzle.

Merry Christmas!

Your Candy jumping for happiness”

30. Letter to Mr. Vincent Brown

“Dear Mr. Brown,

Thank you for the beautiful Christmas card you have sent me. I have put it immediately on the mantelpiece.

As you know, I was not allowed to attend Stear’s funeral, but I still showed up, staying outside the church. I can’t forget the joy I felt when you greeted me on that occasion...I had always wondered what kind of person Anthony’s father was. Unfortunately, I wasn’t allowed to attend your son’s funeral either, and maybe that’s why, even today, I sometimes find it impossible to believe that Anthony and Stear have really left us.

Lately, both in the main residence of the Ardlays and in Lakewood, I have had several opportunities to talk quietly to the portrait of Mrs. Rosemary, Anthony’s mother. There are so many pictures of her!

I use the word *talk* since this is much closer to reality than simply admiring those paintings.

I always feel impressed by the resemblance between mother and son, just as I am astonished by her resemblance to her younger brother, Great Uncle William Albert. I was told that they were very close as brother and sister.

Great Uncle William Albert often speaks with great respect about you, Mr. Brown, as if you were his older brother. He talks to me with great nostalgia about the moments you lived together.

I hope with all my heart that you will come to visit us in the residence of Chicago, and I would be really happy if some day, during the rose season, we walked across the Gate of the Roses in Lakewood together. I would have so many things to talk to you about!

I pray for you to be healthy and to have a calm sea voyage.

Candice W. Ardlay”

31. Letter to the landlady of the House of Magnolia, Gloria Bandog

“Dear Gloria,

It’s been such a long time! Thank you so much for the kind letter you’ve sent me and I apologize for not having sent you earlier my message of gratitude.

I hope everybody at the House of Magnolia is in excellent health!

Albert and I had a truly pleasant stay with you, I assure you about that! So, I beg you not to blame yourself thinking that you threw us out!

It was Albert’s fault. I would suspect him too if I had seen him leaving from the back door of a Chicago bank (accompanied also by a suspicious looking man in an expensive suit), or if I had seen him in a luxurious car! Under those circumstances, it was normal to think that he was involved with the mafia. On the other hand, all of us believed he had lost his memory and we knew he had a dishwashing job in a restaurant. We were even convinced that he was destitute...

I can really imagine how stunned you were when you discovered his true identity in ‘Chicago News Express’. The same thing happened to me.

Albert is the man to whom I owe my life, that’s why I had to intervene when I heard he had lost his memory (although I know he recovered it later and didn’t even tell me) and he had no place to go.

I am the one who should apologize to you for having made you think that he was my brother.

Albert is always very busy, but he told me that with the first chance he gets he would like to come and thank you.

I have returned to my hometown and I’m working as a nurse.

Please give my regards to everybody at the House of Magnolia.

Take care of yourself, don’t forget that!

Candy”

32. Letter to Great Aunt Elroy

“Dear Great Aunt Elroy,

I hope you are well. Please forgive me for taking the liberty of writing to you, and I really hope it won't bother you.

I have felt the need to send you at least a word of gratitude for having allowed me to attend the reunion organized in Lakewood for Stear's memorial.

I would also like to tell you that Dr. Leonard, the director of St. Joanna's Hospital, is a capable and very sensitive physician, contrary to what he may seem to be. I'm sure that he is the most suitable person to occupy the position of the new doctor of the Ardlay family, and that he will also be able to follow up in the best way.

I think Great Uncle William has an extraordinary ability to read the people's hearts (I beg you to forgive me for expressing myself in this manner).

I hope your neuralgia can be relieved.

Candice”

33. Letter to Archibald Cornwell

“Dear Archie,

Have you got used to your new life?

Your decision to attend the University of Massachusetts has also been a great surprise to Annie, but now she has recovered, firmly convinced that you are following your dream.

She has become much stronger, don't you think? She even sent me an admirable letter in which she said that, while waiting for you to come back, she'll try her best to find her way.

The war is finally over, but the world is still in a shock. It is not possible to erase anxiety that is hanging over all of us, but we must move on!

I suppose the memorial in Lakewood has partly encouraged you, Archie, but I also know how much it cost you to return to that residence in which you, Stear and Anthony spent moments of which I was never part.

Great Uncle William said:

‘Every time I see Archibald, I always find him more and more mature and that makes me really happy.’

Certainly these words have a completely different meaning, considering that it was Albert who said them!

Albert and Great Uncle William...I still wonder today if they are really the same person.

I remember that when you found out about it you kept pointing at him with your finger, with your eyes wide open, unable to utter a word! When I recall your expression...Do you remember how many times you asked me to explain the whole situation? *Nine times!* Including the following babble and the conversations you had with yourself.

It amuses me to think of the surprised faces Anthony and Stear would have put on, if they were still with us.

Only very few members of the family knew Great Uncle's secret. I'm amazed by their discretion and cohesion. If I had been in their place, I'm completely sure I wouldn't be able to do the same. No doubt I would have immediately revealed everything (What did you say, Archie? That I'm absolutely right?). As a matter of fact, if Sir William A. Ardlay is the same youthful Albert (who looks even younger than his age), even though he's a good businessman, his appearance doesn't correspond very much to his responsibilities and the role he has to occupy.

As the head of the Ardlay family, Albert is very busy at the moment, and there's almost no way for us to talk quietly. However, despite

being extremely busy, he has been so kind as to go to Lakewood. There, even Patty, always so quiet, asked him why he wanted to hide his identity from us.

Patty...Even she, when her life had to follow an unexpected path, has discovered something she wants to do: when she finished the University of Chicago, she decided to become a teacher! Archie, all of you have started to go on your way! I'm so happy!

Right now Pony's Home is in the middle of reconstruction and extension. Mr. Cartwright, a landowner, has in fact given us the land at a favorable price, and Miss Pony and Sister Lane are very happy: Now they can keep taking care of the children with some peace of mind!

Everything happened thanks to Great Uncle William. He has taken very seriously the matter about Pony's Home, offering also to reconstruct it. However, the teachers have categorically rejected excessive help, not wishing to take too much advantage of his kindness.

When we talk about these things, I always end up expressing myself in a formal tone, and every time Albert puts on such an angry face...But you know, Archie, I can do nothing about it: I can't help thinking that all this support comes from Great Uncle and not from bearded Albert, who at one time looked like a pirate.

The new Pony's Home will have guest rooms, so, Archie, come to visit us! Bring Annie with you, of course!

Dear Archie, take care and make the most of your studies!

I can't wait to see you again.

Candy"

34. Letter 2 to Great Aunt Elroy

“Dear Great Aunt Elroy,

Spring has finally come, even to this village, which was covered with snow for a long time, and the little birds have started singing again. Soon the flowers will bloom again and Pony’s Home will be surrounded by corollas of every color.

I’m happy to know that you are in good health. After a long consideration, I have armed myself with courage and decided to write to you. I beg you to be so kind as to read my words until the end.

I would like to talk to you about Archibald Cornwell and Annie Brighton.

I know very well that you’ll get angry and say that these things don’t concern me, but I absolutely need you to hear me out.

These two love each other for a very long time. Annie already loved Archie before he moved to Lakewood and she has continued to carefully harbor that feeling, being always by his side and gently supporting him. With time Archie also began to reciprocate, and during all this time I have witnessed the path they are traveling together.

I beg you, Great Aunt, accept the sincere feeling that unites them!

I received a letter full of anguish from Archie, in which he tells me that you, Mr. and Mrs. Cornwell and all the members of the Ardlay family have opposed that engagement. I suppose that one of the reasons for so much hostility is Annie’s origins, since she has grown up in the same orphanage with me.

We were abandoned and, as much as we may wish it, we’ll never know who brought us into the world. I’m convinced that our parents were forced to make such a sad decision, but their decision is no fault of ours.

Miss Pony, the woman who brought us up, has always defined what happened to us as ‘a small negligence of God’. The kind of family in which we are born may depend on a slight error from God, but we don’t have to grieve or be angry about this. Miss Pony also affirms that it doesn’t matter where we originate from: what counts is, when we leave this world, to be able to feel that we have lived a full existence.

In the eyes of the people, we may even seem like girls who have had a difficult start, but today I am an incredibly happy person. Moreover, unlike me, Annie was adopted by the Brighton family since she was a little girl and, as you know very well, she was loved and brought up like their true daughter.

I can't deny that the rank of Annie's family is inferior to that of the Ardlays, and I also know that she has been recently aware of the fact that the Brightons have incurred debts of a considerable sum. However, Mr. and Mrs. Brighton have declared that they have no intention of causing you any trouble, and Archie himself has no concern regarding this matter.

Great Uncle William has already given his blessing, and they would have no reason to doubt about making their dream come true, but Archie wishes to have the sincere consent of his parents and of the Ardlay family.

Please, Great Aunt, bless the union of these two young people who are so much in love. I implore you! I'm sure that, once they have obtained your consent, even Mr. and Mrs. Cornwell will change their minds.

Great Aunt, thank you for having read this long letter to the end! Archie doesn't know that I'm writing to you and, of course, the same goes for Great Uncle.

I beg you to forgive me for this meddling of mine, but I ask you one more time to appear magnanimous towards this young couple.

I pray for you to be always in good health.

Candice W. Ardlay"

35. Letter to Alistair Cornwell (never sent)

“Dear Stear,

I have great news! The date of Archie and Annie’s engagement party has been finally fixed!

Great Aunt Elroy and the Leagans (especially Eliza and Neal!) opposed plotting from the shadows and involved the whole family, but in the end the decision that weighed more was that one taken by the head of the family: Great Uncle William has actually given them his blessing, and he has done it wholeheartedly.

Apparently Great Uncle didn’t expect at first such an opposition from Great Aunt; on the contrary, he hoped that everything would be easily resolved. He doesn’t care about people’s origins; that must be the reason why he simply can’t have a good relationship with the rest of the Ardlays.

One of the reasons for that problem is probably because of me. I think that my adoption, carried out without asking for anyone’s consent, is still a deep wound for Great Aunt and the rest. I’m very sorry for all this.

But you already know everything, don’t you, Stear? So you also know that Archie said with a sigh:

‘How I wish Stear was here...’

Of course! Surely you know too about Albert’s true identity!

Since you started this long journey, so many things have happened. All the time I wondered what you would have thought and, without realizing, I started writing letters to you in my heart, as I’m doing right now...

When I talk to you I feel calmer and, inexplicably, it almost seems to me that I get a reply from you. Stear, has by any chance been invented a postal service in heaven?

Since the day I received the invitation for Archie and Annie’s engagement party, I can’t help feeling happy and I think you are the only one with whom I can share this same kind of happiness!

‘And what about me?’ Great Uncle William has asked me many times with exasperation. Assuming the air of Albert (although he is Albert himself) he is eager to attend the engagement party.

However, Stear, you have been watching both Archie and Annie for much longer time than I have, and I wonder how happy you would certainly have been...And who knows what an incredible invention you would have designed for this celebration... When I think about it, I just laugh. There is still time for the wedding, but Annie is happy to become your future sister-in-law!

At first Mr. and Mrs. Cornwell were against this, but it seems they were only influenced by Great Aunt. But now they treat Annie with great kindness.

You know, your father behaves exactly like you. He speaks in the same way, and even when he talks seriously he almost seems to be joking...I didn't know that he also liked to destroy anything and have fun reconstructing it. That's why Patty feels sad and relieved at the same time whenever she sees him.

Oh, Stear...I'm excited about the news of Annie's engagement, but on the other hand, I feel such a great pain when I think of Patty...But I'm sure that you are always there to watch over her!

Right now Patty aims to become a teacher and is completely enthusiastic about it. She has even started raising a turtle she has called Hughley the Second! Certainly she knows better than anyone how much you would hope to see her happy.

You want to know if I'm happy? Of course I am! After all, I've got the Candy Happy Maker box. You have been able to create an object with extraordinary effects; you are really an incredible inventor!

Annie and Archie's engagement will take place in Lakewood. It was precisely Archie who secretly revealed it to me. That day they will make their entrance through your Water Portal, and they are determined to leave everybody speechless. Help us make sure that everything works out to perfection, will you?

I will surely look for you in the sunlight and, of course, I will look for Anthony too...

That day, please, bless Archie and Annie with a very gentle breeze.

A letter from your Candy”

Narrative – Part 7

I take out of the encrusted jewelry box a splendid white card, decorated with a lace design: it's the invitation for Archie and Annie's engagement. The color has remained intact and I relive in my mind the deep emotion I felt the day I received it.

The sumptuous wedding that was celebrated later was wonderful, but the engagement party that took place in Lakewood, so full of warmth, woke up among my many memories, and tears began to flow without stopping.

Lakewood was full of flowers and Annie, in a simple dress of aquamarine chiffon, seemed to glow in an almost blinding light. My friend was beautiful and sure of herself. Of course, the same could be said of Archie.

The blue sky that almost made our eyes hurt, the perfume of flowers in the air...I suddenly noticed that a very gentle breeze was blowing.

I know I can write a letter to Stear in my heart whenever I want to, but at that time it was impossible for me to do the same with Anthony.

The clear light of Lakewood, the scent of the forest, the resplendence of the lake and then the perfume of the roses...it seemed to me that there was a part of him in all those elements.

Between those trees Anthony had turned to smile at me, and his time had stopped forever.

Sometimes I wonder what would have happened if he hadn't died.

I think we would all have stayed in Lakewood, and nobody would have gone to study in England. Yes...We would never have left, I would never have met Terrence. I even came to think that it was Anthony himself who brought Terrence to my path...At least in that way I could make sense of all the suffering of those days.

After taking a deep breath, I gently touch a pale pink envelope, also kept inside the jewelry box. I can still sense the trail of a sweet perfume.

This is a letter from Eleanor Baker and it also contains a ticket for a theatre performance...

“Autumn performance of Stratford Theatre Company

HAMLET

Director: Robert Hathaway

Starring: Terrence Graham”

Eleanor Baker was very kind in sending me that invitation, but I didn't accept it.

36. Letter to Miss Eleanor Baker

“Dear Miss Baker,

Thank you so much for your letter and your invitation.

You have no idea how much time I spent admiring enchanted that ticket for the performance of *Hamlet*.

I already knew about this play from newspapers and magazines. I always try to avoid information about Terrence, but inexplicably I always end up receiving it, almost naturally.

It’s been a long time since we talked in Rockstown.

I came by chance to that town, while searching for a friend who had disappeared and to whom I owed my life. I would never have thought that Terry was playing in a small theatre of a provincial town, joining a company of traveling actors...I can’t express with words the surprise and the pain I felt that moment.

I had read in the newspapers that Terry’s performance had become less effective, causing him to be fired from Stratford Theatre Company. However, I couldn’t believe it...I tried to convince myself that those were only rumors.

Finally Terry was there, before my eyes...I would have wanted to throw myself towards that miserable and dilapidated stage and, through my tears, to hit him hard on his chest. I would have wanted to ask him, what was the use of that night we separated? But I wasn’t able to do it. However, maybe a miracle happened and the voice of my heart reached out to him.

As a matter of fact, it seemed suddenly that Terry’s performance came back to life, and for a moment I saw the old light shining into him. That moment I was sure he could get back on his feet.

I wanted so much to see him again...but not like this...

When I left the theatre I was confused, no longer knowing what to do. At that moment you spoke to me. You were very kind to me, even though we had met only once.

Terrence Graham was born to be an actor! He can’t be content with a stage and a play of such a level! But you know that better than anyone, Miss Baker.

That night I realized that you had always been worried about him and had watched over him with discretion. Knowing that Terry had a *real* mother made me happy. The fact that we have met in a place like that even made me think that we are pushed by a mysterious power.

I wasn’t surprised when I heard that Terry had managed to return to Stratford Company, obtaining nothing less than Hamlet’s role.

However, I’m obliged to refuse your cordial invitation, Miss Baker.

I would like so much to see him playing, but at the same time I'm afraid. If I saw the play, I would certainly want to meet him. I would expect to say at least a word to him.

And then it's the promise I gave Susanna Marlowe. I promised her that I would never see him again.

I think Terry is perfect to play Hamlet. As the critics anticipate, it will certainly be a great success.

I beg you to forgive me, Miss Baker. I immensely appreciate what you have done. Just by looking at this invitation, it seems to me I can see him on the stage and hear the enthusiastic screams and the endless applause of the public.

I'll keep this ticket as the most valuable of treasures.

Miss Baker, I'll wait anxiously for your next film, and I hope you are always well.

Candice W. Ardlay"

37. Letter to Terrence Graham

“Dear Terry,

Every time I mentally talk to you, my heart seems to turn into a ripe bittersweet apricot, ready to fall on the ground at the smallest breath of wind. These moments I’m almost afraid of breathing.

Congratulations on your great success as *Hamlet!*

By great demand, there was one performance after another, wasn’t there? I have read several articles that spoke enthusiastically about you: ‘The Hamlet everybody had always wanted to see!’ ‘A play that goes beyond all expectations!’ ‘It’s decided! Terrence’s *Hamlet* will also be performed in England!’

Even Great Uncle William speaks easily about you now. At first he tried to avoid this subject in any way, even hiding magazines that contained articles related to you. Contrary to his intentions, it was something that made me suffer and I feel relieved that now we all can behave more naturally.

You know, Terry...Great Uncle William (surprise) is Albert!

Incredible! It’s such a terrible story, isn’t it? And to think that I had been in touch with him even in London! Not to mention that, when I abandoned St. Paul’s Institute, I left to Great Uncle William the diary in which I confided, without hiding anything, all of my feelings.

Therefore, Albert knows well, as well as I do, how much I...He knows how we met each other and how, little by little...In short, he’s aware of everything. I can’t even imagine what his expression was while reading those pages I had written... Imagine we haven’t talked about this subject yet.

Thank goodness Albert didn’t dedicate himself to acting; he’s a brilliant poker face! He would become the greatest rival to you on the stage, you know.

Even when he recovered his memory, he didn’t confess it to me immediately...Until today there are still many mysteries to unveil. However, despite everything, he has really saved me. It was perhaps his presence that allowed me to recover in some way. You don’t know how many adventures I faced until I got to America and found you again. I would have liked so much to tell you everything quietly, but in the end that was not possible. How many letters I sent you without your receiving them...But you wrote to me often...despite all your commitments.

The recipient is always ‘Freckled Tarzan’...I would have liked to receive a more romantic message instead of those sarcastic jokes, but I was always convinced I knew what was in your heart. Even between

jokes, your words were always full of affection and thoughtfulness. Thank you, Terry...

To this day I have been keeping all your letters, but I can't read them again.

I also know that you visited Pony's Home, but that moment I was traveling as a stowaway on board a ship. When the teachers told me of your visit, I felt a great rage. If only I could have returned earlier to America...if only you had come some time later...

And the same thing happened in Chicago. We kept running after each other without ever meeting. However, at that time, I was still convinced that we would gain back everything we had lost, and we would be together for a very long time.

That night in New York, the air was freezing cold, but the snow falling from the sky seemed to emit heat, maybe because I had felt the warmth of your chest on my back.

I remember that you said to me:

'Be happy or else I won't forgive you...'

Terry, I am happy and I want you to be happy too.

'Susanna has supported with her love Terrence's return'. Yes, I have also read articles of this kind.

Susanna is a wonderful person. Above all, it's wonderful that she keeps loving you more than anything in the world. And you, who have chosen to have her by your side, are wonderful too.

Of course, I'll never send this letter; I know that very well. But I'm so happy with your success that I couldn't help writing to you.

Terry...don't forget that in a corner of the American countryside there is an assiduous admirer of Terrence Graham. Don't forget that, when you get on the stage, I'm right here, applauding you with all my might.

P. S. Terry...I loved you.

Freckled Tarzan"

Narrative – Part 8

I turn my eyes to a white envelope, the only thing inside the jewelry box that seems wrapped in an icy halo.

I have read its contents only once, but I remember clearly every word.

It's the first and last letter I ever received from Susanna Marlowe.

38. Letter to Miss Candice White Ardlay (from Susanna Marlowe)

“Dear Candice,

I hope you have returned safely to Chicago.

Please forgive me for throwing you out so quickly and in such a state of mind. I knew what Terrence felt in his heart, but despite knowing that, I couldn't accept losing him.

I remember we also met in Chicago, on the occasion of a charity performance. You showed up one night at the hotel asking about him. I couldn't bear seeing your bright eyes or the fact that he thought nothing but you. I would have done anything so that he would forget you. Compared to losing him, having been disabled means nothing to me...

I ask you to forgive me. Since I started loving Terry, I have become an increasingly mean girl.

Since I was a little girl, my dream has been acting and, to be able to achieve it, I have given up many things. But now...my only wish is to be with Terry and never leave him. I know very well how selfish this behavior is.

That night I couldn't stop apologizing and crying, but he said to me: 'I'll stay by your side...forever...'

He pronounced those words while he was looking at the snow outside the window. His voice was just a whisper but at the same time it was extremely clear. I felt that his soul was going with you, but despite everything I clung to his words.

How can I compensate for such kindness? All I can do is apologize to you in my heart and keep loving him for both of us. He is my life. Candice, I am infinitely grateful to you for having given back to me life and hope for the future.

I pray so that you can find happiness too.

Susanna Marlowe”

Many years have passed since I read in an article about Susanna's death. I had read it only once, but the words were engraved in my mind.

Susanna was dead... That moment I collapsed on the sofa, as if I had lost all of my strength. I was breathless and couldn't stop crying. In the obituary there was a photograph of Susanna, smiling and sitting in a wheelchair. It seems that she worked as a writer and even wrote dramas, some of which had been performed on stage, as the article said. Her relationship with Terrence Graham was well known. He had been living with her all the time, and also supported her while she was

fighting against her illness. However, their engagement had never led to marriage.

Terrence hadn't made any statement yet.

39. Letter to Candy (from T. G.)

“Candy,

How are you?

It’s been a year since then...After this lapse of time, I had promised myself to write to you, but then I let another six months pass, while I was wavering.

However, now I have gathered my courage and decided to send you this letter.

For me nothing has changed.

I don’t know if you will ever read these words, but I wanted you to at least know this.

T. G.”