

Section 3

Narrative 1

It was enough for me to close my eyes in order to see again the blinding light of that day.

Where could I go after leaving St. Paul's Royal College? Only one place was always open for me: Pony's Home.

England and America...Two countries separated by an ocean. I knew it, and yet I didn't hesitate in the least. Now I'm going back to America. And once there, I'll see Terry again...

When I told him what had happened on that trip back to America, *he* began to laugh, finding it very funny. Then he suddenly got serious and held me very tight in his arms.

"You are lucky that nothing bad has happened to you..."

That was true; how reckless I had been...

I had hardly any money left, and I had spent most of it to pay for the carriage with which I had tried to reach Terry before he got on the ship. And I had nobody to ask for help. However, I felt as light and peaceful as I hadn't felt for a long time!

Having my lucky charms, the badge of Prince on the Hill, Terry's white tie and Miss Pony's cross around my neck, I wasn't afraid of anything! I was ready to overcome any difficulty.

If you go forward always keeping a pure heart, your path will open before you.

That's what Miss Pony always said.

The fact is that many people I met on that trip helped me. And at the end of the trip I found my way, my real purpose in life.

I take the jewelry box out of my closet's drawer. That large box, encrusted with small gems and mother-of-pearls, has passed down from generation to generation in *his* family, as *he* told me.

In vain I protested that such a beautiful and precious object didn't suit me; *he* insisted.

"You don't have to put your jewels in there!" *he* replied. "Do whatever you like with it!"

Since then, I've been keeping in it things that are valuable only to me. Souvenirs, newspaper articles, bundles of letters...

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

Above a bundle of letters, the report card of Susie Ann Carson from nursing school smiles at me. Susie sent it to me as a thank you gift

after graduating with honors. According to her, it was thanks to me that she became a nurse.

Now, Susie is working in Calcutta, India, from where she sent me a very exotic postcard, two months ago.

*“My dear, dearest Candy,
I’ve been in Calcutta for two weeks, and I’m beginning to get used to life here.
There are so much to see and hear that I’m astonished! I’m sure you would love this city too!
Every day there are so many patients coming to the dispensary that I don’t even have enough time to eat. If you were here, you could teach me so much, I know it..
I’m doing fine, don’t worry! I’ll write to you again soon!
When will we see each other again? Take care of yourself!
Susie”*

I can see Susie’s cheerful and determined face so clearly in that postcard that a smile appears involuntarily on my lips every time I read it again.

This world is definitely made of several threads. Those threads are so bright!

If I became a nurse myself, it was because of the experience I’ve had while caring for Susie, the youngest child of Mr. Carson who had helped me so much during that period when I had no home. Susie was only three years old at the time and couldn’t accept her mother’s death yet. I had found her reaction so heartbreaking...

And now Susie has become a professional nurse too.

Yes...That long succession of threads results from the meetings I made after leaving St. Paul’s Royal College.

Our meetings in life are like a big tree. Every branch gives life to another, which in turn leads to another, and so on. That’s how Mr. Carson led me to my acquaintance with Mr. Juskin, Cookie, and Captain Niven. And my branches are extending and filling with fresh leaves...

From the bottom of my heart, I thank all these people for what they have given me and for the connections they have helped me to create with more things and more people still.

It’s thanks to all of them that I am who I am today.

And yet, I know I gave concern to so many people, and not just once...

When I finally reached Pony’s Home, I had to write letters to everybody and tell them I had arrived safely...

To Great Uncle William, of course...but also to Stear, Archie, Annie,

Patty...

And to all those who helped me in one way or another during this journey...

“Dear Mr. August Carson,

I hope my letter will find you in good health.

After an incredible amount of adventures and misadventures, here I am, at last (really!) safe and sound, back in Michigan, America!

It’s almost a miracle that I have finally managed to get to Pony’s Home.

Well, no, this is definitely not a miracle...It was simply thanks to you, Mr. Carson, and to all the people who helped me during my journey. Today, having reached my destination, I realize it and gratitude fills my heart.

‘Pony’s Home’ is my birthplace. This is where I’ve spent all my childhood after I was abandoned as a baby and taken in by the two ladies who run this orphanage.

If only you had seen their surprise when they suddenly saw me coming back! They were breathless! Since they welcomed me, I’ve been a source a perpetual source of worry for them, and yet they received me with open arms, with tears and thousands of sighs. I don’t know how to thank them.

Imagine how much all this has restored my strength: I’m in perfect shape!

Mr. Carson, thank you for all you have done for that girl who came from God knows where, got into your cart without asking permission and ate the apples that you had brought for your children...Forgive me for everything!

I had never known hunger in all my life; it was the first time.

I didn’t even have enough money to pay for the train ticket to go to the port, and I had spent the night in an abandoned barn. But that was not the worst; I’ve had the experience of spending a night in the dark, in much worse conditions than those (don’t ask me to tell you in what kind of circumstances), and besides, I’m good at sleeping anywhere...But I must say that facing hunger made me lose control. I stole the snack of Sam, Jeff and Susie, and despite that, they allowed me to secretly spend the night in your barn.

I was afraid of you (it was only natural for you to be angry!), but when I saw those wonderful children of yours, I understood that you were certainly a great father. And I was not mistaken!

You didn’t quite agree at the beginning, but you finally allowed me to sleep at your house. It was so kind of you!

You didn’t ask me any questions. I sensed your determination not to ask me anything, and I found that very kind and attentive on your part.

At that time there were so many things that were difficult for me to say, and it was painful to put them into words. If you had asked me even just one question, I would have lost the energy which had helped

me keep a little of my decency; I would have certainly burst into tears, and I would have made you feel very uncomfortable...

I had just run away from St. Paul's Royal College, a famous boarding school in London.

I imagine you must find it hard to believe that a girl like me attended such a prestigious school.

I've already written to you I was abandoned at birth, haven't I?

Actually, I had been adopted a few months ago. By running away from school I betrayed the person who gave me so much.

But I wanted to return to America as soon as possible in order to see someone.

And at the same time, I didn't want to see that person again without having first found the path of my life, so that I could look straight into his eyes, with my head held high. I wanted him to be happy and proud of me.

Well, I found my path at your house.

Susie had measles, and I took care of her...At that moment, I clearly understood what I wanted to do with my life!

What could I do to be useful...?

To become a nurse, of course!

To study that profession seriously, and live by my own means.

Whereas until now my dream was to be adopted by some rich person and lead a quiet life...

Finally I understood that living in idleness didn't really suit me.

Dear Mr. Carson, how can I thank you for introducing me to Mr. Juskin's shipping company when you realized that I wanted more than anything to return to America? And the money you gave me the day I left was very useful to me. I was sorry to leave the children, but one thing is certain...I couldn't stay indefinitely.

In short, thanks to you, here I am, back in America and so I can finally write to you!

All's well that ends well...

Well, not exactly. To be more precise, serious things are just beginning!

I'll send you more news soon.

Be kind to the villagers as you are to your children. Keep your stubbornness only for good things!

You have a wonderful smile; give it to everyone!

Candy"

*“Dear Samuel Carson,
Dear Jeffrey Carson,
Dear Susie Ann Carson,*

Sam, Jeff, Susie!

I hope you are well!

Thank you for your letter and your pretty drawings!

Congratulations, Susie. You can write now; that’s wonderful!

Reading the letter from all three of you, I recalled your faces during that night, when you secretly brought some bread to me. God, that bread was so delicious!

Sam,

I often talk about you to the children of the orphanage, and tell them you are a hard working boy. Actually, at Pony’s Home, where I live now, the children have no parents and it’s difficult for them to be good older brothers and protect their younger siblings, which you do perfectly. For example, I remember what a devoted assistant you were to me when I took care of Susie who was sick with measles. You were much more efficient than your father, who was too much in panic to be good at anything in cases like this! And I know that sometimes you gave up your snack and let Jeff and Susie share it between them.

My comrades at Pony’s Home squabble trying to catch the biggest cookie. And when I ask them where they have learned these ways from, do you know what they answer me? From the eldest among them (that’s me)! Oh, what a nerve; don’t you agree?

Jeff,

I’m sorry I left without teaching you to climb trees...

The first secret is to be careful not to fall! I started with that rule too, and then I challenged myself to climb as quickly as possible. My record of climbing to the top of the big tree in front of Pony’s Home in three minutes and thirty seconds still holds!

Susie,

I hung the portrait you drew of me on the wall, in front of my bed.

But I hope next time you’ll make me prettier!

(Sam, Jeff, be careful, I can hear you laughing...)

Candy”

*“Dear Mr. Dan Juskin,
Here’s a little riddle for you:
‘Despite a huge amount of freckles, she is pretty and kind...’ Who is it?
it?”*

Mr. Juskin: Candy!

*Well done! Correct answer! Ding dong dang dong...dang! ♪
I can see you, speechless and laughing...You can’t believe it, am I right?*

It’s been such a long time! But it’s me; it’s Candy.

I have some excuse: I wrote you several letters which were all returned to me. It was only after I asked Mr. Carson about you that I got confirmation that you were still alive. I also learned that it was reciprocal, and that you were worried about me too. That’s very kind. And here I am, still in good health!

Alas, your shipping company has closed. I must say it didn’t seem to go very well...

And now you have opened a pub along with your former partner: the ‘Harbor Light’!

Hmm...I’m a little worried.

Mr. Juskin, don’t drink more than your customers; besides, that is not good for your health.

I know; who do I think I am, lecturing you like that? But I happen to be studying to be a nurse. I intend to join a school that will allow me to study while working (which would also pay for the tuition fee...) but I still need to acquire the basic knowledge. So, in the manual there is a chapter about the devastating effects of alcohol. When I studied it, I immediately thought of you. It was thanks to you that I could get on board (hmm...) a ship bound for America, so I wouldn’t like my benefactor to become an alcoholic!

I haven’t told yet the ladies at Pony’s Home that I crossed the ocean as a stowaway, hidden in a large box containing cans. They might faint...

These two ladies are like mothers to me. My fate smiled upon me and sent me to spend my childhood in this orphanage. That was the most fortunate incident in all my life; I sincerely mean it!

I told them it was thanks to the help of many people that I managed to get back. And that is the whole truth, Mr. Juskin!

Mr. Carson introduced me to Mr. Juskin who fulfilled my wish...

How lucky I was to meet you!

In the end, I didn’t have to spend much time in that box of cans, holding my breath so as not to be noticed. What happened next?

Well, the continuation will be on the next issue!

No, I won’t make you languish any longer...

It turns out that I was not the only stowaway on that ship!

I imagined I was the only one who had such ideas...Actually, whatever idea you may have, you'll always find someone who has had it before. My predecessor, in that case, had a very appetizing name: Cookie.

A cookie and a candy together as stowaways; it's funny, isn't it?

Anyway, that was not Cookie's first attempt. He knew the ship like the back of his hand and sneaked around like a mouse.

Obviously people are not so nice. Cookie was quickly caught by the sailors. I had never been so frightened in my life.

Cookie had got caught every time he had tried to get on board as a stowaway, but this time the sailors were so furious that they wanted to throw him into the sea! And what's more, they were laughing! Frankly, even as a joke, people don't do something like that! I was so horrified that I rushed out to save him...And bang! Obviously, they caught me too.

But Captain Niven saved me.

Captain Niven is a taciturn seaman, but deep down he's a kind person.

Thank you, Mr. Juskin, for choosing Captain Niven's ship for me to travel. You did it on purpose, right?

According to what Cookie told me afterwards, Captain Niven used to lead a luxurious ocean liner before, but one of his subordinates made a mistake, and his sense of duty led him to resign. That's why he's in charge of a simple cargo ship today...

Besides, Cookie's father was also a sailor, and Cookie told me about him. He wanted to be the captain of a large ship but died young in an accident. And Cookie wants to make his father's dream come true.

And as I can see, Captain Niven understands Cookie's dream...

In short, thanks to Captain Niven, I could reach America safe and sound.

Thank you for everything, Mr. Juskin!

I hope my letter will arrive safely this time!

Long live the Harbor Light, and may it bring you luck and wealth.

And take care with alcohol!

And since I'm making wishes, I also wish that I become a good nurse!

Candy"

*“Miss Candice White Ardlay,
Sir William was relieved to hear that you are in good health and that
everything seems to be going well for you.
The letters you sent me have arrived safely.
Regarding your wish to enter Mary Jane Nursing School, Sir William
is willing to help you financially, if you don't mind. He will respect
your intentions, whatever they may be in that matter.
In any case, you are still a member of the Ardlay family, nothing has
changed, and he wishes that you are always proud of the name you
bear.*

George Villers”

“Captain Edgar Niven,

I hope you are well.

This morning I went to the forest with the children of Pony’s Home to pick some forget-me-nots, early this year.

This afternoon I’m leaving the orphanage to enter Mary Jane Nursing School. The director of the school, Mary Jane, is a very close friend of my foster mother, Miss Pony. I’ll be able to study while working at St. Joseph’s Hospital which is attached to the school, and that will pay for my tuition. That’s a good idea, don’t you think so?

This time the ship is leaving the port...(All aboard!)

Now, the forget-me-nots in a glass, in front of my eyes, remind me of the color of the sea. You had asked me:

‘All that endless sea is boring, isn’t it?’

I shook my head and answered that I was never bored looking at the sea because its color was constantly changing. Then you nodded several times. These color variations remind me of the passing of time, day after day. The sea...Apparently always the same, but actually always different.

And what about you? What ocean are you looking at right now, Captain Niven?

The letters you are sending me from each port where you tie up make me feel I’m traveling too. There are so many countries I had never even thought of! The children of Pony’s Home have never left their village; generally they imagine that America is the only country that exists. Your postcards help them discover the world. Of course, I include myself among them.

You taught me so many things during that trip.

Not only have you forgiven me for secretly getting into your ship, but you have also helped me. I really don’t know how to thank you.

Cookie told me that you have a daughter about the same age as me who is very sad that you are at sea so often and for so long. You can’t know how happy I was when you told me that I reminded you of her. I also had the impression you were my father, somehow...

I hope Great Uncle William, my adoptive father, looks like you! Well, Great Uncle is still much older than you, Captain...

To encourage myself, I recall what you told me:

‘The sea is not always calm, Candy. It’s like life: sometimes peaceful, sometimes stormy. The ship rocks but does not sink, and continues its journey.’

I also intend to continue my journey against all odds.

I give you my new address. I’m looking forward to your next postcard. Where will it come from? Surprise...

Oh, yes; next time you return to England, don’t forget to visit the pub Harbor Light, near the port. The place is run by Mr. Juskin who is the

one who helped me hide in your ship, inside a box of cans. In other words, he's the one who helped me cross the ocean as a stowaway. He'll be very happy to meet you, I'm sure!

*I'm enclosing a forget-me-not in the envelope.
I wish you good health and fair winds, Captain!*

Candy”

*“Dear Candice White Ardlay,
Say, I didn’t know you had such a long name! I got tired just by writing this...
My name is ‘Cricket Dix’! Not bad either, huh? What do you think about that? Well, we’re not having a competition...
Actually, I’m writing to you just to congratulate you! You have finally started your journey to become a nurse. That’s good.
I had been sailing in the Southern Seas all this time, so I could only read all of your letters at once when I got back.
Captain Niven finally took me as a cabin boy. It’s great, but still, he’s really demanding as a boss.
‘Cookie, if you want to become a captain some day, you have to study properly, my boy!’
What do you think? Do I imitate him well?
Oh, curse! This is a letter, and you can’t hear my voice when I imitate him... Writing letters is really not my style.
In short, he advises me to go to school. If I work well, he’s going to help me, he said.
I’ll work; that doesn’t scare me. You’re not a sailor if you don’t intend to become a captain, that’s what my father always said.
I’m going to work, don’t worry!
You too, Candy.
Work well. But no injections, thank you, not even when you become a real nurse! I don’t know if I can trust Candy’s injections. Well, you’re not very skilled with such delicate things yet.
For the rest, taking care of people and all that, I don’t worry; you are very good at these things. Captain Niven said so when you looked after me, that time I was thrown into the sea.
Of course I still keep the ribbon you gave me in exchange for my cap when we said goodbye.
Don’t give my cap to your little minions, even if they offer you money! Anyway, don’t think I paid only 50 cents to get it; it cost me much more than that!
Well, Candy, I’m not very good at writing, so don’t expect me to send letters very often. But I love receiving them, so write to me as many as you like!
We’re leaving in three days.
Oh, I didn’t tell you. I’ve grown by twenty centimeters since we last met. That makes you jealous, doesn’t it?*

Cookie, aka Cricket Dix”

*“Dear Sam, Jeff and Susie,
Thank you for your kind letter.
I was so moved that my eyes were blurred with tears.
Congratulations on your new mama.
Besides, Victoria is a very pretty name.
I can’t help imagining Mr. Carson with a constant smile on his lips,
and I force myself to restrain from giggling.
Mama Victoria’s portrait by Susie perfectly shows her kindness.
And so does Jeff’s letter too, of course!
I can imagine Jeff and Susie, although their hands are still very small,
helping their father and their big brother Sam do the laundry and
chop wood.
Do you remember what you said, Susie?
That your mama was not dead, and that she had just gone to the other
side of Mount Rodney. I think that over there, on the mountain, your
mama handed over the baton to mama Victoria, and that now she has
safely reached her destination.
‘I entrust my darling Sam, Jeff and Susie to you...’ That’s what she
said to mama Victoria, I’m sure.
Bravo, Sam. You’ve done so much for your family so far. Now you
have to think a little about yourself!
I’m working hard to become a good nurse. Besides, I’m on duty
tonight. It’s almost time to go...
I’ll write to you again as soon as I have a little more time.
Give my regards to your father and mama Victoria.
Candy”*

“Dear Terry...

This letter I’m writing to you will not leave. It will always stay with me, since I don’t know your address.

Terry...

Since my return to America, time has passed...I came back to follow you, and time just flies.

Oh, if only I could make it turn back...

If only I had arrived at the port on time...

If you had come to Pony’s Home to see me when I was there...

I remember that one day you said you would like to visit the place where I grew up. I can still see your smile as I saw it the day you said that.

And you did it! Thank you for coming, Terry...It’s a pity you stayed for such a short time...

Miss Pony and Sister Lane told me you went to see the big oak tree where I used to climb all the time, the apple tree where I learned to throw the lasso, and Pony’s Hill.

Those trees you have touched, the hill you have climbed...That makes those places even more important to me.

Terry...

Now I’ve enrolled in a nursing school. My days are very busy and that gives me great satisfaction.

I imagine you are looking eagerly to your future too.

When we meet again, and I know we certainly will, I’ll be able to tell you something, and I’ll do that proudly!

While waiting for that day, you can be sure I’ll live my life fully and with no regrets.

Freckled Tarzan”

“Dear Candy,

This time, without any scruples, I’m writing to you before my brother does! Actually I don’t feel comfortable writing letters on behalf of both of us.

When you told us that you were studying to be a nurse and working at the same time, I must say I was impressed.

Maybe you have already received a letter from Annie on that subject: we’ll soon return to America too. There’s a war wind blowing in Europe. I hope my premonition is unfounded...

I thought I had so much to tell you...but in the end, that’s all I can write this time.

I’ll definitely drop by and see you before I return to Chicago.

Archie”

“So, dear Candy, it seems Archie has let the cat out of the bag and told you we are returning to America!

However, I had suggested to him that we should play fair and write a letter to you together, but that ridiculous fellow didn't resist and wrote to you first without telling me anything. And I had intended to do the same to him, and what's more, to surprise you by appearing crowned with glory in front of your bewildered eyes...

Well, what I mean is that I long to see you again.

The atmosphere in London is tense these days. And it's not only here. It must be the same in other countries. The Ardlay clan has a quick perception; it's clear that the situation is distressing and our return to America was a wise decision. Besides, Archie and I have every reason to be happy; the rules of St. Paul's Royal College were beginning to weigh on us...

Especially since the college without Candy is so grim! Hasn't Archie told you that?

Anyway, London and I have never really got along. I don't want to study in any other place but America.

Annie is returning to Chicago too, of course. And I think also Patty will probably come a little later and study in America. How do you think she can endure life here without me...? No, I'm joking. But not altogether. I'm telling you all this to make you understand that the situation is really serious. Patty's family must have some information; they are related to the world of politics and journalism, but it looks like she has some qualms about going to America and leaving her parents in Europe.

In short, I'll be in Chicago, and so will Annie. It's reassuring for her to know that she'll be able to see you.

You know, Candy, I can't stop thinking about inventing the 'virus of peace' and spreading it from an airplane. Thus, nobody would want to fight anymore.

But there's a time and a place for everything, and for the moment the important thing is to leave this school as soon as possible, dreaming of seeing you soon in your nurse uniform.

I'm not telling you what day we're coming home. That's a secret. Archie didn't tell you either on purpose so that I could surprise you. He's not bad as a brother, after all...

Stear

P. S. I'm sorry, I haven't any news from Albert in Africa. But I hope I'll have some before my departure.”

*“Sister Gray,
Madam director,
I hope you are well.
The memory of the sound of the St. Paul’s Royal College bell always
makes me nostalgic.
Dear madam director, I certainly didn’t expect to receive from the
Cornwell brothers that Bible you had entrusted to them to give to me
upon their return. I was only a very mediocre student and caused you
many problems.
I’m very touched.
Thank you from the bottom of my heart.
But rest assured; I’ve never given up the habit of praying and giving
myself a moment of introspection before going to bed.
I’ll take great care of the Bible you have given me.
Whatever lies ahead of us, I pray to God that He protects St. Paul’s
Royal College and its dear director.*

Candice White Ardlay”

“Madam Mary Jane,

I’ve never missed an opportunity to vex you with my carelessness (yes, it’s true!), but I’ve had a hard time finding one to talk to you, so I decided to write to you today.

When you yelled at me the other day, telling me you were going to give me a holiday, I instantly thought that this time you meant I was fired. But when I arrived at Pony’s Home, I understood how kind and considerate you were. Definitely, I’m still a thoughtless girl who jumps to conclusions...

It was just one day (I’m not saying that in order to point out that you should have given me more!), but those moments I spent with Miss Pony and Sister Lane were deeply refreshing for me.

That being said, it still amuses me to imagine that Miss Pony and you were childhood friends. For example, Miss Pony told me that you were so thin that one could see through you, or that you used to hide behind Miss Pony’s back when some mischief of either of you was discovered (were you a tomboy too?), or that you were a fast runner...

Yes, now I know a great number of episodes of your youth!

Since then, I feel much closer to you.

Miss Pony has explained to you why I was so interested in Mr. William McGregor, hasn’t she?

Well...

I was adopted by a millionaire, Mr. William A. Ardlay, but I have never met him. He is a very generous person: not only did he adopt me, but he always forgave my deviations, even though I heard he was a stubborn, eccentric and selfish old man.

Isn’t that the perfect picture of Mr. McGregor?

Considering Great Uncle William’s possible age, I have to hurry if I want to meet him during his lifetime. In short, I was in such a hurry to meet him that I mistook William McGregor for Great Uncle William. Really, how thoughtless of me.

I was deceived, but that didn’t prevent me from feeling as if I were related to Mr. McGregor. At first he was unkind and disliked everyone, but actually you just had to talk to him about Mina to see him transform into an adorable grandfather.

And who was that Mina to whom he had given his heart? A big fat dog! Even you would never have imagined that, would you?

But Mr. McGregor, although he had shown some signs of improvement, died so suddenly...

Oh, I know, I shouldn’t say this was a surprise; you scolded me for that:

‘Mr. McGregor was not in hospital for fun; he had an incurable disease...’

You also told me:

'You can't be a nurse if you cry every time a patient dies. The only people who have the right to cry in a hospital are the patients!'

'Patients enter a hospital and leave it, either cured or dead! There's no need to panic about that!'

Your harsh voice is still ringing in my ears. But it's not as dreadful as it was for me at the beginning; rather, it sounds more like a touching echo.

When I lost Mr. McGregor, I lost a person who was dear to me.

He was smiling at me just a while ago...It's time for me to realize it; he's not here anymore...

A man's life is something so fragile...Even though I know it, I still have a hard time admitting it.

Madam director, don't think that I doubt it...On the contrary, this event has brought me a great inner calmness. As Miss Pony says:

'God has given death equally to everyone.'

Mr. McGregor has fulfilled his life.

As we are forced to do, all of us.

I'm sad, but I feel I'm ready to face the death of other people now. I'll never forget your encouraging words:

'The world can change, but the important thing is to be able to count on people who can heal everyone's body and spirit. Humanity has no borders!'

Yes, your words are engraved in my heart, and when I'm assigned to St. Joanna's Hospital in Chicago, I'll study conscientiously the surgical techniques and strive to become an accomplished nurse!

One day you'll be proud of your student,

Miss Careless

P. S. I swear to you that it was not me who taught the children to call you 'plucked hen'."

*“Dear Candy,
How are you doing?
Are you always so busy?
And I imagined that when I returned to Chicago I would have the
opportunity to see you more often...
In short, I’ve decided to write to you...
Archie says this can wait until our next meeting, but you never know
when that will be, and then I can’t resist the pleasure of telling you
about it as soon as possible.
You’ll see what it is when you find the newspaper clipping I’m
attaching to this letter. (Well, maybe you already know about it...)
I’m so happy for you!
Annie”*

A beginner with a bright future!

**The new rising star, Terrence Graham, triumphs in the role of the
King of France in KING LEAR, staged by Stratford Theatre
Company!**

Narrative 2

At that time, when I held between my fingers the newspaper clipping Annie had sent me, I had a hard time standing on my feet. I crouched down to resist the avalanche of emotions that swept through me.

And that photograph of Terry appearing in the newspaper...

I couldn't see it clearly; my eyes were wet. To prevent my tears from falling on the photograph, I put it away from me; but as I imagined that it was Terry who was moving away, I rushed to hold it tight against my chest.

I take a thick envelope from the jewelry box. The newspaper clipping I'm talking about is still there. Even after so many years, it has never left me. Wherever I went, I always took it with me, and all those trips have damaged it. But Terry's handsome face is still clearly visible in the photograph.

So Terry had become a stage actor...

That was not at all surprising to me.

He had told me he had something to accomplish. And in Scotland he had read Shakespeare's plays with so much enthusiasm!

The newspaper article spoke of a "particularly severe selection", but regarding Terry, he just had to appear on stage on the day of the audition so that all eyes would turn on him. And his voice, neither too low nor too high-pitched, possessed the ideal profoundness. Strong and virile, he knew how to display that disarming and tender smile which would melt anyone's heart...

The article made no mention of Eleanor Baker. In the end, he owed his rapid success to himself, to his exceptional charm, to his work and to his seriousness.

Terrence Graham...

How many times have I whispered that name all these years...

I was happy to learn that he had given up the name of the Granchesters in order to live his life on his own.

Terrence G. Granchester.

I had often wondered what that "G" stood for.

Now I had received news of Terry. That was enough to give me the impression of a path illuminated by the sun that opened before my eyes.

Yes, I was going to see him again. My dream had just been transformed into a powerful certainty.

I just had to send a letter to Stratford Theatre Company, and it would undoubtedly reach Terry!

And since his company was going on a tour in America, wouldn't they

make a stop in Chicago? Oh, but Terry didn't even know I had returned to America...

I had to tell him quickly!

I was so full of hope at that moment that I wanted to hug myself like a fool!

I was sure that now everything would be fine. I was absolutely certain of it!

I didn't even imagine the difficulties that awaited for me around the bend...

And yet...

No, I don't want to believe that what happened then was fate.

It was in full awareness and with our own free will that we had taken that turning point...

Terry, myself...and you too, Alistair.

I close my eyes tightly for a moment. I let courage rise in my heart, and then I take another newspaper clipping out of the envelope. This article mentions that Frannie Hamilton, an old classmate of mine from the nursing school, receives recognition for her work as an army nurse.

*“Dear Frannie Hamilton,
I suppose you are surprised to receive my letter.
It’s been such a long time, hasn’t it, Frannie?
But it’s really me, Candice, your roommate at Mary Jane Nursing
School. We were also together in St. Joanna’s Hospital. You
remember that, I hope. I would be really happy if you did.
I’m writing to you after all this time because I’ve just read an article in
the newspaper yesterday which praised you as an army nurse.
Frannie, I’ve memorized the article after reading it again and again,
and I wanted to write to you and congratulate you. So that’s what I’m
doing!
Congratulations, Frannie! Well done!
That makes me so nostalgic...
According to your photograph in the newspaper, you are still the
same, always looking so serious...If you only knew how happy it
makes me to see you haven’t changed...
It’s been so long since we took our separate ways.
I would never have imagined that the war would last so long. And I
had thought it would be over soon...
During all this time, you have proved your many abilities. I take my
hat off to you!
I remember perfectly well the time when the army came to St.
Joanna’s Hospital to recruit nurses. You immediately volunteered,
firm and determined.
As for me...I could not.
I didn’t have the courage.
However, I have no family. But I couldn’t give up my dreams of my
insignificant reality; actually, I was selfish.
A little later, regretting my attitude, I suggested that I take your place.
But your decision hadn’t been taken lightly; your mind was very clear
and you remained firm.
‘I’m not afraid to die,’ you said to me.
Then you told me about your family. ‘One may have a family, but if
each one of them thinks only of themselves and they are not bound by
the heart, it’s as if they are all alone,’ you said to me.
That moment I felt really close to you.
I’m ashamed to admit it, but the idea of a nurse on the front still
inspired me with vague images of pathetic sadness at the time. I was
not ready for it. And I know you hated my selfishness. I can still sense
the contempt I had caused you then. I’m so sorry for that.
I’m too friendly with people, I know that. Some like this trait of my
personality, and for them everything is fine. But for those who don’t
appreciate it, I’m just an insufferable little fool.*

I had thought I could easily become your friend, since I am too straightforward and forget to ask myself what other people think. That will be a lesson for me. Not everyone is like me; everyone has their own way of living and feeling about things...

Anyway, I learned so much from you.

I learned to be serious in my work. I learned to be punctual and never be late. I learned to be tidy: everything must be in its place!

Yes...I've learned so much from you, but I have the impression that I haven't actually made much progress...I'm still the same.

Frannie...

I just want you to know that there was a part of me which greatly admired your attitude.

Oops! I just wanted to write a word of congratulations, and here I am, writing whole pages...I'm still a chatterbox, as you see. Forgive me for this long letter.

My best wishes for good luck to you and fulfillment in your vocation as a nurse!

And I also wish you excellent health!

Candice”

*“My dear Candy,
You are always in great shape, I imagine.
The date of my leaving for Chicago has finally been fixed.
My parents, with whom I have never lived for long, to tell the truth,
get teary-eyed whenever we mention my upcoming departure for a
foreign country where I’ll live on my own, far away from them.
England has eventually entered the war too. Obviously, my duty
should force me to stay here and fight along with my compatriots, and
that’s what I think. But my parents don’t agree and prefer to keep me
away instead. Stear is worried about me too and has asked me to join
him in America as soon as possible...And I want so much to be with
him...
Especially since you are in Chicago too!
It made me so happy when I found out. I had the impression that
everything had suddenly turned rose-colored before my eyes.
Oh, Candy, I have so much to tell you!
And then...Is it true what Stear told me in his last letter? Is it true that
Albert was brought to the hospital you are working? Is it true that he
is amnesiac?
Of course I had heard about that train which exploded in Italy; they
talked about that in England too. But I had never imagined that
Albert would be on it...I was sure he was in Africa. It’s really horrible
that such a good man was even suspected of putting a bomb.
I heard he was transported from one hospital to another, from military
hospitals on the front to prison camps...So, if he ended up in your
hospital, Candy, I believe that happened thanks to God’s mercy. He is
no longer suspected as a criminal, I believe, but he hasn’t recovered
his memory yet, as I was told. Is that true?
War is horrible. It destroys the bonds between people and inflicts
deep wounds in their hearts. You know that better than I do, don’t
you, my dear Candy? But now we’re going to join forces in order to
help Albert recover his memory, all right?
Thank you also for being worried about what happened to Hughley. I
would have liked to bring her with me, but I decided to ask the Blue
River Zoo to take care of her.
I’m counting the days until we meet again!
May this war end soon!
All the best to you,
Patty”*

*“To Dr. Frank Campbell
St. Joseph’s Hospital*

Doctor,

A thousand thanks for your kind letter, and for the volume of ‘Introduction to medicine’ you have sent me in order to congratulate me for my graduation.

My good grades in the final examinations for the nursing diploma have surprised you a little, if I’m not mistaken... Well, you see, doctor, I’m capable of succeeding in important things too! (Cough...) Hey, that cough is strange... No doubt it’s because of dust.

I’ll read this volume with all the concentration required, and learn a lot of things, I’m sure.

And then, doctor, I heard that during your trip you took the trouble to make a detour and visit Pony’s Home! It was so kind of you, and it really touched my heart. Thank you. It was Sister Lane who wrote that to me.

You are worried too about Mina whom Mr. McGregor loved more than a human being... I should have known! I was sure Mina would get fat after she was adopted at Pony’s Home. However, a highly rated nurse (that would be me) had told Miss Pony not to feed her between meals, as that was not good for her health, but Miss Pony is incapable of resisting Mina’s lovelorn gaze whenever she wants some treat... You need to know: Miss Pony is strict only with the children (and particularly strict with me).

Actually, I have to ask you for some much more serious advice.

Have you ever had the chance to attend an amnesiac patient?

To summarize the situation for you, it turns out that a person to whom I owe a lot and who, so to speak, has saved my life in the past was admitted to St. Joanna’s Hospital in a state of amnesia. I want so much to help him recover his memory. And I’m ready to do whatever it takes for that.

Please, what would be your advice?

*A highly rated nurse
but still a beginner,
Candy*

P. S. That patient I told you about, the one who has saved my life, is in the Room Zero of St. Joanna’s Hospital. As you may know, the Room Zero is not a normal room and is reserved for sick people who have no hope of recovering. That makes me angry, if I may say so, but at the same time it also makes me sad not being able to do anything.”

Narrative 3

The Room Zero of St. Joanna's Hospital doesn't exist anymore. It was eliminated by Dr. Leonard upon his appointment as the new director of the hospital. It was when America entered the Great War that St. Joanna's Hospital rediscovered the principles and the vocation of an establishment worthy of that name. There are no frontiers for the sick and the wounded. Healing is our mission. That was Miss Mary Jane's belief, and those values were also in Dr. Leonard's heart.

Personally, for a long time I had considered Dr. Leonard a cold and insensitive doctor. He was the one who fired me because I asked to be allowed to take care of Albert myself. But now I think his decision was logical. He was a deputy director at the time, and that was the decision of his superior in hierarchy. Not that he didn't understand my way of thinking or the feelings that stirred inside of me, but he had to respect the rules of the hospital. "It is out of the question to leave a patient in the hands of a trainee nurse," he had told me. It was difficult to hear those words, but on the other hand that was what urged me to work so hard to get my diploma.

Which just goes to show that we should not judge people by their appearance. I'm in a good position to know that; life has made me understand it many times, and despite everything, I always fall into that trap. *He* laughs at me every time I make the same mistake.

Oh, Albert...

At that time I didn't even know his last name! And yet, I didn't ask myself any questions: Albert...was Albert. It came naturally. For me, everything was in that simple name.

His mere presence was enough to fill me with a strange feeling of security, of warm assurance.

Now I can understand the nature of that invisible thread that connected me with him.

The sun begins to set. The shadows on the carpet grow longer. And those shadows also begin to prevail upon my heart. So much trouble and sadness followed afterwards.

To keep reading again all those letters and newspaper clippings is too hard for me; I have not the strength for the moment. I start to put everything back into the jewelry box: Terry's letters, the articles about all his plays, the rave reviews and the negative ones too which give me so much inner pain whenever I read them again...I treasure all those souvenirs because they talk to me about Terry.

And then, my precious music box...

In order to leave that behind and have a change of scenery, I take a deep breath and go to the room next door. That room is the library, also used as a study. The walls are covered with books arranged on their shelves: the complete works of Shakespeare, French and English literature, books of medicine...

In a corner of the library, instead of portraits of ancestors, there are several small framed photographs.

One of them is a photograph of special value, as it seems to me. It portrays the entire Ardlay family, including the Leagans and all their employees.

I had often heard Eliza boasting that the Leagan family owned the largest hotel chains and leading establishments in the tourism industry, and actually, for once, she had not exaggerated. It seems that the Leagans have gradually extended their importance in that sector, thanks to the Ardlay family's support.

Mr. Raymond Leagan had already the reputation of a ruthless entrepreneur. His son Neal had become worse than him as he grew up. Do you think that the current financial crisis could hit hard such cold monsters? They took the opportunity to speculate and are now even more powerful than before!

The photograph was taken during the grand opening of the Miami Resort Inn, the most luxurious hotel in the chain owned by the Leagan family. I really didn't expect to be invited to that kind of event.

I was even surprised that Neal hadn't opposed to my coming, to say nothing about Eliza. When I recall Neal's efforts to avoid crossing paths with me, I feel confused. Our eyes met for a short moment and I felt as if I had been stabbed to the heart. But deep in his eyes, black as an abyss, I saw a desperate loneliness, something I was sure Eliza had never perceived in her brother.

Oh, those two...Neal and Eliza.

I had always considered them as some sort of clones, equivalent and interchangeable. But at that precise moment I understood that Neal had feelings quite different from those of his sister's.

Great Uncle (!) William is in the middle of the photograph, of course. Then Mr. and Mrs. Leagan, Neal and Eliza. When everyone took their place for the photograph to be taken, Great Uncle (!) William called me with a smile and asked me to stand next to him. Of course I refused. I preferred to stand next to Mary and Stewart whom I had not seen for so long. And then I felt more comfortable near them.

Next to me, George is so funny with his sullen expression: he hates to

be photographed.

Great Aunt Elroy hadn't been able to come due to some health problem.

Archie was not there either, supposedly because of urgent business, but I know he just didn't want to participate in that kind of family reunion.

The Leagan family...

Their villa in Lakewood where I had come as a child, full of hope, leaving Pony's Home behind. Despite the floods of tears I had shed during my stay there, those past days have become a wonderful memory.

*“Mrs. Sara Leagan,
I hope my letter will find you in good health.
Thank you for your invitation to the inauguration of the Resort Inn.
Thanks to you, I was able to stay in your splendid hotel and have the
joy of seeing again a lot of people.
I was particularly touched when you publicly denied that rumor
according to which I had the habit of stealing. I have never stolen
anything from you or anyone else, and that dark rumor has cast a
shadow on my memories all these years.
Later, when I thanked you, you told me you had just obeyed Great
Uncle William’s orders. If that is true, it doesn’t change the fact, in my
opinion, that it took you a lot of courage to make that declaration in
front of the whole family.
Please accept my gratitude, as well as my best wishes for prosperity
for the Resort Inn.*

Candice W. Ardlay”

“To Mr. Stewart Lux

Dear Stewart,

I thought I was dreaming when I saw you. I said to myself: ‘Is Stewart still working for the Leagans?’

I must say I was just as surprised when I saw Mary. I imagined you both had resigned a long time ago!

How brave! And how patient, despite everything you’ve been through. Anyway, you were a private chauffeur and now you are head receptionist at the Miami Resort Inn! Needless to say that Mr. Leagan can judge the potential of people and select the best.

One would never think that by looking at you, but you still like making jokes! You gave me new proof of that by coming to meet me in your old chauffeur’s uniform, when you could have come in your splendid brand new receptionist uniform. So many memories of the past came back to me as soon as I saw you that I almost fainted!

Yes, it was that same uniform you were wearing that day when you came to Pony’s Home to pick me up...

From Pony’s Hill, I saw the car approaching on the road, raising a cloud of dust. My heart jumped with happiness at the thought that it was certainly someone who would ask to adopt me.

When you discovered the mischievous little girl I was, you looked desolate. You tried to comfort me in every way, although you don’t enjoy making speeches. But I felt how much you put your heart into it, and that touched me.

Unfortunately, shortly afterwards I met Eliza, which was a shock to me!

I’ll definitely never forget the blow I received. Anyway, maybe it was thanks to that experience that my soul became stronger, and that strength has been very useful to me for the rest of my life.

At any rate, it was thanks to the kindness of all of you that I was able to endure that awful time with the Leagans.

I remember you all had tears in your eyes – Mary, Doug, Mr. Whitman... – and accompanied me the morning I was sent to work on a farm in Mexico. I can still see you...

It was so long ago...There was the Great War and its ravages...I’m happy to have found you all alive and well! A lot of things happened to me too.

I would have liked to see you again upon my return to Chicago, but I have to admit that it was a little difficult for me to enter the Leagan house. What a joy to see Mary too at the opening of the hotel. I felt so much nostalgia meeting all of you.

By the way, I called you Stewart, and not ‘Mr. Stewart’, despite our age difference. When I realized that and tried to correct myself, you

stopped me with a laugh. 'No, that sounds very nice!' So I won't change anything in this letter either.

Well, I hope I'll see you soon, Stewart! Above all, don't forget you've promised me a discount next time I come to the Miami Resort Inn! Needless to say, don't let Mr. and Mrs. Leagan know!

Candy"

“To Mrs. Mary Darcy

Dear Mary,

Seeing you quick and efficient in your work as always and giving instructions to all employees during the opening of the hotel, I really had the impression that I had been transported to the past.

Nothing is done if the head house-maid of the Leagans isn't there! The guests amused themselves by saying that Mary was the real head of the Leagan house, and that's true. The Leagans are sometimes so obnoxious to people that you and Stewart really deserve a medal!

So, Doug has resigned and opened a shop. 'The Glutton'. What a name for a bakery! Just hearing it makes you hungry! One of these days I'll go there to have a look and surprise him.

But the funniest thing is the story you told me: the day when Neal wanted to force me to be engaged to him, you put laxative in his tea! Every time I think about it, I can't help laughing. And the worst part is that it didn't have any effect on him!

You were too angry because of what he had dared to do to let bygones be bygones, and when you told me that story, it was especially your concern that touched me.

When I was sent to the stable to take care of the horses, I remember you used to secretly bring me something to eat. Doug also brought me freshly baked bread...

You told me you were sorry you hadn't done anything for me, but it was quite the contrary! Thanks to all of you, that period when I lived in the stable has remained one of the most entertaining of my life. How much fun I had in that stable! You had made a patchwork pillow case for me. How well I slept with it; it was so cozy and warm! I'll never forget it.

So, it seems it's my fault that Neal still doesn't have a girlfriend. Maybe I have put a curse on him? That's what Eliza thought! It's so funny! So I'm a witch and don't even know it!

That day I spent with all of you was greatly amusing. I hope we'll have the opportunity to chat together again very soon. Next time I'm in Chicago with the Ardlays, I'll contact you...discreetly!

Thank you for Mr. Whitman's address. I'll write to him without delay!

Candy”

“To Mr. Jacob Whitman

Dear Mr. Whitman,

I don't really know how to begin...Mr. Whitman, it's me, Candy!

It's been such a long time...

I haven't forgotten you in all this time, just as I haven't forgotten Mary and the rest of the staff of the Leagan household.

I was invited to Miami for the opening of a new luxurious hotel of the Leagan family. On that occasion, I saw again Stewart, Mary, and many others. Mary told me you had moved and were living in California now. She gave me your address but I delayed writing to you, because the memories are so many and they have swept over me with so much force...

I'm sure you understand what I'm trying to say.

Dear Mr. Whitman,

Thank you for taking such great care of the rose garden. Great Uncle William has assured me of that. When I heard that the Ardlay villa in Lakewood remained closed and no one visited it anymore, it made me so sad. But I was told you had stayed and had continued to take care of the large garden, as well as the house, ventilating the rooms. I was very touched.

What you have done is very generous. Thank you for that.

I went there recently, after such a long time. And oh, dear, everything seemed unchanged to me. Everything had remained as before.

The gate of the roses, the stone gate, the water portal...And let's not forget the forest, of course. Everything was the same.

Dear Mr. Whitman,

Wherever I went, I always carried with me the Lakewood forest and the rose garden. I wondered if the Sweet Candy roses were still in bloom. When I learned that they always flourish when spring comes and they grow bigger and stronger, I didn't know what to say. My emotion was so strong that I remained speechless.

So many things happened since I left Lakewood.

I suppose you have heard what happened to Stear. I can't yet consider all of that as mere memories; sorrow is too great. Are the three gates of Lakewood waiting for the return of their owners?

Now I have come back to my hometown where Pony's Home is, and I'm working as a nurse in Dr. Martin's Happy Clinic.

Of course, as you can imagine, I'm also helping at Pony's Home, which makes my days very busy.

Mr. Whitman, while I was visiting Lakewood, I took several cuttings from the Sweet Candy rose bush. I have replanted them in front of Pony's Home. I'll take great care of them and I hope they will develop and give beautiful roses in their turn.

*Imagine that I've made some progress in gardening! I swear it's true!
Now I can tell the difference between a weed and a flower bud!*

*May your flowers bloom too, Mr. Whitman, under the warm sun of
California, while you are surrounded by your children and
grandchildren!*

And above all, stay healthy until we meet again!

Candy”

“To Mr. George Villers

Dear George,

I was relieved to hear you are quickly recovering from your cold. People like you should never fall ill, even with a simple cold. Could it be some virus you have contracted during the opening of the hotel of the Leagan family?

Great Uncle William was worried too: ‘George rarely has a fever. George is like a knight in a shining armor for me! He’s always there when I need him, always so brave!’

And a knight in a shining armor with a cold is not quite right, don’t you agree?

You’ve always been there during hard times, and yet I’ve never really thanked you. Your letters were nothing but simple reports of Great Uncle William’s decisions. Every time a letter came from you, I felt tense. Now I understand why it was important for those letters to pass through an intermediary. That was very clever, and when I think about it today, it was rather funny, to tell the truth.

Obviously, the main purpose of your letters was to prevent me from asking the question that was burning my lips: ‘What kind of person is Great Uncle William?’ From that point of view, we must admit that you have played your role wonderfully.

I wanted so much to meet him; it was such a strong urge. And you never gave me the slightest clue! You were always as silent as the grave. No wonder this proverb is circulated in the Ardlay family: ‘Are you looking for the Ardlays? Find George!’

We all thought Great Uncle William was an old and feeble man! I too, like everyone else, imagined him as some kind of centenarian hermit with a tired body, although still with a clear mind.

To be more precise, you managed to make me believe that!

Now that the mystery is cleared up, I intentionally call him ‘Grandfather William’. That makes him uncomfortable and he says to me with a forced laugh: ‘Please, when will you forgive me?’

Well, it serves him right. That will teach him to mislead me!

I remember the first time I saw you...

How could I forget it? It was the day I was supposed to be sent to Mexico to work. Suddenly, someone put a hand on my mouth to stop me from screaming and I got kidnapped: it was you, George! Obviously I didn’t know and I wouldn’t give in. I think I scratched you a little and maybe even bit your arm. I’m sorry!

Anyway, it didn’t help much; you remained imperturbable.

You simply declared, in a warm and kind voice that immediately calmed me down, as if by magic:

‘Don’t worry, I won’t hurt you.’

I looked into your eyes, I saw your clear gaze and I was convinced you were not a bad person.

What happened afterwards...I still think it was a dream. There seems to be a blank in my memory.

Me? To become the adoptive daughter of the Ardlay family? But... why?

Of course, I was instantly filled with joy at the thought I would see Anthony and the others again.

And then...

A single word from you was enough to make me decide to go to England.

Yes! I went to England to study!

Dear George, how do you manage to change people's hearts in that way, so completely and spontaneously?

I speak a hundred times more than you do, and yet the children at Pony's Home don't seem to listen to me...

Before I continue, George, I advise you to take your temperature.

How are you doing? No more fever? Good, then you can go on reading.

Great Uncle William says my chattering is like a very enriching food, full of calories...So it may be beneficial to you too, and give you strength!

You never gave me the slightest hint about Great Uncle William, but I wouldn't say the same about Great Uncle William himself...

Actually, I know some things about you now.

You were an abandoned child too (and that brings me so much closer to you...).

It even seems you were a thug for a long time, right? That seems incredible, judging from the way I know you today, but anyway, apparently your acquaintance with William C. Ardlay changed you completely.

I love this story; it's so touching!

It happened at the time of the old patriarch of the Ardlay family. He was traveling in France, when his briefcase which contained very important documents was almost stolen by some kind of petty thief. But his eyes met young George's eyes. Did he read something in that look? Instead of reproaching him, the old patriarch of the Ardlays asked the little thief to follow him to America. He was definitely an Ardlay! Not only was he sensible in business but he also knew how to gauge a man on first sight!

So he gave you an education (and obviously you did excellently) and loved you as his own son.

He didn't have to regret his generosity. You answered perfectly and even surpassed all his expectations.

Just before his sudden death, when he was still in the prime of his life, it seems he said to you: 'I'm counting on you to watch over William A. Ardlay as you have watched over me.'

No, George, don't be angry with Great Uncle William for not holding his tongue. When they reach a certain age, people become talkative, don't they? Well, I'm just joking!

And then, when he told me that story, his eyes were moist with emotion. He remembers that you were always by his side since his childhood. You've always been the one he could ask for advice, an ally he could trust completely, more than anyone else. Thanks to you, just because of your presence, Great Uncle William could live in freedom, with no constraints, while he has given you nothing but worries.

It's true. When he disappeared and you no longer knew where he was, I can guess how anxious you must have been.

You didn't give me any more news...I didn't write everything that had been happening to me either so as not to worry you...Well, now it's almost funny (to think that the vagabond who was hiding in the mountain lodge of the Ardlays, in the forest of Lakewood, was my benefactor! It's very funny!).

And, George, I'm sure you didn't imagine it was me who had been taking care of him, did you?

Life's coincidences are so incredible!

And that time you disobeyed Great Uncle William, although you were absolutely faithful, when I was almost engaged to Neal by force, in order to tell me where he was hiding. And that place was...the villa in Lakewood!

Thank you from the bottom of my heart, George.

Now you understand why I call you a knight in a shining armor!

I hope I'll have the opportunity to be of service to you in my turn.

If you lived nearby, I would take care of you around the clock. (Pardon? You've had a narrow escape? Now, George, I'm a very good nurse!)

Anyway, have you taken your medication? Come on, take advantage of the flu to forget work for a while. Have a little rest!

What? This letter is too long, and that's what has tired you?

Oops, sorry! You are absolutely right!

Then I'll leave you!

Next time I'll bring you my famous homemade cheese cake. You'll tell me the news!

Good night. Sweet dreams!

Candy"

Narrative 4

In the half-dark study, I shift my gaze from the photograph of the party celebrated by the Leagans for the opening of the Miami Resort Inn to a small photograph in an old silver frame.

It's a little fuzzy, which gives the impression that it has been taken in another world.

Archie, Annie, Patty and I are in front of an airplane made of odds and ends, obviously a handyman's work. I have a big smile on my face, and I'm the only one wearing a helmet. The photograph was taken on the day of the first flight of the airplane built by Stear, just before it took off. Everyone had cautiously declined the offer to get on board (even Patty...), and I was the only volunteer.

It was Stear who had taken the photograph, that's why he's not in it. And if it's a little fuzzy, it's obviously because the camera was also Stear's invention. The photograph was found with several others among his belongings. None of them was really clear.

"This is my brother's invention...It's been always like this..." said Archie, with his eyes red, handing me the picture as a souvenir.

Of course, during its first flight, the engine of the airplane exploded in the air, and Stear and I were forced to use the parachutes. Luckily Stear had foreseen that trouble...He was not at all disappointed; for him, that first flight had turned out exactly as expected! And to think that I had trusted him enough to get on that airplane with him!

The war was getting more terrible every day. But life was still beautiful on the outskirts of Chicago. Every time I look at that photograph in which Stear is absent, I can see the world through his eyes. That day, Stear was the most excited of us all. Had he already decided to enlist and go to the front?

The photograph is even more blurry than it used to be.

The afternoon light was blinding. It barely lasted for a moment, but Stear and I saw from the sky the huge estate of the Ardlay family, as well as the surrounding countryside. Everything was beautiful. The flying birds, surprised to see us, almost changed their route; it was very funny. It made Stear and me laugh out loud. A moment later, the engine stopped...

I turn my eyes away from the photograph in the old silver frame. My hand is slightly trembling.

I can't bear to see myself laughing louder than the others in this photograph. I seem to be the happiest of them all. I've been so selfish. I hate myself for that. I didn't see how much Stear must have been tormented that moment. I only thought of my own happiness.

Of course, I was worried about Albert, but actually I only thought of one thing:

I'm going to see Terry again! I'm going to see Terry again!

Terrence Graham had triumphed in the leading role of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Juliet was interpreted by a beautiful rising actress of whom people talked a lot: Susanna Marlowe.

Tabloids and other celebrity gossip magazines were quick to comment on the relationship that could possibly exist off stage between those two young Thespians, but I didn't care about what those journalists could make up. I was sure of my Terry, and I knew exactly his feelings.

We had missed each other during his visit to Chicago on the occasion of the charity performance of *King Lear* by Stratford Theatre. I had left my night shift at the hospital – a behavior unworthy of a nurse, I know – and I was going to watch the play...while during that time Terry was waiting for me in front of the hospital until dawn. Finally, when we understood what had happened, it was almost as wonderful as if we had really seen each other.

Because...yes, I didn't even need to explain to him why I had returned to America.

Later, almost all of the letters I sent to Stratford Theatre addressed to Terry never arrived. Or rather, they did arrive, but they were not delivered to him.

Susanna Marlowe...

At that time, rage had brought tears to my eyes. Today I have the impression I can understand Susanna's feelings. When you love someone from the bottom of your heart, you can't think clearly.

It was *Romeo and Juliet*...

The title itself brought me back the unforgettable memory of the May Festival.

He had promised to invite me to the performance of that play. He had even offered me a train ticket to come and see him!

Yes, this time for sure, I'm going to see Terry again!

Only that thought occupied my mind. Stear came to say goodbye to me, alone for once, before I got on the first train for New York. I saw him on the platform, standing in the morning mist. That was the last time. I would never see him again...

It was the day he gave me that music box. What a wonderfully clear sound...How many times did that crystal music comfort me...

That memory is enough to bring tears to me. I have to bite my lip so as not to cry. I go back to the living room, almost annoyed with myself.

The encrusted jewelry box is still there, on the table.

I lift the cover again, and then I place the music box on the palm of

my hand.

It was Stear who had made it. He had called it “the Candy Happy Maker Music Box”.

“Dear Candy,

Your letter made me happy.

You are the only one I can talk to about my brother now.

I can yell at him and call him names: ‘Alistair! You stupid fool! You had no right to do that to us!’ I’m sure only you can understand how I feel.

My father and mother are lamenting, and are inconsolable since he died. They keep repeating that they should have kept him longer with them, spent more time with him...Great Aunt Elroy hasn’t eaten for several days. Just look at that, you rascal! Making people unhappy like that!

And what about Patty? How are you going to apologize to her, huh? You wanted her to be happy? You claimed that you loved her? But why go to the war when you had promised to make someone happy? Didn’t we return to Chicago precisely in order to escape the war? Didn’t we?

We were only two years apart. He was my only brother, and I thought I knew him like I know myself. But I was a fool. I didn’t know anything about him, and at the end of the day, I never understood him.

Whenever Stear talked about the war, I made sure to change the subject.

I should have discussed more with him.

Since he was little, he hated war and fighting.

Anthony was a gentle boy, of course, and we were the same age. All the same, that didn’t prevent me from fighting with him. But never with Stear. Anthony and I had the passionate blood of the Ardlays in our veins. Stear did not. Stear was too quiet. That’s what everyone said. That’s what we said, like fools. At the end of the day, there’s no doubt Stear was much more passionate and pure and untamed than all of us.

If he was not, why did he enlist as a volunteer, even before America entered the war?

And yet, you see, Candy, thanks to your letter I have the impression I can understand a little my brother’s feelings. He probably couldn’t bear to stay comfortably safe while young people of his age were fighting somewhere in the world. As you say, maybe he really wanted to spread the virus of peace from the sky.

At any rate, here I am now, completely alone. I’ve spent a large part of my life with Anthony who had lost his mother while he was still a child. We grew up together, all three of us.

Stear was a wonderful older brother. If he hadn’t been my brother, I would still have wanted to be his friend. I would have wanted him to

be my best friend. Today I have lost both my brother and my best friend.

I miss Lakewood, Candy.

This is where we met you.

Anthony was radiant with all the light of youth those days. So was Stear. And so was I, if I remember correctly...And of course, as I believe the director of your orphanage, Miss Pony, always said: 'To live is to take several turns on the road.' Indeed, the road of life is not a straight one. And nothing ensures that only despair awaits us at the end of the road, right?

That's why Stear had decided never to regret about anything, as you say.

If you really believe that, then you are right. I think that way too.

I'm beginning to see what I want to do with my life. I'm going to seriously resume my studies. One day or another I'll have to take a responsible job in the business of the Ardlay family. Well, I intend to prove myself worthy of it by also doing Anthony's and Stear's work, as they will be watching over me.

Annie is worried about me and visits me every day. She doesn't say anything in particular; she just stays by my side in silence. I have to admit that her kindness and tact touch me enormously. Candy, I'm counting on you about Patty.

When the war is over, we'll hold a ceremony in Stear's memory. Candy, don't worry about me; just take care of yourself. You are a little thinner, you know (what do you mean, that's better?).

Come on, take care.

Archibald Cornwell"

*“Miss Candice White Ardlay,
I have received your letter.*

Here, at the front, mail is always a little late. And I rely on God so that my reply reaches you without any incident.

Actually, talking to you about Alistair Cornwell as you have asked me to is painful.

He was my subordinate, the best of them all, and I loved him.

In the army we all called him Stear, and as you can imagine, everybody loved him very much. His pleasant and always smiling face, cheerful and free from any ulterior motive, was a great comfort to his comrades while they all lived in the confinement of the front. Only an angelic soul like his could keep the smile and the conscience of his humanity in this hell. I can testify: if I didn't feel hopeless myself I owe it only to his presence.

Stear constantly had ideas for delusional inventions. In fact, he claimed to be an inventor. But his 'inventions' were so frivolous, or maybe I should say 'poetical', that they made us all want to smile. Just one example: I remember a 'water bugle' that let out a jet of water when it played military music. He played it during flight, which produced a rainbow.

That didn't stop him from being an outstanding pilot and mechanic. I was really amazed as I watched him evolve in the sky, and I wondered where he had learned such perfect piloting technique. One of my great regrets is never having properly congratulated him for mastering his machine. One thing is certain: for me, Alistair Cornwell was further from war than any other man I've ever known.

Your letter informs me that Stear had a girlfriend, and that she was wearing glasses. He had kept that secret, but now I understand why he had drawn a pair of glasses on his airplane. When he vanished, I believe he went to join her in the setting sun.

He volunteered for a mission on the front lines; a mission so dangerous that you could say death was his co-pilot. That's how he disappeared. A part of his feelings and of what he had in mind will forever be incomprehensible to me, but I believe every man has within him a destiny that urges him to accomplish certain things.

So, for Alistair Cornwell, fighting was perhaps close to a certain form of prayer. According to some observers, the battle was extremely violent and lasted for a long time. He fought with admirable courage before he was shot down. He could have eliminated his enemy, but he chose to let himself be struck.

War is cruel and merciless.

He knew it very well; I'm convinced of that.

The observers who witnessed that battle said they didn't see Alistair Cornwell's airplane fall; it was as if he was immersed into the sun.

And let me tell you one thing: that was the most beautiful and brilliant sunset I have ever seen since I arrived in France.

Praying that this war will end as soon as possible, I'll continue to fight for the victory of the Allies.

I'll pray every day for Alistair Cornwell's soul to rest in peace, as well as for his family to find serenity.

Rolf Baughmann"

*“My dear Candy,
Thank you!*

I'll never repeat it enough: Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!

At the Cornwell residence, Archie read us Captain Baughmann's letter. But no matter how many times he read it, over and over again, he was always forced to stop in the middle of it because of the tears that prevented him from going any further. He was crying, but at the same time he was laughing, and blowing his nose...Oh, Archie, such manners! Since then, Stear's mother has been keeping the letter and refusing to part with it. In the end, Archie had to make a copy for me...which touched me even more and made me cry.

Especially since (can you imagine, Candy?) Archie's handwriting is very similar to that of Stear's. Did you know that? They were really brothers, through and through.

Don't worry about me; I'll be fine.

You slapped me to make me stop wallowing in mourning and wake up, and that at least managed to get me back on my feet again. I must say you are quite heavy-handed...When you slap someone, you really mean it! I felt it.

I must say that Stear's death really devastated me...I was ready to die and join him. Really I was.

The fact that he had volunteered for the front without telling anyone was a hard blow for me. Of course, if he had told me I would have done anything to prevent him from leaving.

And when he was gone, that only meant one thing to me: he had never loved me. That was very sad for me. I was so unhappy that I had to come to terms with that fact.

Because I loved him! I really did.

And I had managed to convince myself that Stear loved me too...That blow left me with no strength at all. How could I get back on my feet again?

Captain Baughmann's letter has relieved my pain.

Because to live is to experience separation sooner or later. You know that well, don't you, Candy?

'He's dead. You have to accept it...You'll never forget him, of course, but whatever you do, you'll never see him again...That's the only truth...'

You are strong, Candy. I'd like to follow your example and become strong too.

You seem to be very busy at Dr. Martin's Happy Clinic, your new working place. Is Dr. Martin at least a good surgeon? Annie is worried sick about you, and it's impossible to calm her down: 'Those doctors use their head too much, so it's no wonder most of them end up alcoholics! How can we leave Albert in his hands? Does Candy at

least get paid? And why doesn't she take advantage of the Ardlay family's fortune for once and stop working? And why doesn't she do this, and why doesn't she do that...?' Oh, dear, she's intolerable!

It seems America shouldn't be long in entering the war too.

Last week my mother arrived in Chicago. For a report, as it seems, but above all, I believe, to make preparations for relocation, because my father might perhaps be appointed here. I plan to leave the Winston family, with whom I have been staying since I've been here, in order to live with mama. It was Stear who had introduced me to the Winstons who are distant cousins of the Ardlays. They keep talking to me about Stear, which is pretty discouraging, but they are so charming and elegant people that I'll find it hard to leave them.

One of these days, Annie and I would like to make a chicken pie and come to visit you at the Magnolia. Of course, whenever you have a day off. Albert liked it too, remember?

By the way, I asked mama to send me lots of photographs of Hughley at the zoo, to show them to Albert. Maybe they will remind him of something; who knows.

I look forward to seeing you again soon.

All the best,

Patty"

*“The sky is grey as ash, and rain will start falling soon.
I’ve always hated this kind of weather, heavy and dark, since I was a little girl. I find it distressing.
During those days at Pony’s Home, you used to play the role of the big sister and read to me books with cheerful stories.
The other day you left some of the pie which Patty and I had made, and that worried me. Candy, it was Miss Pony’s chicken pie recipe; you always complimented me on it, and loved it so much that you finished even my share, remember? You said it tasted exactly the same...
If you want Patty’s opinion and mine, well, it’s not just because you’re worried about Albert. Stear is dead, and that...How can I say it? I can’t find the words. Of course, I never really talked with Stear; not like you two, anyway, but through Archie I considered him someone very close. And I know he was very kind and supported wholeheartedly my relationship with Archie.
I really don’t know what to do for Patty. Of course, I only have to imagine in what state I would be if Archie was gone to have some idea of her pain. So, when I see how bravely she bears what is happening to her, I find her truly admirable.
But I’m not writing to you today to talk about Patty.
I’m really worried about you.
I don’t ask you anything because I don’t want to add to your suffering, but you know, Candy, I’m with you! I understand you!
It’s because it’s over with Terry, right? Of course it is, I can see it; you are suffering so much. I saw it immediately the day you came back from New York. You returned so quickly, and you were so devastated...Just thinking about it hurts me.
And your fever that prevents you from eating; I don’t think it’s an ordinary illness. You were so happy before you left for New York to see Terry again.
Also, when you came back home, you told me in a light tone that you had eventually decided not to see him again, and that was it. And now...
I knew very well that you forced yourself to act as if nothing had happened. You see, Candy, we were abandoned and grew up together, and I know you. I can even say I know your feelings better than anyone, at least as well as you understand mine, right?
So I did a little research. I went through newspapers and magazines, even the gossipy ones.
I discovered there that Susanna Marlowe had been seriously injured by the fall of a stage light during a rehearsal. She will have to spend the rest of her life in a wheelchair. And if she suffered this, it’s because she threw herself on Terry who was going to be crushed...*

For the rest, those tabloids write only stories; that Susanna and Terry were engaged, that kind of things. They're just lies! Journalists enjoy making up stories, so they present it as if Susanna has sacrificed herself out of duty in order to save her lover's life, but it's not like that at all. If she took a risk, that was her choice!

Of course, I can imagine how shocking this is for Terry and the situation he finds himself in now. A young promising actress has sacrificed herself to save him; that's not something insignificant. And Terry is not the kind of person who would ignore it, that is certain. You wouldn't have fallen in love with him if he had no sense of responsibility.

Oh, what a pity, Candy; what a pity.

Of course, I ask myself: 'My God, what would I do if this had happened not to Terry, but to Archie?'

Well, I would never give him up. Oh, no, I would never leave him to any Susanna on earth!

I would even say...Let's face it; I know Archie is still in love with you, Candy. No, don't deny it, it's useless. I know him well; I know everything he has in mind as if it were written on his face. But that has never discouraged me. I won't give up.

Oh, if only you knew, Candy; I even hated you because of that.

But I feel that, little by little, Archie has begun to accept me.

So, why did you come back so quickly? Why did you abandon Terry so easily? You have read the latest articles about him, I imagine. I'm not talking about the rumors of his engagement with Susanna...but have you read the latest reviews? He's slated in every one of them. It seems he's just the shadow of his old self on the stage, as if he's not there at all, and the rest of the theatre company go to great lengths trying to compensate, to no avail. According to the critics, it's only a matter of time before the role is taken away from him. Still, this is an indication of the torment poor Terry is suffering. And that Susanna who won't let him go...Really, I hate that girl!

Candy, you have always listened to my sorrows and troubles. But you don't tell me anything about yours, so I have to grope towards you in order to figure out how I can support you...But one thing is certain: you can't leave Terry so easily. You must not leave him. No!

I know I can't express myself; I'm not good at talking. But I'm writing to you because I can't sit idly by after having seen what state you were in the other day. I've been praying daily for you and for Albert. I've been praying to see my Candy again soon in great shape.

Annie"

Narrative 5

I burst into tears when I received that letter from Annie.

How lucky I was to have a friend like her.

Yet I had put all my energy into seeming as cheerful as usual, but the truth hadn't escaped her, and as soon as I was alone, understanding that Annie had guessed the truth, my tears began to flow freely, unable to stop.

I'll never see Stear again.

I'll never see Terry again either...

But in New York...Annie doesn't know, of course...I saw it. I saw that Susanna Marlowe was ready to die for Terry. Her love was sincere. Yes, I saw that clearly, like a light.

Susanna is not a hateful girl. How could I hate her?

It was snowing in New York when I went to the hospital to see her. Until then, I had thought her injury was not serious, probably because Terry hadn't even told me about the accident.

It was at the theatre that I heard about Susanna.

I had the impression that something was wrong because I knew she would be the one to play Juliet's role.

In the lobby of the theatre, I heard that Susanna had been seriously injured during a rehearsal in order to save Terry. That fact more or less obligated Terry to marry her. Hearing that news, I fainted.

That's why I hated Susanna! Could one imagine a more cowardly way to keep a man tied up? I trembled with rage. I had come to see Terry on the stage, and suddenly that was no longer the right time for me to enjoy a play. I rushed to St. Jacob's Hospital where Susanna had been admitted.

It was snowing. The night was freezing cold.

That was when I finally saw Terry again. And honestly, I had no intention of bothering with that Susanna. The last time in Chicago where the theatre company had stayed during their tour, she had prevented me from seeing Terry when I had gone to his hotel, and she had kept my letters from him, so this time it was the last straw...I couldn't be more determined when I arrived at the hospital.

But her injury was much more serious than I had imagined. And her love was much more genuine than I had thought.

I had just reached the hospital when she tried to throw herself off the rooftop. Actually, if I hadn't got there in time to stop her, she would have jumped. "My life is only an obstacle for you two..." were her first words when she saw me.

Then I understood. I had no business there. It was not up to me any longer. Terry was there, curled up, with his head on his knees. As soon as the play was over, he had rushed off. He had taken the tearful Susanna in his arms. I'll never forget the tortured expression he had that moment. I couldn't bear the sight of him and lowered my eyes. Then I made my decision.

If I don't give him up, it will only make his suffering worse.

Which one of us had the deepest love for Terry? Susanna or myself? This comparison is totally futile.

I refrained from screaming: "Myself!"

But would that make him forget Susanna? Would it make *me* forget Susanna? Could we leave her alone in her wheelchair and live happily ever after? I instantly understood that was impossible.

I have to go. To go as soon as possible.

Terry and I only exchanged a few words that night.

I was about to leave the hospital when suddenly he caught up with me from behind and took me in his arms. He held me so tight...so very tight.

"Stay a little longer like this. Don't move..." Terry said in a low voice. That deep voice which I adore. I had never wished that time would stop as much as I did that moment. I felt a tear running down my neck. Terry's icy cold tear. But I also felt the warmth of his chest against me. So warm that I can still feel it today.

The music box is playing its little melody.

The music box Stear had given me at the train station, in the morning mist, on the day of my departure for New York. The "Candy Happy Maker" he had invented.

He had explained to me: "Every time you listen to the music, Candy, you'll get closer and closer to happiness."

Stear, I can assure you that your invention works perfectly. That snowy night in New York, it saved me. Without its soft and clear sound, I don't know if I would have reached Chicago.

Afterwards, I used so many times my little music box whenever some tragedy happened to me that its mechanism ended up breaking, which left me depressed. I had the impression that the last link that connected me with Stear had just been broken. Fortunately, a few days later, someone who was to become more and more dear to me repaired it. Apparently it wasn't that much.

Now I'm so afraid of breaking it again that I keep it in my jewelry box as something precious.

It's been so long since I listened to that melody. I don't even know its name. I imagine it was Stear himself who had composed it. Sitting on

a chair, I immerse myself in it.

I don't remember anything else. Only that melody resounds inside me. Little by little, it becomes slower, and then completely stops.

I notice a portrait peeking out of the jewelry box. I take it out with a smile that comes automatically to my lips.

Dr. Martin had hastily drawn that portrait of Albert's when the latter had disappeared, in order to help me find him. The portrait I had sketched myself was so childish and naïve that it didn't look like him at all. However, it must have pleased Great Uncle William since he had hung it on the wall of his office. Even George declared very seriously when he saw it: "An invaluable masterpiece, to be sure. It is literally priceless."

Albert was discharged from the Room Zero of St. Joanna's Hospital, so we started living together. That cost me my job, but I didn't care. I had decided that whatever happened I would not leave him until he regained his health and his memory. It was my choice.

But I must say I had never imagined that Albert would disappear without saying anything to me. He hadn't completely recovered yet. And he was still amnesiac.

How energetically I searched for Albert, even though I hadn't the slightest clue of where he might have been...For days I was so upset that I felt as if my chest was about to explode.

One of the residents of the Magnolia had said that he had sometimes seen Albert talking to some sinister-looking men, all dressed in black. Moreover, Mrs. Gloria, our landlady, suspected that Albert was connected to the mafia, and wanted to throw him out.

Obviously I didn't believe a word of it, because Albert and I had promised to have no secrets from each other and share everything, both happy and sad things.

It was Albert who had proposed that.

I had told him everything. I had told him about Terry, about Susanna...Even things I hadn't been able to tell Annie. Everything. I was convinced that Albert and I deeply understood each other.

What had happened to him?

He had disappeared leaving a large sum of money, along with a note: *"I'm sorry for the trouble."*

I didn't like that word "trouble". And where had he found all that money?

I was so consumed with worry that I couldn't sleep.

When I finally found him and all the mysteries vanished at once, I was so disappointed to see that he had concealed so much from me that I said to him:

“Do you know how worried I’ve been? I feel as if I’ve grown much older all of a sudden because of you!”

Albert, narrowing his eyes, answered me with a mocking air:

“Indeed, I can see that. You look a little less of a ‘little girl’ than before, and a little more of a ‘young woman’. That doesn’t displease me, and it will at least prevent everyone from continuing to take you for my little sister...”

Albert really has a knack for confusing me...

Older brother and little sister...

It’s true; we lived together like brother and sister. Maybe this is how people live as a family.

No, not quite, probably. Well, I don’t know. It’s hard for me to explain it, but still, somewhere in my heart I knew that Albert was special. I could feel it.

And in the meantime, what did Albert think about it?

He’s a terribly exasperating man...

*“Candy,
I don’t have much time; I’m writing to you very quickly and I’ll slip
this note under your door. I’ve heard a shocking rumor.
Be careful with Neal Leagan.
That fellow has been spending his time plotting schemes since
childhood. You must not trust him. He’s capable of anything.
And in my opinion, the worst thing is that he’s serious. Deadly
serious! I repeat myself, but be careful!
We’re all looking for Albert. You don’t need to worry so much.
Well, that’s all.*

Archie”

Narrative 6

Neal Leagan intended to marry me. Can you imagine that? Even today, I can't believe such an idea had come to his mind.

Archie had written to me that he was serious, but honestly, I didn't believe it; it was not possible, simply because for him and his sister Eliza I had never been anything but a despicable and worthless person, by birth as well as by upbringing. And the fact that I had been adopted by the Ardlay family didn't change anything for them. Great Aunt Elroy's attitude towards me was the best proof.

And then, above all, I was a source of irritation and anger for Neal, precisely because I didn't conform to whom he imagined I should be. I was not at his command, and he didn't like it, to say the least.

He tried to scare those around him by saying that if I didn't want to marry him, he would enlist in the army.

It was when I heard that Great Uncle William himself was ordering me to marry Neal that I almost fell into despair. No, I wasn't angry. I was sad. Was I just a pawn on a chessboard then? And was Great Uncle William one of those men who enjoyed playing with people's lives? Was he, after all, one of those old materialistic millionaires? I almost believed that.

In the end, I have to thank Neal.

It was thanks to him and his ridiculous ideas that George finally decided to betray Great Uncle William's secret.

In order to save me, he revealed to me where he was.

Maybe life has other surprises in store for me. I don't know about that, but I still believe I'll never have a greater one than this. This surprise has occupied the first step of the podium, and the record is not about to be beaten!

In Lakewood I finally got to meet Great Uncle William!

William A. Ardlay.

It was Albert.

“Dr. Donald Martin,

Since I left you keep saying to yourself that Candy was definitely an outstanding nurse, I’m sure of that! And especially that you regret not having been nicer to her while she was working for you! Well, it’s never too late to do the right thing; Christmas is coming...No, doctor, I’m joking, of course! Or am I? Oops! There, you almost fell off your chair. Don’t deny it; I can see everything!

Besides, I told you so, didn’t I? My prediction has come true! I knew it: since you stopped drinking, customers have been lining up at your place. Of course they have; you are the best physician in Chicago! And it was not even me who said that; it was a certain...It was Dr. Martin himself! Sir William A. Ardlay can testify for this. You’ve never heard that name? It’s Albert, of course!

Yes! You were the only one who said that Albert would soon recover his memory, remember? Whereas at St. Joanna’s Hospital, they had put him in the Room Zero and left him there to rot without giving him the slightest care.

That man whom no one knew, who for some people might as well be a runaway criminal; you, and you alone accepted him into your establishment without the slightest discrimination.

To Dr. Martin, a great doctor, an altruist and a philanthropist, let us express our gratitude! Trumpets. A medal. Be careful, that might prick you...And as a gift in memory of this great day...A bottle of fine whiskey? Are you sure? You have stopped drinking, right?

Oh, dear, it’s nice to joke a little; it brings back so many good memories of the time when I was working with you, doctor. I’ve learned so many complicated things thanks to you! All those things that were real puzzles for me back then are very useful to me today, and I can apply them here, since I came back to Pony’s Home.

Well, doctor, your devoted and faithful admirer is asking you: please accept Albert’s proposal.

Albert is so grateful to you. You have been so generous and lent us a helping hand when we were desperate. That day, when Albert was hit by a car while crossing the street as he was returning from his work as a dishwasher in a restaurant, he was rushed to the Happy Martin clinic. You gave him immediate emergency care, not to mention all the examinations you did for free...

I had just been fired from St. Joanna’s Hospital, and I was unemployed. You hired me on the spot because you immediately found an exceptional nurse in me, of course. Well, I guess so...

Even so, just between you and me, what’s the use of being the best physician in Chicago if you stay in such a lousy clinic (I’m sorry, but let’s call a spade a spade)? That doesn’t honor your talent; forgive me

for telling you. You don't even have an operating room or a proper pharmaceutical preparation room!

Well, you must have noticed that I'm trying really hard to explain to you why you must absolutely accept Albert's proposal and have a new clinic built. And if that causes you any difficulty, don't worry. Just wait until you have a few more patients so you can start reimbursing. You choose the date. This village needs a doctor like you. Think about it. Seriously.

Candy

P. S. It's 19 days until Christmas!"

*“Dr. Donald Martin,
All these presents! You’re spoiling me! Thank you!
It was not to receive all these presents that I told you about
Christmas. Anyway...yes, of course it was. (Doctor, did you fall off
your chair again? I’m getting worried...)
And you have even thought of the children!
But the most beautiful Christmas present is your favorable answer to
Albert’s proposal.
Imagine how teary-eyed Miss Pony, Sister Lane and I were when we
read your reply: ‘I’ll be happy to accept your proposal, on the
condition that you allow me to build that new Happy Martin clinic
not in Chicago but in your village.’
Thank you so much. Honestly.
So you remembered that I had spoken to you about this village which
has no hospital (that goes without saying) and not even a doctor. And
I thought you were too drunk to hear anything at the time...
How many villagers or immigrants died because they were not
diagnosed until it was already too late? How many children and old
people passed away without receiving any care? I used to hear those
sad stories since I was a little girl. If I was more intelligent, I would
start studying medicine immediately. It’s never too late.
But still, I think I’m better as a nurse than I could ever be as a doctor;
let’s face it. (Eh? Why are you nodding?)*

*And then, maybe I could work with you again...
You’ll find a new wire puzzle enclosed.
Merry Christmas!*

Candy jumping for joy!”

*“Dear Mr. Vincent Brown,
Thank you for your beautiful Christmas card. I have put it on the mantelpiece.*

You spoke to me in front of the church where Stear’s funeral was taking place while I was not allowed to attend. I was touched by your concern. I have never forgotten.

I had wondered for a long time what kind of man Anthony’s father was. I hadn’t been allowed to attend Anthony’s funeral either. Probably that’s why sometimes, even today, I can’t believe that Anthony and Stear are no longer in this world.

But lately I have had several opportunities to talk alone with one of the many portraits of Anthony’s mother, Rosemary, which adorn the main residence of the Ardlays and the Lakewood villa. I don’t just look at her; we almost have real conversations. And every time I’m surprised and touched to see how much Anthony looked like her, and also like her younger brother, Great Uncle William.

He has told me he had been very close to his older sister. Great Uncle William Albert often repeats to me with nostalgia that he calls you ‘big brother’ as a sign of respect and affection. You are always welcome to our home in Chicago. For my part, I would be so happy to take a walk with you to the gate of the roses in Lakewood, in the summer. We would chat; I have so many things to tell you...

With all my best wishes for good health and a safe return from your sea voyage.

Candice W. Ardlay”

*“To Mrs. Gloria Bandog
House of Magnolia*

Dear Mrs. Gloria,

I’ve wanted to write to you for so long!

I was very touched by your kind letter. It was more up to me to write to you and thank you. I’m sorry.

I see that everyone at the Magnolia is in excellent health! Albert and I were very happy in that charming house. I say that in all sincerity; you can believe me. If you think someone scared us away, you are mistaken.

Actually, it was all Albert’s fault.

Of course you had reason to suspect him! If I had been in your place, I would certainly have thought the same thing. At that time, if I had seen him in an expensive suit, coming out of the Bank of Chicago and getting into a luxurious limousine, alongside a sinister-looking man, I would definitely have been confused...

Especially since he was supposed to have lost his memory and work as a dishwasher in a restaurant because he had no money...

I understand that it was funny for you to learn his true identity in Chicago News Express. I had exactly the same reaction as you.

Years ago, Albert saved my life. That was the only thing I knew about him. Also, when he lost his memory and he had no place to go, I couldn’t abandon him.

It seems he regained his memory after a while, but he didn’t tell me anything about it and I never noticed. But I confess he was not my brother. That was a lie. I ask you to forgive me. Albert is very busy, but he says he hopes he can find the time to visit you and thank you one of these days.

For my part, I have returned to the village where I spent my childhood, and I’m working there as a nurse.

I thank you in advance for giving my sincere greetings to all the residents of the House of Magnolia.

Candy”

*“Dear Great Aunt Elroy,
I hope my letter finds you in good health.
I imagine you don’t enjoy my letters very much, and I’m sorry for that.
My latest postcard, in particular, had no other purpose than to thank
you for allowing me to attend Stear’s memorial in Lakewood.
If I may, I would also like to tell you that I consider Dr. Leonard,
director of St. Joanna’s Hospital, to be a top notch physician and a
very kind man, although he looks somewhat aloof at first sight. It was
quite proper to choose him as your personal doctor. What’s that got to
do with me, you will ask. Forgive me.
I hope your nervous disorder is getting better.*

Candice”

“To Mr. Archibald Cornwell

Hello, Archie!

Are you getting accustomed to your new life?

It was a shock for Annie when you decided to attend the university in Massachusetts. But she’s beginning to get used to it, and has decided to respect your choice.

I’m even surprised to see my Annie so strong. I received a letter from her in which she tells me that she’ll be waiting for you, trying to keep busy as much as possible. I’ve never seen her so brave!

The war is finally over, but the world remains plunged into confusion and chaos. Although uncertainty has not disappeared, we still need to move on.

I guess you are relieved too that Stear’s memorial could be held in Lakewood, even if it must have been painful to see the house without your two companions.

The time Anthony, Stear and you spent together was a great mystery to me.

‘It gives me such a sense of solidity and strength to see Archie a little taller and more handsome every time,’ said Great Uncle William.

That same sentence sounds different when it’s uttered by Albert, doesn’t it?

Albert and Great Uncle William...Great Uncle William and Albert.

I still sometimes can’t believe that those two people are the same person.

That must have happened to you too, I imagine. I recall the way you were staring at him, your finger pointing at him incredulously, your eyes wide open, unable to say a word for several seconds. Remember? You really had a hard time believing that Albert was Great Uncle William! If only you had seen your face at that moment...Do you know how many times you asked if it was really him? Nine times! I’m not joking! And still, I don’t count the times you must have repeated the same question while babbling inaudible words.

What would Anthony and Stear have looked like if they had been there? I try to imagine...and I can’t stop laughing.

In the end, only a few people in the family knew. The cohesion and the unwavering firmness of those people when it comes to keeping a secret is impressive, I must say.

If I had known...I prefer not to think about how soon I would have ended up spilling the beans. Maybe even sooner than just a single day! (Pardon? Why do you agree with me?)

And come to think of it, I tell myself that the family may have been right to hide Great Uncle William for several years. He was already an

exceptionally capable businessman, of course, but if everyone had known that he was still a young man known as 'Albert' (who looks even younger than his age, by the way), he might have lacked a bit of courage and authority to assume the position as the head of the family.

But things have changed, and today Albert is quite aware of his burden.

So aware and so busy that he no longer has time to chat with anyone, or almost anyone.

He still found time enough to go to Lakewood where Patty, usually so calm and quiet, asked him: 'But why did you hide it?'

Speaking of Patty...After she has taken some terrible turns on that difficult road called life, she seems to have finally found a clear motivation: once she has finished her studies at the University of Chicago, she intends to teach.

You see, Archie, everyone has made a new beginning in life.

You can't imagine how happy I am to see that.

Pony's Home is currently under renovation and expansion. Mr. Cartwright has sold us a piece of land at a reasonable price, and Miss Pony declared she was happy that this expansion would allow the children to grow up with no restrictions.

All thanks to Great Uncle William!

In the first place, Great Uncle William had offered to rebuild a brand new Pony's Home, but Miss Pony and Sister Lane refused that proposal, saying it would be too much. I must say I also had that opinion, modestly opposing that excessive vision of his. Albert was very upset to see that I stood up to him, but anyway, Archie, you understand me, don't you? I did not oppose Albert, but Great Uncle William. Albert had a beard and looked like a pirate back then, so what would you like me to do about it?

The expansion of Pony's Home will include a guest room, so I would be happy if you came by. With Annie, of course!

Dear Archie, take care of yourself, and good luck with your studies. I look forward to seeing you again very soon.

Candy"

“Dear Great Aunt Elroy,

After a long period during which our small village remained cut off from the rest of the world by a thick layer of snow, some birds are now beginning to announce spring. Flowers will soon bloom everywhere, and Pony’s Home will be surrounded by multicolored corollas.

I’m happy to hear that you are still in good health.

After hesitating for a long time, I have finally gathered all my courage and decided to write to you. Please, I hope you’ll read my letter to the end.

Of course I want to talk to you about the relationship between Archibald Cornwell and Annie Brighton.

This is none of my business, you’ll tell me, but I insist.

They love each other.

And for a long time. Annie has loved Archie before she came to Lakewood. Her feelings have only grown since then. She was always by his side, she was always there to support him, even if nobody noticed.

Archie did notice soon, and their feelings for each other grew harmoniously. I’ve been watching them for a long time, and I’ve seen their concern for each other along the path they have chosen to take together.

I beg you, Great Aunt Elroy, be understanding to such a sincere feeling!

I received a letter from Archie a few days ago, telling me of the pain inflicted on him by your objection, as well as that of Mr. and Mrs. Cornwell, his parents, and ultimately of the whole family at the idea of his engagement with Annie.

One of the main reasons for that objection undoubtedly originates from the fact that Annie grew up in an orphanage, just like me. As abandoned children, we don’t know our parents, as much as we may wish it.

Certainly our parents had some serious reason to choose abandonment as the only solution. But what is certain is that having been abandoned children is not our fault.

Miss Pony has brought us up with the sense that ‘God had made a little mistake’. God sometimes is mistaken in having us born into certain kinds of families. This is not important. We mustn’t feel angry or sad. The only thing that matters, wherever we were born, is to lead a full existence, so as to leave this world happy and satisfied. Maybe we have made a less happier beginning than others, but as far as I am concerned, today I am happier than I could possibly say.

On the other hand, Annie was adopted by the Brighton family while she was very young, and they loved her and raised her as their own daughter, as you know.

I admit that the Brighton family is not as distinguished as the Ardlay family, and I know it has been recently brought to your attention that Mr. Brighton had some debts. But Mr. and Mrs. Brighton have made it clear that they would never bother the Ardlays for that. For his part, Archie has no concern regarding this situation.

Since Great Uncle William, head of the family, has given his consent to their engagement, they could make their union official, but Archie wishes the sincere approval of the whole family.

So, Great Aunt, give those two people who love each other the blessing they respectfully await. Your consent will lead Mr. and Mrs. Cornwell to change their opinion, I'm sure of it.

I thank you from the bottom of my heart for taking the trouble to read my letter to the end. Obviously I haven't said anything to Archie or Annie, and Great Uncle William doesn't know anything about my request to you either.

I always poke my nose into other people's business, I know...

But I count so much on your kindness.

May God keep you in good health.

Candice W. Ardlay"

“To Mr. Alistair Cornwell

Dear Stear,

Great news!

Finally the day of Archie and Annie’s engagement has been officially fixed!

Great Aunt Elroy and the Leagans (especially Eliza and Neal) have struggled to make that project fail. We’ve seen them plotting and trying to win votes from the whole family, but they had little success. The advantage was the favorable opinion of the head of the family! It must be said that his opinion was a little more sincere and affectionate than all their shenanigans...

Great Uncle William was a little too optimistic at first, and didn’t imagine he would have to face such a strong opposition from Great Aunt Elroy and a few others. It is certain that Great Uncle William is not so unfailingly attached to the values of origin and upbringing as other people are, and on this point, he often finds himself at odds with the rest of the Ardlay clan.

Obviously the reason for that discrepancy is my fault...

Back then Great Uncle William adopted me without consulting anyone and without obtaining a consensus, which Great Aunt Elroy and others still can’t endure. I’m really sorry.

Well, I don’t know why I’m telling you all this; you already know everything, don’t you? Then you also know that Archie keeps sighing and saying: ‘Oh, if only Stear was here...’

And then, I don’t need to tell you either how we found out about Great Uncle William’s true identity, right? From where you are, you’ve known everything for a long time!

Since you left on your long journey, so many things have happened... Every time I wonder: ‘How would Stear react? What would Stear think?’ So, I’m writing you a letter that will never be sent, without asking myself any questions, as I’m doing right now...I find a certain inner peace there, and gradually I manage to get the impression I receive your answer. It’s strange...Have you by any chance invented a system of communication with heaven?

Since the invitation for Archie and Annie’s engagement arrived, I’ve been crazy with joy. And it’s only with you that I can share that feeling.

‘Well, what about me?’ Great Uncle William protests vehemently in Albert’s role...Obviously he would like to participate...

But no; this definitely concerns Stear, and that’s all there is to it. You have watched Archie and Annie long before I did. So I know you would feel that joy too...if you were here. What brilliant invention would you make for them as an engagement gift? Hmm...I can’t help

laughing...

The wedding won't take place right away, but imagine, in the end, you'll have the honor of having Annie as your sister in law! Isn't that nice?

Your parents, Mr. and Mrs. Cornwell, were not very enthusiastic at first, but actually they had expressed their opposition so as not to lose Great Aunt Elroy's esteem. The truth is that they're quite lovely towards Annie.

It's amazing how much Mr. Cornwell looks like you. You have the same way of doing things, the same way of speaking. He can talk about the most serious subjects, and yet his tone gives you the impression that he always takes everything lightly. And I've found out that he loves to break and reassemble any kind of object! In fact, Patty likes seeing your father, but every time that makes her sad.

Oh, Stear, if you knew...

Of course, I'm happy for Annie, but at the same time I can't stop thinking of Patty...Always watch over her from up there!

Right now Patty is entirely devoted to her project of becoming a teacher. And Hughley No. 2 is always with her!

Anyway, the bottom line is that Patty knows very well you are the first to wish her happiness, of course.

What? Me? Am I happy?

Certainly!

Why?

Well, thanks to the 'Candy Happy Maker', of course!

That invention was extraordinarily effective. You are definitely a genius!

Archie and Annie's engagement will take place in Lakewood, you know. It was Archie who said that, even though it's still a secret.

They have already decided the main lines of the ceremony: to surprise the whole congregation, the couple will arrive together through the water portal, Stear's portal! From up there, make it work! That day, I'll also look for you in the sunlight of Lakewood. And for Anthony too, of course...

That day, send a gentle breeze to blow over Lakewood, as a sign of happiness for Archie and Annie.

Yours truly...

Candy"

Narrative 7

I take a beautiful card with a lace pattern out of the encrusted jewelry box.

It's the invitation card for Archie and Annie's engagement. It has not yellowed at all, and is still intact.

Instantly, I feel the deep emotion that gripped me the day I received it. Of course, their wedding was also wonderful and really majestic, but the most emotional memories I have are from the day of their engagement. It was simpler, more cordial, more modest, bathed in the warm spring atmosphere. So many memories wash over me like waves, that I start crying.

Nature in Lakewood was in full bloom that day. Annie was dazzling in a very simple dress of aquamarine chiffon. She was splendid, beautiful and full of confidence. Archie was perfect too.

The sky was a blinding blue and the air was full of flower scents. That moment I suddenly noticed that exactly the "gentle breeze" I had asked from Stear was blowing.

I can write to Stear whenever I want, in my heart.

But I couldn't write to Anthony at that time; not yet.

Lakewood. Its clear light, the scents of the forest, the sparkling of the lake. And the perfume of the roses...

I suddenly felt that Anthony was present in all this.

Anthony's time had stopped the moment he had turned to me, in this forest, and it hadn't moved since.

If Anthony was still alive..., I sometimes tell myself.

If Anthony was still alive, we would all have stayed in Lakewood; we would not have gone to study in England. Yes...And if we hadn't gone to England, I would never have met Terry. Maybe it was Anthony who led me to meet Terry...I even came to think so...

And when I believe that, I also tell myself that the days of anguish that resulted from it are not a coincidence either...

I take a deep breath and my fingertips touch an envelope inside the jewelry box. It's a pink envelope. It still has a very sweet perfume.

It contains a letter from Eleanor Baker. And also a ticket for a play.

Stratford Theatre Company
HAMLET

Directed by Robert Hathaway,
with Terrence Graham

I did not go there.

“Miss Eleanor Baker,

Thank you for your letter and the ticket for Hamlet.

I can't tell you how long I remained with my eyes fixed on that ticket. I knew about the performance of which I had read in newspapers and magazines. Yet I haven't been looking for information about Terrence; I would even say I've been avoiding it. But it's strange; it seems to be getting to me on its own.

It's been so long since you called my name in the small town of Rockstown where I had gone looking for a friend of mine who had disappeared and to whom I owed my life. How could I have imagined that Terry was playing in a provincial traveling theatre troupe...

I have no words to express the surprise and the sadness I felt that moment. I had read somewhere that Terry had been fired from Stratford Theatre Company since his acting had become too erratic, but I didn't want to believe it. I preferred to tell myself that it was just a malicious lie.

But Terry was there, before my eyes, and his acting was so outrageous and artificial that I almost got on stage to punch him and yell at him. ‘Remember! We didn't leave each other...we didn't tear each other apart that night so that I would find you here slaughtering Shakespeare...’

But I didn't have the strength to do that.

So, maybe a miracle happened? Maybe he still heard the voice of my heart?

Indeed, in the middle of the play, I had the feeling that his acting was beginning to change, that his character was beginning to have a soul. I thought I saw again the light that used to shine in his eyes before. And that moment I believed Terry was getting back on his feet...

I wanted to see him again...

But not like this.

So I left that miserable tent. I was confused. And that moment you called me. We had only seen each other once, ages ago...

Terrence Graham was born to be an actor!

That sordid stage under that dilapidated tent does not measure up to his talent!

You know that better than anyone! I know you were there only because you were very worried and wanted to protect him in secret, just in case...

And I was happy to see that you were still his mother. Yes, the fact that we met in that place is indeed the sign that something invisible had drawn us to each other...

So today, that a second chance is given to Terry by the Stratford Company with the role of Hamlet, I'm not surprised, I must say. And yet, Miss Baker, I have to decline your cordial invitation to come and

see the play.

I would like to see him play...and I don't want to.

If I come and see the play, I'll probably want to see him again. And if I saw him, I would like to exchange a word with him...

I'll keep my promise to Susanna Marlowe. I won't see him again. I have promised.

The role of Hamlet is made for him.

It will be a triumph, I'm sure of it.

I'm sorry, Miss Baker.

I'm very touched by your kindness, but it also hurts me.

I keep my eyes fixed on this ticket, and that's enough for me to watch the performance, to see him playing, and to hear the enthusiastic applause of the audience.

I'll treasure this ticket.

And I'll also wait for your next film, Miss Baker.

Take care of your health.

Candice W. Ardlay"

“Mr. Terrence Graham,

Terry...

Every time I try to look at your image inside of me, my heart becomes like a bittersweet apricot. The slightest breeze could make me sway, and I can't breathe.

Congratulations on your triumph as Hamlet! I can't open a magazine without coming across a flattering review, a glowing portrait, or a dithyrambic analysis!

‘The Hamlet everyone had in mind, even larger than life...’

‘Terrence will play Hamlet in England...’

Even Great Uncle William speaks of ‘Terry’ since that name is on everyone's lips. At first he forced himself not to say anything, and even hid the magazines from me. But no doubt he finally found that awkward, and then he started talking about you as if it were something natural. I must say I prefer it that way too.

Yes, Terry, you may have heard of it, but Great Uncle William, the head of the Ardlay family, was Albert! That's incredible, right? Still, that's what I call a nerve! And we saw each other even in London! And to think that I had entrusted my personal diary to Great Uncle William as a token of good faith when I left St. Paul's college...

Therefore, if there is someone who knows at least as well as I do how much I...hmm...about you, Terry, that's Albert.

He knows how we met, how long it took us to realize that we...hmm... in short, he knows everything. I would give anything to see that man's face while he was reading my diary...As it happens, he is careful not to bring this subject up for discussion. Well, so am I, I must say.

Fortunately Albert never thought about acting. With that impassive face of his, he could have been your greatest rival. He even concealed from me for a while the fact that he had recovered his memory. And not all mysteries have been clarified as far as he is concerned; far from it...

But I have to confess that Albert has saved my life. There's no doubt that I managed to get back on my feet because he was by my side during my worst moments.

Terry, I wanted so much to tell you how I returned to America to find you, but I didn't have the time to talk to you about my adventures. Besides, almost all the letters I wrote to you at that time never reached you.

Fortunately you sent me heaps of letters. You were busy, but...Your letters were addressed to ‘Freckled Tarzan’; you only wrote to make fun of me while I was hoping for messages that were a little more romantic...Well, that didn't prevent me from seeing deep in your heart. You were laughing at me, but I clearly saw your kindness and

consideration between the lines.

Terry, thank you.

I've been treasuring all your letters, even if I don't have the courage to read them again.

You even went to Pony's Home once, didn't you?

Miss Pony and Sister Lane told me that later. At that time, I was a stowaway on a ship, which I regretted! If I had returned a little earlier...Or if you had come a little later...

The same thing happened in Chicago...

How many times did we just miss each other? But that was nothing; I was convinced we would make up for those lost opportunities later, any time, and then we could be together for a long, long time...I believed in that.

That night in New York was cold, but in my memory the falling and accumulating snow was warm, maybe because it kept the warmth of your arms. I hadn't given up on being happy...It was you who had promised me I would be happy some day.

I am happy now.

Terry, be happy too! It was Susanna's love that supported you and helped you be reborn. I have read that in an article about you.

Terry, Susanna is a very nice person. A wonderful person. That unfailing love for you...She's really extraordinary.

And you are wonderful too, Terry. You have chosen Susanna. That's the proof you are beautiful inside.

Of course, this letter will never be sent...

I know that.

But I'm so happy with your success, Terry, that I had to write it, even if I'll never send it.

Oh, Terry...

Don't ever forget that Terrence Graham has an admirer somewhere in the American countryside.

Don't ever forget that every time you get on the stage...the curtain goes up...and I applaud with all my might.

Freckled Tarzan

P. S. I loved you, Terry."

Narrative 8

A white envelope lies now before my eyes.

It's the only envelope in the entire jewelry box that seems to be wrapped in an icy halo.

I have read the letter it contains only once, and yet I know the text by heart.

The first and last letter Susanna Marlowe has ever sent to me.

*“Miss Candice White Ardlay,
I hope you have returned safely to Chicago.
Please forgive me for letting you go without even bothering to
alleviate the terrible feeling I’ve caused you.
I knew where Terrence’s heart was. I always knew it, and yet I
couldn’t give him up.
Do you remember the night we saw each other in Chicago, during
that charity performance? That night you came to the hotel hoping to
meet Terry. I hated you when I saw your eyes sparkling with joy. I
hated Terry too because he only thought of you.
I was ready to do anything to make him forget you.
Becoming paralyzed? Losing the use of my legs? It’s a small thing
compared to losing Terry...
Forgive me.
By falling in love with Terry, little by little I became a detestable
woman; I know it.
Becoming an actress was my childhood dream. In order to achieve it,
I gave up a lot of things. But now...None of that matters anymore. I
want to be with Terry. I don’t want to leave him. This is my only wish.
Pure selfishness, absolutely abominable on my part, I know.
That night, when he heard me cry, Terry said: ‘I’ll stay by your side.
Now and always.’ He spoke in a very low voice, watching the snow
falling out of the window, but he did say it, and his words were
perfectly clear.
I know his heart was going after you at that same moment, but I
clung to those words. How could I live so I would deserve Terry’s
tenderness? And just because I know what I have done to you, the
answer is simple: Loving him twice as much, for my sake as well as
yours.
Terry is my life.
Candice...You gave me hope to live and I can never thank you
enough.
I wish you every possible happiness.
Susanna Marlowe”*

Then, one day, I read a newspaper article announcing Susanna Marlowe’s death. That happened years ago. I also read that article only once, but I don’t need to read it again because every word of it has been engraved in my mind.

Susanna was dead...

Suddenly, I lost all of my strength and let myself fall on the sofa.

I couldn’t breathe, and my tears were flowing without stopping.

The article was accompanied by a photograph of Susanna, smiling, in

a wheelchair.

Susanna had continued her theatrical career only as a narrator and a voice-over. She had also written various plays, several of which had been performed on stage, as the article said.

The famous Terrence Graham had lived with her and supported her to the end in her struggle against her illness. However, they had never been married.

There had been no statement from Terrence.

*“Candy,
Are you still the same?
...A year has passed.
I told myself I would contact you after a year. But while I was
hesitating, six more months have passed.
So, I’m writing to you, and come what may.
As for me, I have not changed.*

T. G.”