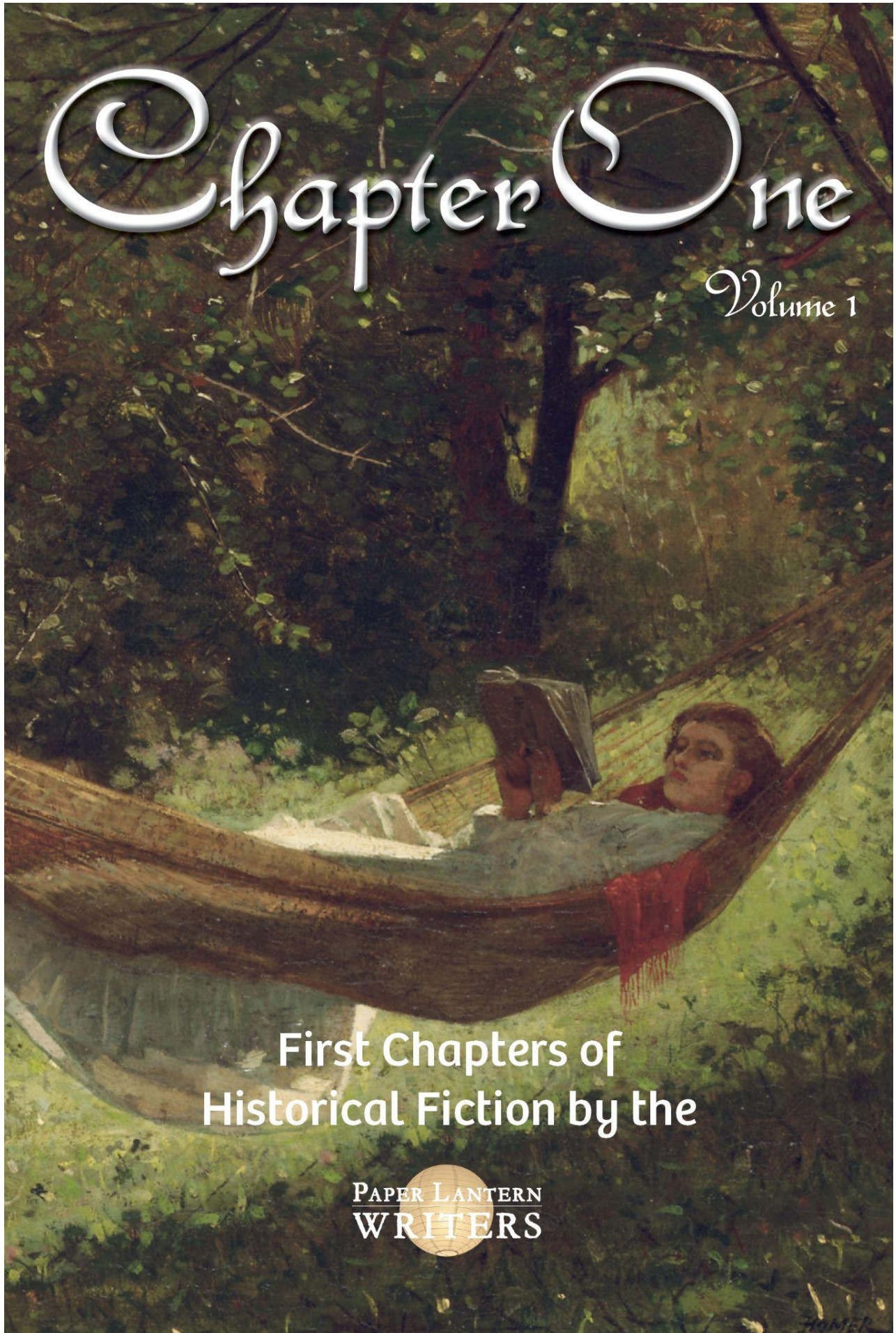


Chapter One

Volume 1

First Chapters of
Historical Fiction by the

PAPER LANTERN
WRITERS



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UNDER THE ALMOND TREES

by Linda Ulleseit

Published 2014

Chapter 1: New York 1848-1849

Ellen Rand Perkins

I commit my first overt act of rebellion at the age of twenty-one when I insist to my mother that I must marry my cousin, Jacob Perkins.

“Mama, I have loved him my entire life.” I stand square in front of her, shoulders back, feet in a wide stance instead of knees demurely together. My chin juts firmly. I’m sure she sees it as unattractive.

The late summer sunlight lances in through the window, a spear to her chest. She perches in her usual spot on the settee, as always prepared to leap to my father’s beck and call. It’s a hard habit to break even after seven years of widowhood. Her shoulders slump, and for a moment it seems the shaft of sunlight has wounded her. She purses her lips and sets her embroidery hoop beside her, eyes drooping with sadness and disappointment when she looks up at me. It’s not the sunlight that’s hurt her. A good mother must try once more, so of course she does. “There is a fine son of a friend...”

“I want only Jacob.”

“He is your cousin,” she begins, twisting her hands in her lap.

But I’ve heard it all before and rattle off the litany of rebuttals before she can voice her tired objections. “He’s the son and heir of Papa’s favorite brother, the Congressman. Jacob will have no trouble finding work. And I love him.”

Mama drops her gaze to her lap, where she stills her hands. I know she is thinking of successful bankers, successful merchants, successful anybodies rather than my cousin. I also know she misses my father most when one of us, usually me, taxes her. Papa left her with four children: a student, an heir, a delight, and a rebel. I've always known my role among my siblings, but this is the first time I've held my ground. Then Mama sighs, and I know I have her.

Jacob and I marry in November of 1848, but after two blissful months together, the world intrudes. Word of gold discovered in California reaches New York. Cholera rages through our city. Everyone seems to be rushing about in a dither, either panicking or packing. People predict 1849 will change the face of the country forever. Maybe I am selfish to care only about my beloved and our life together.

Just before five o'clock on a frigid January day, my husband arrives home from the office. The solid front door clicks shut on a howling wind that rattles the windowpanes in our small flat, closing out the world of New York's Lower East Side, where increasing numbers of immigrants are spreading cholera to us all. I know Jacob isn't terribly happy working for my Uncle Moses at his newspaper, but the *New York Sun* is becoming quite popular and I pray Jacob will find an aspect of the business he enjoys.

The stove has been burning all day, and the oxtail soup smells delicious. I wipe my hands on my apron and peek at the boiled leg of mutton, which is almost done. I look over my kitchen, my domain, with satisfaction. Untying the apron, I wipe my hands and quickly smooth my skirt. In the hall, I pause by the mirror to tuck a few strands of light brown hair back into place before hurrying into the front room to greet my husband properly, with a smile and a kiss.

His expression halts me. He stands with his back against the closed front door, face filled with dread. He wears his suit like one unaccustomed to business. His slicked dark brown hair is neat and his mustache combed, but his expression is grim as he puts his hat on the rack. Why would he fear coming home?

"Jacob?"

"Ellen." He says my name softly, his eyes warm with love even as his mouth tightens into a line. He walks to his big chair, perching on the red velvet cushion as if it were a hard bench. "Come, sit. We must talk."

Clasping my hands to avoid wringing them, I sit in one of the carved Victorian chairs my mother presented to us upon our marriage. The ornate table clock strikes five, its stentorian tones echoing importantly before fading to silence.

“I have come across an amazing opportunity, my love,” he says without directly looking at me. “The *Apollo* leaves New York for California in two weeks, and Lucian and I plan to be aboard her.”

“Lucian? He’s talked you into this?” My sister must be having a similar conversation with her husband at this very moment. I’m sure she would have told me had she known sooner.

“Cousin Joseph’s going, too. He set up the whole thing.”

Our cousin has a taste for adventure. That’s what Mama says, anyway. I always think of Joseph as reckless. His father has the money and the ship to make this adventure happen. Suddenly I realize he means to go alone. Stricken, I ask, “Jacob, why?”

He finally looks at me, face etched with misery. “Ellen, I want to give you everything, but I want to earn it. This is my chance to make a future for us, independent of the family. I would bring you with me, my love, but California is a wild place. Let me go first and I shall send for you once we are settled.”

I nod, but my mind whirls. What will I do without him? Jacob’s been part of my world since we were small. My sister, Coelia, has her children to keep her busy, but I’ll be alone. “It’s not so bad,” he says. “Mama Perkins will relish your company. I can see you placed with her before I leave if you wish. Or with Coelia if you prefer. I’m sure she’d appreciate help with the children.”

I shudder at the idea of living with Coelia and my three small nieces and nephew. My sister, the graduate from Rutgers Female Institute, who studied to no purpose other than to marry and have children. No, moving back with Mama and my younger sister, L’Amie, is the better choice. They have lived with my Uncle Benjamin since the death of my father. Uncle Benjamin’s household with his wife and three children will reabsorb me as if I had never left to get married.

“Jacob, must you?” I ask, trying to keep the pleading tone out of my voice. “I will miss you so!”

I love him even more when he doesn't remind me that his word is law, like Lucian does to Coelia. Instead, he folds me in his arms. I cling to him, memorizing the smell of his cologne and the feel of his wool coat against my cheek. He murmurs in my ear, "As will I, my love. I will send for you the moment we have secured appropriate lodging in San Francisco."

In the next two weeks I object quietly, then vociferously, then with tears. But come sailing day Jacob walks up the plank to board the *Apollo*, my cousin Joseph and brother-in-law Lucian striding with him, handsome and confident. The three brash young men turn more than one head in the crowd with their smiles and camaraderie. The wind teases their coat flaps and hair, and I want to run to Jacob and button his coat and smooth his hair. I resist. Coelia can't bear to witness the sailing, and has stayed home with the children, but Mama and I watch the tugboat pull the *Apollo* away from the dock, and wave madly, hoping our men folk can see. The bitter bite of January drives us indoors before the ship is out of sight, but I will never forget the image of *Apollo's* belching stacks as she works up speed and diminishes with distance.

I spend the rest of January moping with my embroidery near a window in Uncle Benjamin's parlor but never picking up the needle. Instead I stare at raindrops smattering the glass. A small one quivers until another small drop joins it. Fused into one, it slowly moves down the pane, gathering drops and moving faster until it's hurtling down the outside wall. And my gaze returns to the top of the window to find another drop to watch.

A raucous clatter drags my attention away from the window. With a sigh, I prepare for the imminent intrusion of my two young cousins. My own children will never be so wild, running through their house as if it were a gymnasium! But it's Uncle Benjamin's house, and his sons. They run into the parlor, shirts awry and suspenders trailing, screeching as if being pursued by a demon. Today the demon is my sister, L'Amie. At fifteen she should know better, but she was Papa's delight and remains Mama's baby.

"L'Amie!" I snap. "They are wild enough without your encouragement!"

"Oh, Ellen, you are so stuffy," she complains. She scrunches up her pretty face, graced with a petite nose rather than my own hawked beak, and emits one more horrible roar that sends the boys scampering from the room. L'Amie doesn't follow. Turning to me, she says, "I shan't be an old stuffy married lady at twenty-one."

I tighten my lips into a disapproving line.

“I will be a doctor,” she declares. She throws back her head, dark hair falling to the middle of her back. The ribbon that pulls it back off her face has come untied and straggles amidst the glossy waves. Her back straightens, and her chin juts out in an unattractive manner.

I allow my laugh to be loud and unladylike, caused no doubt by her earlier insult. “A lady physician? I don’t think women will come that far in our lifetime, sister.”

Rather than make her angry, my words seem to inspire her. Eyes alight with passion, she grabs my arm and says, “Oh, but we can make it happen! Did I tell you I met a girl the other day whose mother was at last summer’s convention in Seneca Falls?”

“The women’s convention?” My brow furrows. “Does Mama know you’re consorting with those people?”

“It was fabulous, Ellen! Women from everywhere were there, and some men, too. They talked about women in professional careers, and even voting. A women’s rights group meets at my friend’s house. Will you come with me tomorrow night?”

My sister may be young and impetuous, but she’s intelligent. She knows the immigrant women moving into the Lower East Side don’t have the advantages our family connections give us. Women like our serving girl work long hours for our family then go home to toil for their own. “L’Amie,” I say, laying a hand on her arm, “I appreciate the sentiment, but these women are not...respected. Do you understand?” At her blank stare, I try again. “Papa indulged you, maybe too much. You think everyone is wonderful, and that they all like you. I’m not sure these women are the right ones for you to follow.”

“Stuffy,” my sister huffs, but her eyes glitter and she won’t look at me. Instead, she runs from the room roaring. Giggles and running feet tell me the boys have been waiting for her in the hall. At least she’s taking their noise away from me.

I return to my contemplation of raindrops on the window, but my own reflection in the rain-streaked glass intrudes. I am a happily married woman. Yes, my husband is absent, but the state of matrimony contents me. Nonetheless I am interested in the politics of L’Amie’s new friends, however reluctant I am to admit it. The notion of women voting for elected officials secretly thrills me. I fear I won’t be able to keep my curiosity from my sister and thereby

encourage her.

Two weeks linger as if they are months. I grow tired of the constant worry that is my companion. Besides, how long can I pine for word from Jacob? The *Apollo* will take months to get to San Francisco. I seek L'Amie in the parlor, where she is stabbing some fabric with a needle. I think she's trying to embroider.

"So isn't your women's meeting tonight?" I ask her.

She looks up with joyous stars in her eyes. "Will you finally come with me?"

"Yes," I tell her. "Someone needs to keep an eye on you."

By the time a weak spring sun spreads across New York, L'Amie and I have attended a handful of meetings and openly declared our support for women's rights. Mama remains silent on the matter, only giving us an occasional pained smile when we speak of voting someday. At these meetings I have met a handful of married women, two whose husbands are ardent supporters of women's rights. I am sure my Jacob will agree that women should have a voice in the running of the country, especially in as wild a place as California.

As the first heat of summer begins to bake the city, Mama's pained smiles turn to frowns as she realizes the cause is no passing fancy for L'Amie and I. It is a family dinner that brings the matter to open discussion.

Uncle Benjamin sits at the head of the long cherry wood table with my aunt at the foot. Mama's place is on one side, flanked by L'Amie and me. The boys usually sit on the opposite side, but tonight my brother Joey and Cousin Henry are visiting from college. Coelia and her three are here, too. The younger children have been banished to the kitchen. I face Cousin Henry across the bowl of turnips. Coelia is in the middle, and our brother across from L'Amie.

At eighteen and nineteen, Henry and Joey think they are old enough to bestow their opinions upon us, and have been doing so throughout the first few courses. The conversation slows for a moment when Aunt Eveline rings for the sixth course and the serving girl brings in a platter of fish. That's when L'Amie speaks.

"Ellen and I have been attending meetings for women's rights," she begins. Mama's fork clatters to her plate, and I can see her hand shake. "We are working with a temperance union." L'Amie's eyes are bright as an evangelist.

“Temperance!” laughs my brother. “You’ll find no supporters at our school!”

Henry laughs too, but has the grace to stifle it. “Not many men at that meeting, I’ll wager,” he says to L’Amie.

“There are some,” she insists.

“Men who value their partnership with a woman do not need to drink to gain power over them,” I say.

Mama gasps. “Girls,” she protests, with a glance at her brother.

Uncle Benjamin leans forward and pins me with the steely eyes that make him a good businessman. “Are you saying, Ellen, that a man should never take a drink?”

“Some men cannot hold their liquor, Uncle,” L’Amie says. Even to me she sounds prim.

“Times are difficult for women,” I say, warming to the topic. I intend a scholarly discussion that will end with the men in my family staunchly behind the issue of women’s rights, but I forget with whom I am dealing.

“I cannot have a household full of rebellious girls, Mary,” Uncle Benjamin warns, his stern gaze now focused on my mother.

“I am sorry, Benjamin,” my mother says. “I thought this would pass, so I allowed it.”

“How long have they been going to meetings?” Coelia asks. I wonder where her alliance lies. Her face is carefully neutral. I notice her hands resting on her stomach, where Lucian’s parting gift grows.

Mama puts both hands in her lap, where I can see her tormenting a linen napkin between them. Her glare silencing me as I start to answer Coelia, she murmurs, “I shall speak with them after dinner.”

The men talk among themselves for the remainder of the meal, discussing politics, prospects for gold in California, the cholera epidemic, anything that does not involve a woman.

As soon the serving girl clears the last dinner plate, Uncle Benjamin rises and leads his son and his nephew into the den, a world without womanly influence. There they will smoke cigars, sip cursed brandy, and discuss their flighty women.

My sisters and I follow Mama into the parlor. I settle into the seat by the window, where my embroidery has lain, largely forgotten, since January. Coelia sits near me, dropping heavily

onto the settee, arranging her skirts neatly, and accepting a tiny cup of tea when Mama pours. I sip mine, but L'Amie leaves hers to get cold. She paces the room, waiting for Mama to speak. It's Coelia who speaks first, however.

“What were you thinking, L'Amie, to bring that up at dinner?” she demands.

“You don't support our cause, sister?” L'Amie turns on our eldest sister.

Coelia shakes her head, as if talking to a child. “I am busy with my household and my family, and worrying for my husband every day. I have no time for lost causes.”

I bristle at her insinuation that I'm not worried for Jacob. “And does your worrying help, then?” I ask in as chill a tone as I can manage.

“What will Jacob think when he hears of your activities, Ellen?” Mama asks in a low tone. One of the grey strands in her hair has come loose from its knot and strays along her cheek. Her eyes are sad as they contemplate me.

“He loves me,” I begin.

“Jacob is of our generation, Mama,” L'Amie interrupts. “He will support his wife to build a better future for women.”

I appreciate her effort to support me, but I'm tired of being interrupted. “I believe it is time to stand up for better conditions for women. Jacob and I will discuss this when we are reunited. Then, as now, it is our affair and no other's.”

Mama looks at me, her eyes brimming with emotion. “I, too, know what it is like to lose a father young, and to be alone in a marriage. I am not unsympathetic to your ideas, but I ask you not to offend your uncle's hospitality by creating hostility at dinner?”

I nod, but L'Amie speaks first. “It is not worth my time to discuss reform with him. His views are a shame.”

“What is a shame,” Mama puts in, “is that Benjamin hurried away from the dinner table before cook had an opportunity to serve the almond cake.”

Her eyes sparkle with humor and I know she has forgiven us as she always does. L'Amie and I rush to embrace her. I turn to my elder sister. “Coelia, do you stand with us?”

“In spirit, I do. In actuality, my life is too busy to be running around attending meetings.”

I'm content with this. She has her children, after all, to fill the lonely days, and one on the

way to prepare for. I have only vivid terrors of storm swept ships lost at sea.

Summer fades to autumn, and Coelia gives birth to a baby girl. She has no way to send word to Lucian. As the days cool and the leaves turn, I spend more time watching for a letter or telegram than attending meetings. The *Apollo* is sailing around Cape Horn, and Cousin Joseph is charged with setting her up in San Francisco as a floating store. Jacob and Lucian, of course, will head into the hills to look for gold. I hope they remember to send word first.

When it comes, late in October, I am both relieved and disappointed. The letter reads, *Have arrived. All well.* Four words after eight months?

I fret daily, waiting for the long letter with proclamations of undying love and a summons to reunite. Instead, in the middle of November I get a letter from Lucian. The courier places it in my hand and I close the front door. Still standing in the entry, I rip the envelope and let it drift to the floor. I am angry it's not from my husband. The single sheet flutters to join its envelope on the floor as I gasp in incomprehension at Lucian's terse words. I want more, but at the same time he's told me all.

Jacob killed in mining accident. My deepest condolences.

To read more, check out [UNDER THE ALMOND TREES](#).



FANNY NEWCOMB AND THE IRISH CHANNEL RIPPER

by Ana Brazil

Published 2017

Chapter 1: New Orleans Friday, April 26, 1889

FANNY NEWCOMB SUCKED THE BLOOD from the knuckle of her right thumb. Her fingers were stiff and reddened; her nails were torn. Her cuffs were rolled up to her elbows and she'd undone the top three buttons of her bodice. She dabbed the glow from her forehead with her crumpled handkerchief and surveyed her opponent. The battle had just begun.

The Hammond typewriting machine was not entirely uninjured. The A, P, and W keys were snarled tightly and buried deep in the carriage well. The typewriter was immobilized.

Fanny's pride was bruised but her spirit was unbowed. "You're just a machine," she sneered. "Wires and plates and copper and keys. I'm smarter than you are. It might take me a while to figure you out but I'll do it."

But Fanny needed to master the machine *now*. If she couldn't teach her students how to create perfect correspondence on the typewriting machine by next Wednesday, all hell would break loose. All hell in the grand personage of Sylvia Giddings, Founder and Principal of the Wisdom Hall Settlement House. Sylvia Giddings's outlook, authority, and decisions were absolute. She did not allow her employees to fail her. And Fanny was entirely in Sylvia's employ.

Four months ago—when she answered Sylvia's newspaper advertisement for a woman to teach business courses—Fanny had consummate confidence in her abilities. After all, Fanny had

managed her father's law office for ten years. If Fanny could file papers, keep accounting ledgers, and take shorthand, she could teach younger women to do so also. Fanny excelled at every office chore; she just had never seen a typewriting machine before.

But four months ago Fanny was at the end of her resources. Lying to Sylvia was her only option. Like Sylvia, Fanny was a spinster. But unlike Sylvia, Fanny's prospects had shriveled to almost nothing after her father's death a year ago. Since then, Fanny had both lost her livelihood at the Law Office and failed as a ladies' companion. Teaching at something as new as a settlement house—especially one in New Orleans' roguish Irish Channel—appealed to her as interesting, useful work. And Fanny was definitely qualified to teach. Well, almost.

Fanny dug her hands into the carriage well only to prick her fingertips again. "Damnation!"

Her fidgeting was interrupted by a resounding thump. And then another, both echoing from the third floor and down to Fanny's first floor classroom. Even at eleven at night, Sylvia's carpenter was still hard at work, building a staircase from the new third floor up to the roof. The work of turning Wisdom Hall into a glorious edifice of immigrant education—Sylvia's *Grand Plan*—never ended.

"Go home, Karl!" The carpenter had disrupted both of Fanny's classes tonight with his noise. "Give me a moment of quiet!"

Fanny dabbed her forehead and neck with her handkerchief again. Although it was only April, New Orleans was choked with a sudden heat that was worthy of summer and the early evening breaks of rain only intensified the humidity. Closed-up in the classroom, Fanny was drenched in frustration.

Still, she carefully unglued the keys from each other and examined the machine to make sure she had not permanently injured it. She reviewed the diagram of the keyboard pinned on the easel and commanded her fingers to press each key with equal strength and rhythm. She'd almost completed typing the date when the 8 and 9 keys jammed.

The paper was smeared and unreadable. Fanny ripped it from the wheel, enjoying the harsh whir she forced from the machine. She picked up the machine—ready to shake it into submission—and then thought better of it. Sometimes a mean machine really needed a sharp

kick. She set the machine on the floor and aimed her boot at it. But before she could discipline the keys, the infirmary night bell rang out from the front gallery.

Fanny was out of the classroom and into the main hallway in seconds. Only Sylvia's sister—Dr. Olive Giddings—or the doctor's assistant Thomas were supposed to answer the infirmary bell but it was still ringing frantically when Fanny arrived at the front door. And there was no sign of Olive or Thomas.

Fanny gave a thought to buttoning up her bodice. Despite the roar of spring heat, despite her frustration, she should never have aired her neck until she reached her bedroom. But the collage of blood and ink on her fingertips had already left vivid stains on her skirt, and this was her best bodice.

Two sturdy black dogs rose from their beds at the back of the hallway and galloped toward the front door. "Ready to break the rules again?" Fanny asked Cain and Abel as she pulled the doorknob.

Liam O'Donnell, all twelve years and eighty pounds of him, stood at the threshold, feet planted firmly apart, as if he were in the boxing ring. Through his thin cotton shirt Fanny could see his narrow chest heave up and down. He gulped for air but managed to blurt out, "Doctor Olive's needed at Conner's Court."

Fanny stooped down to meet his dark wet eyes. "Why? What's happened?"

The boy wiped his hand under his nose and then on his pants. "Someone's been murdered in the Irish Channel!"

Fanny hurried the boy through the dark halls toward the back of Wisdom Hall. She barged through the Infirmary door to find Olive looking up from behind a table of dark apothecary bottles.

"Well," the doctor asked sharply. "What is it?"

Fanny put her hand gently on Liam's shoulders, "He sa—"

"Murder!" The boy honked like a trumpet. "A girl's been murdered in Conner's Court!"

"Murdered girls don't need doctors." Olive scowled at Liam and returned two of the bottles to the cupboard behind her. "Even you should know that."

"They *said* she was murdered...but somebody screamed for a doctor."

Fanny pressed forward gingerly, having been told more than once that the Infirmary was Olive's sacred soil, and entrance was by invitation only. "If there's any chance she's still alive, we must—"

"Of course we must." Olive took a key from her pocket and turned the lock on the medicine cupboard. She grabbed her medical bag and passed the lantern on her desk to Liam. "Well, what are you waiting for?"

The sultry Friday evening had enticed the inhabitants of the Irish Channel out of doors, and young Liam gamely maneuvered between men, women, donkeys, and dogs as he led Fanny and Olive through the soft darkness. Fanny had never been in this direction from Wisdom Hall, and quickly inventoried the new landscape: the battered old mansions that were as large and imposing as Wisdom Hall; the tall brick warehouses that were built almost into the streets; the slight shotgun houses that seemed to sink into the soft soil; and...was that a church steeple?

After five blocks and one near-miss with a pair of drunken roughs, Liam pointed toward a swelling of gaslight coming from between two saloons. "There!"

As Liam led the women forward, Fanny saw dozens of men and women crowded together, staring into the dimly lit space between the saloons. Just beyond the crowd, the doors and windows of both saloons were pinned open to the warm evening. Lights bounced from lamp to mirror in the saloons, illuminating tables of card players, drinkers, and the women who entertained them.

Conner's Court, New Orleans, America ~ Irish Only was painted in broad strokes on a wall. Even from the calmness of her father's downtown law office, Fanny had heard about Conner's Court, a well-known enclave of New Orleans' depravity. Could it really be as evil as it was reputed to be?

Liam grabbed Olive's arm and plowed through a hole in the crowd. Fanny followed, but Olive turned and commanded, "Not you; this is doctor's work."

Fanny jammed her hands into her skirt pockets, embarrassed by how absolutely Olive had dismissed her. Despite all of Fanny's hard work at Wisdom Hall, Olive and Sylvia still treated her like a simple-minded employee.

Fanny turned toward the growing crowd that began to envelope her. Were there fifty, sixty people here now? She inspected the men and women closest to her. *Something* had happened here. Something made that pregnant woman wipe her sleeve on her eyes; something made that man lose his dinner against the wall. *Something* was wrong here.

At five feet and six and a half inches, Fanny was the tallest woman in the cluster. If she'd taken time to put on a hat and cape, she would have been taller than most men here tonight, a thought that helped her remove her hands from her pocket and straighten her posture. Fanny felt eyes turning toward her and she met them unflinchingly. Her warm, golden hair and calm complexion marked her as an outsider amongst the freckled, flame-haired Irish. And her unfashionable clothes—even her ink-spotted skirt—were better made than the grimy rags worn about her. Even in the darkness, Fanny could not pretend she belonged in the Irish Channel.

Whispers cascaded throughout the court: *Mother of God!...poor wee thing...what type of monster...I'm going to be sick meself.*

More people collected behind her, immersing her in the odors of alcohol and the heavy, stale scent of Mississippi river. Fanny felt warm breath close to her ear and turned quickly. A thin woman offered a crooked smile.

“What happened here?” Fanny demanded.

“There’s blood everywhere. Blood, blood, blood, and blood,” the woman’s litany continued. “Everywhere.”

Fanny caught sight of the dried blood behind her own fingernails and remembered her failed attempts at mastering her typewriter machine. A shadow of responsibility and guilt hovered over her. She should be back at Wisdom Hall. She should be training herself on that accursed machine.

Instead, Fanny stretched to her full height and steeled her eyes into the darkness of Conner’s Court. If someone was murdered blocks from where she lived, Fanny Newcomb wanted to know all about it.

To read more, check out [FANNY NEWCOMB AND THE IRISH CHANNEL RIPPER](#).



A LADY'S REVENGE

by Edie Cay

Published 2020

PROLOGUE: LONDON, 1815

The hoofbeats couldn't pound fast enough to erase the feeling of dread that draped her like a cloak. Lydia hated being that close to the river, the creaking mastheads, the towering giants, the smell of sewage and rot. But perhaps that was the smell of her own soul, rotting her from the inside out. She'd know the difference as they retreated further into London—if the smell was her or if it was Wapping.

"We are never going there again," James said, leaning forward to peer out the carriage window for some unknown danger lurking about in the shadows. The carriage lurched as Vasily, the driver, climbed atop his perch. James pounded the carriage wall, and the vehicle eased into motion.

"I don't know," Lydia said, shivering in her pelisse. The area was still haunted by the gruesome Ratcliff Highway murders five years ago, giving them a false impetus to visit the area, as if they were voyeuristic aristocrats out to tour the misfortunes of others. "I thought I might ask Papa to buy some property in Wapping."

James rolled his eyes. "Fancy being a fishwife now?"

"That makes it sound like I would marry a piece of cod."

"Might make a good husband. Won't beat you and all that."

"Your standard for marital bliss is staggering." She could see her breath in front of her face. She had been glad to have both James and Vasily there for protection. "What will Margaret say

about this?"

"You shouldn't have gone. I should have done this alone." James pulled a blanket out from underneath the seat. "Take this."

Their appearance an hour earlier in the Kings' Arms tavern was accepted as morbid tourism. No one had cared that two aristocrats and a foreign bodyguard sat down with a scruffy sailor. No one had noticed when James slipped that sailor a sack of coins worth more pounds than any of them would see in a year. James didn't trust the man, but Lydia didn't care; she didn't have a choice whether to trust or not. She needed the midshipman.

"Maybe we don't tell Margaret," James suggested.

"Margaret agreed to all the same sacrifices we did." Lydia arranged the blanket around her and pulled it up to her neck, but the shivering didn't stop because it wasn't just the cold. It was all of the darkness, pooled around her for so long. It was the odor of stale brandy from her childhood, it was the heavy weight pinning her down, it was the guilt for pulling James and Agnes and Margaret into it with her. If only she had kept her mouth shut. No one would have had to know, and while it would have killed her, at least the rest of them would have been free.

"We were just children. Agnes and Margaret more so. They didn't know what they agreed to," James reminded her.

"But they've made their sacrifices just the same."

Lydia's clothes felt wrong on her body. The chafing fabric, even the stockings on her legs, the hair on her head. "They have a right to know."

"It's a hanging offense. Do you realize that?" His face was nothing but harsh planes in this dim light. She did her best to ignore the resemblance to his father, the face of the monster in her dreams.

"I do," she whispered. "As did Midshipman Smith. As do you. This is the risk, and we are all taking it."

James fell back against the squabs, silent as the clack of the wheels turning on the road. It would be some time before they were home, back to Mayfair, back to clean rows of hedges and curated heirlooms and constructed histories.

"Do you think he can do it without hurting anyone?" Lydia asked. "You know Margaret

will be concerned.”

“And you aren’t?” James scoffed. He shook his head. “He said he could do it.”

“Needs must, and all that,” she said. There was nothing right about this. Or her. Or the world. There was no blanket big enough to hide under, no embrace safe enough to hold her, no volume of tears big enough to calm her. Her body trembled, the panic threatening to take over.

“It’s not just your revenge,” James reminded her.

“He hurt so many people.”

“James.” She said his name to bring him to his senses. “This isn’t about your father. He’s dead. Tonight was about Hackett.”

James shifted in his seat, the muscle in his jaw flexing as he clenched his teeth.

Lydia flitted her hand out, trying for a gesture that meant they could drop the subject. Her temporary palsy didn’t make it very clear, but James understood.

“As long as Midshipman Smith can manage his commitment aboard the Europe,” James said, “we will have only two of those bastards left.”

“One,” Lydia corrected. “Denby is on a trajectory that no one can help. Sebastian looked into his finances for me.”

“Must you include Sebastian?” James’s brows knotted together in a pout.

“Must you whine? You are impossible when you’re petulant.” Lydia pulled the blanket up around her neck again. The shakes were fading now that they were talking about actual plans.

“He isn’t a part of us. He doesn’t have any stakes.”

“He was William’s friend, and that’s what matters,” Lydia said. William’s death had been the reason they were all together in that country house fifteen years ago. The family was shoring itself up, licking its wounds. It was unthinkable that the heir to her father’s title would have perished with something as commonplace as catarrh, but he had. William was so much older that he’d already been out of the nursery by the time Lydia and James came along, but he was their hero. He took time to play with them whenever he was home. He taught Lydia how to ride and play cards. He carried baby Agnes around like he was her own nursemaid. Everyone commented on what a sweet boy the heir was to dote so on his sisters.

William got sick at school and was transported home white as a sheet, buried in blankets,

his lips an unnatural color. Then he was gone. The girls had been kept from him to prevent any further illness. So, they took to the country—Lydia, her father, mother, and sister. Her mother's sister's family, too: Lord Andrepont, Lady Andrepont—her mother's sister—their heir James, and, oddly, Margaret, the daughter of a housemaid, who everyone knew to be Andrepont's bastard. But everything about James's family was strange. Sinister.

And Andrepont was a monster. Everyone knew it. Everyone whispered it. Even the nursemaids with children present. He was the shadow in the corner, the highwayman in the woods.

And they were right.

Chapter 1: London, 1816

The mill had been out of town the night before. It had taken John hours to get back home, late, bloodied but victorious. His body didn't yet creak and ache, but he knew it would come the day after. Best to make money while there was money to be made.

Parsons entered the room with a tray.

"I'll eat at Garraway's, don't worry. Is Michael ready with the gig?" John tied his cravat in a hasty mailcoach knot.

"May I help you with your coat, sir?" The butler's tone of voice was imperious, commanding even. It wasn't a question so much as a nudge toward his desire for John to set up his house properly. Hire a valet, a cook, a kitchen maid, instead of leaving this lurching townhouse empty save Parsons, Michael, and the maid whose name he couldn't remember. He hadn't seen her but once, when he hired her. Lucy, maybe?

"Aye—I mean, yes. Please do," John said, trying to match his butler's unhurried formality. The crisp distance wasn't part of his nature.

Parsons held out the coat, and John shrugged into it as the butler pulled and pinched the fabric here and there, retrieving a brush to take off any stray bits of lint that may have stuck.

John said, "Am I fit to go gossip with all those rogues and cheats?"

Parsons inclined his head with a faint smile. "I will get Michael readied for you, sir."

John needed to work—it was as urgent a feeling as needing a chamber pot. He took a sip of the coffee Parsons had left for him. It was better than the swill he picked up at Garraway's, but he needed the company that the coffeehouse gave. He hated the days the Exchange was closed. The coffeehouse became the de facto Exchange, with runners from all industries reporting as brokers and jobbers congregated and poured over newspapers from all around. He thundered down the stairs, no doubt causing Parsons a fit.

But no, the unruffleable butler was by the door with hat and gloves waiting. Just once he'd like to catch the man out. "Michael will be out front shortly."

"Tell him I've started on. He can catch me up on Holborn," John instructed, pulling on the gloves. "Fine togs make me look a respectable sort, yeah?"

Parsons's face twisted. "If I may, sir, the clothes may do the service, but the state of your face after one of your events does not."

"It's a mill, Parsons. A prizefight. I see toffs there all the time. It ain't like it used to be."

"Some things, perhaps, are not. However, some conventions are not so easily brushed aside. You do look a bit of a..." The butler cleared his throat and looked away. "A bit of a highwayman."

There was the rancor! John laughed. He couldn't wait to tell Caulie about the discomfort of a man he paid to bring him his coffee in the morning and his liquor at night. It just seemed all backwards. Like living with money turned the whole world upside down. "Let me put you at ease, Parsons. It's just Garraway's, and all of those blokes have seen or had a bit of blackening of the peeper afore. Ladies ain't allowed."

"Very good, sir." Parsons returned to his full height and full distance.

John popped his hat on, giving it a thump for good measure. He could swear Parsons cringed. John supposed he should speak in his genteel accent with his butler, but it was so much more fun to needle that way. Besides, he still thought in those meaner tones. He couldn't be expected to get up in the morning with such long vowels.

Michael wasn't at the front gate with the gig yet, and John was not a man who did well waiting. But as he passed through the wrought iron fence, he spotted a different quarry.

Ladies Lydia and Agnes Somerset were leaving the townhouse next door. What a strange bit of luck. Lord Elshire rented the house, and his ward was just now having her debut. John had not met the girl yet, but Lord Elshire was an interesting cove who had never spent much time in London. This was the first time John had seen the Quality leaving the house. Society didn't always go as far afield as Marylebone. He checked his watch and there they were, upholding the rules of such ladies. They were on their round of calls. Three-fifteen. Formal call, then, not yet friends.

He itched to curl his hands into fists, just to shadowbox there in the street, blow off some nervous steam. But he didn't. He stretched his neck from side to side, feeling the comfortable crack on the right and on the left and on the right again. He hadn't planned this moment, but he'd dreamt of it.

Pearl needed a sponsor. He had enough money to line his pockets for all time, but his sister needed a protector, and a husband was better than a brother. But if she was going to marry well, she needed more than money. She needed friends in the right places, an entrance to the best parties, to the fashionable shops. Right now, she was mired in the lower middle class at Mrs. Tyler's Boarding School for Ladies. It was more than he could afford when she started, and it was less than he could wish for now that she was finishing.

To make Pearl's happiness come true, he had to find her some new acquaintances. He hadn't been able to figure out who, exactly, would be good mates for her. Henrietta had tried to be helpful during their dalliance, but she didn't know the unmarrieds.

But here on his doorstep was the fashionable set! Seemed like Fate. Nothing to it but to be bold. Best not think too hard; he was better on his feet.

"Excuse me, Lady Lydia, Lady Agnes," he called to the women as they walked to their phaeton. He cleared his throat, trying to remember to open his vowels, yawning to make those expensive sounds.

Lady Agnes, the tall one, kept talking. She was bigger all around than her older sister, and a bit plain. Lady Lydia was in front, her expression colder and even more distant than Parsons could be on a December day in Hell. She moved well, Lady Lydia did. A strange thing to notice, maybe, but she moved like someone who knew her business, not careless and flip with

her limbs. Her dark hair was shiny, visible underneath her bonnet, decorated with lavender flowers. She wore a gray-and-violet dress tailored so well that despite it showing off her curves, it seemed just as impenetrable as a suit of armor.

“But I thought it was perfectly well done. Really, Lydia, sometimes you can be such a snob,” Lady Agnes was saying. They approached the phaeton, but the step wasn’t down and the driver hadn’t noticed the ladies were ready.

“Pardon me—” John tried to cut in again, but Lady Agnes was back at her patter.

“I can see precisely what James sees in her, of course I can. What is shocking to me is that you cannot. It really is a selfish thing to not be able to see the very attractive traits in others,” Lady Agnes continued.

He’d committed now, to anyone watching, to speak to these ladies. He would be a fool to give up, and especially a cur to abandon the acquaintance if Pearl needed it. He didn’t think, he just acted. He put his hand out and landed it on Lady Lydia’s arm. Her head whipped around. Lady Agnes gasped. Wrong move.

“Pardon me,” Lady Lydia bit out in a tone that should have poisoned every stray dog, cat, and rodent within a one-mile radius.

John gave the biggest, least threatening smile of his life. He willed his blue eyes to sparkle with charm. If there was ever a time a diamond could pop out of his peepers, now was the time. “Excuse me, Lady Lydia, I was hoping to have a word.” Belatedly, he swept off his hat and gave a quick bow.

“We all face disappointment in life,” she said, the poison receding just a bit. It was the first time they’d been face to face, but recognition flared. Her eyes were blue, but the dark and stormy type, the opposite of his own. They were offset by dark eyelashes and brows, and an almost star-shaped beauty mark near her right eye.

It was as if all the wind had been knocked out of him. He willed himself to breathe. He hadn’t felt like this since he’d lost a mill to the Game Chicken three years ago. Those fists the size of pineapples and the brilliant midnight blue of this woman’s eyes had the same effect.

The driver lumbered down off his perch. He was the size of a small horse with hands like a porter’s hooks. This man was the protection, not just the chauffeur.

“I don’t care much for disappointment, my lady,” John said, giving another great smile, this time including Lady Agnes, who he had momentarily forgotten was still standing there. He concentrated on breathing in and then breathing out.

“We haven’t been introduced,” Lady Lydia said, as if she were speaking to a child. It was like she knew all the tones that could put off a person and didn’t mind using them.

“Walk with me for just a moment, here, in public, with chaperones.” He gestured to her sister and the driver. “And that will surely remedy our acquaintance.” He offered her his arm.

“That isn’t how it works.” She folded her arms across her chest. “Perhaps if you had better breeding, you would know.”

If this had been a turn-up, all bets would be against him. “I’ve spent my life taking chances, my lady. I always weigh the risk to benefit. Making your acquaintance, however I can get it, is worth the risk. And knowing me is always a benefit.” He meant to give another non-threatening grin, but he was in earnest. This was the grin that marked him as rubbish. The Quality didn’t smile—they didn’t need to. But it was the winning bits of his domino box that made folks relax and trust him.

She narrowed her eyes and watched him for a moment. It was only then that he remembered his black eye. He must be a wretched fright for a lady like her. No wonder she wouldn’t talk to him.

“Agnes, get in the phaeton. We’ll walk a single block, sir. Make your case. Vasily will follow us.”

“But—” Lady Agnes protested.

“Done,” John said, wanting to stick his hand out to shake, as if this were a deal on the floor of the Exchange. It felt like the hardest bargain he’d driven that year. Maybe even that entire decade. Was he supposed to feel grateful? He wasn’t sure.

The driver folded down the step and handed the taller woman into the phaeton. Lady Lydia spun on her heels to walk in the same direction the horses were pointed. Thankfully it was towards Holborn, and thus Garraway’s. John hurried to take the street-side position next to her.

“Don’t go far,” Lady Agnes called from the open vehicle.

Lady Lydia turned to give her sister a sharp look. As she turned back, John caught a

glimpse of a mischievous expression. Maybe she thought of him as a kind of adventure? Not the first time. The Quality was always entertained by a bit of mud.

“You may begin your inquisition,” she prompted.

John cleared his throat. “I was hoping to obtain your help.”

“Oh?”

He took a chance and glanced over at her face—still icy, still haughty, an eyebrow raised as a question. But was it in response to his question, or was it that he, himself was questionable?

“It’s for my sister. I know that with our breeding, as you put it, she’d never get an invitation to Almack’s, but an invitation anywhere would be a good start.” His mouth started to run away from him. “She needs a chance. I’ve made my money, but it’s different for ladies. As you know.”

Michael drove up with his gig. John made a motion for him to circle around the block and try him again. They crossed a street, and he knew he should be thankful that she walked with him onto a second block of houses.

“A chance at what, precisely?” Lady Lydia asked.

He cut a sidelong look at her. She knew exactly what he meant. Why was she making him say it? Suddenly he felt very foolish, and he didn’t like to feel foolish. She was mocking him, trying to make him say how very crass and crude he was. So he was born in St. Giles. So he grew up with a pig inside the house. So he could outpunch a cove twice his weight. So there weren’t much more to recommend him than the massive jingle in his pocket. But he had a *massive jingle*, which was more than most of her lot could say.

“Don’t play the air-headed *bon vivant*, my lady.” Irritation seeped into his voice.

Her voice snapped back into ice. “I don’t care for your tone.”

John glanced back to see where their vehicles were. Michael was still circling the block, and the lady’s phaeton was stuck at the previous intersection, which was blocked by an old, shabby carriage. The horse hitched to it was clearly in distress, its ears pinned back. John’s attention returned to the woman next to him. She had twisted this conversation into something impossible. It weren’t as if he were asking her to introduce his sister to the Prince of Wales. Just a silly garden party sometime. Or take her to buy a hat. Or ribbons, or hell, he’d buy them a

whole haberdashery if it would get Pearl mixing with the right people. The right men.

A man that would treat her well. One that wouldn't go out cavorting and bring her back the pox. One that would listen to the fairytales she made up, the kind that he listened to for hours on cold nights when the wind whistled through the broken glass. A man that would love her. One that would see her through not just the ripening of her belly, but also the aftermath and all the bother a babe might bring. The kind of man they'd never met. The kind of man he'd hoped he could be, but knew that he wasn't.

Pearl's man needed to have money, but it didn't have to be much. John had the Midas touch enough for everybody. If this man were titled, that could be right fun. But the man needed to have respectability. That vaporous, elusive quality that even John wasn't sure what it meant. That was the man for Pearl. Respectable.

Which, according to Parsons, he was not.

"She needs a respectable man," John said.

The woman nodded her understanding but didn't say anything. So, John's mouth just kept running. "And since your lot is so obsessed with respectability, I thought—"

She barked out a laugh. Wasn't that rude? Or at least, a breach of a young lady's etiquette? He stared.

"Obsessed is the proper term, but you won't find true respectability amongst Peers, I'm afraid. I'd stick to your own."

"I beg your pardon, my lady?"

She halted their walk to turn and face him. "I know who you are, Mr. Arthur. Would you ever enter into a brawl with a man smaller than you who had no formal training?"

His pride flared. "Of course not."

"Even if he was saying mean things to you?" Lady Lydia questioned.

This was a trap. He didn't know where she was going with it, but he knew enough to want to sidestep it, to prove he was smarter. But since he didn't know what this had to do with respectability, he stuck to the truth. "Words are just words. They can hurt, but a person doesn't always recover from a beating."

Lady Lydia nodded her agreement again. Her hair caught the afternoon sun and it shined,

showing deep, rich colors. He wanted to touch it with his bare hands to see if it was as silky as it looked. “Just so. Because your opponent is weaker, smaller, untrained. Ungentlemanly to attack, isn’t it?”

“I agree with you, my lady. But what does this have to do with respectability?” He cracked his neck again, side to side, before he could catch himself. Rude behavior, he knew it, but old habits couldn’t be erased so easily.

Her eye was caught by something up the street at the previous intersection. But she righted her attention back to him. “It is considered respectable to beat your wife. A man may bludgeon a woman, hopefully not to death, but certainly within a handspan of it, if need be, and still be considered respectable. Are those the type of men you would like your sister to meet?”

He was horrified. “Of course not!” How had this conversation gone so wrong?

“Respectability is in the eyes of the beholder, Mr. Arthur. It does not get transferred by patents of nobility. Excuse me.” Lady Lydia made a move to cross in front of him, into the street. Before he could think, he gripped her elbow to stop her. No one should be so foolish as to walk into the middle of a crowded thoroughfare.

She gave him a look so lethal that were he not of hardier disposition, he would have fallen down dead. But he liked her elbow, and even through his gloves and her dress, he felt something—not electricity, more like the smooth stupor of good gin. Like he would get good and drunk just by being in her company.

“I don’t know why you persist in the erroneous belief that you may touch me,” she snapped.

He immediately removed his hands, holding them up and away from her. It was not for the likes of him to be touching the likes of her, right, right, understood. His head cleared instantly. Free of him, she moved into the street, deftly sidestepping the manure that dotted the terrain. She had her gaze fixed on the horse attached to the shabby carriage.

She was daft. That explained it. She was purely insane. Clicking her tongue, trying to get the wild-eyed horse’s attention, she crept back towards the intersection. Michael appeared with his horse and gig on the opposite way, now blocked as well. Michael waved at John, but John ignored him, trying to ascertain what it was that Lady Lydia was after.

Against his better judgment, he stepped into the street as well. Michael whistled for him, causing the skittish horse to rear. Michael's horse whinnied in return. The reins slipped through the carriage driver's fingers. Michael whistled again. The skittish horse bolted, ears back, the carriage clattering out of control. The driver's eyes were wide, his mouth open as he scrambled to catch the loose reins.

John's legs were already in motion before he started thinking. He caught Lady Lydia in his arms, pushing her to the far side of the street. Their feet scrambled beneath them, and they fell just out of reach of the carriage wheels. They landed with Lady Lydia underneath him, a pile of horse dung not far from their heads.

For a moment, with her eyes closed, her face relaxed, she looked approachable. Fun, even. The kind of girl who could have a few rounds and kick up her heels. Make a body feel funny and charming, not worthless and crass. His palm cradled the back of her head, underneath her bonnet. He was right, her hair was silky, pinned up in swirls and twirls. He wished he wasn't wearing gloves. Still, it was a nice moment, it was. Soft and comfortable, without rules and order.

Her eyes opened, and he could swear they were violet. Whatever color that was, those sparklers were pretty. He wasn't supposed to talk so. No, he mustn't use such language. But they were open, and big, and she looked as if she would nuzzle into him like a baby kitten nuzzles into the crick of an elbow. He wanted her to do it, too—he wanted her to feel safe and warm. And he would nuzzle her back, drunk on her smell of oranges and vanilla.

But then he saw it: the wall came crashing down as she remembered herself. "I can't breathe with you lying on top of me."

He grinned because everything absurd made him smile. Even the resignation he felt as they returned to who they were, letting that smooth, heady feeling disappear. He rolled off to the side, giving her more room. "Apologies, my lady." He kept his hand in her hair. It was a pleasant thing, a woman's hair.

Then she began to tremble. Strange, sort of like the stray dogs that shake when certain people come near. Her jaw set so hard he wondered if she was going to break her teeth. Was it because of him?

There wasn't a moment he wanted her to waste being afraid of him, so he began massaging her scalp. It was a trick some of the other kids used to do when they were all holed up for the night, scared of the dark, too young to be imitating their elders with bedsport. Clever fingers run through hair melted away all manner of fears.

"Are you playing with my hair?" she asked. But her jaw muscle relaxed.

"No," he said. It wasn't playing with her hair. It was a real thing that helped people.

"I think you are," she teased. She really was mocking him now, trying to embarrass him. "I think you would like to kiss me."

That made him stop. He focused on her in the way he would focus on an opponent in the ring. The world melted away; all he could see was her. Her violet eyes became more vivid. Her scent of oranges and vanilla—dark and rich, not bright like oranges in the sun, but like a garden during a new moon—filled his head so completely it swam. Would he like to kiss her? Silliest question he'd ever heard. Her skin was smooth, her complexion pink with health. Only a body who was well-fed her whole life looked like that. She would have made his mouth water, but it was more than that: she was the personification of a hungry man's desire. His body desperately wanted to respond, but he kept control. He was very good at control. "Of course I would. You are a very beautiful woman. To say otherwise would perjure Nature."

Her expression froze over, even more walls, even greater distance. He was inches from her face, but he may as well have been in Manchester.

Two sets of boots came running up: one massive set, belonging to the chauffer Vasily, and the other still men's boots, but underneath the hem of an expensive frock. Strange.

"Lydia, are you hurt?" Lady Agnes yelled.

"I'm not deaf," Lady Lydia grumbled. John stood and tried to lend her a hand, only to be all but pushed aside by Lady Agnes and Vasily.

"What happened? Why were you in the street?" her sister asked.

Lady Lydia turned to John. "Please tell me you attempted to save my life rather than merely physically assaulting me," she said. "If it was the latter, then I'm afraid poor Vasily here will have to dirty his fists."

John barked out a laugh. "Vasily will have to get in line." He gestured to his black eye.

“Are you well, my lady?” Vasily asked, his voice thick with a Russian accent.

Her jaw muscle was back at full tension and John could see her hands shaking. She said, “Fine, Vasily, thank you.”

“Please let me see you home,” John offered.

“No, quite unnecessary, thank you,” she said, her spine straightening, her shoulders pulling back so hard it was as if she were being tied to a post.

Stepping back to the sidewalk, he watched Lady Lydia limp over to the phaeton, using her sister and driver on either side as crutches. That had not gone well. He wanted to sweep her up in his arms, carry her to the carriage. Or to his house. To his bed. Those were not thoughts of a respectable man.

But while his thoughts were still reeling and drunken, her expression was perfectly clear: he was mud, and that was that. Michael pulled up in his gig, and John clambered on.

“That was a right mess,” Michael said. “What happened?”

“No idea,” John answered. “I was hoping to get my sister asked to tea.”

“Funny way to do it,” said Michael, urging the horse onward down to Holborn. “I’ve not tried pushing a lady down to get an invitation. Did it work?”

“No,” John said. “I’ve made an ass of myself.”

“I’ve made an ass of myself many a time afore.” The boy shrugged. “Sometimes it works.”

To read more, check out [A LADY’S REVENGE by Edie Cay](#).



ROSES AND REBELS

by C. V. Lee

Work in Progress

Chapter 1

Friday, December 24, 1462 ~ Christmas Eve

Young Philippe de Carteret hurtled out of the manor house. The heavy wooden door slammed shut behind him and the iron latch clanged into place. With his lessons complete for the next fortnight, he bounded across the green and up the grassy knoll. He settled onto his favorite stump and considered the endless expanse of the Atlantic Ocean, as uncharted as his future. From his vantage point, he watched the ships as they sailed to and from England; a mysterious land from which came tales of brave knights fighting for king and country, and the chivalrous defending the weak and powerless.

From the north, a ship glided into view, its sails billowing in the breeze, bathed in the hues of rose and lavender splayed across the sky as the sun descended on the horizon. Its progress halted just beyond the mouth of the bay. Philippe dreamed of one day climbing aboard such a vessel and chasing adventure far beyond the shores of this tiny pastoral island of Jersey, a place where each day blended seamlessly into the next.

A gust of wind rustled through the barren alders that stood along the ridge like watchmen protecting the island from invaders. Philippe wrapped his cloak tightly around him to keep out the chill. Although he would have preferred to stay and watch the sunset, the wagging of the tree branches, like disapproving fingers, a reminder he was expected elsewhere. Careful to avoid the mud, he raced down the hill, rounded the corner of the family chapel, pushed open the door and stepped inside. His mother sat alone in the front pew; her head bowed in prayer. The last of the

sunlight streamed through the stained-glass window, dappling her white wimple with splotches of red and green. He exhaled in relief. His father hadn't yet arrived, a good sign he wasn't late.

He raked his fingers through his shoulder-length hair and tugged at the hem of his dark blue tunic, a gift he'd received a few months earlier for his tenth birthday. Already it was short and tight. As he sauntered up to the front pew, his wooden pattens clomped on the stone floor shattering the reverent silence, and leaving a path of mud in his wake. He slid in next to his mother, breathing in the familiar scent of roses, and waited for Vespers, the evening service, to begin.

She didn't look up, but clutched her rosary beads tighter to her breast, her lips moving in silent prayer. As the crowd grew, the smell of horses, hay, smoke and sweat hung in the air, the silence broken by the loud whispers of servants and retainers. His mother lifted her scented handkerchief to her nose, her only acknowledgment of their arrival.

The door to the chancel opened, and a priest dressed in ceremonial albs, a long white tunic belted at the waist, slipped in behind the rough-hewn stone altar. He lit the candles and swept his hand across his body in the sign of the cross. Lifting his hands toward heaven, his loud baritone voice droned as he thanked the God of heaven for the gift of His beloved Son who came to earth to open the eyes of the blind to the evil surrounding them.

Philippe squirmed in his seat. His father still had not arrived. He would never miss Christmas Eve Vespers. Leaning closer to his mother, he whispered, "Where's Father?"

She scowled at him and placed a finger to her lips.

The side door creaked open and Philippe craned his neck to see who entered, but the parishioners blocked his view. His gaze caught sight of a mother cuddling her young son on her lap. Pain stabbed his heart as he recalled how his mother once held him close. He winced at a jab from her elbow. Facing forward, he closed his eyes and tried to direct his attention back to the words of the priest.

The touch of a skirt tickled his ankles, followed by the faint scent of jasmine. Thomasse. He opened one eye and regarded his governess as she perched beside him on the pew. She gave him a quick smile and clasped her hands in prayer. Wisps of blond hair escaped the single braid wrapped in cording at her nape. A member of the gentry and educated in England, she had

arrived in Jersey with her father nigh two years ago. Although she was eight years his senior, they had become fast friends.

The priest made another sign of the cross. "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen." The congregation rose as one for Evensong. Philippe scrambled to his feet and mouthed the words, finding it impossible to sing between the sweet lilt of Thomasse's voice on one side and the off-key trill of his mother on the other.

When the service finished, Philippe gave his mother a questioning look. "Why has Father missed evening services?"

"How many times must I remind you to call him Seigneur de Carteret when others are around?" She replied through clenched teeth. "He's been delayed on a matter of business and attended Vespers in the village." She spun aside, turning her back to Philippe. Her dismissiveness stung as she addressed Thomasse in a pleasing tone. "I release you, my dear. Hurry home before darkness falls."

Thomasse curtsied. "Thank you, Demoiselle Penna. I'll be back in the morning."

"Give your father my regards." Scarcely had the words left her mouth before Penna hastened off to make her daily confession and pay penance for her sins. This confused Philippe, for he knew none so devout as his mother.

He turned to address Thomasse just as she vanished into the jostling crowd, sucked away like a wave receding from the shore. He hurried toward the family door. The servants moved back to let him pass, reminding him of the biblical story about the parting of the Red Sea.

Once outside, he gulped in the fresh air. The colors of the sunset had faded to grey and black, and his eyes searched for her in the darkness. He spied her hurrying across the green toward the hill. He wanted to run to her, but how many times had his mother admonished him to behave with dignity. "Thomasse! Wait!" he called.

When he caught up with her, they trudged up the hillside together. As they reached the crest, the bells of St. Ouen's Church in the village pealed, announcing the official end of Advent and the beginning of Holy Days. They listened for several minutes and watched as pinpoints of fire danced in the darkness as the villagers rushed home for the evening feast.

Thomasse hugged him and wished him a Happy Christmas and headed off toward home.

She held her lantern low to the ground, taking each step cautiously to avoid turning an ankle on a rock or tripping in a hole. He watched until the glow from her lantern disappeared.

Philippe looked out at the bay. A sliver of moon peeked out from behind the clouds, reflecting eerily on the murky water. The vessel he'd seen earlier had drifted closer to shore. In the dusk, it looked like a phantom ship, dreamlike and ghostly.

He shivered and dashed toward the house, passing servants still milling about the green, exchanging Christmas greetings. He jumped up the steps and grasped the iron latch. Turning it, he pushed open the heavy wooden door and entered the great hall, a large room constructed of whitewashed stone. It was sparsely furnished with carved chairs and cupboards positioned against the walls. Tall windows graced both sides of the entrance, and an enormous hearth to his right warmed the room. The entrance to the banquet hall lay just beyond, and just opposite a stone staircase led to the private family quarters.

Philippe shut the door and grabbed a chair, dragging it over to the window to watch the comings and goings outside as he awaited his father's early return as the village church was but a quarter hour away by horse. Then the feasting would begin.

The servants dispersed, some heading toward the cookhouse and others up the path to the main house. His mother hovered near the chapel door conversing with James, the head groom. A man on horseback galloped up the roadway and halted next to them. Philippe recognized Geoffrey de Beauvoir, his father's reeve, who administered the estate. He shouted a few words, then wheeled his steed around and disappeared back into the night.

James ran toward the stable, and his mother hurried toward the manor. When she crossed the threshold, a servant rushed forward to take her cloak. She smoothed her gown and went to stand by the fire.

Philippe slid off the chair and joined her by the fire. "Was that news of Father? Will he be home soon? I'm starving."

"It's as I told you." She held out her hands to the warmth. "He's been delayed and asked us to begin the festivities without him."

The horn blew, announcing dinner. Demoiselle Penna, the Lady of St. Ouen, head held high, back straight, proceeded into the banquet hall, leaving Philippe to follow.

The room sparkled with the light of hundreds of flickering candles in large silver candelabras. White tablecloths covered trestle tables garnished with holly, ivy, mistletoe and pewter flagons filled with spiced wine.

They stepped up onto the dais and took their places at the table in front of the fire. Flames licked around the Yule log, providing welcome warmth. Once seated, the household staff filed in. Benches scraped across the stone floor as they seated themselves at the other tables, talking and laughing as they waited for the pages to make their rounds with the ewers for hand washing.

Carvers paraded in carrying platters of pheasant, fish, and the traditional roasted Yule boar, an apple stuffed in its mouth. They placed them on the sideboards. They were followed by servants hoisting bowls piled high with apples, plums, dried figs, nuts flavored with cinnamon and cloves, and baskets of bread and cheese.

A butler set plates heaped with food in front of Philippe and Penna and bowed deeply as he backed away and returned to his duties. Spoons clanked against platters as pages filled trenchers and placed them on the tables. Minstrels strumming psalteries sang Christmas carols, while mummers and jugglers strolled about the room entertaining the diners.

Everything the same as in years past. Everything except his father's empty chair.

Philippe took a small bite of venison pie and pondered the vacant chair beside him, a beautiful work of craftsmanship, carved and upholstered over a century ago for the seigneur of St. Ouen, and puzzled over what kind of business would cause a man to abandon his family on Christmas Eve.

He glanced at his mother. She hadn't spoken a word to him since they had sat down to supper. The distance between them that made conversation difficult was more than just the empty chair; it was a divide he didn't know how to cross, and his mother never bothered to try.

They had been a happy family once. Then six years ago, his baby sister, Marguerite, died of a fever. After that, his mother changed. She suffered bouts of melancholy, and he often wondered if she wished he was the one who died. And tonight, with Seigneur de Carteret's conspicuous absence, she dropped any pretense at gaiety, pushing her food around the plate, only eating a few bites.

Noisy chatter and laughter drew Philippe's attention to a table filled with children. They

dug greedily into their meal and shared an easy camaraderie. He longed to join them, but such behavior would be frowned upon. Their faces radiated joy while he, the heir to the manor, sat miserable and alone.

He picked up his spiced apple tart and honey oat cake and tucked them into a napkin. He slipped away from the banquet hall and settled cross-legged onto the sheepskin carpet in front of the fire in the great hall and nibbled at his treats, savoring the flavor of cardamom and the sweetness of honey.

A sniffing sound followed by a damp nudge against his palm disturbed his solitude. His hand shot over his head. "No, Puddles, it's mine." The black hound circled round to face him and sat at attention; his sad eyes fixed on the cake. Philippe broke off a piece, and the dog gobbled it down only to plead for more.

James and several retainers strode across the room and out the door. Philippe wrapped the rest of his cake in the napkin and placed it on top of the cupboard. He raced to the window, wondering what took them away from the festivities. They reappeared minutes later on horseback, carrying lit torches, heading down the roadway leading to the village.

He stared after them for several minutes and then walked back to the fire, his thoughts troubled.

Penna entered the room, her shoulders stooped, her brow furrowed.

"I saw James leave," Philippe said. "Are they looking for Father?"

She glanced up at him, her eyes glistening. "Yes, but you needn't worry. Everything will be fine." She came to him and tousled his hair. For a moment she looked at him with soft, loving eyes, but she quickly snatched her hand away and her visage hardened, a look Philippe had grown to understand all too well. Don't ask questions. "Go join the festivities."

His face tightened, and his hands clamped into fists. How he chafed under his parents' constant need to protect him from anything deemed unseemly or harmful to his sensibilities.

With no more information forthcoming, he went to retrieve his treats. He wrapped a hand around the napkin and it crumpled easily. The treats were gone. He whirled around to find Puddles sitting on the carpet, his head on his paws, looking up at him with innocent eyes. Philippe placed a fist on his hip and glared sternly.

The animal responded by rolling over and kicking his leg, begging for his belly to be caressed. Philippe obliged, thankful for the diversion. His stomach felt unsettled. Worried over his father's unknown whereabouts, he decided against returning to the banquet hall. He settled back on the carpet and Puddles snuggled up next to him. He stroked his dog as he waited.

James returned, after what seemed like hours, alone. He and Penna bent their heads in whispered conversation, ending with James dashing back outside, returning a few minutes later with several dogs. Without even a glance in Philippe's direction, they entered the banquet hall. The music stopped abruptly and the cheerful voices and laughter faded to silence. His mother addressed the servants, but from his location her words were muffled.

Tired of feeling left out, Philippe stole to the entrance and pressed his back against the wall. He tipped his head, trying not to breathe, and listened hard. His mother's voice sounded strong and confident, and a few phrases seized his attention; marauders, attack, and St. Ouen's Bay.

His mouth went dry and his heart raced. Pirates! He had never seen a real one. He'd heard stories from Clement, a friend he looked up to as an older brother. Although Jersey was often the target of such raids, it was unusual on this side of the island. Philippe's breath caught. The ship he had noticed earlier!

Benches scraped across the stone floor, and servants scattered from the room. James and several retainers scurried out the door, long bows in hand and swords at their sides. The men bustled about opening chests and pulling weapons from their places on the walls while the women cast furtive glances and whispered together in corners.

Philippe stood before the fire transfixed as the great hall transformed into an armory piled high with an array of swords, fauchards, long bows, maces, pitchforks, hoes and axes.

When Mother entered to inventory the weapons, he asked, "What's happening? Is Father hurt?"

Her smile appeared strained. "Seigneur de Carteret has been delayed longer than expected."

Blood rushed to Philippe's head, and his face tightened. "Why can't you speak the truth? Our home is being turned into a fortress. I overheard you telling the servants that pirates landed

in St. Ouen's Bay."

His mother looked at him, her eyes narrowed and her lips pursed. "A ten-year-old needn't concern himself with these things."

Philippe's clenched jaw made it difficult to get the words out. "Clement doesn't think I'm too young. He's told me many tales about pirates."

"That popinjay would do well to keep his thoughts in his head," Mother ground out as she gestured to a servant. "When you're old enough, you'll be privy to the affairs of the manor. Now, run along."

Philippe stamped his foot. "I'm not a child. Boys in the village younger than myself are learning a trade. But me, I'm treated like some breakable toy to be kept in the cupboard."

His mother threw her hands up, and her voice was steely. "This is hardly helpful. We are preparing for an attack. I don't want to ask again. Go upstairs." She turned away to speak with the servant.

Followed by his faithful pet, Philippe slunk up the stairs, fighting back tears that threatened to fall. He crawled onto the windowsill. Puddles jumped up and licked his face, then flopped across his lap. He scratched the dog's ears as he recalled the stories Clement told; reports of villages and fields burned, of men dead in the streets, of babies murdered in their cribs, of food stores pillaged and survivors left to starve.

His stomach hurt, as if he had swallowed a rock. If only Thomasse were here. She always set his mind at ease, distracting him with stories of life in England and teaching him silly songs. But most of all, if she were here, he would know she was safe.

A hand touched his shoulder. He hadn't heard the tread of footsteps on the stairs, but he knew it was his mother by the telltale scent of roses. "I see you're distressed. I must accept you're growing up."

Philippe stared out the window, expecting her to retire to her chamber, but she cleared her throat and continued. "This afternoon while your father was exercising his destrier, Magnar, he spotted the ship. He's helping the peasants herd the sheep to Grosnez Castle. He and his men plan to launch an offensive at dawn."

Philippe rotated his body until he was sitting with his back to the window. "Won't that be

dangerous?"

"There is always danger, but you needn't worry. Our preparations are only a precaution. Seigneur de Carteret is an accomplished military leader, and the marauders have lost the advantage of surprise. When they come ashore, your father and his men will be waiting along the hilltops." But her wrinkled brow betrayed her worry.

"Do you want me to sit with you?" Philippe asked.

She gave him a weak smile and shook her head, then glided to her chamber, the train of her gown swishing along the floor, and shut the door.

Philippe peered out the window, his body tense and alert to the sounds of the manor; the rumble of tables and benches being shoved against the walls, the plunk of mats dropped on the floor, the bustle as servants prepared for bed, the heavy breathing and snoring of men as they slept, the footsteps of the watchmen as they quit the house to secure the estate, the thud of iron bolts as they slid into place. And the constant tread of his mother's footsteps as she paced in the Lord's chamber.

The best retainers were with his father. If his strategy failed and the pirates breached the hill, he knew the responsibility would fall on her to command the fight.

His shoulders slumped. She was right; he was a nuisance. He had yet to learn how to wield a sword or handle a crossbow. The only help he could provide was as a watchman. Any forewarning would gain some advantage. He wiped the frost from the window and pressed his nose against the glass, waiting.

When he felt confident the household was sleeping, Philippe slid from the ledge and tiptoed down the stairs, worried that the click of Puddle's nails on the stone floor would wake someone. Pulling back the locks, he slowly opened the door and slipped out into the darkness. He crouched down next to the steps, waiting for the watchmen to pass, and then bounded across the green with Puddles at his heels.

On the hilltop, his gaze scanned the waters until it landed on the ship. Now, with the sails furled, the masts looked menacing in the dim glow, like hands of death reaching out to grab their prey and drag them down into the watering depths.

A chill went up Philippe's spine. He trembled as the bitter cold seeped through his boots,

chilling his toes. Determined to keep watch, he settled on the ground, curled his legs tightly to his body, and huddled next to his dog for warmth. He uttered a prayer for his father's safety and victory in the upcoming battle.

A stick cracked, startling him. He peered through the dark to see what was approaching. Someone cleared their throat and Puddle's tail thumped against his leg. A man stepped forward out of the darkness. "Master Philippe, wat ye doin' har? Ye should be tucked in bed."

Philippe stood straight in defiance. "I'm keeping watch so I can warn Demoiselle Penna if pirates are coming."

"A noble pursuit but foolhardy an' dangerous. Come, I walk ye home. Don't give me any trouble or yer father will have me hide."

Philippe stuck out his lower lip. "I never get to do anything fun."

"Armed conflict hain't fun. Letz go. I march ye back to ze house."

"You won't tattle on me?" Philippe asked as he followed James down the slope.

"If I don catch ye out har agin tonight," James replied, his eyes serious as he gave Philippe a military salute. His gaze never wavered until Philippe was safely inside.

* * * * *

Saturday, December 25, 1462 ~ Christmas Day

A loud whinney startled Philippe awake, surprised to see the sun overhead in the sky. Magnar, with his high-stepping gait, long flowing mane, and shiny black coat, trotted up the roadway toward the manor; his father sat tall in the saddle, light glinting off his armor.

Flinging off the blanket someone had thrown over him during the night, Philippe scrambled from his post. "Mother! Father's home!" he shouted as he slid down the stone handrail and raced across the great hall. At the door, he threw back the bolts, lifted the latch and pulled it open. He jumped over the steps and charged up the path.

With James' help, Seigneur de Carteret dismounted his destrier and removed his helmet. He ran his hand through his dark, shoulder-length hair before opening his arms to his son. Philippe rushed into his embrace.

"Is everyone safe?" his mother asked behind him.

"Demoiselle Penna." De Carteret bowed to his wife. "We suffered no casualties. When

we loosed the first round of arrows, those miscreants retreated to their ship like the cowards they are. The peasants will stay on at Grosnez Castle until I am assured the marauders have left St. Ouen for good.”

"Did you see Thomasse?" Philippe asked.

De Carteret grabbed hold of Magnar's bridle. "She's not here at the manor?"

"She left last night after Vespers." Philippe's hands felt clammy, his body went cold and the tone of his voice ticked up. "She promised to be back this morning." His eyes darted from one adult to the other, noting the frightened looks passing between them, but no one spoke.

Philippe grasped his father's arm. "We must go look for her."

Release date to be announced in 2021.



THE CASKET MAKER'S OTHER WIFE

by Kathryn Loosli Pritchett

Work in Progress

Chapter 1: Salvation

His letter fluttered to the floor with a whisper, as though it were of no consequence. Lisabeth picked it up, begging “*Mami*, read, read,” but Anna ignored her pleas, pulling the girl close to her swollen belly as she scanned the street below. Veiled women and men in straw hats strolled homeward at the end of the day, the afternoon heat slowing their steps. She searched frantically for Jakob’s slim silhouette and familiar swagger, despite his clumsy scribbles.

At the lower end of the street, a small crowd stood by the old town gate, listening to two men proclaiming God’s word. Yesterday, Anna had been one of them, her black lace veil drawn over her face to avoid being recognized. She’d strained to hear the missionaries’ message beyond the plash of the fountain. Something about an American Zion.

As he’d done then, the man with the red vest stood to one side as his companion—a Saxon—spoke. The Saxon’s high forehead and pointed goatee reminded her of Jakob. Jakob who had written he was not coming home today. Not coming home *ever*.

Her growling stomach reminded her about the empty larder. There was barely enough food for the week and only a handful of coins in her pocket. She took a deep breath and squeezed her eyes shut to keep from crying.

Australia. He was off to Australia—a place he’d never mentioned. But Jakob had many secrets. Some that left pressed flowers in his pocket and the scent of lilac on his tunic.

Opening her eyes, she caught a glimpse in the mirror of the faded bruise that still colored her right cheek. She covered it with her hand. At least if he'd truly left, there'd be no more ranting about the stink of the dye pots and the rattle of the looms. Or something worse, if he'd stopped by Herr Gruber's *Bierhalle* on his way home from the factory.

Move on, her mother often said. *Don't dwell in the past, move on.*

Anna took the children's hats from the hook by the door. She tied Lisabeth's bonnet with the sky-blue ribbon that matched both their eyes. Jakob had brought it to their ringleted daughter just before he'd left for "urgent business" in Rotterdam. She held out a tassel-topped cap to Peter, who dangled a ball of yarn in front of their old cat Minka.

"Come, we're going out." He grumbled at first but when she cried "*Jetzt!*" he dropped the yarn and stood up. She smoothed his cowlick before covering it with the cap and glanced back at the black lace veil hanging on the peg. Leaving it behind, she set out to seek salvation.

By the time she reached them, the missionaries had gathered a goodly crowd. Shopkeepers and farmers done selling their wares huddled in the old gate's shade. Herr Fuhrman, the butcher, waved his straw hat over his wife's head, attempting to dispel the fetid air.

Today of all days, Anna needed to hear about their prophet, Joseph Smith. His story enchanted her as much as the fairytales she'd loved as a child. A shimmering angel with a golden Bible appeared to the poor farm boy Joseph. Magic seer stones came forth from the ground. Pilgrims took long, difficult journeys to reach a great mountain city by a lake that was salty as the sea. Imagine that, a sea at the top of a mountain in the middle of a desert. Salt Lake City. The place the missionaries said Christ was coming to save His people. To save her.

The Saxon's icy eyes searched the crowd as he shared how he'd come to be a member of the Latter-day Saints. Tall and spare, he spoke in High German, his speech formal and precise. "When I was training in Dresden to be a professor, I discovered that Christ's chosen people were in America."

“This holy huckster’s a fool, taken in by a foreign religion,” yelled Councilman Mueller, one of her father-in-law’s cronies. The men standing with him on the edge of the crowd jeered. Thankfully, Herr Kohler was not among them.

The Saxon ignored the brewing disruption. “Do not fear detractors,” he said. “The very illogical deductions and sarcastic invectives flung against this religion caused me to investigate. What I found was the old and everlasting gospel, brought again to earth by an angel. Upon my conversion, the authorities ordered me to leave Dresden. My own family thought I suffered under a monstrous delusion.”

“They were right!” Councilman Mueller earned more cheers from his companions. The missionary pressed on. “I’ve spent the past dozen years in Utah Territory, happily working to build God’s kingdom, teaching school on the American frontier. Now God’s own prophet, Brigham Young, has sent me here to invite you to join us so that we may welcome our Lord and Savior when He returns.”

“Perhaps you’d best be heading back to your school-teaching—and your women. Leave ours alone,” said Mueller, as his friends chanted “*Geh nach Hause!*”

Peter stared at the Saxon scholar with suspicion, while Lisabeth pulled on Anna’s skirt and whined about the heat. Anna felt exposed without her veil. She ducked her head, thinking it best to leave. Then a booming voice, speaking in the slow, loping cadence of the Bernese, fixed her in place.

The other missionary, the red-vested man, faced down Councilman Mueller while addressing the crowd. “*Mein Schweizer Kollege*, I bring good news of an American Zion, a glorious American Zion.” Sturdy and sunburned, he could have been a cousin to any of the *Bergbauers* who farmed around Lenzburg. “Here in Kanton Aargau your farmland hasn’t yielded well since your grandfathers worked it. Now it’s the handful of factory owners who thrive—at your expense. But in Utah, we live like lords!”

The hecklers held their peace. Even Lisabeth, who’d been clamoring for a sweet, stopped fussing. “In this *schönes* place, the land is easy to work; the harvests are good. I’ve seen men come without money, a wagon or oxen—some of them in debt—and now they possess a farm, cows, oxen, mules, pigs, a number of chickens and ducks. All paid for!”

He loosened the patterned kerchief knotted around his neck. “When I reached the Great Salt Lake, I didn’t wish myself back here for a moment; I was happy God had led me to such a land of opportunity—where the fields are ripe with grain and the rivers overflow with trout. God has smiled on us, blessed us with all He offers, including fresh mountain air and pure water.” He raised both hands to praise his heavenly benefactor.

Anna thought how the Aabach often ran a murky red as more and more textile mills rose on its banks. Her countryman lacked the Saxon’s erudition, but his words triggered one of her waking visions and she could see and hear the trout-filled streams roaring through the golden fields where God’s people were gathering to welcome Christ back. She sensed an urgent pull both to this American Zion—the “New Jerusalem”—and to the men who were telling her where to find it.

The Swiss missionary reached out as though to embrace the crowd. “The Latter-day Saints want to share their blessing with all of God’s children. Come, join us.”

“*Mami*, let’s go home!” said Lisi, once again pulling on Anna’s skirt. The heat prickled her skin and the blistering stones toasted the soles of her feet, but Anna wasn’t ready to go just yet. She promised Lisi they would stop for a chocolate—one last indulgence—if she’d be quiet for a few minutes more. As the missionaries moved through the crowd distributing tracts, she took both children by the hand and hurried towards them.

The Saxon greeted her first. “*Guten nachmittag, frau*. We bring copies of *The Star*—Mormon scriptures and hymns translated into German.” He offered her a tract, but she kept hold of the children.

“Sir, your talk of moving to America. We want to join you,” she said, raising their hands as if she were surrendering them all to his care.

“Why, the Lord—and his saints—will surely welcome you, Frau ___?” he said, tucking the tract under his arm and extending his hand. “I’m Elder Maeser, president of the Swiss Latter-day Saint mission.”

“Kohler, Frau Kohler,” she said, releasing Peter and putting her sweating hand into Elder Maeser’s cool one.

“Frau Kohler, I can sense already that you would be an excellent addition to our community of saints. Your countryman, Elder Stöckli, will lead the group leaving for Liverpool week after next to sail to New York City. Where is Herr Kohler? We’ll tell him everything he needs to know to secure passage for your family.”

Anna withdrew her hand and placed it on Peter’s shoulder. “My husband won’t be going with us.”

Peter twisted around to face her. “Why would we go without Papi?”

Anna pressed her lips together and shook her head at the boy. “Later.”

To the Saxon “elder,” who was not elderly by any means, not even old enough to be her father, she said, “*Herr*, tell me what we need for the trip. My husband won’t protest our leaving.”

Elder Maeser looked down at her. She saw him take in the bruise on her cheek; the sweat-soaked dirndl puckered over her swollen belly; and the two young children.

“There’s a meeting tonight where we’ll discuss provisions and passage fees.” Anna hoped her knees would hold. Where would she find money for passage fees?

“Frau Kohler?” said Elder Maeser, his eyes softening as he put his hand on Peter’s other shoulder.

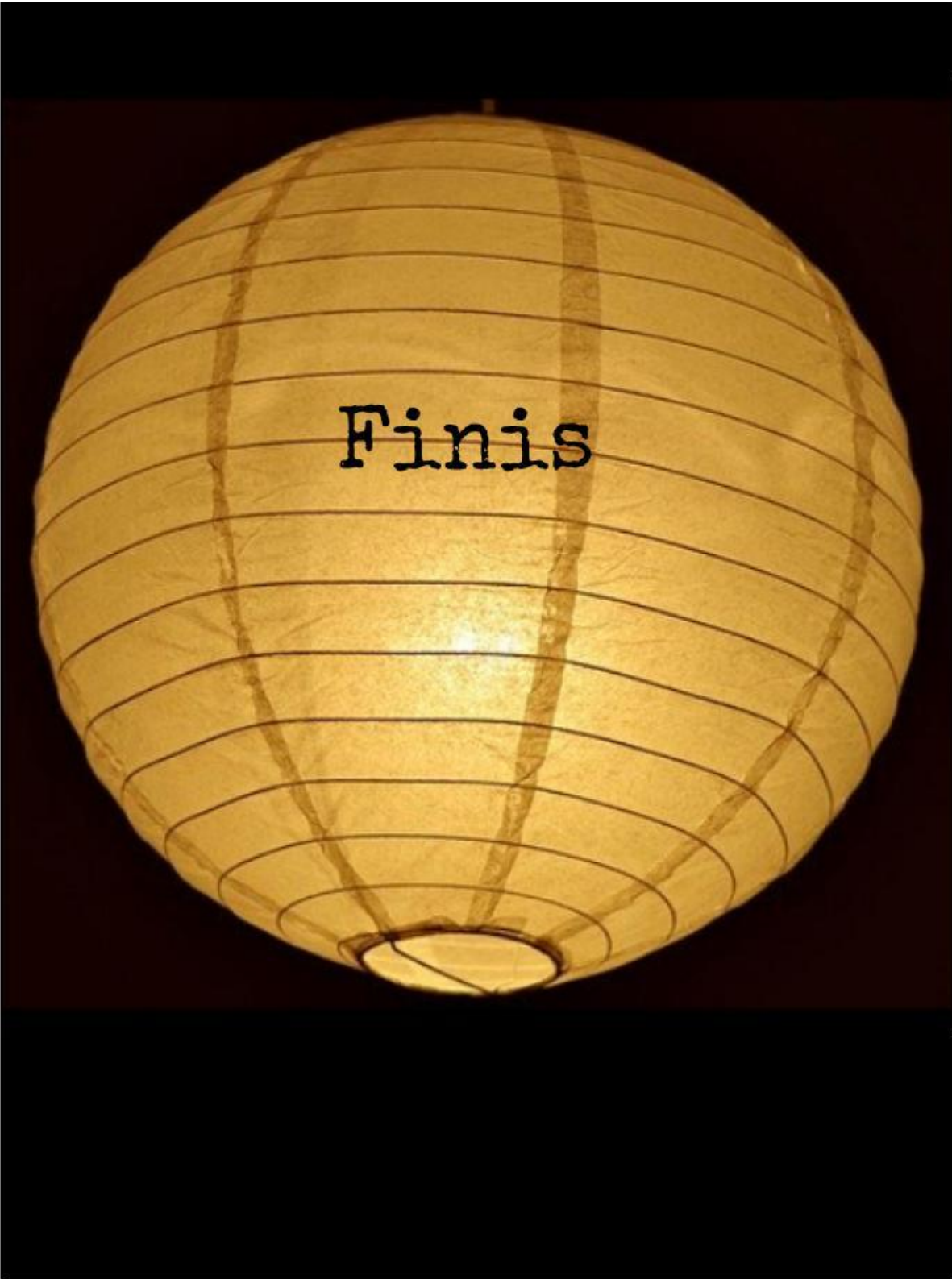
“Yes?”

“The decrees of God have gone forth; the angel has sounded the trumpet and the plans of the Almighty are about to be consummated. He’ll provide a way. We meet tonight at Brother Fischer’s.” With that, he tipped his hat and pivoted to answer Herr Fuhriman’s question about how to butcher a buffalo.

Turning towards the apartment at last, she ran straight into the other missionary, her red-vested countryman, who shoved a copy of *The Star* into her hands before striding off without a word.

This concludes PLW First Chapters 2020

See you next year!



Finis