





*Sophie & Juliet*

*Rags to Royalty*

*by*

*Carol Jeanne Kennedy*



Copyright © 1994-2016 by Carol Kennedy  
ISBN: 978-1-945494-11-6

### **Publication Rights**

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic methods, without prior written permission from the author, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and other uses permitted by copyright law.

Characters, places, names, and incidents are fictional. Locales and public names are sometimes used for atmospheric purposes. Any resemblance to actual people, living or dead, or to businesses, companies, events, or institutions, is coincidental. Portraits of actual people represent the author's suggestion of what fictional characters may have looked like.

Cover: *Portrait of Emperor Paul I's Daughters*, 1796, by Marie Louise Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun (French, 1755-1842.) Public domain.

### **Dedications**

To all my wonderful friends and family who helped me along the way in writing my novels. This book is dedicated to Don Knight, Billy Miller, Jean Gess, Carol Silvis, and Mary Burdick. Also, special thanks to Hennie Bekker whose musical compositions *Algonquin Trails* and *Stormy Sunday* provided the creative spark for *Winthrop*, followed by the rest of my Victorian Collection.

### **Other Great Novels by this Author**

***Winthrop*** – *Tragedy to Triumph*  
***The Arrangement*** – *Love Prevails*  
***Bobbin's Journal*** – *Waif to Wealth*  
***Poppy*** – *The Stolen Family*  
***Sophie & Juliet*** – *Rags to Royalty*  
***The Spinster*** – *Worth the Wait*  
***Holybourne*** – *The Magic of a Child*

### **Links and Reviews**

Visit the author's website: [KennedyLiterary.com](http://KennedyLiterary.com)  
Like on Facebook: [caroljeannekennedy](https://www.facebook.com/caroljeannekennedy)  
Follow on Twitter [@carol823599](https://twitter.com/carol823599)

# Table of Contents

Chapter 1 – Lord Grayton Buries his Father.....	1
Chapter 2 – A Surprise Party.....	7
Chapter 3 – Henry’s Garden Party.....	12
Chapter 4 – Shocking News Comes to Rosewood Park .....	16
Chapter 5 – The Village of Alton.....	21
Chapter 6 – Anne’s Sister, Jane Stewart, Arrives.....	30
Chapter 7 – A Great House is to be Built for Jane .....	36
Chapter 8 – Love Works its Power.....	43
Chapter 9 – Margaret’s Invention .....	46
Chapter 10 – Rosewood Park.....	50
Chapter 11 – The Whitmores – Alton, Five Years Hence .....	56
Chapter 12 – King George Takes Ill in London.....	63
Chapter 13 – Henry Graduates from Eton .....	67
Chapter 14 – The Holiday at Rosewood Park.....	74
Chapter 15 – Norfolk-House, St James Square, London .....	77
Chapter 16 – Jane’s Letter to the Whitmores .....	80
Chapter 17 – Left for Dead .....	83
Chapter 18 – William Arrives at Norfolk-House, London .....	87
Chapter 19 – All the Queen’s Men .....	92
Chapter 20 – Margaret and Jane Leave the Palace.....	95
Chapter 21 – Sarah Mends her Dress.....	101
Chapter 22 – Sarah and Henry Join the Others .....	104
Chapter 23 – His Lordship’s Family Arrives at the Orphanage .....	106
Chapter 24 – Norfolk House, St James Square, London .....	109
Chapter 25 – The Queen’s Physician Returns with Sad News .....	115
Chapter 26 – A Premonition Grips Jane .....	118
Chapter 27 – The Earl Delights the King and Queen .....	124
Chapter 28 – A Royal Invitation .....	128
Chapter 29 – The King’s Birthday – London, 4 June 1788.....	134
Chapter 30 – 4 June – At the King’s Ball .....	137

## PROLOGUE

The “Mad King who lost America” (in English children’s history books) King George III, had what was formerly thought to be a genetic disease, porphyria. More recently, scientists theorise that he had a mental illness, perhaps bipolar which came on in episodes of ‘incessant loquacity,’ but with rest and seclusion, he recovered from these bouts and continued to rule for 60 successful years, a dedicated and diligent king. His Majesty was a very conscientious ruler who believed in personal rule, albeit through constitutional means. He could speak to the ordinary man with humour, and he was afforded respect; he was very popular. But from 1788 he suffered from “some sort of debilitating disease,” and by 1811 his health had deteriorated significantly. He subsequently became so deranged that his son George was made Prince Regent until King George III died in 1820. His beloved wife Charlotte died in 1818.

I have created this fictional romance novel not to make light of his mental illness nor to humiliate His Majesty, King George III, or his wife, Queen Charlotte, but only to bring a somewhat whimsical side to a real-life historical couple. For royalty in those days, with their privileged lifestyle, command over people, and with their ability to shape the world at whim, was a power unequalled in society. When they chose to, they could grant favours to the lesser rank, or by mere association, could esteem someone into high society and wealth. It was all too tempting to enjoy myself over this purely fictional tale. They were obviously a loving husband and wife, for they were married fifty-seven years and had fifteen children.

## Chapter 1 – Lord Grayton Buries his Father

The Earl of Grayton buried his father with absolute relish. The tyrannical old boy was finally, absolutely, this time, really dead. His lordship remained at the grave site long after everyone had gone, watching the gravediggers heave shovelful after shovelful atop his father's coffin. Sniffing the air, he tossed a handful of dirt onto the mound and watched as the sexton tamped the moist black soil until it would sink no more.

"Well done, well done," said his lordship as he turned and walked into the foggy morning air. "And to think I thought this day would never come."

\* \* \*

His busy London life and everything to do with a proper burial for his father had kept his lordship from his beloved boyhood country estate, Rosewood Park and his long-anticipated *new life*. Indeed, a new life now devoid of his father's rule, the stuffy formalities of the upper crust, the boring idleness of Court. All his life there was a gnawing restlessness to remake his dull existence and now, finally, resting in his own hands was his destiny to shape as he saw fit.

One of his first duties in his new life was to reacquaint himself with all the tenant farmers who had, up until now, been ignored, ill-used and overtaxed. Sitting upon his favourite leisure horse, Quill, he stared out over the valley below with his hound, Holly, obediently at his side.

"Fascinating intrigue, I must say, ol' girl. Indeed, if I am going to assume control of my life I must engage farmer

Whitmore." He smiled. "And more importantly, I must first engage his wife, Anne."

\* \* \*

It was a cool, rainy October day in the small village of Alton, located fifty or so rutty miles southwest of London and two miles from Lord Grayton's Rosewood Park. Between downpours, Anne Whitmore hurried from her small cottage to fetch a bucket of water. Hearing horses approach, she turned to see four quite spectacular dapple-greys pulling a closed carriage. "Dear me, it's Lord Grayton and his hound. I wonder why he comes?" She hurried back to the cottage, her bright red hair frizzed about her rain splattered translucent, freckled white face.

A streak of brilliant silver lightning pierced the thunderous path of black clouds as Sarah, her newborn, fussed. William, her husband, was busy stacking wood. Grayton's handsome equipage squeaked to a lumbering stop.

Anne stood at the threshold and curtsied as Grayton stepped from his carriage. "My lord, please come in and sit by our fire." She set the bucket down, wiped her rough red hands on her apron, and for being a little out of breath, apologised, "Excuse me, your lordship, would you like a mug of water?"

"No, Mrs Whitmore." He entered the cottage and glanced around, sniffing the air.

William entered, and being very tall, ducked to avoid the low opening. Finding Grayton, he gaped. "My lord, sir, you are very welcome."

Taking a chair at their rough-hewn sup table, the Earl looked about the cottage. "Ah, your fire is warm." He slipped lower in the chair, making himself very much at home. It smelled of fresh apples and green pasture grass. Through one wavy-glassed window, a stream of gold pierced the dark cottage air. He watched the unsettled gold dust glittering in the sun's beam as it touched quietly upon the white-washed wooden floor. There were but two chairs in the kitchen, and a barrel. On a shelf sat wooden bowls, pewterware, and spoons. A few lit candles flickered mild shades of yellow into the dank, heavy air.

"Yes, I like it here very much."

Anne curtsied. "Thank you, sir. I'm glad you find it pleasing." Just then Sarah began to wail. "Oh, beg pardon, your lordship," said Anne.

Grayton stood. "Bring your child to me. I must see it, Mrs Whitmore." He drew off his spotless kidskin gloves and tossed them onto the table.

Anne exchanged glances with her husband. "But of course, my lord." She hurried to Sarah, wrapped her in her nicest blanket, and brought her to him.

"Two births, Grayton.' His Majesty spoke those words a few months ago to me." He turned to Anne. "You mentioned the good omen when we first met."

Sarah stopped fussing at his voice.

William stood silent, confusion plain as day on his face.

"Indeed I did, your lordship," said Anne as she glanced at her child in amazement, for she was now cooing. "I remember our conversation exactly, my lord. My husband told me of the two shooting stars crossing paths in the night sky just as I gave birth to Sarah."

William nodded. "Indeed, my lord." He opened the door and stood on the threshold. "I stood right here and witnessed the most excellent of omens—two shooting stars crossed paths in the heavens just as Sarah was born."

Grayton nodded. "Well, standing on the balcony at Norfolk-House, London, at King George's birthday ball, I witnessed the very same precisely when my son, Henry, was born."

"Our families are blessed it seems," said Anne. A gracious smile spread across her face.

"Whitmore, are you going to stand there forever holding that wood?" said Grayton with half a smile.

"Oh, no, my lord, ah, indeed, not." He tossed the logs into the woodbin and brushed the dirt from his hands, nodding respectfully. "Thank you, my lord. They were a trifle heavy."

"I thought so. Well, as I was about to say, there is more to the story of our children being born at exactly the same time two shooting stars arced. Indeed, when His Majesty learned of the prophetic sight in the Heavens, he raised his ornate silver cup and from his lips declared, 'there were two births, Grayton. You must go and find your son's mate.'"

Anne lifted Sarah, who was now cooing at his lordship. Her expressions were giggly and sweet, pink and shiny.

Looking amused, the Earl gazed down at her sweet, animated face. "Sarah?" Her tiny hands flailed about, apparently mesmerised by his shiny brass buttons, by the showy feathers in his hat, his black beard, and his deep, resonant voice. "Ah, yes, you are the very one."

Anne and William laughed as their daughter clearly stole his lordship's heart.

"I am now convinced that your daughter is the second birth His Majesty spoke about."

Anne and William stood in silent awe.

"Indeed, therefore, I will share with you my plan." He glanced from Anne to William. "You shall school my son in morals and manners."

The Whitmores stood quiet and confused, daring not to say one word; very much unaware of what was next to come.

"I must not have a nanny who is cold and indifferent as Mrs Brown, his present nursemaid. Heaven knows she never smiles." He shook his head. "She is too strict and forbidding. Haha," he picked up his gloves and slapped them on his knee, "I dare say she does not care two straws for me, and absolutely detests when I take Henry on jaunts. Lady Grayton becomes overly excited because of her. Yes, I have no doubt Mrs Brown will leave her mark on my four daughters. I am afraid they will all become quite ruined." He stood. "But she shall not mark my son as my father marked me."

"But your lordship, what are we to do for your son?" said Anne.

Just then there came a scratch at the door. When William opened it, a black whirl bounded past him. Prancing in with great delight, his lordship's beloved hound, Holly, wiggled to his side.

"Oh, dear me," Grayton laughed, "this mad, foolish, mad-rigal hound, has once again found me." He glanced at Anne. "Do forgive the beast, madam. She's my very shadow."

William and Anne laughed politely.

"Oh, sir, she is no bother," said William, "no bother at all."

"I don't believe it, William." His lordship settled the dog at his side with a stern, "Sit. Ah, where were we then? Oh, yes, Henry. Well, school him as you would your own daughter, Sarah."

The Whitmores exchanged glances, clearly stunned.

"I mean to leave my son with you all day, every day. I will have him brought to you in the morning, and I will have some-



one bring him home in the evening. Oh, not to worry, I shall reward you handsomely. I know you both are the very ones to plant good seeds into my only son."

"But, your lordship, what of Lady Grayton? Would she not be offended by common people tutoring your son?" asked Anne.

"Her ladyship has not a word to say upon the matter. She has four ruined daughters to her credit, and I will not have a spoiled, ruinous, ne'er-do-well, for a son."

With tears in her eyes, Anne gently laid Sarah on the table and removed her little wrap. "Sir, I wish it of you to first witness her imperfect form. Perhaps you may ..."

His lordship glanced down at the infant's deformed leg, being a few inches shorter than the other. "Pity, pity." Turning, he tugged at his gloves as he kept staring down at her. "You must treat Henry as you do Sarah, in all ways and manner." He approached the door, opened it and stopped. "I shall bring him to you in the morning. You must not address him titled, reserve that only in public."

Anne snuggled Sarah to her breast. "Oh, indeed, sir."

Anne and William had no choice but to honour Grayton's strange request.

Standing at the open door, his lordship smiled at Anne. "Mrs Whitmore, I found the Holybourne Orphanage."

"Oh, indeed, my lord, my sister Jane wrote me of your visit expressing how kind your spirit."

"How kind my spirit?" He twisted the tip of his thick black moustache. "Indeed."

"Her words exactly, my lord."

He smiled, adjusted his hat, and left.

As they stood watching his carriage amble away, William turned to his wife. "The orphanage, Anne? Why would his lordship visit the orphanage?"

"Last month at our faire, his lordship inquired of me about the silver-haired maiden who had charge of so many beggarly children running about. I explained that she was my sister, Jane, and that we were both raised in the orphanage. She alone remained when the other teachers left for better prospects."

William nodded. "Indeed, despite her circumstances, Jane is a comely beauty."

Grayton was truthful when he said he would pay them handsomely. Soon after his proposal, he bestowed upon the Whitmores many cows, oxen, foodstuffs, furniture, horses, even a chaise and carriage.

William added another room to the cottage. His lordship rewarded them financially, as well. So much so, that William didn't tend the fields any longer. He had not the time, but to keep up with Grayton's gifts, he had to keep building and improving his cottage.

Helen Whitmore, William's mother, sat in her son's cottage overwhelmed at his good fortune. Helping Anne fold Henry's clothes, she sighed, "All these fine things we have sewn for Henry and they are always returned, never worn."

"For my life, Mother, I cannot imagine having so many things to wear that the child cannot be clothed with the same thing more than once." Anne shook her head.

"Such wealth is beyond me."

"Aye, Mother, I agree, but we shall never know that now, will we?"

"I don't imagine so, Anne, but the way Lord Grayton sends things to your step, I should wonder, for soon your cottage will make two of mine."

"Indeed, Mother, he is far more generous than his miserly father who only came to complain."

\* \* \*

Henry was brought to the Whitmores' every day as promised. There was never a day or a holiday missed. At each visit, Henry would first run to see Sarah, for they had become inseparable. When Grayton would personally bring Henry, he would affectionately bid his father farewell, as he was taught. Sarah would limp to his lordship and pout if he did not kiss her as well—the bond was set.

## Chapter 2 – A Surprise Party

When Lord Grayton and his son, Henry, left Rosewood Park's pebbly roadway onto the Winchester Road to Alton, the rain suddenly turned to a gentle mist, the air now a fine spray. It was such a morning that lent itself to reflection. Henry, propped up on his pillow, wiped the carriage's fogged window with his gloved hand, silent as the glass he stared through. Ten years had passed since Grayton embarked on setting his son to become a good and honest man under the tutelage of the Whitmores and he was satisfied with the outcome.

Grayton watched his son with a growing sense of pleasure. Indeed, he seemed more than pleased by Henry's developed good nature and fine manners, and he was always proud to hear how well he was doing in his lessons. Moreover, he was so impressed by his son's most excellent progress that an intriguing thought entered his mind—*I shall plan a surprise for Henry's tenth birthday; and where else could it be celebrated than our ancestral home in the great gardens of Rosewood Park. Everyone in the village shall be invited.* He patted Henry on the head congratulating himself on such a splendid idea. *Oh, indeed, and we mustn't forget the little orphans from Holybourne. Capital, capital.*

Henry noticed his father's excitement. "What is it, Papa? Do you have something to say?"

Grayton cleared his throat, looking smug. "You shall soon see, Henry, you shall soon see."

Arriving at the Whitmores', Grayton now found himself in a very happy mood. "Mrs Whitmore, I have thought of a wonderful idea to celebrate Henry and Sarah's tenth birthdays."

Anne stood, obediently listening, as usual. "Indeed, my lord, I must hear it."

"I will have a grand garden party at Rosewood Park. Everyone in the village is welcome. I would ask that you extend the invitation to me. Oh, and one must not forget your sister, Miss Stewart, she may bring the orphans."

Anne gushed at such a prospect. "Oh, Lord Grayton, I find that a very kind thing for you and your family to do. Why, June is but two months away. Henry talks of his mother and sisters so often, and since we have not met your family, we shall indeed look forward to coming. Oh, and to bring the orphans to such an event will bring much happiness to their hearts, they have so little, sir."

Well pleased with himself, Grayton smiled with a nod. "Indeed so, Mrs Whitmore, I thought as much."

His lordship had not mentioned his grand plan to his wife since the idea had come upon him so suddenly, but he would inform her when he returned to Rosewood Park that very day. For a few minutes at least, he was happy at the thought, but then his mood turned to melancholy. *How am I to present such an idea to Elizabeth? A garden party for Henry and Sarah? Dear me.*

Lady Elizabeth was not one for festive balls and idle pleasures for the children—for any children. Such favours made her quite nervous and cross. *But there is time enough to inform her of my plans*, he felt relieved, *for June is a full two months away.*

\* \* \*

Lord Grayton had put off informing his wife of Henry's garden party for several weeks now and questioned himself about his hesitancy. He felt silly over the entire affair and decided to inform her of his plans this morning, over breakfast. He thought for a second longer and then wisely corrected himself. *"After breakfast, for I am famished."*

Somehow the reaction from his wife did not surprise him. The news mortified her and their four daughters: Margaret, Mary, Victoria and Elizabeth. They were embarrassed that such a gathering would be in *their* garden.

"What should the neighbours think upon the occasion," cried his wife.

The earl stood firm. "You *will* all attend the party, Elizabeth." He glanced at each of his daughters and then to his wife. "Henry has grown into an unspoiled young man. Why, he has a

kind heart and purpose. We fish together, throw stones together, and soon he and I shall ride together. Perhaps you have conveniently failed to remember how His Majesty carried on so about me finding Henry's mate ... the twin birth? The crossing of stars? You know very well, Elizabeth, for it has been well understood for a very long time now that Sarah Whitmore is that very child—Henry's mate."

In a huff, Lady Elizabeth tossed her napkin to the table. "Please, my lord, spare me."

"We shall celebrate both children's births." He gulped the last of his tea feeling very satisfied that he dealt his snooty family a proper set-down. After all, it was his destiny to become a good and thoughtful human being, never forgetting his tyrannical father for an instant.

Lady Elizabeth and her daughters glared at him in disbelief. No one uttered a sound.

His daughter Margaret, the most spoiled, stood. "Papa, may I be excused?"

He studied her plate, the food suitably consumed. "Very well, you may."

Rising from the table, she turned her nose in the air and proceeded toward the door. She was the eldest at sixteen and most pompous in disposition. Just before she quitted the dining room, she made a parting comment to her mother, "Really, Mama, must I be witness to such a scene with Henry's *heathen friends* in our garden?"

Her sisters, Mary, Victoria, and Elizabeth made faces, nodding in total agreement.

Lady Elizabeth glared at her husband. "My lord, pray tell, how should we entertain an entire village of ignorant, filthy farmers with their broken and shabby wagons? The ruts they shall make in the roads; their oxen and horses will crowd the flowers. Oh, the smell. Think of the smell, John. Oh, it shall not be tolerated. What have we done to deserve this?"

He sat back smiling at the snobs. "What have you done? What *haven't* you done?"

Her ladyship stood. "Excuse me, sir, I am going to spit up."

Mary and Victoria followed her from the room. Elizabeth, ten and two years of age, remained.

Grayton watched his wife and daughters leave. He turned to Elizabeth, who was two years older than Henry and not one

to hold her tongue. "Well, Lizzy, why are you still here? I thought surely you would follow your mother and sisters."

She frowned. "Papa, you will celebrate Henry's birthday in grand fashion, but you forgot mine just a fortnight past."

He frowned. "Is that so?"

She looked him straight in the eye. "That is so, Papa, and sir, why do you not come to see *us* like you always do Henry?"

He studied her deep-set blue eyes, her wrinkled freckled little nose. "*Us*? Are you speaking for your sisters?"

She set her fork down. "No, they do not care two straws for you, Papa."

His brows arched at her frankness. "And what about you, Lizzy? Do you care two straws for your Papa?"

She squirmed, wiped her brow, directing her eyes down-cast. "Well maybe, but I don't know you as a father, Papa. You are a father to Henry, but not me." Her dark blue eyes sparkled like chips of ice.

"Is that so?"

"Yes, Papa, that is so."

"How old are you, Lizzy?"

"I am ten and two, sir." She sat up straight, still studying his every move.

Grayton glanced out the window. It was a sunny day, and he had decided earlier that he would ride to the Whitmores' rather than bother with the carriage.

"Lizzy, I wish to ride this morning. Would you like to join me?"

She scooted her chair back and stood. With a wide smile, she nodded. "Oh, indeed, Papa." Her face sobered as she plopped back down in her chair. "But I have French lessons this morning." She folded her arms and sighed heavily. "And we are to entertain Lady Hammish after lunch, I cannot go."

"Well, I do believe I can arrange to have your French lessons postponed for another day, and I think your mother and sisters are quite capable of entertaining Lady Hammish without your help."

Her head bobbed in absolute delight. She detested Lady Hammish and her stupid, nippy, nasty little pug. Hurrying to her father's side, she took up his hand, startling him.

He tweaked her nose. "Well, well, let us be on with it then." With an air of triumph, they left the room together. Stopping at Mrs Brown's classroom, his lordship informed her that Lizzy's French lessons would be postponed until tomor-

row. "And inform Lady Grayton that Lady Elizabeth has gone riding with her father."

Behind their back, the grumpy old Mrs Brown dumped Lizzy's lessons into the trash bin. Wiping her hands in disgust, she mumbled, "Humph, do this, do that ..."

Grayton and Lizzy walked to the mews holding hands, silent as they traversed the crunchy, well-worn gravel footpath.

He glanced down at his daughter. "Lizzy, tell me, do you get on well with the governess?"

Her little nose wrinkled, her brow furrowed deeply. "No, Papa, I hate Mrs Brown." She took her hand from his. "Look, Papa," she held up her knuckles for him to examine them in detail. "As you can clearly see, sir, they are red and bruised from her pointing stick always hitting them. I cannot learn French as well as Mary, Margaret and Victoria. I hate being laughed at. I am always last it seems."

"Well, perhaps we can change all that."

"Really, Papa?"

He looked at her frilly-laced morning dress. "Daughter, are you going to ride in that frock?"

"Oh, Papa, I, I didn't think you were of a serious mind and that you really wanted me to ride with you."

Grave as any judge, he nodded. "Oh, but I do. I do."

She lit up with a smile, the sweetest sort of smile. "Oh, sir, it shall not take me long to change."

He laughed as she bolted from his side, kicked off her shoes, and ran quite wild through two petticoats. Nearing the stewards' entry, she tossed off her bonnet and yelped. The gardeners laughed as she whooshed by.

Grayton looked up and witnessed Mrs Brown's expression of horror at the sight of Elizabeth's most unladylike conduct. With a smirk, he removed his hat and bowed to her. With an indignant turn, she quickly left the window as Margaret, Mary and Victoria followed.

## Chapter 3 – Henry’s Garden Party

It turned out to be a lovely June morning for Henry and Sarah’s garden birthday party. *It is an omen that such a wonderful day shall end so.* With that happy thought settling him, Grayton turned from the window and addressed his wife, “My dear lady, I would wish it of you to dress down this day. Being polite to our less fortunate *guests* would be thoughtful, indeed.”

She pursed her lips. “Sir, ever since your father died, your odd-mannered demands have become quite impossible. Dress down? Whatever do you mean, sir, dress down? After all, they are just farmers, certainly nothing to take notice of. Indeed, I shall *not* dress down. I shall not, nor shall my daughters.”

His lordship sighed. But, he knew better than to reason with her. “Well then, Elizabeth, you may dress as you please, but with restraint, with restraint. I wish that of you, wife.”

She frowned. “Restraint? I should wonder at using restraint. I would wish you would do the same, my lord. These past months you have become exceedingly odd in your demands. I am vexed that you should grovel in the mud with those farmers. Oh, spare me the torment and ridicule from my friends over your silly, stupid whim to entertain a ten-year-old boy and his so-called *mate*, Sarah.” She snorted, “Foolish business to be sure.”

“Madam, that is quite enough.”

“Your son is but a child and not yet capable of reasoning, nor for that matter, choosing his own proper society. You should be ashamed.”

“Very well, Elizabeth, you do not need to join our party, but I insist my daughters are to be present, and sensibly dressed.” He left, closing the door firmly behind him.



Lady Elizabeth felt relieved at being released from the *lawn affair*. Finally, she had prevailed upon her husband. Standing at her long mirror, she tied her bonnet under her left ear and huffed, "The silly fool."

She planned to leave the Great House as soon as may be. Her daughters were to fend for themselves. After all, they had the most excellent guidance of Mrs Brown, who was to attend the affair in her stead. As for Henry, she shook her head. "I fear he shall be like his father in all ways and will find nothing to mortify his little bones over the entire squalid matter. Let him become the object of ridicule, what shall I care over the calamity. I have done my duty in lending objection, and now being quite put out of the absurdity, I shall leave quietly, before the disgusting hordes arrive."

Her ladyship stepped merrily down the stairs thinking of her visit with her sister, Lady Catherine, in London. A fifty-mile journey was a lengthy one, and she planned on returning the following day. She had already been stewing a goodly amount of time, forming the *garden party debacle* into neat little boxes that she may present each to her sister. *Surely she will swoon at the news.*



From his room, Henry watched his mother board the carriage. He wondered why she never kissed him goodbye like Anne and Sarah always did. He shook his head. "But Mama never kisses me." As he wiped his eyes, he suddenly spotted oxen on the distant hill pulling carts.

"They are come!" He shouted, jumping up and down. "They are come to my party!" He was so excited that he scrambled out his window and hastily climbed down the wild rose vine trellis. No matter that a thorn ripped his trousers. His dog, Willie, spotted him and the two scurried to the hill that was filling fast with his *other family* from Alton. Spotting the Holybourne orphans, he ran and jumped with them all ... proudly dressed in their cleanest rags, shoeless.

He soon found William. "Sir, you did not use the road there?" He pointed.

"Aye, Master Henry didn't want to rut the road."

"William, you must not call me Master ..."

"Oh, but indeed I must. For now we are in public. I know my place, young man."

Henry shrugged. "Very well, William, I suppose you are right." He noticed his mother's carriage move away. "There goes my mother, sir. She is going to London. She finds no happiness in your visit here." Henry waved goodbye to her, but she stuck her nose in the air and turned away.

Henry smiled up at William, ignoring his mother's snub. "I am glad you are here, and so is my father." In his next breath, he cried, "May I ride your ox, sir? I shall hold tight. Oh, please, sir."

William laughed as he lifted Henry onto the huge, gentle ox.

Suddenly Lizzy appeared at his side out of breath and panting. Her thick black hair stuffed up high into her yellow bonnet, sweat beaded on her upper lip. "Oh, please, William, may I lead the ox?"

He handed her the rope. "Indeed, Lady Elizabeth, you may."

Henry squinted in the sun's glare. "But do not go so very fast, Lizzy."

She rolled her eyes. "I know very well how to lead an ox, Henry." With a sigh and shake of her head, she led them away.

\* \* \*

As Lord Grayton stood before the many tents and tables in the garden, he caught sight of his son riding the ox, Lizzy leading the way. He shook his head in awe. *I never would have thought she would do such a thing.* He felt a tug on his sleeve.

"Papa," Margaret pointed, "Henry is riding that beast. Dear God, he shall fall and become impaled on those ghastly horns. And, mind Lizzy, sir, she is leading the ghastly parade. You must stop this immediately."

The Earl put his arm around her shoulder. "Daughter, calm yourself. Can't you see the smile on your brother's face? The happiness in his manner? Why, he is wild with delight. I dare say if he runs himself through, he shall die a happy boy."

Her jaw dropped.

Her sister, Mary, stood behind her and overheard the entire conversation. She bid her tongue a respite, lest her father throw her into the ox's path. Then, from the corner of her eye, she caught an odd movement and tugged on Margaret's arm. "Look there at that little girl." She pointed.

Margaret eyed Sarah. "One leg is very much shorter than the other," she whispered.

Mary stared. "Oh, I have never seen a freak before." She watched in horror as Sarah limped past.

But Margaret was not in the least bit appalled at such a disfigurement. She was always fascinated with ways in which she could splinter a wounded animal; help a bird that broke its wing; the imperfect body fascinated her. She would steal away at night into the library and read books on anatomy, human or animal.

Sarah, being quite aware of people staring, limped away. She found that if she simply smiled at them, they would move on. Being taught to respect her betters, she curtsied, but her good foot became stuck in cow dung, and she fell.

Mary guffawed at such a sight.

Within an instant, Henry slid from the ox and ran to her side. "There now, Sarah," he steadied her. Taking his handkerchief from his pocket, he wiped her hands and frock.

Margaret and Mary watched in bewilderment as Henry brushed the dung from her frock.

Mary's nose wrinkled. "He is touching the little freak's hand. Oh, how disgusting. Her name is Sarah? Surely that is not *the* Sarah Whitmore from Alton—Henry's so-called mate?" She covered her mouth in horror. "Oh, that mother shall faint straight away."

## **Chapter 4 – Shocking News Comes to Rosewood Park**

The next morning after the garden party, Margaret stood in disbelief at the news. Lord Grayton sunk into his chair, dumbfounded. Mary wept as Victoria stared blankly at the floor. Lizzy sat at her father's feet. Henry had just returned from the Whitmores' when the shocking news came to Rosewood Park.

"How did it happen, Byron?" Grayton dropped his head into his hands in anguish at the news of his wife's death.

"Well, my lord," said the magistrate, "Lady Grayton and her sister Lady Catherine were riding in the chaise when suddenly an out-of-control carriage raced them by, startling their team. Lady Catherine's horse bolted and pulled the chaise wildly down the road crashing into a tree. Lady Catherine suffered a few cuts, and that is all we know at this moment—I am truly sorry, your lordship." With that, the humble magistrate bowed and made way a little distance from the grieving family. "My lord, is there anything more I may do?"

Grayton shook his head. "No, leave us now, leave us to our grief." Excusing him with a flick of his wrist, his lordship crumpled back into his chair, devastated. He felt guilty for having a cross word with his wife just before she left.

"But, Papa, how should this happen to our family, we are wealthy," cried Victoria.

"Death plays no favourites," he said in a terse whisper.

Margaret glared at Henry. "First off, Mother should not have been there."

Henry lifted his eyes to her, crying as well, but he was too young to fully understand the implication. He was not too