



Winthrop

Tragedy to Triumph

by

Carol Jeanne Kennedy



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Cover: *The Pink Rose*, by Charles-Amable Lenoir (French, 1860-1926.) 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.

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Chapter 1 – Marianne’s Wedded Bliss

Smoke billowed from the Mandeville chimneys like white velvet ribbon, twisting and curling magically into a fine, hovering mist. Evening came early and quietly; without notice, snow had covered the grounds. Standing smart, the wooden white-capped posts stood as sentries should a coachman need direction. It was Christmas, after all, and frost was in the air.

The hounds, nestled snugly on their beds of straw beneath the kitchen’s portico, whined at the aroma of baked ham. The once distant jingle of sleigh bells now pealed louder and brought the sleigh full of bundled revellers swiftly into the courtyard. Sniffing about, the dogs soon spied their prey and bounded through the snow to greet the returning Mandeville guests. The dogs, though dumb as chickens, were of good disposition. They hopped and barked excitedly as they escorted the sleigh to the Mandeville carriage-porch, an ancient overhang of exquisite stonework—indeed, shelter from the tumbling tufts of snow.

Mrs Fleming, the housekeeper, and Mrs Rose, the cook, heard the dogs barking and knew their company had returned.

“Well, then,” said Rose eyeing the dinner table with pride, “I say, well done. This table is dressed beautifully.”

The silver gleamed, the china sparkled, and the centre-piece of fresh holly-berry and pines held a nestling of old-fashioned wax candles. Rose glanced over the table for the last time. Tapping her head, she mumbled, “Now, dearie, you will have to remember to light them candles.”

Under the watchful eye of Mr Grover, the butler, Fleming and Rose always did a magnificent job at its setting. Indeed, warmth and informality prevailed at Winthrope, not the cold aloofness their mistress, Marianne, so abhorred. This holiday, the freshly married Marianne and her husband Charles were to

entertain his widowed mother, Charlotte Mandeville, along with Marianne's mother and father, Wilberton and Harriet Harrison who were, at present, just returning from their sleigh ride.

Amidst the barking hounds, Grover assisted them from the sleigh and into the vestibule where a huge fire, consuming half a tree, greeted them—a very welcome sight, for everyone complained of being chilled to the bone.

Mrs Mandeville, first to arrive in the drawing room, found Marianne and her governess, Mrs Molly Bickers, standing at the window. She ignored the governess's warm smile. In her opinion, the help should not be included in the intimacy of an evening with family. She also found it absurd that Marianne still kept her around.

"Good evening, Mrs Mandeville," smiled Marianne. "Molly and I were wondering if you enjoyed the sleigh ride."

"Tolerable, I suppose," she grunted, "but those beastly dogs nearly ruined the entire day. They were quite wild, jumping and barking as if consumed by distemper. They really should be tied, Marianne. Why do you let them run free?"

Molly, expressionless, returned to gazing at the falling snow.

It was difficult, but Marianne kept her smile. She felt the animals should be free and unbridled. Still smiling, she apologised, "I am sorry for it, Mrs Mandeville. I did not think they were so troublesome. Please excuse their exuberance." Just as she finished her apology, her parents, Mr and Mrs Harrison entered.

Gesturing toward the hearth, Marianne nodded. "Mama, Papa, come. It is delightful here by the fire."

Mrs Harrison took a seat across the room from Molly, nodding at Mrs Mandeville as she passed. "We shall remain where we are, thank you all the same." Perusing the room, she sniffed. "What? Is not Sir Thomas coming?"

"No, Mama. Uncle decided it safer to remain home for such snowy days."

"Indeed, we are only a few years younger," she huffed. "I shan't let a little snow ruin a holiday with my dear daughter."

"A glass of port, Mama?" offered Marianne ignoring her mother's snipe.

"No wine for me *or* your father; we shall wait for supper." Spreading her fan, Mrs Harrison glanced about the drawing room. Her gaze finally settled on a Ming Dynasty piece. "Tell

me, dear, whenever are you going to the Orient? It is quite impossible to understand their true culture without first visiting them." She took a half-breath, "Because if you do your father and I must come along. Grant you, they do have beautiful statuary in China, but their silks are finer. I have a room full of statuary, as you know; actually, it has become rather boring. Be that as it may, dear, you really should travel more."

Mrs Mandeville squirmed. "Well the Orient may be well and good, but my son Charles and I prefer touring the local areas and counties. The diseases over there, you know. The last party to return from *that place* had dysentery and bleeding gums. Oh, but no, we shall never travel that distance. It is far too dangerous, far too dangerous."

Mrs Harrison puffed up like a toad. "Indeed, you quite mistake the place, Mrs Mandeville. Why, my husband and I visit there yearly." She nudged her husband. "Isn't that so, Wilberton?"

With a blank stare, he mumbled obediently, "Yes, dear."

At that moment Charles entered apologising for his lateness. Already feeling the tension in the room, he addressed his meek father-in-law. "Mr Harrison, please, you must have a taste of some very exquisite wine." He produced a bottle cradled beneath his arm, nudging his father-in-law. "Sir, from the ten-year cellar—Merry Christmas everyone."

Mr Harrison's face broke into a kindly smile. He winked at Charles, avoiding his wife's glare. "Oh, indeed, Merry Christmas." He lifted his glass. "Ah, nothing like a superb glass of wine on such a night as this."

"Indeed, sir, on such a night." Charles cheerfully patted the old gentleman on the back.

Lifting her glass to her husband, Marianne whispered, "Thank you, Charles. You always say the right things."

Grover announced supper. Everyone clamoured toward the door, famished from the sleigh ride, and of course, the ladies were anxious to see the table.

At first glance, Mrs Mandeville wrinkled her nose at the centrepiece. Taking her place at the table, she muttered, "Trifling, I must say."

"I beg your pardon, madam," inquired Marianne's father, "did you say something?"

"Well, sir, it is only that I pride myself on being superior in all things domestic," she hemmed, "but, no one seems to take my advice."

"Oh?" Mr Harrison took up his napkin. "Is that so?"

"Come, Papa," interrupted Marianne, "you must say grace."

Everyone sipped their wine, often nodding agreeably, seemingly savouring the wine and food.

Charles's mother hemmed, "Marianne, dear, wherever did you find the table greens? I know you must have designed the entire affair." She held her handkerchief to her nose and snorted.

Charles stood. "Marianne, dear, moments ago, I discussed with your father that piece, that lovely piece you played at the piano this morning. Come, then, let us hear it again."

Now deterred from saying anything more to her mother-in-law, Marianne nodded. "But of course, dearest, you adore it so."

Taking her arm, Charles whispered, "You must not let Mother excite you so. Come then and play."

Entering the music room Marianne went directly to the piano. Charles followed.

Mr Harrison rubbed his ears. "Cards anyone?" He enticed his wife and Mrs Mandeville to play. "And why not?" he smiled. "Piquet is highly engaging."

Molly took to the sofa nearest the hearth and picked up her embroidery. "Marie has a lovely touch about the keys, I must say."

"Marie?" Marianne's mother huffed under her breath, "The very idea of servants so familiar with family names."

Marianne lifted her fingers from the keys. "I beg your pardon, Mama?"

Charles, by now, knew how to defuse a nasty confrontation. "Dearest," he winked, "do play another, won't you?"

Marianne, still bristling nodded. "Very well."

After playing a few songs, Marianne glanced about the room. Her mother and father were busy playing cards with Mrs Mandeville, Molly was at her sewing and Charles was dozing. Nudging him gently, she whispered, "I do hope they retire soon. I am exhausted, dear."

He sat up, covered his mouth and yawned. "But, Marianne, it is only nine, are you not feeling well?"

"I stayed out too long in the snow today." She ruffled her hound's thick black hair. "Look at Holly, will you, dead to the world." She sighed. "I have been with her all day in the woods

searching for cones and holly greens for the table—" she shook her head in disgust—"to have it set just right."

She glanced over at the card table to make sure her mother was not eavesdropping. "You know how I love to sleigh, Charles. Though bundled with furs and coverings," she chuckled, "Molly and I always find room for a dog or two." She noticed his eyes were waxing heavy again. "Today, while we sleighed through Tennyson Meadow, we came upon that gipsy family again ... tucked back in the woods, huddled around a small fire."

"Hmm, yes, Marianne," now half asleep he mumbled, "they are there."

She watched his head bob. "Oh, I always wave to them, dear. On this bitterly cold Christmas Day, Molly and I thought it a kind gesture to offer them food. We went back to the kitchen and had Rose make up a basket of ham, biscuits and cheeses."

Marianne felt very good about her charitable mission that afternoon. Eager to share her wild and forbidden undertaking, she glanced once again at her mother and father to make sure they were not listening. "Dearest, do you want to hear more?"

He half-opened his resting eyes. "You have piqued my curiosity, dear, do go on."

"Well, we then hurried back with the baskets to the gipsy camp."

Charles's eyes opened wider.

"Now, dear," she patted his hand, "Molly went with me. We carried the baskets to an older man—the elder, ah the king. They call him Array."

Charles's jaw dropped. "Surely you did not venture into a pack of gipsies, Marianne."

Mrs Mandeville, accustomed to listening to many conversations at once, heard her son's voice rise and turned her ear in his direction. Seemingly mesmerised with Marianne's shocking declaration, she folded her cards. The others did likewise, and the three listened in awe. Molly had fallen asleep and therefore could not warn Marianne of the eavesdroppers.

Marianne chatted on, "I recognised the Old Man, Array. Smiling, I said, 'Merry Christmas, please take this basket of food on such a frigid day.' I told him that I often see him and the others about in the woods. 'I am Mrs Mandeville; my husband's ancestral home is Winthrope.' I pointed toward our Great House.

“Array took the basket, saying: ‘Aye, we are hungry. The snow come down. We are cold, yes, but our fire warm, you sit.’ Bowing, he gestured toward the fire.”

Charles shook his head. “Marianne, I cannot believe what you are saying.”

“Dear, it is Christmas; have no fear. Why, I could sense no danger at all, and joined them by the fire. The children were in rags. The poor darlings snuggled close to me.”

Fondling her thick black ringlets, Marianne smiled up toward the ceiling. “They stared at my hair. One little girl said to me in the dearest voice, ‘Madam, you smell like meadows in spring.’

‘I should, little one. I dried some flowers last summer and made sachets. I carry them with me when the snow falls upon the meadows. I smell the sweet sachet, and all the warmth of a summer day warms me.’

“I closed my eyes as I spoke. All of the little ones did likewise; the gypsies laughed at how I had captivated their children. They said they also passed on legends of their own this way.

“They respected my sincerity, Charles, and I theirs. Hearing our horses’ whinny, I realised that Molly and I must soon leave. Before going, I broke open a sachet and sprinkled flower dust in each child’s hand. Their eyes sparkled so. What a wonderful Christmas, Charles. They were such beautiful, happy children. I told them I must be off because my horse would suffer in the cold, and my dogs, as they could see, were anxious to run.

“I bid them all a Merry Christmas and turned to Array. ‘I do hope you enjoy our bounty. Your wife may keep the basket; I wove it myself.’

“On my way down the path to the sleigh, one of the older women touched my arm. Smiling, she made some sort of sign with her hands. I have since learned it means to go in good health.”

Charles, well aware of the vagabonds travelling about the countryside, pulled Marianne close. “Dearest, yes, it is Christmas, but you must promise to never ...”

“Dear me,” cried her mother, fanning herself. “Dear me. Gypsies? Will you ever grow up Marianne?” She turned back to the card table and glared at her husband. “I rather think your daughter has quit her senses.”

Molly woke up at the exchange. Clearing her eyes, she looked from one to another in apparent puzzlement.

Mortified to find that they had all listened in on her private conversation, Marianne's face glowed a deep red. The room grew quiet. Holly lifted her head and groaned.

Mr Harrison folded his cards and leaned into his wife. "Our daughter is a married woman now, dear. She does as she pleases. Let Charles take care of the unfortunate affair."

Charles stood. "If you will excuse us, Marianne and I will retire."

Mrs Mandeville smirked behind her fan.

Before they left the room, Charles stopped at the open door. "It goes without saying my wife has an adventuresome spirit. Good night."

Molly stood. "Good evening." She followed them from the room.

Once in their bedchamber, Marianne undressed quietly. "What do I do that makes mother hate me so? Surely I am not seeking glory to myself, Charles." Shaking her head, she sighed. "And to think, I almost made an entire evening without provoking either of our mothers."

"Marianne, dear," said Charles as he took her chin, "let the matter drop. You know how they are. They will never change; it was extremely rude of them to listen in on our conversation. They are, I believe, beyond hope. I am sorry your feelings are so wounded. And of course my mother, drawing up, gloating so. Well, I do not know what shall be done about it. Can we be at peace for one more day until they are gone?"

She nodded. "Their rudeness is indeed abominable, Charles. I can't recover my happiness so quickly anymore." She untied her delicate silk nightgown. "Poor Papa, he cannot escape." She tossed her gown to the foot of the bed, slipped under the covers and reached for Charles, but before he could even kiss her goodnight, she had fallen sound asleep.

* * *

The very next morning Marianne stood at the window watching the powdery white snowflakes swirl softly in the air. The ground was hard and stiff. The deepest part of winter was fast approaching.

"Come away from the window, dearest. I shan't have my bride catch cold."

“So, you have awakened?” She smiled demurely, trying to hide her flushed face from him. She had heard how a bride must act those first few months of marriage, but Charles had this way of blurring all that advice. A proper lady must not carry on so without due regard to her dignity, nakedness (even in bed) was frowned upon. That’s what nightgowns were for. And she had many, all unworn—Charles saw to that.

She fondly recollected how he passionately kissed her on their first night of marriage. He was patient as he unbuttoned her gown making her promise to never wear anything over her beautiful skin to bed ever again. Speechless and blushing, she obeyed him, as a good wife should. He was gentle and sweet to her, and when fully aroused he did not force himself onto her, but let her come to him. His soft lips had a persuasion that positively confused her logic, and she secretly vowed to succumb to his touch at any time, day or night.

“Come, my dear, I need to hold you,” he whispered while he slowly untied her plush, white robe and let it drop to the floor. He fondled her small soft breasts, and when his hardness could not be ignored, he pulled her to him. Wrapping his arms around her scented, supple skin, he moaned, “Darling, you make me a very happy man.”

She snuggled closer. “I love being in your arms, Charles. I love being naked in your arms. Forgive me the words, sir, but I love it.”

* * *

Later that morning, over breakfast, Grover, the butler interrupted, “Beg pardon, sir.” He held out the silver mail salver. “An urgent letter, sir.”

Shaking his head, Charles took the letter, ripped it open and hastily read it. He sighed and tossed it into the open fire. “I am sorry, dear, but I must go.”

Pouting, Marianne ran her fingers alongside his face. “Charles, you are taut and looking tired again. Must you leave?”

“I am afraid so, dear.”

“But you were out only yesterday, Charles.”

He sighed. “I will meet with Uncle Thomas this week. Now that I am a married man, I shall not mind relinquishing some of my duties. It is exhausting, troublesome work to be sure.” He glanced at his pocket watch. “I have been summoned

by the Magistrate to help settle a dispute between one of my tenants. I shall not be long."

When he made motion to leave, Marianne leaned into him. "Love," she whispered, untying the satin ribbon to allow her thick black curls to unfurl, "this evening as we meander about our moonlit garden, I shall beg you to untie *all* my ribbons."

"Hmm." Running his hands through her hair, he whispered, "O for a Life of Sensation rather than of Thoughts!"¹

* * *

To his promise to find someone to help him, Charles kept his word. He hired an excellent young attorney, Mr Andrew Wyatt, as bookkeeper for Winthrope.

His uncle, Sir Thomas Mandeville, was visiting for the day and was pleased as Charles finally hired someone to take over the books. Winthrope was a vast estate.

"Marianne will be happy, Uncle."

"You will be happy, Charles. Mr Wyatt is a capable young man. He will serve you well. He was one of my most admirable law clerks."

"Indeed, Uncle."

With the pressing affairs of Winthrope taken care of, Charles and his Uncle took supper alone.

While buttering his bread, Sir Thomas commented, "I am pleased that you have chosen a young man for your books, Charles. Mind, in a few years I will retire. Perhaps if Mr Wyatt proves worthy, he might assume more control."

"Perhaps, Uncle," said Charles as he watched his beloved uncle eat heartily, "but sir, you are not so old."

"That I consume an entire loaf of cake, perhaps not."

Both laughed.

Sir Thomas eyed Charles with affection. "Indeed, Charles, you and Marianne will do well in life." Turning on his cane, he sighed. "I feel it in these old bones."

¹ John Keats (1795-1821) English poet. From a letter to Benjamin Bailey (1817).

Chapter 2 – Two Summers Pass

The Mandevilles shared a great passion for horses. While Charles greatly favoured the hunters, Marianne loved the beauty and grace of the jumpers. They, being private people, kept their estate staff private and small and engaged only two excellent groomsmen—Eldon Firth and Stuart Dean.

* * *

Standing at the paddock gate with furrowed brow, Marianne gazed at her mare, Evelina. “I believe she will deliver very soon, Mr Firth.”

“Aye, ma’am, we’ll be keeping a close eye on her.”

Marianne’s horse, Evelina, was a full eleven months with foal, and because she had a difficult time of birthing in the past, it was decided that this would be her last.

Also with child, by three months, Marianne knew she must use caution if she was to carry her own delicate pregnancy to full term. Charles forbade her going anywhere near the paddocks. As well, he cautioned the servants over the matter and would often council her, “In your delicate condition, Marianne, you must take to the sofa and remain there.”

“Nonsense, Charles,” she scoffed. “I will do nothing of the sort. However, I will promise to be very good and cautious in all matters.” Much to his consternation, she added, “Charles, it is not the helps’ concern for my judgments. I shall be with child like my mother before me and hers before her. Besides all that, dearest, Molly is my constant companion.”

* * *

The very next day while at the morning room window, Marianne overheard the gardener say that the mare Evelina was in trouble and that he had summoned the veterinarian. Concerned, she rang for Molly, but apparently she had stepped out. *Oh, I shall be careful. I must see Evelina for myself.*

"But madam," said Firth, "Mr Mandeville specifically told me to be on guard and see that you do not come near the mare or exert yourself in any manner unnecessary."

"I have not overexerted myself, Firth." She assured him. "I am very well, as you can see." Looking toward Evelina's stall, she cocked her ear. "Listen, you can hear her pacing; her foal is coming, Firth. One peek, and then I shall leave."

Exhaling heavily, he gave in. "Very well, madam." He squinted as the bright sun streamed into the dark, dank mews. "But a peek, mind," he sighed in exasperation. "The veterinarian should have been here by now."

"Do find why he is not, Firth. I do not want anything to go wrong."

After opening the horse's top half-door, Marianne smiled at the clumsy, bloated mare. "Good morning, Love."

At the familiar voice, Evelina greeted Marianne with a nudge. Her intelligent brown eyes were soft and alert; her ears perked as she tossed her head in obvious delight.

"I love you, Evelina." Marianne stood tiptoe, putting her arms around her neck, stroking her silky ears, kissing her prickly, soft muzzle.

The mare nuzzled her in return.

"Oh, you will be the sweetest mother," she cooed. "You will soon have a baby suckling you." Rubbing her own belly, she giggled, "Me too, and together we shall become happy, satisfied mothers."

Suddenly the mare backed away; her huge belly convulsed.

"What is it, girl?"

Pacing around her stall, the mare whinnied—a low whimpering sort of cry. Labouring through the deep straw, she tried to turn, but her front legs buckled and she fell forward. Catching herself, she leaned against the wall, apparently trying to steady her legs.

"Oh, Evelina." Unlatching the door, Marianne cautiously eased her way in. Running her hand along the mare's silky neck, she soothed, "Oh, you are in agony dear girl. Be still now, the veterinary surgeon is on his way."

Suddenly waves of violent convulsions moved through the horse's belly, her legs buckled again, and her huge body crumpled onto the straw.

Holding her hands to mouth, Marianne cried, "Oh, dear me. What is to be done?"

Backing away, she stumbled. To break her fall, she slid backwards down the rough-hewn half-door, and in so doing wrenched her body. In pain, she slid to the floor holding her stomach. "Oh, no."

Firth heard her cries and rushed into the stall. "Ah, be Jesus. I knew I shouldn't have left you alone." Picking her up, he shouted for someone to fetch the doctor.

"Please, I am only dizzy." Moaning, she grabbed her stomach.

Firth shouted to a gawking stable boy, "Bring a bench ... now!"

"Never mind me," urged Marianne, "go to Evelina, she is in far greater need."

"Please, madam, do not worry. Mrs Bickers will be here soon. Do not move, madam."

"I am fine, Firth." She grimaced. "Oh, what have I done? Charles will be furious."

He shook his head. "No matter," he softened, "you love her, ma'am, and have every right to be near her, but not *in* the stall." He had informed Charles weeks earlier that the mare and the foal would not survive.

"Go to her, Firth. I will be fine. Please," she cried, "do as I say."

Rufus, the stable boy, ran to the Great House to find Molly. Dashing into the kitchen, he found no one about and began clanging the bell. There were clusters of mutton, ham and beef hanging over hot fires. Freshly slaughtered poultry dripped blood into catch pots. The smell of sweet cakes baking in the hot brick ovens wafted about. Rose suddenly walked back into the kitchen and found Rufus.

"Beg pardon, Mrs Rose, but ..."

"What be you doing with your dirty boots wandering around my kitchen? Can' ye see the bell?"

"I clanged it four times, ma'am. Mrs Mandeville is unwell. She's in the stable with the mare. Firth said to fetch you. She needs a doctor right away."

Rose hurriedly wiped her hands on her apron. "Oh, my, well then, Rufus, ride for the doctor and be quick about it."

"Aye, ma'am."

Rose scurried throughout the house screaming for Molly and Fleming. Fanning herself with her apron, she panted, "Oh my, Mrs Mandeville is hurt. She needs you at the stables; I've sent for the doctor."

Molly ran out the kitchen door shouting over her shoulder for someone to bring hot water and clean cloths.

Fleming was fast behind. "Oh, my. Oh, my."

Out of breath, the two women found Marianne lying on the stable bench, weeping.

Kneeling by her side, Molly took her hand. "My heavens, Marie, what has happened?"

"Oh, never mind about me." Marianne sat up on one elbow pleading with Firth. "You must take the foal or Evelina will die."

He exchanged glances with Molly. "I found Mrs Mandeville in the stall *with* the horse."

"Please, Firth, go to her," pleaded Marianne.

"Very well, ma'am."

Molly took Marianne's hand. "What happened?"

Having just arrived, Fleming hurriedly spread her shawl over Marianne. She noticed blood dripping from the bench where she lay.

Rose arrived with a basin of hot water, spilling most of it. "Here you are, then." She set it on the dirt floor and handed Molly a wad of clean cloth.

"Explain," said Molly as she dipped the cloth into the water, wrung it out and dabbed Marianne's forehead.

"I simply went in to soothe her and I, I slipped."

Molly shook her head.

"I am bleeding," said Marianne tersely. She heard the laboured breathing of her mare; the cries of an animal in panic. "God, please help her."

Molly calmly ordered the stable boys to carry Mrs Mandeville into the house.

Marianne sat up. "Wait, wait. I must know if Evelina and the foal survive. Please, Molly, I must stay."

"You'll find out soon enough." Molly stood. "We must get you to the house."

Firth's voice came calm and certain, "I must take the foal. We can't wait for the veterinarian."

"But, sir," protested one of the stablemen, "you need more help."

Firth wiped his brow. "I can't wait."

The watery slip of the foal brought Marianne again to her elbows.

Firth's voice was low and soothing, "Hold it, easy, girl, hang on girl." And then a joyous shout, "Aye, a fine colt, a fine colt, indeed!"

Marianne's head eased back on the hard wooden plank. "Oh, at last." She glanced up at Molly. "Now you may take me to the house."

But Evelina did not lift her head to welcome her foal; she lay upon the bed of bloody straw—lifeless, painless now; her soul fled.

Marianne sat half-way up. "Wait, I can't hear Evelina breathe. Tell me, what has happened?"

Firth opened the stall door and walked out, blood dripped from his hands. Slumped, he shook his head. "I am sorry, madam."

There, beyond the open stall door, lay the foal, wet and wobbly, struggling to get up, his sweet little head bobbing as he searched for his mother.

Looking away, Marianne whimpered, "Oh, Evelina, it is my fault, old girl. I should not have bred you again. I failed you." She heaved heavily and clutched her cramping belly as a warm mass slowly moved from her body.

"Marianne," said Molly as she took her chin, "Marianne, open your eyes. Look at me."

More blood dripped from Marianne's skirt; her face turned as grey as a winter's day. Her eyes fluttered open. "The cold, wet cloth to my face ... feels wonderful. I shall sleep for a little while," she whispered.

"Someone's coming," said Fleming as she hurried to the stable door. "Ah, Dr Blystone has arrived at last." She waved frantically. "Over here, doctor, make haste!"

The heavy-set doctor sprang from his carriage with amazing alacrity. Breathing in short, raspy gasps, he shouted, "Where, where am I to go?"

"This way, doctor," said Fleming, waving frantically. "Over here, over here."

The doctor spied Marianne and hustled his rotund body next to Molly. Taking up her hand, he grunted, "Hmm, we must get her to a warm, dry place. Make haste."

"To the kitchen," directed Molly.

The stablemen lifted Marianne with great care and headed for the house. Her dog, Holly, licked her dangling hand.

Dr Blystone, stumbling up the slight hill, kicked at the hound. "Make way, you filthy beast, make way."

"Sir, that *filthy beast* is Marianne's own particular dog." Molly scowled, "Better you speak in a softer tone."

The doctor pressed a finger to his left nostril and blew his nose.

When they reached the kitchen, the stablemen laid Marianne on the massive hearth ledge in front of a blazing fire. The doctor ordered everyone out except Molly, Fleming, and Rose. The examination began.

Next to the doctor, Rose sat a basin of warm lavender water along with a stack of clean linens. She then set a kettle to steeping on the hob. While mumbling a little prayer, she hurried from the room.

Fleming situated a privacy screen to shield Marianne and retain the warmth. "Here we are," she soothed. "A bit of privacy is in order."

"Very good, Fleming," said Molly. "You are the one who always thinks of these things."

"Aye," said Blystone, "aye, indeed, very good, very good."

Mrs Fleming nodded with a smile.

It could have been the warmth of the fire or the gentle touch of someone removing her clothing that stirred Marianne to open her eyes. "Molly?" she whispered, "what is happening to me? Where is Charles?" Tears welled in her eyes. "Please, I think I must sit up."

The doctor pressed her shoulder gently. "Oh, no, Mrs Mandeville. No, no, indeed not. You must lie still now," he urged. "You are soon to be taken to your room, but I must first put more compresses to stop the bleeding."

"Bleeding?" She looked ashen and drained. "So, I have lost another child?"

He turned to Rose. "Heat a dish of caudle while I mix a tonic of centaurium. That should give Mrs Mandeville strength within the week."

Marianne groaned. Taking Molly's hand, she whimpered, "She is dead. Evelina is dead all because we selfishly wanted just one more foal."

"Charles will be home in the morning, Marie. It will be a new day, dearest. Think of it as being a brand new day. Think of all the wonderful times that magnificent animal brought

you, and let us not forget her foal. You must think about him and look after him now."

Fleming hemmed, "Madam, your caudle." Holding the warm cup to Marianne's lips, she repeated the doctor's orders. "There, now, madam, drink—all of it."

"Indeed, Mrs Mandeville, you must finish it all," said the doctor. He stood back. "Madam, what brought on this unfortunate accident?"

Molly stepped on his toe. "Doctor, Mrs Mandeville witnessed the demise of her beloved horse. Furthermore, sir, I can assure you, she is very sensitive to the well-being of all living things." Her expression silenced him. "So, Dr Blystone, you may guess the rest."

He nodded. "Indeed." He watched Marianne finish the last of the caudle. "I shall examine a little further." He scanned her pupils and checked her skin tone. "I believe you have purged all the blood you will, madam. Oh, you are pale, but that is to be expected." He dug in his bag and brought out a tin of balsam. "Rub this on Mrs Mandeville after her bath. It will soothe her." He closed his bag and headed for the door. "I shall stay the night." With that, he offered his condolences at the unfortunate circumstances and excused himself.

Fleming led him to a room just down the hall from the servants' quarters. Stopping at the open door, she offered, "I am not exactly sure when Master Charles is returning, Dr Blystone."

He nodded. "Well, it is wise of me to stay. Indeed, one does not dare leave a woman too soon who has a death born."

"Hmm, particularly a Mandeville, sir." She paused. "Would you like tea, Dr Blystone?"

"I would."

"Very good, sir." As she prepared to leave, she sighed. "Oh, what a terrible pity, for now there shall be no one to carry on the Mandeville name." She wiped her eyes. "My poor master will be devastated. Oh, and that Mrs Mandeville's beloved horse, Evelina, died."

He glanced about the room. "Yes, yes, unfortunate—but, then, it always is. Oh, and along with the tea, bring a full decanter of sherry."

"Yes, Dr Blystone." She dabbed the corner of her eyes with the tip of her apron. "A decanter full, indeed."