



# *Fall Rendezvous*

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The insipid autumn sun had reached the zenith, but it was not fooling anyone. The warm summer days were all gone. The clouds were covering the sky, barely giving place to a white, opaque light that slightly warmed the two young people sat on the grass. Terrence looked up, visibly annoyed by both, the obvious advent of colder days, and the content of the letter he had just finished reading. He and his young friend were sharing the news as they enjoyed a fleeting moment of mutual company during the noon-break.

He lowered his eyes to the white page and went over a few of the passages. The girl by his side, propped on her elbows, half lying on the pretended Pony's Hill, eyed at him yet another time. The truth is that she could hardly keep her eyes away from him when they were together; especially when his attention seemed to be focused elsewhere and she could look at him with more liberty.

"Africa is so far away, isn't it, Terry", she managed to comment, diverting her eyes from her companion, "Yet, no matter the distance, Mr. Albert once told me that when two people are very close . . .", she sighed, unable to finish her sentence.

"Well, Albert seems to me like a person that needs to be constantly on the move," the young man replied, leaving the letter aside and turning to see Candy, "He must be free to go away whenever he pleases to be truly happy, I reckon. Just think of it, Candy, with all those animals running freely, in the wilderness, he must be on seventh heaven. He is a freedom lover, I think. . . I admire that in him."



“I suppose you are right,” Candy admitted still a bit reluctant to reconcile Albert’s restless nature with her desire to enjoy his friendship and guidance on a steadier basis, “I guess I must be patient. Someday I will see him again,” she concluded trying to keep a light tone in her conversation.

The young girl lay down on the grass, immersed in her own recollections of her repeated encounters and abrupt good byes with her mysterious friend. It was kind of sad to have to be separated from those people she loved, such as Albert, Miss Pony, Sister Lynne . . . so many. It was as if life was a continuous series of separations. It did not sit well with her gregarious inclinations. She did not voice her thoughts to Terry, though. Instead, they both lay on the grass, side by side, silently looking at the sky that was being tainted by the plain colors of autumn. They often did that. They could stay together for long minutes without saying anything in particular, and yet, they were totally at ease with each other’s presence. Candy thought that Terry was the only person in the world with whom she could share such a comfortable silence. It was strange. Even though she usually felt an urgent need to talk to every living soul around her, she was not opposed to stay quiet for a moment, if it was with him.

A soft breeze swept Candy’s loose curls and brought a soft perfume to her nostrils. She recognized the faded fragrance of the few flowers that still covered the pretended Pony’s Hill. The girl recognized that the summer carpet was about to wither, and a sudden nostalgia seized her heart.



*It has been such a wonderful summer” she thought, unconsciously turning her eyes to see Terrence. The young man seemed to be lost in his own thoughts.*

*“He’s always like that,” she smiled to herself, “as if he didn’t care about me being here, but he can’t fool me; not anymore. I remember clearly what he told me the last time we were in his villa: He casually said, as if by passing: <<you know Candy, now that I return to London, I’ll be missing being outdoors after being here for all the summer. I think I’ll spend my noon-breaks in the pretended Pony Hill’s to feel less cloistered>>” Candy had to make an effort not to laugh at that memory, “As if I were not going to get his hints,” she thought.*

*“So, I meet with him here since we returned to school,” she continued her musings, “Does this look like a **secret rendezvous**? . . . I don’t think so,” she first dismissed the idea, but soon had to admit, at least to herself, that her meeting with Terry on daily basis did seem very much like a sort of romantic date, “If not,” she argued, “why does it give me the jitters every time I’m on my way to see him?”*

Terrence’s eyes that seemed to be fixed on a distant point in the horizon turned then to meet hers for a brief while. He smiled in a swift, almost imperceptible way. Then, he lifted his torso, supporting his weight on his left elbow, and using the index of his right hand, he brushed the tip of Candy’s nose.

“You know what I was thinking?” he suddenly asked.



How would I know, silly? I don't read people's minds," she said smiling playfully, ". . . but since you brought it up, I suppose you want to tell me," she added raising her eyebrow.

"Well," he began, casually pulling a grass spike from the ground, "I was wondering about this nurse that Albert mentions in his letter."

"And . . .," she prompted him to continue, changing her position to sit while resting her elbows on her knees.

"I mean, if she really looks like you, I'm sure she has a snub-nose and is always getting herself in trouble, just like you," he concluded while he quickly dodged Candy's playful fist, that pretended to search retaliation for his remark.

"Sure she does," Candy laughed. She had got used to his teasing, which now seemed to her as his own affectionate, private way to talk to her. Yet, something about Albert's comment about his nurse friend suddenly made her get serious, "Now that I think of it," she then said, "I kind of admire her, I mean, it is very brave of her to be helping people in Africa; don't you think? That is surely a challenging and useful kind of job."

For a while the girl's eyes got lost in a distant, invisible point, and Terrence understood that she was searching the words to tell him something important for her. His heart skipped a beat, as it always did whenever she talked to him about her memories and her dreams for the future.

"You know, Terry," she finally said breaking the silence, "at Pony's Home, when any of the children got sick, it was always a cause of great concern."



Terrence noticed a shadow clouding her otherwise bright eyes and couldn't avoid feeling a pang.

“Being sick was always a problem, you see,” she continued, “for there was no doctor in the village, and it takes too long to get to La Porte, where there is clinic. I remember that one night, when I was just a wee girl, I had a fever and both of my teachers were almost in tears. The poor souls did not know what to do, I suppose,” Candy said, her voice almost a whisper.

Terrence frowned in concern. He knew that a child with a persistent fever could easily die . . . she could have died that evening! The mere thought sent shivers down his spine.

“I was lucky, that time,” Candy continued, not noticing Terry's worried glances, “but, other children . . . sometimes things did not end up so well, you see what I mean?” she cued him, not able to say out loud that other children had died, “I remember that Sister Lynne always regretted not having any training as a nurse, and I, being just a child, could not be of any help . . . I wish I could have been of help,” she echoed wistfully, her saddened voice cutting like a knife in Terrence's heart.

“*Candy!*” Terrence thought, “*How ironic life can be! . . . You are always so lively and sweet that I can hardly believe you've lived so many hardships. This is yet another example of them. To think that you went through childhood without proper medical attention when you needed it, whereas I always had doctors and nurses to fuss around me. . . however, none of them could ever equal the love your teachers gave you. I wonder who of the two of us was more unfortunate.*”



Terrence lowered his head, remembering his own childhood, with a mixture of pain, anger, and resentment.

*“A simple cough and the pediatrician would dash to me to find out if something was the matter,”* Terrence kept on thinking, *“That has been my life as the son of Richard Grandchester, always pampered and spoiled with everything money could buy . . . and yet, the attentions that employees and a legion of sycophants can bestow on you are bright but tawdry . . . one cannot feel truly loved when everybody only flatters you, deceitfully searching your favor.”*

In his mind, Terrence relived in a second the many instances of his wretched childhood, caught between the indifference of his father, the open hatred of his step-mother, the absence of his real mother, and the attentions of mercenary hands devoid of feelings. Always left under the charge of servants, or abandoned in a severe and cold boarding school, he had nurtured a profound resentment which threatened to explode at the least provocation. Since he had recently learned to see his mother in a different light, he was now channeling all of his anger towards his father. The visit that the Duke had paid to him in recent days had only fueled his animosity exponentially.

*“If only my father had loved my mother the way he should”* , Terrence thought despondently, *“ . . . if only the two of them had been there for me . . . if he only understood the pain he caused,”* the young man kept brooding in his heart, feeling as though his father’s shadow would oppress him, even now that he was distant. *“Damn it! How can I remain dependent on a man like that?”*



Unbeknownst to Terrence, his anger had risen to the point that he had unconsciously torn the grass spike with which he had been toying. He found that it was embarrassingly ironic that the moment before he was thinking about Candy's unfortunate childhood, and it had only taken him a second to return to his usual sour thoughts about his father.

*"Must I always be so selfish?"* He wondered. *"Whereas she . . ."* he looked at Candy once more. The girl had remained silent for a while, letting the shy sun warm her thoughts again. A second before, her memories had cast a gloom over her eyes. Yet, her sunny disposition seemed to have regained control of her countenance.

*How does she do it?"* He wondered, *"Before I met her, I was so self-absorbed in my own grief; well on my way to become an embittered cynic. However, when I'm with her, even if I feel down, like now, I can't stay like that for long. She warms my heart, like none else in the world. I really don't fathom what I did to deserve her, but this I know: I will not make the same mistakes my father did! Now that I've found her, I know she's my soul mate, the one I want to share my life with. I will devote the rest of my life to make her happy,"* he swore, unable to fully comprehend how such an oath was going to lead him into a long, painful journey, before he could finally fulfill his promise.

In spite of his inability to see the future, the young Terrence instinctively knew that something important had just happened. He felt that his chest was going to explode with the powerful emotions Candy evoked in him and wished again to have the courage to hold her tight within his arms. Yet, he only managed to look at



her, caressing her brief profile with his soul. It was then that, for a brief moment, his eyes betrayed all the tender feelings that he kept for her.

Candy did not turn to see him in the eye, but distinctively felt his intense gaze on her skin. Soon, a familiar warm tingle spread from somewhere inside her, tainting her cheeks with the brightest blush. She always wondered what could have happened that afternoon if she had dared to look into his eyes. However, she slowly closed her eyelids, while her fingers caressed the grass. She took a deep breath, trying to treasure that blissful moment in her mind . . . Deep in her heart, she wished that the warmth of his glance on her skin could last forever.

The bell rang then, and Candy and Terry had to return to their lessons, ignoring they had just enjoyed the last moment of peaceful communion they would be allowed to share together in many, many years.

