

Manchester, England
February 1864

Amanda slumped in the dressing table chair, thwarting her maid's efforts for the third time.

"Please stop fidgeting, Miss Amanda, or I'll never finish your hair. At this rate you may miss breakfast altogether." As she spoke she swiftly fastened the coiled braid to the back of Amanda's head with a half dozen long hairpins.

"I'm sorry, Helene. I don't know why I can't cut it off since it's such a bother, or at least wear it down until noon. After all, it's only my family at table." Amanda stared at her wavy reflection in the mirror. The dreary winter had robbed her cheeks of all color. She was as pale as the ghost the staff insisted roamed the attic of Dunn Manor.

"You can't wear it down because you're not a child anymore. Young ladies must have fashionable *coiffures* unless they are abed with the fever and their continued earthly existence appears in doubt." Helene winked at Amanda's reflection in the mirror. "And cutting it off is advisable only if you plan to book passage to India disguised as a man."

Amanda chuckled at the mental picture of herself dressed in flannel and tweed. "I've seen you in the garden of the carriage house with your hair plaited down your back. And you're older than I."

"True enough, but I'm the widowed daughter of your papa's coachman. My appearance ceased to be of much interest the day I married. But you, Miss Amanda, should make a good impression wherever you are, no matter what time day or night." Helene bent to whisper close to her ear. "How else will you catch a fine husband like a viscount or an earl?"

Amanda emitted a rude noise that would have appalled her mother. "Your suggestion sounds dreadfully dull. Instead, maybe I'll become an actress and travel the world, or perhaps a famous opera singer and appear on the finest stages of Rome, Vienna, and Paris." She closed her eyes, imagining the sound of thunderous applause.

Helene freed two tendrils to soften the severe look of Amanda's upswept hair. "To be a famous opera singer, one must first be able to sing." She tugged on a lock playfully. "Go to breakfast before your mama sends her maid after you."

Without an alternative, Amanda dutifully obeyed. On her way downstairs, she heard rain pelting the window with chilling relentlessness. This time of year *any* career someplace warm sounded preferable to winter in Lancashire.

"There you are, my dear. I feared you'd taken ill to be this tardy." Agnes Dunn maintained a hawkish perusal of her daughter while sipping her tea.

"Forgive me, Mama. My hair refused to cooperate with Helene." Taking her usual seat at the table, she asked the footman for coffee instead of tea. "Where is Papa?" she asked, noticing that her mother sat alone at the ornate table for twelve.

"His cough is no better. He's not coming downstairs this morning." Agnes signaled for the footman to serve.

Amanda's unease increased threefold. "Papa is still in bed? He doesn't plan to go to the mill? I can't remember that ever happening—"

Her mother narrowed her eyes. "Please don't overdramatize, Amanda. Everyone gets sick, even your hale and hearty father. You're too young to remember a bout of gout which laid him low for days." She nibbled her toast. The barest coating of lemon cheese provided a sunny glow.

Amanda refused to be put off easily. "But he never misses breakfast. It's his favorite meal of the day. I'll take him a bowl of poached eggs and some kippers. And I know he won't refuse porridge with fresh cream."

"If your father is hungry, ring for the maid and she will carry up a tray. I won't have you doing servant work. Everyone needs to earn their wages." Agnes glanced at the footmen, who pretended not to be listening. "But you should visit your father when you finish eating. He asked to see you this morning."

Amanda set down her fork, her taste for food gone. "He wishes me to come to his bedroom?" Her father never spoke to his children except at the dinner table, at tea, or occasionally by the parlor fire if they weren't entertaining that evening. And he certainly never requested an audience while wearing his dressing gown. "Do you know what this is about, Mama?"

"I have my suspicions but prefer not to speculate. When did you become so apprehensive?" Agnes's expression softened. "I would have expected as much from your sister, but not from my fearless girl."

A second oddity within ten minutes was almost too much to bear. Her mother never mentioned Abigail, as though her twin sister hadn't been born. Since Alfred's death several years ago, it felt as though she'd been born an only child. "Will you come upstairs with me?" Amanda asked.

"No, my dear. I'm merely relaying the message. Your father requested only you, not the two of us. He will impart any decisions he's made to me when the time is right." Mama smiled, but the gesture fooled no one.

Amanda knew her parents hadn't taken rooms at opposite ends of the hall because of his snoring or Agnes's restless tossing and turning. She'd hoped they would become friends, if no longer passionate about each other. But her brother's untimely death put an end to that possibility. Amanda finished her toast and coffee, and then she refilled her cup at the sideboard. "I shall go now."

"Allow me to carry that for you, Miss Dunn." Joseph, the head footman reached her side with a saucer.

Reluctant to argue in front of her mother, Amanda allowed him to precede her up the stairs to her father's suite.

"Miss Amanda to see you, sir," announced Joseph, stopping in the doorway.

"Come in, daughter," said George Dunn, his voice hoarse and scratchy. "Why are you standing there like a statue? Come talk to your old papa."

She hurried then to his bedside, the sight of her robust father under heavy quilts giving her a chill. "Mama said you're not feeling well, sir. I hope that's not true." Amanda smiled as she said this, yet she needed little confirmation from him as to how he was with his face drawn and haggard.

"I'm a touch under the weather, but it's nothing for you to be concerned about. The way Ochs fusses over me, I'll either be right as rain or ready for a nanny and perambulator before long."

As though on cue, her father's trusted valet since before Amanda was born entered the room. "I intercepted your breakfast on the stairs, sir. Everything looks quite in order. I'll have more coal sent up for the fire."

"Getting my room to tropical temperatures will not cure a bit of the flu. Leave the tray on the table and my hearth alone for now. I want to speak privately to my daughter."

The valet turned as though just noticing her. “Good morning, Miss Dunn. Shall I have a tray sent up for you too?” He looked down his thin hooked nose at her.

“No, thank you, Ochs. I breakfasted with Mama.”

“Very good. Ring if I can be of service, sir.” He bowed and departed with great dignity.

“My, my. The man absolutely never smiles.” Amanda perched on the edge of her father’s massive bed.

“It’s in the valet’s rulebook not to.” Papa’s dimples deepened as he said that, and for a moment he resembled his normal self until a hacking cough convulsed his large frame.

“Oh, Papa, that sounds dreadful. Did anyone send for the doctor?” Amanda patted his arm once the coughing subsided.

George reached for the glass of water on his nightstand and took a tentative sip. “What would that old blighter do? Bleed me again? I feel worse after his therapies, not better. Stop fussing. The cough will be gone once this damp weather breaks. Anyway, that’s not why I summoned you. I have a favor to ask of you, one that will be no spring stroll in the garden.”

Amanda’s spirits lifted. Seldom did her father ask anything of his family other than impeccable manners at social events. “Of course, Papa. What can I do?”

“Only the young and foolish say yes without hearing the question.” He covered her hand with his larger one. “Pelton visited yesterday afternoon.”

Papa received a mill employee at home in his bedchamber? Amanda’s stomach tightened.

“The situation at Dunn Mills is growing critical. None of my overpaid managers have been able to line up sufficient cotton from Latin or South America, and certainly nothing that compares to the quality of the cotton we had access to before this nuisance of a war in the States. I can’t run textile mills and continue to pay men’s wages without raw materials.” His vehemence triggered another round of coughing.

Amanda blinked, unsure of a suitable response. Her father seldom discussed important matters and never his business concerns. “What about wool from the northern counties and silk from the Orient?”

“All well and good, but cotton is more than half the industry of the mill. I need to restore reliable sources.”

“How can I help? Shall I write to... Jackson?” She murmured the name of their primary American factor—and brother-in-law—reluctantly. He had fallen from favor with her father, to put it mildly.

He sighed heavily. “I’ve already written to the elder Henthorne several times. Every reply has been the same: His hands are tied. Their new president, Jefferson Davis, has decreed that no cotton is to be exported to the United Kingdom until Queen Victoria takes a stand for the Confederacy. Why would our Queen choose sides in a dispute affecting former colonies? And I can’t fathom why southern states would break away and form a new nation. Could you imagine the Scottish deciding to pick their own queen and sever ties with us?”

Amanda waited to see if he expected her opinion on a political topic—one she would be hard pressed to give—but then he waved off the question like a bee from the honey pot.

“None of that concerns you, daughter. I shouldn’t sidetrack myself from our dire circumstances.”

“How can I help?”

“Hear me out before making up your mind.” He coughed again with alarming intensity. When he caught his breath again, he said, “I need you to travel to North Carolina to do whatever

is necessary to restore shipping lines to Lancashire. Speak with Randolph Henthorne first, but if you must, call on every cotton factor in Wilmington. There has to be *someone* willing to ignore Davis's edict and transact business with us. I'm willing to pay a thirty-percent increase over previous contracts, although you certainly shouldn't open negotiations with our most generous offer." He hesitated and dabbed his mouth with his linen handkerchief. Her flummoxed expression had finally given him pause.

"You wish *me* to board a ship and sail to America? The farthest I've traveled is across the channel to the continent."

"I realize I'm asking a lot, Amanda. Such a voyage may be dangerous. Had your brother lived, he would be the one making the journey." Papa's complexion faded to an unhealthy pallor. "I need someone to represent the interests of Dunn Mills on my behalf. I would go myself, but the doctor insists the damp sea air would hasten my demise."

"Of course I'll go," she said without another thought. The possibility of losing her father negated her personal misgivings. As soon as she agreed, a small seed took root and began to grow—a seed that might break the *ennui* that had consumed her all winter.

"You won't be traveling alone. I will send Pelton with you."

Amanda's spine arched at the mention of the pompous man's name. Their few instances of acquaintance had left her with a sour taste in her mouth. Charles Pelton believed a woman's place was in the home, and that they shouldn't speak on subjects other than drapery fabrics or sconce choices for tea. "Why him, Papa? You have several capable managers in your mills. Surely you could select one more amenable for a travel companion."

Papa's brow furrowed. "I understand your reservations, but no one knows the textile trade better. He could answer any question you or the Carolina factors may present."

Amanda lifted her chin. "If you hold Mr. Pelton in such high esteem, why do you wish me to go at all? Perhaps he should represent Dunn Mills while I embroider samplers in the parlor with Mama."

Her father's weary face brightened. "That's what I've always admired—your spirit. Those American aristocrats will expect me to negotiate contracts. They might take offense if I send an employee in my stead."

She squeezed the bridge of her nose. "They would prefer someone who knows little about running a mill and even less about grades and qualities of cotton?"

"You're a Dunn, daughter, besides my heir. You will attend the meetings primarily as my emissary—a figurehead, if you will. Pelton will discuss specifics and negotiate the final terms of contract." Papa reached out to pinch her cheek as though she were still nine years old.

"I wish to visit Abigail if I'm traveling to Wilmington. I won't cross the sea without laying eyes on my sister."

His ebullience faded but he nodded agreement. "Your sister's move to the States is one reason I broached the subject. Because she married a wealthy man, your mother and I won't have to worry you'll land among a rough sort. But that's the only positive thing I can say about Jackson Henthorne." He turned his face into the pillow as another convulsive cough robbed him of breath.

Amanda left his bedside and walked to the window. The rain continued to fall, turning the cobblestones below slick underfoot for both man and beast. She stared blindly into the mist while her mind whirred with ideas. After five long years, she would be able to see Abigail? She could visit America—a brand-new land teeming with opportunity—if that's what North Carolina

still considered itself part of. But that arrogant Charles Pelton would doubtlessly prevent her from experiencing any adventure.

By the time her father's coughing spell passed, Amanda had made up her mind. "I would be happy to represent Dunn Mills with one condition, Papa. Mr. Pelton remains here in Manchester while I sail solely with my maid."

For a moment her father's lips opened and closed like a trout floundering on the riverbank. "A young woman traveling alone? That is unheard of. Your mother would never permit such recklessness."

"How could it be possibly be reckless? I assume you would book first-class passage. If necessary I could remain in my cabin until we reach the Carolina coast. At that point, I would be the guest of Mrs. Jackson Henthorne and under her husband's protection." Amanda offered a wry smile.

"Nevertheless." He dragged out the word for emphasis. "By your own admission, you know nothing about textiles. How can you be useful in convincing the brokers to restore the cotton trade?"

"The fact I've been little help to you since Alfred's death troubles me. I'm of little use...period."

He shifted against the pillows and waved his hand in dismissal. "That doesn't alter the fact—"

"Please, Papa, I've listened patiently to you. I would appreciate it if you would afford me the same courtesy."

His eyes grew round. "Go on."

"Because we wouldn't set sail before March, I plan to study the textile business until then, night and day if need be. I have a month to learn all about cotton so I can represent Dunn Mills adequately."

He laughed, pressing his fingertips to his eyelids. "I've spent thirty years learning the business. You think you can fill my shoes within thirty days? And a woman, no less."

"Certainly not. I'm not interested in producing garments or managing employees. I merely intend to determine what constitutes quality material and what does not. You and Mr. Pelton can run things here while I deal with those American factors."

"Amanda, my darling girl—"

"May I suggest you book my passage along with Helene's for four weeks from now? If you're not satisfied by then that I can represent you, I will accompany Mr. Pelton merely as a figurehead. After all, I am a *woman* as you pointed out. Would that be agreeable to you, Papa?" Stretching out her hand, Amanda held it steady while he laughed again at her.

But when she held her ground, his expression changed from mirth to contemplation. "You won't abandon us and marry some fast-talking trickster?"

His question caught her off guard. "I will not, sir. I love you and Mama."

He slumped deeper into the pillows and closed his eyes, looking older than when she had entered his bedchamber. "You have a bargain, daughter. Report to Mr. Pelton tomorrow and begin your education."

"Oh, thank you, Papa—" She stopped speaking when she realized he was falling asleep. Creeping quietly from his room, she ran smack into her mother.

"Are you going to America?"

"You were listening?" Amanda asked in surprise.

"Of course I was. You're my only child now. What would I do without you?"

Rely on a houseful of servants the way you always do? Amanda squashed the uncharitable thought and selected the logical reply. “You have another daughter, Mama. She resides in North Carolina.”

“Do you think I’ve forgotten?” Her mother wrapped an arm around Amanda’s waist and led her toward the stairs. “That’s the reason I’m overjoyed you’ll make the trip.”

“Not because hundreds of families depend on Dunn Mills to provide bread for their tables?”

“That is all well and good, but you must check on your sister. I may be a grandmama without my knowledge. And you must convince her to return to England.”

Amanda laughed without amusement. “Do you think she would abandon her husband and come home after five years?”

“Your father never thought much of the Henthornes. Perhaps Abigail has had enough frontier living and desires civilization again.”

“The coastal Carolinas are not the western territories. They live as civilized as we do.”

“How would you know that? And if that’s the case, Abigail can bring Jackson along. Your father needs someone in the family to run the mill after he’s gone.”

“I doubt Papa considers the man who eloped with his little girl as part of the family.”

“We must put that behind us, considering...”

Halfway down the grand staircase Amanda halted. “Considering what? Is there something you’re not telling me? I thought Papa had a mild case of influenza.”

“Yes, of course. But neither of us grows any younger. We need to prepare for the future.” Her mother patted her back. “Shall we read in the parlor for a while? I believe Joseph built a warm fire in there.”

“No, thank you. I intend to have the carriage brought around for a tour of Dunn Mills. There’s no time like the present to begin my schooling.”

“Splendid! Take the rest of the day if you like.”

If Amanda had wanted to speculate on her mother’s response to her plans, enthusiasm would have been last on the list. All of this continued divergence from Mama’s typical behavior made her more than a little nervous.

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April 1864

“Do you suppose I should hire another lady’s maid?” Abigail Henthorne’s question drifted toward the twelve-foot ceilings of the dining room without a corresponding answer. “Jackson,” she murmured in her modulated tone.

“What’s that, my dear?” Her husband lowered his copy of the *Wilmington Star News*. Lately, he’d picked up the habit of reading at the breakfast table, something her father never would have tolerated.

“My sister will be arriving in a few weeks. I was wondering if I should hire another maid.” Abigail sipped her coffee, an acquired taste since coming to America.

Jackson folded his newspaper. “Five years in the Carolinas and some customs still escape your notice. If one needs additional help, the lady of the house doesn’t run an advertisement in the paper for available domestics. She informs her husband, who then purchases another slave either from a broker or the auction.” He picked up his fork and began eating with great gusto.

Abigail glanced nervously at the slaves lined up by the breakfront—maids, footmen, and the butler—all with faces from light cocoa to deepest ebony. It wasn’t as though Dunn Manor hadn’t an equal number of servants, but they had been paid wages along with room and board.

“All right then, dear husband. I wish for another maid to assist Amanda during her visit. You know how horrible I am at sharing.”

“And why should you share? I will happily accommodate you, but don’t expect to receive someone who has been styling the latest coiffures.” Jackson gestured toward her elaborately arranged curls.

“Why not? Estelle is quite handy with a brush and comb.”

He smiled indulgently. “She was a wedding gift to you from my mother. She’d been specially trained to assist a lady. I will certainly inquire among the brokers, but house slaves aren’t usually as talented as Estelle.” Jackson held out his cup, which was promptly refilled by a footman. “But enough about tiresome subjects. Do you really think your twin will step off a clipper ship here in Wilmington?”

“I do. According to her letter, Amanda should arrive by month’s end.” Abigail could barely contain her excitement. “And she’s sailing alone. Can you imagine my parents permitting such liberty? She must have grown adept at maneuvering Papa.”

“Apparently you’re not identical in all aspects.”

“No, I suppose not. I never could stand up to him. He seldom granted me more than a few moments of his precious time.” Abigail folded her hands in her lap, her eggs and ham forgotten.

“Don’t trouble yourself with that old codger, my dear. That’s all behind you.” Jackson sipped his coffee without taking his focus from her.

“According to her letter, the name on her travel documents is *Mrs.* Amanda Dunn, as though she had married a cousin or some such. Papa agreed, saying that a matron wouldn’t attract much untoward attention during the Atlantic crossing. Truthfully, I would be surprised if Papa didn’t have her locked inside her cabin until the ship docks. He always treated Amanda as though she were a rare porcelain vase.”

“Your sister lied on the ship’s manifest?”

“Those were her plans. I wonder what the village vicar would say about bearing false witness. Of course, it was probably the best course of action. The captain might have refused passage if he knew she was single.”

Jackson sniffed. “Indeed. Just don’t get too excited too soon. Storms or overly calm winds, not to mention infernal interference by Mr. Lincoln’s navy, could delay her arrival considerably. If the ship is forced to seek port in Virginia, Amanda would have to make her way south overland.”

“Perhaps, but with my sister’s luck she’ll be here when expected and without encountering so much as a mild case of seasickness.” Abigail pushed away her breakfast plate.

“Time will tell. Now, what are your plans for today?”

Abigail tossed down her napkin. “I intend to oversee the gardeners among the roses. I wish large bouquets without thorns in every room. Then I plan to take luncheon with Carolyn Lowell. As long as there’s no hint of rain, she’s having eight ladies on the terrace. Then I’ll probably read and nap until your return from the office.”

“That sounds delightful, but don’t overtire yourself. Remember what the doctor said about resting.” Jackson reached for her hand and kissed the backs of her fingers. “I must be off.” He paused in the doorway and looked over his shoulder. “Nothing stronger at Carolyn’s than lemonade.”

“Stop worrying, husband. I’m fine.”

Jackson accepted his coat and hat from a footman and strode out the door.

From the window, Abigail watched his carriage until it turned the corner. How she loved that man. He was tall and handsome, generous and kind—at least to her. Anything she asked for he graciously provided and asked for nothing in return except an heir, a son to carry on the family business, the prestigious Henthorne and Sons. Thus far she'd been unable to fulfil his one request. Two earlier pregnancies had ended abruptly within a few months.

But this baby she was carrying would be hearty and strong. Abigail just knew it. And Amanda journeying to the Carolinas was a very good omen.

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"Miz Henthorne?" A child appeared in the gap in the privet hedge.

"Yes, I'm Mrs. Henthorne. Who might you be?" Abigail smiled kindly at the young boy—a slave, judging by his clothing."

"I'm Daniel from Mr. Phelps. He's the dockmaster."

"The dockmaster?"

"Yes'm. I was sent to say the *Queen Antoinette* has come to port." He shuffled his feet in the dirt.

"Is my sister, Miss Dunn, aboard the ship?"

"Yes'm. I was 'spose to say that too, but I forgot her name." Daniel stole an anxious glance. "Mr. Phelps say you should send your carriage."

Abigail rose to her feet. "I shall at once. Before you run back, Daniel, stop at the kitchen door and ask the woman there to give you a cookie."

When the child had vanished, she moved almost as quickly. Within thirty minutes her carriage pulled into the loading area of the wharf.

"Looks to be fewer ships than usual, Miz Henthorne." The driver shielded his eyes from the sun with his hat.

"Don't dawdle, Thomas. Find Miss Dunn and then tell the porter to bring her luggage to the carriage."

Thomas jumped down and tied the horse to a post. "How will I know which lady is Miss Dunn, ma'am?"

Abigail giggled behind her fan, trying to stem her enthusiasm. "That's easy. She's my twin sister. She looks exactly like me."

Thomas disappeared down the ramp toward the docks and returned with a pale waif of a woman a few minutes later. Amanda wore a somber gray suit that fell in a straight line to the ground, a drab hat with a veil, and sensible lace-up boots. Except for her face, the two women looked nothing alike.

"Amanda! At long last," Abigail called. "I've been so worried."

"My dear Abby! You have no idea how glad I am to be on solid land without all that swaying from side to side."

Abby. No one had called her that in years. Jackson abhorred nicknames. He even cringed when his brother called him Jack. "I assume it wasn't a smooth voyage?" Abigail extended her hand.

Climbing into the carriage, Amanda clasped her fingers as though too weak to walk another yard. "I refuse to begin our overdue reunion by complaining. There will be plenty of time for that later." Amanda threw her arms around her sister's neck and hugged. "I'm overjoyed to see you." Her dimples deepened with her grin.

Her sister's smile hadn't changed one bit. Abigail said, "And I, you, although you were expected a week ago. I've been sitting atop pins and needles." Suddenly, an ominous thought

crossed her mind. "Your dark clothes...oh, goodness. Please don't tell me something dreadful has happened to Mama or Papa."

Amanda's gaze rotated between her charcoal wool and Abigail's aqua silk and lace. "I see why you might assume such a thing, but no. Rest easy. Our parents are fine. Papa had a cold when I left, but the doctor insisted he will be better soon."

"What a relief, although I suppose neither gives a whit about me anymore."

"Then you would suppose incorrectly." Amanda leaned back against the upholstery. "They both expressed their regards, and I am to send word upon arrival to let them know how you are."

"Hmm, I'm sure you exaggerated their fond wishes somewhat, but no matter. You came to see what's become of me, and I'm happy to report that Jackson and I are doing splendidly," Abigail said, smoothing her palms down the expensive fabric of her frock.

"Judging by the opulence of your carriage, I would say that's no exaggeration." Amanda fingered the ornate brass trim. "And you look the picture of health, Abby. Marriage suits you."

Abigail spotted the porter wheeling two huge trunks toward the back of the carriage, with a small, dark-haired woman at his heels. "Who is she? Did you bring your maid oversees?"

"Yes. It was the only way I could leave Manchester without Papa sending one of his mill managers for my chaperone. Her name is Helene. I hope she won't pose a problem."

"Not at all." Abigail opened the window and leaned out. "Helene, you may ride topside with my driver. Thomas, I wish to leave the moment the porter loads the trunks. These docks attract an unsavory type of worker as well as shiftless vagabonds." Abigail closed the window and settled back. As soon as they left the docks, she turned toward her sister. "There may be another reason for my healthy glow. I believe I'm expecting a child." She whispered even though they were alone.

"How wonderful! I'm pleased for you. When does the doctor anticipate the child's grand entrance?"

Abigail snapped open her fan. "I haven't consulted him yet. I wish to be certain first as we've suffered several disappointments thus far."

"That sounds like a wise move." Amanda swiveled around to peer out the side window. "Your adopted city appears quite prosperous."

"Wilmington is small but growing by leaps and bounds." Abigail was happy that Thomas had chosen the most flattering route through town. There would be plenty time for her sister to learn about the unfortunate privations of war.

"Do you live very far from the river?"

"Perhaps another five minutes." Abigail cracked open the window to let a little of the early spring air in. "I'm sure you're eager to rest in a real bed."

"I had no idea how cramped a ship's quarters could be, especially during so long a voyage. Helene and I were the only female passengers, so other than dining at the captain's table, we mainly confined ourselves below deck. Unfortunately, reading and sewing often triggered nausea, so we had little to occupy the hours."

"That sounds dreadful. I'm glad your ship wasn't further delayed." Abigail smiled as the carriage stopped in front of the mansion.

"Is this where you live, Abby?" Amanda swung the door open the moment Thomas lowered the steps. "It's magnificent! A rather enormous house for a young couple, no?"

Abigail followed her onto the stone banquette, letting her gaze travel up to the soaring roofline. "The house belonged to Jackson's grandparents, but they have since passed on."

“Do your husband’s parents live here too?”

“No, they have a plantation in the country, although Jackson’s father often stays with us when he conducts business in Wilmington.” Abigail turned toward Thomas. “Please see that Miss Dunn’s trunks are delivered to her room.” Turning back to her sister, she said, “Would you like to rest before tea?”

“Actually, I’m eager to stretch my legs after weeks of confinement. Could you show me your garden instead?”

“Of course. Let’s take the path to the left through the roses. We’ll end up on the front veranda eventually.”

The twins set off at a leisurely pace, with Helene keeping a respectable distance behind them. Amanda asked many questions about the flowers of North Carolina, which were quite different from the blooms of Lancashire or the western coast of England. Before long, however, it wasn’t the magnolia, climbing wisteria, or flowering crepe myrtle piquing her interest.

“Who lives in there?” With a slender finger, she pointed at two cottages along the back property line.

“Our servants.” Abigail kept her answer short and to the point.

“All of them? How is that possible?”

“The single women live in that cabin. Our cook is married to our driver, and they live in that one.” She indicated the second narrow doorway. “The other men live in the loft of the carriage house.”

Amanda frowned, her lower lip protruding. “Why don’t they live on the third floor of the house? There would be so much more room.”

“Because that’s where the ballroom is located. Besides, as living quarters it would be suffocating during the summer months even with cross ventilation. This is the South, dear sister.” She fluttered her fan beneath her chin.

“Yes, of course. I didn’t consider that, but their quarters seem rather cramped—”

“They have this entire courtyard for socializing.” Abigail spread her arms wide. “Our climate is milder than back home. We stay indoors far less often.”

At that moment one of the cook’s helpers exited the cabin. Wearing a homespun shift in need of replacing, the young woman plopped down on the stoop with a bowl of peas to shell.

Amanda’s eyes nearly bugged from her face. “Do you have *only* slaves here?”

“Well...yes. They came with the house. They belonged to Jackson’s grandparents.”

Abigail felt her forehead bead with perspiration.

Amanda stammered as though confused. “I knew you lived in the South, yet for some reason I never considered the possibility Jackson’s family would embrace the loathsome practice.”

“*Loathsome*? Mama has a fleet of servants paid little beyond room and board. And you travel with your personal maid.” She pointed at the small woman cowering behind a trellis.

“True enough, but our parents don’t *own* human beings. Their domestics are free to quit their jobs and seek employment elsewhere.”

“Abigail?” A voice sounded from behind them. “Why are you and our guest standing in a dusty stable yard while refreshments are waiting on the verandah?” Jackson’s arrival had gone unnoticed during the twins’ tête-à-tête. “And the rest of the staff is eager to make your sister’s acquaintance...as I am.” He bowed gallantly to Amanda. “Miss Dunn, I presume.”

“Mr. Henthorne, I’m please to meet you and grateful for your kind hospitality.” Amanda extended her hand.

While Jackson kissed her hand with great flourish, two slaves stepped forward. “How do, ma’am? Name’s Estelle. I’m maid to Miz Abigail. This here’s Josie. She’s a fast learner and will catch on before you know it.” Both women dropped into the curtsies Abigail had painstakingly taught them.

“How do you do, Estelle, Josie,” Amanda murmured.

“Estelle is my maid and Josie shall be yours. She’s a gift to you from Jackson.” Abigail smiled fondly at her husband.

“Thank you, sir, but that won’t be necessary. My maid, Helene, traveled with me from home.”

“Then you’ll have two attendants, Miss Dunn. Buying a slave is much like ordering a *couture* gown—you can’t very well send it back.” Jackson peered down his nose at his guest, his lip curling. “You ladies can work out the details in a more comfortable spot than this. Shall we?” He pointed at the stone path leading around the house.

“A wonderful idea, I’m dying for something cool to drink.” Hooking her arm through her sister’s, Abigail led the way. “Will you join us, Jackson?”

“I’m afraid I must return to the office. I’ll see you both at dinner. The dockmaster sent word that the *Queen Antoinette* had arrived. I wanted to make sure Miss Dunn had a smooth transition into our household.”

“Thank you for your attention to detail.” Amanda bobbed her head politely, yet she maintained an expression of seasickness that should have abated the moment her feet touched solid ground.