

I loved to sit in the bay window of a Sunday afternoon, reading my favorite novelist, and occasionally jotting notes in the margins of a beloved book. My sister said I was a monster for writing inside the books, but they were mine to do with as I pleased. What she didn't know was that my margin notes eventually became stories that I penned in my secret notebook. Women novelists were a bit of a curiosity in my country back then, and mother said I would never catch a husband if the men of our acquaintance knew I had such wild ideas as to write books.

That day, I chewed on the nib of my pen and stared at the peeling wallpaper at the corner where the bay window met the wall. I couldn't resist the urge to pick at it until I had pulled a long section that abutted the molding. I stared at the curling paper in my hand until my sister came into the room and screamed at me. "What are you doing? Taking the house apart?"

Her yells brought our mother who entered the room panting as if she'd run a marathon. "Henrietta! What's come over you?" She stomped over to me, her dress flouncing with every step. "I demand you drop that rubbish and go change at once! Mr. Pettigrew is coming to take you for a drive."

I looked at her, my mouth agape. Mr. Pettigrew was a prattling idiot.

She sniffed at me. "I suggested a picnic at Hound Island. Dress appropriately." She held her head high and turned on her heel, exiting with my sniggering sister behind her.

I let the brittle paper fall from my hands and withdrew the envelope I'd stuffed into my corset. The words hadn't changed from the time I'd first opened the letter to now.

*"We are pleased to inform you that your manuscript has been accepted for publication. We wish to thank you for your submission, Mr. Henry Pensworth. Enclosed please find your advance. We anticipate a wonderful future together."*

I covered my smile with a hand. I would swap a thousand picnics with Pettigrew to have this new life before me. I replaced the letter inside my corset and hopped off the window seat. I exited the front door, and walked away from my home, my stifling life, and my even more dismal future as the respectable Mrs. Pettigrew. I was Henry Pensworth now, and I was a writer.