

1941 by anex

November 2008 (Revised)

Non Disclaimer: My characters are unashamedly distant relatives of Xena & Gabrielle and have inherited all of their traits, thank the gods!

Sex: This story depicts scenes of a sexual nature between two consenting adult women.

Authors Note: This is a rewrite of the story first posted in September 08. After several e-mails from readers commenting on the ending I decided to change it. Feedback is essential so please let me know what you think. But I am NOT rewriting this again - OK?

Feedback To: anex@hotmail.co.uk

P.S. Thanks Rio, sorry about the apostrophes!

In a time when so many had lost so much, two people found something very precious, love...

June 1941

The summer of 1941 was the hottest Rose Taylor could remember. The 18 year old land army recruit boarded a train at Manchester Piccadilly station with two goals in mind; adventure and to serve her country in its time of need.

Rose re-read the certificate she had been given after her induction;

'Every woman who helps in agriculture during the war is truly serving her country as the man who is fighting in the trenches, on the sea or in the air.'

Her uniform itched and her boots were too big but at last she was finally contributing something toward the war effort.

Some fifteen hours later she arrived in the small village of Winchester in the county of Herefordshire. Night time in rural England without the aid street lamps was black as pitch. There were no signs or road markings and there was not a soul about to ask for directions. She briefly thought about running after the bus and going straight back home.

Rose was to meet a man by the name of Mr Stevens at the village hall at 8pm. But her train had been diverted because of bomb damage at Coventry making her desperately late. It was almost 11pm now and she was sure they had left without her.

"Miss Taylor?"

Rose jumped at the sound of her name being called from somewhere across the street.

"We thought you wasn't comin' I was just about to leave." An elderly looking man appeared and offered the desperate young woman a friendly smile.

"Mr Stevens?" She asked cautiously and wondered again if her impulsive nature had caused her to make a

grave mistake.

"Aye miss, you look like you could do with a cup of tea." His weathered old face crinkled with age and outdoor life showed a degree of compassion toward the young girl.

"I'm sorry I'm late, I wasn't sure you'd be here, the train was delayed and I couldn't send word." She offered her apologies and the old man waved them away.

"No bother, as long as you're here and in one piece. Now lets get going or the missus will be givin' our supper to the dog."

Rose suddenly realised she was ravenously hungry, her nervousness had concealed it before. The mention of food now was the only motivation she needed to follow Mr Stevens toward the waiting cart.

The last leg of her journey was mercifully a short one as it involved rattling around in rickety horse drawn milk wagon. Petrol was a scarce commodity in war time. Most rural communities had gone back to using horsepower as an everyday means of transportation.

It was hard to tell where they were going but Rose could smell cattle very strongly now and presumed they must be near the farm where she had been posted.

The farm was actually a dairy, set in the grounds of Winchester Hall; a 15,000 acre estate and the ancestral home of the present Lord and Lady Winchester.

"It's been a heck of time tryin' to keep this place goin' without the labour. I hope you've got a strong back miss cos its 'ard work mind." He clicked his tongue and the horse broke into a brisk trot.

"I may be small Mr Stevens but I'm pretty strong for my size." She replied feistily.

"Aye lass, I bet." He laughed to himself as they rode the rest of the way in silence.

Rose did have reservations about what she was doing, not because of the work, but for leaving her home town of Salford (or what was left of it). She had only been outside Manchester once, on a trip to the seaside at Blackpool when she was 9, it was the first time she had ever seen the sea.

In spite of her fears she had always possessed a strong sense of adventure and had longed to travel and see the world with her own eyes instead of through pictures and books. The opportunities that awaited her were boundless she believed. Her parents had always sought to encourage her, especially her father. He had been a source of great inspiration to her young mind up until the outbreak of the war when he was called into service.

"Ere we are then."

The blue black fabric of the night sky offset the darker outline of trees and hedgerows, Rose could just make out the shape of the large stone farm house and a few out buildings she presumed to be the cow sheds, mainly because of the smell.

Mr Stevens brought the wagon to a halt outside the main entrance. The front door opened and an elderly lady came out to greet them. Rose clambered down from the cart and went to meet her.

"You must be Miss Taylor; I bet you're half starved after a journey like that. Come in child and let's get you settled in." They were the kindest words anyone had spoken to her in a long time and after the rigours of

her day coupled with the upheaval of her life she almost burst into tears. Mrs Stevens could tell homesickness when she saw it and simply put her arm around the young woman and guided her into the house.

"Jack will take care of your things. My name is Mary."

"Rose." She replied simply not trusting her voice and took the offering of a cup of sweet tea in both hands.

"It's a pleasure to meet you Rose, welcome to Winchester." Mary kindly spoke as she pulled out a spindle backed chair for her new guest to sit on.

Rose looked about the unfamiliar surroundings of the old farmhouse with a sense of homesickness she hadn't previously acknowledged. She had no home herself to speak of anymore, not since the German bombs had levelled it to the ground.

"Now I want you to feel at home here Rose, if there's anything you want you just help yourself." She set a plate of sandwiches down in front of her as she spoke. They were like doorsteps. Rose looked up hesitantly at her hostess. "Goodness me eat up child before Jack gets back and cleans the plate." She chuckled. Mary had a wit which warmed her and suddenly Rose didn't feel quite so lost.

After her hearty supper Mary took Rose for a quick tour of the downstairs house. Most of the rooms were unused and kept neat and tidy, the parlour and the kitchen were the main centres of activity it seemed as in most homes. Upstairs there were four bedrooms and a bathroom with indoor plumbing; Mrs Stevens explained that the heat from the Aga provided the house with an adequate supply of hot running water but that it was limited.

Finally Rose was taken to her attic bedroom. It was sufficiently sized with a wardrobe, dresser and single bed. Mr Stevens had brought her case up earlier and placed it on the neatly made bed.

"I'll leave you to unpack and settle in." Mary paused considerately before taking Rose by the shoulders and looking her directly in the eyes. "This is your home now, and we're very glad to have you stay, and remember if there's anything you need just ask."

"Thank you Mrs..."

"Please call me Mary."

"Thank you Mary." She gratefully wrapped her arms around the old farmers wife and scrunched her eyes closed tightly to stem the tears of emotion this simple act of kindness provoked in her. Mary returned the gesture and then bid her leave to let the young woman settle down for the night.

Rose opened the small worn leather suitcase, there wasn't much in it. Her lifes possessions, which were few to begin with were all here. She hung up her spare uniform in the wardrobe. She hadn't many clothes at all in fact. A floral print cotton dress, two short sleeved shirts a spare pair of trousers and another jumper. They sagged pathetically off their hangers in the vast empty cavern of the closet. All of them donations from the Red Cross for displaced victims of the war.

She turned to retrieve the rest of the items when she caught sight of something that stopped her in her tracks. A book, the most valuable thing she owned. It belonged to her father. She picked it up and studied the tarnished gold lettering on the broken spine.

Opening the cover she read quietly to herself the first few words.

"Call me Ishmael..." She smiled as she remembered her father reading her this epic tale of one mans obsession with his great nemesis, 'Moby Dick'. She could picture each and every scene as his passion for story telling brought the text to life until she could swear she smelled the ocean. She placed the treasured

novel by her bedside. It was the only thing she had managed to salvage from her childhood home.

All these things reminded her that she was far away from home. This strange place was as alien to her as the moon and she missed her tiny red brick terraced house in Salford. And as she lay down to sleep in this strange bed in this strange house in a different part of the country she wondered about this new chapter in her life and the fate that awaited her.

The first thing that surprised Rose about working on a farm was the early morning starts. 4am to be precise. In fact she had felt as though her head had barely touched the pillow before she was being called by Mrs Stevens.

She washed from a jug of warm water and then ate a light breakfast of eggs and toast provided by Mary before heading out with Mr Stevens to milk the herd.

In fact the day was full of surprises. How large Hereford cows were, the fact that they came to be milked of their own accord. And that machines actually did all the milking.

The farm had been run by the Stevens' since the late 1760's and boasted several prize winning Hereford bulls in its heritage. It was an industry that was much needed in the present climate. The beasts were a valuable commodity and Mr Stevens took great pride in their husbandry.

By mid morning most of the dairy work was complete. Mr Stevens had been patient to explain the jobs and even though Rose was a fast learner and a hard worker it was going to take a few weeks of conditioning to get used to the rigours of farm labour.

Rose sat on a straw bale taking a well deserved break; eating a corned beef sandwich and drinking a glass of milk; she thought proudly about how she had helped to produce this very drink herself and for the first time she felt a huge sense of accomplishment.

In the afternoon she had another surprise as she rode the milk wagon up to the great hall to collect the empty churns.

She stared up wide eyed at the massive sixteenth century stately home and marvelled at the grandeur and elegance of the ancient building. She had never seen anything as spectacularly imposing in all her life.

"There must be hundreds of windows." She gawked openly as she tried to take it all in.

"You'll be catchin' flies if you don't watch it." Joked the old farmer.

"Do people still live here?"

"Lord and Lady Winchester and their daughter Lady Katherine. His Lordship's a Wing Commander in the RAF; he's stationed down in Kent right now."

They went around the back of the house, through a stone archway and into a cobbled courtyard.

"Afternoon Millie." He greeted the young scullery maid who came out to meet him.

"Just two empties today Mr Stevens." He took the tin churns off her hands and loaded them in the back as Rose stepped down.

"This is my new recruit." He introduced the two girls who were roughly the same age.

"Expect you'll be seein' quite a bit of Rose around, be nice to have someone your own age to natter too I bet. Mind cooks not watchin' yer though." He winked making the girl smile.

"Speakin' of cook. She's got a treat for you if you'll be stopping."

Rose found herself in a large kitchen with a huge open cooking range. And more pots, pans, jars and plates than she could hope to count. Over by the large stone sink stood a portly woman in a white apron, ruddy cheeked and formidable in an argument Rose presumed.

"You'll be wantin' some tea to go with you're scones Mr Stevens?" She said without looking round at her visitor and continued with her task at hand.

There on the large wooden table in the middle of the room stood a huge plate of fresh current scones with pots of strawberry jam and clotted cream on the side. Rose nearly swooned at the sight.

They ate their fill as cook and Millie bustled around them in a blur of activity. Rose presumed they must have known each other for years the way they spoke so familiarly.

They asked a lot of questions about their newest recruit too. And Rose answered as politely and diplomatically as she could. She was beginning to realise what a curiosity she was to the household of the Winchester estate. A young woman far away from home doing the work of a man and with no family of her own to speak of. Cook and Millie were equally enthralled by the prospect.

Mr Stevens could've cared less being just grateful for the extra pair of hands since and all but one of his farm labourers had gone off to fight in the war. And Sam - the one he was left with - was a simpleton.

On the journey back to the farmhouse Rose was quietly contemplating her afternoon meeting with cook and Millie when suddenly the horse pulling the wagon became spooked.

"Whoa there Jess." Mr Stevens tried to calm the animal.

Something was coming. And whatever it was it was coming very fast.

"What's going on?"

"You'll see in a moment lass." He said as he held the mare steady.

There was a distant thundering beat of hooves. Rose looked around but couldn't tell which direction they were coming from.

Jess, the old dray horse nickered now as the galloping animal approached.

And then suddenly like a flash of white lightning a horse and rider came flying over the hedge row just in front of them.

"Hi Jack!" The rider yelled.

"Afternoon Lady Katherine!" Mr Stevens called back shaking his head.

The animal took two strides then took off again as it launched into the air and sailed over the hawthorn across to the other side and away to the downs beyond.

"That was Lady Katherine?" Rose stared after the manic rider in surprise.

Mr Stevens clicked his tongue. "Get on Jess... aye Rose that it was." He smiled to himself.

"Does she do that a lot then?"

"Aye, she does." He answered matter of factly.

Rose watched the horse and rider until they disappeared over the horizon and wondered how on earth anyone could do that and not be killed.

Sam was a shy lad from the village who worked as a general labourer on the farm. Most people thought him simple although few would realise he was actually a very gifted young artist who loved to carve and draw animals.

Rose was in the barn gathering hay to feed the calves when she heard a noise. It sounded like somebody crying. It was coming from an empty stall close by.

She looked around the corner to see the young man crouched over something on the floor and sobbing. He sensed her presence and looked up, his face streaked with dirt and tears.

"He's dead." Sam whimpered looking down at the small black bundle of fur in the straw; Rose could tell now it was a puppy.

She knelt beside the distraught fellow and scooped the lifeless animal up into her hands. He was stone cold.

"Let's bury him in the garden." She offered gently.

"Will you say a prayer for 'im?"

"We'll both say one."

They took the animal out to the edge of the cottage garden. Rose wrapped the tiny pup in some swaddling she got from Mary. Sam dug a small hole and together they placed the body in it and covered it over.

Rose recited the Lords Prayer whilst Sam knelt and placed wild daisies on the grave.

"That boy's soft in the head when it comes to animals." Mary tutted as she looked out across the garden to where Sam was still sitting and mourning the puppy.

"Aye, and everything else an all."

"Oh pipe down Jack, that dog meant the world to him."

Rose listened as the two bickered lightly about the lad. They were both very fond of him really.

"It was a kind thing you did Rose, I'm grateful to you." Mary said finally moving away from the window to start supper.

"Maybe we can get him another dog?" Rose asked hopefully as she helped set the table.

"We've no time to be fretting over pets, this is a farm not a bloody zoo. I'm going to wash up." Mr Stevens said briskly then left the kitchen. It wasn't that he didn't care, on the contrary he was the one who stopped Ted the gamekeeper from finishing off the sickly pup. But he hadn't the time to spare for letting Sam mope about the place wasting valuable time when the hay making was already behind schedule.

"Pay no attention to Jack, he grumbles if he ant got something to grumble over." Mary laughed to herself as she placed a steaming hot game pie on the table. She called for Sam to come in and wash up.

Her first day at Winchester had certainly been an adventure. But there seemed to be one thing in particular that stayed in the forefront of her mind, it was Lady Katherine; her long dark hair flailing in the wind, her flashing smile so wild and dangerous and very, very beautiful. Rose found she was quite intrigued by the young lady of the manor.

"I saw Lady Katherine today." Rose began with the hopes of eliciting more information from the farmers wife.

"She's back from Oxford then." Mary answered as if Rose had already known that fact.

"She's been to University?" Rose questioned with surprise. For it was relatively uncommon for women to reach such high degrees of learning, even amongst nobility.

"Oh yes, she's as sharp as a pin that girl; wants to be a doctor no less. I expect her mothers got other ideas though." Mary stopped and called Sam again from the kitchen window.

Mr Stevens came back in and sat down at the table. Rose wanted to know what Mary meant by Lady Katherine's mother having other ideas but somehow the appearance of the farmer curtailed her investigation. And she had to be content with the small insight she had gained, yet somehow this served to further pique her curiosity.

As the days turned into weeks Rose began to settle down into life on the farm. Coming from a city like Salford she thought perhaps it would be difficult to adjust. But in fact it was quite the opposite, Rose took to country life like a duck to water. She was even getting used to the early morning starts.

Jess ambled down the track, the horse had done this journey a thousand times and didn't really need to be guided. So Rose sat there and daydreamed as the countryside rolled by. She liked to daydream, not about anything in particular she just liked to let her mind wander freely. She thought about home mostly...

Suddenly the old horse started at something and Rose snapped out of her reverie.

"Steady girl. Is someone coming?" She talked to the mare to calm her down which seemed to do the trick. Again Rose heard the rider approaching at speed.

With a loud 'yah' Lady Katherine once again sailed over the hedgerow on her dashing white stallion.

"Hi Rose!" She flashed a dazzling smile at the young land girl.

"Hello." She called back slightly startled that Lady Katherine knew her name although they had never been formally introduced.

But instead of speeding off into the distance, the lady of the manor pulled her steed to an abrupt halt. And for a while the only sound that could be heard was the winded animal as he regained his breath from the hard ride.

The two young women regarded each other curiously...

Lady Katherine had come home for the summer break before beginning her second year at Oxford. Her ambition to become doctor was her main focus in life and in spite of her mothers persistent meddling she was well on her way to accomplishing her goal.

She was spirited and free thinking and not at all like the 'Lady' her mother had groomed her to be. She grew restless up at the large house to the point of irritability and a good long ride stripped her of the torpor she was succumbing to.

Rose wanted to say something so as not to appear rude or stupid but she couldn't think of anything to say. Her mind was utterly a blank. Lady Katherine's vivid aqua eyes were now the sole focus of Rose's world. Intense and penetrating she had never seen such a colour as to know how to describe it.

The rider appraised the young driver of the cart with interest too. The farm girls sleeves were rolled up above her elbows, revealing slender chorded forearms hewn from labour. Her shirt was loose and her skin was a healthy outdoors colour. She could see the light sheen of perspiration trickle its way from her throat down to the depths of her cleavage. She was beautiful, Katherine thought. Her soft golden hair ruffled slightly on the midsummer breeze and her eyes sparkled like green chips of quartz.

The horse snorted impatiently and pranced making a chomping noise as his teeth ground the bit. The rider was most definitely in control however and the beast obeyed with deference following a slight pull on the reins.

"It's a lovely day isn't it?" Was her opening line and she inwardly groaned at the English penchant for discussing the weather.

"Yes it is." Rose offered politely. "That's a fine horse."

"This is Ares." She replied patting the sweaty thickly muscled neck.

"The Greek God of War, I hope he's not too much like his namesake."

"Oh no, this fellows much less trouble." As if on queue the animal stamped his hoof and again snorted loudly making both women laugh lightly at his antics. Katherine was impressed the girl knew something of mythology and obviously had a mind.

"Well, unfortunately I must be going, I hope to see you again soon; it was nice meeting you Rose." Lady Katherine reined the animal with one hand and kicked him on. Within seconds they had leapt the hedge and were speeding off towards the horizon.

"And you." Rose called after her.

The wireless crackled into life as Mr Stevens tuned the needle to the right frequency. The BBC broadcast news on the Home Service and listening to it had become a sort of evening ritual for many households. The war in Europe was intensifying and the allies were even fighting the Germans in North Africa now. They listened to Churchill give a rousing speech about how bravely the nation was resisting the enemy not just on the battlefield but in the factories and the farms and in all walks of regular life. This made Rose feel

very proud indeed.

And as she lay awake in bed that night her thoughts conjured those eyes of powder blue once again. She had no idea what was so compelling about Lady Katherine. She seemed to Rose to be an enigma, fascinating and uncompromising; someone who knew exactly what they wanted out of life and didn't care what other people thought. And one way or another Rose was driven to find out more.

The following Sunday morning everybody from the estate went to Church. Rose was not a particularly religious person but she understood the need to gather the community and rally the human spirit.

The final hymn was always Jerusalem by William Blake and it resonated strongly in the hearts of every Englishman. Rose loved the way the organist blasted out the notes deep and long. It was rousing and uplifting and gave her a sense of proud defiance.

As they began the first verse Rose noticed an unfamiliar voice singing along. Rich and clear and powerful. She turned to its direction to see Lady Katherine at the back singing for Britain it would seem.

'And did those feet in ancient times,

Walk upon Englands mountains green...'

They made eye contact and Lady Katherine winked at the young woman whilst she was mouthing the words. Rose turned around sharply to face the front and felt the heat rising up her collar and onto her cheeks.

Feeling her heart beating slightly faster than normal she wondered if Lady Katherine had seen her colour. She closed her eyes and focused on the voice that carried each note with perfect pitch. Rose fought the urge to turn around again and began to sing along now realising how tuneless she sounded in comparison.

After the service Rose left the chapel with the Stevens' and filed out into the churchyard. Her eyes scanned the crowd and her attention was immediately drawn to how tall Lady Katherine actually was as she stood talking to the vicar who himself was not a small man. She allowed the Stevens to wander ahead as she dawdled by the old stone font at the chapel entrance; the truth was that Rose could actually view Lady Katherine from this vantage point properly without being noticed. Or so she thought...

As soon as she saw Rose standing alone, Lady Katherine excused herself and made toward the land girl.

"Hello again. We met the other day, I'm..."

"Lady Katherine Winchester." Rose finished for her a little too quickly. She couldn't understand why she was so flustered in the presence of this woman. She was not normally given to being flustered by anyone, nobility or otherwise.

"I was going to say Dame Vera Lynn but I suppose I could be a Lady." She laughed at her own joke and hoped the young woman would see it as an ice breaker.

"Well, I think you sing much better than her your Ladyship." The compliment was genuine and suddenly Rose felt less foolish.

"Please, just call me Katherine." She leaned in conspiratorially. "Or if my mothers not around you can call me Kate."

"Is your mother around?" Rose whispered as well to share the conspiracy.

The tall heiress gave a quick nod over her shoulder to indicate that Lady Winchester was behind her talking to someone.

"Then I'm pleased to meet you Katherine." Rose offered and they shook hands. Instantly Rose felt the warmth once again travel the length of her arm and straight to her blossoming cheeks.

Mercifully Lady Katherine became distracted as her mother appeared along side her daughter.

"Come along Katherine we have to be going." Lady Winchester said impatiently as she cast a withering look at her acquaintance.

"Mother, this is Rose Taylor."

"Ah yes, the land army girl. Stevens needs all the help he can get I suppose. Keep up the good work." Her tone was somewhat insincere and Rose detected more than a little condescension in it.

"Thank you Lady Winchester." She replied politely nonetheless. Noting the features of the older woman were very similar to her daughters. She was handsome and still relatively young herself, Rose guessed somewhere in her mid forties; she was clearly very esteemed by the local population who politely bid their '*good morning Lady Winchesters*' as they passed by, only for her to nod vaguely each time in acknowledgement.

The Winchesters usually worshiped in the private family chapel in the south wing of the house but Lady Katherine had insisted on going to the community service in the village today; much to her mothers chagrin and it clearly showed with her contemptible behaviour. The elegant aristocrat smiled falsely before turning and walking toward the wooden gate and the waiting Rolls Royce beyond; leaving her daughter behind to say goodbye no doubt to the 'plebeians'.

This was something Lady Katherine was used to however. "Sorry about that. Don't pay any attention to mother. She's in a particularly foul mood having received a letter from the war office. Apparently the east gates are to be removed and melted down for munitions." Katherine apologised and smiled in hope that it had been accepted.

"I understand, it must be hard, how will she ever keep the little people out now?" Rose countered.

"Touché." Katherine was glad the land girl had shown spirit. Her mother had insulted her and she deserved some recompense.

"Do you ever get time off for good behaviour up there?" Lady Katherine was hopeful with her next question.

"I get time off, but it's not for good behaviour." Suddenly Rose found her flirtatious comment completely inappropriate and wished she could suck it back in.

Katherine laughed at her quip however. "I thought perhaps you might like to join me this afternoon for a picnic."

Rose was surprised but delighted by the offer. "I'd like that very much." She said slightly over enthusiastically and fought the urge to blush once more.

"Splendid." Katherine smiled warmly. "I'll call around one."

"See you then... Kate." Rose winked and the two laughed and shared the joke.

Katherine spread their picnic blanket on the bank by the lake in the shade of an ancient willow tree.

Every now and then a fish would rise breaking the stillness of the water to take an insect. Moorhen and wood pigeon called in harmony and fluffy clumps of bull rush seeds floated lazily on the barest whisper of a warm breeze.

It could have been any time, past present or future. No war, no poverty or hardship, just tranquillity, peace and beauty all around. It was the most beautiful place Rose had ever seen.

"This lake is filled with the most enormous carp. The Benedictine monks created it around the tenth century and would catch the fish to eat." Katherine explained.

As they trekked through the countryside Rose had listened with intrigue to Katherine's stories about the house and its grounds and its rich and colourful history. The estate had been in the Winchester family for seven generations. And there were plenty more tales to be told, good and bad she continued...

"Legend has it there's a fish in here that's as old as the abbey itself, a giant weighing over one hundred pounds; and no ones ever been able to catch him. My grandfather came close once, almost drowned trying to wrestle him back to the bank."

Katherine's eyes sparkled with the tale of the Monster of Abbey Lake. And Rose listened in rapt anticipation of each word.

"Watch this."

She threw a chunk of bread into the water. In moments the lily pad leaves swirled and parted and a huge leathery mouth extended to engulf the morsel whole before eerily sinking back into the depths again.

"Was that him! Was that the Monster!" Rose leapt up off the bank to try and get a better look.

She turned and frowned when she heard a low chuckle.

"That was just a baby."

"Well if that was just a baby I wouldn't like to meet his parents." She sat back down on the blanket. She was thirsty and hungry after their long hike to get to this idyllic spot. They had walked for what seemed like miles in the heat of the midday sun until they came across the ruined abbey and its huge lake.

Katherine began to unpack the sumptuous lunch. There were cooked meats, plump tomatoes, crisp lettuce, a pork pie, coleslaw and Katherine's personal favourite, duck pâté. She also pulled out a flask of chilled lemonade and poured two large glasses. Rationing had made it seem impossible to create such a feast, but all these delicacies were the produce of the Winchester estate and in good supply.

They ate in comfortable silence with equal relish...

"What's your favourite season?" The young land girl asked randomly after finishing a bite of her apple.

Katherine thought for a moment.

"I like all of them." She answered non-specifically.

"Well, what reminds you of summer for example?" Rose persisted, her new friend wasn't being very

imaginative.

Katherine thought harder.

"Today will always remind me of summer." The tall girl smiled and relaxed back on her elbows breathing in the heady scent of wild honeysuckle and verbena. "It's perfect." She added looking first at Rose and then out over the water and beyond towards a rocky outcrop in the distance.

She liked the way Rose observed life and talked about seemingly meaningless things that actually were quite meaningful, and it made Katherine think to enjoy the wonder of the world around her, a world that perhaps she had taken for granted all these years...

"What's that mountain called?"

"That's Yat Rock." Katherine laughed heartily.

"What's so funny?"

"It's not a mountain. There are no mountains in Herefordshire."

"How am I supposed to know that?" Rose pouted.

"You've obviously never seen a real mountain." Katherine sensed she had wounded her young companion's feelings by un-intentionally laughing at her. Of course she had never seen a mountain; there were no mountains in Manchester either. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to sound..."

"Condescending?" Rose supplied.

"No... yes, I don't know." Katherine was momentarily flummoxed by the forthright observation. "I meant no offence." She added with a degree of sincerity such that Rose forgave her with a warm smile.

"None taken."

Katherine decided a change of subject was in order.

"Have you a sweetheart hidden away somewhere Rose?"

"No." The younger woman looked away and smiled shyly.

"Oh, I find that hard to believe. A beautiful English 'rose' such as yourself ought to have a sweetheart." The pun on Rose's name was noted.

"You think I'm beautiful?" She couldn't decide if she was simply being humoured again.

"Incredibly, do you mean to tell me that nobody's ever said that to you before?" Her incredulity was earnest.

"No, except for my parents." Rose swallowed a sudden lump in her throat.

There was a long pause as Rose considered her next question.

"Have you ever been in love?" Suddenly she felt as though she was being too personal.

Katherine thought for a moment before delivering her reply.

"No, I do understand the concept though." She sighed then lay on her back and looked up at the sky.

"And what is the concept of love?" Rose relaxed again and genuinely was intrigued to know.

"That your heart yearns for someone so much you cannot bear to exist without them." Katherine spoke with a profound belief in her definition; even though her nature was not usually given over to romantic assignations.

"Mother brings regular gentlemen callers to the house." She added with chagrin. "And I find each and every one either too foppish or too boring or totally pig headed. I don't think I'll ever fall in love."

She sighed heavily then sat up promptly and turned to regard her younger companion. "Do you believe in true love?"

"Yes. It's what we all dream of isn't it, finding our soulmate?"

"I suppose it is..." Katherine said with a hint of sadness that spoke of more than just not meeting the right man.

Rose felt she seemed resigned to some other fate that she couldn't quite grasp. But before she could explore this facet further Katherine jumped to her feet.

"Fancy a swim?" She began taking off her blouse.

"A swim, in there?" Rose could scarcely look at her friend.

"Where else?"

"B-but what about the monster?" The younger woman stammered.

"He won't bite you... could give you a nasty suck though."

Rose caught a glimpse of bare midriff and sucked in a breath. Katherine dropped her skirt next and then her underskirt.

"Come on, you'll be safe I promise." She stood in front of Rose now holding out her hand. Rose's eyes were scrunched shut.

"I can't."

"Yes you can." Katherine took hold of Rose's arm to pull her up.

The younger woman protested further, her eyes still firmly shut.

"No, please."

"Take off your clothes or you'll get wet." Katherine's hands began un-buttoning the collar of Rose's shirt. The taller girl persisted thinking her friend was just being coy and silly.

"STOP!" Rose cried and stumbled backwards falling breathless onto the blanket.

"Please, I... I can't swim." Rose admitted shakily.

"Ok, ok... I'm going to force you. I'm sorry, I didn't know."

Rose opened her eyes to see Katherine kneeling beside her, stripped to her underwear. And in that moment she didn't know what she was more scared of, drowning in water or drowning in desire.

She swallowed hard and forced herself to look at Katherine's eyes and nowhere else. Those eyes that had mesmerised her from the very second she had seen Lady Katherine Winchester.

"So blue." Rose whispered subconsciously.

"Pardon me?"

"You go." She corrected in a small voice.

The tall young woman turned and slipped effortlessly into the cool crystal waters of the lake. Rose held her breath in sympathy with her friend until she surfaced moments later some distance away. She let out a loud whoop which echoed all around them startling a few ducks from the rushes; then she smiled broadly back at Rose before swimming powerfully toward the middle of the lake.

Rose looked on nervously, she had been afraid of water ever since she had fallen into the Bridgewater canal as a small child. Luckily for her a passer by had pulled her to safety. She had never been near deep water since.

Katherine finally came ashore and arose out of the depths like Tethys the goddess of water herself. She was magnificent. Her body was athletic yet feminine; her skin was as creamy and as perfect as the clouds above. Her breasts were small yet round and full, the dusky hardened nipples clearly visible through her thin wet bra. And her long dark hair glistened like black glass in the sunlight.

Rose had never looked upon another naked woman before except for herself of course. This was most definitely not the same. Her own body had changed considerably in the past couple of years and she had quickly noted a number of comparisons. But the effects of seeing one now for the first time, especially one so beautiful had created some very unusual sensations in the lower half of her body. Not entirely unpleasant but unusual nonetheless.

She had pretended to be reading her book when Katherine stepped up onto the blanket.

"You're dripping on my Dickens." Rose scorned good naturedly.

"Forgive me." Katherine chuckled and flopped down to dry off in the rays of the sun.

"You are forgiven." Rose had her face almost pressed up against the print.

She tried to read whilst Katherine basked in the sunshine beside her.

"Aren't you afraid someone will see you?" The young woman croaked after a while.

"No. Nobody ever comes here." She stretched her long arms back behind her head and squinted across to see if Rose was alright; clearly her young friend was not comfortable about her indifference to modesty.
"Does this bother you?"

Rose gradually lowered her book and steeled herself to look at Katherine again; her eyes betrayed her as they blazed a trail up her slender body lingering on the dark patch showing through the damp material at the apex of her thighs.

"No." Her voice was now the traitor. And she found herself fighting the overwhelming urge to touch the beautiful young woman beside her in such a way that the mere suggestion caused her cheeks to once again colour furiously.

"Good." Katherine smiled self satisfactorily and relaxed back to enjoy the best of the days sun.

The rest of the afternoon was spent picking fruit in the orchard and taking turns reading extracts from Dickens' Great Expectations.

"You must come up to the house and help yourself to the library, we have thousands of books. It's a shame that most of them will never see the light of day." Katherine offered hoping that she might see a lot more of her new friend in the process.

"I'd like that very much." She accepted and thanked her host for the kind offer.

"Forgive me for asking this, but..." Katherine tried not to sound pompous. "You seem so... well read."

"You mean for a workhouse peasant." Rose unfortunately took it the wrong way and closed her book with a slam to prove it.

"That's not what I meant at all. I wasn't trying to be rude."

There was silence for a while and then Rose spoke.

"My parents were schoolteachers. My education was very important to them... look Kate, I didn't mean to be snippy with you, I'm sorry."

"Cook told me your father was killed in Dunkirk, and your mother in the Salford blitz... I just wanted to say, I'm sorry too." Katherine added warmly.

There was nothing more one could say. Sorry was such a small word Rose thought. Her thoughts drifted back to Christmas Eve...

She had been walking home from work when the air raid sirens sounded. She was ushered into a nearby shelter by an ARP warden as the bombs began to fall steadily as the snow but with very different effects...

She sat in the dark listening to the explosions and feeling the earth literally quake beneath her feet... and afterwards came an eerie silence. Emerging into the grey cast of dawn she remembered walking back through the smoke and rubble. Every shop, house and factory as far as the eye could see had been levelled to the ground. When she reached her small red brick terraced house on Henry Street there was nothing left.

"It was last Christmas Eve... The Luftwaffe bombed our homes... why would they do that to innocent women and children?" She asked bitterly.

"It's a world war Rose; we're all in it together."

"That doesn't make it right."

"No, it doesn't." Katherine answered finally.

They walked back along the sun dappled track leading to the dairy farm, and talked about all sorts of things.

"I hope we can do this again soon Rose, I've had the best day." Katherine said smiling and linking arms with her as they walked. It was a simple gesture of friendship and trust, nothing more.

Rose accepted it as naturally as the air she was breathing and she smiled happily in response.

"So have I... but I'm not going swimming with you." Rose again protested at her friends insistence that she teach her how to swim.

"It just might save your life one day." Katherine added somewhat seriously and stopped to convey her point

turning to face her.

"Well I won't be getting wet anytime soon."

"We'll have to see about that." Katherine grinned mischievously and raised an eyebrow.

Rose studied the teasing gesture, it was definitely meant to say so much more but she didn't quite know how to interpret it. They shared a lingering look, there was something shockingly intimate about it all. And for the longest of moments time stood still. A strange sense of familiarity or déjà vu washed over her. Rose suddenly wanted to place the tips of her fingers to Katherine's high sculpted cheekbones and soft velvet lips, the need was utterly compelling.

Just as her hand began its ascent the spell was broken by a familiar voice and she pulled back quickly.

"Would My Lady Katherine and her young companion care for a lift?" The old farmer asked kindly. Mr Stevens the custodian of the dairy was driving his horse and cart back from market.

The two young women smiled shyly at each other and the intimate moment they shared, whatever it was, passed by.

Thanking Mr Stevens for the ride they hopped up onto the back of the wagon laden with feed and supplies.

They were wordless now, just letting the beauty of the Herefordshire countryside around them speak for itself.

It had been the most perfect afternoon either girl could remember in a very, very long time.

As the summer weeks passed Rose and Katherine saw quite a lot of each other. Often Katherine would stop by whilst out riding. Rose always found it a very welcome distraction from the toils of her labour. And when Rose had chance she would journey up to the house; the two women would drink tea and talk for hours about literature and philosophise in general over life and current events.

It was on one such day as this that Rose had taken leave to venture up to the great house and see her friend...

Entering through the kitchens as usual, she hoped to snag some morsel or treat from under the cooks nose.

"Afternoon cook." Rose greeted the portly woman with her customary cheery nature before sneaking a small slice of home made cherry cake.

"Oy! Them cakes are for tea!" Cook called after the fleeting form and laughed to herself at the spiritedness of the young girl.

Rose loved to wonder around the huge house. No matter how many times she visited she always saw something new and exciting to look at. The house was cool and dark in contrast to the summer sun and heat outside. She made her way through a series of servants corridors and through a secret passageway that lead out into the great library. This was where she was supposed to meet Katherine as usual. But Lady Katherine it seemed had yet to appear, so Rose waited patiently and began browsing through the vast collection of classic literature looking for something to borrow.

Winchester Hall boasted one of the finest art collections in Western Europe; amassed over centuries from every corner of the globe. Its walls were festooned with old masterpieces and its mantles with priceless

objektart. But there was one thing in particular that always caught Rose's attention.

High above the Adams surround hung a full length portrait of Lady Katherine. She was depicted in traditional hunting regalia of scarlet jacket, white cravat and jodhpurs. Her highly polished black leather riding boots with tan tops glistened realistically in the sunlight. At her heel were two Irish wolfhounds whose wiry grey coats were so lifelike Rose felt as though she could run her fingers through their fur. But the most striking feature of this painting was not the lifelike animals or the fluffy Turneresque clouds in the background. It was in fact Katherine's china blue eyes, so blue in fact that they seemed to take on a life all of their own such that Rose almost felt them upon her. The painting she thought captured the essence of the young Lady's beauty; though it paled in comparison to the real thing. Still she found it most pleasant to gaze upon as a substitute nonetheless.

As she was standing there admiring the work of John Armitage she suddenly became aware of raised voices coming from across the hall in the direction of the drawing room.

Rose moved from the library and made her way over to stand outside the crack in the great drawing room door. She hadn't meant to eavesdrop, but when she heard the discordant voices mentioning her name she became drawn to the spot.

"It's inappropriate; I simply cannot understand what you see in her."

"Mother, Rose is my friend."

"You have plenty of friends Katherine. It's simply not right and proper that you should be consorting with the help."

"I'll choose my own friends and I'll thank you to keep your hands off my life."

"I'm sure your father would be horrified to hear what you've been up to again. You're determined to bring shame on this family. Well, I won't allow it."

"Listen to yourself for God's sake, we're not Victorians!"

"Evidently, or you would know your place. Frankly the sooner you get yourself a husband the better."

"The sooner I get out of here the better!"

"Rose, is everything alright?" Rose nearly leapt out of her skin as Millie appeared behind her.

"Millie... I, I was just waiting for Lady Katherine..."

"They're 'avin a right old set to in there I bet." She grimaced knowing the Ladies of the house could often be heard in heated discussion. "C'mon best not be caught about out 'ere."

Millie led a very sheepish and bemused Rose away to the library.

"Best wait 'ere, I'll give you a nod when the coast is clear."

"Millie, is Lady Katherine to be married?"

The young scullery maid was a very loyal member of the Winchester household and didn't want to speak ill or out of turn regarding her employers. But she could see Rose's concern and sensed her nature was not given over to gossip. So she sat next to the young woman and explained.

"Her Ladyships fixin' to wed Lady Katherine to Captain Harrington. But she don't want none of it, she's studyin' up at Oxford wantin' to be a doctor."

A bell rang in the parlour alerting the young maid of her duties.

"I've to get back to work Rose. Don't worry about Lady Katherine though, she can 'andle herself alright that one." She winked and slipped out of sight.

When Millie had gone Rose's world seemed to collapse in on itself. She hadn't thought of their relationship as inappropriate. Their stations in life were very different but it had never even crossed her mind there might be an issue. And now it seemed Lady Winchester planned to marry her daughter off to some lantern jawed war hero - as she pictured him. Suddenly a deep sense of betrayal and loss washed over her and she fled the house near to tears.

Supper was a quiet affair. Everyone ate in relative silence.

"Is everything alright dear, you seem out of sorts tonight." The farmers wife eventually spoke.

"Just a little tired Mary, that's all." Rose stirred her stew thoughtfully. "Have you ever heard of Captain Harrington?" She ventured still trying to make sense of what she'd overheard.

"You mean Lady Katherine's beau." Mary added knowingly with a wry smile.

Rose wondered with great incredulity how everyone knew this except her. Given that she had spent quite a lot of time with Katherine, they had even discussed sweethearts; she couldn't understand why it was never mentioned.

"When are they getting married?"

This made the old lady laugh heartily.

"They'll have to hitch that girl to a team of wild horses to get her down the aisle."

"You mean Katherine doesn't want to get married?"

"Not if she has anything to say about it. You see... Lady Katherine isn't the marryin' type."

"Hush now Mary, tisn't right to be gossipin' about her Ladyships." Mr Stevens interrupted.

Mary winked at Rose when her husband resumed eating his supper. But the conversation had now been disrupted and it was clear Mary was not going to impart anything more now.

That night as she lay in bed, Rose was very troubled by what Lady Winchester had said. Katherine had treated her as an equal; there was never any suggestion of them being anything but, until now. And what of this Captain Harrington, why had she never mentioned him? Her mind conjured a picture of the dashing Captain with a chest full of medals sweeping Lady Katherine off her feet to live happily ever after in some fairytale castle. And Rose silently cried herself to sleep.

Dawn saw the young land girl swilling out the stalls ready for the morning milking. She was even there before Mr Stevens. Her job was dirty and smelly but she didn't care as long as it served a purpose. Perhaps she would work until dusk and be so exhausted she wouldn't have time to think.

By mid afternoon Rose was in the east pasture with Sam repairing a dry stone wall. It was a back breaking job but the young farm hands made seemingly light work of it. A distant humming noise drew their

attention and they stopped their toil to look skywards.

In the distance twelve Lancaster bombers were flying high in formation over head, their distinctive shape and sound made them unmistakable.

"Woo hoo, go get them Nazi bastards!" Sam leapt to his feet and jumped up and down screaming and punching at the air for all he was worth.

They watched as the planes disappeared into the blue void, Rose wondered just what fate awaited them.

"Good luck." She said softly.

As her eyes tracked down from the sky they alighted upon the figure of a horse and rider advancing steadily over the horizon. Rose quickly grabbed Sam by the arm pulled him down behind the wall out of sight.

"We need to hide Sam, please don't move ok?" He started to question what they were doing and she shushed him.

Wide eyed with surprise he nodded and crouched lower.

Through a small gap in the stones Rose could see the rider slow, then circle the horse a few times before eventually riding off in the direction of the farm.

She didn't want to speak to Katherine, she felt confused and upset by what she had heard and she couldn't trust herself not to get emotional about it in front of her.

"Ouch! I've been stung by nettles." Sam whined and squirmed in discomfort. "Why are we hiding anyway?"

"Just practicing in case any Germans fly over."

"Oh, do you think they could see us here?"

"Not a chance." She silently thanked the heavens for his simple nature.

By the time they returned to the sheds to put the tools away it was almost dusk. They were exhausted and very late for supper.

Mary appeared in the doorway.

"I was going to send out a search party. Sam you best get home or your mother'll ave you." The lad quickly did as he was told and headed straight off.

"I'll be a few more minutes yet Mary." Rose continued to tidy up. Mary didn't move from her spot and watched the young woman busy herself with growing concern; for it was not like her to miss supper and she suspected Rose was deeply unsettled by something.

"Lady Katherine's been 'ere looking for you lass, she seemed quite upset. Have you two had a fallin' out?"

Rose put the shovel back on its peg, her shoulders sagged as she sighed heavily and turned around to face her. "Not exactly, the thing is..." Rose told Mary about what she had overheard in the library yesterday. The farmers wife seemed quite sympathetic to Roses dilemma.

"I'm afraid that's how it is with them folks. It's not you it's them, don't take it to heart child. Lady Helen's got a broom stuck up 'er arse, if you'll pardon my French." The old woman winked and managed to make Rose smile with her subversive jibe.

"What did you mean last night at supper, when you said Lady Katherine wasn't the marrying type?"

"It isn't really for me to say."

"Mary, please tell me. I promise I won't repeat it."

"Alright, but you better not breath a word of this to anyone."

Rose swore on her grave that she wouldn't repeat it as Mary began to explain...

"There used to be a young house maid worked up there by the name of Fiona. She was a flirt that one, had all the men after her she did. But it turns out she had her sights set on none other than Lady Katherine. Word has it they had a bit of a fling and her Ladyship caught em red handed. Anyway, Fiona got her marchin' orders and Katherine went off to Oxford soon after. Caused a right stink it did."

Rose was almost agape in shock. "I think perhaps I had better keep away for a while, I don't want to cause any trouble." She finally said with resolution her mind was reeling from the unexpected tale.

"Maybe that would be for the best." Mary smiled kindly at the young woman. She had seen the girls friendship develop and knew it would be just a matter of time before Lady Helen got wind of it. She hoped Rose would make new friends soon once Lady Katherine went back to university in a few weeks.

"Now come on, I've got two chops in there and if you don't watch out Jack'll be 'avin 'em." She chortled and Rose smiled back in spite of herself and they both headed back to the house.

Lady Helen Winchester frowned deeply at her plight as she paced around her chambers. She saw herself as a kind and philanthropic woman who was very much aware of the social and economical poverty surrounding her. She saw it as her duty to help the 'common man', but she drew the line at consorting with them.

Up until the outbreak of war in 1939, British society had retained a rigid class structure, with the educated middle and upper classes tending to believe in their own moral and cultural superiority over the working classes. Proper models of behavior were seen to emanate from this section of society, including correct pronunciation, table manners, appropriate dress and even the courting of wedding partners. With few exceptions, the holders of power and authority came from an upper class background and had a public school education. They saw themselves as the guardians of culture, and those lower down the social order seldom questioned their position. It was a social and cultural hierarchy that was largely self-policed, with members of different classes rarely willing or able to move to alternative social groupings. It was expected that people would conform to the values of their peer group, and any attempt to transcend this hierarchy was restricted by social convention.

Lady Winchester sensed that the Second World War was to have a profound effect on the way British people saw themselves, both in terms of their role in society and in the expectations they had of their own quality of life. Times were changing and her Ladyship knew she could not hold onto these halcyon days forever.

Her plan to announce to 'society' during the hunt ball that her daughter would wed Captain Harrington would maybe stem the flow of rebellious behavior around the house and restore the hierarchy she craved.

The annual hunt ball was a tradition at Winchester Hall dating back to the time of Henry VIII. It is said that the King himself rode in the first hunt at Winchester. And from that time forwards there had been such an event held every year. Nobility from all parts of the country would attend. Lady Winchester was renowned for holding lavish parties and this was no exception. Even a war wasn't going to get in the way of this extravagant occasion. The whole estate was buzzing with the anticipation.

As the purple dusk of twilight settled around the vast house, a cloaked figure slipped silently away from the party. Katherine could hear the fading music of the orchestra playing a Strauss waltz as she hurriedly made off towards the garages. Her ultramarine sequined evening gown was trailing on the floor and she cursed to herself several times as she stepped on the hem. She took the keys to the Daimler off the hook and climbed inside the old car.

Rose had managed to avoid Katherine for several days after her visit to the house. She kept herself busy and worked long hours often past dark to keep her mind off her troubles. One of the calves was sick and she had to go up to the barn to check on the animal when she heard a car pull up outside.

"Rose?" Called the familiar voice of Katherine.

The young woman drew a sharp breath and ducked behind feed bins out of sight.

"I saw you come in here. Why are you avoiding me...? Please Rose I need to see you." Katherine sounded very distressed.

Rose cautiously came out of her hiding place. She looked at Katherine standing there like a silken vision of such unimaginable beauty it took her breath away and she fought to appear indifferent.

"Lady Katherine." She said deferentially to try and distance herself.

"Why do you call me that? I thought we were friends."

"I think perhaps it would be better for you not to consort with the *help*."

Her words tasted almost as bitter as they sounded and the silence afterwards was almost deafening.

Katherine's eyes flashed with hurt and then anger.

"Who told you that... mother?"

"Not directly, but it's apparent to me that I'm not welcome up at the house or in your company. I overheard what she said the other day when I came to see you."

"Then you'll surely know that I don't agree with her."

"I don't want to cause you any trouble, therefore..." Rose swallowed back a sob. "I think it's best we don't see each other anymore."

The words cut through Katherine like a knife. "Is that what you want?"

Rose felt her heart clench painfully in her chest her eyes began to sting with unshed tears. "No." She whispered finally and pressed her hand up to her mouth as she began to cry; she was then startled to find Katherine's arms embracing her tightly.

"Please hold me." The taller woman sobbed too.

So Rose did what she had wanted to do the moment she laid eyes on her. They held on to each other as if

their very lives depended on it. There was something profoundly comforting about being in each others arms. Everything suddenly felt peaceful, warm and secure. After several minutes Katherine found her voice.

"I don't want to lose you Rose, please don't pay any attention to what my mother says. She just wants to control me and everyone around her... That's why I have to leave."

"Leave? I don't understand."

"He's here."

"Who?"

"Captain Harrington."

Rose felt her heart lurch with envy and she pulled back questioningly at Katherine. "Your fiancé?"

Katherine looked down unable to take the weight of Roses searching eyes.

"Mother's planning to announce our engagement tonight at the ball, it's her way of *controlling* me."

Rose could literally feel her soul breaking as she suddenly realized the truth of her own heart. "Do you love him?"

"I could never love a man like that... or any man." She added in a small whisper.

They looked at each other for several long moments. Rose could see an unspoken question flicker across her friends face.

Suddenly Katherine seemed to steel her resolve and pulled away. "I'm leaving here for good." She was determined.

"Oh Kate..." Roses eyes brimmed with fresh tears. "What are you going to do?" She cried her words sounding desperate but she didn't care anymore.

"I've decided I'm not going back to Oxford, instead I've enrolled at the Royal College of Nursing in London. I'm catching a train first thing in the morning." She drew a long tremulous breath. "I wish things could've been different..." She smiled sadly and droplets of water fell from her cornflower eyes.

Rose didn't know what else to do she was petrified and confused and in a moment of spontaneity or madness (she would never know which) she reached for Katherine and drew their lips together.

It was like discovering the meaning of life.

After several heartbeats Rose pulled back, almost reeling from the sensation. "I'm sorry... I... it seemed like the right thing to do."

She blinked and watched as Katherine's eyes fluttered open, a slow smile crept across her lips and before Rose could draw another breath she felt Katherine's velvet soft mouth upon her own again.

There was no room now to doubt how they felt about each other. Rose had never kissed anyone fully before this - there were a few adolescent fumbblings behind the Astoria picture house with a couple of local boys - but nothing had prepared her for this, not even in her wildest dreams had she thought this kind of feeling could exist.

Katherine's hands cradled the back of Roses head urging her to deepen their union, Rose instinctively

parted her lips and sighed in rapture as Katherine's tongue plundered the soft warm cavern of her mouth. It was a spiritual and physical awakening for the younger woman; the dawn of her sexuality had arrived and warmed her skin like the rays of the sun. She flourished under the tender ministrations of Katherine's touch. The heat penetrated her very core and created a delicious sensation of arousal that inspired her to seek more. She hungered for something she couldn't define but all too soon the taller woman pulled away.

"Rose... we have to stop." Katherine rasped heavily her eyes hooded with longing but she was now showing an enormous capacity for self restraint.

"I can't stop..." Rose moved to resume their kiss but Katherine held her fast by the shoulders.

"Please, we need to talk about this..." The taller woman implored.

"I love you." Rose impulsively spoke those three immortal little words for the first time and Katherine was instantly undone.

"I love you too." She almost sobbed as once again their lips met in a fervent almost desperate kiss. Their connection was undeniable, their bodies pressed firmly together hands began to roam freely to discover what was there to be discovered. The word love seemed quite inadequate to describe the actual feeling.

"I wish..." Katherine sighed after they finally broke apart.

"What?" Rose whispered, her lips still tingling with the feeling of her lovers kiss as she brushed them lightly across her smooth elegant neck and throat; she could feel her pulse pumping rapidly like that of a small bird. She inhaled the unique scent of her, like wild jasmine on a summers eve; evocative, exotic and highly intoxicating. Rose wanted to be lost forever to this feeling.

Katherine shuddered at the sensation of Roses lips upon her. "God... I wish we could stay like this forever." Her voice was deep and sensual.

"You mean you're still going to leave... even after this?" Rose stopped what she was doing and looked up into those pale eyes which seemed to hold fear in them now whereas moments ago they showed only desire.

"I have no choice, I've already signed up for my training."

Rose almost fell backwards in disbelief and Katherine had to move quickly to hold her.

"No, you can't go!" Rose put her hand up to stifle a sob. "I need you, I want you..." Her throat closed around her words and she couldn't finish them.

"It's only four years, and I'll come back as often as I can... I promise." Katherine drew Rose into an embrace that held the world for both of them. She wondered if she had done the right thing now by leaving, had she perhaps acted too impulsively in order to thwart her mother's plans. "Hush now, don't cry... please don't cry. I have to do this, I can't stay here." She soothed. Maybe there could have been another way. But on the other hand she too wanted to serve her country in it's time of need. To languish in the relative comfort and safety of her privileged life had seemed wrong to her. This gave her a new found purpose and meaning.

"I'm sorry, I have no right to ask you to stay." Rose conceded finally as they parted she turned away and wiped her eyes on the sleeve of her jumper.

"You know it will be difficult for us to be together here anyway." The taller woman's eyes brimmed now too.

"I know." Rose said in a small voice. The convention of their relationship was suddenly becoming clear to

her now too. "I meant what I said Kate, I do love you..." She smiled in spite of herself and turned to look at Katherine before continuing. "I remembered... what you said by the lake, about you understanding the concept of love, well, I understand it too... and I realise I just can't bear the thought of being without you... when I'm with you it's like I suddenly feel alive, and when you're not here I feel so..."

"Empty." Katherine finished knowingly and caressed the side of Roses damp cheek with her palm. "It's exactly how I feel." She reached for her and Rose did the same and they held on to one another tightly. Katherine placed a small kiss atop Roses flaxen hair. "I loved you from the moment I saw you." She whispered. "I just knew you were the one."

They fell silent, each wishing they could live their whole lives suspended in this one perfect moment of togetherness.

"You'll write?" Rose asked eventually accepting their fate.

"Every chance I get. And as soon as I can get leave I'll come straight back." Katherine promised emphatically. "Will you see me off from the station tomorrow?"

The smaller woman simply nodded her agreement unable to voice her reply.

Katherine placed the tenderest of kisses upon Roses swollen lips before slipping away into the night.

Early the next morning they bid a tearful farewell at Monmouth station. The whistle blew and the guard called for all aboard. Katherine leaned out of the window clutching Roses hand as the train pulled away in a cloud of steam. They didn't speak, they just looked into each others eyes and saw more than a thousand words could ever say. Rose followed as far as the platform would allow and stood alone until the last carriage was out of sight. And she couldn't help but wonder if this was perhaps the last time she would ever see Katherine again.

The early winter frost was bitter and hard first thing in the morning. Rose began her day breaking the ice in the water troughs with a shovel. She wondered where Sam had disappeared to. He should have been splitting leaves of hay and filling the racks ready for the morning feed.

"Happy birthday!"

She almost leapt about six feet in the air as Sam suddenly appeared and thrust a small parcel at her.

"Jesus Sam I almost had a heart attack!"

"I'm sorry." He looked scorned and immediately Rose smiled widely to reassure him.

She took the proffered object that was poorly wrapped in newspaper from him and thanked him warmly with a hug.

"I made her just for you." He added enthusiastically.

Carefully she unwrapped the present and gasped in genuine delight when she saw what it was.

Intricately crafted out of a small piece of English cherry it was a perfect replica of Tessa, Sams faithful border collie dog.

"She's beautiful." Rose turned the carving in her hands to study the detail. "Thank you Sam, I'll treasure her

always."

"It's Tessa." Sam said proudly as he patted the actual dog sitting faithfully beside him. Tessa was a gift from Rose and Mary. They were inseparable friends now and it warmed her heart to see them happy together.

"Yes, I can tell." She gave the lad a peck on the cheek and he blushed furiously. "How did you know it was my birthday?"

"Mrs Stevens told me, she's baking a cake for your party tonight and... oh, I wasn't supposed to tell you that. Please don't tell her I told you, it's a surprise." He begged rather upset with himself he had let the cat out of the bag.

"Don't worry Sam I won't tell." She promised.

Rose's nineteenth birthday was not something she had planned on celebrating. Mary always made a fuss about birthdays. Rose would have preferred to just let it slip by. In any case the one person she had really wanted to celebrate it with could not be here and so it didn't seem worth celebrating.

Since Katherine's departure Rose had tried to get on with her life, but not a moment went by when she didn't think about her. She haunted her dreams both day and night almost to the point of distraction. But what she most looked forward to were Katherine's letters and occasionally a phone call. The word up at the house according to Millie was that Lady Helen had been so distraught and humiliated by her daughters sudden departure she had disinherited her completely. This news greatly upset Rose, she could not understand why a mother would be so cruel to her only child. Katherine on the other hand seemed indifferent almost to the point of gratefulness to be released from her bonds.

Her mood however had lightened considerably after Sam's gift and she spent the rest of the day with a definite spring in her step.

After supper Mrs Stevens produced a sponge cake lighter than air and bursting with strawberry jam and fresh whipped cream. Even Mr Stevens joined in singing 'happy birthday'. Rose blew out the single candle and wished only for one thing; that the war would end and return Katherine safely into her arms.

Mary had knitted her a long and colourful scarf which was gratefully received.

"There's just one more thing." The jolly farmer's wife said reaching behind the clock on the mantle she produced a letter.

Rose held her breath as she took it. Instantly she recognised the hand, it was from Katherine.

5th November 1941

My Dearest Rose

I do hope this reaches you in time for your birthday, I wish I could be there to celebrate it with you. I'm sure Mary is spoiling you rotten though. I just wanted to say... Happy birthday my love, I miss you terribly. I pray the end of the war is in sight and that we can spend eternity together.

Yours forever

Kate xxx

Rose read the letter to herself with everyone looking on in anticipation of a few words.

"She sends her love and wishes she could be here." Rose gave a strictly edited version and tucked the precious piece of paper into her trouser pocket.

Just then there was a knock at the door.

"Who could that be at this time?" Mr Stevens grumbled as his wife got up to answer it.

"*Goodness what a surprise!*" Mary gasped from the hallway at the unexpected visitor.

She quickly came back into the parlour where Rose, Sam and Jack all sat waiting on tenterhooks to see who it was.

"Look who's here!" Mary exclaimed and stepped aside.

"Kate!" Rose leapt up and flung herself at the tall woman. They clung to each other, fighting the urge to press their lips together in a passionate kiss. "Missed you." Rose whispered into the starched white collar.

"Happy birthday, my love." Katherine whispered back.

Remembering the company they were in they parted and Katherine stepped fully into the room now to properly greet everyone.

She looked incredibly stylish in a grey trouser suit and soft cashmere overcoat. Nurses uniforms were not to be worn outside the hospital, she explained to prevent the spread of disease.

Her once long raven tresses were now shoulder length and softened into permanent waves. She looked to Rose like a movie star, so glamorous and so breathtakingly beautiful she could scarcely believe Katherine would even look at her twice. But she did, her sky coloured eyes told Rose all she needed to know. Their penetrating intensity set Rose's pulse racing at an almost dizzying pace such that she had to sit down before she collapsed in a heap.

"I hope there's some cake left for me." Katherine grinned knowingly and winked at Rose.

It was the best birthday present Rose could have hoped for and the smile on her face said as much. Her wish had finally come true.

They talked for hours by the fireplace in the sitting room. Katherine recounted some of her experiences at the hospital treating victims of the air raids. It had obviously had a profound effect on her, the things she had witnessed and dealt with would stay with her for the rest of her life. But whilst she was back at home, or with Rose at least, she did not want to dwell on them. She hadn't written to tell Rose she was coming because she wasn't sure up until the last minute she could make it. She had begged Sister Drummond and offered to work extra duties at the hospital when she got back.

Mary had the spare room made ready for Katherine's impromptu stay. Katherine had three days leave, she hadn't been planning to go up to the house to see her mother during that time either. Something told her that she wouldn't exactly be welcome; so she hoped Mr and Mrs Stevens would let her stay with them for the duration of her visit, and of course they kindly obliged.

Later as they bid a good evening to their hosts they eventually found themselves alone in Rose's attic bedroom. It had been so long and so much had happened that both women were secretly concerned the others' feelings might have changed.

But all Katherine wanted to do was take Rose into her arms, hold her close and love her with every fibre of her being. She wanted to show Rose now more than ever how she felt, perhaps it was because of the adversities she'd faced or just the sheer need to be with her and express those emotions physically.

Whatever the reason, she didn't need to analyse her feelings toward Rose to know that she truly loved her. And if Rose wasn't ready she would wait, for just being near her and seeing her smile was more than enough to sustain her heart.

"Now we can say hello properly, I hope." Katherine smiled somewhat tentatively and waited for Rose to respond.

Rose slowly moved to stand in front of the taller woman. Then sliding her hands around Katherine's shoulders she pulled her in to an intimate embrace till their faces were mere inches apart.

"Hello..." Rose uttered, her eyes lingered on soft pink lips. And without conscious thought she pressed herself to them. Their kiss was long and unhurriedly sensual. Gradually no other cognisant feeling or thought existed apart from the awareness of gentle questing lips and tongues, warm breaths and tender sighs. Everything became a blur around them.

"I know I'm awake... but it's like I'm in a dream." Rose uttered finally drawing breath.

"I was afraid your feelings might have changed." Katherine's uncertainty was rare and caused Rose to respond assertively.

"Never, I love you Kate, I've always loved you. I've waited for you. Have you... waited for me?" She tried to quash the pique of jealousy in her tone.

Rose trembled as she felt Katherine's gossamer lips flutter against the creamy swirl of her ear as she whispered back.

"I would wait forever; I am yours Rose, if you'll have me." Her soft cheek brushed against the smaller woman's.

"Yes... forever." Rose swallowed the rising lump in her throat and offered her a relieved smile before leaning in to brush her lips against Katherine's. She meant it to be brief but quickly lost herself in the softness of her lips as their tongues began to stroke hesitantly against each other.

Gradually Katherine's curious fingertips began to trail through soft short hair and down over Rose's finely sculpted shoulders and arms; eventually reaching up to trace light circles over the turgid peaks of her nubile young breasts.

Rose broke their kiss and gasped at the sensation this provoked; her hard sensitised nipples seemed to be directly connected to the already insatiable ache between her thighs. "Kate... I, I'm not sure what to do." She whispered unsteadily.

"Do you trust me?" Katherine continued her torturous exploration, her own passions becoming inflamed beyond the edge of her control.

"Of course." Rose trembled in response.

"Do you truly love me?" Katherine stilled her caresses and drew back to look deeply into the young woman's sea green eyes. She knew if they made love it would alter the course of their relationship forever and she had to be certain that Rose wanted her as much as she wanted Rose.

"With all my heart." Rose answered, her face the very picture of love, trust and desire.

"Then you'll know what to do..." Katherine's words trailed off as she placed a series of mind altering kisses upon Rose's lips and neck as her hands worked steadily to unbutton the land girl's shirt, quickly followed by her trousers and finally her underwear. The young woman's chest rose and fell rapidly as her breathing became ragged with need. Katherine cradled the supple mounds and placed tender kisses on their tops. "Are

you alright?"

"Teach me, show me..." Rose pleaded.

Katherine smiled hungrily and slid her thigh between Rose's legs, pressing it to her centre firmly. Rose let out a stifled grunt as they kissed again but this time there was something more demanding, more intensely passionate.

They had both succumbed to the power of their arousal.

Now Katherine began to whimper as she felt strong hands cup her behind and firmly pull her in. The fabric of her slacks soon became saturated with Rose's passion. Katherine tore her lips away and husked "I need to feel you against me."

Rose understood her wish, everything seemed to click into place, and she felt her confidence rise as her hands reached for the buttons of Katherine's blouse.

Trembling needy fingers began to remove her tall lover's clothes. "You're so beautiful." She kissed the supple skin as she peeled back the material, sliding it effortlessly off Katherine's broad shoulders. "So soft..." She grazed her lips and teeth along the swell of her breasts whilst her fingers worked to unclasp the bra that was preventing her from revealing their full glory. Rose marvelled reverently as the taller woman's naked body revealed itself to her... "So very beautiful..."

"Touch me, please." Katherine whispered hoarsely clasping Rose's hands and placing them upon her breasts. Her head fell back as they made contact, she almost had to bite her lip to keep from groaning out loud.

Rose sucked and licked the heated flesh of her chest setting her skin on fire.

Taking her by the hands Katherine led them to the small bed where she laid Rose down gently. Rose looked up at her lover with adoring green eyes and as their naked bodies pressed fully together for the first time, they whispered each other's names softly to the night.

Katherine marvelled at the beauty and perfection that was Rose, never had she felt such a strong desire to be with another human being. It was compelling almost to the point of addiction, a need so fervent she knew she would want this woman beyond eternity.

She again touched her lips to Rose's before working her way down, adoring her breasts until she reached her stomach, it was like kissing a warm flat stone. Her hands slid up solid sculptured thighs to caress the shapely firm behind and Katherine couldn't help but squeeze the globes tightly with both hands. Rose groaned in longing at the feel of Katherine's hot breath on her belly. Finally she slipped away into oblivion as she felt Katherine's lips press into her soft pale mound of hair.

Katherine hungrily inhaled the scent of her passion. Her destiny almost fulfilled.

"Please..." Rose urged by pressing herself towards the Katherine's mouth, tangling her fingers in the rich dark locks making her request unmistakable.

For Katherine her first taste was magnificent, the feeling unimaginable and the combination was wildly erotic. Rose had to cover her mouth with her arm to muffle the passionate cry that ripped from her throat as Katherine took her to the dizzying heights of ecstasy with her exquisite tongue.

Rose's body stiffened and she choked out a breathy sob as she climaxed quickly, too quickly for her to languish in the joy of her ascent. She had reached the ultimate sexual state of grace fulfilling a need she had never thought she possessed until now. Katherine placed a final loving kiss into her silky wetness before pulling a very weakened Rose onto the circle of her long arms to bask in her afterglow.

"How do you feel?" Katherine questioned with a tender smile. She stroked the back of her hand in a soothing motion across the smooth plane of Rose's belly.

"Perfect." Rose eventually replied after regaining focus and control of her breathing. She laughed quietly embarrassed at the sheer naked wantonness that had consumed her. She turned fully to regard Katherine anew. "You're so breathtakingly beautiful Kate, I love you so much." She caressed the older woman's face with her fingertips as she spoke. "How am I ever going to live without you now?"

Katherine felt her heart swell at Rose's words and she smiled tenderly before answering. "I'll always be here." She placed her palm over Rose's trembling heart. Their lips met in a gentle loving kiss and Rose groaned again at the new and intoxicating taste imparted by her lover's sweet breath.

Soon their kiss gained heated momentum and Rose pushed Katherine back by her shoulders, pressing her down to the soft mattress with smouldering intent. She wanted suddenly to feel everything touch everything almost all at once her entire body needed to be one with her lover and she wasn't sure how to express it. She pulled away gasping with passionate intensity. "I want..."

Her look of desperation prompted Katherine to finish. "To be inside me?" The very words opened up a whole new level of craving in the young woman. Katherine immediately took her hand and guided it towards her throbbing sex. She groaned as she pushed two of Rose's fingers deep inside her and hissed sharply as Rose's mouth clamped firmly at the base of her neck.

Rose moved instinctively to the rhythm of her lover's pelvic motions and pressed against her small pink muscle with her palm. Katherine's orgasm lifted them both off the mattress, she fought to keep her cries of ecstasy silent before crashing back down to earth, dazed and gasping for breath.

She was no stranger to pleasures of the flesh herself yet the few experiences she'd had lacked a certain indefinable something. And only now through the clarity of passion could she see what that 'something' was... love.

The following morning Rose was awoken by a knock on her door. Startled she suddenly realised she was in the most compromising position imaginable. Naked, with the Lady of the manor draped shamelessly all over her. Quickly she pulled the sheet over her sleeping lover in an attempt to conceal her. Mercifully Mrs Stevens did not enter.

"Rose, time to get up. Breakfasts ready." Came the usual cheery voice from behind the door.

"I'll be right down." She held her breath and waited for the footsteps to descend down the creaky old staircase before she moved.

"Kate... Kate wake up." Rose whispered frantically. They had fallen asleep together in the same bed and if Mary had walked in and seen them in an obvious state of post coital bliss there would have been a lot of explaining to do.

Katherine slowly came around and for a moment wasn't sure where she was.

"What time is it?" She croaked still half asleep and enjoying the warmth of the younger woman's firm body half underneath her.

"Shhhhhh, it's five thirty." Rose hushed and began to clamber out of bed. Trying to find the light switch in the dark she tripped over Katherine's case. She cursed to herself and eventually managed to flick the light

on.

Katherine shrank under the covers away from the stark light. She stopped for a moment to consider what had happened looking over at the woman she had shared her body with and marvelled at the incredible sense of love that seemed to burst from her chest. But she had to get a grip of herself otherwise the jig would be up.

"You'll have to sneak into the spare room when I've gone to work." She placed a loving kiss into a pile of soft dark hair. "Kate... don't fall back to sleep, if Mary finds you here they'll be a right to do." She shook the tall woman by the shoulder to wake her again.

"Ok, ok I'm up." Katherine grumbled and then promptly went back to sleep.

Rose decided to wash and dress first before trying to rouse her reluctant lover again.

In the kitchen Mary was cooking porridge, Rose appeared and gave a very bright smile to greet her as she snagged a piece of freshly buttered toast.

"Sleep well?"

"Very." She blushed but fortunately in the dim light she could conceal it.

The routine at breakfast was unbroken; only Rose knew that from this day forth she was forever changed. She felt different, changed on the inside, yes... but she wondered if she'd changed on the outside too. Did she look different to others, could everyone tell her maidenhood was no more. And she wondered if all people went through this, even Mr and Mrs Stevens...

"What are you grinning about?" Mr Stevens eyed her curiously as he came in from the yard carrying a bucket of coal.

"Nothing." She gave her best innocent 'butter wouldn't melt' look.

"Well you won't be grinning in five minutes when you've got a pile 'o shit to shovel." He said half jokingly.

"Language Jack!" Mary scorned.

The old farmer rolled his eyes and muttered something about bumptious females under his breath as he slipped his worn out coat off.

After breakfast Rose ran back upstairs to check on the whereabouts of her lover. She entered her own room first to find it empty and the bed made neatly with no evidence of her night of passion to be seen. She suddenly feared last night had been a heavenly dream and went to the spare room to check.

She let out a tiny breath of relief when she saw Katherine tucked up snugly in the small cot. The temptation to climb right back under the covers and ravish the sleeping beauty was intense. But Rose reigned in her rising desires and instead crept over to where Katherine lay and placed a feather light kiss upon her soft full lips.

Long arms reached out to pull her closer and they shared a lingering moment together before Rose heard Mr Stevens calling her.

"I have to go, promise you'll be here when I get back."

"I'll be waiting for you." Katherine purred sensually as she took the young woman's hand and pressed it wantonly to her bare breast.

Rose shuddered and gasped becoming instantly aroused.

"Rose! Them cow's aren't gunna milk 'emselves now!" The farmer shouted again.

They both giggled realising the irony of his words as Rose gently squeezed the soft breast feeling the nipple stiffen through her fingers. Katherine's eyes glowed like blue flames of desire, her throaty moan sent shockwaves straight to Rose's centre.

Rose gulped audibly. "S-sorry, we'll have to continue this later." She squeaked and pulled away reluctantly. They quickly kissed one final time before Rose slipped out to begin her day.

"Rose! I don't know where your 'ed is girl but you better look sharp."

The land girl had been lollygagging around all morning and who could blame her when less than one hundred feet away was the most beautiful woman in the world waiting for her.

"Sorry Mr Stevens." She apologised again until it was just a reflexive response to everything he said.

"Why don't you just take the rest of the day off, me an Sam ere'll manage. All these bloody women mooning around 'ere it's a wonder anything gets done..." He sounded cantankerous but there was a forgiving glint in his tone as he said it.

Without being asked twice Rose dropped the broom she had been aimlessly pushing around for the past half hour and ran at full tilt towards the house.

She almost ran Mary over on the way in.

"Goodness child you nearly 'ad me!" Said the startled farmer's wife as she was nearly bundled to the ground in the hall way.

"Sorry Mary, I was... I need to go... I have to pee." She lamely excused herself and ran up the stairs.

"Kids today!" Mary tutted to herself as she left the house herself to go to the village market.

Katherine wasn't in the spare room. Nor was she in her own room. It was still quite early and she wondered where she could have gone when suddenly she heard a sweet tuneful humming coming from the bathroom.

She quietly opened the door to reveal her sky blue eyed beauty soaking up to her neck in hot scented bubbles.

"Mmmmm... care to join me?" Katherine purred and gave her best crooked sexy smile, the one that said everything Rose now understood the meaning of.

Rose gulped at the prospect and before she could even consider all the practical reasons why this was not such a good idea she was already removing her clothes.

"I think perhaps I maybe turning in to a sex maniac." Rose said later as they were getting dressed.

"Well, at least you can't get locked up for it." Katherine joked and then her expression turned serious. "Rose... we have to be careful when we're together in public, you understand that don't you?"

"I know we have to act very differently around each other if that's what you mean."

"It's not that I want to, it's just..."

"People won't understand." Rose finished.

Katherine smiled but there was still a trace of sadness in her pale eyes.

Mary's voice calling them to lunch broke them from their embrace.

"We better go, I've been in enough hot water today as it is." Rose tried to brighten their suddenly sombre mood.

"Yes, but it was very pleasant hot water." Katherine growled and wiggled her eyebrows provocatively.

"And I thought I was the sex maniac here." Rose chuckled.

It was a crisp clear late winters day and the air was sweet and fresh.

They ambled arm in arm through a dense oak copse in relative silence just enjoying one another's closeness; the crunching carpet of fallen leaves and the occasional warbling of a blackbird the only sound.

"Thank you." Rose said eventually.

"For?"

"Coming back to me."

Katherine sighed with contentment, and smiled lovingly. "I'll always come back to you." She stopped walking and turned to face Rose thoughtfully. "No matter what happens in this life, I know now that I found someone that made it worth living. It's me who should be thanking you, my love." She bent and kissed her with infinite tenderness.

"I have a question to ask of you." Katherine said after their delicious interlude ended. "And you don't have to answer right away... just tell me you'll think about it, alright?" Rose nodded with intrigue and held both hands in hers. Katherine took a deeply nervous breath and began.

"What will you do after the war is over Rose?"

"I'd like to follow in my parents footsteps and go into teaching."

"You'd make an excellent teacher... taught me a thing or two last night." Katherine winked and grinned cheekily.

"Hey!" Rose jabbed her tall companion in the ribs for being lewd.

Katherine took her punishment well and continued in a more serious tone.

"When my grandfather died he left me part of his will in a trust. I'll inherit it next month on my twenty first birthday. Part of that inheritance is Heathcoat Park, a large country estate in Oxfordshire. After the war is over I plan to settle there, finish my medical degree and set up a practice in the community as a GP." Rose said nothing and continued patiently to listen, her expression unreadable. "I wanted to ask if you'd consider coming with me."

There was silence for a moment as Rose contemplated her answer.

"You're asking me to live with you?"

Katherine nodded hopefully. "You could study to become a teacher like you wanted."

Rose furrowed her brow in deep consternation causing Katherine to shuffle about nervously. "You want me to live with you in a large country house, be waited on hand and foot and then share your bed at night?" She spoke as if contemplating it out loud to herself.

"Yes, if you'll consider it." Katherine was growing increasingly worried that she had overstepped some sort of boundary and was asking too much too soon. It was all a bit sudden, then just as her tiny insecurities began rippling to the surface...

"Well I suppose I could if I *had* to." Rose was trying desperately to suppress a huge grin.

Realising she was being teased Katherine lunged for the smaller woman's ticklish spots and soon both women were rolling around in the woodland carpet as their shrieks of laughter warmed the chill winter air.

Rose pinned her quarry to the ground and sat on her, the taller woman had given up rather too easily. She loved to hear Katherine's laughter and see her broad perfect smile, so dazzling and incredibly sexy. How could she refuse this dark haired beauty anything? She was totally lost to her, now and forever. Her own laughter calmed and her breathing steadied as she gazed down into those china blue eyes so like her portrait but still far more alluring. "I want to spend the rest of my lifetime loving you. If that's in a fine country estate or a run down terraced house in Manchester, I don't care as long as we can be together."

"Forever?"

"Forever." Rose repeated before sealing her promise with a kiss.

THE END

I hope you enjoyed my story.

Feedback appreciated to anex@hotmail.co.uk