



Elizabeth  
HART

*Lily*  
OF THE  
TOWER

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## About the Author

Elizabeth makes her home in southern California with her partner and their three cats, plus one in spirit. She is a bibliophile who surrounds herself on all sides with overflowing, unkempt bookshelves, mostly filled with fiction, but also herstory, some history, and geology. One of her favorite ways to spend a lazy afternoon is immersing herself in a novel with a full-bodied California cabernet in hand, while a hearty soup simmers in the slow cooker. *Lily of the Tower* is Elizabeth's first novel.

*for Yvonne  
because of you*

## **Acknowledgments**

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# Lily

1833

“I am to be married,” Lily informed Zona, her lady’s maid.

“To Mr. Daugherty?” Zona questioned softly.

“To Rudolpho, yes.” Zona’s face fell.

“But not until I am nineteen; my father has specified this. It is still two years away.”

“Yes,” Zona responded, attempting a smile. She moved about, pretending to tidy the room. The sunlight coming through the window played on her blond hair, turning it golden. As she bent to pick up the hairbrush she had just knocked down, her golden locks cascaded to the side, diffusing the sunlight. Her pale complexion seemed to glow and the sharp bridge of her nose was softened in the flattering light.

“You know I won’t abandon you,” Lily said, walking over to Zona. “You will come with me as my lady’s maid.” She hesitated. “You are my truest, dearest friend.” She tucked a stray hair back behind Zona’s ear. She stood before a beautiful angel,

inharmoniously dressed as a servant.

Zona's blue eyes sparkled wetly, looking up to meet Lily's so much darker than her own. "And you are mine." The words came out with a catch, and she leaned in to hug Lily. Lily could feel small shudders, but said nothing.

"What put it into your head that you and I would be separated over such a silly thing as marriage?"

"It is no silly thing, Lily. It is the goal of every woman's life to find herself wed to a man of means and good reputation. And," she stumbled a bit here, "I have no right to expect that you would include me in your remove to his home, to your new life."

"Oh, my sweet Zona," Lily said still holding Zona's slender body in her arms. "I wouldn't go there if you couldn't go with me. I don't want a life that doesn't have you in it." Lily held Zona away from her and looked into her eyes to emphasize the point.

Zona nodded, her relief evident.

"Who knows, dear Zona, you may fall in love and wish to leave me for the marriage bed of some lusty young lad," Lily said, teasing.

"No, you can trust I will never do that." Zona's expression held none of the certainty of her tone. She seemed nervous and fretful, more so than she had been lately.

"You believe you will never marry, Zona, though it is the 'goal of every woman's life'?"

"Almost every woman, then." Zona smirked. "Besides, not every woman can rightly hope for that."

"We'll just see about that," Lily said, showing off her brilliant smile before leaning in to kiss her friend on the cheek.

In spite of Lily's assurances, Zona still seemed anxious, seemed to be always on edge. The slightest thing would irritate her, tears would appear without provocation. She had not genuinely smiled in weeks. Though she had made a valiant attempt to put on a brave face, it was nowhere near good enough to fool Lily, of all people. And today, Lily had a plan to turn that all around.

Lily sat at her vanity watching as Zona arranged her dark

locks for the day.

“We’ll be leaving shortly after breakfast.”

“Leaving?” Zona looked up from her work, questioning Lily’s reflection.

Lily smiled hugely. “Your birthday is in a few days, and we shall go into town and buy you a few gowns better suited for your age. Some of your gowns are very outmoded now. Such high waists are no longer the thing. They are very young-looking. You are a woman now, and must dress to match.”

Zona blushed, and Lily laughed to see it, kissing her on the cheek. Zona only blushed the more.

In town, Lily guided her from shop to shop, looking for the best—price was no object.

“But these are beautiful,” Zona argued.

“Not as pretty as the ones we just saw at the other place.”

“Then let’s go back there.”

“First, we shall see all of our options, and then choose.”

Zona let out a mock sigh of exasperation. Lily laughed and, grabbing her hand, pulled Zona along to the next shop. Luckily for Zona there were not more than a handful of dress shops in the town for them to go through. They ended up going back to the first shop they had visited.

Lily had picked out eight gowns for Zona to consider, and a surfeit of petticoats. Having heard the shop bell announcing another customer’s entrance, the shopkeeper had withdrawn, leaving them quite alone together in the back room fitting area.

“Eight gowns!” Zona declared in astonishment.

“Of course,” Lily responded, “one for every day of the week, and an extra for special occasions.”

“This gown is well beyond my station, Lily,” Zona argued, pulling out one of them. “You could wear it, but not me, and these petticoats, too. The colors...” she said, touching the material covetously, “...and what is this? Silk?”

“As I said, that gown is for special occasions. Have you not worn my very own gowns for occasions? Well, now you shall have your own. As for the petticoats, they are for you. For the most part, they will be hidden under your dresses. Besides,” Lily said jokingly, “who else but me will see your petticoats?” She placed her hands on her hips. “HmMMM? You said as much yourself.”

“Why? Would you be jealous?” Zona queried, playing along.

Lily gave her a sidelong glance. “I would be jealous of anyone who would steal you away.” She kept her eyes on Zona, watching her blush grow deep red. All at once, awareness came over her. For the present, she pushed the thought away, her expression unreadable.

The shopkeeper having returned, Zona’s measurements were taken, and they made arrangements to pick the dresses up in two weeks’ time.

“We will take the petticoats with us now,” Lily stated. “You must have something new to wear for your birthday.”

On the drive home in the carriage, Lily carried on as usual in her talkative, joking manner. The drive was a long one, however, and eventually, the conversation ceased, and the two settled in quietly as the carriage rocked them. Lily watched her friend, wondering what she was thinking. Her own mind drifted to the mornings and evenings when Zona would dress her, and undress her. She thought of the way Zona’s hands felt as they cinched this tighter and buttoned that, and how her heart would beat unexpectedly harder. She thought of the surreptitious dreams and desires that came on her in the deepest night, and the response of her hand as it slid beneath the covers.

Lily had always been adept at hiding her feelings when she chose to. She knew her face was unreadable now. But, inwardly, she knew a hope had entered her thoughts. *Does she feel as I do? Could it be that is why my future marriage is so upsetting to her? I hope so.* She watched Zona stare out the window.

“Come, let’s see you in your new petticoats,” Lily demanded after the two had retired to their rooms for the evening.

“I am too tired for that; perhaps tomorrow,” Zona answered, not looking at Lily.

“If you are too tired, then I shall dress you. After all the years you have done so for me, I believe it is my turn.” Lily couldn’t resist.

Zona stood frozen, as if unsure how to respond. “But that would be improper.”

“Come here,” Lily said in a tone that could not be refused.

Zona moved to where Lily stood. Lily turned her around and began to undo the hooks of her dress.

“Lift up your arms,” she stated matter-of-factly. Zona did so, and Lily slipped off her gown. Slowly, Lily unlaced, untied and unbuttoned, watching Zona’s reactions intently as she did so, until Zona stood vulnerable in her loose shift.

“You are shivering, and covered in gooseflesh. Is the room not warm enough?”

“I am fine,” Zona responded faintly.

She turned Zona around to face her and rubbed her arms briskly to warm her skin.

“You are very beautiful, Zona; I have always thought you so.” Lily said this as if she were commenting on the weather, but she caught the look in Zona’s eyes—her pupils dark and deep. Lily wondered if Zona felt the same knot in her belly as she did. Zona’s frame trembled slightly, her skin blanched. Lily smiled, as if not noticing, and walked over to the pile of petticoats.

“Let’s see.” She put a finger to her lips ponderingly. “I think this light blue one would look best on you. It will bring out your eyes. Let’s try this one for now.” As Lily gathered it about Zona’s waist, she allowed her fingers to linger. She smoothed the fabric down the sides of Zona’s legs, looking up into Zona’s eyes before rising. “There now,” Lily said gleefully, “turn around for me.”

Zona did as she was told.

“Stunning,” Lily said, and she meant it. Lily stepped toward

Zona. Facing each other, Zona stood almost as tall as Lily, her forehead level with the bridge of Lily's nose. Her apprehension made her look fragile. Had her emotional state been caused by anything else, Lily would have kissed her forehead and comforted her saying her fears would come to naught.

She pulled out Zona's hairpins, letting her long blond hair fall about her shoulders. "Would any husband be as bewitched by you at this moment as I?" Lily asked, kissing her on the cheek, tauntingly close to Zona's lips.

Zona breathed in sharply, and pushed Lily away. "What are you doing?"

"Rudolpho will never come between us," Lily whispered. "You know that, don't you?"

Zona stood frozen.

"And you know that I must marry. I have no choice in the matter. My father has already made the decision. I cannot refuse. I could, of course, run away, and learn to make my own way as a woman may. But, would that not be worse? You would not be able to follow me there. You would not want to."

"I would follow you anywhere," Zona said softly.

Lily smiled at the simple genuine quality of the statement. "Then follow me to Rudolpho's home. He at least is only one man, not the many you might have to share me with if we were unprotected." This had the effect Lily had hoped for. She took Zona into her arms. "It is you that has my heart, dear Zona," she whispered pulling Zona close. They stayed close for a long time. Lily could not tell if Zona trembled from fear or cold. *Like me, she has been carrying this for a long time.*

Eventually, Zona calmed and looked up into Lily's face. Lily kissed her lips, gently, but long, and the fire smoldering inside of her seared. But she did nothing more. Lily was not uninformed; her older brother, Alfred, was less than discreet, and when she had asked him privately what would be expected of her when she was married, he had discerned no problem in telling her. Lily was aware of what men and women did together, and to an even

greater extent, was aware of her own body. She felt confident in her ability to extrapolate. Not tonight, however—she knew Zona well enough to leave her be, for a while—tonight, they would sleep.

“Dear Zona, you are overwrought. I did not mean to upset you so.”

“I am not upset,” Zona replied, her voice uneven.

“You are,” Lily responded. “Let me put you to bed.” Lily removed Zona’s new petticoat. Again, Zona stood before Lily in her shift. “Come,” Lily said, taking Zona by the hand and leading her to the bed.

Zona looked quickly to the door that adjoined her own room to Lily’s. Lily pretended not to have seen the movement. She pulled back the blankets, indicating that Zona should lie down.

Zona got under the covers awkwardly. Lily smiled at her compassionately. She then undressed herself and settled in beside her, kissing her lightly behind her ear. “Sleep now,” Lily said. Then she reached across and turned down the lamp. She could smell the lingering smoke of the stifled flame.

As Lily lay there, she was surprised at how easily she had crossed a line, for she knew she had. And she knew she—they—would go further. She lay in the dark euphoric, the heat of her love’s body warming her.

When Lily awoke the next morning, it was to discover that Zona had not shifted position the entire night. She put her hand on Zona’s arm and leaned over to look into her face. Her eyes were closed, but she was not sleeping.

“Zona,” she whispered shaking her slightly. “Zona, wake up.” Zona opened her eyes, clearly feeling uncomfortable.

“Please don’t feel awkward,” Lily begged, fearing she had assumed too much, pushed too far.

“I’m sorry,” Zona replied. “I don’t know how to be.”

“Just be like we were before.”

Zona looked up at the ceiling. “But...we aren’t like we were before, are we?”

Lily laughed out loud. “No, I guess we’re not,” she said as she reached out to hug Zona, who in turn, could not help laughing with her.

From that point on, Zona’s bed went unused. Outside their rooms, they carried on as usual, and no one noticed any change.

Throughout the next few weeks, Lily spent much of the time reassuring Zona. She was surprised at how agonizingly timid Zona had become about everything. She doubted her every move, was afraid to make any advance toward Lily. She once attempted to smooth a hair from Lily’s cheek, and when Lily’s eyes met hers, she pulled her hand back as quickly as if she had been burned.

At that, Lily had reached out, taking back the hand and placing it on her cheek, leaning into it. “Why are you afraid of me?” she asked.

Zona took a deep breath, sighing. “Because, in the end, I am still your lady’s maid, and you are my mistress.” Lily made to counter this argument but Zona said, “Please let me finish. What happens to me if you decide you are done with me? There is more at risk here than just my heart. Your displeasure can ruin me. And...”

Zona stopped here. Lily could see Zona was uncertain whether she should continue.

“And?” Lily prompted, gently.

“And if anyone were to find us out...they just wouldn’t understand. I don’t even understand.”

Lily paused, taking Zona’s words in completely before answering. “Zona, do you really think so little of me that you could believe I would, by action or inaction, allow you to be ruined? I never would. I couldn’t. Besides,” she added, “we haven’t done anything.” She regretted it as soon as she said it.

“I think that we are both young, and do not know what the future brings,” Zona said, ignoring Lily’s last statement.

“It will bring me to you every time.”

Zona rolled her eyes, jokingly, and let out an exasperated sigh. “Did you get that from one of your novels?”

“No, I came up with it myself,” Lily said proudly. “Maybe one of these days, I’ll write my own novel, filled to the brim with romantic platitudes.”

“You would.”

Lily smiled. She leaned over and kissed Zona, as she had many times over the past few weeks, but this time, she did not stop. This time, Zona did not stop her; she urged Lily on. Lily paid close attention to Zona’s movements, not wanting to push her where she did not want to go, but unwilling to capitulate to her abstract fear. Zona began to shake, and Lily paused until she realized she had begun to tremble as well. She put her hand at the back of Zona’s neck, kissing her harder, not allowing their lips to part. Moving as one, they made their way to the bed, lips fused, Zona’s back to the bed. Lily pulled away just enough to see into Zona’s face. Her heart was pounding, and she could see a persistent throbbing at Zona’s neck. She caressed Zona’s cheek, letting her hand fall to trace the lace collar at her neck, letting it slip down her dress, barely grazing her breast, letting it come to rest on Zona’s waist. This time, Zona leaned in to receive Lily’s kiss. Lily fumbled trying to get to the hooks at the back of Zona’s gown. The attempt was so utterly futile, the two started laughing nervously.

“Turn around,” Lily said. She undressed Zona with shaking hands. She stood there, naked, beautiful, exposed. Lily traced the line that traveled down the inward curve of Zona’s back to the top of her buttocks.

“Undress me, Zona.” The words came out soft and shaky.

She felt Zona’s trembling hands at her back, unlacing her corset, then at her waist, removing her petticoats; it only served to fuel her the more. It made her want to hold Zona and touch her, assure her that everything would be all right. Lily turned around to face her before Zona could finish removing Lily’s

undergarments. She grabbed hold of Zona's hands, placing them on the outside of her bodice.

Zona's breathing grew rapid; her hands began to explore. Lily pressed her body up against Zona's, kissing her neck. Frantically, Zona began removing what remained of Lily's clothing. After years of practice dressing and undressing, Zona was much more adept at garment removal than Lily had proven to be.

The two women stood before each other, naked, breasts touching lightly. The space between them was charged. Lily leaned in to Zona and kissed her fully. She guided Zona to the bed with her body, laying her down gently. She put her lips again to Zona's neck, then to her breasts. She felt them hard and taut, straining for her touch. Lily ran her hand down the length of Zona's side, following the inward and outward curve to her outer thigh and back up. She loved her curves. Lily wanted to explore the beautiful body beneath her, this angel, to its fullest, but she did not have the self-control to do so. She kissed Zona again on the mouth, and allowed her hand to slide down the plane of Zona's stomach to the wetness between her thighs. Her breath caught and something deep inside of her melted. She touched her softly, slowly, feeling Zona's legs part for her.

"Are you all right?" Lily asked afterward.

Zona smiled. "Yes," she said, her hand tracing the outline of Lily's neck and shoulder.

Lily closed her eyes, enjoying the caress. They lay like this for a while before repositioning their haphazard positions on the bed to sleep. Lily lay behind her, holding her close.

"I love you, Zona," she whispered in her ear.

"I love you," Zona replied, holding Lily's hand in her own.

Lily closed her eyes contentedly.

*Nothing will ever come between us,* she said to herself in the darkness. *We will keep it our secret, and we will be safe from the world.*

After that night, Zona's apprehensions had all fallen away. The two young women inhabited their own secret paradise. They had been careful. There had been no public slip-up. They had not been witnessed in a compromised situation where they should not have been; they had scrupulously maintained appearances, keeping their romantic relationship behind closed doors.

A lady's rooms were off-limits to entrance by anyone without a direct invitation. Besides herself, the only other that could come and go was the lady's maid. The two operated under this belief—that they were safe in their rooms.

It was a beautiful summer day. Lily sat reading, her black hair mostly hidden beneath an extravagant bonnet, while Zona tramped about bareheaded and in her stockings, gathering flowers to press. Lily looked over to the shoes Zona had kicked off. There were certain freedoms Zona had that she did not. Lily watched her picking out only the most perfect blooms, completely absorbed. *She would run about barefoot if she could.* Lily's eyes took in Zona's slender ankles, picturing them without the hindrance of stockings. Her imagination quickly ran away with her, traveling along Zona's calves to her thighs, to Zona's scent. She was in thrall to Zona—even the woman's feet could somehow send her into this state of yearning. She crossed her legs to no avail.

Wanting nothing more than to be alone with her, Lily had stated that she wanted no dinner and would retire early, feeling somewhat faint from the heat of the day. "Wish mother a good evening for me," she said to her father. Her father nodded that he would.

The two headed up the stairs, and upon reaching their rooms, began frantically removing their clothing, letting it fall where it would as they made their way to their bed. Unfortunately, Lily had not considered her mother's reaction to discovering that she had gone to bed early feeling ill. She had not considered anything

beyond getting Zona's naked body against her own.

Later, Lily would go over that moment in her mind a million times. How long had her mother stood there before she let out that horrible gasp, her eyes wide in disbelief, her hand to her mouth? Lily had quickly reached for the sheets to cover themselves. Her mother went running out of the room. Lily ran behind her, but this time to lock the door. The fear in Zona's face was almost debilitating. "Get dressed," she ordered. Lily looked about the room, at clothing flung everywhere. She saw it as her mother would have seen it.

"We have to get out of here!" Lily said frantically, pulling her clothes on. "We are already ruined. The only hope we have to stay together is to leave right now."

They dressed hastily. Lily ran to the window. They were on the second floor, and it was too high to jump. She heard the door handle jiggle, and then her father pounding on the door, demanding that she open it. Lily tried to think. Zona cried, distracting her. She heard the jingle of keys outside her door. All of the blood drained from her face. The futility of the situation hit her hard, a punch in the stomach. She reached for Zona and hugged her, crying.

"They won't keep us apart. I'll find a way," was all Lily could think to say.

Zona was unceremoniously pried from her arms and taken from the room.

Lily was left alone, locked in her room. She was kept like this for almost a week. Mrs. Timms, the cook, brought her meals. That was all the contact she received.

"What have they done with Zona?" she asked of Mrs. Timms. From her window, Lily had witnessed Zona's late-night removal on the same evening they had been discovered together, but she had been told nothing.

Mrs. Timms only looked at her, the gray eyes in her careworn face almost squinting from stress and fatigue. She had not fully recovered from the death of her husband less than a year ago,

Lily knew, and now this.

“Please tell me,” Lily pleaded. “I won’t request anything more of you, if you’ll only answer that.”

Mrs. Timms sighed. “I believe they sent her home, Miss.” Lily’s eyes followed her out of the room, the swish of her uniform whispering commiserations as she left.

“Put on something warm,” Lily’s mother said, waking her up in the deepest part of the night. Lily dressed and stepped out into the night air. It was so cold.

The malevolence of her father’s features were exaggerated by the shadows cast by the lantern light. He held the door of the elaborate park drag open for her to step in. His posture indicated that it was not a gesture of civility—if she did not step in on her own, he would use physical force. She glanced up at the driver, Mr. Wendt, who was usually so jovial, but not tonight. Tonight he stared straight ahead, no hint of a smile. He pulled down on his short top hat, a useless gesture against the cold—proper uniform was required by her father in whatever circumstance or weather. His wife was bundled up beside him, better equipped with a hand muffler and a comforter around her shoulders. *How odd he should bring Mrs. Wendt along*, the thought sending a sudden chill down her spine that had little to do with the temperature. *This will be no short trip*, she realized. *Wherever they are taking me, it is far away from here*. She’d been given the opportunity to forget all this, forget Zona, and marry Mr. Daugherty. She had refused. She was being done away with.

Lily climbed into the carriage, followed by her mother and then her father. She took a seat across from them. The carriage took off at her father’s thump on the roof with his walking stick. They moved along very fast, so fast, it scared her. She bounced painfully on the thinly cushioned seat, putting her hands out to either side to hold herself in place. The door was to her left. *I could leap out right now. I could find my way to Zona, and we could get*

*away*. Her mother burst into tears, as if divining somehow what her daughter had been thinking. Lily snapped back to reality, her eyes staring into her mother's. *How many times have those eyes looked on me with love?* Now they were pained, worse than that, heartbroken. Her mother's soft, full features had weakened somehow—what was once subtle yet distinct had become vague and sagging. The semblance Lily had once resembled had changed. She wondered if they would still be recognizable as mother and daughter. Her father stared at her accusingly for causing the pain. *He hates me*.

Then all at once, there was a snapping sound, and a momentary feeling of weightlessness before her head slammed against the side of the carriage, and she found herself lying face down in the packed dirt of the road, the taste of blood in her mouth. It all seemed to have happened in an instant. She was disoriented, but could hear the sound of screaming and the sound of wood giving under terrible force. Running to the edge of the road where it dropped steeply, she saw the carriage falling, cartwheeling in flames, until it landed with a crash at the bottom. Her knees gave out, hitting the hard-packed dirt with a painful thud.

Her parents, she knew, were dead, the driver and his wife too. Lily's breath came quickly, her heart pounding. She was free under the most horrible circumstances. This was her chance. She scrambled onto her feet, running through the nighttime countryside. She had no money, no food, but she would get to Zona if she had to walk and beg the whole way.

The pounding of a running horse sounded behind her. She threw herself down in the long grass, breathing shallowly—the scents of damp earth a comfort. She grasped tightly at the ground as she heard the horse slow, carefully approaching. She wanted to become one with the earth, hidden by it, indiscernible. The legs of the animal came into view right beside her prostrate form. Lily refused to look up.

Without a word, her brother dismounted, picked her up and set her on the horse. He mounted the horse, sitting behind her,

and ran the horse at full gallop until they reached the estate.  
Lily was returned to her rooms and locked inside.

Again Lily's only contact was Mrs. Timms, until her brother, Alfred, appeared in her rooms a week later.

"You are believed dead," Alfred said bluntly. His usually handsome features turned sour with his tone.

"What!"

He didn't respond.

"Why? Why would they think that?" she asked, horrified.

"Because that is what I have told them."

"Why!" she screamed. "Why would you say such a thing?"

"To preserve our name," he answered, his voice calm and firm. "Now no one will know where you were headed, or why."

She hadn't known where she was headed, but she argued, "They wouldn't need to know. You wouldn't have to tell them. You could still say you were mistaken, that I am alive," she pleaded.

"Mistaken?" He laughed wildly. "You must be protected from yourself. I am only doing what is best for you. I want you kept from the madhouse as much as you. However, you cannot be free to do as you will out in the world. You lack discretion. You will either remain here, like this, or you will be sent secretly away where they will attempt to cure you, as they claim. I will not send you away unless you force me to." His tone, though threatening, was also sympathetic.

*The madhouse.* A sick realization began to ferment in the pit of her stomach. *Am I to be kept like this, a prisoner in my own home?* The realization turned to an immense overwhelming fear with a single focal point: Zona. How would she ever get to see Zona again? Without this hope, how would she go on? "This is little better than a madhouse, then, and you are no better than a crooked keeper!"

"I assure you," Alfred straightened, his dark eyes flashing,

“this is much better than where our parents would have sent you,” he said without emotion.

She began to go into hysterics. Her brother turned and left, locking the door behind him. She chased him, slamming into the door as he shut it. Then, tirelessly, she screamed and pounded on the door. She refused to stop. She would shriek and bawl without end until he released her. Some time later Alfred returned to give her a dose of a vile tasting liquid. She had tried to refuse it, slapping the spoonful of green liquid to the floor, but he was stronger than her. His large hand tightening around her upper arm was painful. She didn’t want to be pressed up against the wall anymore. She wanted him to leave her alone. Giving in, Lily finally opened her mouth and swallowed the mouthful of laudanum. It did its work quickly—the waking world slid away. She awoke the next morning, still groggy, with horrible bruises on her right arm.

Realizing the seriousness of her predicament, Lily knew she had to appear calm and resigned. At first, Alfred checked on her regularly, several times throughout the day, and often throughout the night. However, seeing Lily’s docile behavior, this duty was shortly returned to Mrs. Timms, who was a great deal less anxious and foreboding than Alfred. Soon, there was a routine, which was exactly what Lily had been waiting for. Mrs. Timms would check on her at meal times and sparsely throughout the day, but would leave her alone for the entirety of the evening following supper. Still, Lily waited; she would not take any unnecessary risk. She knew she would get only one chance.

*1834*

It had been more than a year. A year. But, eventually, Lily was given permission to be about the house. During her confinement, there had been some profound changes in the house. Only two servants remained: Mr. McKlintock, the gardener, and Mrs.

Timms, now the only house servant. There were new locks on all doors that led outside—every one locked from the inside, and requiring a key. As had already been done to the windows in her own rooms, Lily was surprised to discover that every single window in the parts of the house still in use had been exchanged for the gritty, opaque windows—“etched” was the proper term for them, she was informed. And just as in her own rooms, they were all nailed shut. They were also covered over with heavy curtains. Not a single visitor came. Alfred had effectively banned all visitations, and, apparently, no one saw fit to contravene. In her dull and oppressive home, a sunless, airless tomb of stone, Lily did as she was told.

Alfred had begun to trust her, and Lily began devising a plan. This time, she would not run off wildly. She needed money, a head start, and some sort of advantage. And she needed to wait for the perfect opportunity.

## 1835

Time went by slowly. But after several seemingly eternal months, she learned that Alfred would be away for a few weeks. He had not gone away once since the accident. It was a miracle. On hearing the news, her heart began to pound. This was the opportunity she had been waiting for.

“You will behave yourself, Lily,” her brother had admonished. “Mrs. Timms has been given the authority to keep you locked in your rooms, should you misbehave, even in the slightest. I will make this journey as short as possible. I am trusting you. There is a lot at stake for you,” he warned her menacingly. “You mind yourself.” Lily seethed, but only shook her head in assent, playing the part of the child he had assigned to her.

Lily immediately began to work loose the long nails that had been hammered through the wood frame of her window into the sill, using her fingers and a butter knife she had kept from one of

her meals. She rocked the long nails back and forth, then pushed them back into place so they would not be noticed.

After her brother's departure the following week, Lily had astutely carried on with her usual routine. By the end of the week, Lily knew Mrs. Timms was confident that there would be no trouble. Late one afternoon, Lily took her first explicit steps toward escape. She quietly sneaked to her brother's rooms. The door was locked, an eventuality she had, stupidly, not considered. Her brother would be the only one who carried a key. Lily began to feel tendrils of hopelessness tugging at her insides. Desperately, she spent the evening in her room, practicing picking the lock on the door between her bedroom and Zona's room with various implements. She had no success; she would never be able to pick the lock to her brother's rooms. She threw down the hairpin she had been using and gave in to tears of frustration. *What am I going to do?* She could easily get away from the house, but with no money and no means of hiding her identity, she would not get far. And everything she needed was separated from her by a single wooden door, not three inches thick.

"Mr. McKlintock," she said to herself. He lived in the gardener's shed on the property.

Lily went over it in her head. She would have to sneak out and sneak into his home. He would be there, though, as it would have to be at night, and the same night that she would leave, or he would notice things missing before she could get away. Plus, his clothing would be dirty and unkempt, not the gentlemen's clothing she needed and had hoped to steal from her brother. And, she realized, it was doubtful that there would be enough, if any, money to be easily found amongst Mr. McKlintock's possessions. It was completely unrealistic, yet it began to seem her only chance. She would almost certainly be caught and sent away. Lily's only available option would fail. It began to seem that whether she tried to escape or stayed put, she would never again see Zona.

Lily went about depressed and defeated, feeling with each

passing day the unseen filament that connected her and Zona uncoil, growing slack, and increasing their distance from one another. Until one afternoon, only a few days before her brother was due to return.

Lily was sitting in the library when she had heard a door open and close, and the click of a lock. She opened the library door slightly and peeked out. She saw Mrs. Timms walking from Alfred's chamber door. *She has the key*, Lily realized, *of course*. All that she needed to do was get hold of that key, and she knew she could. Lily knew Mrs. Timms's habits. She knew Mrs. Timms had a tendency to set the keys down. Time and again, Lily had seen her set them on a counter or table, having finally grown annoyed at their clanging at her side. Those keys were now the only occupation of Lily's thoughts. She would need to get the key, and then return it without Mrs. Timms noticing. This was an easier task than she could have imagined—she had only to wait for it.

Lily kept her eyes on Mrs. Timms from the drawing room where she sat idly, book in hand, not reading a word. As the afternoon waned, and she continued to monitor the overworked and perpetually frazzled woman trace her usual pattern through the house, she noticed that Mrs. Timms no longer had the keys attached to her side.

*She has set them down.*

Lily jumped up. She listened, waited for Mrs. Timms to go around to the servants' passage, then she slipped into the empty kitchen. Looking at the ring of keys, though, she was stumped. *Which key is it?* They were all brass. They all looked the same, except for the variations in their teeth. She frenetically flipped through the keys on the key ring, fighting back tears of anger. A tiny engraved letter on the head of one the keys caught her eye. It was the letter "N." *For Netherfield, I suppose*. She looked closer. They were all engraved. Another was engraved with the letter "W." She wasn't sure what that one meant. *Perhaps the west wing?* That wing was now permanently locked. She found

another marked with an “L” and an “N”—her own initials. She gasped in excitement, her fingers flitting through the rest of the keys until she landed on exactly what she was looking for, quickly removing the key from the ring and slipping it into her shoe. She left the kitchen and was back in her seat in the drawing room again before Mrs. Timms returned. Lily watched Mrs. Timms go into the kitchen. She watched her come back out, and then go back in. Mrs. Timms had not noticed. Lily exhaled a long breath. She knew, if she was going to do anything, she had to do it now. Dinnertime was approaching, and she needed to accomplish her goal and return the key before she was locked in her room for the evening. That is, if she really meant to leave tonight. Besides, the longer she held the key, the more likely it was that it would be discovered missing.

Lily left the drawing room, partially closing the door to obscure the view into the room. Closing it completely would certainly arouse Mrs. Timms’s suspicions. She hoped that Mrs. Timms would assume her still inside, and would not check. She crept up to the second floor to her brother’s rooms. She took the key from her shoe and looked at the lightly engraved italic letters “A” and “N.” She was afraid to slide the key in, afraid that after all, she was wrong, and the key would not work. “Alfred Netherfield,” she whispered the name that fit the initials, hoping that saying it would make it true. She slid the key in the lock and turned. The mechanism in the door turned and clicked with little effort—the door was unlocked.

Lily let herself in and closed the door behind her. She did not want to waste any time. She walked silently to the closet, removing two complete suits, including linen shirts and top hats. She picked up a pair of his shoes—they were much too big. She would have to come up with a different solution for footwear. She quickly found two pairs of gaiters to use as shoe coverings. Then she moved to his desk. In the top drawer, she found a stash of money. She smiled; she had counted on this, and as it turned out, it was more than she had been hoping for. Lastly, she stole a

pocket watch she saw sitting on a bureau. She did all this in only a few moments. She exited quietly, locking the door behind her, and scuttled, arms full, past the library and to her own rooms, where she secreted the goods in her closet. Then she headed back down the stairs to return the key. She listened for movement in the kitchen, but heard nothing. Opening the door, she saw that Mrs. Timms was not there. Luckily, the keys still sat where she had left them. Lily quickly returned the key to its place on the ring. Exiting the kitchen in a hurry, Lily ran straight into Mrs. Timms.

“Where’d you get yourself off to?” she asked Lily, wearily. “Went into the drawing room to fetch you for dinner, and you weren’t there.”

“I’m sorry. I went into my rooms for a moment.”

“Checked there, too. You weren’t there.”

Lily saw the suspicion in Mrs. Timms’s eyes. “Then we missed each other on the stairs,” Lily answered, knowing even in her brother’s absence Mrs. Timms would have used the servants’ stairway.

“Perhaps,” Mrs. Timms responded, warily.

Lily’s hands felt cold. She knew this had been a close call, and that she had aroused Mrs. Timm’s suspicions.

After dinner, Lily excused herself and went to her rooms early. Mrs. Timms followed behind, locking her in for the evening. Tonight, Lily was grateful for it; she would not be bothered. She pulled the two suits from where she had hid them in her closet, and began to hem them the best she could at the cuff and at the sleeve. She wished Zona were here to take care of this part. She would have been able to tailor them as if they had been ordered just for her measurements, but as it was, hemming was the only thing Lily would attempt. To try to take in the jackets would have made them look sloppy and more noticeable. As for the pants, they could be easily pinned and hidden under the jacket. When

she had finished, she packed the other suit and a few of her and Zona's nicest dresses, a few toiletry items, and two of her favorite novels.

She paused. The library was the only thing she would miss about Netherfield, about this place she had once called home. She hoped that wherever she and Zona ended up, there would be a decent circulating library. London! The thought came to her, as if of its own volition. The very best libraries will be in London. In that instant, she decided she would take Zona to London. There would surely be a niche they could carve for themselves in so large a city as London, bristling with endless opportunity.

Finished packing, she took up the task she had put off as long as she could. She pulled out a pair of Zona's sewing scissors and went to the large mirror above her toilet. She looked at her long, dark locks, and allowing no sentiment, began cutting them off. She cut her hair short, like a boy. She looked at herself, and the piles of wavy curls about her feet. *This will fool no one.* She put on one of the top hats she had taken from Alfred's room.

"Oh God," she said, shaking her head. She would have preferred a hat that offered a bit more coverage, but a gentleman wore a top hat. And gentlemen were not hassled, they were deferred to—given the wall and a wide berth. And most of all, were not questioned.

It was nearing ten o'clock, and though she knew Mrs. Timms would not be retiring for another hour or so, she wanted to leave soon. She needed to catch the post chaise as it came through, and she did not know what time that would be, only that it would be coming through sometime tonight. Fortunately, Mr. McKlinton would have already been asleep for hours. Except for rare occasions, he rose and slept with the sun, so she did not have to worry too much about him spying her on the lawns. And the opaqued windows of Netherfield would prevent Mrs. Timms from glimpsing her. *Unless she has entered into any of the locked up portions of the house where the windows are still transparent glass.* The thought sent a chill down her back. She did not think

it was likely, but it was certainly possible. She pushed it out of her mind, busying herself with pulling the sheets and the duvet cover off her bed, tying them end-to-end. *Rapunzel*, she thought sardonically.

Everything was ready. All that remained to be done was to change into the suit. She pulled on the black pantaloons and pinned them at the back, cinching them about her waist. She then put on the high-collared, white linen shirt and the tan waistcoat, buttoning and smoothing it down. She slipped the pocket watch into the proper pocket, and slipped the chain fob through the buttonhole. After several attempts, she managed to do a passable job in tying the black cravat. She pulled a pair of black knitted socks over her feet, and put on a pair of flat, cream-colored shoes, then slipped the pantaloon straps under each. The shoes did not match the suit well; however, after putting on a pair of gaiters, this was hardly noticeable. She then threw on the fitted redingcote she had picked out for herself, black with a tan liner, and buttoned it at the waist. It was noticeably loose on her for a garment meant to be fitted, but there was little she could do about it. Fortunately, her height made up for some of this. Lily walked over to her mirror to get a good look at herself before topping off the ensemble with a black felt top hat. She smiled at herself. Now, wearing the full ensemble, it did not look so unbelievable after all, despite the slightly disheveled clothing and the soft feminine features and full lips under the cropped head of hair. She had heard of women dressing as men and assuming men's roles before. Not that she had ever seen such a woman herself, that she knew of. Even so, the thought gave Lily courage. *After all, it isn't such a new idea. It's at least as old as Shakespeare.*

It was time to go.

Lily looped the long piece of fabric around one of the legs of her bed, then tied the two ends to her bag. The nails she had worked on slipped out easily, and she opened her second-story window as slowly and quietly as she could. With the makeshift rope, she lowered her bag to the ground, setting it down on the

lawn without a sound. Now it was her turn. She looked out into the unwelcoming darkness, down the wall that was slick with ivy. She looked back at her rooms. The only thing to keep her here was a warm bed and a fire. *It's not enough.*

She climbed out the window, carefully making her way down. She slipped once on the smooth ivy, and was left dangling precariously, holding onto the bed sheet with one hand, but she quickly righted herself and made it safely down.

Her feet on solid ground, she was immeasurably happy. She untied the bag from the rope, and pulled the rope-sheet hand over hand until it retraced its loop around the leg of her bed, and the entire thing came tumbling back down. She stuffed it into a ball and shoved it in some thick shrubbery, hiding the evidence of her escape, and hopefully buying more time. Then, she ran.

Now the success of her plan—everything—hinged on her ability to get a seat on the post. Lily was not sure exactly the route the post took, but she knew it was basically in the direction she needed to be going, and she would have to depend on that. She would have to flag it down from the road, which was a dangerous endeavor. The post chaise would be flying down the road at full speed, and the driver would not likely want to stop, especially if the driver thought she might be an unsavory character, which was likely. She knew her chances of flagging it down would be better if she had remained dressed as a woman, but her opportunity for anonymity and her chances for making it to her destination safely—to Dunlow and to Zona—would have been greatly reduced if she had. She ran along the road, hidden in the shadows, until Netherfield was completely out of sight. She stopped and waited just off the road, hidden in the shadow of a linden tree. It was dark and quiet, and a light breeze, dense with the evening's cold, tickled her exposed skin and whispered in the leaves above her head. In this moment, in this place, she seemed the only person in the world. Lily waited for a stranger upon whom all of her hopes now rested.

Finally, Lily heard the noise of pounding hooves and jostling

carriage. She could barely make it out in the distance, but she could tell it was approaching quickly. *What if it isn't the post?* she suddenly feared. She had to risk it; if she waited behind the tree until she was sure, she would miss it as it dashed past. When it was still a good way off, Lily stepped out of her hiding place and onto the side of the road.

The driver was mounted on the left front horse, riding postilion. The rig did not slow. The driver made no acknowledgment of having seen her. Lily was not sure if he had not seen her, or if he was ignoring her. She determined it must be the former. She stepped out into the middle of the road. The four-horse team came bounding directly at her. She waved her hands frantically in the air, preparing to throw herself out of the way if they did not slow. Suddenly, the driver yelled and pulled hard on the reins. The horses reared up, and Lily put her arms up to protect herself, though they were still far enough away, they could not have hurt her.

“Bloody hell!” the driver cursed. “What are you about?” he demanded.

Lily swallowed, consciously tightening her throat to gain control of her voice and drop it to a lower range. Her hands felt like ice, but she felt a flush of heat tear through her body. She was breaking out in a sweat. She fought for control. “I am in need of a seat. It is somewhat of an emergency.” She now noticed the guard at the back of the carriage, his face taut and his pistol raised.

The driver looked at her aghast. “An emergency, you don’t say!” he responded angrily. “What sort of emergency sends a gentleman such as yourself slinking about in the middle of the night, flagging down coaches? I’d like to know.”

*He called me a gentleman.* Lily felt elation and a boost to her confidence. She turned her frightened gaze from the guard, still feeling the weapon aimed at her, to the driver, and summoning all her courage, mimicked the rakish smile of her brother, at least as it had been before everything had changed. It occurred to her at this most inopportune of times that her brother had changed

long before she had been discovered with Zona. But she had been too distracted—too in love—to give it much thought and again she was unable. As quickly as the thought came into her head it was dismissed. “The sort of emergency that brings me out is the same sort that might send any man suddenly afoot in the middle of the night,” she replied.

The driver raised his eyebrows, a grin forming as realization dawned.

“If you must know,” she went on cockily, “I pursued a certain chaste female, and now I find myself chased...by her father. Not a very understanding fellow, I must say.”

The driver let out a bellow, followed by a long, hearty laugh, slapping his leg and wiping tears of mirth from his eyes.

Lily smiled broadly.

“Hop in, if you like,” the driver finally said after catching his breath.

Lily ran to the carriage, stopping at the door. The guard still had her in his sights. She stared at him silently, unsure of how to proceed. At last, he lowered his pistol and took his seat. Lily let herself in, her heart still thumping. She could hear the driver still chuckling to himself. The carriage started up with a lurch, and bounded down the road again at full speed, hitting, it seemed to Lily, every rutted spot on the road.

“Where are we?” Lily asked of the driver when they had stopped at a post house. They stood on a landing as the horses were being changed out. The guard leaned against the wall, still eyeing her suspiciously. She ignored him.

“You trying to get anywhere in particular?”

“Dunlow,” Lily responded, “to the train station there.”

The driver spat. “Don’t see why you would. Silly looking contraptions, them trains, nothing but a carriage on rails, and not any faster as a well-run post.”

She had seen plates depicting railway cars, and “a carriage on rails” was exactly what they were. The bottom level, the interior, was basically a carriage equipped with specially made wheels

to ride on rails. The top level had seating for several more, but other than the shade offered by a simple fabric covering, those passengers were completely exposed to the elements.

“Dunlow’s the end of the trip for me too,” he volunteered. “You can stay on until then, if you like. It’s a long trip, mind you. There’ll be a fee.”

“Of course. Thank you,” Lily responded. *This is working out perfectly.* She could not believe her luck.

“Damn railway’s gonna put me out of business,” the driver muttered to himself as he turned away to check out the new team that had been supplied for this leg of the journey.

It was a long and uncomfortable trip. The night had passed, and the sun had already been up for hours. Lily’s legs ached from sitting. Her rear end, she felt sure, was a giant bruise from the constant bouncing on the hard wood seats. Her arms were utterly fatigued from trying to hold on and resist the jarring effects of the carriage’s movements. They had made another stop in the early morning to change out the horses, and she had blessed it. To Lily’s great relief, they again slowed and stopped and she discovered they were at another post stop. She stepped out into the late morning sunshine, stretching her stiff limbs back into life. Her stomach was grumbling, and she reproached herself for not thinking to bring any food. She did not know how much this trip was going to cost her, and she still needed to purchase train tickets; she would not waste any of the money on food. She would have to wait until she reached her destination. Hopefully Zona could pack some provisions.

“We’re on the last leg now,” the driver offered as he drank his ale, while Lily watched him thirstily. “We’ll be in Dunlow by late afternoon.”

Lily smiled, wishing she felt more relieved than she did. By now, she would have been discovered missing. The search would be well underway. *Had they gotten word to her brother yet? He knows, she felt certain, exactly where I’ll head. At least I have a good head start.* She settled herself back into the carriage. The curtains were

tied back to let as much of the daylight in as possible. Lily would have liked to sit up top, but would have felt too conspicuous doing so. It was safer inside. She sat in a kind of daze, watching the countryside go by.

When they finally made it to Dunlow, the setting sun was coating everything in a reddish glow. The trip had taken almost an entire day and night. She looked about suspiciously. She felt paranoid. She settled her bill with the driver—which was reasonable, she judged—and, headed to the train station. There, she purchased two tickets to Hilcombe—the end of the railway line. She and Zona would have to hire a stage from there to London. In order to sit in the enclosed lower level carriage area of the train, she'd had to purchase first-class tickets. It was more expensive, but worth it to be out of the elements and out of view. Besides, all told, she had spent shockingly little. The money she had taken from her brother, Lily realized, would go further than she had expected.

After making her purchases, Lily asked if she might be directed to the Stiles' residence, Zona's family name. The clerk was unable to help her, and she was directed back to the post office.

Following the postmaster's directions, she made her way through the town, which was much larger than her own, and much larger than she had imagined. She was glad for it; it would work to her advantage. She passed a tavern, and her stomach growled. She was starving and thirsty. *Well, I do have plenty of money and time*, she thought. She needed to wait until it was dark, anyway. Lily approached, and stopped just outside the door, doubting that women were allowed. Then she looked down at her pantaloons, and laughed at herself. She smoothed her waistcoat and entered. The deferential tavern keeper served her a pint of ale and a bowl of oyster stew.

Lily later found her way to the Stiles' residence easily, feeling her pulse quicken when she recognized the house as it had been described to her. As she looked at the small house from where

she stood across the street, a figure exited the house. The figure looked casually at Lily. *Zona!* Lily stood still, watching. Zona turned away, unperturbed, and walked down the street. *She doesn't recognize me*, Lily thought, half in joy, half in disappointment. She considered chasing after her, letting Zona know that it was she, that she was here. No, she told herself. Wait until the evening.

Lily went into a nearby alley from which she could see the house. It smelled unmistakably of urine. She held the back of her hand to her nose not relishing the idea of spending so many hours in this stinking place. Zona returned, shortly. After a few moments, Lily was able to spy Zona in the house. She could see her moving about. Zona's room, she hoped.

Time passed slowly. Lily leaned against the brick of the wall, refusing to take a seat in the filth at her feet. Dusk seemed to remain forever on the horizon, though the dark alley grew ever darker. Lily feared the footfalls that echoed at her from the street. She waited in fear for men, sent by her brother, or her brother himself, to go bounding up the walkway to the little house and give word of her escape, putting the house on alert, ruining her chances. Or worse, for them to sneak up on her from behind in this dark alleyway, and drag her away. To her relief, not a soul ventured into the alley; no one approached the house. In the gloom of the alleyway, it occurred to her: It's been nearly two years. Will Zona even want to see me? Lily looked across to the house. *I've not forgotten. I've never stopped loving. Neither would she.* She had come all this way, she wasn't about to give up on Zona now. A slight breeze came up and cleared the foul air for a brief moment.

After the sun had been down for hours, and the last light had gone out in the house, Lily approached what she hoped was Zona's window. Peeking inside, she could not make anything out. She tapped lightly on the window, waited a few seconds, then tapped again. Zona's sudden appearance at the window made Lily jump. Seeing the strange young man outside her bedroom window, Zona started then turned as if to run for safety. Lily had

no choice but to cry out loudly to be heard through the glass.

“Zona, wait! It’s me. It’s Lily.”

Zona froze and turned, walking with trepidation to the window.

She was still so beautiful. Her features had become more angular, creating a balance with her pronounced nose and accentuating those fine lips. She had the beauty of a woman, not the girl she realized Zona had been two years ago—that they both had been.

Zona opened the window and stared at Lily for long moments, tears welling.

“It is you, isn’t it?” Zona whispered in the darkness, her eyes wide.

“It is,” Lily replied. She saw the look of disorientation clouding Zona’s features as she took in the disguise. “It was the only way I could think to get all the way to you unnoticed,” she explained jovially.

“But we were told you were dead. I was sent a notice by your brother. I even managed to get hold of a Werford paper, and it reported the same. I cried for you. I...”

“I am going to London. Come with me,” Lily blurted out, smiling. “It was a lie,” she added, seriously. “Do you not believe your own eyes? Alfred thought to keep me secreted away at Netherfield, like some mad woman.”

Zona stared back at Lily, baffled. “London! What shall you do there?” Zona asked.

“We shall do whatever it takes to survive. Whatever it is we must endure, it is still better than enduring without each other.”

“I suppose.”

Lily could see Zona’s uncertainty. “You don’t want to come with me?”

“Is it really you? I don’t know... What is happening? We will have no home, no place. How will we get money? Lily, is it really you?”

Lily reached in and gently pulled Zona’s face to hers, kissing

her softly, deeply, having never forgotten how Zona's lips moved against her own. "Zona, it's me."

Zona's face was flushed and her eyes again welling with tears.

"We will make a living with your sewing, of course, and I... perhaps I could write. And," she paused for a moment, "there are other ways in which women may make a good deal of money in one night, if they are amenable."

"You can't possibly mean..." Zona blurted, unwilling to finish the sentence.

"Is it really so different from being forced to marry for the sake of security? Is that not goods for services?" Lily said, reaching. "At least there would be some measure of choice in the matter."

"Yes! Yes, it would be very different. You said so yourself."

"So I did, and so I meant it then, when my home with him would include you. But what are the comforts of home and place if I don't have you? Come with me, Zona. Do you not love me as you once said?"

They stared at each other through the open window.

"I cannot do what you would have me do to survive. I want to be with you always, but...I cannot do...that." Zona's fingers gripped the windowsill tightly.

Lily placed her hands on Zona's, feeling their grip slacken.

"Then you will not. Hopefully I won't either. I meant it only as a last measure. I will do whatever is necessary for our survival."

"That is not acceptable!"

"Either way, I am going," Lily lied, "whether you come with me or not. I have no option now. I cannot return home. Will you come?"

Zona nodded in agreement, never lowering her gaze from Lily's.

Lily breathed an imperceptible sigh of relief.

Zona reached through the window, her fingers tracing the features of Lily's face. The touch sent a wave of pain into her chest. It had been so long.

*Have I changed too?* Lily wondered. Zona's fingers pressed lightly against Lily's generous lips. Lily first kissed them then grasped them tightly. They didn't have much time. This would have to wait.

"We must leave now. I brought a man's suit for you to wear." She fished it out of her bag and handed it to Zona through the window. "Pack just one bag; we can't carry a lot. I already have two of your best dresses and petticoats. And get food from the kitchen, as much as you can quickly get. Hurry! And be quiet. And get scissors," Lily added.

Zona looked back at Lily in confusion, but went ahead, returning in a few moments with a loaf of bread, cheese, a small roast and some boiled red potatoes.

"This is all I could get," Zona said handing the food to Lily over the sill.

"That's perfect," Lily replied, nervously. She was getting anxious to move on.

Zona quickly packed a bag, moving around in the darkness. She changed into the suit Lily had brought for her as quickly as she could, found the best shoes she could to go with the outfit, and was out the window.

"Turn around," Lily directed. She pinned Zona's pants at the back. "There, nice and snug." Lily looked Zona over in her brown pantaloons and linen shirt. Lily felt her chest tighten. She was unprepared for how attractive Zona would look in the outfit. Lily leaned in impulsively and kissed her, despite the time constraints. "Now, we must do something about your hair. And you haven't tied your cravat."

"I don't know how to tie it. What about my hair?" Zona asked, defensively.

"It is too long. You will not pass for a boy with hair like that."

"I can shove it up under the hat," Zona argued.

"It can't be hid very well under a top hat. We have to cut it. I'm sorry," Lily said seeing the regret in Zona's eyes.

They walked a roundabout path to the train station, taking

quieter, less-trafficked streets until they came upon a bench, lit dimly by candlelight coming through a window. Lily did not like being so obvious, but the street was empty, and she did need some light to do a passable job on Zona's hair.

"Sit here."

Zona sat, and Lily closed the scissors on the first swath of yellow locks. She felt Zona shudder at the silvery, grating sound the metal shears made as they sliced through her hair. Lily was done within a few minutes. It was not a good job, but it would not be noticeable under the hat.

"There you are," Lily said.

Zona reached up and ran her hand through her hair.

"Oh!" she said softly. Lily saw the tears forming.

"It will grow again," Lily said, rubbing Zona's arm. Lily reached in her bag and pulled out a brown top hat to match Zona's suit, and placed it on her head.

"Perfect," Lily said surveying the completed picture. Almost complete. Lily bent down to tie Zona's cravat. "Now, you let me do all the talking, okay?"

Zona agreed.

"Good," she said, finishing her work. "Let's go."

Lily led Zona to the train station.

They had to wait a few hours for the next train out. Lily knew her head start had been lost in waiting. By now, her brother could be right on her heels. *Maybe*, she thought without any real hope, *he'll just let me go*.

It was early morning, and the sun had not yet risen when the train pulled up. The train station was empty, but for a few other passengers, and a pair of uniformed railway workers. Lily's eyes ran over the machine. It seemed a rude contraction—the front engine car loud and bulky and belching black smoke.

Shortly, they were directed to their seats in one of the carriage cars. Zona quivered with nervousness.

"You'll feel better when we are moving. It is the waiting that is so playing on your nerves," Lily offered then checked her pocket

watch. "Only a few minutes now," she tried to sound comforting. She looked out the window at the lightening sky.

"How long is the trip?" Zona asked.

"Let me find out for you," Lily said with a smile. She rose from her seat. "I'll be right back."

"No! Never mind. Stay here."

"It's okay," Lily stroked Zona's face. They were the only ones in the car. It appeared it would remain that way. Somehow, Lily thought, we've succeeded. "I would like to know myself how long the trip is. I will only be a moment." Zona held Lily's hand tightly, but then let it go.

Lily headed off down the steps to the platform. As she stepped down, the porter who had directed them to their seats walked up.

"Excuse me, sir," she said in as deep a voice as she could manage, "how long..."

But before she could finish her sentence the sight of another man walking up to them made her blood run cold. Before she could look away, before she could back up, he looked up and recognized her immediately.

She tried to step backward up the steps into the train, but misjudging, her heel caught on the step. She fell down on her back, and Alfred was upon her. Lily struggled as hard as she could, but she was no match against the grip of her angry brother. He hauled her up onto her feet.

"Let me go, Alfred! I will disappear, and you will never see or hear from me again. Isn't that what you want, what you would prefer? You wouldn't have to keep me hidden away." She tried to pull away.

He tightened his hold, gripping her painfully. "You cannot be left to yourself. This escape attempt is proof of it, a lady who would choose to be a homeless beggar, dressed in a man's suit, no less." He let out a sigh of disgust. Lily started to rebut this, but was quickly silenced. "Shut up," he hissed.

Lily felt the anger rise up inside of her like bile. She screamed

and flailed, started kicking and biting. Alfred slapped her repeatedly to no avail, and finally punched her in the stomach, knocking the wind out of her and dropping her to her knees. She fell onto her hands and let her forehead touch the cool brick of the platform. Finally, raising her head to meet Zona's terrified gaze through the window as her brother picked her up by the armpits and dragged her away.

She watched Zona sit frozen in place as the train started to move, slowly picking up speed. Lily watched it pull away until her brother had dragged her beyond the station, and she could no longer see it.

Lily began to sob. The train whistled twice, the second already sounding farther off than the first.

*We hope you enjoyed this  
Bella Appetizer.*

