

# **Gothic Spring**

**By  
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## **One**

I do not expect anyone to understand the bizarre sequence of events that changed my life from its bucolic existence into a living hell, nor do I look for compassion. Suffice it to say, I grew up in the northern part of England, an only child who'd been orphaned since I was ten and, prior to the time of these mishaps which I am about to describe, I had been living for five years under the protection of an indulgent aunt—a plump woman in her mid-sixties, whose faded mouse-brown hair aged her beyond her years.

Growing up, I kept to myself much of the time. Being a bookish child, I fancied that I was brighter than my classmates at the Leland School for Girls, that ivy encrusted structure that looked more like a mausoleum than a center for learning. I imagined that they resented me for my passions, Shakespeare and Milton, while they contented themselves with chatter about bustles and garden parties given by the Queen. Further, because I suffered from a severe form of epilepsy and was subject to seizures, they thought me strange, or at least, unreliable.

No matter, by the age of thirteen, my seizures increased and the purgatives became more severe. No longer did I suffer mere episodes of faintness that could be remedied with the application of trinitrini. What followed were periods of complete collapse that began with a tingling in the limbs, then a stiffening and ended in bodily thrashings so severe that I had to be held down to prevent me from doing myself an injury. Not a pretty picture I suppose, though I never had any recollections of my suffering, being unconscious at these times. Certainly these seizures and the treatments that followed, pine

baths and the application of leaches, were remedies alien to a classroom. I was forced to withdraw from school, my education assigned to the sometimes careless hands of a series of tutors, most of them so unremarkable that I can recall neither their names or faces—except for Mr. Huddleston, who was dismissed because he wrote me endless poems. The other whom I remember with some fondness was Vicar Soames who served not as my academic but as my Biblical teacher.

A cleric of advanced years, the vicar's frock coat reeked of the camphor he rubbed into his joints, and his asthma made him wheeze. Despite his impairments, he was faithful to me and tottered to my fireside each Wednesday afternoon so that, once grown used to him, I found him amusing. Toward me, he showed both patience and endurance, being neither alarmed nor repulsed by the excesses of my illness. In time, we two misfits grew together, each accommodating the other the way the earth accommodates a seed until it flowers.

On the occasions when his infirmities caused him to be absent, I missed him and was saddened when these lapses increased. His failing health affected his work in the parish, as well, and in time the church council called for his retirement. Aunt Julia was among them, though I suspect she had another motive. The extended length of our visits, the Vicar's and mine, became an annoyance to her. "The man is forever underfoot," she would often complain. Nor did the gifts he brought me—flowers and sweet meats meant as rewards for my studies—win him her approbation. At the very least, she accused him of spoiling me. At the very worst, she may have spied him kissing my hands, my cheeks.

Whenever the subject of retirement was broached, however, the vicar argued against it. "One does not retire from God's work, Miss Ellsworth," he huffed once during a

chance street encounter with my aunt. “I may not be a young man, but neither am I so enfeebled that I should be put out to pasture like an old cart horse.”

His remarks did nothing to endear him to my relative who wielded considerable influence where church politics were concerned. In the end, her will prevailed. A railway ticket was purchased, lodgings arranged for in Brighton and in a matter of days, the old man was no more than a memory.

He, for his part, wrote faithfully to me during the early months of his exile. His first letters were restrained. He described the beauty of his walks along the seashore, the temperate nature of the breezes; but as time passed, I sensed in his descriptions a hunger for my company that bordered on the sensual. “Victorine, how I long to have you with me so that we might sit together on the beach, our fingers luxuriating in the warmth of the sand. The abundance of God’s beauty here could open your heart, free you in ways that were never possible in that northern clime. If you could come to me, for a week, a day? Will you come?”

For a time, I considered accepting his invitation and even toyed with the wording of a response. “Dear Vicar, to walk with you upon the beach, to share the rhythms of the undulating waves, to feel the sun’s glow warm upon our backs, our faces, that would be heaven, indeed. How I desire it and to hear your sweet voice pour wisdom into my ears again...”

Of course, his proposition was ludicrous. Aunt Julia, because of my illness and her dislike of the vicar, would never countenance the journey. Knowing that impossibility, my thoughts were bold, shameless, perhaps. But no matter. In the end, I made no reply. What was the good of it? Because of the distance, I would never see Vicar Soames again.

He was as dead to me as my parents. I had to bury him with silence. Eventually, his letters stopped coming. It was no more than I expected. And yet, I confess to feeling betrayed. He should have prized me more.

Happily, a new man soon arrived to assume the community's pastoral duties, a man I thought to be interesting in that he reminded me of my father. Vicar Flemming was of middle height, a broad-shouldered man with a coarse beard and an uneven gait that suggested time spent at sea. His wife, Eva, by contrast, was thin and colorless, except for her mass of auburn hair.

I found her cloying. She insisted upon clinging to her husband's arm during the round of social receptions that were arranged upon their arrival. Perhaps she sensed the disparity in their talents and was afraid to lose sight of him lest he find someone more his match. Some observed this same behavior and thought her manners sweet—men, especially, for whom it would be natural to think that a woman should live in her spouse's shadow.

Aunt Julia's reaction, when she heard my opinion, was a disappointment. She defended Mrs. Flemming. "She strikes me as being a good and dutiful wife, Victorine. Someone whose demeanor you might study. You'll be a wife one day, God willing."

Being a spinster herself, I doubted that my aunt's advice was coinage but the words did make my skin crawl. I was fifteen with no desire for marriage, especially since most of the males in our village shared a common want of intellect!

My father had been an exception. He'd served as vicar of our church until his death five years earlier when he and my mother were killed in a house fire, whilst I was away, visiting my aunt. I had adored my father. Like our new vicar, he too had been of medium

height, dark and craggy, and like him, seemed more framed for hard labor than for a life upon the pulpit. But, unlike the farmers and tradesmen who populated our community, my father had been a scholar, attentive to the Scriptures and preoccupied with questions of the eternal. Some thought him too serious, even moody, but he was never so with me. I could interrupt him whenever I liked—a privilege not afforded my mother and which, I suspect, raised her ire. I would often be accused of being spoiled, though not within my father's earshot. She held her tongue in his presence; though sometimes when he sat me on his knee before the evening fire, her expression verged on anger or possibly, apprehension. I was never sure which.

I only knew that I never could please my mother. If I brought her picked flowers, she'd dump them in water and forget to arrange them in a vase. A drawing brought home from school was her opportunity to criticize. "Cows aren't green, Victorine. Grass is green. Surely there are enough cows in Braxton for you to know better." Even her acknowledgement of my successes was faint. "I met your teacher on the High Street today. She was full of praise for the fairy tale you wrote. I wonder that you didn't submit a poem as we agreed. A poem requires more *talent*, surely."

If my father detected my mother's ambivalence toward me, he never spoke of it and I kept my silence, seeing no other recourse but to try harder to please her. The task sometimes plunged me into deepest despair, especially on those nights when the voices of my parents rose above their usual murmurings and my name filtered back to me. I hated to hear them argue, especially as I was the cause. On those occasions I would fall asleep, crying.

The new pastor's similarity in form and feature to my father did much to explain my immediate interest in him. I felt a kinship between us the moment we met. When he announced that he would soon resume his duties as my Biblical teacher, I was elated. And I confess that on the morning of my first lesson at Windmill Cottage, my heart and my head were filled with butterflies. I'd barely slept the night before and had risen early so that Aunt Julia would have time to plait my wild, black tresses with ribbons.

"Such a peacock," she teased, staring at my reflection in the mirror when she'd finished. Then she uttered a sigh. "Seeing you like this, I'm reminded of how much you resemble your poor mother. She was quite the beauty in her day, though I doubt it brought her much joy."

"I don't recall that anything did," I said, allowing the memory of her to pass through me like a shadow. Then I shrugged and took another turn before the glass, determined to let nothing spoil the day.

I confess to being satisfied with my reflection. I might have wished to be taller, not so petite, and that my complexion was less pale; but my eyes were a gift from my mother, large and violet and on this day, they sparkled with expectation. My sole regret was that I wore a serviceable gray gown instead of my blue one. Aunt Julia had insisted that I make a sober first impression, an idea completely foreign to my own; but when I saw what an admirable job she had done with my hair, I gave no complaint and followed her, meek as a lamb, down the stairs for a final inspection of the parlor.

There, the curtains were drawn back to let in the light and as it was a cold November day, a fresh fire had been set. The room was perfect. No detail had gone unattended. Greens, in lieu of flowers, filled the vases and stood out against the background of

whitewashed walls and Tudor beams. On every chair, chintz cushions had been plumped to their maximum. Still, I continued to pace, fearful of some oversight. It seemed an eternity before the hall clock struck three.

Hearing it chime, I ascended the stairs to my room, hoping for a good view of the gate. A minute passed, then two, but there was no sign of the Vicar—neither in the street beyond the picket fence, nor anywhere on the gray horizon. When a quarter of an hour had passed and he was still missing, I was beside myself.

“Do you see him yet?” Aunt Julia called up from the hallway. I told her no and despaired that he’d forgotten us. But no sooner had I spoken, than I caught sight of him. He came flying down the street like a man chased by dogs, his hat grasped firmly in one hand. The garden gate squealed its warning and before I had time to offer a warning of my own, his knock could be heard on the front door.

“Never mind, Vicar. Never mind,” my aunt could be heard cooing. “Tucked away as we are on the edge of the moor, we’re only too glad that you found us.”

They commenced into the parlor and closed the door behind them to keep in the fire’s heat, and I could hear nothing more. What were they were talking about? I wondered. Was it me? Was Aunt Julia amusing our guest with stories about my nervous fluttering as I awaited him?

Knowing that she would be inclined to do so, I should have hurried downstairs. But a stronger impulse had prevented me. I wanted to make an entrance: I wanted to hear conversation stop, to enjoy the element of surprise as our visitor turned to gaze at me, his eyes taking me in, perhaps admiringly.

What I'd not reckoned with was that my guardian should take such a fancy to the vicar that for an interminable period my absence would go unnoticed. No call came from the stairwell. No voice chided me to hurry along. I feared that if I failed to make an appearance soon, I might be entirely forgotten! Horrified, I ran from my room without a final glance into my mirror.

"Dear child, I was wondering what delayed you. Not still primping, I hope." Aunt Julia turned a puckish face in our guest's direction. "She was in such a state earlier. Afraid you'd forgotten her."

Color rose to my cheeks as I shouldered past her, a frailty she was quick to note. "You seem a little flushed, dear. I hope you're not coming down with something. What do you think, Vicar? Doesn't she seem flushed to you?"

The man in the frock coat came forward, eyed me intently, and with much appreciation in his voice said, "If I'm to be allowed an opinion regarding the young Miss Ellsworth, I should say she's looking well. Very well, indeed."

I feared he might be making fun of me, but the effect of the shadow cast by his prominent brow, the mouth being thinly drawn and the jaw squared, led me to hope that here was a man of character who might be trusted. For what seemed an eternity, we peered into one another's eyes. I could feel my cheeks grow warm again and was forced to lower my gaze for fear he might read too much in my expression. He turned away, perhaps as a courtesy to me, and addressed my aunt.

"My prescription for the young lady, and I confess, for myself, would be a strong cup of tea. Could you manage that, Miss Ellsworth?"

At his question, Aunt Julia lept to attention. “Of course, Vicar. I’ve laid out a lovely tea. It’s in the kitchen. I’ll just bring it in, shall I?”

Without waiting for her guest to reply, my guardian disappeared behind a swinging door, leaving her apologies behind like a trail of fallen leaves. The Vicar and I were alone. I was so nervous I could feel a slight tingling in my left hand. *Oh, God, oh God*, I prayed, silently. *Please don’t bring on an attack. Please don’t make me appear grotesque before this man.*

I focused my eyes on the Oriental pattern of the carpet at my feet. If I could concentrate, I might hold back the tingling sensations that were creeping up my arm. I knew that I should sit down. My thoughts were becoming sluggish, floating idly in my head like goldfish in a bowl of water. I moved toward one of the chairs by the fire and the warmth seemed to revive me. Perhaps I was not having an attack after all. Perhaps I was simply nervous.

Aunt Julia returned with a trolley at that moment, and seeing the Vicar and I still standing, encouraged us to sit down, an order with which I was happy to comply. Our guest seated himself in the chair opposite me and stared with pleasure at the array of treats my aunt had assembled. How so many towers of biscuits, trifles and tarts could be piled upon on a single tray seemed a feat of magic. My guardian had outdone herself—and to such a degree that a person with a suspicious mind might have accused her of raiding the local pastry shop. However, the vicar and I were inclined to raise no questions concerning the source of this bounty. We dug into our tea and were profuse in our compliments.

Beyond being an excellent hostess, my guardian was also something of a raconteur and while we ate, clotted cream trickling down our chins, she regaled the vicar with the local gossip—meant only, she protested, to acquaint him with his new parish. The stories, however, were told with sufficient animation to keep him enthralled. He learned, for example, that Constable Mills, a sleek young man with a shock of red hair, had recently purchased a bicycle in London. It was glossy black with a padded seat and a bright, shiny bell which, when rung, was loud enough to be heard across the Commons.

“Regrettably,” said my aunt, leaning forward as though confiding to a pair of co-conspirators, “young Mills took too great a fancy to his new bell. It could be heard late into the night. Everyone was annoyed by it. Then one afternoon, he went too far. He rang his contraption as he was passing Anthea, Miss Clemmons, a teacher at the Leland Girls’ School. He was on the High Street at the time and I’m sure he meant nothing but a greeting by it. Still, she was so taken aback that she lost her balance, spun round and, as she’s not a small woman, brought the pair of them crashing on to the cobblestones.”

Tears of laughter formed in the corners of Aunt Julia’s eyes as she recalled the incident. “Anthea, you will learn, Vicar, does not take humiliation lightly. She threatened to bring a charge of disturbing the peace against our young constable and would have, too, if it hadn’t been for her friend, Elliot Pounder. He’s the music teacher at the Chapman School for Boys. He promised to have a word with his former pupil and apparently his admonishment had its effect. The bell is seldom heard now, except on occasions—like that time, just before you came, when a crate bounced free of a lorry and spilled a load of chickens onto the Commons.”

Aunt Julia sat wiping her eyes with her hanky. In a moment she would go on to snipe about Mrs. Snively's penchant of large hats or the ambition of her fellow Church Councilman, Robert Crowley, to be appointed as a local magistrate. She was prevented from it, however, by the chiming of five bells upon the hall clock.

"Dear me, where has the time gone?" said the vicar, returning a biscuit to the tea tray. "I shall be late for vespers." That said, he leaped from his chair and, giving his hostess a handshake with his thanks, he rushed from the cottage forgetting me, my lesson and almost forgetting his coat—which he was quick to retrieve before trotting down our gravel footpath in the direction of the church. Disappointed, I watched him go with his coattails flying behind him like a pair of crow's wings.

Afterwards, Aunt Julia and I returned to the customary silence of the parlor. The cushion upon which the Vicar had sat still carried his indentation, but that and the extra cup and saucer, were the only evidence of his visit. For me, he might as well have been a dream as we had barely spoken.

With some annoyance, I watched my aunt, humming to herself, as she loaded the trolley with the empty dishes and headed for the kitchen. For her, the afternoon had been a success. For me, it had been a failure. Whether the vicar returned tomorrow or each week thereafter, I had been robbed of the present, and for me, given the vagaries of my illness, the present was all I could rely upon. Standing at the center of the empty parlor, I could feel my energy dissipate as if into a vacuum. Only the wind and the sound of a bare branch tapping against the window hinted at any signs of life.

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We received no other visitors until Saturday. Jeremy Simones made our deliveries on that day, bringing produce from his father's shop. He was a few months younger than I and didn't share my love for books, but we were close all the same, much to the envy of a number of schoolgirls who considered him handsome and wanted his attention for themselves. He had been kind to me since early childhood, but I confess I took no romantic interest in him.

To his credit, the flirtations he endured never turned Jeremy's head. He remained modest throughout his life and could pass a mirror without pausing to admire his blonde reflection. Nor was he inclined to be like other boys his age, rowdy and full of mischief. What free time his father allowed, he spent designing gadgets or kites, which he flew along the cliffs at the edge of the moor. I'd often see him there during my solitary walks, chasing the wind with one of his paper birds. Sometimes he'd stop and we would walk together; but as he grew older a shyness, which I found amusing, took hold of him.

Aunt Julia was exceedingly fond of Jeremy and always had tea waiting when he arrived. They'd chat in the kitchen for an hour or more if his duties permitted, and could become so engrossed in their conversation that, if I joined them, which was not always the case, they could be slow to acknowledge my presence.

On the Saturday following the vicar's call, I made a point of seeking the pair out. I was hungry for news of our new cleric and hoped that Jeremy, as he made his delivery rounds, had collected some new information. By the time I joined them, their conversation was well underway.

“You mustn’t think that because a man has manners that he’s a fop or a dandy,” Aunt Julia was lecturing. “That would be false. Very false, indeed. Learn by his example and you’ll escape growing up to be a lout. You wouldn’t want that, would you?”

“My pop’s not like him and he’s no lout.”

“No. Your father’s a fine man. A man of character and integrity. But you could learn from someone else all the same.”

“Who?” I asked, by way of announcing myself.

Jeremy and Aunt Julia looked up from the table.

“We’re having tea, Victorine. Would you like some?”

“Yes, please.” I slid into the chair my aunt vacated and looked Jeremy in the eye.

“Who were you talking about just now? You sounded annoyed.”

The blue-eyed boy opposite me colored a little. “I’m not annoyed. We was just talkin’.”

“Jeremy thinks the new vicar’s a bit affected,” replied my aunt with her back to us.

“That’s because he’s a man of good breeding. We don’t see much of that in these parts. It makes him stand out.”

“Maybe so. But what’s the good of breedin’ around a lot of cows? If he wants to put on airs, he’s best off in London or Paris where they fancy that sort of la-de-da.” Jeremy wrung his cap as he spoke.

“My, my. Whatever’s got your back up?” Aunt Julia chuckled. “The man’s not been here much more than a month.”

“Dunno. It’s a feelin’ I guess. Like he can’t be trusted. “

“Can’t be trusted? What nonsense. He’s a man of God! Victorine likes him. Tell him, dear. Didn’t the three of us have a jolly visit Wednesday?”

I took the cup that was handed me and paused while my aunt drew another chair to the table. “I don’t know. Maybe Jeremy’s right...”

“What?” My guardian’s eyes widened.

“Well, he doesn’t have much in common with the farmers and shopkeepers of the village, does he?” I shrugged. “As you said, he’s too cultured.”

“I didn’t say *too* cultured.”

“Well, he is and you know it. He doesn’t belong in this wasteland.”

Aunt Julia’s chest swelled to the size of a pillow. She always bridled at my attacks upon Braxton. “I wouldn’t call our village a wasteland, dear. Ours is a pretty place. Peaceful and quiet—”

“It’s a wasteland!”

“It’s not the hurly-burly of London, I admit. But not everyone finds that sort of life attractive. We had several applicants for his position, you know.”

“Several?”

“Yes, Victorine. Several!”

The grocer’s son flashed me a conspiratorial smile. “Point is, he works too hard at tryin’ to impress other folks. All that talk about art and books. In the end, people around here will come to resent it.”

“Yes, they will.” I nodded. “But that’s because they’re fools.”

Jeremy slumped back in his chair, uncertain of the meaning of my reply. He'd imagined me his ally until that moment. "Is that what you think of me, then? Am I a fool?"

"Not a fool." I dropped a lump of sugar into my peppermint tea and let the pungent aroma fill my lungs. "But your studies never do come first, do they?"

"I like school, well enough..."

"Yes, but you don't read much. That's true, isn't it?"

"Haven't time. What with work and lessons—"

"And all those hours you spend on the moor flying your kites? What about then?"

Jeremy's face grew red. He might have given me a retort but Aunt Julia interceded.

"Hush now, the pair of you. I'd like a bit of peace today. Besides, Victorine, Jeremy is our guest."

"Our guest? He practically lives here."

"What a wicked thing to say, dear! You make it sound as if Jeremy isn't welcome..."

The grocer's son scraped back his chair and rose, glaring at me. "It's all right, Miss Ellsworth. Everyone knows your niece is full of opinions. Not that anyone cares."

"Don't be upset, Jeremy. Victorine doesn't mean—"

The back door slammed before my guardian's sentence could be finished.

Turning towards me with her hands on her hips, she gave me a stern look. "Victorine Ellsworth! I'm astonished. Why bait the poor boy like that, especially with his mother in her grave less than a year? He comes here for a bit of comfort and that's as it should be. That boy's been a great help to us and a good friend to you. You've no call to mock him."

I shrugged as if to make light of her accusations, but I admit I felt guilty. I had been too harsh, turning on him the way my mother used to turn on me. That wasn't my intent. He was a good friend. He didn't loathe me for my illness, nor was he jealous of my talents. I trusted him; but in truth, my trust had its limits. He was to me, like a pet, a large, gangling Labrador that made no judgments but also lacked in understanding. From a friend, I wanted more, much more.

Unlike me, Jeremy never plumbed beneath the surface of appearances, was never curious about the secret lives of other people, their innermost fears, passions, morbid desires. And if I goaded him in those directions, he would gaze at me with his wide, blue eyes, reflecting his confusion, rather than any comprehension. He was, in sum, too loving, too forgiving of my twisted inclinations.

After giving me a proper chiding, Aunt Julia sent me to my room to contemplate the error of my ways. I could not feel ill-used by her rebuke, but my penitence was short-lived. Much of the time, I spent daydreaming about our new cleric. If I gave any thought to Jeremy, it was to wonder why he had taken such a dislike to the man. That was not his way. As I have said, he was usually too generous in his thoughts. Confronted by his opinion, which was so distant from my own, I became curious as to the reason. Indeed, the more I thought on it, the more curious I became and vowed to seek Jeremy out the following Monday.

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When Jeremy saw me waiting for him in the High street, he looked surprised. Breaking from his gaggle of classmates, he jogged toward me, wary of my mood but caring nothing for the taunts the other boys hurled at his back.

My smile reassured him and the moment he was at my side, he apologized for his behavior on Saturday. “I don’t know why I got angry. I know how smart you are. You’ve won so many school prizes. I’m proud of you, honest. But sometimes...well...I don’t always know how things stand between us. I get confused.”

We began walking past rows of shops while I considered how to answer him. His charge was true. We were growing apart, not because he was the son of a shopkeeper and I had my roots in the gentry. That difference was real but of no consequence. Had I cared for him the way I sensed he cared for me, the difference in our stations would have been no impediment. I’d have thrown caution aside.

No, the growing distance between us stemmed, as I have said, from the difference in our natures. But how could I tell him that? How could I trust a friend with so little imagination? He was content with his lot while I... I hated mine—my infirmity, the suffocating village in which I was buried. I even hated myself, at times. He could never understand my despair. He’d make light of my feelings or, if I could make him see, he’d be bound to hate my dark thoughts. There was no way to explain my vicissitudes so I apologized for my behavior, as well, and said that I was on edge because of my upcoming exams.

The lie satisfied his gullible nature. Seeing him satisfied served to increase my loneliness.

We were approaching his father's shop when he paused to put a hand on my shoulder. As if attempting to read my thoughts, he said. "You like this new vicar, don't you? He's not a lout, like me, is he?"

"I never called you a lout. You're putting words in my mouth."

Jeremy's smile displayed a row of teeth that were white and even. "Oh, I'd never put words in your mouth, Victorine. You got enough of those already."

When I didn't return his smile, he rubbed his hand across the back of his neck. "I don't know why I said that. It was stupid. No wonder you think I'm a fool..."

"I don't think you're a fool. Nor does anyone else."

"Your aunt says I might turn into one."

"She doesn't mean it the way you make it sound. Besides, don't take too much stock in what she says. She called me a beast after you left on Saturday..."

"She didn't! She couldn't. I'm the one who was bein' stupid."

"You should have stayed to tell her that. I spent the entire afternoon in tears."

"Because of me?"

"Who else?"

My companion stared at his boots. "Gosh. I dunno what to say. I feel rotten."

"Say that we're still friends and that you forgive me."

He took the hand I held out to him and peered at me with a solemn expression. "It's me who should be askin' for forgiveness. I really am a lout, you know."

When I made no reply, he went further with his apology. "Look, from now on I'll keep my thoughts to myself. If you like the vicar that should be good enough for me."

We were stopped beside a crate of apples outside his father's shop at the time. I could see Mr. Simones waiting inside for his son. I picked up one golden orb and pretended to examine it. "You mustn't make me out to be such a tyrant, Jeremy. I expect you to be honest. If something's put you off about the man, then you must tell me. I might agree. You trust me, don't you?"

The shadow cast across my companion's face was not only from the fallen lock of his hair. He seemed torn between his desire to answer truthfully, yet do no harm. "I...It's not that I don't trust you, Victorine. It's just that..."

His father's call seemed to come as a relief to him. He started to back away. "I can't talk now, Victorine. Maybe later. But I don't know nothin'. Honest."