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To Turn Full Circle

Written by Linda Mitchelmore

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To Turn Full Circle

Linda Mitchelmore



Extract:
Chapter One

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Chapter One

‘Well, well, well – look what the cat’s brought in,’ Mrs Phipps said when Emma eventually made it down to the kitchen. ‘Taken you six weeks to walk this far it has.’

‘As long as that?’

‘Didn’t I just say as much?’

‘Yes, Mrs Phipps,’ Emma said. ‘What day is it? Sunday?’

‘Monday.’

Emma struggled to remember which month it might be. And the date. She pressed her lips together as she concentrated. Her mama’s and Johnnie’s funerals had been on a Friday and …

Mrs Phipps cut into her thoughts. ‘12th April to save you addling your brain.’

‘I’ve survived this long, thinking about the date’s hardly going to kill me now.’

Despite her spirited response, Emma’s voice sounded weak to her own ears. She thought about checking it was still 1909 but didn’t think she’d be able to stomach the look of derision Mrs Phipps would undoubtedly give her.

But she was on the receiving end of that look anyway. ‘King’s been to Germany and back while you were idling away upstairs.’

‘I wasn’t idling. I was convalescing.’

And still am.

It had been struggle enough for Emma coming down the stairs, her knees stiff after weeks of lying in bed, her legs so thin she was afraid they wouldn’t carry her to the bottom step. She’d almost dropped her carpet bag. Mrs Shaw – the doctor’s wife – had fetched it for her from her home, Shingle Cottage, after Emma had asked her to because it contained her ‘treasures’ and she wanted them close by her. Thank goodness Mrs Shaw had thought to look for a change of underthings in Emma’s room and had put those in, too. But that had been all. No one had expected that Emma would be ill for so long, least of all Emma herself.

The bag was hardly heavy but Emma had been grateful to leave it

in the hallway at last while she went in search of a hot drink and something to fill the cavern in her belly, her nose following the smell of frying bacon. How long had it been since she'd eaten anything decent? she wondered. All Mrs Phipps had served up was thin soup with bits of gristle floating in it.

'Pleurisy you've had,' Mrs Phipps said. 'And a fever. It comes on with shock sometimes, the doctor said. And you made a right spectacle of yourself at the funeral. I expect you want to know what happened, and how …'

'Not particularly,' Emma said.

Bits of things kept coming back to her – unwelcome, the way heart-burn is. She remembered St Mary's had been packed for the joint funeral. Emma shook her head to banish the unwelcome memory.

But Mrs Phipps was intent on dragging it all up again it seemed. 'Fainted clean away you did, maid. And hot afterwards. I've never touched anything so 'ot that didn't have a kettle or pot boiling away on the top of it. I put my hand to your forehead and I swear I yelped with the shock of it.' Mrs Phipps banged a saucepan of water down on the range. 'Thank goodness Dr Shaw was there. Of course, when he asked the congregation who could take you in I was the first to offer, because didn't your dear, dead mother and I always say we'd look out for one another's little 'uns if times got hard?'

Mrs Phipps placed her hands on her hips, turned towards Emma. But Emma was prepared to let the woman prattle on knowing all of what she said was more than likely lies and that to challenge those lies would be pointless.

'Well, maid, didn't we?'

'I don't know, Mrs Phipps. My mama never told me what she spoke to the neighbours about.'

'Well, there's gratitude.'

'I am grateful to you, Mrs Phipps. For looking after me. Keeping me warm. I don't suppose there's a bite of breakfast left I could have?' Emma's stomach grumbled and groaned with hunger. She

grasped the back of a kitchen chair for support. But Mrs Phipps was glaring at her. ‘Please,’ Emma said, remembering her manners.

‘I could spare you a scraping of dripping on some bread.’

Emma swallowed hard. She thought she might retch at the thought of cold dripping, possibly filthy with the remains of goodness knows what from Mrs Phipps’ cooking pot. ‘I was hoping for a piece of bacon,’ Emma said.

‘Oh, were you?’ Mrs Phipps sneered. ‘And where be I getting bacon from, may I ask?’

‘From Dr Shaw. I heard him say he’d be providing provisions for me and …’

Emma left her sentence unfinished, giving Mrs Phipps time to assimilate the fact Emma had heard what Dr Shaw had said. The doctor was kindness itself – going far and beyond the calling of his duty to his patients. Emma’s mama had been on the receiving end of that kindness many a time. And in return, she’d done sewing jobs for his wife without charging.

‘Well you heard wrong.’

‘I didn’t, Mrs Phipps,’ Emma said, gripping tighter onto the chair back. ‘And my laundry. Where is it? I can’t find any of the clothes I was wearing in the church when I …’

When I couldn’t bear to see my mother’s coffin with my six-year-old brother, Johnnie’s, small one sitting on top and I knew for sure then I wouldn’t see either of them again, and something overwhelmed me, bigger than the raging sea that took them both. Something dark and sinister that took my breath from me and stilled my heart.

But Emma couldn’t say the words for fear she would be overwhelmed once more and she’d have to stay with Mrs Phipps forever.

‘Well, my lady, you’d best forget anything you *thought* you heard the doctor say, you hear me? Especially if you’re wanting a bit of breakfast.’

‘Yes, Mrs Phipps,’ Emma mumbled. ‘But I can smell bacon’s been

cooked in here and not so long ago, so I'd like a piece. Please.'

She had a good idea where her Sunday dress had gone – the dress she'd worn to the funeral. To Mrs Phipps' daughter, Margaret, no doubt. Although a year or so younger than Emma, the girl was about the same size.

Emma smoothed out the creased fabric of a navy blue serge skirt that had been mended in at least three places which Mrs Phipps had placed on the bed ready for her to put on. It bagged at the waist and Emma had had to turn the waist band over twice to stop it sliding down over the tops of her shoes; shoes that had been her mother's which she'd worn to the funeral. And the cream Viyella blouse was no better; one cuff was frayed beyond mending and there was a button missing.

'I've never heard such audacity in one so young. That's what comes of your father having been a furriner, no doubt.'

'My father was a Breton, Mrs Phipps. The Breton language is similar to Welsh and Cornish. My papa …'

'Oi! Don't you come your clever ways with me, my girl. All that educating is wasted on you now. Why you didn't leave the learning at fourteen like everyone else, I don't …'

'Education is never wasted, my mama said. I stayed at school to help the little ones. Mama wanted me to be a teacher.'

Emma folded her arms across her waist. She could kiss goodbye to some breakfast now for her cheek, couldn't she?

'Did she now? From what I've heard, they won't be wanting you back at the school to help the little 'uns no more.'

'I don't believe you.'

Emma had been overjoyed when the headmistress had asked if she'd like to stay on at school after she'd turned fourteen, to see if teaching would be the career for her.

'P'raps, then, you'll believe this.'

Mrs Phipps handed Emma a letter. She opened it slowly and began to read. The school could no longer continue with her training to become a teaching assistant. The Board had had a meeting and

concluded that Emma wasn't the sort of person suitable for the education of young minds. Emma shrugged. The letter hadn't said in as many words, but her guess was that the Board's decision had something to do with her mama's death. She hadn't been entirely sure that teaching *was* the career for her anyway – and now the decision seemed to have been made for her. Things were getting worse and worse, but what could she do but struggle on? She would have to find work of some sort – enough to pay rent and for food. But what?

'Ain't pretty, is it?' Mrs Phipps said, a sly smile on her face, as though she was glad it was bad news for Emma.

'No.'

'Well, seeing as you'm up and dressed you'd best be on your way. Is that your bag I see out there in the hall?'

Mrs Phipps jabbed a stubby finger towards the hallway and Emma's carpet bag. Emma shuddered. Mrs Phipps' fingers had nails that were none too clean. Emma wasn't sure now she wanted to eat another thing that Mrs Phipps might serve up.

But she was hungry – so hungry. She didn't think she'd be able to make it to the front door never mind back to Shingle Cottage.

'The bacon, Mrs Phipps,' Emma said boldly. 'The bacon Dr Shaw said he'd instruct Foale's the butcher to deliver here for me. I'd like some, please. Just one rasher.'

''S all gone,' Mrs Phipps said.

Which was as near to a confession that Mrs Phipps had appropriated food sent for Emma as she was ever going to get out of her – the two-faced, lying, harridan. She'd only offered to look after Emma for what she'd known she would get out of it, hadn't she?

'I thought it might have,' Emma said.

'So it's bread and dripping or nothing.'

'Then I'll take the nothing,' Emma said.

Dripping had always made Emma gag eating it, and the thought of what state Mrs Phipps' dripping might be in was making the bile rise in her throat.

She let go of the back of the chair and willed herself not to feel faint. Then she retrieved her carpet bag from the hall, not that there was much in it save a brooch fashioned like a bunch of anemones that had been her mother's and a toy wooden horse that had been still clutched in Johnnie's hand when he'd been found. Emma had asked for her mother's rings – her square engagement ring with four, small diamonds set within it, and her thin wedding band – but had been told that they were missing when the body was pulled from the water. Emma had asked Dr Shaw about the rings and he said he'd check with the coroner who had said the same thing.

To Emma's surprise Mrs Phipps rushed out after her. She laid a hand on Emma's shoulder. 'Maybe I've been a bit hasty. I could send my Philip down to Foale's to ask for a bit more bacon. Charge it to the good doctor. And mebbe a bit of nice beef skirt to make a pasty for your supper.'

Emma imagined Mrs Phipps' filthy fingers and nails rubbing lard into flour to make pastry and shuddered. 'No, thank you,' she said. 'I've troubled you too long. If you could just tell me where you've put my coat.'

'Coat? I don't remember no coat.'

'It's red,' Emma said. She remembered her mother making it, telling her the material had once been an officer's uniform from when England had fought Napoleon. 'Don't tell your papa though, will you?' she'd laughed, hugging Emma to her at the joke. Fighting back tears because she missed her mother so, Emma went on, 'It's got black curlicue stitching on the collar.'

'Oh yes, I remember now,' Mrs Phipps said. 'In the church. The last I saw it was draped over the pew end. Next to Beattie Drew.'

'Mrs Drew would never take my coat,' Emma said.

'Did I say she had?' Mrs Phipps snapped, her eyes narrow slits, hard and flinty. 'Best you don't go around accusing folks of anything. D'you get my meaning?'

'I do,' Emma said, with a sigh. She pulled her shawl – at least Mrs Phipps hadn't appropriated *that* for her daughter – around her

shoulders and tied it more tightly. It would have to do until she got home – there was bound to be a jacket hanging on a peg somewhere. Something smarter to wear than a shawl at least.

She lifted the latch on Mrs Phipps' front door. A blast of good sea air almost blew Emma off her feet – but how good it felt after so long in the mustiness of Mrs Phipps' front bedroom. If she took things slowly, breathing in deeply until she got back to Shingle Cottage it couldn't help but give her strength, could it?

It was only a short distance from Mrs Phipps' home in Cliff Terrace back to Shingle Cottage but it felt like miles to Emma. Her bereavement and her illness had taken a toll on her and she'd had to stop to catch her breath more than a few times. But now she was catching it for a different reason – Seth Jago. If the first person she had to see after leaving Mrs Phipps' was Seth then she was glad it was him. He had his back to her, standing on a ladder, and the bright sunshine was making his crow-black, thick hair – straight as candles – glisten like wet coal. Rumour had it that Seth's pa was of Spanish descent. Certainly, Emma thought, gazing at him, Seth's skin was a lot darker than hers was, swarthy even.

Many were the times before Emma had been orphaned, when they had come across one another in the town, and would fall in to step together if they were going in the same direction. They never ran out of things to talk about. And once Seth had carried her basket of groceries from May's the grocer all the way back up the hill to Shingle Cottage for her. Emma had often had the feeling that he'd been hoping he would see her and that perhaps he might ask her to walk out with him. But circumstances had put a stop to that speculation.

The last time she'd seen Seth her brother's body had been cradled in his arms – half of her adored Johnnie's fair hair had been ripped off and his face was lacerated where he'd been thrown against rocks. Seth's face had been wet but Emma couldn't be sure if it was tears or the rain that had been pouring relentlessly down.

Two days later her mother's body had been washed up further down the coast.

'What are you doing, Seth?' Emma asked.

At her words, Seth turned on the narrow rung of the ladder and almost fell off. Thick, brown paint slid from his brush onto the window. He grabbed for a rung up above his head to steady himself, then jumped to the ground. He walked towards Emma, a shy smile on his face, but a smile that reached his conker-brown eyes all the same. He looked, Emma thought, as thrilled to see her as she was to see him.

'As you see, Emma. Painting window frames. But I've been interrupted now and glad to be. My, but it's good to see you.'

Emma felt a blush coming. Not just at Seth's obvious pleasure in seeing her but because he wasn't wearing a shirt. Emma could understand him wanting to be cooler because it was an unseasonably warm day for April. Hot even. But how broad Seth's chest was. How dark the hairs that ran from his chest down over his stomach until they disappeared into the waistband of his trousers.

'And me, you,' Emma said as the flush spread up the sides of her neck, pinked her cheeks. 'Thank you for the flowers.'

Mrs Phipps had put the stocks Seth had brought round in an old – and not very well washed-out – jam jar. But their ugly container had done nothing to take away the gloriously heady scent of the flowers.

'It was the least I could do. Mrs Phipps wouldn't let me in over the doorstep to see you, though.'

'And just as well,' Emma said. 'I wasn't a pretty sight.'

She stared down at her shoes – she wasn't a pretty sight now, either.

'Beauty's in the eye of the beholder,' Seth said, and Emma looked up at his words. He was still smiling at her – with his eyes, not just his lips. 'You're bound to have been affected by the loss of your ma and Johnnie.'

'Not forgetting my papa,' Emma said, her words coming out sharper than she'd intended them too.

But Seth hadn't lost his father to the sea, had he? Even though their fathers had been on the same boat – *The Gleaner* – that fateful day. And his father hadn't lost *The Gleaner* either because by some miracle it hadn't sunk, even though some of his crew had been tossed into the sea. The boat had been overloaded with fish, so rumour had it, but nothing had been proved. No, it was only Emma's father, Guillaume, who had drowned.

Emma couldn't bear to look towards the harbour because she knew *The Gleaner* was likely to be there and her father was never going to jump from it, with a basket of fish for their own supper, ever again.

'Not forgetting your pa. Never. But you're a sight for sore eyes, Emma Le Goff, that's for sure,' Seth said, his smile widening now. 'I'm pleased to see you better. You're a lot thinner, but …'

'I'm pleased to see the cottage is being smartened up a bit,' Emma interrupted him. She didn't need reminding how thin she was – lying in bed at Mrs Phipps' her pelvis had held the sheet off her body it stuck out so much. 'You're making a lovely job of my windows.'

Seth looked away from her then. He stared into the distance, unable to meet her eye. 'They're not *your* windows, Emma. They're my pa's,' he said. 'You know Shingle Cottage is his …'

'I'm not stupid, Seth Jago. Of course I know that.'

'Then you'll know it has to go to one of Pa's crew. Someone's already been taken on. My pa owns most of the cottages in this row,' Seth made a broad arc with his left arm, then with his right, to show Emma just how much of Cove Road his father owned, 'all lived in by his crew.' He was speaking slowly, his voice gentle, and smiling at her again now.

He ran a hand through his hair and Emma wished he wouldn't because the sight of him doing it and smiling at her so kindly was doing funny things to her insides.

'But I live here. It's the only home I've ever known,' Emma said, swallowing back the beginnings of a sob. 'My pa always kept it so tidy. He would have painted the window frames if he hadn't drowned.'

And hadn't he always been so proud of the vegetables he grew in the little back garden? Every inch of ground filled with flatpole cabbages, potatoes, onions, leeks, radishes. Herbs, too – parsley, and thyme, and sage. And hadn't her mother always been so happy turning the insides upside down for the spring cleaning, singing as she washed walls and beat rugs and rinsed curtains in the tub? Making a home for them all. The only time she'd ever seen her mama sad was when she'd lost the babies she was carrying. Time after time she'd lost babies. Until Johnnie. He'd been the apple of her eye. Not her favourite, but special because she'd waited so long to have him – nine years after she'd had Emma.

But now they were all gone.

Tears burned the back of Emma's throat and she gulped to swallow them. Fear replaced them. What was she going to do? She had no home …

'I'm sorry, Emma,' Seth said. 'About your pa. He …'

'I suppose you've got to say that,' Emma said.

'Stop putting words in my mouth, Emma. It wasn't like that. The boat had been out three days and the catch had been good. But that made the going slow, especially when the wind dropped. So they had a drink or two to pass the time. Then, when …'

'Not my papa!' Emma stopped him. Her papa had never gone down the alehouses with the rest of the crew. He always came straight home to his family. And if he drank at all it would only be a glass of cider of a summer evening while he tended his vegetables.

Emma dropped her carpet bag on the path and folded her arms across her waist in an attempt to hold herself up, stop herself from collapsing with weakness and hunger.

'Emma,' Seth said, 'I can understand your anger. But if you'll just listen for a moment …'

'I don't think I want to hear it.'

'No? Well, I'll tell you anyway. Your pa died a hero. He jumped in to try and save Herbie Adams who couldn't swim. My pa threw a line and your pa grabbed it and tied it to Herbie Adams. Pa soon got

Herbie on deck but when he went to throw the line again he couldn't see your pa anywhere – he'd gone under. And that's the truth.'

'Is it?' Emma said. There was something about Seth and the way he was standing so tall, so dignified despite being splattered with paint, his gaze holding hers, that made her want to believe him. But could she?

She remembered asking her mama more than a few times what had happened, exactly, that day her papa had drowned, and always her mama had said, it didn't matter, he was dead and he wasn't coming back, and she was to stop asking questions.

'That's the truth, Emma.'

'I wish I'd known when Mama was alive,' Emma said. 'I could have comforted her, perhaps. But *someone* could have told me.'

'They could. And for my part I think they ought to have done. But straight after – what with your ma taking it so badly – my pa didn't want to intrude on her grief. It's why he let you all stay on in the cottage instead of evicting you …'

'Evict us? That would have been a cruel thing to do. He …'

'Life often is cruel, Emma,' Seth said.

'So I'm finding out all by myself,' Emma said as the reality of her situation came crashing down on her head, along with the fear. 'I don't know that I need *you* to tell me.'

'Don't fight me, Emma, please. I feel bad enough about this as it is. I know all this is a shock.' Seth waved an arm towards the windows he'd been painting. 'But my pa's not all bad. He sent Dr Shaw around to your ma – paying the bill and that.' Seth halted, as though waiting for Emma to take in the information.

Yes, she remembered Dr Shaw sitting in the kitchen while her mother cried, telling her it was all raw for the moment but she had the children to think of now. She had to be strong.

Emma nodded.

'I remember the doctor calling a few times, but I'm sure my mama would have had money to pay him.'

'Maybe she did, Emma,' Seth said. 'I'm only repeating what my

pa told me. Anyway, all the potions Dr Shaw could give your ma were no good because she jumped …'

'She didn't jump. My mama would never have jumped. She must have slipped. The Coroner said so, too. Accidental death, he said. Ma and Johnnie wouldn't have been buried in the churchyard if she'd been a suicide, and you know it as well as anyone.'

'I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said that.'

'No, you shouldn't.'

Emma put her face in her hands. She wouldn't allow her emotions to show – and especially not to Seth Jago if she could help it. And she didn't want to permit herself to think what was forcing itself into her mind unbidden – the way filthy flood water creeps under doors and through windows – that her mother had been pushed. Although who would have done such a thing? Emma couldn't imagine.

She looked up, held Seth's gaze for a moment. He mouthed the word 'sorry' at her.

'Accepted,' she said. 'And if you don't put your shirt on soon, Seth Jago, you might burn, even though you look tanned already.'

'Do I now?' Seth said. He sounded pleased that Emma had noticed.

'I don't lie,' Emma said. She tried to walk past Seth but he dodged in front of her, blocking her way, his bare chest at eye level. Emma forced herself not to gaze at it.

'Let me pass. There's things inside I need.'

Once she'd got inside and made herself a cup of tea – although she'd have to drink it without milk because the milk in the larder would surely have curdled after all this time – she'd feel better.

'Emma, you can't,' Seth said. He grabbed Emma's arm.

'Let me go! Why can't I go in? Let me by, Seth. There are things of mine in there.'

'Not any more, there aren't. Pa has had all your stuff cleared out. He sold most of it to cover the weeks when he was getting no rent from the place. There's only the beds and a table and chairs left. A rug or two and some plates and cutlery.'

‘Did you help him clear it out?’

Seth hung his head.

‘How could you?’ Emma shouted, making herself sound much stronger and in control of the situation than she felt. Not caring who heard her. But her heart was hammering in her chest – it made her feel faint and she had to take deep breaths to steady herself. ‘You did, didn’t you?’

‘My brothers did most of it. But I won’t lie to you. I did do one cart load, Emma, that’s all. I had no choice. He’s my pa. I had to do what I was told.’

‘Even though you knew it was … was immoral.’

‘I’m sorry …’

‘I accepted your apology just now, but I won’t accept this one. I don’t think you know the meaning of the word sorry, Seth Jago,’ Emma said. ‘Now let me go.’

Seth loosened his grip, took his hand away. He reached for his shirt where it was draped over a lavender bush and pulled it on over his head.

‘I’ll show you,’ he said. He walked down the path, took a key from his pocket and opened the front door wide.

Emma sucked in her breath and was afraid she’d never be able to let it out again. Seth was right – there was nothing in the sitting-room but the table and two chairs, which had always been in the kitchen when Emma had lived there with the family. And there had been four chairs then, not just two. A few plates were piled in the middle and some knives and forks strewn across the table. Not even a tablecloth. Her mother would have been mortified to see her table without a freshly laundered cloth.

Emma raced through the room to the kitchen. There was a kettle on the range but nothing else. Not even a saucepan – and her mama had kept her copper pans so shiny and bright.

‘I suppose your pa’s dug up all the vegetables as well,’ she said, yanking on the back door handle. It was unlocked and the force of her action made it bang noisily against the kitchen wall.

And then she saw it. The remains of a bonfire. There were a few remnants of cloth left unburned. And a book with its spine ripped off had escaped the blaze.

Emma began to cry then. It was like losing her parents and Johnnie all over again.

'So, you see, Emma,' Seth said, coming to stand beside her, 'why you can't stop here. This is no longer your home.'

He put an arm around Emma's shoulders and she wanted more than anything to shrug it off. But she couldn't. She needed the support. She leaned into Seth, felt the warmth of him. How she'd often dreamed of such a moment – but not in these circumstances.

And then she remembered that Seth was a Jago and always would be. She ducked out from under his arm.

'I'm not going to hurt you, Emma. I like you. You must know that. I thought you liked me.'

'I do. It's your pa I'm not keen on.'

'I'm not my pa.'

'But you've done his bidding?'

They stood looking at one another for a long moment. Then Seth put a hand either side of Emma's head, pulled her towards him and kissed her forehead. 'I'm so sorry, Emma, truly sorry. Sorrier than you'll ever know I've had a part – albeit a small one – in all this. But Pa needs this place for the new crewman. He's on his way from Slapton. He'll be here by nightfall. Come on. Let's fetch your bag. I'll carry it for you to wherever it is you want to go.'

'No, you won't. I … I wouldn't want you to carry my bag if you were the last person on earth, Seth Jago. But there's no need for you or anybody to be carrying it for me because I'm not going anywhere! I'll be back for my bag – just watch me.'

Seth put a hand over his mouth to stop himself calling after Emma. He knew it would be useless anyway. Even if she did hear him, she'd probably ignore him. He'd never seen such fire in a person's eyes before.

And what beautiful eyes they were too – the colour of burnt barley-sugar but with greenish flecks in them. Eyes that looked huge in her gaunt face. She looked older – more womanly, more adult, more knowing – since the last time he'd seen her walking behind her mother's and her young brother's coffins as the cortège came slowly up the steep path from the lane to the church.

His pa had forbidden him and his brothers, Carter and Miles, to attend the funeral. When Seth had asked why, he'd received a hard clout across his face and been told not to question his father's orders. Ever.

But his father hadn't said that Seth couldn't stand between the graves, head bowed. So he had. And his heart had almost broken for Emma.

He'd made to follow the last mourner in, but had then turned and walked back home, ashamed of himself.

More shame seemed to pile on his shoulders, seep into his soul, now. He was doing his father's bidding again, wasn't he? Aiding his parent to throw the orphaned Emma out of the only home she'd ever known by painting it up for the next tenant.

Seth couldn't think how he could ever look Emma in the face again. And he wanted to. She had always had the ability to make him laugh, even when events at home made him feel as unlike laughing as it was possible to get. Just glimpsing her in the distance had made him smile When he'd turned on the ladder and seen her there he'd had to wrestle with his instincts not to rush to her, fold her in his arms, even though he'd never so much as touched her hand before. She was so beautiful, even given what she'd been through – perhaps more so now that a loss of weight through illness had heightened the shape of her high cheekbones. And she was so young. Who did she have to look out for her now? Him? But would Emma ever want anything to do with him, a Jago?

He watched her go until his eyes misted over trying to focus on her retreating figure. Her illness and her grief had weakened her. Her steps were short and slow – no longer striding and quick like the

Emma he'd had to run to catch up with when he saw her scuttling along the pavement on her way to May's, or the bank, or the haberdashery. Now she had to grab hold of garden fences to keep herself upright as she went, head held high and with the sun highlighting the copper tints in her dark hair – hair the colour of polished mahogany.

Seth picked up Emma's carpet bag from the path and followed her.