

Backlit by the moon, Asthall Manor was a scene of dramatic majesty. The wind howled like a savage beast, battering the very walls of the house, the heavens themselves seeming to part and vent their unrelenting anguish; great torrents of rain tumbling down from their miserable depths and on to the sudden ground below. Thunder would crash and vent its rage in deafening peals of wrath, while the occasional crack of lightening would illuminate the sky in terrible flashes of light; the pale disc of the moon snuffed out by the smoky miasma of clouds. The cold stars ever looking on in disdain. On nights such as this, it was not unusual to hear the horses whinnying in their stalls, the whites of their eyes rolling as they reared up; hooves colliding with the doors as they tried in vain to burst out into the beckoning night. This din only echoed by the baying of hounds, their ears pricked and teeth bared; ferocious to the point of seeming possessed. And all the while, the house itself would creak and groan beneath one's very feet; the windowpanes shuddering as a certain chill stole upon the air, one that was always keenly felt and never failed to induce a shiver. The strange fall of footsteps sounding out, as if some svelte-footed revenant from bygone times wandered the halls... As it was now, a solitary figure wandered through the storm-tossed grounds, a shawl clutched to her chest as her gaze darted fearfully about. Dread had been Eleanor's only companion since coming to Asthall, and she was determined to catch a coach bound for London. Even if it meant leaving the wild and rugged nature that held it in an unruly trap far behind. The Lord of the manor wouldn't be best pleased, but the young tutor had had quite enough of his foul-tempered company, and even more so of his bedevilled progeny. They really were far too much for a single woman to bear, naughty grins on their tiny faces as they levelled insult after insult at her, once even going so far as to pull her hair. No! She would far rather be miles away, even if it meant living in the very gutter of society, with mud and grime to keep her company. Anywhere was better than this place. With this thought to persuade her, she grew ever more hurried, passing the dark ruins of some long abandoned outbuilding and shuddering when it seemed as if the very branches on the trees sought to catch her clothes and entangle her in their bony limbs; preventing her from pursuing her intended path. With a shuddering gasp, Eleanor burst free in a flurry of leaves; relieved to see the wrought iron gates standing imposingly before her. They had come off their latch in the wind, and as gust after gust swept over the grounds, swung and screeched on their rusted hinges. The young tutor took advantage of this fact, slipping out with little strife, before hurrying down the country road, knowing the local inn wasn't far from here. Once there, it would be a simple matter of hailing a coach in the morning, and then she would be off. Free to do as she pleased. She was sure the Lord could find another tutor with little difficulty. He was wont to print adds in the local newspapers, and with this thought to spur her on, she fled, never to return again.

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