

An Opportunity

By Emma Lengkeek

A carriage pulled up to a large stone, building. It was one of those rainy days in the countryside of England. The stone building had a faded sign saying, 'Mrs. Haredale's Boarding School for Girls'. A servant stepped out of the carriage, opened an umbrella, and helped an old gentleman out of the carriage. The servant rang the bell and a stern looking lady opened the door. This was Mrs. Haredale. "What do you want?" Mrs. Haredale asked. The gentleman sighed, "I have been searching for my granddaughter who was supposedly was left at a girl's school seventeen years ago. Her name is Lucia. "Why," said Mrs. Haredale, "Seventeen years ago a baby was left here with a note saying, 'please look after this baby. I cannot take care of her. Her name is Lucia.'" Since then, I have looked after her. She must be the girl you are looking for." The gentleman's face brightened, "Indeed it must be. Could you fetch her?" "Of course," said Mrs Haredale, "Jonas will show you to the parlor." Jonas stood up quickly, blushing, for he had been listening from behind the door.

"Lucia," said the gentleman rising weakly from the chair, "I have something to tell you that may come as a shock so please sit down." Lucia sat down nervously, glancing around. Looking at the door, she saw that the key hole was dark. She smiled to herself; Jonas was listening in. Lucia realized that she and the old man were not alone, a man stood in the corner scowling. As she looked at him, their eyes met and he gave her such a disgusted look that she shuttered. "Do not be alarmed," said the old man he is just my man servant Murdock." "My name is Mr. Vineyard and I am your Grandfather." "I have searched for you for seventeen years and now I have found you." "Would you like to be a lady and have lots of money?" asked Mr. Vineyard. "Yes indeed sir," gasped Lucia. "Then you shall. You cannot come with me now for I have business abroad, but be ready for me when I come for you. It may be up to six months."

An hour later Lucia and Jonas were talking to each other outside on a bench. It had stopped raining and the sun shone brightly. They often talked to each other after Jonas was done his work and Lucia had finished helping teach school.

Lucia was almost eighteen. She was very pretty and had long brown curly hair and bright eyes. She loved to spend hours outside, she liked to sew, but most of all she liked to sing. She had a beautiful voice, and wanted voice lessons very badly. Lucia had finished school two years ago, and was now learning to teach school.

And when she turned twenty-one she planned to go to London and become a singer.

“But now this has all changed,” said Lucia, “Now I will be a lady and I will not need to work and I can go to balls and have voice lessons and have lots of money.” “Yes,” said Jonas. But Jonas had always planned to marry Lucia and to buy a farm together. “Lucia,” said Jonas, “All this talk of being rich may never happen. I want to ask you something. Will you let me?” Lucia looked at Jonas. He seemed very upset. His normally tan face was pale and he was nervously playing with his hands. “Yes,” said Lucia gently. “I love you and I want to marry you,” said Jonas slipping his arm around her waist. Lucia realized how much she loved Jonas, but then she remembered her Grandfather and the money. “No I will not! I can marry anyone I want now that I am rich I do not need to marry someone who will never have a place in the world.” She said angrily, and she dashed into the house. Jonas put his head in his hands and sobbed, “What have you done, Lucia?” That same day Jonas left the school forever and went to London to find work.

Lucia stopped teaching school that year and for three years all Lucia did was wait. In the morning she would get dressed and pack her bags for when her grandfather came, and in the evening she would undress and unpack.

One day she received a telegram saying that Mr. Vineyard died three years ago and all his money had gone to his man servant Murdock. Lucia collapsed; when she came to herself, she went and told Mrs. Haredeale that her grandfather had died and that the money had gone to someone else and that she wished to go to London. The next week Lucia went to London to work at a factory.

For five years Lucia worked hard at the factory, scrimping and saving. It was a gloomy evening in London as Lucia walked slowly home from the factory. She was changed. Her hair was pulled back tightly and was tied in a knot, she was much thinner, and her eyes were no longer bright. Lucia started coughing badly. She covered her mouth and nose with a handkerchief to keep the dust out, but when she drew back the handkerchief it had blood on it. The next day she got lost and went through a more wealthy part of town. As she passed one of the houses a man she recognized got into a fancy carriage and drove off. It was Murdock. She felt so angry and upset he had taken the money that was rightfully hers, but whether by deceit or by murder she did not know. She walked on, but she was still lost so decided to ask a nearby workman for help. “Excuse me sir,” Lucia started to say, and then she recognized the workman as Jonas, “I was wrong I should....” but Lucia could not finish, for a violent coughing fit interrupted her. When she had stopped coughing, Jonas said gently, “Lucia I am married and have two young

children, but if you need help I can help you". "I know I don't deserve your help, but I will repay you for your kindness," said Lucia. She got up, stumbled, and fell. Then she picked herself up and ran.

The next day Jonas was eating breakfast and reading the newspaper. The headlines said 'Wealthy Mr. Murdock Mysteriously Stabbed to Death'. "I must go to work now," said Jonas and he said goodbye to his wife and children and went to work.

"Excuse me sir, said a police officer, " I would like you to identify a woman, we found dead last night in her rooms." So Jonas followed the police officer to a rundown boarding house "Strange," said Jonas, "I have never been in this part of the city before." The police officer opened a door. They walked over to the bed and the police officer pulled back the sheet that was over the body. "It's Lucia," cried Jonas. "She died of consumption and overdoing herself. She left all her money to you and a good sum it is, for belonging to such a poor woman," said the police officer. "By the way did you hear about the murder last night?" questioned the officer. "Yes," answered Jonas. "We think it could be a woman that had something against him," finished the officer.

"She did not do it," muttered Jonas.