

A
Victorian
Rose



JAN POLLARD

A Victorian Rose

A Victorian Rose

A NOVEL BY

Jan Pollard



Eloquent Books
New York, New York

© 2009

All rights reserved Jan Pollard

No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, or by any information storage retrieval system, without the permission, in writing, of the publisher.

Eloquent Books

An imprint of AEG Publishing Group

845 Third Avenue, 6th Floor—6016

New York, NY 10022

www.eloquentbooks.com

ISBN 978-1-62857-596-5

Text Design by James Meetze

Production by Eloquent Books

CONTENTS

PROLOGUE	9
PART ONE: BIRDS OF PASSAGE	11
PART TWO: CLAY CROSS	57
PART THREE: RED GUM RIVER	127
PART FOUR: THE MELBOURNE CUP	177
PART FIVE: THE CALL TO ARMS	247
PART SIX: SEVEN CREEKS	309

*To my daughters.
Sallie and Kathryn
With love*

PROLOGUE

The clipper ship, *The Fair Maid*, had made good time on this crossing from Liverpool to Australia, despite being momentarily becalmed in the Indian Ocean. Whilst waiting for a wind to fill her sails, a brief ceremony was taking place on deck. The intensity of the heat made it necessary to dispose of a corpse at the earliest opportunity. The Reverend Paul Briggs, a passenger on board, had offered to officiate in place of the captain, having made the acquaintance of the family concerned since embarking at Liverpool.

A merciless sun shone down upon the sad little company gathered at the gunwale. John Taylor, head bowed, stared down at the deck, listening to the sonorous tones of the Reverend Briggs.

“We therefore commit her body to the deep to be turned into corruption . . .”

John felt empty of all feeling. He had had such hopes for Julia in this new country to which they were travelling. The people at the manor where he had been an estate carpenter had done all they could to help once they had learned of Julia’s condition, for John’s family had worked at the manor for generations and were considered an integral part of the estate. The decision to leave had been the cause of much heart searching but Julia’s constant racking cough had left them no choice but to find a warmer, dryer climate in which to live. The offer of a good job and a home in Australia had seemed like the answer to all their problems. Now it was over, and John wished with all his heart that he had never taken Julia away from the home she had loved so much.

Rosie stood very still holding her father’s hand, looking towards the group of mourners. Amy Briggs, in her stiff black dress and bonnet, showed no emotion. She had attended too many funerals in the past to feel grief at the passing of a woman scarcely known to her. Slightly to one side stood Mr. and Mrs. Potts and the two Hopkins sisters. Alice Potts and Sarah Hopkins wept openly as they followed the service, but Lizzie’s mind was elsewhere, and she remained quietly composed. Rosie wanted to run across the decking which separated her from Alice Potts and to feel the warmth of those comforting arms around her but she

Jan Pollard

had promised Miss Briggs that she would behave well for poor Papa's sake, and she was too afraid of the consequences should she not keep her promise.

Reverend Briggs had stopped speaking. The short service was over. Rosie's small hand involuntarily tightened within her father's grip, and, as John raised his eyes to look at his eight-year-old daughter, Julia's last remains slid silently away beneath the waiting sea.

PART ONE

Birds of Passage

1860

CHAPTER I

From where she stood at the top of the field, Rosie could see the backs of the stone-built cottages nestling among the trees in the valley below. The last cottage in the row had been her home since her birth there eight years ago and was the centre of her small universe. Usually, she was cheered by the sight of the welcoming smoke as it wreathed upwards from the squat little chimney pot and would take to her heels down the meadow path and burst in through the kitchen door to surprise her mother.

Today, it would be different, and she felt no inclination to run and skip down the grassy slope where the fast growing lambs were gambolling in the late April sunshine. Her mother would be resting on the horsehair couch in the parlour, too weary from her constant coughing to take much notice of her return. And Papa would be there with her this afternoon, wearing the worried look on his face he so often wore since Mama's illness. An important visitor was expected to call, and she had been sent out to play for a while. Seeing the pale, yellow bells of the cowslips growing in the field beyond, she had picked a bunch to take home with her. Every spring for as long as she could remember, she had helped her mother gather cowslips to be made into wine, and sometimes she had been given a drop to sip during a restless night, and sleep had come easily afterwards. There would be no wine made this spring but the cowslips would bring some of their brightness into the dark parlour where her mother spent most of the day.

Jan Pollard

Rosie dawdled through the small back gate and along the stone path which divided the vegetable plot and softly lifted the latch to the back door. She could hear a voice she didn't recognise and her father's quiet reply.

The front door was opened with difficulty, and heavy footsteps crunched on the gravel path. The gate clicked shut and a horse's hooves scraped the ground restlessly as the rider mounted and quickly rode away.

The parlour door opened, and John Taylor came into the kitchen expecting to see his daughter there having heard the latch move.

"The doctor has just left, Rosie," he explained. "His Lordship arranged for him to see your mama as she hasn't been so well lately."

"Can he make her better soon, Papa?" asked Rosie, who had a child's faith in all superior beings.

"No one can make her better as long as we live here my little one, but there is something we can do which might help. We have been talking it over with the doctor and your mama is quite agreeable, although it will be difficult for her. Come into the parlour, and bring your flowers with you. They will please her."

Rosie followed her father into the front room where her mother lay on the couch, propped up by pillows. Her pale, oval face showed the strain of her illness and gave her the appearance of a woman much older than her twenty-eight years and nearer to that of her husband, ten years her senior.

"Cowslips," exclaimed Julia. "How lovely, my darling. Did you find them in the top field?" Holding the bunch up to her face, she smelled their sweet fragrance and then placed them on a small table beside her next to the spittoon—that hateful reminder of her illness. Rosie sat on the couch beside her.

"They were my surprise, Mama," she said lovingly.

Julia smiled and stroked her daughter's plump little hand. Rosie was the picture of health with her pink cheeks and her lively brown eyes, capped by a mop of unruly golden curls. Her very presence gave Julia the will to live, and she thanked God for sparing them this child, for Rosie was the only one she had carried without mishap.

"Has Papa told you we are going away?"

"No," exclaimed Rosie in great surprise, hardly believing her ears. It seemed a strange time to be moving when her mother was so ill. "Where are we going?"

A Victorian Rose

John turned from placing another log on the fire. “A long way from here, Rosie—to another country on the other side of the world, called Australia. The climate is better there, and I have the prospect of work. It’s too damp here in the valley and too cold in the winter for Mama’s cough to improve. Lancashire can be a bleak place for an invalid.”

Rosie felt too bewildered to take it all in. The tiny hamlet of estate cottages and the village in the next valley were the only places she knew intimately, and she had expected to live there all her life.

“Where shall we live, Papa?” she asked, apprehensively.

John smiled at her concern. “There is nothing to worry about, my dear—think of it as a great adventure. We are going to a place called Clay Cross on the Murray River where His Lordship’s brother owns a sawmill, and I am going to work for him, building a wharf for the riverboats. But, in the meantime, you must do all that you can to help your mama to get stronger for the journey. We don’t sail until September, and the summer days will soon be here to help her feel better, we hope.”

A rasping sound from the couch drew John’s attention to his wife’s needs, and he lifted her gently forward to help her breathing.

“Fetch your mother some fresh water, Rosie—quickly now.”

Rosie took the jug to the pump in the yard, feeling sad and dejected. To leave the estate where she knew everyone and to travel to the other side of the world was a frightening thought. She would miss the children she had grown up with, the rides on the haywain as it returned from the harvest field, and the picnics beside the beck, and most of all, the party, held every Christmas at the manor for the estate workers and their children, which was the highlight of the year. There could never be another place like this green valley in the whole world, and she hated the thought of leaving it.

She shuddered in horror when she recalled a picture which hung on the wall of one of the cottages, showing a storm at sea and men drowning. *Would it be like that*, she wondered?

The jug began to overflow like her tears, and picking it up with trembling hands she made her way indoors.

Buy the B&N e-Pub version at:-

<http://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/a-victorian-rose-jan-pollard/1018712635>

Buy the Kindle version at:-

<http://www.amazon.com/A-Victorian-Rose-ebook/dp/B00FZ9AC9U/>