



AMANDA FOX

*The
Albatross
and the
Mermaid*

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by Amanda Fox

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Dedication

For my husband, who never gives up.

For my children, who make me both laugh and cry.

For the rest of my family, for their enduring love and support.

And for my “amant de reve”, because without him, this book wouldn’t exist.

Prologue

He told me that he loved me. He'd said it a total of eleven times over eight years; I'd counted. Counted each finger on both hands, plus one. Five instances occurred in the throws of passion, when his mottled penis--an appendage the color of plums and overripe strawberries--plunged in and out of my developing body. Twice, he'd mouthed the words across the dinner table as I cleared the dishes between courses--between the stew and custard, and the meat pie and spice cake. Three times, he'd said it in various locations around the great house: when he caught my arm on the way up the grand staircase, when he pushed me up against the stone wall in the cellar, and in the nursery as I lulled baby Stephane to sleep. The last episode happened in the kitchen when, with his wife's back turned, he whispered those very words into my ear. "I love you Seraphine," he said. "I love you."

The day I knew for certain that Henri Bouchard's love for me was false, was the day my life took a turn for the better. It was May 2nd, 1786 at about 3:30 in the afternoon, five years prior to Toussaint L'Ouverture's joyous insurrection. A revolution had been brewing for some time and reports of many uprisings throughout the Caribbean had reached the house over the years.

Undoubtedly, we were all waiting for the big one to finally deliver our salvation, and as such, the mood between the supervisors and the workers was tense, orders coming down even harsher than usual whenever details of another outbreak made news. Cook always seemed to know about the gossip on and around the Lazare plantation, and that was how I found out about things.

Now, I wouldn't say that I was a very smart person in those days, but that doesn't mean I lacked the potential. It's in us all; it's just a matter of circumstance, and as you will see, mine were less than ideal. What little schooling I got was acquired mainly by accident as I dusted and tidied up around the master's children. Marie Rose--Henri's eldest daughter--took me as a friend and taught me the basics of how to read and write. Cook did what she could as well, but like most of us, she too lacked an education. At best, she tried to impart upon me the essential facts of life, or whatever those could've been living in such a terrible place.

And while I don't really blame myself for my predicament, I do wish sometimes that things had been different. Perhaps I should've made better choices, or maybe I should've appealed to the spirits for more guidance and help. No matter. Now that I'm

dead I have the clarity to see things for how they truly were anyway.

I know most people fear the end, but in my world, being dead isn't so bad. If that were the case, most of us would never have made it through the fires of hell. Decidedly however, we came across the sea with the firm notion that after death, one is once again reunited with family and friends-- that when a person dies their spirit returns to the homeland for a great feast with all those who have passed on before.

That belief, my friend, is what gave us hope, enough to persevere through the long days and lonely nights of captivity. Considering this, it may seem odd that more people didn't put a rush on the process--you know, getting to the "better" before it was officially time. Admittedly, some did do that, but we weren't put here to cut our own lives short, and this left most of us making the best out of a really bad situation.

Certainly, my people found reasons to live, reasons to believe that life could change, if not for themselves then at least for the generations that came after. We learned from our hardships and took those lessons with us, and that is why, as one of the dearly departed, I remain an invaluable member of my community.

And now that I'm in a good place, I don't like to dwell on the past. There is one situation however that I must clarify because of the important lesson that it taught me. What love truly is or isn't--or was or wasn't in that time before--is my topic for debate.

As the rounds of precipitation began in those early days of the vernal equinox, it became glaringly obvious that Henri Bouchard never truly loved me, and it is with this tidbit of information that we return to our story...

* ... *

The month of May fell right in the middle of harvest season, which ran a lengthy six months of the year, from January to July. An unusual amount of rain had flooded the earth that spring, causing the plants to grow faster than the cutlasses could be swung. Thus, the field workers were forced to labor into the twilight hours almost every evening, and I can't tell you the number of accidents--of cut faces, and slashed arms and legs--that those nighttime operations caused.

While the first and second gangs toiled among the tall stalks of cane in the blistering heat by day and in the shadows by night, I continued on with my job inside the house. While it seemed like I had been working for two or three lifetimes already, in reality, only a quarter of a century had passed. I was barely a woman.

Born on the plantation to a woman named Beatrice, I ended up an orphan at the age of three when my mother was beaten to death for drinking water when she should have been chopping cane. With no one to watch over me, I got shuffled around among the others until one day Lillian--a woman who had lost her own child during the passage overseas--took pity on me. As the cook, she managed to get me inside the great house, making sure I had enough food to eat and a warm place to sleep.

Thanks to her, I persevered, growing up alongside the eldest children of the Bouchard family. In the kitchen, I helped to gather vegetables, prepare meat, wash dishes, and scrub floors--any and all of the numerous tasks involved in running a household of that size. At the age of fifteen, things changed and I was put in charge of the Bouchard's three youngest offspring--Stephane, Natalie, and Anaise.

Becoming the nursemaid on the Lazare plantation was not a decision of the

missus, that's for sure. There were arguments over who should get the job, but as the man of the house, Henri had the last say. "You have a pleasing and kind nature, Seraphine. The little ones have taken a liking to you, and I think that you are perfectly suited for this job." That was his explanation and I had no reason to doubt him.

The position was passed to me from an older woman named Mitzi who had succumbed to a devastating illness of the brain--when she couldn't remember the children's names anymore and when she started behaving like she'd been possessed by the devil. It was a common affliction among us, and sadly, Mitzi was sent out one day, never to return.

After I accepted my post, I wondered about her often. When I asked him, Henri simply said that she'd been discharged of her duties and had gone to live with her cousins in town. In my heart however, I knew she'd been killed--probably burned to death or eliminated in some other equally abhorrent manner.

Ignorance is bliss as they say, and so, as a teenager I tended my charges happily, unconcerned for my own safety if things ever went awry. Again, it wasn't until later that I came to see Henri for the despicable man that he truly was, and not until after the grand contretemps that I am leading up to, that I contemplated the rationale behind his arrangement.

I think now that Henri entrusted me with the position of nursemaid for one reason, and one reason only. It brought me closer to his children, closer to his family, and indirectly, closer and more available to him as well. That must've been his intention, because that's exactly what happened.

Mind you, the particular moment that I knew I was meant to be more than an aide to the Bouchard's children didn't involve erotic words or sexual innuendo. With an easy stroke of his hand up the length of my spine--a casual touch where there hadn't been one before--he so much as told me that I'd become an object in his quest for personal gratification. In fact, he spoke of something completely off topic when he made the move.

We were in the study and he was giving me instructions on what to do with Stephane and the girls while he and the missus were away for the morning. "Seraphine, make sure the children bathe once they've completed their lessons. The girls need to have their hair washed as we are expecting visitors later on this evening. Furthermore, the linens in the sleeping quarters need to be cleaned and the pillows fluffed. Please see that this is all done by the time we get back."

On the last sentence of his diatribe, he moved up quite close to my front and reached around to trace over the vertebrae of my spine. As he did, his eyes met mine with a glazed-over look, like I was something delicious to eat and he was a very hungry animal indeed. Now, as I'm sure you can gather, whether or not I got involved with this man was never an option left open for debate. I was the slave and he was my master. *That* made it a done deal.

Oh, I may have put up more of a fight, but Henri seemed like a kind and gentle man, and I was such a lonely, young girl. I confused his sexual advances as signs of love and affection--two things that I craved more than anything--and thus sex with Henri became part of my job. I'm ashamed to admit this, but it was something I actually enjoyed most of the time, right up until the end that is.

The end. I remember that day as if it weren't a lifetime ago, mainly because it

took place just before my twenty-fourth birthday, eight long years since Henri had procured me as his lover. Before I go any further, let me describe to you the man who stole my virginity, the man who was to become the bane of my existence.

To begin with, Henri was the color of boiled snapper, his skin ghoulishly pale next to my cocoa brown. His hair was the texture of a horse's mane and his eyes were so squinty that it was like the sun was always shining in his face. Oddly enough, he was devoid of eyelashes, but his eyebrows compensated for his lacking there by crossing over the middle bridge of his nose where they almost touched--two caterpillars saying hello.

Speaking of his nose, his nostrils were so narrow that I often wondered how he ever got enough oxygen. Moreover, his legs were like sticks and they pointed inward at the knee, giving him a rather feeble gait. When he stood naked however, he had a roll of fat that hung like a tire around his waist. Without a doubt, he was a rather pathetic human specimen, but then I was never drawn to him for his physical qualities in the first place.

Albeit homely, Henri's demeanor was amicable and his temperament seemed even-keeled. From what I'd seen, Henri was a good father to his children and a kind husband to his wife, who, if you ask me, was a very ill tempered and quarrelsome woman.

She never liked me--that's for sure. She must've known about my affair with her husband and was simply staking a claim to her territory, making it very clear who was, and who *was not*, the wife. Certainly, I would've found it hard to believe that she didn't know about the two of us, or the others.

Yes, of course there were others. Even I knew that. No man of status in the colonies--planter, trader, businessman or otherwise--was restricted in the number of lovers that he took. How did I cope with this knowledge? Well, I just imagined myself at the top of Henri's list, focusing on his feelings for me (or what I interpreted were feelings for me), and closing the door on the rest.

And Camille, well, I often wondered what he ever saw in her to begin with. I didn't like to think that he picked her and I both, for I saw no similarities between us.

Now Henri's personality, while affable enough, was certainly not the aggressive type, and it may have accounted for his less than stellar achievement in enterprise. Compared to other planters in the Caribbean, Henri Bouchard held title to only a single plantation--Lazare--which he'd named after his father.

Henri and Camille, and their six children lived with us most of the time. They'd come from somewhere far across the ocean, but stayed on the plantation a good three quarters of the year, sometimes more. Supposedly, they stayed so that Henri could ensure things ran smoothly, so he could guarantee that none of his underlings ever tried to displace him as overlord. His power I guess, was not so far reaching.

If you recall, the day in question--the "end" as it were--was a hazy May afternoon, and I was in one of the guest rooms in a remote section of the east wing. Henri and I had just finished having sexual relations as he was want to do at least four or five times a week. As I said before, I enjoyed my encounters with Henri and I will never forget my first time.

"Open your legs for me, Mon Cherie," I remember him saying. "I promise, I'm not going to hurt you." Tentatively, I unfolded, Henri helping some by pressing my knees to the side. When he then caressed my private area, the feelings that I felt were so intense that I actually cried. It'd been so long since I'd experienced intimate contact that these

initial touches were overwhelming.

“Seraphine, it will be OK. You are such a dear girl, but don’t worry. I know how to make you feel so good, you’ll cry for me every time we’re together.” His arrogant words somehow made me brave and I mustered enough courage to watch what he was doing. Skillfully, Henri slid his fingers through the thatch of coarse black hair that covered my secret lips and everything moved along quite easily until he attempted to push his finger inside.

Met with resistance, he worked slowly, alternating gentleness with pressure until he was in up to his knuckle. “My goodness, Seraphine. I knew you would be unyielding, but this is better than I’d hoped.” Licking his lips, he poked and prodded until he was able to add another finger and yet another, stretching me until he’d ultimately replaced his digits with his erect penis.

With the enthusiasm of an unseasoned soldier, Henri’s penis always stood up for me, and the more times he entered my body, the more I actually enjoyed the experience. I was proud to know just how much I aroused him, and sometimes when I saw him coming, he would almost gallop, a horse running to the trough after a long, hard ride. In the very least, our unbridled affair brought a variety of welcome pleasures to us both and I was grateful for the physical satisfaction that was prevailed upon my person.

As the years crept by however and as I thought more and more about the privileges that freedom would bring--a notion that was almost conceivable by that point in time--I began questioning both Henri’s motives and my desire for him. So when I raised my head off the pillow that day in May overcome by feelings of exhaustion and desistance, I was less than surprised.

“Come here Seraphine. Let me look at your face in the sunlight.” Sluggishly, I moved off the rumpled bed, pulled down the skirt of my cotton shift, and went to stand beside him near the open window. With each step, I felt the residual ache between my legs from where his penis had been only moments before, and my feet moved like stone tablets. I’d had enough, and I hoped that he wasn’t expecting more.

There was a faint breeze that day and on a current of heated air, the poignant aroma of a hemp pipe wafted up from the shed down below. Somebody was smoking that afternoon, secreting away a few moments of bliss. Inhaling deeply, I tried to share in their diversion. When Henri reached over to clasp my hand--his palm was cold to my warm--I knew that something was wrong with him too.

Relinquishing his grip to finish buttoning his shirt, he murmured, “You are so beautiful Seraphine. Do you know that?” His eyes now vacant, he kept the compliments coming. “Your skin makes me think of a chocolate sun, radiant and sweet. And if I could press my nose into these lovely ringlets of yours for all eternity, I would be ecstatic.” He began nibbling erroneously at my neck, pulling a coil of hair to its full length.

What happened next, I consider to be a major turning point in my life to follow. Without warning, Henri pushed up behind me and shoved me hard against the window frame. Pressing his formless body into mine, he wrapped his arms around my slender physique and cupped one palm over my breast like it needed his support. Stroking and fondling me there briefly, he then firmly encircled my waist with his other limb.

“I have something to tell you Seraphine,” he said, anger in his tone. “I can’t see you like this anymore.”

With that, he pinched my breast, much harder than usual. Confused, I froze,

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