

AN EDUCATION

CHAPTER 1

A meeting in the rain

Twickenham, south-west London, 1961

Jenny Mellor was sixteen years old and she had a dream. One day, she would go to Oxford University and study English literature. If she worked hard enough, she would get there. And Jenny intended to work really hard. Right now, she was sitting in a classroom on Friday afternoon. Friday afternoon meant two hours of English literature. She loved her English classes and Miss Stubbs was her favourite teacher. Jenny was good at English. She was good at French too. In fact, Jenny was good at almost everything, except Latin. But English was her favourite. She loved reading. Books allowed her to escape into other worlds where people travelled and fell in love and had exciting lives.

Nothing exciting ever happened to Jenny. She lived with her parents in a nice house in a nice suburb of London and she went to a nice girls' school. Everyone and everything around her was nice ... and polite and dull. They said on the radio that London was a fun city, full of life and colour, a centre for music and fashion and parties. But Jenny didn't see any of those things. Her life was pale and grey. She didn't feel very alive at all. She didn't have anyone she could really talk to either. Not a *real* friend who could share her interest in France and French culture. Jenny loved French books, French music ... anything

French. She loved the sound of the language, and she loved speaking it too. No one in Twickenham understood French – or no one that Jenny knew.

Jenny looked around the classroom. The class was studying *Jane Eyre**. Miss Stubbs had asked a question and, as usual, no one had answered. Amanda Staple was studying her hands. Celia Smith was staring out of the window and Susie Salt seemed to be asleep. Poor Miss Stubbs, thought Jenny. It must be awful to teach people who just weren't interested. She put up her hand.

'Yes, Jenny?' said Miss Stubbs with a smile.

'Is it because Mr Rochester's blind?' suggested Jenny. She knew her answer was right. Her answers were always right.

'Yes, thank you, Jenny!' Miss Stubbs looked at the rest of the class and sighed. 'Now please turn to Chapter 6 ...'

Jenny sat back in her chair. Just one more year, she thought, and I'll be away from all of this. I'll be at Oxford University. I'll be a new person ... with a new life.

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Sunday lunch at Jenny's house was always the same. Her mother spent the morning peeling vegetables in the kitchen, while the smell of meat cooking in the oven filled the house. They always ate at half-past twelve and finished by half-past one so that they could listen to the news on the radio. The food was always brown and grey – it matched their dining room, Jenny thought. The conversation was always dull too. Her father did most of the talking and he always talked about school and her

* *Jane Eyre* is a famous book written by Charlotte Brontë in 1847. It tells the story of Jane Eyre, who falls in love with and eventually marries Mr Rochester. Mr Rochester, who is blind, is also much older than her.