

Eight Yards of Muslin

They must think her a fool. They were delighted by their stupid cleverness. They were shiny as satin and tighter than bone buttons. Her aunt and Mr Morgan, the late-flowering love. How she hated him. The way he held the eye with such cumbersome care and made light of her concerns with false fol-di-rols. Just to encourage her in her little ways, she being quite the young lady.

Always unconvinced of the sense in burdening a young woman with an education that properly should be reserved for certain boys, her aunt had always argued with it. Father had always retreated, mother always turned to some small task, but Eleanor had still attended the school. Her education had stopped as soon as her aunt took her in.

Aunt and Mr Morgan. Waiting for her now, waiting to see if she would return with their poisonous cripplements. Or knowing them for what they were would turn and run. Would die lost and starving. A village that knew her as that unfortunate child would send her back; further on, strangers would turn her from their door.

Draper, grocer, chemist, butcher. Eleanor wondered if she could contrive a way to let the constable see the list. He would see it was her aunt's instruction. He was dependable. Mr Morgan said he was. Mr Morgan must know the constable.

Aunt had said she'd been such a good brave girl, how she deserved some light to follow such dark days: a new dress for summer, a sweetmeat, good red beef. She looked so wan. But Aunt looked at Eleanor through the larger shape of her inheritance.

A rich sauce to hide the taste of poisons, wrappings for her shroud. Eleanor knew the truth. She bought: a nice piece of fillet, peppercorns, a liquorice root, arsenic for the slugs and eight yards of muslin.

And married Mr Morgan six months after her aunt's funeral.