

A woman in a historical white dress is seated, holding a baby wrapped in a white cloth. The scene is lit with warm, golden light, suggesting an indoor setting. The woman's dress is long and flowing, with a high collar and long sleeves. The baby is held in her arms, and the overall mood is intimate and tender.

AUDREY  
HOWARD

*Rose Alley*

RICH OR POOR, WE CANNOT ESCAPE OUR DESTINY

AUDREY HOWARD

# Rose Alley

  
HODDER

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Audrey Howard  
As the Night Ends

Driven by her idealism and courage, Alex Goodwin will make any sacrifice to win votes for women. Her despairing family, unable to rescue her from yet another dangerous prison sentence, is overjoyed when Patrick O'Leary comes into her life. A hard-working young surgeon, Patrick is as idealistic as Alex and loves her with all his heart.

Then they are separated – first by a quarrel, then by the terrible war which engulfs their world, and finally, after a miraculous reunion, by a tragedy that seems to make it impossible for either of them ever to love again . . .

The story of Alex and Patrick is one of the most moving that Audrey Howard has ever written: an unforgettable story set in a time of war and hope.

Audrey Howard

Distant Images

As they dazzle all the men at Queen Victoria's jubilee ball, Beth and Milly Goodwin seem to be mirror images of one another: beautiful, graceful and rich, they can take their pick of any man in St Helens. Only those who know them best realize that Milly's dark brown eyes hide a wild, untamed wantonness, while Beth's silvery-grey ones betray her idealism and kindness.

But the only man in the room either of them wants is the one who could destroy both their lives. Hugh, sixteenth Lord Thornley, is a rake who needs to marry an heiress to restore the fortune his father gambled away. Even a lowly daughter of a glass manufacturer will do – provided she is biddable and strong and willing to bear the son he needs.

Beth, he decides, will make him a perfect wife. But it is Milly who traps him into a loveless marriage – and sets in motion a chain of events that could destroy everything they hold dear.

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Audrey Howard  
Reflections from the Past

*'No man will ever take what is mine . . .'*

When Abby Murphy discovers she's heiress to one of St Helens' largest glass works, her whole life is turned upside down. Torn from her poverty-stricken family and forbidden to see her childhood sweetheart, Roddy Baxter, she is forced by her tyrannical grandfather to become a lady.

Then Roddy disappears and soon, it seems inevitable that Abby will have to marry her grandfather's chosen successor, Noah Goodwin, and bear his children. Trapped in a marriage where she is little more than a possession, Abby is determined that no matter what else might change, nothing will stand in the way of her steadfast passion for Roddy.

But is she prepared to give up everything she has now for a love from the past?

Audrey Howard  
Painted Highway

They are as different as two sisters can be.

Vibrant and headstrong. Ally Pearce loves working on the *Edith*, her family's narrowboat, proving she is the equal of any man on the Leeds to Liverpool canal. Betsy, delicate, calculating and sensuously beautiful, wants only to become a 'lady' – and will use the most unladylike means to become one.

When Dr Tom Hartley enters the sisters' lives after a tragic accident both are attracted to him but for very different reasons.

Tom seems blind to Betsy's ruthlessness. Ally is devastated when her sister announces that they are to be married. Then Betsy disappears to pursue a better prospect and Tom and Ally realise it's their chance to put the past behind them and make a fresh start.

But will it be with each other?

# I

Queenie stopped, bringing the handcart she was pushing to a standstill, and placing her hands on her broad hips straightened her aching back. Her feet were inches deep in the rutted dust of the track which was really no more than a sheep trod and she wondered if she had made a mistake in taking this short cut across Oswaldtwistle Moor. Her hands, which were hardened after years of pushing the cart along every path and track of the South Pennines, were rubbed sore, for she had forced herself and the child to the limit these last few days. Winter was coming on. Sleeping out of doors under the handcart would be out of the question before long and the sooner they reached Liverpool and home the better.

She looked about her at the endless rolling moorland, wild and uninhabited except by the wavering dots of sheep which wandered in what seemed to be an aimless manner from one small heathery shrub to another. A group stopped to stare at her, lifting their tangled heads in a supercilious way, then scattered as the child, as children will, clapped her hands and shouted 'Boo', laughing with delight. Queenie wondered, as she had done for years now, where the child got her natural exuberance from given the hardship of her life. Probably from that red-haired scamp who was her father and whom Queenie had not clapped eyes on since the day she had told him she was with child.

'Come on, chuck, don't dawdle . . .' Which was unfair, for the child never failed to keep up. Her little legs would go ten to the dozen, almost running to keep pace with her mother, and if



she wasn't running she was hopping or skipping, probably singing as she did so, which again was an inheritance from her merry Irish father.

'Look, Mam, what's them on those bushes?' she asked, pointing a finger at the spreading carpet of vegetation that lay about them for mile after mile, broken only by enormous misshapen boulders, some looming silently alone, others in companionable groups, scattered as though by some mischievous giant child. Queenie followed the child's pointing finger, scanning the variety of plants among which only the sheep moved. There was cowberry creeping across the landscape, its white flowers beginning to die as autumn progressed; mosses of all shades of green, for the ground was boggy and wet; moor grass; the massed and lovely purple of heather which was at its peak; but the plant the girl pointed out had black fruit growing on it, deep and luscious.

'Why, them's bilberry, our kid, an' if I can find that old basket nobody wanted ter buy in't market-place we'll pick us some to mash up wi' our oats. That'll mekk a right nice finish fer us dinner when we gerr 'ome which I 'ope'll be by th'end o't week. That's if they keep. Should do, picked fresh terday. But we'll 'ave ter look sharp, fer we've still over thirty miles ter tramp. Are yer mothetten, lass, 'cos if ya are yer can 'op up on't cart when we've picked bilberries. Yer a good lass an' we've come a fair way terday.'

'No, Mam,' the child said stoutly. 'I'm not tired.' And to prove it she skipped a step or two.

'Right, well, let's gerron. 'Appen we can get by Over Darwen, on ter Darwen Moor an' set down under't cart fer't night there. Them big stones mekk a good shelter. We should know, shouldn't we, chuck. We've done it a few times.' She chuckled and the child laughed with her, then the mother turned in a complete circle, putting her hand to her forehead and studying the sky. 'It don't look like rain.'

The child copied her mother's action. 'No, Mam, it don't,' she said solemnly.

Queenie smiled, her heart bursting with love for this gift she had been given so late in her life, this precious girl who not only had her father's merry ways but her own good common sense. And she was so lovely that Queenie had begun to worry, for she had noticed men looking at her with that certain expression Queenie had come to recognise. She was only seven years old but there were perverted chaps who liked a bit of young flesh; indeed there was a flourishing market in the cities for innocent virgins and plenty of greedy, unscrupulous women to provide it for the right price.

The sun moved slowly across the deep blue bowl of the sky, skirting a cloud or two as the woman and child moved deep into the clutching embrace of the bilberry bushes, their ragged skirts catching on the ground-covering branches. They picked steadily, staining their already dirt-engrained fingers, Queenie holding up her skirt to catch the luscious fruit, the little girl placing those she picked in the basket that had failed to sell at the market in Accrington. She was careful not to crush the fruit, though now and again she popped one of the berries into her mouth, staining her lips to an even more rosy red, and she sang as she moved from bush to bush.

*I know where I'm going,  
And I know who's going with me  
I know who I love,  
But the dear knows who I'll marry.*

Queenie smiled, creasing the honey-coloured skin of her face into deep wrinkles. It was said that Queenie came from gypsy stock and her sun-browned face seemed to prove it. She walked like a queen, which was probably where she got her name, some thought, straight-backed, her dark head held high, swaying

gracefully with long strides, looking neither to left nor right as though those who passed by her were beneath her. She was tall, full-breasted with generous hips and it was a mystery to those who lived about her why some man had not moved in with her. Of course, someone must have had his way with her, for where had she got the kid, but none had ever seen him and Queenie was not a woman to question or to pass on confidences, even to her neighbour Jess Wilson who was the closest Queenie had to a friend.

It was Jess's son Jem who had taught the child the song she was singing now and not just this one but many others he had learned in his work about the shipyard. 'I Saw Three Ships Come Sailing By', 'Greensleeves', 'It Was a Lover and His Lass' and the one Queenie herself used to sing to the child when she was a baby, 'Golden slumbers kiss your eyes, smiles awake you when you rise . . .' which was exactly what happened as soon as the child woke in the morning. Smiles, laughter, beauty, joy, as though it were an enchantment just to be alive with the ability to pass on all these wonders to those in her world, despite their desperately poor lives.

'I think we've gorr enough now, luv. We'd best gerr a move on or it'll be dark before we get ter Darwen Moor.'

Instantly obedient, the little girl turned and made her way behind her mother to the handcart. The bilberries Queenie had picked were tipped into the basket and placed carefully on top of the tottering pile of goods that Queenie had failed to get rid of in the market at Accrington but which she hoped to sell in the markets of the several towns and villages they would pass through on their way to Liverpool. There was Over Darwen, Chorley, Wigan, St Helens and Prescot, all fair-sized places with a market in each. She and the child had spent many weeks in the cotton towns of the South Pennines, going from factory to factory buying, as cheaply as they could, the cotton goods that were surplus to requirements. They had even gone over

the tops and into Yorkshire, to Keighley and Halifax, where woollen goods might be on sale, then back into Lancashire to Colne, Barnoldswick, Burnley and yesterday Accrington. They had set up their cart on the edge of the market, erecting the wide banner Queenie had made years ago which proclaimed that woollen and cotton goods were for sale along with donkey stones, brass fire irons, a coal scuttle, a battered bird cage, an enamel frying pan, a golden syrup can, a mouse trap, all what the rest of the world would call rubbish and which were rusted and in a poor condition. She had picked up innumerable household goods for next to nothing, which were all that the desperately poor who had bought them could afford. Cleaned up, they would make a decent profit, even as much as a penny on each item! And this winter she and the child would scour Liverpool, knocking on back doors asking if the household had any old rubbish it wished to get rid of. There were many markets in the city, starting with the magnificence of St John's Market where the upper classes – or at least their housekeepers – shopped. But Queenie favoured the Pedlars' Market in Deane Street where the kind of goods she had to offer might be displayed for the benefit of those less well off: baskets, earthenware, glass, toys, bonnets – second or even third- or fourth-hand goods. And there was St Martin's Market in Scotland Road; Pownall Square, which was held in the open air; the Pig Market and Gill Street Market where, at the rear of the market proper, in the yard there was space for market dealers like herself selling hardware, woollen and cotton goods, cheap stuff that was within the financial range of the inhabitants of the tenement houses in which she herself lived.

Since she had been a small child Queenie Logan had been practical, sensible, clear-headed, but it all deserted her seven years ago when it came to the naming of her newly born daughter.

'*Gillyflower!* What sorta name's tha' fer Christ's sake? Poor

kid'll get six bells o' shit knocked out of 'er by them in't street.' Jess, who had just delivered the child, was open-mouthed with amazed horror.

'I don't care, Jess. That's wharr I'm callin' 'er.' She didn't explain why to Jess. That was *her* secret. 'She'll 'ave ter learn ter stick up fer 'erself, same as I did. Anyroad, I like Gillyflower,' she said, wincing sharply as Jess dealt with the afterbirth.

Jess swabbed carelessly with a none too clean cloth at the tear between Queenie's thighs from where the baby, a strong, lusty girl, had just yelled her way into the world. The afterbirth, which she had dropped into one of Queenie's chipped basins, was carried to the door which opened on to a small basement area with steps leading to the street. Climbing the steps, she flung the mess into the foetid gutter where it was pounced upon by two scrawny dogs who immediately began to fight over it. It was a raw February night and Jess shut the door hurriedly to keep in the warmth of Queenie's cellar room. Coal was expensive and the fire in the grate was no more than a smouldering ember or two but the hard labour the two women had just gone through had brought both out in a sweat, giving the impression that the temperature was warmer than it actually was. Jess wanted to keep it that way. She would have to get off soon or her own children would be howling for her, but none more so than that fat arse of a husband who had given them to her. Of course he wasn't actually her husband in the eyes of the law, for none round here had the cash to purchase a marriage licence, but at least she had a chap, which was more than could be said for poor Queenie.

She looked round the dingy room, still littered with the debris of the conflict they had just fought, rags slopped on the floor, a spilled basin of water, a small pool of Queenie's blood, the knife with which she had cut the cord and the remains of a dish she had dropped and broken. Not that she had the time or the inclination, if the truth were told, to tidy it up a bit; in fact she

wanted to do no more than make a cup of weak tea, one for each of them, which she would drink while she rested in Queenie's sagging old rocking-chair before the sulky fire. The baby had been wiped round with the same cloth that had tidied Queenie up 'down there', wrapped in an old blanket Queenie had brought from the market in preparation for this day and put to her mother's breast where she was suckling heartily. Jess watched approvingly.

'That un'll survive, lass. Look at way she's slurpin' it down. A good sign, Queenie. An' she's a good weight. Seven pounds, I'd say. But yer'll be wantin' some more water fetchin', ter clean up a bit and bath 'er like.' Not that Jess would bother with such a thing herself, for she was indifferent to the state of her home and her children's hygiene, or lack of it, the last born only three months ago but still surviving, since water was a scarce commodity in the alley, but she knew Queenie was a bugger for it. 'Shall I send our Jem round ter fill yer bucket?'

'Thanks, Jess, that's kind. I'll be up termorrer ter see ter messen but I'd be glad of Jem ternight. When this un's 'ad 'er fill I'll get some sleep. I'm off ter't Saturday market at Aintree Racecourse an' I could do wi' a birrof a rest first. An' 'appen your Jem could give me a 'and wi't handcart. Gerrin it up them steps is tricky at the best o' times.'

'Course, lass.' Jess eyed the handcart which was Queenie's livelihood and which took up a fair space in the corner of the dingy cellar. It was a dilapidated thing made up of odd bits of wood tacked together, rusted nails holding them in place and the two leaning wheels giving the distinct impression that they were about to fall off at any moment. But Queenie, with the help of Jem who was glad of the ha'pence he earned, kept the thing on the road despite its unsafe appearance. It should be said that Tommy Wilson, Jem's father, was the beneficiary of the money Jem earned, for it went straight into his pocket, finding its way across the bar counter of the Crown and Anchor

at the corner of Pumpfields and Vauxhall Road right next to the coal yard, which was handy of a cold night. Jess was glad of the lump or two her Tommy often fetched home in his pocket and the only loser was poor Jem. But he was a good lad and Jess didn't know what she would do without him! And neither did Queenie. He would help her to load up the handcart in the morning from the neat piles of what looked like decomposing rubbish that was stacked in every corner of the room and if she gave him a few pence would come with her to Aintree and help her set up her stall, which would be a help with the baby to see to. But she'd manage. She always had, hadn't she?

There was quiet in the room but for the sucking of the child, which was becoming slower as satiation and sleep overtook her, and the hissing of the kettle which sat on the bars across the front of the fire. As Jess rocked the rockers tapped gently on the bare floor and for a moment she almost fell into a doze, then she shook herself awake and stood up. She smoothed down the stained apron she wore, stained with the blood of the woman who had just given birth and other matter which did not bear looking into! A small ginger cat twined round her feet, mewing piteously. She pushed it irritably aside with her foot as she made her way to the door.

'An 'yer'd best watch this bugger wi't baby, chuck. Cats is known ter lie on their face an' smother 'em. One o' Mrs Berry's went that way, poor soul. Eight weeks old, it were, an'—'

'Aye, thanks, Jess, I'll keep Gillyflower in bed wi' me.' Queenie's eyes were drooping and the baby lay peacefully at her side.

Jess raised her eyes to the stained ceiling and tutted exasperatedly, feeling sorry for the poor little beggar and wondering how she would survive in Rose Alley with a name like *Gillyflower*. 'Right then, chuck, I'll send our Jem wi' a bucket o' water right away otherwise stand pipe'll be turned off before we know where we're at.'

‘Thanks, Jess, yer a pal.’

‘Nay, we ’elp each other in this bloody world, Queenie. I’ll pop in later termorrer, lass. See ’ow yer gorrion at market.’

Queenie was more than half asleep when a tentative knock on the door brought her from the rest her body craved. For a moment she was startled then she remembered young Jem and as she struggled to sit up he put his tousled head round the door, his freckled face beaming from ear to ear, for he liked Queenie and was always glad to give her a hand. She often slipped him a farthing or two, some of which he managed to keep secret from his pa, when he helped her with the handcart. Well, it had to be bumped down the steps of the basement area and into her cellar at night since it could hardly be left outside where not only its contents but the handcart itself would have vanished by morning. Then it needed two of them to get it up the steps the next day before Queenie set off for market.

‘I brought yer water, Mrs Logan,’ he whispered. ‘Me mam ses yer want ter wash baby,’ his face as perplexed as his mam’s, for none of the Wilson family were much acquainted with cleanliness.

‘Thanks, lad, purrit down by’t fire. ’Appen yer could fill kettle fer me an’ leave it on’t fire then I can see ter’t baby first thing.’

‘Right you are, Mrs Logan.’ He did as he was told then crept closer to the bed and peered down at the swaddled bundle beside her mother. ‘This ’er?’ He studied the sleeping baby with little interest but something about her caught his attention and he leaned closer. She was still mucky with dried blood and the stuff newborn babies were coated with, but it was her eyelashes that fascinated him. They were the longest he had ever seen, resting in a fan on her rounded cheek, and they were the colour of copper, as were her delicate eyebrows which arched above her swollen, tightly shut eyes. Her pursed lips sucked hopefully and then were still and Jem Wilson, who had



seen many newborns, since he was the eldest of his mam's seven, felt something inside him move, melt, become warm.

'She's right pretty, missis,' he said hesitantly, surprising himself and the baby's mother. 'Look at colour of 'er 'air.'

They both studied the infant's hair which even under its smear of damp birth traces could only be called red. It lay flat in waves on her delicately formed skull with a short curl sticking up here and there. Jem reached out a tentative finger and touched one and it was then that he fell in love with the woman the baby would become, though he was not yet old enough to recognise the emotion. He turned to smile at Queenie. It was clear he was lost for words which was surprising, for Jem's life was made up of a definite need to speak up and *stick up* for himself in the rough and ready world he inhabited. Among the noisy family of which he was a part he fought for his place in it and amid the scores of street urchins who lived and died in the multitude of tall and tottering houses that lined Rose Alley and the neighbouring streets that jostled against one another, their occupants numbering thousands. They lived in filth and squalor in the tenements which rose out of a sea of stench in dense, dirty masses built by landlords who cared only for the profit they made from the rents. From cellar to attic, three storeys high, the structures were so rotten they were in grave danger of simply tumbling into the courts around which they were built. In the space of one square mile, should any of them have cared to count, lived 66,000 inhabitants, sometimes a family of nine, such as Jess Wilson's, in one room.

'Right, missis, I'd best be off then if there's nowt else yer need. I'll be in first thing ter give yer a 'and wi't barrow.' The boy grinned engagingly, took one last puzzled look at the sleeping baby then scuttled off up the area steps to the cellar next door where the bit of straw and sacking that he shared with his siblings awaited him.

Queenie would have liked another cup of the weak tea Jess