



SHADES *of*
MILK *and* HONEY

MARY ROBINETTE KOWAL

"A beautiful, lyrical, tightly woven meld of Jane Austen, Jane Eyre, and Beauty and the Beast—I couldn't put it down!" —LILITH SAINTCROW

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and Honey

TOR BOOKS BY MARY ROBINETTE KOWAL

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This is a work of fiction. All of the characters, organizations, and events portrayed in this novel are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously.

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*To my grandmothers, Mary Elois Jackson
and Robinette Harrison, who taught me
the importance of family and storytelling*

One

Jasmine and Honeysuckle



The Ellsworths of Long Parkmead had the regard of their neighbours in every respect. The Honourable Charles Ellsworth, though a second son, through the generosity of his father had been entrusted with an estate in the neighbourhood of Dorchester. It was well appointed and used only enough glamour to enhance its natural grace, without overlaying so much illusion as to be tasteless. His only regret, for the estate was a fine one, was that it was entailed, and as he had only two daughters, his elder brother's son stood next in line to inherit it. Knowing that, he took pains to set aside some of his income each annum for the provision of his daughters.

The sum was not so large as he wished it might be, but he hoped it would prove enough to attract appropriate husbands for his daughters. Of his younger daughter, Melody, he had no concerns, for she had a face made for fortune. His older daughter, Jane, made up for her deficit of beauty with rare taste and talent in the womanly arts. Her skill with glamour, music, and painting was surpassed by none in their neighbourhood and together lent their home the appearance of wealth far beyond their means. But he knew well how fickle young men's hearts were. His own wife, while young, had seemed all that was desirable, but as her beauty faded she had become a fretting invalid. He still cherished her from habit, but often he wished that she had somewhat more sense.

And so, Jane was his chief concern, and he was determined to see her settled before his passing. Surely some young man would see past her sallow complexion and flat hair of unappealing mousey brown. Her nose was overlong, though he fancied that in certain lights it served as an outward sign of her strength of character. Mr. Ellsworth fingered his own nose, wishing that he had something more to bequeath to Jane than such an appendage.

He slashed at the grass with his walking stick and turned to his elder daughter as they walked through the maze comprising the heart of the shrubbery on the south side of the house. "Had you heard that Lady FitzCameron's nephew is to be stationed in our town?"

“No.” Jane adjusted the shawl about her shoulders. “They must be pleased to see him.”

“Indeed, I believe that Lady FitzCameron will extend her stay rather than returning to London as she had planned.” He tugged at his waistcoat and attempted to speak idly. “Young Livingston has been made a captain, I understand.”

“So young? He must have acquitted himself ably in His Majesty’s navy, then.” Jane knelt by a rosebush and sniffed the glory of the soft pink petals. The sunlight reflected off of the plant, bringing a brief bloom to her cheeks.

“I thought perhaps to invite the family for a strawberry-picking Thursday next.”

Jane threw her head back and laughed. It was a lovely laugh, at odds with her severe countenance. “Oh, Papa. Are you matchmaking again? I thought Lady FitzCameron had it set in her mind that the captain was to marry Miss FitzCameron.”

He stabbed the ground with his walking stick. “No. I am merely trying to be a good neighbour. If you have so little regard for the FitzCamerons as to shun their relations, then I have misjudged your character.”

Jane’s eyes twinkled and she pecked him on the cheek. “I think a strawberry-picking party sounds delightful. I am certain that the FitzCamerons will thank you for your courtesy to them.”

The tall yew hedges hugged the path on either side of

them, shielding them from view of the house. Overhead, the sky arched in a gentle shell of blue. Mr. Ellsworth walked in companionable silence beside his daughter, plotting ways to bring her together with Captain Livingston. They turned the last corner of the maze and went up the Long Walk to the house. On the steps, he paused. "You know I only want the best for you, my dear."

Jane looked down. "Of course, Papa."

"Good." He squeezed her arm. "I shall check on the strawberries, then, to make certain they will be suitably ripe for next week." He left her on the steps and went to the hill on the east side of the house, making plans for the party as he walked.

Jane folded her shawl over her arm, still thinking of her father's thinly veiled plans. He meant well, but would surely tip his hand to Captain Livingston, who was, after all, several years her junior. She had first met Henry Livingston before the war broke out when he wintered with Lady FitzCameron while his parents were away on the continent. He had been an attractive boy, with large dark eyes and a thick crop of unruly black hair. Though a favourite of Lady FitzCameron, he had not been back to the estate since, and it was hard to imagine him as a grown man. She shook her head, settled the folds of her muslin frock, and entered the drawing room.

The smell of jasmine nearly overpowered her, burning

her nose and making her eyes water. Her younger sister, Melody, who wove folds of glamour in the corner, was evidently the source of the overwhelming aroma.

“Melody, what in heaven’s name are you doing?”

Melody jumped and dropped the folds of glamour in her hands; they dissolved back into the ether from whence she had pulled them. “Oh, Jane. When I visited Lady FitzCameron with Mama, she conjured the loveliest hint of jasmine in the air. It was so elegant and . . . I cannot understand how she managed such a subtle touch.”

Jane shook her head and went to open the window so the jasmine fragrance could dissipate with more speed. “My dear, Lady FitzCameron had the best tutors as a girl, including, I believe, the renowned German glamourist Herr Scholes. It is hardly surprising that she can manage such delicate folds.” When Jane let her vision shift to the ether, so that the physical room faded from her view. The lingering remnants of glamour were far too bulky for the effect that Melody had been trying to attain. Jane took the folds between her fingers and thinned them to a gossamer weight which she could barely feel. When she stretched them out, they spanned the corner in a fine web. Once she anchored the folds to the corner, the glamour settled into the room, vanishing from view. The gentle scent of honeysuckle filled the air, as if from a sprig of flowers. It took so little effort that she barely felt light-headed.

Melody squinted at the corner where Jane had left the web, as if trying to see the invisible folds.

“Please do not squint, dear. It is unbecoming.” She ignored Melody’s scowl and turned back to the web. Not for the first time, she wondered if Melody were near-sighted. She could never handle fine work, even with needlepoint, and her glamour seemed limited to only the broadest strokes.

“What does it matter?” Melody threw herself on the sofa. “I have no hope of catching a husband. I am so abysmally poor at all of the arts.”

Jane could not help herself. She laughed at her sister. “You have nothing to fear. Had I half your beauty I would have more beaux than the largest dowry could settle upon me.” She turned to straighten one of her watercolours on the north wall.

“Mr. Dunkirk sends his regards.”

Jane was thankful that her back was to her sister, for the sudden flush she felt would have given her away. She tried to hide the growing attachment she felt towards Mr. Dunkirk, particularly since he seemed to have a higher regard for Melody, but his gentle manner drew her to him. “I hope he is well.” She was pleased with the steadiness in her voice.

“He asked if he could call this afternoon.” Melody sighed. “That is why I wanted to freshen the drawing room.”

The wistfulness in Melody’s voice would only be appropriate if she had reached an understanding with him. Jane turned to her sister, scrutinizing her countenance.

A gentle glow suffused Melody’s delicate features. She

stared into the middle distance as if her cornflower blue eyes were blinded by a radiant image. Jane had seen the same expression on her own plainer face in unguarded moments. She could only hope that Melody had been more cautious in company. She smiled gently at her sister. “Shall I help you set the drawing room to rights, then?”

“Would you?”

“Of course.”

The drawing room already had a simple theme of palm trees and egrets designed to complement its Egyptian revival furniture. For the better part of an hour, Jane and Melody twisted and pulled folds of glamour out of the ether. Some of the older threads of glamour in the palm trees had become frayed, making the images lose their resolution. In other places, Jane added more depth to the illusion by creating a breeze to ruffle the fronds of the glamour. Though her breath came quickly and she felt light-headed with the effort of placing so many folds, the effect was well worth such a trifling strain.

Placed in pairs in the corners of the room, the trees seemed to brush the coffered ceiling, accenting its height with their graceful forms. Between each tree, an egret posed in a pool of glamour, waiting an eternity for the copper fish hinted at below its reflection. Simpler folds brought the warm glow of an Egyptian sunset to the room, and the subtle scent of honeysuckle kissed the breeze.

When all was settled, Jane seated herself at the piano-forte and pulled a fold of glamour close about her. She played

a simple rondo, catching the notes in the loose fold; when she reached the point where the song repeated, she stopped playing and tied the glamour off. Captured by the glamour, the music continued to play, wrapping around to the beginning of the song with only a tiny pause at the end of the fold. With care, she clipped the small silence at the end of the music and tied it more firmly to the beginning, so the piece repeated seamlessly. Then she stretched the fold of glamour to gossamer thinness until the rondo sounded as if it played in the far distance.

The door to the drawing room opened. Melody leapt to her feet with a naked expression of welcome on her face. Jane rose slowly, trying to attain a more seemly display. She placed her hand on the pianoforte as the room spun about her with the lingering effects of working glamour.

But only their father entered the room. "Hello, my dears." The plum brocade of his waistcoat strained across his ample middle. He looked around the drawing room in evident pleasure. "Are we expecting company?"

Melody said, "Mr. Dunkirk said he would honour us with a visit this afternoon."

"Did he?" Her father looked befuddled. "But I saw him not fifteen minutes ago passing through our fields with the FitzCamerons. They looked for all the world as if they were going hunting. Are you certain you did not mistake his meaning?"

Melody's face soured. "His meaning was clear. But per-

haps he preferred to spend the afternoon in the company of a lady than a farmer's daughter."

Jane winced as Melody flew from the room.

"Good heavens. What has gotten into the child?" Mr. Ellsworth turned to Jane with his eyebrows high. "Does she think that the whole neighbourhood must dance attendance to her whims?"

"She is young, and . . ." Jane hesitated to commit her sister's potential indiscretion to words, but as her sister had not taken her into confidence, and as Jane feared for Melody's state of mind, she continued on. "I fear she may be developing an attachment to Mr. Dunkirk."

"Does he return it?"

"I do not know." Jane plucked at the waist of her frock. "Certainly his behaviour has been above reproach in every instance of which I am aware."

Mr. Ellsworth nodded, evidently satisfied with that reassurance. "Then we must hope that Melody will not embarrass herself while we wait for this fancy to pass."

The front door slammed.

Jane hurried to the window and peered out. Melody strode across their lawn, heading for the fields between their home and Banbree Manor. Jane caught her breath. "I fear that is what she has set out to do."

Her father looked over Jane's shoulder. "I will go fetch her before she can damage our neighbour's good opinion of her."

Jane nodded, though she wanted to tell her father to let Melody do as she would. Let the headstrong girl make a fool of herself. The rational part of Jane knew that Melody was not her obstacle to Mr. Dunkirk's affection. Jane was too plain and too quiet to engender any interest in him or any other gentleman.

Jane turned from the window and sat at the pianoforte. She loosened the fold around it, silencing the distant song. Quietly, she began to play, losing herself in the music.

Her fingers played across the keys and stroked thin folds of glamour on the ebony and ivory surfaces. Colours swirled around her in answer to the sound. She welcomed the light-headedness, which came with too much glamour, as a distraction from her cares.

When the front door opened, Jane kept her attention on the pianoforte; she did not want to speak with Melody and have to comfort her. But that was unjust; Melody could not know how her actions affected Jane.

Bringing the song to a close, she looked up as the colours around her faded.

Mr. Dunkirk stood in the door to the drawing room. His face was alight with wonder. "Forgive me, Miss Ellsworth. I had told your sister I would call, and am later than I intended."

Jane's heart pounded with more than the effort of glamour, and a flush of warmth flooded her face. "Mr. Dunkirk. You have just missed her; she has gone for a walk with my father." Jane rose with care, pretending that gray blobs did

not swarm in her sight. She would not swoon in front of him. “But please be welcome. May I offer you tea or a brandy?”

“Thank you.” He accepted the brandy she offered and raised the glass to her. “I had no idea you were such an accomplished musician and glamourist.”

Jane looked away. “It is an idle amusement, sir.”

“Nonsense. Music and the other womanly arts are what brings comfort to a home.” He looked at the palm trees and egrets adorning the drawing room. “I hope to have a home such as this one day.”

Jane put her hand on the piano to steady herself, keenly aware that she was alone with him. “Indeed,” she murmured. “Though I would venture to say that Robinsford Abbey is most gracious.”

“But it lacks that comfort which a wife with the gift of glamour might bring.” He inhaled the scent of honeysuckle and exhaled it in a sigh. “Other men might seek a lovely face, but I should think that they would consider exquisite taste the higher treasure. Beauty will fade, but not a gift such as this.”

“Do you not think that glamour might be learned, whereas beauty is innate?”

“Glamour, yes. But not taste, I think.” He smiled and inclined his head. “It was a conversation close to this topic which prompted my tardy arrival here. Have you had occasion to meet Mr. Vincent?”

“I’m afraid you have the better of me.”

“Ah. I thought Miss Melody might have mentioned him.

Lady FitzCameron has retained his services to create a glamural for her dining hall. He is a fascinating fellow, who studied with Herr Scholes and has taken commissions from the Prince Regent. Stunning talent, really.”

“Did Melody meet him, then?” It seemed odd that her sister would fail to mention it. Visitors to their neighbourhood were rare enough to be newsworthy, but to have such an accomplished glamourist in the vicinity was a significant event.

“I thought they met, but perhaps I am mistaken. In any case, Mr. Vincent had much to say on the subject of glamour, which I think you might find to be compelling arguments in my favour.”

The front door opened again, and Melody flung the door to the drawing room wide. Her face was red and stained with tears. When she saw Mr. Dunkirk, she uttered a cry of dismay and fled the room.

Jane closed her eyes. Poor Melody. What must she think? To see Jane quite alone with a man for whom Melody so clearly had an attachment must seem as a betrayal. When Jane opened her eyes, he had set his glass down to greet Mr. Ellsworth.

Excusing herself, Jane said, “I feel that I must check on Melody.”

“I hope she has not suffered an accident,” Mr. Dunkirk said.

Jane’s father harrumphed and mumbled that Melody had twisted her ankle while walking, to which Mr. Dunkirk

replied, "Then I will leave you to tend to her." He took his leave, only pausing at the door to say, "May I call again?"

"Of course!" Mr. Ellsworth beamed. "Come whenever you like."

"Then I will see you soon." Mr. Dunkirk bowed. "Your daughter is a credit to you, sir."

When the front door closed, Mr. Ellsworth said, "Well. Melody needn't have worried after all. 'A credit.'"

Jane smiled. "Indeed."

Still glowing with the words of Mr. Dunkirk's praise, Jane went abovestairs and knocked on the door of Melody's room. Such a small thing, those words, but it was the first time she could recall coming to his special notice. He had always been courtesy itself when in her company, but her attachment to him grew more from how he treated others than from any sense of his having regard for her.

She leaned her head against the door, listening for sounds within the chamber. "Melody?"

"Go away."

Jane sighed. "Dear. Let me come in."

The silence stretched out, during which Jane had time to examine the wood grain on the door and the age worn in the softened edges of its panels. "Melody?"

Cloth rustled within, and the key turned in the lock, unlatching the door. As Jane opened the door, she was in time to see Melody fling herself artlessly upon the bed, where the rumpled spread shewed how she had spent the time since Mr. Dunkirk's visit. Her golden curls lay across

the bed in an intricate lacework, and tears glittered on the ends of her lashes like diamonds.

Jane closed the door behind her and leaned against it, regarding her sister. “Mr. Dunkirk sends his apologies for his tardiness.”

Melody sat up with alarming speed. Her face flushed. “Is he still here?”

“No. Papa let him understand that you had twisted your ankle while out walking.” Jane sat next to her sister.

Placing her hands over her eyes, Melody groaned and fell back on the bed. “Now he thinks me clumsy as well as overexcited.”

“I am certain he does not.” Jane wiped her sister’s brow, which was hot with the force of her excitement. Reaching into the ether, Jane conjured a cooling breeze to soothe her.

Melody pulled her hands away from her eyes, though she kept her lids shut and turned her face toward the breeze. “But he does. I stammer and blush when he is present. La! Do not tell me you have failed to notice.” She opened her eyes and glared up at Jane.

“Until today, I had not the faintest notion that you had any affection for Mr. Dunkirk beyond that of a neighbour. Indeed, I had thought you were no more fond of him than of one of our uncles.” Jane smoothed the folds of her skirt, praying that her own countenance was not as transparent to feeling as Melody’s. “Have you an understanding with Mr. Dunkirk?”

Melody burst into laughter. “An understanding? My

dear Jane, Mr. Dunkirk is gentleness embodied. He is grace and elegance and all that is good in a man, but he is also too conscious of propriety to betray anything beyond courtesy. This is why I had such hopes when he said he would come to call today. I had hoped that perhaps he might have begun to pay notice to me as myself instead of as simply the daughter of his neighbour.” She groaned and rolled over, burying her face in her arms. “What did you speak of while I was out acting the fool?”

“Very little. Music. Glamour. Lady FitzCameron’s glamourist.” Jane waited to see if Melody would speak of meeting Mr. Vincent, but her sister charged ahead with her litany of woes.

“You see! I could not speak with him of any of those. I am talentless.” She clenched her fingers in her hair, and for a moment Jane feared that Melody would pull her own hair out by the roots.

Such were Melody’s torments that Jane gave away the comfort that she had taken for herself. “Not true. Ask Papa what he said about you.”

In an instant, Melody turned over, her eyes a vivid, sparkling blue. “What did he say? Do not tease me, dear sister.”

“He said, ‘Your daughter is a credit to you.’”

Melody’s face lit with an inner glow of pleasure, but it faded quickly. “He was surely speaking of you.”

“I was there, Melody. Why would he speak of me as if I were not present?” And as Jane spoke, she realized that it

was true. She had taken Mr. Dunkirk's words to her heart as if he had spoken of her, but he surely had not. Who else could he have meant but Melody? Had his compliment been intended for Jane, he would have said, "*You* are a credit to your father." There could be no doubt that he had meant Melody. Jane reached out and tousled Melody's hair to mask the wet disappointment that seeped through her. "You see?"

Melody sat and flung her arms around Jane. "Oh, thank you. Thank you for telling me."

"Of course. We must find these small comforts where we may." Jane held her sister and wondered where she would find her own small comfort. She reached for a new topic, to push away the pain of this one. "And now, should I chide you for not telling me of Lady FitzCameron's glamourist?"

Melody pulled back, her eyes wide with guilt. "Oh, Jane! I am so sorry. When Mr. Dunkirk said he would call, all else slipped my mind. Though, truly, there is little to tell."

"Well. What sort of man is he?"

"More bear than man, really. La! He said barely two words the whole visit. Lady FitzCameron says that he is rightfully clever, but I did not see any signs of it."

"Fortunately, one does not need to speak to weave glamour." Jane sighed. "I should like to have had the training that he has had."

Melody leaned against Jane, wrinkling her nose. "See! You chide me, but you already know more of him than I do."

“You were too distracted by Mr. Dunkirk, I daresay.”

When Melody blushed, her infatuation was writ large on her cheeks. “Oh, Jane. Is Mr. Dunkirk not the most handsome, most admirable man you have ever met?”

“Yes.” Jane hugged her sister, so that her own telling countenance was hidden. “Yes, he is.”