

The UNSELECTED JOURNALS *of*
EMMA M. LION

VOL.1



BETH BROWER

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BETH BROWER

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblances to actual persons, living or dead, events, business establishments, or locales is entirely coincidental.

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Emma M. Lion

*would like to dedicate her journals to all those
who have the presumption to read them.*

March 5th

I've arrived in London without incident.

There are few triumphs in my recent life, but I count this as one. My existence of the last three years has been nothing *but* incident.

The train billowed its way into St. Pancras Station five minutes early. Auspicious, as I am fairly certain such a thing has never before happened in the history of the British railway system. A less than enthusiastic porter helped me with my two trunks, my case, and my hat box. He took note of the frayed edges on my morning coat, made a sound of disapproval, and began to silently convey his displeasure at helping me. I did give him a halfpenny. *Rather* generous, considering my financial state. Strangely, it was the hat box that caused the greatest sneer, despite it actually carrying a hat. For over a year it carried something a modicum less pleasant: the monkey's head Maxwell sent me.

I almost crossed that out, the bit about the monkey's head. In Bournemouth, I developed a rather unfortunate habit of redaction, seeing as how Cousin Matilde was no respecter of personal belongings, as proven by The Great Burning of 1882. The tendency to assume I've no privacy has persisted despite my best efforts, but I am determined to break it. This journal does not deserve to have a foul, black mark running through every incriminating thought. I will no longer censor myself!

I digress.

After securing a hansom cab, an unavoidable expense, I gave the driver the directions to my favourite place in all the world:

Lapis Lazuli House in the neighbourhood of St. Crispian's, London.

My blessed fate.

As the cab turned onto Whereabouts Lane, I leaned out of the window to watch Lapis Lazuli House come into view. There it was! Tall and memorable,

grey limestone with exterior carvings akin to a park bench or an ornate grave marker. When the cab rolled to a stop, I was out and onto the street, relieved to have finally arrived. Though the squared portico needs to be repainted, the five curved steps leading to the front door were newly swept. The windows need cleaning, but, dare I boast, they are taller than most in the neighbourhood. Yet, despite all this, there is an unaware feeling about this house that I love. As impressive as Lapis Lazuli is, it by no means takes itself over-seriously. A cosmic balance to the ego of its current inhabitant.

Cousin Archibald, said inhabitant, was not at home when I arrived. He must have sensed ~~his impending doom~~ my pending arrival. His man, Parian, was in, for it was he who answered the famous blue door and—after breathing out through his nose several disapproving times—allowed me to cross the sacred threshold. The new scullery-maid-turned-cook was also present for my arrival. Her name is Agnes. She is the most promising unpromising girl of sixteen I’ve ever met. Both she and Parian helped me transport my effects to my rooms.

There were several sets of stairs involved. Several. For my benevolent cousin has placed me not in my own rooms on the very reasonable third floor, but in the garret of the fifth floor.

The garret.

I repeat, the garret.

My old rooms are apparently mine no longer. I am banned from them. Why? one might ask. To which I answer, there are some things we are never meant to understand.

Though honesty demands I acknowledge it may have something to do with The Incident which led to The Scar.

Spitefully, the entire fourth floor is empty and is to remain untouched. The third floor consists of two guest bedrooms and my former rooms. Below that, Cousin Archibald occupies the second floor, including the forbidden-to-me library, which he keeps locked. The first floor hosts the drawing room, the dining room, and an unused salon. The kitchens and storerooms are on

the ground floor, with a room for Agnes behind the kitchen, near the gardens.

Where, one might ask, resides Parian, our valet-turned-butler-turned-rather-intolerable-man? I carry my suspicions that His Current Rooms were formerly known as My Rooms. May he enjoy the view of the garden.

While this rearrangement might never have occurred in any other London household, I cannot say I am very surprised it has happened here. In the words of my maternal aunt, Lady Eugenia Spencer, “Lapis Lazuli is a bizarre establishment, to say the least.” And she is never content to say the least, so let it be marked.

As for the state of the garret, it is a mess of furniture, dust, and cobwebs. Ascending the final staircase, one finds oneself presented with three doors. The left door opens to a west room, with one and a half windows that overlook the back garden. The middle door leads to a closet in severe disarray. The right door opens to the east room, also with one and a half windows, but that offer a view of the street. The half window is due to Lapis Lazuli Minor, which Cousin Archibald created when he walled off a ridiculously small, ten-foot sliver of the house in order to lure in wealthy renters. After giving a mere ten feet on every other floor—three of those ten feet being occupied by the former servants’ stairway—Archibald waxed magnanimous in the garret and gave the flat full half. Meaning my rooms are smaller, and I have one and a half windows in each.

I have found a bed and a small night table among the detritus in the east room, and it is here I will make camp until I can assess the best course of action. Agnes made certain I understood that the bedding had been washed twice. She seemed so brightly insistent upon its cleanliness that I admit to feeling dimly alarmed as to what its previous state had been.

I did find, among the wreckage of the garret, a worn copy of *Paradise Lost*. Victory! Cousin Archibald’s plan to keep me uneducated suffers a retreat. How wonderful it will be to have something to read until I can rebuild my own library. In addition, finding Milton in your garret must be a sign of sorts.

And so I say to myself, welcome home.
I shall have some cards made up.

Emma M. Lion
Lapis Lazuli House, Whereabouts Lane
London

March 6th

This morning I was informed that, unless otherwise directed, I would be taking all of my meals in my garret on a tray. Into the dining room I shall not go. Parian delivered the news with noticeable self-satisfaction. I believe my banishment has brought a great deal of joy to his life. I won't begrudge him it. He is, after all, Cousin Archibald's valet. Joy must not be easy for him to come by.

After he left, I considered this new dictum and its advantages to me. It's a grace to be sure, eating one's meal alone, outside the scrutiny of a crotchety old man. In celebration, while sitting pleasantly on my window seat, I ate some biscuits from the tin sent by Arabella.

I've always enjoyed the view from Lapis Lazuli, settled right on the elbow of Whereabouts Lane. It offers a perfect glance at anyone walking up or walking down, and the fifth-floor window has only improved it, the house stretching on tiptoe to capture the rooftops of London. Taking my meals here, while meant to be insult, will certainly cause no injury.

The one drawback about having my meals relegated to a tray in the garret (a good deal of poetic imagery there) is that I have neither purse nor scrip with which to slip out for a tea and baked goods as supplement to the comestibles fate sends forth from the kitchen. And everyone knows that those who live in garrets must find at least a portion of their sustenance from tea and baked goods at establishments such as Everett's or the Reed and Rite. It is immutable scientific fact. Perhaps Darwin wrote something on the subject. Speaking of, the man died in Kent last year. Kent! Survival of the fittest indeed. Considering his theories, perhaps I ought to go into Hyde Park and wrestle waif-like young ladies for their purses. London is a harsh climate and one must survive.

Cousin Archibald himself has not yet made an appearance, and thus I've had no chance to enquire after my owed salary and its accompanying allowance. My belief is that said salary and allowance has been on his mind also, my proof being his avoidance of me. I've seen a shadow of a man slip from the house in the early morning and slip back into the house in the late evening, and one can be quite sure that if it is a shadow of a man, it must be Cousin Archibald. He's not only thin in person, he's thin in humour and spirit and character.

I found a mirror in the west room and have moved it into the east room above the washstand. It must have been my great-aunt's and is beautifully framed in gold, a Greek key pattern as the adornment. Leaning it against the wall, it is tall enough to show the reality of my reflection.

I am looking rather pale.

Having seen Father in myself for so long, it is alarming to see Mother now. Father's eyes still belong to me, that uncanny sea green; wide-set, large, wholly disapproved of by Cousin Matilde.

But Mother has shown herself in a *tour de force*. I have her cheekbones, her way of raising my eyebrows, and the heritage of the women of this family: a dimpled chin. My hair is dark and unruly, a gift from my Portuguese maternal grandmother.

And across the bridge of my nose? A constellation of freckles.

"They will fade when you are older," Mother had said.

"I hope not," Father had called from across the room, bent over an illustration. "'Twould be a pity for Emma to lose that bit of magic, now wouldn't it?"

Well, Father, I haven't lost it, though I look in this mirror and recognise myself less now than when I was a child. I suppose that happens when you've grown up and still don't understand your place in the world.

By stature, I am neither very tall nor very short, but am fixed prosaically in between. Cousin Matilde once claimed this to be my single asset in finding a husband. "Men don't want a gawky, tall specimen, nor a stunted child, our Majesty the Queen excepted. Your height is the only thing to recommend

you. You may even aspire to a bank clerk, bearing him first a boy and then a girl, in that order.” She wagged her finger then. “All these women bearing girls first thing! What in heaven’s name are they thinking? They aren’t, that’s what.”

My great thanks, Cousin Matilde, for your generous view on my future life.

March 7th

Today I canvassed nearly all of St. Crispian's. It was a ritual of my father's, beginning each stay at Lapis Lazuli with a survey of the neighbourhood, and I have continued the practice.

It is a glory to be in London again, and even better to be in St. Crispian's. It has always been the favourite neighbourhood of mine, settled so near Primrose Hill. Much of London's uncanny history is jostled together here. The fifteenth century church built over a Celtic burial mound. The remains of a Roman fort still standing watch at the top of Whereabouts Lane. The gallows, still intact sans rope, silently waiting in the middle of Traitors Road. If one reads the biographies of many a great—if slightly scandalous—Londoner, they often spent a few formative years here in the wonderful St. Crispian's.

Miraculously, St. Crispian's boasts a fair amount of *respectability* as well, due to both Sterling Street and Baron's Square. The Lady Trewartha lives here, as well as Lord and Lady Blankenship, General Braithwaite, and the Duke of Islington. I myself cannot boast personal acquaintance, as I am a stumble or two below their lofty class, but in a place like London, one always knows of the most important people living nearby. You can't help it. Gossip is as catching as the plague ever was.

Admittedly, there are some unusual things about the neighbourhood. The architecture in places could be called eccentric. The flora and fauna tend to grow at an astonishing rate. It must also be disclosed that there are some other *peculiarities* we tend to not discuss openly outside the neighbourhood. But truly, St. Crispian's is almost perfectly normal.

Almost.

Every shop front does have its signage either upside down or backwards, considered a mark of good luck since the ascension of Charles the Second. I know not what to say except it seems to have worked. All the businesses on King Henry's Road do very well.

St. Crispian's is tucked snugly—and snugly is perhaps too generous a word—between Primrose Hill and Primrose Hill. Meaning, it consists of four streets with various appendages, and a square, set down right in the middle of the neighbourhood of Primrose Hill. A state inside of a state—rather like the Vatican. The three main roads are as follows: Traitors Road, towards the west; my own Whereabouts Lane on the east; and in the middle, Sterling Street, very properly leading up to Baron's Square. These three are all traversed by the Diagonal, and undergirded by King Henry's Road.

As previously mentioned, Sterling Street and Baron's Square are *reputable*. Very. The houses are all of uniform design, each painted white, with roses flanking the stairs leading up to each perfectly painted green door. However predictable, I enjoy my walks there.

Whereabouts Lane, my own piece of St. Crispian's, is nothing of the white and green, rose-adorned glory. Rather, it is a hodgepodge of brick and stone, all grey or cream or reddish-brown, with all of the doors painted a slightly different colour. It has always been this way. Every ten years or so, the residents of Whereabouts Lane invite a painter (usually French) to come and select the colour palette for the doors and shutters, with the exception that Lapis Lazuli's doors remain, well, Lapis Lazuli—brilliant blue that it is. In the mid-1870s, the artist Edouard Louis Dubufe was invited to select Whereabouts' palette. Now that we're in 1883, there is again talk of a fresh scheme. I only know because Cousin Archibald wrote of the debate to Cousin Matilde. Some are pushing for it to happen soon. Translation: Mr. Morrow is tired of his front door being pink.

On the west of St. Crispian's, Traitors Road is all grey limestone brought down from Scotland. It hosts gallows, as previously mentioned, and is popular with the London bachelors and several young gentlemen who see it as a great adventure. (Byron once held a drunken duel in the middle of the

road. Thrilling to young males everywhere.) The current residents pride themselves on the most unusual lamps outside their doors, and it is a bit of a game among the younger sets in London to walk the street in the gloaming before full dark to see the lamps in their glory. My favourite is a fox with a bird in his mouth, the bird being the light, only fitted with wings.

While respectable Sterling Street glides straight up the hill, ending in the beautiful Baron's Square, both Traitors Road and Whereabouts Lane unravel into a few random side streets. These tucks give them a very irregular feel, and it is almost impossible for carriages to turn around.

The Diagonal cuts from upper Traitors to lower Whereabouts, politely crossing Sterling on its way.

All this considered, the best part of St. Crispian's is the tall house with a blue door that resides in the quirk of Whereabouts Lane.

Home.

Maxwell was always entertained with my stories of St. Crispian's. He said he would come to London when I did and take up rooms on Traitors Road.

"Certainly not. You would be a guest at Lapis Lazuli House," I'd insisted.

Part of me still expects to see him walk through the front door.

March 8th

I am going to have to deal with my garret. A discouraging reality. A rigid practice in avoidance might be endurable for the present, while sleeping on the narrow bed stuffed between odd bits of furniture, my few belongings strewn about, but the dust and cobwebs are demanding attention. Perhaps tomorrow.

Agnes has told me something of interest—and thus the promising side of her unpromising nature peeks through a window. Apparently, The Roman is spending his nights on Traitors Road.

The Roman is a centurion that guards St. Crispian's. A ghost, in other words. Not that I've seen him myself, but nearly everyone has a story—Mrs. Bailey, Mr. Ford, even the esteemed bachelor Plithco Wright, whose garden claims as prize a portion of the wall.

According to local lore, it was he—The Roman, not Mr. Wright—who very first ordered the wall built that separates Whereabouts from Magi Street. The wall is only partial ruins now, but everyone speaks as if it's in full glory. The Roman never wanders too far from his beloved ruins, which is why an appearance on Traitors is worth a mention.

They say The Roman speaks proper English because seventy years ago a professor of Latin took up the job. I, sadly, cannot personally confirm the fact.

As close as we are to Primrose Hill and Regent's Park, we in St. Crispian's boast a small garden of our own. It is found through a gate—a stone passage in reality, with two benches set inside its elongated arch—that rests on the top end of Whereabouts. There is a small lawn, a corner of trees, and some beautiful brick walls on three sides of the park. The fourth is completed by

the remains of the Roman wall. We call the garden Jacob's Well. No one seems to remember why.

I asked Agnes this morning if The Roman has been seen at Jacob's Well, a favourite haunt for him in the past. She laughed at me as if I'd told her I was a frog.

"Of course not, Miss Lion. Where would the monks practice?"

I blinked. "The monks?"

"For the last two months, the monks from St. Benedict's have let Jacob's Well from midnight to dawn," Agnes answered.

"Is that the singing I heard last night? I'd supposed I was dreaming."

She looked at me like I was daft. "Of course. What else would it be?"

What else, indeed?

March 9th

I walked longingly past The Dalliance today, St. Crispian's Bookshop. I did not go in. There are realities we must face, an empty purse being one of them. I did pause before the front window and read the placard, which—being read backward—states that they sell books of the 'New, Slightly Used, & Abominably Treated Yet Resurrected Variety'.

I adore this shop, but the price for even a resurrected book can be quite steep. And the bookseller, Mr. Graves, has not looked directly at me since I sold my father's collection to another bookseller to finance my education. But I was at my aunt's house in the country. She was not going to let a thirteen-year-old girl take hundreds of books by train to satisfy Mr. Graves.

Alas.

Upon returning home, I sent the following to my cousin,

Arabella,

*Spring has come. This change in the weather will do me good, I think.
I look forward to seeing you next month in London.*

*Yours ever,
Emma*

A few hours later I received this,

Emma,