

## **A World Inverted**

### **Book 2 in the 'Journey' Series**

**By Lizbian**

#### **Prologue**

“Come ‘ere, Eddie!” The boy desperately tries to escape the clutches of the five six-year-old girls, in pursuit across the large grass-covered park. A young, slender girl stands off to the side, untidy straw-coloured hair escaping its tie, her piercing blue eyes narrowed as she watches the game.

“Issy, why aren’t you chasing Eddie? We need to catch him.” A shorter girl with chestnut curls stops in front of the blonde, bending over and breathing heavily as she rests her hands on her knees.

“I don’t want to kiss ‘im.”

“Why not? It’s just a game of kiss chase, it doesn’t mean anything.” The slight girl grabs her friend’s hand and tugs her back towards the other children. “Don’t be foolish.”

“Annie, I don’t want to kiss a boy. Please don’t make me.” A panicked expression crosses Issy’s face and she snatches her hand back, turning away from the game.

“If you really don’t want to we don’t have to.” Ann lowers herself to the grass, pulling Issy down beside her.

“You play, you was ‘avin’ fun and I know you want to kiss Eddie.” Ann scrunches her face up at the thought of kissing the boy. “I don’t *want* to kiss him, and it’s not as much fun if you’re not playing.” Issy’s secretly pleased Ann would rather sit with her than play a game of kiss chase. She wonders why she is so different to the other girls who all enjoy the game, loving to chase the reluctant boys and planting a big kiss on them once they’re cornered. All except Annie. Ann plays the game because the other girls do, but more often than not she ends up sitting with Issy on the side. Issy doesn’t like the boys kissing Ann.

## Chapter 1

The petite seventeen-year old girl stands in the drawing room door of her parent's house, taking as deep a breath as she can, given her tight corset. As the front door closes behind the departing youth she trudges back to the embroidered chair, grimacing at the bright flowers adorning it, matching the rug on the floor. She gazes unseeing out the grand window in front of her that stretches almost to the ceiling, oblivious to the large paintings covering every wall and the pianoforte in the corner of the room. The girl mentally shakes herself, sensing her mother's watchful gaze as she picks up the sketch she'd been working on.

"I don't know why you couldn't make more of an effort with your dress, Ann Marie." Ann's mother frowns disapprovingly at the simple beige muslin gown her daughter wears. Her careful speech hides her Bristol burr, not wanting to appear common by overpronouncing her 'r's as most Bristolians, including her children, do.

"What's wrong with it? It's an afternoon dress and perfectly appropriate to receive visitors." Ann looks down at her ankle length dress thinking how uncomfortable the billowing gigot sleeves and wide skirt are. She would much rather be able to wear a simple morning dress and only one petticoat but knows her mother would never allow her to receive guests so underdressed.

"It is old and plain. You should have chosen one of your newer dresses. Perhaps your yellow one."

Ann rolls her eyes and lets out a long-suffering sigh, used to her mother's constant disapproval of everything she does. Mrs Bryant is formally dressed as usual, today wearing a

dark blue gown and she will no doubt change into even more formal evening dress before long. Her greying hair is elaborately tied up, the recrimination on her face obvious.

“Edward has grown into a well-mannered young man.” Ann’s mother looks up from her embroidery to see her daughter with a faraway look in her face.

“Mmm.”

“Ann Marie? You are nearly eighteen and it’s time you thought of your future and a husband. You could do worse than end up with Edward Peters -- he works in his father’s grocery store and will take over the business in time. I would rather you marry someone higher up the social ladder but given your...rebellious streak, I fear this is unlikely.” Ann’s mother scrunches up her nose as she thinks of her eldest daughter, and how lucky she’ll be to marry her off at all.

“Eddie’s nice enough but I don’t want a husband,” Ann answers absently as she focuses on the portrait taking shape under her pencil.

“Don’t be ridiculous,” Ann’s mother snaps. “Of course you need a husband. You can’t stay here forever and you don’t want to end up a hoyden like Isabella Clark.” At her words Ann’s hand stops, hovering over the paper as she pins her mother with a glare.

“Don’t speak of Issy that way!” Ann’s eyes flash with anger at her mother’s criticism of her best friend. “Just because Issy works in her father’s jewellery store and can’t afford to wear four different outfits every day doesn’t mean she is a hoyden or going to end up an old maid. It’s 1831 -- plenty of women stay unmarried.” Ann’s mother leans forward in her chair, stabbing her finger at her daughter, her mouth turned down into a scowl. “Don’t you *dare* talk to me in that manner – this is *exactly* the reason you are going to find it hard to secure a husband. Isabella’s mother died when she was a baby so she doesn’t know better but obviously her ill manners have already tainted you.” Ann’s mother spits the words out in fury at her daughter, whose eyes narrow.

Ann shakes in anger, the pencil digging into her hand as she clenches her fist. She knows she should stop speaking before she says something she'll regret later but she's so furious she can't stop herself. She speaks in a low, clipped voice quivering with emotion. "Mother, there is *nothing* wrong with Issy's manners. She is my best friend and I would much rather spend time with her than the likes of Eddie Peters. "I would like to go up to bed now, may I be excused?"

"Hmph I suppose so. Good night," Ann's mother says as she turns her head away, studying the wall rather than her daughter.

Ann kisses her mother on the cheek to try to appease the older woman. "Good night," she replies and leaves the room, her mother wondering what she did wrong to raise such a strong-willed daughter.

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"Mother and I are arguing more lately." Ann and Issy sit together on the grass in the middle of Bristol's Queen square the following day. "We had words this morning about me leaving the house without a chaperone. I had to promise I wouldn't remove my bonnet in case I was recognised but I know the subject will be brought up again soon." Issy's pale blue eyes squint against the morning autumn sun, her pale head unprotected by a bonnet as usual, fair hair tied loosely behind her head in a bun.

"It's not the done thing, I s'pose – an unmarried girl wanderin' the streets without a man to protect 'er." Issy's common Bristol roots are evident in her slow drawl.

"I know -- I think the words 'social death', 'ruined reputation' and 'gossip' were all mentioned." Issy laughs at Ann's pout, knowing this is one argument her friend and mother have often because they are both so stubborn. "I just find mother so frustrating. She expects me to marry the first man to come along."

“I’m sure she only wants what’s best for you,” Issy meets Ann’s dark eyes which flash with anger in the morning sun under her bonnet.

“I know, but I have a brain and can think for myself.” Ann’s knuckles are white as she wraps her hands around the bottom of her dress, twisting it hard.

“You definitely ‘ave a brain, maybe that’s the problem,” Issy replies mildly, trying to appease her friend. Ann is so beautiful when she’s angry, her eyes glinting with fire and her words forced through clenched teeth.

“She thinks marriage is the answer to everything and a woman’s life isn’t whole until she’s found a husband.” Ann looks at Issy whose whole attention is fixed on her as if she’s the only person in the world. “Do you think you’ll get married, Is?” Issy flinches at the question and averts her eyes. So much for changing the subject before Ann could turn it around to her.

“No,” She says so quietly Ann can hardly hear her answer.

“Why not? There is someone out there for you, I’m sure of it.”

Issy laughs bitterly. She’s already found the perfect someone but there is no chance of them ever being together.

“No Annie, I’m different from you. You’ll get married and ‘ave a family, even if it’s not with Eddie. I’ll help papa with the store and be the favourite aunt who spoils your children.” Issy desperately wants to change the subject as thinking about Ann marrying feels like a knife tearing through her heart. “Maybe your mother’s right. You could do worse than marrying Eddie, and you know ‘e’d treat you well.”

Ann jumps to her feet, eyes flashing with fury. “Don’t you *dare* take her side and tell me who I should marry, Isabella Clark. I’m quite able to sort my own life and I am *not* going to marry someone just because mother tells me to.” Ann takes a deep breath trying to control her temper, as it’s not Issy she’s mad with. “I want to marry for love; someone whose touch

makes my belly flutter and whose kiss leaves an imprint on my soul.” Issy stands up to join Ann.

“Do you think you’ll find a man like that?”

“I don’t know. I want more than the usual arrangement between two families.”

“I’m sorry Annie, I didn’t mean to upset you. I just want you to ‘ave someone who’ll be good to you.”

“I know Bella, you are always thinking of me, thank you.” Ann rests her small hand on Issy’s arm and squeezes, Issy’s skin burning from the soft touch. “You are the best friend I could ever hope for.” Issy smiles a sad smile, knowing that’s all she will ever be to Ann and desperately wishing things could be different.