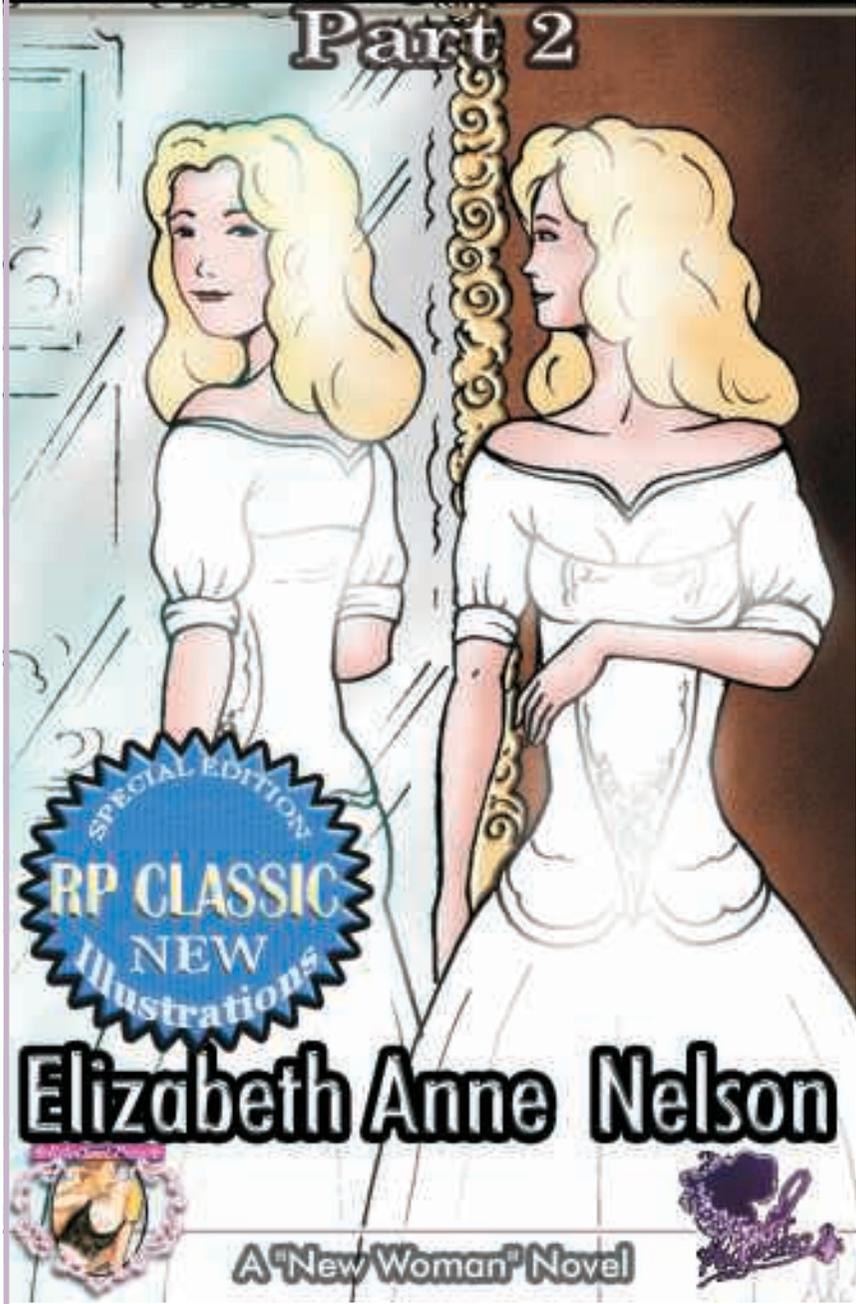


# Auberan

## Part 2



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A "New Woman" Novel



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# Auberan

## Part 2

by Elizabeth Anne Nelson

### **Chapter Seven: Abigail Continues Her Story: I Learn Not To Believe In Cinderella.**

I guess that it's best to measure a year by its seasons. From the Christmas holidays through Spring, I could not really testify to too much change, unless it was in the type of drudgery. Even my dreams were filled with the step-by-step process of cleaning something. It was clear that there would soon be nothing in the kitchen that I had not cleaned a dozen times or more!

With the end of one particular chapel in the late Spring, I was about to march two-by-two with my form to learn more of the pleasures of pot cleaning when Mistress Adams stopped me and had me follow her to Mrs. Crisp's office! She motioned for me to knock and enter, which I did with a curtsy.

“Come in.”

Fearing the worst, I entered, knowing that there were only two reasons why a girl came to her office; to receive a visitor or a beating from Madame Birch. Thus far, I had had no reason to expect the first and was perhaps long overdue for the latter! I curtsied.

“Abigail, your guardian wishes to talk with you.”

“Yes, Mrs. Crisp,” I curtsied again towards Mrs. Gretch. “At your service, Ma’am.”

“Ah, that is a wonderful improvement,” Mrs. Gretch commented with a nod of approval. “Do you like your new school, Abigail?”

“It’s a good school, Ma’am,” I replied with a curtsy, not wishing to lie. “It will teach your humble servant her proper place, Ma’am.”

“Indeed, yes,” she agreed with a pleased smile, “a vast improvement. You are no longer fat and slovenly, and your manners have improved immensely.”

“Thank you, Ma’am.” A curtsy of acknowledgment.

“Mrs. Crisp has been giving me her report upon your progress,” she noted.

“Abigail is basically flighty with a tendency to daydream,” Mrs. Crisp observed, opening a report book. “She works very hard under supervision, but tends to dawdle when left alone.”

She scanned the page. “A talkative child filled with silly impertinences. Much in need of a firm hand. Curtsies prettily and has excellent feminine posture. Far too pretty for her best behavior. She will do.”

Mrs. Crisp placed the report book aside. “I recommend she stay here this summer. She is not ready for the service you propose.”

My hopes fell almost before they arose. Did Mrs. Crisp plan to take me in service for the summer? Bowing my head in shame, I awaited my dismissal.

“I think that the girl needs to gain a little experience,” Mrs. Crisp countered. “Would you like to serve in a great house this summer?”

“If it would please you, Ma’am,” I replied formally with a happy smile of hope.

“She will be a burden,” Mrs. Crisp observed coldly, “she is capable of only the simplest of chores and her manners are still quite rough.”

“Perhaps you are right,” Mrs. Gretch replied, but then she shrugged. “I think that the child needs a chance to prove herself. If she fails, I shall leave her here next summer, unless you are pleased with her progress at school. But for now, I will promise to give her chores that are simple, and she shall be kept where her lack of manners will be least noticed.”

“Very well, Mrs. Gretch.”

Mrs. Gretch fetched a lady’s travel casket from the side of her chair. “I have brought a dress and cloak for your travel clothes. Please dress. We have a long journey.”

“You may withdraw, girl.”

I curtsied and withdrew with the chest in hand, feeling joy at my chance to see the outside world.

I would not fail her.

Retreating to the dormitory, I quickly opened the chest to find a simple, dark blue, cotton dress with white, lace collar and cuffs. It was classically beautiful to my eyes as was its full-length under slip with real lace trim. A real dress and not a plain uniform. The cloak was of matching blue and just as pretty to my eyes. Undressing, I arranged my sleeping space before redressing in my new clothes. Packing my uniform and few toilet articles, I checked my sleeping area to make sure that all was well.

I then went to Mistress Adams to report the good news and accept her kiss of departure before I returned to the Head Mistress's chambers.

In a few minutes, I was riding with Mrs. Gretch in an open carriage. It was a beautiful Spring day with the sun smiling from a clear blue sky and birds all aflutter like my own joys. I was to be a servant in a great house all summer long!

“While we are traveling, perhaps you can tell me of your training, girl, so that I may best judge your value to the household?”

“As you wish, Ma'am,” I began, recounting my experiences with a hidden humiliation of being humbled before a mere housekeeper. But, she was now so high in rank above me that I knew my place, even if my pride was hurt. She asked a myriad of questions, seeking every detail to make certain of my truth and training. When I was finished, she nodded her approval.

“Mrs. Crisp does very well by her girls.”

From then on, the ride was silent. We paused for lunch at a wayside inn and, despite my fears, I passed well as a young girl. Soon, we were on our way again. Just prior to supper, we pulled through a great stone archway and moved up a poplar-lined driveway to a great Late Georgian mansion with sprawling, well-kept grounds. In a moment, we were in the servants' yard where the driver stopped the carriage and helped us dismount to follow behind to the servants' entrance with our luggage.

“Ah, Mrs. Gretch,” a tall matron in black greeted, opening the door to our knock. “And this must be the child, Abigail.”

I curtsied and then followed her lead into the servants' foyer.

“Mrs. Pliss is in charge of the domestic staff, Abigail. A Mr. Abbot is the majordomo, but you shall not have reason to see him,” Mrs. Gretch commented as I repeated a deep curtsy towards my new Mistress, Mrs. Pliss.

“Where shall I assign her?”

“Scullery and chambers,” Mrs. Gretch advised. “She is still a bit rough and not at all too bright.”

“I see,” she observed, looking towards a maid. “Fetch Mrs. Demming.”

The girl curtsied to leave and in a minute returned with a plump woman dressed in a white uniform spattered with food.

“This is Abigail, Mrs. Demming. She is to work in the scullery and clean chamber pots. Susan can serve as a cook’s helper.”

“Yes, Ma’am. Come, girl, you have work to do,” Mrs. Demming ordered, taking my hand as I executed a curtsy to withdraw in her brisk charge. She took me up a back flight of stairs to an attic room much in need of cleaning. “Your uniform is in the closet. You will change and I shall wait to be sure that you are neat.”

I curtsied and quickly removed my cloak and dress to fetch from the closet a pink and white candy striped uniform with a Dutch pinafore apron. Hanging my dress, cloak and pretty slip, I put on my school slip and the new uniform before turning to face Mrs. Demming.

“Come, I have supper to prepare,” she noted, leading me back to the kitchen and then to a large cleaning scullery just filled with pots and pans and dishes! “When they are clean, you may go to bed. In the morning, you will fetch the chamber pots from the rooms during breakfast and clean them good enough to eat from.”

Hours later, after finishing the supper dishes, I half-dragged myself to the dirty room to realize that it too needed to be cleaned before I went to bed. By the time I was half dead, I managed to find my cotton gown and crawl into bed. I had hardly slept a second when the cock crow awakened me to yet another day. Dressing in a clean uniform, I reported to the scullery to handle the breakfast pots before I was released to collect the bedroom chamber pots onto a wheeled, covered cart. I disposed of the waste and then set about cleaning the china bowls until they glistened clean, which was good, since Mrs. Demming actually made me eat my breakfast from one!

It was humiliating, but instructive.

The days of summer were without any real human contact during the work day which started from dawn and continued until well into the night. All I saw were piles of kitchen goods to clean along with thousands of smelly chamber pots. It was an endless stream. In my spare time, I had to clean my own clothes and keep my room clean so that I would be presentable.

From time to time, I would see the splendid country guests of Sepoy Hall, to be entertained by Lady Greensmith, but it was not my place to notice them nor be noticed by them. I was but a shadow that passed unnoticed through the corner of their eyes.

And then, my summer ended with my return to the asylum where school began again. The school year moved quickly despite the exactness of each day. Then suddenly, Mrs. Gretch came to collect me for the summer again. This summer, I served as a scrubbing girl to keep polished the long halls, stairs and many rooms of Sepoy Hall until each shone like the wall mirrors. With the end of that summer, I was returned to school. It had been a strange summer. Like the previous summer, I was not really in human company. I could not really explain why the summers seemed so empty to the other girls who sought to hear of life in a great hall. I was almost relieved when schoolwork came again.

I cannot honestly say that when Mrs. Gretch came to fetch me the next summer that I was actually happy. I could see nothing but more pots or floors to be kept clean. It was good that I could keep them clean so that Mrs. Pliss wouldn't complain, but it was so lonely. When I dismounted from the carriage, I was greeted by Mrs. Pliss who took me to a Mrs. Claire.

"This is our little Abigail," Mrs. Pliss announced as I curtsied to the rest of the presentation. "She shall assist one of your chamber maids. And, she is to have one day off each week."

"Yes, Ma'am," Mrs. Claire replied with a curtsy, motioning for me to come closer. When Mrs. Pliss left, Mrs. Claire smiled. "I have seen you the past two years. You are a hard-working girl. Mrs. Pliss has given you a wonderful chance for advancement. Do you appreciate that?"

“Yes, Ma’am,” I curtsied.

“Ah, so solemn a child. Remove your cloak and let me see you better.”

I followed her request.

“Turn about.” I turned about, feeling a bit silly.

“You are a beautiful girl,” she commented seriously, bringing a blush to my cheeks, “a real catch when you are of age. And such a pretty smile.”

She nodded her approval.

“You shall live with Misty. She’s about your age and the same size. I think you will find her a good teacher.”

“Thank you, Ma’am.”

“Yes,” she replied, leading me out of the room to the servants’ quarters where she stopped by one of the room doors. She opened it, revealing a neat little bedroom with two beds, a dressing table, two dresser chests and a commode. The room was a far cry from my little attic room. It was quite cheerful. “Do you like it?”

“Oh, yes, Ma’am,” I replied with a happy curtsy.

“Well then,” she half-laughed, opening the closet to remove from it a pink and white candy-stripped uniform, “you had better change into your uniform, child.”

I curtsied and dressed in the basic household uniform with a chamber maid’s full apron and puff hat while she watched, commenting upon my slim waist and wide hips. “We shall have to find a young man for you sooner than I thought. You are really in full bloom. I was married when I was sixteen, barely a year older than you are now.”

The idea frightened me, for I could see that she clearly meant do do as she had suggested. She had taken a matronly interest in me and now resolved to find a husband for me.

“We shall discuss the matter again. Misty is changing beds on the third floor of the west wing. You will report to her.”

“Yes, Ma’am,” I replied with a pert curtsy, withdrawing to my duties. I could not believe it, I was to be a maid’s assistant! Moving quickly down the stairs, I executed a curtsy before a lady and continued up the hall until I came to a bedroom where a tall, dark-haired girl was changing the sheets.

“At your service, Miss.”

“Oh, you must be Abigail,” the girl exclaimed happily. “We are to be roommates. I have the bed by the window, you know.”

“Yes, Miss,” I replied with a curtsy.

“Oh Dearest, please relax,” she laughed, fluffing out a pillow. “You will find the linen at the end of the hall. Take the next room.”

I curtsied and fetched the clean linens for the next room to begin my duties. For the rest of the day, I helped to change bed linens and clean up the rooms in the west wing. At lunch and supper, I helped to serve the servants’ table and just after supper, I was released from duties to join Misty.

“Now,” Misty exclaimed, sitting upon the edge of her bed, dressed in her night gown, “let your hair down and we shall have some girl talk. I’m Misty Brown. My folks work one of the tenant farms. I heard that you were an orphan?”

“Yes, Misty,” I replied, removing my apron and dress. “I’m related to Mrs. Gretch.”

I continued, finding the first person a bit difficult to use after so many years of hard instruction to drop any personal thoughts in favor of my superiors. The slip and drawers came next with the flannel petticoat. “Would you help me with my corset?”

“Of course, how did you tie it so tight?”

“One of the girls at school did it,” I sighed, feeling the corset release itself. “Do you wear one too? All the girls at school must.”

“Mom is death on them,” Misty replied, looking at the garment with pure envy. “Can I put yours on, just to see?”

“Sure,” I laughed, helping her into the corset, noting that her natural waist was a bit plump. “We must not tie it too tight. It might hurt.”

In a minute, she was holding her breath and exhaled with a giggle. “Oh, it feels like I can hardly breathe,” she exclaimed, turning to look at my naked form. “Why, you’re perfect. My breasts aren’t anywhere near as full as yours and your waist is so narrow. You don’t need a corset, Abigail!”

“I must wear it,” I sighed, slipping into my night gown. “It helps my posture.”

“Well, I’m going to talk to Mom,” she resolved, allowing me to help her from the garment. “And you are going to come home with me on our day off. I want you to meet my cousin, Will. He’s home from India and he has ever so many great stories, and he’s a real man.” She giggled at the thought. “He’ll like you.”

“Oh, I don’t think I should,” I countered, feeling strangely attracted to the idea of a real man.

“You must. A girl must be seen if she is to attract a man,” Misty said with authority. “And I’m sure Mrs. Claire will approve.”

Thus it was settled and with Mrs. Claire’s permission, I joined Misty in a pony cart for the ride to her home. I wore my blue cotton with a little flowered hat and white gloves.

The Brown cottage was about two miles from the hall. Mrs. Brown greeted us at the door dressed in a simple house dress and a broad smile to match her rather ample plumpness. She exchanged kisses with her daughter and took me in for a matronly hug and kiss with much concern for my “half-starved” look. “I have tea and fresh bread with lots of churned butter and sweet honey.. Come in, girls, and tell me all about the Great Hall. I’ve heard that Mrs. Pliss is expecting and Mrs. Jones, the Gamekeeper’s wife, is about due for their fifth.”

“Is there anything I can do to help, Ma’am?”

“You relax, poor child, I know well enough about your work. I slaved for the Lady herself when I was younger.” She presented a serious nod and fetched a tea pot while her daughter cut the warm bread. Soon we were at tea and talked about anything that took Mrs. Brown’s fancy. First we ran through the local folk and then matters concerning the Duchess of Auberan’s affairs and growing wealth, and Mrs. Brown’s opinion that she was a great woman who all would gladly die for. “She being so kind and blessed. No mark against Her Grace!”

“Oh, Mom, poor Abigail is full of gossip,” her daughter laughed from her eating. “Is Bill still visiting?”

“Ah, a girlish plot,” Mrs. Brown chuckled, looking me over more closely. “You are of a marriageable age, Mistress Smith, and Bill would be a fine catch for any lass. He’s a Corporal in the regular army and a fine figure of a man.” She smiled and studied me intently. “Yes, my daughter was right bringing you. What sort of dowry do you have?”

I blushed and wondered if I shouldn’t run, but the thought of having a real boyfriend attracted me. I would be the envy of all the rest of the girls at school!

“Mom, she isn’t ready for that!” Misty laughed, taking my hand into hers. “Where are they?”

“Cutting hay in the south field.”

Without a chance to protest, I found myself following in tow across a spring field to a stone fence and then along the fence to a little wooded area with a duck pond and thence to another stone fence where Misty cautioned me to be silent. In the field, two men were cutting the hay and tying it before dumping the bales into an ox cart. The gray haired man was undoubtedly Misty’s father.

The younger man was almost six foot tall and stripped to the waist. His golden brown skin rippled in glistening sweaty sheen over powerful hard muscles. From time to time, he would pause and roar with laughter over something her father said, the deep masculinity of the laugh touching my very soul as my eyes saw him pause to scratch the bulging proof of his sex beneath the tight pants.



And then I saw him calmly undo his trousers as Misty clutched my hand in anticipation. His strong fingers encircled an organ of great size that emptied in a stallion's pouring!

"Better not let Misty's girlfriend see that," Misty's father laughed. "You'll scare the poor girl right out of her wits!"

"That's for later," he replied in deep masculine tones that actually speeded my heart as Misty pulled me forward as if to catch him buttoning his pants! He blushed like a schoolgirl to her giggling laughter and he turned his back to tend to the rest of his buttons. He then turned around to greet his cousin and examine her friend.

His eyes were walnut brown with funny little flecks of light that sparkled with manly amusement, studying my reflected image.

"Miss Smith, may I present William Brown," Misty announced with my submissive curtsy. "And my father."

"Ah, youth before brains," her father laughed, tossing the next bale. "You girls belong at home, not chasing after handsome soldiers."

"Father!"

"It's nice to meet you, Miss. Are you from these parts?"

"She's an orphan, related to the Ma'am of Auberan House." Misty took our hands together. "Her name is Abigail which suits her service as well. And I think that you and she should chat while I take my poor Father to the shade for a cool drink."

"Are you daft, girl?" her Dad protested, but laughingly withdrew. "Beware of women, lad, they'll be ruining your life!"

And then I was alone with Bill!

My heart ran away and I was weak to the point of sitting down upon the low portion of the stone fence, being careful to arrange my skirts. "I hear that you are in the Queen's service?"

"Yes, Miss, a Corporal. I'm on leave. Was wounded on the frontier."

“Oh, where?” I exclaimed in girlish interest.

“Not where a lady might look,” he laughed, patting his hip gingerly. “It was deep, but I’ll soon be posted back to my unit.”

“Are corporals allowed to bring their wives to India with them?”

He smiled. “Asking for anyone in particular, Miss?”

“Oh, no,” I exclaimed in a fluster, hearing his wonderful laugh and knowing that I was falling head over heels for him. He took his seat by me and I could smell the richness of his work with the newly-cut hay.

“Just curious...”

“How old are you, Abigail?”

“Fifteen, but close to sixteen,” I added. “And you?”

“Nineteen. Enlisted at fifteen. I was full-grown.” He smiled, looking at my bodice. “Like you, Miss.” He took his great powerful hands and encircled my waist with them. “A perfect fit. You were made for my hands, Abigail.”

I must have blushed three colors of pink. “Please, Sirrah!”

He bent over, and kissed me!

I slapped him proper and stood up, straightening my skirts and heading for the Brown house!

“Abigail, you cannot leave me so,” he pleaded, following close at my heels until I lifted my skirts and began to run, trying to make it to the house and safety for I did not trust the emotions that flooded my heart. God, he was a real man! And to him, I was a woman! I ran awkwardly until a clump of dirt turned my right ankle and I landed face down in the grass with him behind, turning me over with a happy, triumphant laugh. “Did you hurt yourself, Miss?”

“Oh, my ankle!”

“Let’s look,” he suggested, taking the liberty of lifting my skirt full to the knee and taking my ankle into his hands! Ignoring my modest efforts to lower the skirt, he removed my boot to feel the ankle. “Ah, such a dainty ankle, but it looks like a simple sprain. Perhaps I had better carry you home. But, first...”

He moved me to his lap and placed his arm about my waist to kiss me again, full upon the lips until my breath came in a yielding sigh!

And then he kissed me once more before he suddenly swung me into his arms like I was a mere babe and stood up, picking up my loose boot.

“If you are going to marry a soldier, you will need to plump up a bit. I like my wives plump, like Mrs. Brown!”

“Whoever said I would marry such an oaf as you?” I protested, only to be kissed into silence as he strolled to the cottage where he entered the front door with bowed head to avoid banging his head.

“She sprained her ankle,” he announced to their amusement, lowering me to a chair. “Runs like a duck...”

Mr. Brown burst into laughter and I all but died as the women joined.

“Shame on you,” Mrs. Brown scolded, taking my hand. “We’d better take a look at that sprain.”

Misty helped me into a bedroom where I removed my stocking and Mrs. Brown fetched something for the swelling. “Did he kiss you?”

“Yes,” I confessed from my girlishly secret with a little laugh.

“Oh, you must tell us all about it. Promise?”

“Oh, Misty.”

“You leave her alone,” Mrs. Brown ordered, wrapping the ankle. “You lie back and rest. You can not walk about on that for the next few hours.”

Detecting my anxiety, she smiled.

“He will be here for another week.”

I sighed and stretched out in the bed, not knowing that after supper that night, before the pony cart ride back to the hall, I would not see Bill again for a long time. The hall had a great party the next week and I was required to help with the table on my day off. And then Bill was gone!

With summer over, I was returned to the asylum.

About a month later, I received a letter from Bill, which Mrs. Crisp required me to read aloud to her! She then had me post a formal reply indicating that my services came first and I was not ready for marriage.

“You will tell him the truth, that you cannot have children,” she insisted coldly. “No man’s seed shall be wasted upon such a sterile bed. It would be a sin! Do you understand, eunuch girl?”

I wrote as she asked and cried my heart out when the post left with my shattered girlish dreams...

## **Chapter Eight: Emma Continues Her Story: I Follow In My mother’s Footsteps.**

“Good morning, Emma,” my nurse greeted, lowering the railing of my crib and helping me to my potty. “We have a wonderful surprise for baby.”

“Turpwise, oh, Emma woves turpwise,” I exclaimed in a toddler’s version of my new language, finishing with potty and allowing my nurse to help me complete my ritual before helping me to wash, then dressing me in a simple waist to hold up my long black stockings, a cotton vest, cotton lace-trimmed drawers, a white cotton slip and a lawn, white cotton and lace toddler dress with ever such short skirts that revealed the lace trim of my drawers if I were careless.