

DAPHNE
DU MAURIER

The King's General

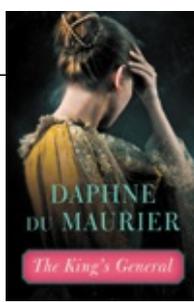
THE KING'S GENERAL

Daphne du Maurier

Foreword by Justine Picardie



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Foreword

The first time I read *The King's General* was on a melancholy autumn day, not long after I'd started a new school, in a town where I knew no one, at the age of fourteen. Daphne du Maurier's landscape—seventeenth-century Cornwall, last refuge of brave Cavaliers—was entirely distant to mine; hundreds of years and miles away, further by far than the home I'd left behind. But as I sought refuge in the school library, escaping the rain and all the people I didn't know, and who didn't want to know me, the book seemed more real to me than the unfamiliar place I had found myself; offered more solace than anything else at the time.

Returning to *The King's General*, decades later, reminds me of how well it expresses the sadness of the dislocated and dispossessed. That might sound melodramatic—and the book is melodramatic, at times; just as I was as a teenager, about the dismal misery of my new life—but *The King's General*, so often overlooked by literary critics, is more than a melodrama, more subtle and unsettling. Widely regarded as a straightforward historical romance—which it can be, if that's simply what you want it to be—the novel also does something unusual, creating a story that feels timeless, for all its period detail. The description of the Cornish setting—always vivid in du Maurier's writing; far more than a backdrop, as crucial as any of the main characters—seems as atmospheric and as true now as when *The King's General* was first published in 1946. Anyone who loves Cornwall, as I do (both as a real and imaginary landscape) will be comforted by the idea that the hills and the moorland, the beaches and the cliff tops, remain, in essence, those that du Maurier's heroine, Honor Harris, gazed upon as her story opens in 1653; and I like to think that future readers of the novel will feel the same way.

That opening is also an ending—or close to an ending, it seems; though du Maurier is unsurpassed at keeping secrets, at the same time as hinting at revelations to come. At fourteen, I found it impossible not to look at the ending, so intriguing was the first chapter: but unlike any other writer that I can think of, du Maurier still managed not to give the game away; at least not to me, the cheating reader; not then, for it is only when you read the whole book that the final page makes sense.

So it would be entirely wrong of me to break the suspense now, in this introduction; though I think it safe to say that the first few pages, with their description of a summer's end, and the encroaching chill of autumn, are a perfect indication of what is about to unfold. “The first clouds of evening are gathering beyond the Dodman,” observes the novel's sole narrator, Honor Harris, an ailing woman writing by candlelight. “And the surge of the sea, once far-off and faint, comes louder now, creeping towards the sands. The tide has turned. Gone are the white stones and the cowrie shells. The sands are covered. My dreams are buried. And as darkness falls the flood tide sweeps over the marshes and the land is covered.”

Faraway, across the sea, Honor imagines her former lover, Sir Richard Grenville—the King's General no longer—banished from the land he loved. “My heart aches for you in this last disgrace,” writes Honor. “I picture you sitting lonely and bitter at your window, gazing out across the dull flat lands of Holland...” As an opening, it is as brooding as the first pages of *Rebecca*; and the darkness of that more famous novel, published eight years previously, casts a shadow over *The King's General* too. There are other similarities, as well: for like the hero of *Rebecca*, Sir Richard Grenville is

ruthless, powerful man; more powerful, apparently, than the woman who loves him.

Daphne du Maurier dedicated *The King's General* to her husband, Sir Frederick Browning, Grenadier Guards officer, otherwise known as Tommy: "To my husband, also a general, but, I trust, more discreet one." Margaret Forster's marvelous biography of Daphne du Maurier reveals that Tommy (who had been knighted in the 1946 New Year's Honours List) guessed that his wife's dedication would make people assume that Richard Grenville, "first a soldier, second a lover," a man "violent from his youth... cruel... hard," was based on him. Tommy (a likeable chap, by all accounts though prone to depression) was amused; at the same time as expressing the hope, in a letter to his wife, that her latest novel might "have a nice ending for a change, because you know what I think of your sad endings."

But there was to be no happy ending for Honor and her general; an indication, perhaps, that Daphne (who wrote the book while Tommy was still stationed abroad) was fearful of what might happen to their marriage when he finally returned to Menabilly, their house in Cornwall. And Menabilly was to play a crucial part in *The King's General*: it is where much of the action takes place, and Daphne immersed herself in its history when she was researching the novel. The house had fascinated Daphne ever since she first discovered it, soon after her parents bought a holiday house in Fowey in 1927, and its original owners, the Rashleighs, were also to appear in *The King's General*. She was particularly intrigued by the tale of a skeleton found in Menabilly in the nineteenth century, apparently discovered by builders, in a bricked-up room. As she explains in her postscript to the novel, the workmen "came upon a stair, leading to a small room, or cell, at the base of the buttress. Here they found the skeleton of a young man, seated on a stool, a trencher at his feet, and the skeleton was dressed in the clothes of a Cavalier, as worn during the period of the Civil War." The rest—in Daphne's version, anyway—is not history, but romance; though the story as she told it seemed entirely convincing to me, as a teenager (far more so than those dreary history textbooks about the struggles between Royalists and Parliament that I should have been reading instead).

Given the success of other du Maurier stories that were turned into films—*Rebecca*, *The Birds*, *Don't Look Now*—I'd always half expected to see *The King's General* as a swashbuckling Hollywood movie. But despite the sale of the rights for what was then the enormous sum of £65,000—part of which was spent on a new boat for Tommy after the war—the film was never made. (After years of setbacks and delays, Elizabeth Taylor was suggested to play the heroine in 1958: Daphne was horrified by the prospect; nor did she like the script.) I still think it would make a good film—it has the right blend of epic and intimate qualities—but there is pleasure, too, to be had in feeling the book to be one's own private discovery. When I first read it I knew no one else who had, so its revelations and secrets remained mine alone. This, of course, is part of the conceit of the novel, from the beginning: Honor Harris, she tells us in the first chapter, knows "this autumn will be the last" for her, and her memoir "will go with me to the grave... rotting there with me, unread." Honor's purpose, in writing down her secrets, is, she says, "to rid myself of a burden"; and though Daphne du Maurier chooses not to reveal why, or how, the story escapes from the grave, the reader is left with the sense that we have been given not a burden, but a gift.

It's a remarkable achievement—and all the more so, I realize now, as I reread *The King's General* in my own middle age. As a fourteen-year-old, I adored the novel's early chapters that describe Honor Harris as a spirited teenager, before tragedy had torn her life apart; now, while I still love that part of *The King's General*, I also appreciate du Maurier's account of growing older. Towards the end of the book, when Sir Richard Grenville has remarked in a letter to Honor that doubtless she finds her days monotonous, alone in Cornwall, she observes:

I have seen the shadows creep, on an autumn afternoon, from the deep Pridmouth valley to the summit of the hill, and there stay a moment, waiting on the sun... Dark moods too of bleak November, when the rain sweeps in a curtain from the southwest. But, quietest of all, the evenings of late summer, when the sun has set, and the moon has not yet risen, but the dew is heavy in the long grass.

You could not ask for a better, swifter description both of the passing of the seasons, and the turning of the years. Daphne was in her late thirties when she wrote the novel—"a dull, gray-haired, nearly forty wife," she wrote in a letter soon after Tommy arrived home from the war—and while by now she means close to death herself, it cannot be coincidence that she chose to write about Honor Harris, who died at the age of thirty-eight. (Like the other principal characters in the novel, there was a real Honor Harris, who was buried in a church near Menabilly, in the parish of Tywardreath, on 17th November 1653.) Daphne herself lived on until the age of nearly eighty-two: a long, extraordinary life, in which she became one of the most wildly popular authors of her time. Yet nowhere in her writing, it seems to me, than in *The King's General* will you find better expression of that bittersweet blend of foreboding and hopefulness, of passionate love and anguished loss, that marks what it means to grow up. "Come now, take heart," says Honor's brother Jonathan, on the final page of the book, when we know she is nearing her end, fading into the twilight that has shaded her story from the start. "One day the King will come into his own again; one day your Richard will return."

"One day," replies Honor, repeating lines that have echoed throughout the novel, "when the snow melts, when the thaw breaks, when the spring comes."

Justine Picard

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September, 1653. The last of summer. The first chill winds of autumn. The sun no longer strikes my eastern window as I wake, but, turning laggard, does not top the hill before eight o'clock. A white mist hides the bay sometimes until noon, and hangs about the marshes too, leaving, when it lifts, a breath of cold air behind it. Because of this, the tall grass in the meadow never dries, but long past midday shimmers and glistens in the sun, the great drops of moisture hanging motionless upon the stems. I notice the tides more than I did once. They seem to make a pattern to the day. When the water drains from the marshes, and little by little the yellow sands appear, rippling and hard and firm, it seems to my foolish fancy, as I lie here, that I too go seaward with the tide, and all my old hidden dreams that I thought buried for all time are bare and naked to the day, just as the shells and the stones are on the sands.

It is a strange, joyous feeling, this streak back to the past. Nothing is regretted, and I am happy and proud. The mist and cloud have gone, and the sun, high now and full of warmth, holds revel with me on the ebb tide. How blue and hard is the sea as it curls westward from the bay, and the Blackhead, dark purple, leans to the deep water like a sloping shoulder. Once again—and this I know is fancy—seems to me that the tide ebbs always in the middle of the day, when hope is highest and my mood is still. Then, half-consciously, I become aware of a shadow, of a sudden droop of the spirit. The first clouds of evening are gathering beyond the Dodman. They cast long fingers on the sea. And the surge of the sea, once far-off and faint, comes louder now, creeping towards the sands. The tide has turned. Gone are the white stones and the cowrie shells. The sands are covered. My dreams are buried. And as darkness falls the flood tide sweeps over the marshes and the land is covered. Then Matty will come to light the candles, and to stir the fire, making a bustle with her presence, and if I am short with her or do not answer, she looks at me with a shake of her head, and reminds me that the fall of the year was always my bad time. My autumn melancholy. Even in the distant days, when I was young, the menace of it became an institution, and Matty, like a fierce clucking hen, would chase away the casual visitor. “Miss Honor can see nobody today.” My family soon learned to understand, and left me in peace. Though peace is an ill word to describe the moods of black despair that used to grip me. And well... they're over now. Those moods at least. Rebellion of the spirit against the chafing flesh, and the moments of real pain when I could not rest. Those were the battles of youth. And I am a rebel no longer. The middle years have me in thrall, and there is much to be said for them. Resignation brings its own reward. The trouble is that I cannot read now as I used to do. At twenty-five, at thirty, books were my great consolation. Like a true scholar, I worked away at my Latin and Greek, so that learning was part of my existence. Now it seems profitless. A cynic when I was young, I am in danger of becoming a worse one now I am old. So Robin says. Poor Robin. God knows I must often make a poor companion. The years have not spared him either. He has aged much this year. Possibly his anxieties over me. I know they discuss the future, he and Matty, when they think I sleep. I can hear their voices droning in the parlor. But when he is with me he feigns his little air of cheerfulness, and my heart bleeds for him. My brother. Looking at him as he sits beside me, coldly critical as I always am towards the people I love, I note the pouches beneath his eyes, and the way his hands tremble when I

lights his pipe. Can it be that he was ever light of heart and passionate of mind? Did he really ride in battle with a hawk on his wrist, and was it only ten years ago that he led his men to Braddock Down side by side with Bevil Grenvile, flaunting that scarlet standard with the three gold rests in the eyes of the enemy? Was this the man I saw once, in the moonlight, fighting his rival for a faithless woman?

Looking at him now, it seems a mockery. My poor Robin, with his graying locks shaggy on his shoulders. Yes, the agony of the war has left its mark on both of us. The war—and the Grenvile. Maybe Robin is bound to Gartred still, even as I am to Richard. We never speak of these things. Our life is the dull drab life of day by day. Looking back, there can be very few among our friends who have not suffered. So many gone, so many penniless. I do not forget that Robin and I both live on charity. Jonathan Rashleigh had not given us this house we should have had no home, with Lanrest gone, and Radford occupied. Jonathan looks very old and tired. It was that last grim year of imprisonment in St. Mawes that broke him, that and John's death. Mary looks much the same. It would take more than a civil war to break her quiet composure and her faith in God. Alice is still with them, and her children, but the feckless Peter never visits her. I think of the time when we were all assembled in the long gallery, and Alice and Peter sang, and John and Joan held hands before the fire—they were all so young, such children. Even Gartred with her calculated malevolence could not have charged the atmosphere that evening. Then Richard, my Richard, broke the spell deliberately with one of his devastating cruel remarks, smiling as he did so, and the gaiety went, and the careless joy vanished from the evening. I hated him for doing it, yet understood the mood that prompted him.

Oh, God confound and damn these Grenviles, I thought afterwards, for harming everything that touches, for twisting happiness into pain with a mere inflexion of the voice. Why were they made thus, he and Gartred, so that cruelty for its own sake was almost a vice to be indulged in, affording a sensuous delight? What evil genius presided at their cradle? Bevil had been so different. The flower of the flock, with his grave courtesy, his thoughtfulness, his rigid code of morality, his tenderness to his own and to other people's children. And his boys take after him. There is no vice in Jack or Bunny that I have ever seen. But Gartred. Those serpent's eyes beneath the red-gold hair, that hard, voluptuous mouth. How incredible it seemed to me, even in the early days when she was married to my brother Kit, that anyone could be deceived by her. Her power to charm was overwhelming. My father and mother were jelly in her hands, and as for poor Kit, he was lost from the beginning, like Robin later. But I was never won, not for a moment. Well, her beauty is marred now, and I suppose forever. She will carry that scar to the grave. A thin scarlet line from eye to mouth where the blade slashed her. Rumor has it that she can still find lovers, and her latest conquest is one of the Careys, who has come to live near her at Bideford. I can well believe it. No neighbor would be safe from her if he had the charm of manner, and the Careys were always presentable. I can even find it in my heart to forgive her, now that everything is over. The idea of her dallying with George Carey—she must be at least twenty years the elder—brings a flash of color into a gray world. And what a world! Long faces and worsted garments, bad harvests and sinking trade, everywhere men poorer than they were before, and the people miserable. The happy aftermath of war. Spies of the Lord Protector (God, what an iron designation!) in every town and village, and if a breath of protest against the State is heard the murmurer is borne straightway to jail. The Presbyterians hold the reins in their grasping hands, and the only men to benefit are upstarts like Frank Buller and Robert Bennett and our old enemy, John Robartes, all of them out for what they can get and damn the common man. Manners are rough, courtesy a forgotten quality. We are each one of us suspicious of our neighbor. Oh, brave new world! The docile English may endure it for a while, but not we Cornish. They cannot take our independence from us, and in a year or so, when we have licked our wounds, we'll have another rising, and there'll

be more blood spilled and more hearts broken. But we shall still lack our leader. Ah, Richard—~~Richard—what evil spirit in you urged you to quarrel with all men, so that even the King is your enemy now.~~ My heart aches for you in this last disgrace. I picture you sitting lonely and bitter at your window, gazing out across the dull flat lands of Holland, and putting the final words to the defense that you are writing, and of which Bunny brought me a rough draft when he came to see me last.

“Oh, put not your trust in Princes, nor in any child of man, for there is no help in them.” Bitter, hopeless words, that will do no good, and only breed further mischief. “Sir Richard Grenville for his presuming loyalty, must be by a public declaration defamed as a Banditto and his very loyalty understood a crime. However, seeing it must be so, let God be prayed to bless the King with faithful councilors, and that none may be prevalent to be any way hurtful to him or to any of his relations. *Aid* for Sir Richard Grenville, let him go with the reward of an old soldier of the King’s. There is no present use for him. When there shall be the Council will think on it, if not too late. *Vale.*”

Resentful, proud, and bitter to the end. For this is the end. I know it, and you know it too. There will be no recovery for you now; you have destroyed yourself forever. Feared and hated by friend and foe. The King’s General in the West. The man I love. It was after the Scillies fell to the Parliament and both Jack and Bunny were home for a while, having visited Holland and France, that they rode over from Stowe to see the Rashleighs at Menabilly, and came down to Tywardreath to pay the respects to me. We talked of Richard, and almost immediately Jack said, “My uncle is greatly altered—you would hardly know him. He sits for hours in silence, looking out of the window of his dismal lodging watching the eternal rain—God, how it rains in Holland—and he has no wish for company. You remember how he used to quip and jest with us, and with all youngsters? Now if he does speak it is to find fault, like a testy old man, and crab his visitor.”

“The King will never make use of him again, and he knows it,” said Bunny. “The quarrel with the Court has turned him sour. It was madness to fan the flame of his old enmity with Hyde.”

Then Jack, with more perception, seeing my eyes, said quickly: “Uncle was always his own worst enemy. Honor knows that. He is damnably lonely, that’s the truth of it. And the years ahead are blank.”

We were all silent for a moment. My heart was aching for Richard, and the boys perceived it. Presently Bunny said in a low tone: “My uncle never speaks of Dick. I suppose we shall never know now what wretched misfortune overtook him.”

I felt myself grow cold, and the old sick horror grip me. I turned my head so that the boys should not see my eyes.

“No,” I said slowly. “No, we shall never know.”

Bunny drummed with his fingers on the table, and Jack played idly with the pages of a book. I was watching the calm waters of the bay and the little fishing boats creeping round the Blackhead from Gorran Haven. Their sails were amber in the setting sun.

“If,” pursued Bunny, as though arguing with himself, “he had fallen into the hands of the enemy, why was the fact concealed? That is what always puzzles me. The son of Richard Grenville was a private, indeed.” I did not answer. I felt Jack move restlessly beside me. Perhaps marriage had given him perception—he was a bridegroom of a few months’ standing at that time—or maybe he was always more intuitive than Bunny, but I knew he was aware of my distress. “There is little use,” he said, “going over the past. We are making Honor tired.” Soon after they kissed my hands and left, promising to come and see me again before they returned to France. I watched them gallop away, young and free and untouched by the years that had gone. The future was theirs to seize. One day the King would come back to his waiting country, and Jack and Bunny, who had fought so valiantly for him, would be

rewarded. I could picture them at Stowe, and up in London at Whitehall, growing sleek and prosperous, with a whole new age of splendor opening before them.

The civil war would be forgotten, and forgotten too the generation that had preceded them, that had fallen in the cause, or had failed. My generation, which would enter into no inheritance.

I lay there in my chair, watching the deepening shadows, and presently Robin came in and sat beside me, inquiring in his gruff, tender way if I was tired, regretting that he had missed the Grenville brothers, and going on to tell me of some small pother in the courthouse at Tywardreath. I made a pretense of listening, aware with a queer sense of pity how the trifling everyday events were now his one concern. I thought how once he and his companions had won immortality for their gallant and useless defense of Pendennis Castle in those tragic summer months in '46—how proud we were of them, how full our hearts—and here he was rambling on about five fowls that had been stolen from a widow in St. Blazey. Perhaps I was no cynic after all, but rotten with sentiment. It was then that the idea came first to me, that, by writing down the events of those few years, I would rid myself of my burden. The war, and how it changed our lives; how we were all caught up in it, and broken by it, and our lives hopelessly intermingled one with another. Gartred and Robin, Richard and I, the whole of the Rashleigh family, pent up together in that house of secrets—small wonder that we came to be defeated. Even today Robin goes every Sunday to dine at Menabilly, but not I. My health pleads its own excuse. Knowing what I know, I could not return. Menabilly, where the drama of our lives was played, is vivid enough to me three miles distant here in Tywardreath. The house stands as bare and desolate as it did when I saw it last in '48. Jonathan has neither the heart nor the money to restore it to its former condition. He and Mary and the grandchildren live in one wing only. I pray God they will always remain in ignorance of that final tragedy. Two people will carry the secret to the grave: Richard and I. He sits in Holland, many hundred miles away, and I lie upon my couch in Tywardreath, and the shadow of the buttress is upon us both. When Robin rides each Sunday to Menabilly I go with him, in imagination, across the park, and come to the high walls surrounding the house. The courtyard lies open, the west front stares down at me. The last rays of the sun shine into my old room above the gatehouse, for the lattice is open, but the windows of the room beside it are closed. Ivy tendrils creep across it. The smooth stone of the buttress outside the window is encrusted with lichen. The sun vanishes, and the west front takes once more to the shadows. The Rashleighs eat and sleep within, and go by candlelight to bed, and to dream; but I, down here three miles away in Tywardreath, wake in the night to the sound of a boy's voice calling my name in terror, to a boy's hand beating against the walls, and there in the pitch-black night before me, vivid, terrible, and accusing, is the ghost of Richard's son. I sit up in bed, sweating with horror, and faithful Matty, hearing me stir, comes to me and lights the candle.

She brews me a warm drink, rubs my aching back, and puts a shawl about my shoulders. Robin, in the room adjoining, sleeps on undisturbed. I try to read a while, but my thoughts are too violent to allow repose. Matty brings me paper and pen, and I begin to write. There is so much to say, and so little time in which to say it. For I do not fool myself about the future. My own instinct, quite apart from Robin's face, warns me that this autumn will be the last. So while my Richard's defense is discussed by the world and placed on record for all time among the archives of this seventeenth century, my apologia will go with me to the grave, and by rotting there with me, unread, will serve its purpose.

I will say for Richard what he never said for himself, and I will show how, despite his bitter faults and failings, it was possible for a woman to love him with all her heart, and mind, and body and I thank God I was that woman. I write at midnight, then, by candlelight, while the church clock at Tywardreath chimes the

small hours, and the only sound I hear is the sigh of the wind beneath my window and the murmur
the sea as the tide comes sweeping across the sands to the marshes below St. Blazey bridge.

2

The first time I saw Gartred was when my eldest brother Kit brought her home to Lanrest as his bride. She was twenty-two, and I, the baby of the family except for Percy, a child of ten. We were a happy, sprawling family, very intimate and free, and my father, John Harris, cared nothing for the affairs of the world, but lived for his horses, his dogs, and the peaceful concerns of his small estate. Lanrest was not a large property, but it lay high amidst a sheltering ring of trees, looking down upon the Loo Valley, and was one of those placid, kindly houses that seem to slumber through the years, and were loved it well. Even now, thirty years after, I have only to close my eyes and think of home, and there comes to my nostrils the well-remembered scent of hay, hot with the sun, blown by a lazy wind; and I see the great wheel thrashing the water down at the mills at Lametton, and I smell the fusty, dusty golden grain. The sky was always white with pigeons. They circled and flew above our heads, and were so tame that they would take grain from our hands. Strutting and cooing, puffed and proud, they created an atmosphere of comfort. Their gentle chattering among themselves through a long summer afternoon brought much peace to me in the later years, when the others would go hawking, and ride away laughing and talking, and I could no longer follow them. But that is another chapter. I was talking of Gartred as I saw her first. The wedding had taken place at Stowe, her home, and Percy and I, because of some childish ailment or other, had not been present at it. This, very foolishly, created a resentment in me from the first. I was undoubtedly spoiled, being so much younger than my brothers and sisters, who made a great pet of me, as did my parents too, but I had it firmly in my mind that my brother's bride did not wish to be bothered with children at her wedding, and that she feared we might have some infection.

I can remember sitting upright in bed, my eyes bright with fever, remonstrating with my mother. "When Cecilia was married, Percy and I carried the train," I said (Cecilia was my eldest sister), "and we all of us went to Mothercombe, and the Pollexefens welcomed us, although Percy and I both made ourselves sick with overeating." All my mother could say in reply was that this time it was different, and Stowe was quite another place to Mothercombe, and the Grenvilles were not the Pollexefens—which seemed to me the most feeble of arguments—and she would never forgive herself if we took the fever to Gartred. Everything was Gartred. Nobody else mattered. There was a great fuss and commotion too about preparing the spare chamber for when the bride and bridegroom should come to stay. New hangings were brought, and rugs, and tapestries, and it was all because Gartred must not be made to feel Lanrest was shabby or in poor repair. The servants were made to sweep and dust, the place was put into a bustle, and everyone made uncomfortable in the process.

If it had been because of Kit, my dear easygoing brother, I should never have grudged it for a moment. But Kit himself might not have existed. It was for Gartred. And like all children I listened to the gossip of the servants. "It's on account of his being heir to Sir Christopher at Radford that she's marrying our young master," was the sentence I heard, amidst the clatter in the kitchens. I seized upon this piece of information and brooded on it, together with the reply from my father's steward: "It's not like a Grenville to match with a plain Harris of Lanrest."

The words angered me, and confused me too. The word "plain" seemed a reflection on me

brother's looks, whom I considered handsome, and why should a Harris of Lanrest be a poor bargain for a Grenvile? It was true that Kit was heir to our uncle Christopher at Radford—a great barracks of place the other side of Plymouth—but I had never thought much of the fact until now. For the first time I realized, with something of a shock, that marriage was not the romantic fairy legend I had imagined it to be, but a great institution, a bargain between important families, with the tying-up of property. When Cecilia married John Pollexfen, whom she had known since childhood, it had not struck me in this way, but now, with my father riding over to Stowe continually and holding long conferences with lawyers, and wearing a worried frown between his brows, Kit's marriage was becoming like some frightening affair of State, which, if worded wrong, would throw the country into chaos.

Eavesdropping again, I heard the lawyer say: "It is not Sir Bernard Grenvile who is holding out about the settlement. But the daughter herself. She has her father wound round her finger."

I pondered over this awhile, and then repeated it to my sister Mary. "Is it usual," I asked, with no doubt irritating precocity, "for a bride to argue thus about her portion?"

Mary did not answer for a moment. Although she was twenty, life had barely brushed her as yet, and I doubt if she knew more than I did. But I could see that she was shocked. "Gartred is the only daughter," she said, after a moment. "It is perhaps necessary for her to discuss the settlements."

"I wonder if Kit knows of it," I said. "I somehow do not think he would like it."

Mary then bade me hold my tongue, and warned me that I was fast becoming a shrew, and no one would admire me for it. I was not to be discouraged, though, and while I refrained from mentioning the marriage settlement to my brothers, I went to plague Robin—my favorite even in those days—tell me something of the Grenviles. He had just ridden in from hawking, and stood in the stable yard with his dear handsome face flushed and happy, the falcon on his wrist, and I remember drawing back, scared always by the bird's deep, venomous eyes and the blood on her beak. She would permit no one to touch her but Robin, and he was stroking her feathers. There was a clatter in the stable yard, with the men rubbing down the horses, and in one corner by the well the dogs were feeding.

"I am pleased it is Kit and not you that has gone away to find a bride for himself," I said, while the bird watched me from beneath great hooded lids, and Robin smiled, and reached out his other hand to touch my curls, while the falcon ruffled in anger.

"If I had been the eldest son," said Robin gently, "I would have been the bridegroom at the wedding." I stole a glance at him, and saw that his smile had gone, and in its place a look of sadness. "Why, did she like you best?" I asked. He turned away then, and placing the hood over his bird, gave her to the keeper. When he picked me up in his arms he was smiling again. "Come and pick cherries," he said, "and never mind my brother's bride."

"But the Grenviles?" I persisted as he bore me on his shoulders to the orchard. "Why must we be so mighty proud about them?"

"Bevil Grenvile is the best fellow in the world," said Robin. "Kit, and Jo, and I were at Oxford with him. And his sister is very beautiful." More than that I could not drag from him. But my brother Jo, whose rather sarcastic, penetrating mind I put the same question later in the day, expressed surprise at my ignorance. "Have you reached the ripe age of ten, Honor," he inquired, "without knowing that in Cornwall there are only two families who count for anything—the Grenviles and the Arundells. Naturally, we humble Harris brood are overwhelmed that our dear brother Kit has been honored by the august hand of the so ravishing Gartred." Then he buried his nose in a book and there was an end of the matter. The next week they were all gone to Stowe for the wedding. I had to hug my soul to patience until their return, and then, as I feared, my mother pleaded fatigue, as did the rest of them.

and everyone seemed a little jaded and out of sorts with so much feasting and rejoicing, and only my third sister Bridget unbent to me at all. She was in raptures over the magnificence of Stowe and the hospitality of the Grenvilles. "This place is like a steward's lodge compared to Stowe," she told me. "You could put Lanrest in one pocket of the grounds there, and it would not be noticed. Two servants waited behind my chair at supper, and all the while musicians played to us from the gallery."

"But Gartred, what of Gartred?" I said with impatience.

"Wait while I tell you," she said. "There were more than two hundred people staying there, and Mary and I slept together in a chamber bigger far than any we possess here. There was a woman to attend us, and dress our hair. And the bedding was changed every day, and perfumed."

"What else, then?" I asked, consumed with jealousy.

"I think Father was a little lost," she whispered. "I saw him from time to time with the other people, endeavoring to talk, but he looked stifled, as though he could not breathe. And all the men were so richly attired, somehow he seemed drab beside them. Sir Bernard is a very fine-looking man. He wore a blue velvet doublet slashed with silver, the day of the wedding, and Father was in his green that fits him a little too well. He overtops him too—Sir Bernard, I mean—and they looked good standing together."

"Never mind my father," I said. "I want to hear of Gartred."

My sister Bridget smiled, superior with her knowledge.

"I liked Bevil the best," she said; "and so does everyone. He was in the midst of it all, seeing that no one lacked for anything. I thought Lady Grenville a little stiff, but Bevil was the soul of courtesy and gracious in all he did." She paused a moment. "They are all auburn haired, you know," she said with some inconsequence. "If we saw anyone with auburn hair it was sure to be a Grenville. I did not care for the one they called Richard," she added with a frown.

"Why not? Was he so ugly?" I asked.

"No," she answered, puzzled. "He was more handsome than Bevil. But he looked at us all in a mocking, contemptuous way, and when he trod on my gown in the crush he made no apology. 'You are to blame,' he had the impudence to tell me, 'for letting it trail thus in the dust.' They told me at Stowe he was a soldier."

"But there is still Gartred," I said. "You have not described her." And then, to my mortification, Bridget yawned, and rose to her feet. "Oh, I am too weary to tell you any more," she said. "Wait until the morning. But Mary, and Cecilia, and I are all agreed upon one thing, that we would soon resemble Gartred than any other woman." So in the end I had to form my own judgment with my own eyes. We were all gathered in the hall to receive them—they had gone first from Stowe to my uncle's estate at Radford—and the dogs ran out into the courtyard as they heard the horses.

We were a large party, because the Pollexefens were with us too, Cecilia had her baby Joan in her arms, my first godchild—and I was proud of the honor—and we were all happy and laughing and talking because we were one family and knew one another so well. Kit swung himself down from the saddle—he looked very debonair and gay—and I saw Gartred. She murmured something to Kit, who laughed and colored, and held his arms to help her dismount, and in a flash of intuition I knew she had said something to him which was part of their life together, and had naught to do with us, his family. Kit was not ours any more, but belonged to her.

I hung back, reluctant to be introduced, and suddenly she was beside me, her cool hand under my chin. "So you are Honor?" she said. The inflexion in her voice suggested that I was small for my age, or ill looking, or disappointing in some special way, and she passed on through to the big parlour, taking precedence of my mother with a confident smile, while the remainder of the family followed.

like fascinated moths. Percy, being a boy and goggle-eyed at beauty, went to her at once, and she put sweetmeat in his mouth. She has them ready, I thought, to bribe us children, as one bribes strange dogs. "Would Honor like one too?" she said, and there was a note of mockery in her voice, as though she knew instinctively that this treating of me as a baby was what I hated most. I could not take my eyes from her face. She reminded me of something, and suddenly I knew. I was a tiny child again at Radford, my uncle's home, and he was walking me through the glasshouses in the gardens. There was one flower, an orchid, that grew alone; it was the color of pale ivory, with one little vein of crimson running through the petals. The scent filled the house, honeyed, and sickly sweet. It was the loveliest flower I had ever seen. I stretched out my hand to stroke the soft velvet sheen, and swiftly my uncle pulled me by the shoulder. "Don't touch it, child. The stem is poisonous."

I drew back, frightened. Sure enough, I could see the myriad hairs bristling, sharp and sticky, like a thousand swords.

Gartred was like that orchid. When she offered me the sweetmeat I turned away, shaking my head, and my father, who had never spoken to me harshly in his life, said sharply, "Honor, where are your manners?" Gartred laughed and shrugged her shoulder. Everyone present turned reproving eyes upon me, and even Robin frowned. My mother bade me go upstairs to my room. That was how Gartred came to Lanrest.

The marriage lasted for three years, and it is not my purpose now to write about it. So much has happened since to make the later life of Gartred the more vivid, and in the battles we have waged the early years loom dim now and unimportant. There was always war between us, that much is certain. She young, and confident, and proud, and I a sullen child, peering at her from behind doors and screens, and both of us aware of a mutual hostility. They were more often at Radford and Stowe than at Lanrest, but when she came home I swear she cast a blight upon the place. I was still a child, and could not reason, but a child, like an animal, has an instinct that does not lie. There were no children of the marriage. That was the first blow, and I know this was a disappointment to my parents, because I heard them talk of it. My sister Cecilia came to us regularly for her lying-in, but there was never a rumor of Gartred. She rode and went hawking as we did, she did not keep her room or complain of fatigue, which we had come to expect from Cecilia. Once my mother had the hardihood to say, "When I first wed, Gartred, I neither rode nor hunted, for fear I should miscarry," and Gartred, trimming her nails with a tiny pair of scissors made of mother-of-pearl, looked up at her, and said, "I have nothing within me to lose, madam, and for that you had better blame your son." Her voice was low and full of venom, and my mother stared at her for a moment, bewildered, then rose and left the room in distress. It was the first time the poison had touched her. I did not understand the talk between them, but I sensed that Gartred was bitter against my brother, for soon afterwards Kit came in and, going to Gartred, said to her in a tone loaded with reproach, "Have you accused me to my mother?" They both looked at me, and I knew I had to leave the room. I went out into the garden, and fed the pigeons, but the peace was gone from the place. From that moment everything went ill with them, and with us all. Kit's nature seemed to change. He wore a harassed air, wretchedly unlike himself, and a coolness grew up between him and my father, who had hitherto agreed so well.

Kit showed himself suddenly aggressive to my father, and to us all, finding fault with the working of Lanrest and comparing it to Radford, and in contrast to this was his abject humility before Gartred, a humility that had nothing fine about it but made him despicable to my intolerant eyes. The next year he stood for West Looe in Parliament, and they went often to London, so we did not see them much, but when they came to Lanrest there seemed to be this continual strain about their presence, and one day there was a heated quarrel between Kit and Robin one night when my parents were from home. It was

midsummer, stifling and warm, and I played truant from my nursery and crept down to the garden in my nightgown. The household were abed. I remember flitting like a little ghost before the window. The casement of the guest chamber was open wide, and I heard Kit's voice, louder than usual, lifted in argument. Some devil interest in me made me listen. "It is always the same," he said, "wherever you go. You make a fool of me before all men, and now tonight before my very brother. I tell you I cannot endure it any longer."

I heard Gartred laugh, and I saw Kit's shadow reflected on the ceiling by the quivering candlelight. Their voices were low for a moment, and then Kit spoke again for me to hear.

"You think I remark nothing," he said. "You think I have sunk so low that to keep you near me, and to be allowed to touch you sometimes, I will shut my eyes to everyone. Do you think it was pleasant for me at Stowe to see how you looked upon Antony Denys that night when I returned so suddenly from London? A man with grown children, and his wife scarce cold in her grave? Are you entirely without mercy for me?" That terrible pleading note I so detested had crept back into his voice again, and I heard Gartred laugh once more.

"And this evening," he said, "I saw you, smiling across the table at him, my own brother." I felt sick, and rather frightened, but curiously excited, and my heart thumped within me as I heard a step beside me on the paving, and looking over my shoulder I saw Robin stand beside me in the darkness. "Go away," he whispered to me. "Go away at once." I pointed to the open window. "It is Kit and Gartred," I said. "He is angry with her for smiling at you."

I heard Robin catch at his breath, and he turned, as if to go, when suddenly Kit's voice cried out loud and horrible, as though he, a grown man, was sobbing like a child. "If that happens I shall kill you. I swear to God I shall kill you." Then Robin, swift as an arrow, stooped to a stone, and, taking it in his hand, he flung it against the casement, shivering the glass to fragments.

"God damn you for a coward then," he shouted. "Come and kill me instead." I looked up and saw Kit's face, white and tortured, and behind him Gartred with her hair loose on her shoulders. It was a picture to be imprinted always on my mind, those two at the window, and Robin suddenly different from the brother I had always known and loved, breathing defiance and contempt. I felt ashamed of him, for Kit, for myself, but mostly I was filled with hatred for Gartred, who had brought the storm to pass and remained untouched by it.

I turned and ran, with my fingers in my ears, and crept up to bed with never a word to anyone, and drew the covers well over my head, fearing that by morning they would all three of them be discovered slain there in the grass. But what passed between them further, I never knew. Day broke and all was as before except that Robin rode away soon after breakfast and did not return until after. Kit and Gartred took their departure to Radford, some five days later. Whether anyone else in the family knew of the incident I never discovered. I was too scared to ask, and since Gartred had come among us we had all lost our old manner of sharing troubles, and had each one of us grown more polite and secretive.

Next year, in '23, the smallpox swept through Cornwall like a scourge, and few families were spared. In Liskeard the people closed their doors, and the shopkeepers put up their shutters and would do no trade, for fear of the infection.

In June my father was stricken, dying within a few days, and we had scarcely recovered from the blow before messages came to us from my uncle at Radford to say that Kit had been seized with the same dread disease, and there was no hope of his recovery.

Father and son thus died within a few weeks of one another, and Jo, the scholar, became the head of the family. We were all too unhappy with our double loss to think of Gartred, who had fled to Stowe.

the first sign of infection and so escaped a similar fate, but when the two wills came to be read, both Kit's and my father's, we learned that although Lanrest, with Radford later, passed to Jo, the rich pasture lands of Lametton and the Mill were to remain in Gartred's keeping for her lifetime.

She came down with her brother Bevil for the reading, and even Cecilia, the gentlest of my sisters, remarked afterwards with shocked surprise upon her composure, her icy confidence, and the niggardly manner with which she saw to the measuring of every acre down at Lametton. Bevil, married himself now and a near neighbor to us at Killigarth, did his utmost to smooth away the ill feeling that I sensed among us, and although I was still little more than a child I remember feeling unhappy and embarrassed that he was put to so much awkwardness on our account. It was small wonder that he was loved by everyone, and I wondered, to myself, what opinion he held in his secret heart about his sisters or whether her beauty mazed him as it did every man.

When affairs were settled, and they went away, I think we all of us breathed relief that no actual breach had come to pass, causing a feud between the families, and the fact that Lanrest belonged to me was a weight off my mother's mind, though she said nothing.

Robin remained from home during the whole period of the visit, and maybe no one but myself could guess the reason.

The morning before she left, some impulse prompted me to hesitate before her chamber, the door of which was open, and look at her within. She had claimed that the contents of the room belonged to Kit, and so to her, and the servants had been employed the day before in taking down the hangings and removing the pieces of furniture she most desired. At this last moment she was alone, turning over a little secretaire that stood in one corner. She did not observe that I was watching her, and I saw the mask off her lovely face at last. The eyes were narrow, the lip protruding, and she wrenched at a little drawer with such force that the part came to pieces in her hands. There were some trinkets at the back of the drawer, none I think of great value, but she had remembered them. Suddenly she saw my face reflected in the mirror.

"If you leave to us the bare walls, we shall be well content," I said as her eyes met mine. My father would have whipped me for it had he been alive, and my brothers too, but we were alone.

"You always played the spy, from the first," she said softly, but because I was not a man she did not smile.

"I was born with eyes in my head," I said to her.

Slowly she put the jewels in a little pouch she wore hanging from her waist. "Take comfort and be thankful you are quit of me now," she said. "We are not likely to see one another again."

"I hope not," I told her. Suddenly she laughed. "It were a pity," she said, "that your brother did not have a little of your spirit."

"Which brother?" I asked.

She paused a moment, uncertain what I knew, and then, smiling, she tapped my cheek with her long, slim finger. "All of them," she said, and then she turned her back on me, and called to her servants from the adjoining room. Slowly I went downstairs, my mind on fire with questions, and coming into the hallway I saw Jo fingering the great map hanging on the wall. I did not talk to him, but walked on past him into the garden.

She left Lanrest at noon in a litter, with a great train of horses and servants from Stowe to carry her belongings. I watched them, from a hiding place in the trees, pass away up the road to Liskeard in a cloud of dust.

"That's over," I said to myself. "That's the last of them. We have done with the Grenvilles."

But Fate willed otherwise.

3

My eighteenth birthday. A bright December day. My spirits soaring like a bird as, looking out across the dazzling sea from Radford, I watched His Majesty's Fleet sail into Plymouth Sound.

It concerned me not that the expedition now returning had been a failure, and that far away France La Rochelle remained unconquered; these were matters for older people to discuss.

Here in Devon there was laughing and rejoicing and the young folk held high holiday. What a sight they were—some eighty ships or more, crowding together between Drake's Island and the Mount, the white sails bellying in the west wind, the colored pennants streaming from the golden spars. As each vessel drew opposite the fort at Mount Batten, she would be greeted with a salvo from the great guns, and, dipping her colors in a return salute, let fly her anchor, and bring up opposite the entrance to the Cattwater. The people gathered on the cliffs waved and shouted, and from the vessels themselves came a mighty cheer, while the drums beat and the bugles sounded, and the sides of the ships were seen to be thronged with soldiers, pressing against the high bulwarks, clinging to the stout rigging. The sun shone upon their breastplates and their swords, which they waved to the crowds in greeting, and gathered on the poop would be the officers—flashes of crimson, blue, and Lincoln green, as they moved among the men.

Each ship carried on her mainmast the standard of the officer in command, and as the crowd recognized the colors and the arms of a Devon leader, or a Cornishman, another great shout would fill the air, and be echoed back to us from the cheering fellows in the vessel. There was the two-headed eagle of the Godolphins, the running stag of the Trevanions from Caerhayes, the six swallows of the numerous Arundell clan, and—perhaps loveliest of all—the crest of the Devon Champernownes, sitting swan holding in her beak a horseshoe of gold.

The little ships, too, threaded their way among their larger sisters, a vivid flash of color with the narrow decks black with troopers, and I recognized vessels I had last seen lying in Looe Harbour or Fowey, now weather stained and battered, but bearing triumphantly aloft the standards of the men who had built them and manned them and commissioned them for war—among them the wolf's head of our neighbor Trelawney, and the Cornish chough of the Menabilly Rashleighs.

The leading ship, a great three-masted vessel, carried the commander of the expedition, the Duke of Buckingham, and when she was saluted from Mount Batten she replied with an answering salvo from her own six guns, and we could see the Duke's pennant fluttering from the masthead. She dropped anchor, swinging to the wind, and the fleet followed her, and the rattle of nearly a hundred cables through a hundred hawsers must have filled the air from where we stood on the cliffs below Radford, away beyond the Sound to Saltash, at the entrance of the Tamar River. Slowly their bows swung round, pointing to Cawsand and the Cornish coast, and their sterns came into line, the sun flashing in their windows and gleaming upon the ornamental carving, the writhing serpents, and the lions' paws.

And still the bugles echoed across the water and the drums thundered. Suddenly there was silence, the clamor and the cheering died away, and on the flagship commanded by the Duke of Buckingham someone snapped forth an order in a high, clear voice. The soldiers who had crowded the bulwarks

were there no longer, they moved as one man, forming into line amidships, there was no jostling, no thrusting into position. There came another order, and the single tattoo of a drum, and in one movement it seemed the boats were manned and lowered into the water, the colored blades poised though to strike, and the men who waited on the thwarts sat rigid as automatons.

The maneuver had taken perhaps three minutes from the first order; and the timing of it, the precision, the perfect discipline of the whole proceeding drew from the crowd about us the biggest cheer yet from the day, while for no reason I felt the idiotic tears course down my cheeks.

"I thought as much," said a fellow below me. "There's only one man in the west who could turn an unruly rabble into soldiers fit for His Majesty's Bodyguard. There go the Grenville coat of arms—you see them, hoisted beneath the Duke of Buckingham's standard?" Even as he spoke I saw the scarlet pennant run up to the masthead, and as it streamed into the wind and flattened, the sun shone upon the three gold rests.

The boats drew away from the ship's side, the officers seated in the stern sheets, and suddenly it was high holiday again, with crowded Plymouth boats putting out from the Cattwater to greet the fleet—the whole Sound dotted at once with little craft—and the people watching upon the cliffs began to run towards Mount Batten, calling and shouting, pushing against one another to be the first to greet the landing boats. The spell was broken, and we returned to Radford.

"A fine finish to your birthday," said my brother with a smile. "We are all bidden to a banquet at the castle, at the command of the Duke of Buckingham." He stood on the steps of the house to greet us, having ridden back from the fortress at Mount Batten. Jo had succeeded to the estates at Radford, my uncle Christopher having died a few years back, and much of our time now was spent between Plymouth and Lanrest. Jo had become, indeed, a person of some importance, in Devon especially, and besides being Under Sheriff for the county he had married an heiress into the bargain, Elizabeth Champernowne, whose pleasant manner and equable disposition made up for her lack of looks. My sister Bridget, too, had followed Cecilia's example and married into a Devon family, and Mary and I were the only daughters left unwed.

"There will be ten thousand fellows roaming the streets of Plymouth tonight," jested Robin. "I'd give a warrant if we turned the girls loose among them they'd soon find husbands."

"Best clip Honor's tongue then," replied Jo, "for they'll soon forget her blue eyes and her curls once she begins to flay them."

"Let me alone—I can look after myself," I told them.

For I was still the spoiled darling, the *enfant terrible*, possessing boundless health and vigor, and a tongue that ran away with me. I was, moreover (and how long ago it seems), the beauty of the family, though my features, such as they were, were more impudent than classical, and I still had to stand on tiptoe to reach Robin's shoulder. I remember, that night, how we embarked below the fortress and took a boat across the Cattwater to the castle. All Plymouth seemed to be upon the water, or on the battlements, while away to westward gleamed the soft lights of the fleet at anchor, the stern windows shining, and the glow from the poop lanterns casting a dull beam upon the water. When we landed, we found the townsfolk pressing about the castle entrance, and everywhere were the soldiers, laughing and talking, encircled with girls, who had decked them with flowers and ribbons for festivity. There were casks of ale standing on the cobbles beside the braziers, and barrow-loads of pies, and cakes, and cheeses, and I remember thinking that the maids who roistered there with their soldier lovers would maybe have more value from their evening than we who must behave with dignity within the precincts of the castle.

In a moment we were out of hearing of the joyful noises of the town, and the air was close and

heavy with rich scent, and velvet, and silk, and spicy food, and we were in the great banqueting hall with voices sounding hollow and strange beneath the vaulted roof. Now and again would ring out the clear voice of a gentleman-at-arms. "Way for the Duke of Buckingham," and a passage would be cleared for the commander as he passed to and fro among the guests, holding court even as His Majesty himself might do.

The scene was colorful and exciting, and I—more accustomed to the lazy quietude of Lanrest—felt my heart beat and my cheek flush, and to my youthful fancy it seemed to me that all this glittering display was somehow a tribute to my eighteenth birthday. "How lovely it is! Are you not glad you came?" I said to Mary, and she, always reserved among strangers, touched my arm and murmured, "Speak more softly, Honor. You draw attention to us," and was for drawing back against the wall. I pressed forward, greedy for color, devouring everything with my eyes, smiling even at strangers and caring not at all that I seemed bold, when suddenly the crowd parted, a way was cleared, and here was the Duke's retinue upon us, with the Duke himself not half a yard away. Mary was gone, and I was left alone to bar his path. I remember standing an instant in dismay, and then, losing my composure, curtsied low, as though to King Charles himself, while a little ripple of laughter floated above my head. Raising my eyes, I saw my brother Jo, his face a strange mixture of amusement and dismay, come forward from among those who thronged the Duke, and bending over me he helped me to my feet, for I had curtsied so low that I was hard upon my heels and could not rise. "May I present my sister Honor, your Grace?" I heard him say. "This is, in point of fact, her eighteenth birthday, and her first venture into society."

The Duke of Buckingham bowed gravely, and, lifting my hand to his lips, wished me good fortune. "It may be your sister's first venture, my dear Harris," he said graciously, "but with beauty such as she possesses you must see to it that it is not the last." He passed on in a wave of perfume and velvet, with my brother hemmed in beside him, frowning at me over his shoulder, and as I swore under my breath (or possibly not under my breath, but indiscreetly, and a stable oath learned from Robin at that) I heard someone say behind me, "If you care to come out onto the battlements, I will show you how to do that as it should be done." I whipped round, scarlet and indignant, and, looking down upon me from six foot or more, with a sardonic smile upon his face, was an officer still clad in his breastplate of silver, worn over a blue tunic, with a blue and silver sash about his waist. His eyes were golden brown, his hair dark auburn, and I saw that his ears were pierced with small gold rings, for all the world like a Turkish bandit.

"Do you mean you would show me how to curtsy or how to swear?" I said to him in fury.

"Why both, if you wish it," he answered. "Your performance at the first was lamentable, and at the second merely amateur."

His rudeness rendered me speechless, and I could hardly believe my ears. I glanced about me for Mary, or for Elizabeth, Jo's serene and comfortable wife, but they had withdrawn in the crush, and I was hemmed about with strangers. The most fitting thing, then, was to withdraw with dignity. I turned on my heel, and pushed my way through the crowd, making for the entrance, and then I heard the mocking voice behind me once again. "Way for Mistress Honor Harris of Lanrest," proclaimed in his clear tones, while people looked at me astonished, falling back in spite of themselves, and so a passageway was cleared. I walked on with flaming cheeks, scarce knowing what I was doing, and found myself, not in the great entrance as I had hoped, but in the cold air upon the battlements looking out onto Plymouth Sound, while away below me, in the cobbled square, the townsfolk danced and sang. My odious companion was with me still, and he stood now, with his hand upon his sword, looking down upon me with that same mocking smile on his face.

“So you are the little maid my sister so much detested,” he said.

“What the devil do you mean?” I asked.

“I would have spanked you for it had I been her,” he said.

Something in the clip of his voice and the droop of his eye struck a chord in my memory. “Who are you?” I said to him.

“Sir Richard Grenville,” he replied, “a Colonel in His Majesty’s Army, and knighted some little while ago for extreme gallantry in the field.” He hummed a little, playing with his sash.

“It is a pity,” I said, “that your manners do not match your courage.”

“And that your deportment,” he said, “does not equal your looks.”

This reference to my height—always a sore point, for I had not grown an inch since I was thirteen—stung me to fresh fury. I let fly a string of oaths that Jo and Robin, under the greatest provocation might have loosed upon the stableman, though certainly not in my presence, and which I had only learned through my inveterate habit of eavesdropping; but if I hoped to make Richard Grenville blanch I was wasting my breath. He waited until I had finished, his head cocked as though he were a tutor hearing me repeat a lesson, and then he shook his head.

“There is a certain coarseness about the English tongue that does not do for the occasion,” he said. “Spanish is more graceful, and far more satisfying to the temper. Listen to this.” And he began to swear in Spanish, loosing upon me a stream of lovely-sounding oaths that would certainly have won my admiration had they come from Jo or Robin. As I listened I looked again for that resemblance to Gartred, but it was gone. He was like his brother Bevil, but with more dash, and certainly more swagger, and I felt he cared not a tinker’s curse for anyone’s opinion but his own.

“You must admit,” he said, breaking off suddenly, “that I have you beaten.” His smile, no longer sardonic but disarming, had me beaten too, and I felt my anger die within me. “Come and look at the fleet,” he said, “a ship at anchor is a lovely thing.”

We went to the battlements and stared out across the Sound. It was still and cloudless and the moon had risen. The ships were motionless upon the water, and they stood out in the moonlight carved and clear. The men were singing, and the sound of their voices was borne to us across the water, distinct from the rough jollity of the crowds in the streets below.

“Were your losses very great at La Rochelle?” I asked him.

“No more than I expected, in an expedition that was bound to be abortive,” he answered, shrugging his shoulders. “Those ships yonder are filled with wounded men who won’t recover. It would be more humane to throw them overboard.” I looked at him in doubt, wondering if this was a further installment of his peculiar sense of humor. “The only fellows who distinguished themselves were those in the regiment I have the honor to command,” he continued, “but as no other officer but myself insists on discipline, it was small wonder that the attack proved a failure.”

His self-assurance was as astounding to me as his former rudeness.

“Do you talk thus to your superiors?” I asked him.

“If you mean superior to me in matters military, such a man does not exist,” he answered, “but superiors in rank, why yes, invariably. That is why, although I am not yet twenty-nine, I am already the most detested officer in His Majesty’s Army.” He looked down at me, smiling, and once again I was at a loss for words.

I thought of my sister Bridget, and how he had trodden upon her dress at Kit’s wedding, and wondered if there was anyone in the world who liked him. “And the Duke of Buckingham?” I said. “Do you speak to him in this way too?”

“Oh, George and I are old friends,” he answered. “He does what he is told. He gives me no trouble.”

Look at those drunken fellows in the courtyard there. My heaven, if they were under my command I hang the bastards." He pointed down to the square below, where a group of brawling soldiers were squabbling around a cask of ale, accompanied by a pack of squealing women.

"You might excuse them," I said, "pent up at sea so long."

"They may drain the cask dry, and rape every woman in Plymouth, for all I care," he answered "but let them do it like men and not like beasts, and clean their filthy jerkins first."

He turned away from the battlement in disgust.

"Come now," he said. "Let us see if you can curtsy better to me than you did to the Duke. Take your gown in your hands, thus. Bend your right knee, thus. And allow your somewhat insignificant posterior to sink upon your left leg, thus."

I obeyed him, shaking with laughter, for it seemed to me supremely ridiculous that a colonel in His Majesty's Army should be teaching me deportment upon the battlements of Plymouth Castle.

"I assure you it is no laughing matter," he said gravely. "A clumsy woman looks so damnably inferior. There now, that is excellent. Once again. Perfection. You can do it if you try. The truth is you are an idle little baggage, and have never been beaten by your brothers." With appalling coolness, I straightened my gown and rearranged the lace around my shoulders.

"I object to dining with untidy women," he murmured.

"I have no intention of sitting down with you to dine," I replied with spirit. "No one else will accompany you, I can vouch for that," he answered. "Come, take my arm. I am hungry if you are not."

He marched me back into the castle, and to my consternation I found that the guests were already seated at the long tables in the banqueting hall, and the servants were bearing in the dishes. We were conspicuous as we entered, and my usual composure fled from me. It was, it may be remembered, my first venture in the social world. "Let us go back," I pleaded, tugging at his arm. "See, there is no place for us; the seats are all filled."

"Go back? Not on your life. I want my dinner," he replied.

He pushed his way past the servants, nearly lifting me from my feet. I could see hundreds of faces staring up at us, and heard a hum of conversation, and for one brief moment I caught a glimpse of my sister Mary, seated next to Robin, away down in the center of the hall. I saw the look of horror and astonishment in her eyes, and her mouth frame the word "Honor" as she whispered to my brother. I could do nothing but hurry forward, tripping over my gown, borne on the relentless arm of Richard Grenville to the high table at the far end of the hall where the Duke of Buckingham sat beside the Countess of Mount Edgcumbe, and the nobility of Cornwall and Devon, such as they were, feasted with decorum above the common herd. "You are taking me to the high table," I protested, dragging his arm with all my force.

"What of it?" he asked, looking down at me in astonishment. "I'm damned if I'm going to dine anywhere else. Way there please, for Sir Richard Grenville." At his voice the servants flattened themselves against the wall, and heads were turned and I saw the Duke of Buckingham break off from his conversation with the Countess. Chairs were pulled forward, people were squeezed aside, and somehow we were seated at the table a hand's stretch from the Duke himself, while the Lady Mount Edgcumbe peered round at me with stony eyes. Richard Grenville leaned forward with a smile. "You are perhaps acquainted with Honor Harris, Countess," he said, "my sister-in-law. This is her eighteenth birthday." The Countess bowed, and appeared unmoved. "You can disregard her," said Richard Grenville to me. "She's as deaf as a post. But for God's sake smile, and take that glassy stare from your eye." I prayed for death, but it did not come to me. Instead I took the roast swan that was heaped upon my platter.

The Duke of Buckingham turned to me, his glass in his hand. "I wish you very many happy returns of the day," he said.

I murmured my thanks, and shook my curls to hide my flaming cheeks.

"Merely a formality," said Richard Grenvile in my ear. "Don't let it go to your head. George has a dozen mistresses already, and is in love with the Queen of France."

He ate with evident enjoyment, vilifying his neighbors with every mouthful, and because he did not trouble to lower his voice I could swear that his words were heard. I tasted nothing of what I ate or drank, but sat like a bewildered fish throughout the long repast. At length the ordeal was over, and I felt myself pulled to my feet by my companion. The wine, which I had swallowed as though it were water, had made jelly of my legs, and I was obliged to lean upon him for support. I have scant memory indeed of what followed next. There was music, and singing, and some Sicilian dancers, strung about with ribbons, performed a tarantella, but their final dizzy whirling was my undoing, and I have a shaming recollection of being assisted to some inner apartment of the castle, suitably darkened and discreet, where Nature took her toll of me, and the roast swan knew me no more. I opened my eyes and found myself upon a couch, with Richard Grenvile holding my hand, and dabbing my forehead with his kerchief.

"You must learn to carry your wine," he said severely.

I felt very ill, and very ashamed, and tears were near the surface.

"Ah, no," he said, and his voice, hitherto so clipped and harsh, was oddly tender. "You must not cry. Not on your birthday."

He continued dabbing at my forehead with the kerchief.

"I have n-never eaten roast swan b-before," I stammered, closing my eyes in agony at the memory.

"It was not so much the swan as the burgundy," he murmured. "Lie still now, you will be easier brought and by."

In truth, my head was still reeling, and I was as grateful for his strong hand as I would have been for my mother's. It seemed to me in no wise strange that I should be lying sick in a darkened unknown room with Richard Grenvile tending me, proving himself so comforting a nurse.

"I hated you at first. I like you better now," I told him.

"It's hard that I had to make you vomit before I won your approval," he answered. I laughed, and then fell to groaning again, for the swan was not entirely dissipated. "Lean against my shoulder, so he said to me. "Poor little one, what an ending to an eighteenth birthday." I could feel him shake with silent laughter, and yet his voice and hands were strangely tender, and I was happy with him.

"You are like your brother Bevil after all," I said.

"Not I," he answered. "Bevil is a gentleman, and I a scoundrel. I have always been the black sheep of the family."

"What of Gartred?" I asked.

"Gartred is a law unto herself," he replied. "You must have learned that when you were a little child, and she was wedded to your brother."

"I hated her with all my heart," I told him.

"Small blame to you for that," he answered me.

"And is she content, now that she is wed again?" I asked him.

"Gartred will never be content," he said. "She was born greedy, not only for money, but for men too. She had an eye to Antony Denys, her husband now, long before your brother died."

"And not only Antony Denys," I said.

"You had long ears for a little maid," he answered.

I sat up, rearranging my curls, while he helped me with my gown.

~~“You have been kind to me,” I said, grown suddenly prim, and conscious of my eighteen years. I shall not forget this evening.”~~

“Nor I either,” he replied.

“Perhaps,” I said, “you had better take me to my brothers.”

“Perhaps I had,” he said.

I stumbled out of the little dark chamber to the lighted corridor. “Where were we all this while?” he asked in doubt, glancing over my shoulder. He laughed, and shook his head.

“The good God only knows,” he answered; “but I wager it is the closet where Mount Edgcumbe combs his hair.” He looked down at me smiling, and, for one instant, touched my curls with his hand. “I will tell you one thing,” he said, “I have never sat with a woman before while she vomited.”

“Nor I so disgraced myself before a man,” I said with dignity.

Then he bent suddenly, and lifted me in his arms like a child. “Nor have I ever lay hidden in a darkened room with anyone so fair as you, Honor, and not made love to her,” he told me, and, holding me for a moment against his heart, he set me on my feet again.

“And now, if you permit it, I will take you home,” he said.

That is, I think, a very clear and truthful account of my first meeting with Richard Grenville.

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