

TREASON

Other books by
BERLIE DOHERTY

The Girl Who Saw Lions

Daughter of the Sea

Deep Secret

Holly Starcross

The Company of Ghosts

BERLIE DOHERTY



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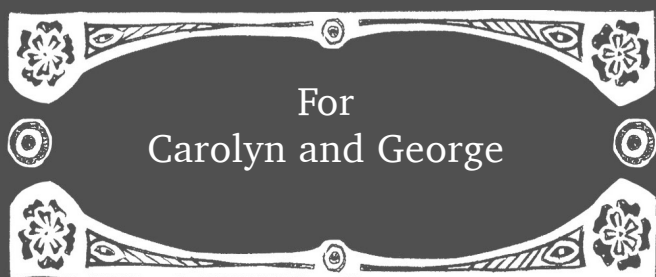
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For
Carolyn and George

The year is 1539. Henry VIII is King of England. All three of his wives, Katherine of Aragon, Anne Boleyn and Jane Seymour are dead. He has three children: Mary, Elizabeth and the long-awaited heir to his throne, Edward. Henry has broken away from the Church of Rome because the Pope would not allow him to divorce his first wife. Anyone who refuses to accept that he is the Supreme Head of the Church of England is accused of an offence that is punishable by death.

Treason.

The drowning

We jumped down from our horses and ran ahead of Father along the shore. Sand whipped into our faces. Waves hurled themselves against the rocks, sending cascades of spray high into the air, then rolled across the sand like hungry dogs, snuffling into every hole and hollow.

‘I’ll race you to the cave!’ I gasped over my shoulder. Matthew strode on past me. An extra-high wave filled his boots and he jumped sideways onto a boulder, waving his arms to keep his balance. I scrambled up after him and we staggered from rock to rock towards the cave.

‘Don’t go any further!’ Father shouted. He had his hands cupped round his mouth. ‘The tide’s too high. It’s dangerous.’

We ignored him. It was too exciting to stop now. We were above the waves, but the water curled over our feet and bursts of spray soaked right through our heavy clothes.

‘We’ll never make it to the cave,’ I panted.

‘We’ll have to,’ Matthew laughed. ‘We’re surrounded. Can’t go back. Have to go on.’

‘Come back!’ Father shouted again.

Behind him, where the sand was still dry, Ned Porritt,

the stable lad, stood clinging onto the reins of the horses. He was hopping from one foot to the other. 'Master Matthew, Master William!' he mouthed. 'Come back!'

Matthew laughed across at me. 'That's got them worried. Not scared, are you?'

'Of course not!'

'Then follow me. Onward, ever onward!'

'I still think we should try to go back,' I said. I turned to look at my father, and at that moment a tower of sea smashed against the rock, slamming me off balance. I flung my arms out as I toppled forward, and grabbed wildly at my brother's sleeve. Then we both plunged helplessly into the sea.

I was being rushed along in someone's arms. My eyes kept opening and shutting. I saw sky with huge clouds, and spatters of leaves and blinding sun, and black shadows. I saw the archway that led into the house, and the blue-painted wood of the ceiling above the stairs, and the dark curtains that draped over my bed. I saw my sister Margery's white, anxious face peering down at me. I saw light and dark and light again. I heard muffled voices, and Father, far, far away, saying, 'I tried to save him. I tried, I tried. I could only save one of them.'

But which one? I tried to say, and couldn't. *Am I alive, or am I dead?* The voices were spinning away from me, fainter and fainter.

'Master Willim, Master Willim, wake up now. Sit up, come on, I'll help you.'

I opened my eyes. Nurse Joan had pulled back the curtain from around my bed and was easing her arm

under my shoulders. My head and my arms felt too heavy, my chest was tight and painful. I could hear myself moaning.

‘That’s a good boy. Have this food I’ve brought you, and you’ll feel much better.’ Joan pushed a cushion behind my back as I struggled to sit up. I took the wooden bowl and spoon and tried to swallow the salty gruel, but it came back up my throat again. I pushed the bowl away and sank back onto the pillow. Something had happened. I tried to remember what it was, and couldn’t. Nurse Joan watched me gravely, as if she was waiting for me to speak. I couldn’t find the words. What was it? What had happened?

She sighed and stood up. ‘I’ll send Stephen in to clean you up,’ she said.

‘Where’s my father?’

‘In chapel. Praying with Brother John. They’ve been there all day, and the vigil will go on all night, so don’t ask for him.’ She waited again as if she expected me to say something, and then turned to go.

‘And Matthew?’

Nurse Joan stifled a sob and hurried out of the room, leaving the door open for the old servant Stephen. But it was Margery who ran in, as if she had been hovering outside the door all the time.

‘Don’t you know? Hasn’t she told you?’ Tears were streaming down her cheeks.

‘What? What’s happened?’

‘Matthew’s dead. He’s drowned, Will.’

'You are alive'

In the weeks that followed, I hardly saw my father. I wanted to be with him; I wanted him to comfort me, to tell me it was all right, to make things better again. But it wasn't all right, and it never would be again, and Father kept away from me. Matthew hadn't been found, and Father went down to the shore every day, alone, watching. He loved Matthew more than any of us; we knew that. Nurse Joan told us he was breaking in half with grief.

There was a weight of silence in the old Hall, and when Father came home in the evenings he walked on his own in the dark gardens as if he couldn't bear to be in the house with us. He had scarcely spoken to me or to Margery, hardly even looked at us. Our meals were sent to us in our rooms. I had to look across at the empty bed that Matthew and I used to share. I drew the curtains round it, but then the stillness scared me so much that I opened them again. The house was so quiet without his boisterous laughter that Margery and I hardly dared speak to each other, hardly dared cross the creaking floorboards between our rooms.

After the first month, Brother John asked me to go and see him in the rose garden outside the chapel. He was my father's cousin, and he used to live in a monastery,

before King Henry closed them all down and took their land and money to pay for his war with France. He was our tutor now. Matthew and I used to meet him in the rose garden every morning after Mass, before our lessons started.

‘The fresh air will bring colour to your cheeks and light to your eyes,’ he always said, in Latin. ‘Healthy boys make healthy scholars.’ He liked us to talk in Latin most of the time, but it was very hard, especially before breakfast. Sometimes he would notice how much we were struggling and he’d drop into English and tease us with a riddle.

It was still winter, and the grass was sharp and fat with ice. Brother John was bending down, hands on knees, looking at something on the ground.

‘Something here has made me think of a riddle for you,’ he said. ‘I swim, but am no fish. I have legs, but am no man. When I’m full-grown, I leap across the land, but am no hare. What am I?’

I wasn’t in the mood for riddles. Besides, I wasn’t very good at them. Matthew was always the one to guess the answer first. He used to whisper it to Brother John and then wrestle gleefully on the ground with me till I guessed the answer too, or until he shouted it down my ear.

‘Come on, William,’ Brother John coaxed.

‘I’ve no idea,’ I said at last. ‘Tell me.’

‘Ah no. It’s no satisfaction if you’re told the answer. Look at this now, what do you make of it?’

I squatted down next to him. There was a patch of ice across the path, but it was beginning to thaw in the pale sun. The surface ice was thin and hard, but

underneath it moving water squeezed and bubbled in dark blobs.

‘You’d think it was alive, wouldn’t you?’ Brother John said. ‘You’d think it was full of living creatures squirming to be let free.’

I watched the black wriggling shapes. ‘They look like tadpoles.’

Brother John clapped me on the back. ‘Exactly! Nothing in this world is quite as it seems.’ He stood up and looked down at me. ‘Death is not the end, William. Your brother is with his maker. He will have eternal rest. You are alive, and you bring hope to your father.’

‘My father doesn’t talk to me any more.’

‘He will. He will come out of his grief, and you will be the one to help him. You are *alive*. Remember that. Remember it always. While there’s life, there’s hope. Who said that?’

I fumbled for the answer. No Matthew to prompt me or to try to beat me to it. ‘Cicero?’

‘Exactly – one of the greatest Romans. Aha, but can you translate it?’

It had always been a tussle, between me and Matthew, to get there first. Even though he was three years older than me, I usually had a fair chance of beating him. But there was no race today.

‘Dum anima est, spes esse dicitur.’

Brother John beamed down at me. ‘Good, good, good! What a splendid morning this is turning out to be! Time for breakfast, and then lessons. I think I shall invite Margery to join us now, instead of pining in her room. What does she do all day, William?’

I shrugged. ‘She spends most of the time with Nurse

Joan, reading or sewing or something. She plays Mother's psaltery, but she's not much good at it.'

'Then she has time to join us. What an excellent idea.'

He strode back to the Hall so quickly that I had to run to keep up with him. It made me laugh, because I knew Brother John was doing it deliberately. I tugged the edge of his sleeve. 'Stop! I've worked out the answer to your riddle!'

Brother John spread out his hands questioningly. 'And? What am I?'

'You're a tadpole!'

When I arrived in the library after my breakfast I was surprised to find Margery sitting there already, practising her handwriting with a new goose quill. Brother John leaned over her shoulder, peering at her script.

'You read and write beautifully,' he told her. 'And there's room in your brains for much more than that, Margery. I should like you to learn French and Latin and Greek, like your brother. There's a place for you now, where Matthew used to sit.' He looked across at me. 'It's better with two, isn't it, Will?' His kind brown eyes glittered as he spoke. 'I loved that boy,' he added quietly. 'We will never let him out of our thoughts.'

Then he smiled quickly at us, rubbing his hands together. 'Aha! I have a riddle for you both. This will get your brains moving. I have no sight nor hands, many ribs, a mouth in my middle. I move on one foot, I am swift as the wind. What am I?'

Margery giggled. 'Give us a clue of some sort,' she begged, but the monk shook his head, smiling, and pursed his lips.

‘He never tells us the answer,’ I warned her. ‘We have to work it out for ourselves.’

‘Here’s an easier one. I am a thief in the darkness. I eat words. What am I?’

He looked brightly from one to the other of us. ‘Quick now, quick.’ His eyes flicked to the shelves and back again.

‘Ah! I know!’ Margery shouted. ‘A bookworm!’

Brother John clapped his hands together. ‘Exactly! And that’s what I want *you* to be, Margery. Start chewing now!’

Is it wrong, I wondered? *Is it wrong to laugh and joke, when the rest of the house is so wrapped in grief for Matthew?* I saw how bright Margery’s eyes were, and how her white cheeks were flushed with laughter, and how Brother John smiled. I imagined Matthew then, laughing and joking with us all. It made me feel a little better.

Up till that morning, it had always been Matthew and me: playing, riding, reading, joking, teasing, laughing, fighting. We were inseparable. Sometimes Ned Porritt, the stable lad, would be with us, especially when we went riding. And afterwards, when we were cleaning and brushing the horses together, Ned used to scare the wits out of us with ghost stories. And while the horses breathed and stamped in the darkness of the stables, Matthew used to hide in the shadows and suddenly jump out at me, making me yell with fright. And we used to run back to the Hall, clutching each other’s sleeves, shrieking with laughter.

Margery was never part of that. She had a friend called Lady Catherine who used to come and stay

sometimes, and they used to play together at whatever it is girls play. But then Catherine moved to live in a fine mansion in London, too far away to visit us, and Margery wrote long letters to her. I suppose she was quite lonely, but Matthew and I never invited her to join in our games. But now she was having lessons with me, and I liked it. We shared the huge hole in our lives that Matthew had left. But we couldn't talk about it. We didn't know how. And still Father was hardly ever seen. He spent his time on the shore or in the chapel, praying.

'Come with me and sit with Father in chapel,' Margery sometimes said, but I didn't. I desperately wanted to talk to him, but how could I, when he wouldn't even look at me? It was as if he didn't want to know me any more.

So nobody mentioned Matthew, except Brother John.

'Remember, children, Matthew is in heaven now. There's no need for grief. Pray for his soul, that he may have eternal rest,' he said.

But I couldn't imagine where Matthew's soul might be, except rolling backwards and forward at the bottom of the ocean. How could it ever have rest, when the tides moved it constantly, when fish drifted around it, day after day, night after night?

One day Margery and I went riding together. We cantered over the moors, setting the skylarks skittering away from us. And then, without really meaning to, we came up to the edge of the cliff and looked across the bay. The sea was winter blue and calm, with hardly a fleck of white. We stared down at it.

‘Hard to believe,’ said Margery at last.

‘I know,’ I agreed.

‘I was watching from up here,’ she said slowly. ‘Nurse Joan was with me. We saw it happen. It was awful. I saw Father plunging in after you. He dragged you out, and then he went in again. He stayed in the water for ages and ages. Ned brought you back, but Father stayed, walking back into the sea, and running along the shore, and going back in again.’

I couldn’t remember any of that, nothing at all. There was an empty place in my mind between clutching at Matthew’s sleeve and waking up in my own bed. ‘He wishes it was Matthew that he’d saved, not me.’

Margery turned her head slowly towards me, biting her lip. ‘Don’t be silly,’ she said. But she didn’t deny it. Then she kicked her pony’s side and cantered back down to the house.

The heir to Montague Hall

A couple of months after Matthew's death, Brother John told me that Father wanted to see me after lessons. I couldn't finish my work for trembling. Margery squeezed my hand as I left the library.

I hardly dared to knock at Father's door. I heard a voice telling me to come in, and still I dithered. Stephen saw me waiting and opened the door for me, but I hesitated until I heard Father's voice again.

'Come in, William.'

Although it was still cold outside there was no fire in the room. The light was gloomy. Father was sitting at his chair by the table, reading by candlelight. He didn't look up, and I waited just inside the door. We used to run over to him, Matthew and I, and stand each side of his chair. He used to get up and embrace us both, Matthew first, then me, and laugh at us because Matthew was getting so tall and I had a lot of catching up to do.

'Come over here,' Father said at last. He put his book to one side and gestured to me to come and sit by him. He looked at me, and then he looked away again and cleared his throat. 'We have had a most terrible loss.'

I nodded. I had no idea what I should say about what had happened in the bay; whether I was expected to apologise, or to try to explain, or whether to mention

it at all. What I wanted to say was, 'It wasn't my fault. I couldn't help it.' But the words couldn't find their way out.

Father turned back to me and gave me a brief, weak smile.

'You are the heir to Montague Hall now, William. Two years ago I talked to your brother about his responsibilities here. What it meant to be a Montague, and what an honour it is for us to live here. I asked him to bear the name with pride and to carry it into future generations.' He cleared his throat again. 'Now I ask the same of you.'

I wriggled in my chair. I could hardly take in the words.

'You know that long ago your ancestor, Walter Montague, was a favourite of King Edward the second of England?'

I nodded. I had heard the story many times. It was in the fourteenth century, over two hundred years ago. The king gave my ancestor a massive estate stretching across several counties.

'When Montague lost favour with the king he was disgraced. And so his family moved here, to this old hall, which was ancient even then. This is all that remains of the power of Montague. But we have this hall, we have our name and we have this ring to remind us how beloved and wealthy he once was. And we should be proud of that. I wear my name with pride, and I wear my ring with pride.'

Then he took the ring from his finger and reached across for my hand. 'One day this will be yours, William. Look at it now.'

It was a signet ring. When I was little, Father used to let me press it into the hot wax that sealed his letters. It was big and heavy, with a broad band of silver and a high mounted plate, polished almost smooth with the years. It was just possible to see the shape of gryphons twisted round each other and the letters WM engraved into it; the family shield. The same device was carved into the arch over the entrance gate.

‘Try it on.’

I did as he said, and slipped the ring onto my finger. It was too big, and slid round so the signet plate was on the inside of my palm.

‘One day it will fit you, and it will be yours till you die,’ Father promised. ‘You will wear it with pride, and men will always honour you.’

‘Yes, Father.’ I swallowed hard, trying not to think that he had said all this to Matthew, and that the ring, and Montague Hall, and the pride in the name, should rightly belong to him. But Matthew had gone. Matthew was under the sea. Through the silence, I could hear the distant waves rolling, rolling across the sands.

Father rang the bell and asked Stephen to fetch Margery. We waited for her in silence. It was as if Father couldn’t think of anything else to say to me. I slipped the ring off my finger and gave it back to him. Absent-mindedly he twisted it round and round in his hands. I noticed how big and strong they were, and how he had to push the ring over his knuckle to fit it back on. Margery came in smiling and breathless from hurrying. She went straight to Father and hugged him as she always used to do. I wished I could have done the same. But I was shy of him now, a bit

afraid of him. I didn't feel I had the right to hug him any more.

'I have something to tell you both,' Father said. He bid Margery sit and got up from his chair and moved across the room. Wafts of dust rose from the herb-strewn floor as he walked. It drifted in the pale sunlight that streamed through the window slit. 'I don't feel I can stay here any more.' He stood with his back to us. 'Much as I love Montague Hall, it holds too many memories for me. I can't be happy here. Your uncle Carew, my brother-in-law, has been immensely kind to me. He has offered me a position in court as his secretary. I'm leaving tomorrow.'

To me his words were like a flock of black rooks, but Margery sat up sharply on her stool and clapped her hands together. 'King Henry's court! Will you see the king?'

'Probably.' Father turned round and smiled briefly at her. 'But King Henry won't see me. He won't notice me, anyway. There are hundreds of people working in his various palaces – thousands. I will be very low among His Majesty's attendants. I won't even live in the palace. I'll have to find apartments nearby. But I'm very proud to be working for Lord Carew. He is so very close to the king, such a very, very important man. It's an honour for our family.'

'Oh, but tomorrow's too soon!' Margery jumped down from her stool and clutched his hand. 'We'll be lonely here without you.'

'You won't be alone. Your aunt Carew has kindly offered to come back here for a few months to run the house and to look after you.'

‘Oh no!’ Margery gasped. She turned her head and looked at me, screwing up her face. ‘Not Aunt Carew!’

Neither of us liked our father’s sister. She was like a hen, full of bustle and bossiness and cluck. The thought of having to live with her in our house was awful.

‘Why does she have to come?’ I asked. ‘We’re all right here, really. There’s Brother John and Nurse Joan and Stephen and everyone.’

‘Yes, we could manage,’ Margery agreed quickly.

Father smiled again. He knew we didn’t like her, and that she didn’t like us. He didn’t like her much himself. He once told us it had been a relief to everyone when she’d married Lord Peter Carew and gone to live in London with him. And when her husband became King Henry’s adviser, at last she had everything she could wish for. Her dream had come true.

‘Your aunt has plans for you both. Great plans, she says, and I believe her. I’ve agreed to leave it entirely to her to make all the arrangements she needs.’

Margery and I exchanged anxious glances.

‘But we’re fine as we are,’ I started to say, and then I saw the pain in Father’s eyes, and I stopped. We weren’t fine at all. We had lost Matthew: laughing, playful, adventurous Matthew. He was gone for ever. Nothing would ever be the same again.

‘Leave me now,’ Father said. He sighed deeply. ‘It’s agreed. And that’s that.’

Aunt Carew

It was hardly light, and we were still rubbing sleep from our eyes as we stood in the windy courtyard waiting to say goodbye. Ned Porritt was saddling Father's horse and I ran across the yard to help, as I always used to do.

'Shall we go riding after, Master Willim?' Ned asked.

I shrugged. In the old days we would be out for hours, racing each other along the cliff tops and over the scrubby headland. Matthew would always be in front, hollering at us to catch up with him. But I hadn't ridden for weeks now.

Ned smiled slowly. 'Your pony's nearly too small for you. You should be enjoying her, before Mistress Margery takes her off you.'

'I don't much feel like riding today, Ned.'

He nodded. 'You'd feel better if you do. We could have a race! Or we could go along the track with your father for a bit, to set him on his way.'

'I don't think so.' I turned away and walked slowly back to Margery.

Father was in the chapel with Brother John, and they came out together at last, wrapping their warm cloaks around themselves. Father hugged Margery, said goodbye to the servants and thanked Ned for his care

with the horse. He hardly seemed to notice me. He and Brother John embraced.

‘Goodbye, Cousin,’ the monk said. ‘God be with you on your journey.’

‘Aye,’ Father said. ‘It’s a cold day for travelling. I shall be glad to be in London, away from this damp air.’

His horse was stamping the cobbles, impatient to be off, snorting white air into the cold. Margery clutched my hand and edged me forward, and as if it was a sudden idea that had caught him unawares, Father leaned down from his horse and touched my shoulder.

‘Young Master of Montague Hall,’ he murmured. ‘Take care of it. Take care of your sister.’

‘I will, Father.’ *Climb down, climb down*, my wild thoughts sang. *I want to hug you, like Margery did.*

But Father kicked his horse on and trotted briskly away, with his man Bailey following behind him. Soon the sea fret had sipped him up, and the muffled sound of hooves died away to nothing. Like one of Ned Porritt’s ghosts, he had slipped away from us.

Brother John rubbed his hands as if they were leather shoes to be polished. ‘And we don’t want chilled bones and cold feet, do we, and runny noses for the rest of the day? Hurry inside now. Warm yourselves by the fire, and we’ll have breakfast together, and then lessons. Stories today, from a great Roman poet. Nothing better than stories to take your mind off things.’

We stayed with him until late afternoon, reading aloud and listening in turns, while Brother John chuckled and nodded and smiled encouragement. His eyes shone with the wonder of the old stories we were reciting to him, as if he was hearing them for the first

time. 'Don't you love that bit? Isn't it wonderful?' he muttered from time to time, shaking his head in disbelief, and then leaning back, closing his eyes to listen with every part of himself.

Suddenly we were all aware of a flurry in another part of the Hall; a woman's voice raised in sharp anger, feet pattering in the corridor, and the door to the library was flung wide open. Stephen stood egg-eyed with fright in the doorway, and then he was pushed aside. Aunt Carew, in a purple-red velvet gown crusted with pearls, stood in the doorway like a plum tree bursting with ripe fruit.

Brother John closed the book and motioned to us to stand up, but Aunt Carew walked straight past him, brushing him aside as if he were a low-born servant who had strayed into her presence by mistake.

'No one to greet me! Too busy reading!' she snapped. 'READING, if you please! And look at you both, dressed like peasants. Go up to your rooms at once and get the servants to put you into some respectable clothes, fit to greet a lady of the court. And DON'T run. Then come down and give me the courteous welcome I deserve after travelling all hours to this wretched place.'

We hurried out, heads down, stifling the nervous laughter that always seemed to trouble us when we were near Aunt Carew. Brother John started to follow us.

'Stay! I want a word with you,' Aunt Carew told him.

I closed the door behind us. Stephen was standing up against the wall, his arms folded, his head drooping like a dry old sunflower. Aunt Carew would shout at him for that.

‘Shall we listen?’ I asked.

‘Of course!’ Margery whispered.

We crept along the corridor and pressed open a door that was used by the servants, leading back to the very room we’d just left. A heavy tapestry hung across the door on the other side to keep the draughts out. It was moth-eaten and frayed in places, and we edged forward so we could just make out the muffled voices and fuzzy shapes of Brother John and Aunt Carew.

‘Don’t giggle!’ I whispered.

Margery pressed her fist to her mouth, red in the face and eyes watering.

‘I didn’t expect to find you here,’ we heard Aunt Carew say.

‘It’s my home again now,’ Brother John said. We could imagine the smile of delight in his voice, and how his eyes would be shining. ‘When King Henry closed the monasteries, Robert was good enough to write to me and invite me back to the Hall to tutor the children. Without his help I would be starving and homeless, as you well know.’

‘He could be hanged for letting you live here,’ she snapped. Beside me Margery gasped, and I clutched her arm. *Hanged!* ‘King Henry broke away from the Pope in Rome completely so he could marry Anne Boleyn. He is the head of his own church now, as you very well know. I also know that your monastery refused to disband, refused to accept his supremacy as head of the Church in England. What are your views on that now, Brother John? Do you accept that King Henry is head of the Church in this country?’

‘I do not, Cousin. And I never will.’

‘Then that is treason. If my husband knew you were in this house you would be out on your ear, starving or not.’

‘Oh, Elizabeth, Elizabeth.’ Brother John’s voice had a chuckle bubbling in it. ‘We are still cousins. Nothing can change that. I’ve known you all your life! We were children together; we played and sang together in this very room. You had a pretty voice in those days.’

Aunt Carew huffed impatiently. ‘A great deal has happened since then, Brother John. I grew up. I grew away from this draughty miserable barn of a house. I’ve spent the last five years in the houses of the aristocracy, learning how to be a true lady.’

‘Congratulations,’ Brother John murmured. ‘All your hard work has been rewarded.’

Aunt Carew swung away from him angrily. She could tell that he was mocking her.

‘I too worked hard and long to fulfil my dream,’ he went on. ‘I studied hard and gave my life to God. I looked after the poor and the sick in the monastery. We have lived very different lives, Cousin.’

‘I hope you understand that I am deeply ashamed of being a member of this ill-bred Montague family,’ Aunt Carew hissed. ‘I am a Carew now, and proud of it.’

‘Then it was good of you to pay us a visit. I hope your stay will be a pleasant one.’ Brother John bowed, his hands clapping together silently behind his back. Perhaps he guessed we were there, watching and listening like a couple of mice behind the tapestry.

‘I intend to remain till the summer,’ Aunt Carew said.

I groaned. I couldn't help it. This time it was Margery who put a warning hand on my arm. Aunt Carew was very close to the tapestry now. We could hear the swish of her dress as she swept against it.

'My husband is building a magnificent house outside London for when he and I are away from court, and I will live there as soon as it's ready. And then I will be done with the Montagues for ever. Meanwhile, these children have to be protected in case they suffer the same fate as their brother. If I had children of my own I would never let them out of my sight! What was their nurse thinking of?'

'Their father was with them when the boy drowned,' Brother John protested, and was ignored.

'They are not allowed, ever, to go out of the grounds of Montague Hall. No more playing like a farmer's brats. Nor are they allowed, ever, to go into that ludicrous chapel with all its painted wooden dolls and popish frippery. I don't like it.'

'Madam, you overreach yourself.' It was the first time we had heard anger in Brother John's voice.

'Sir, I did not give you leave to interrupt me. For you to be here is to risk my husband's job, if not his life,' she snapped. 'We will not discuss it again. The boy is to study in the mornings, and you may continue to teach him until I can find someone more suitable. You may *not* pray with him.' She shook her head, making the jewels in her hair bob like bluebottles. 'I myself will teach him the manners proper to the nephew of Lord Carew. I have plans for him. Great plans. He will thank me with all his heart if my plans succeed. Likewise the girl. She may *not* study with you. She knows how to

read and write, that is enough. I will take on the difficult, near-impossible task of turning her into a lady instead of a plain-faced farmyard wench. My brother is a sick man. He nearly lost his mind when Matthew died. He has handed over the Hall and the children into my care completely.'

'No,' whispered Margery. 'Please, please, no!'

'It is not my wish, but I have agreed to do what I can to provide for William's and Margery's future. I have made plans for them. Now leave me.'

Wait, wait, wait

I hardly saw Margery after that, except at meal times. Brother John taught me for five hours every morning, and Aunt Carew was in and out of the library, listening, watching, frowning, scolding. There was no laughter there any more, though Brother John's eyes still shone with smiles whenever she wasn't looking, and he chirruped like a bird set free as soon as she went out of the room.

And in the afternoons, well, it was her turn. She turned me into a nobleman. She drilled me as if I was about to become a soldier and go into battle, but instead of marching and fighting with all the thrilling sound of trumpets and drums, I had to learn to bow and simper, to smile sickly smiles when nothing funny was being said, to praise her beauty – which was all in her imagination – and her charms and her massive gowns, and I had to watch her at all times. I had to learn to dance; slow elegant dances instead of the sweating jigs and reels we loved so much when the local people came to us for Christmas celebrations. I had to sing dreary court ballads about soppy love, instead of hearty village songs. When I went wrong or forgot or went into a daydream she slapped my face till it stung hot and sore. I had to murmur, never shout; never speak unless I was

spoken to or was ordering the servants. I had to walk as if there were eggshells under my feet – stroll, just stroll – and never, ever run.

The worst thing was that I had to treat the servants like servants instead of like members of the family. I was never to chat to them or listen to Nurse Joan's gossip or sit in the kitchen eating warm tarts and hearing the cook's songs and the kitchen maid's old stories.

'Ignore them. At all times ignore them,' my aunt insisted. 'Never speak to them unless you are asking for something. They are low born. Never forget that, or they will take advantage of you.'

'Not even Ned?' I asked. 'He's my friend.'

She snapped round at me then, flashing her hand across my cheek. 'Servants are never friends.'

So I wasn't allowed to spend time in the stables with Ned Porritt, and when I went riding he would get my pony ready on his own while I stood and waited. As I mounted, he would smile his slow smile at me as if to say, *Let's race together! Let's have some fun!* and I wasn't even allowed to smile back. Dear old Nurse Joan was told to stay with Margery now, and I was given ancient Stephen, who could hardly walk up the stairs any more without creaking and huffing. He really belonged next to the fire in the kitchen, turning the spit and dreaming as he watched the yellow stars dancing in the logs in the great hearth. He had to wash me and dress me and he was so much of a snail that I was always late and always being told off. And his hands were as cold as ice too.

And then the day came when my aunt said I was ready.

‘What for, Aunt Carew?’

‘For life!’ she snapped. ‘Don’t let me down, boy. Don’t make the Carews ashamed of you.’

There were no more lessons with Brother John after that day. I had no idea where he was. I couldn’t find him anywhere in the house. The chapel was locked, as it had been since Aunt Carew came, and his room was empty. I couldn’t believe that he would go, just walk away, without saying goodbye to me.

In a panic I ran to find my aunt, and got told off for not walking.

‘You cause a flurry of dust, boy, wherever you go,’ she said, shuddering.

‘Aunt Carew, where’s Brother John?’

‘His services are no longer required,’ she answered sharply. ‘Go to your room, William, and wait.’

I asked Stephen if he knew where Brother John was, and he stood with his long hands pressed together as if he was praying and said, ‘I’m not allowed to say, sir.’

I ran to Joan, desperate now, and she shook her head, and pressed her lips together.

‘Joan, where is he?’ I demanded.

‘I can’t say, Willim. He’s gone, that’s all I know. Sent away by your aunt during the night. Told never to come back.’

‘But he hasn’t got anywhere to go!’

‘No, Master, you’re right. But what does she care about that?’ Joan pursed her lips. ‘And I would do as she says and wait in your room, or I’ll be sent off next.’

But I couldn’t give up. Not yet. Margery and I ran out along the lane, searching for a sign of him. Surely

we could catch up with him and bring him back home.

‘It’s not fair,’ Margery panted, jogging just behind me. ‘He was brought up here too. He’s a Montague, like us. It’s his home as much as hers.’

‘And she doesn’t even like it,’ I agreed. ‘But nothing Aunt Carew does is fair, is it?’

Soon we heard the sound of hooves pounding along the lane, and turned round to see Ned Porritt cantering behind us on my pony.

‘You’ve to come home, Master Willim,’ he shouted. His voice bounced up and down with him. ‘Your aunt has sent me to find you, and if I don’t I’m in for a beating, so please come.’

He cantered up to us and slid down from the pony. ‘Master Willim, Mistress Margery, why didn’t you come to me first?’ he whispered. He untied a piece of sacking from his belt. ‘I don’t know where Brother John is, but he left these in the stable and I found them this morning. I know they’re for you.’

He fumbled inside the sacking and brought out two small bundles, which he slid into our hands. All the time glancing furtively over his shoulder as if he expected to see Aunt Carew quivering down the lane after him. One of the items was a wooden rosary. I had watched Brother John make it himself, fashioning little round beads out of the wood from a fallen hazel tree, polishing each one till it shone like a nut and threading them onto a lace of leather. He drew a tiny knot behind each bead, so we could count our prayers. He fastened a little carved figure of Christ on the cross where the ends of the lace tied together. I knew it was meant for me. The other present was a tiny carved statue of the

Virgin Mary, in a painted-blue gown. It just fitted into Margery's palm. She gazed down at it and closed up her hand, hiding it.

'I'll keep her for ever,' she said.

'Come home now,' Ned pleaded. 'You two ride the pony, and I'll walk.'

So we went with him, and I did as I had been told and went straight up to my room and waited. I sat gazing out of the window slit across the yard. I could hear the voice of the sea, sighing, growling. It spoke to me all the time. *Wait, wait, wait*. Sometimes I would hear a long, sad cry. Was it one of those great, white sea birds, or was it the voice of my brother, rising out of the bed of the ocean?

I spent three days waiting, just waiting, for my life to begin. And then I heard the sound of a horse trotting up the lane, and saw Ned running out to take the reins. It wasn't until the rider dismounted and turned towards the Hall that I recognised who it was.

'Father! Father's come home!' I heard Margery shouting down the corridor, and then heard my aunt hissing at her to be quiet, 'And walk!'

Slowly, as if the day was too hot for us to possibly move any faster, though in fact it was sharp with April glitter, we sauntered together down the stairs and into the yard.

Father hugged Margery and kissed her and told her how beautiful she was getting, and she laughed and twirled for him. He bowed slightly to his sister, who just bent her head and tilted her mouth in the polite simper she had taught me to make. And then Father turned to me, as I stood waiting and watching. He said nothing,

nothing at all, but clutched me quickly to him till I could feel the warm air of his breath on my hair. As I lifted up my arms to hug him properly he stood away again at arm's length.

'I could swear you've grown!'

'Not at all,' said Aunt Carew. 'I have taught him to stand upright as he should, proud and tall, instead of slouching round like a farmer carrying hay on his shoulders.'

'Are you back with us for ever now?' Margery asked, standing on tiptoe with her hands behind her back, as she used to do when she was little and wanting a special treat. '*Please!* Say you are!'

'Of course he isn't,' Aunt Carew said. 'My husband will need him back in court. He has work to do. Your father is staying here overnight to rest, and then tomorrow he and William are leaving for London.'

'For London?' I gasped, staring at my father.

'Don't gape, boy.' Aunt Carew lifted her hands in despair. 'You look like a fish. Of course you're going to London. Haven't I told you? You're ready now for life!'