

Through His Eyes are the Rivers of Time

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Dedication

Thanks to all of those friends and family who said I could do this even when I was tearing my hair out in frustration. Special thanks to Peg Halpin for her contributions to the Cover. Kudos for her painting skills and encouragement.

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Chapter 1

My mother kissed me awake, tucked the covers down at my feet on the carved wooden foot-board of the Jacobean boat she called a bed and tickled me. I rolled over, protesting as cold air invaded the cocoon of warmth under which I burrowed. Flannel sheets; warm, thick and nubby from frequent washing, my coverlets were down because the room in this old house although centrally heated still lacked the warmth of more modern places. Cryllwythe Manor had been corner stoned in 1597, added to and renovated over hundreds of years.

In the sixties, shortly after I had been born, my father had spent a small fortune installing a massive heating system of flues and radiators, furnaces and vents that took up a respectable amount of cellar space but didn't intrude into the wine cellars.

I had played in the cellars and dungeons, considered them my own private playgrounds. I was an only child but not lonely, had plenty of things to play with plus my own active imagination.

My room was no longer the nursery but a small valet's bedchamber off my parents bedroom. They did not conform to the upper crusts dislike of sharing the same room let alone bed but snuggled together in the massive four-poster that I called the boat. Crafted in Elizabethan times, it had a canopy, swans, and griffins, carved on the headboard and up the four posters. Silk curtains bound by gilt cords held the drapes back and the canopy overhead was velvet and embroidered with the Welsh and Cornish Lion. My father traced his family name back to the 15th century, my mother even earlier to Irish royalty.

I was in the Stewards room, small, inner with no windows. Just the bed, a dresser, chair, and child's desk. Painted a creamy yellow, it boasted hardwood floors with a priceless Isfahan rug underfoot.

"Break fast, Silver," Mum cajoled. "Pancakes, sausage, porridge and hot cross buns."

I grumbled, rubbed my eyes, and slid my feet out that didn't reach the floor. Rather than searching for the steps that let me climb up onto the high mattress, my mother helped me down with a hold under my armpits.

I hit the cold floor and shivered, and then raced out into their room. A quick glance showed me that my father was already up and out on his farm rounds so I padded down the long corridor with mum yelling at me to slow down.

The bathroom was huge and modernized. My dad had growled loud and often about cold wear showers and chamber pots. We had a flush commode, two sinks, a walk in shower and a lion's foot tub I had adored at first sight and unlimited hot water.

I was still too young to use the toilet by myself so mum parked me on the seat and helped me scrub my face. By then, Sally the upstairs maid was in and took over, chuckling as

she scrubbed the sleep from my eyes and behind my ears, made me brush my teeth and teased me as she dressed me in jeans and buttoned down shirt.

Breakfast was in what used to be the Solar, a room filled from floor to ceiling with windows, well lit and my favorite room in the mansion.

Breakfast was a meal I rushed through; it was a beautiful warm, sunny day outside, a rarity in this part of Cornwall.

My family owned a goodly portion of the Cornish countryside; growing organic beef, hogs and grain for European markets and being a thrifty and progressive manager, my father head quietly prospered when many of his other friends and peers had become the genteel poor.

Lord Griffon Argent was an Earl, my mother the daughter of one and could claim kinship with Elizabeth. My parents told me that one day; I would make my bow before my liege sovereign and presented at Court when I came of age. It was not something my five-year-old mind found exciting. Not like meeting the new farm bull.

I was out the door and running to the south pasture before either Sally or Roger could catch up to me.

Roger was the farm manager, a dour Cornish man who smiled only when a heifer calved or my face peered around a hay bale. He never minded if I was underfoot or climbing to the loft, only cared that I was safe.

Sally hollered and met up with him at the corner of the bullpen, saw me and scolded. "Aidan Argent, you're supposed to wait until I take you to Mr. Penrose, not go haring off on your own. You know that the lorries are coming today to pick up a load of kine for the markets and you're too wee to be spotted. You'd be flattened like a pancake," she scolded. "Sorry, Mr. P. I can take him back to yon house."

"He's fine, Sally me girl," he grinned, tousling my head of curls. "He's eager to see the new bull, he's coming in today, shipped the entire way from America. Registered Black Angus, he be. Champion breeding bull from the state of Texas."

"Oh, really? I thought his Lordship would be sticking with Texas longhorns."

"Too bony," I said. "Beef's too tough and stringy. No marbling."

She laughed and Mr. P grinned. "His little lordship knows his beefers. Crossbreds do better, are healthier, and mature earlier. Tis a fine crop of steers going out this sennight. Fetch top prices per pound. I'll take him out of your hair this morn. Come along, young Aidan."

I took his hand and we walked through the barn to the calf lot and out to the big pasture where the old bull grazed. I knew what would happen to old Midas and was sad but growing up on a farm brought home the realities of life and death at an early age.

We pattered, checked the fences, found no grass growing under the wooden rails, none

dared to poke their heads through, Penrose had a crew who did nothing but maintain the fence lines.

It was near noon when the cattle trailer pulled in and he made me wait at the stock pen until the big black beast was unloaded and driven into a stall in the barn.

His eye was large, round, white rolling, and his black coat curly and dense. Sweat stained his hide and muscles rippled beneath it.

His head was huge, polled with a shiny wet, black nose; his tongue was black as well.

He snorted, pawed, and tested both the walls and the gate.

‘Aidan, me lad, you are not to go in his stall nor the pasture when he is out. Understand? He is not like Old Midas who knows you.’

‘He will,’ I announced, standing on a bucket so I could peek in and admire his 2000 lbs of black perfection.

‘No, Aidan, not even when I’m around. He’s hurt several people. Promise me. Or you won’t be allowed in the barn.’

‘I promise. Cross my heart and hope to die stick a needle in my eye.’

‘Good. Now, are you coming to help me gather the ducks? The cook wants two for tonight’s dinner.’

‘Not pluck them,’ I protested. I hated the smell of wet feathers.

‘Only if you want to eat them,’ He laughed and I ran out of the barn and down to the lake, some hundred acres of water and ornamental gardens. He followed more slowly and we spent an enjoyable few hours chasing ducks around until we caught two.

Chapter 2

I spent the evening in front of the telly, watching some silly, inane program that fascinated me. I was explaining it all to my friend Ned who sat near me on the floor in front of the fireplace, my dad was in his favorite armchair reading the Times while my mum knitted.

A log shifted, rolled towards the fire-dogs and hit the screen, I heard him say, and ‘How is Neddie today, Silly?’

I hated that nickname; called that cuz my mum had labeled me Silver at an early age for my light blonde hair. ‘Peachy,’ I replied. ‘Says he’s bored with this show, says it’s not as good as Benny Hill.’

Dad hooted. ‘Moiré, his imaginary friend watches Benny Hill. Fancy that.’

‘Hush, Griff,’ she murmured. ‘Neddie’s as real to him as you are.’

I shook my head at Ned, said, "They don't mean it, Ned. Grownups, you know."

He stuck his tongue out and I sneaked a look at mum but she didn't notice. Sally came in and knocked on the paneled doorjamb, her red curls damp, her uniform was a neat dress of her choice and an apron. She wore sensible trainers. "Good evening, milord, my lady, Aidan," she chirruped. "Time to get ready for bed."

I protested but she ushered me out after a quick kiss from mum, dad, and a goodnight to Ned and me.

Sally had the tub full of bubbles and my own legion of floating goodies. She stripped my dirty clothes, plunked me carefully into the hot water after I toe-tested it, and warned her not to put me on Ned's lap.

"Neddie needs to be washed up, too, Aidan. He must get as dirty as you do. You smell like cow."

"Don't listen to her, Neddie," I said earnestly. "You smell fine to me." He blinked his fine blue eyes and ducked his blonde head of curls under the water, came up laughing as my yellow submarine hung from one ear. He finished at the same time as I did and Sally didn't make him brush his teeth but she tucked him into bed next to me, kissed us both goodnight and left the room, softly closing the door.

Once I was sure, she was gone, he got up, and turned on my night light and we dragged out the big book of the history of the local castles I'd stolen from Dad's extensive library.

Mum's new project was renovating the 16th century knot and rose- gardens; she was replanting several heirloom species of Tudor Roses. I'd helped her pick out some varieties mostly because I liked the names.

We turned the thick vellum pages and he helped me with the names of the castles.

Ipswich. Dunsmuir. Palladium. Snowdonia. Blenheim. Marleybourne Court. And our own, Cryllwythe Castle, called Manor.

"Look, there's a Priest hole. And an ouble---ouble." I couldn't pronounce the word but he knew it.

"Oubliette. A good place to stay out of, Aidan," he warned. "They dropped prisoners in there to starve to death. Sometimes, we didn't find them for centuries."

"Daddy says no one's been murdered in our dungeons."

He rolled his eyes. "Of course they have. Why else would the Manor have dungeons? He doesn't want to give you nightmares."

"Not me," I protested.

"It's okay, Aidan. I get them, too. That's why I sleep with you. So we can protect each other. Look, this is Pennyroyal Court. I was born there. Nothing much left of it but four walls. It was a pretty estate until the Crouchback burnt it to the ground. I buried treasure

there.”

“What kind?”

“Special rocks. Toy soldiers. My lady mother’s christening gift. My signet ring. First tooth.”

“Let’s go dig it up,” I said and he agreed. “Oh wait. We can’t go now. It’s too dark and the coaches don’t run this late.” I thought a bit. “We’d have to get into town and I’d have to get some money. How much is in my piggy bank?”

“Ten pounds, four shillings and fifty-seven pence,” he recited. “You could borrow some from the cook and the household account.”

“She’d tell Mum.” I shook my head. “How much does a taxi cost? I could phone one and have the driver pick us up.”

“Would they come out here and wouldn’t everyone see him?”

“I could tell him to wait for us at the gates,” I said doubtfully.

“The gatehouse would call up and ask what and why,” he mused. “Why don’t we wait until Lord Argent takes you to the village on Saturday? We can take the coach to Tregarth and then Colmsby-on-the-Moor.”

“Is it far?” I looked at the map in the book, it was only two inches away from London, and I remembered how long a trip that was. It had taken days to drive up with Dad last year. The three of us had gone to the World’s Trade Fair to enjoy the livestock exhibits and the sales. Coming home, we had brought two new bloodlines of both beefers and horses.

The Argent Stud was almost as famous as the Queen Mother’s was.

“Remember that trip?” I asked and he shook his head, laid back down.

“Nay. I didn’t know you then, Aidan,” his voice was suddenly sleepy and I pulled the covers over us, slipping the heavy volume behind the headboard, had to sit back up to shut off the light only moments before my mum entered the bedroom and peeked in on us.

“You awake, Silver baby?” she asked quietly and came in our room. Her hand hovered over my covered head.

“I love you, baby bunting,” she cooed. “Sleep tight, little Silverbell. Goodnight, Aidan.”

I heard the door close, the rumble of my da’s deep voice and it all faded into dreams I never remembered when I woke.

Chapter 3

Saturday was one of those typical Cornish days. The sun barely made itself peek through

the lowering clouds and a misty rain came down eventually soaking everything. Dad and Mr. P were glad to see it, they'd both agree that the Kieber acres of wheat needed more moisture before harvest and we'd been unusually dry for a long time.

The town was fairly large, a half hours drive from the farm and I'd slept most of the way in, only waking when Neddie nudged me as the Range Rover dipped onto the bridge and the old street cobblestones.

"Good morning, little Silver," Mr. P grinned. "Ready for the feed dealer? Or do you want to go with his lordship to the Law clerks?"

I snorted. Dry, dusty books and even drier, dusty old men with white wigs. Like I wanted to spend the morning in with them when I could wander the aisles of farm gadgets, smell the sweetness of molasses and pet the nearly feral shop cats who kept down the rats.

My dad dropped us off, we strode into the feed mill, and the smells overwhelmed me. I darted down the aisle where the blacksmithing supplies were, kept my ears out for Mr. P's tones. He told me not to wander too far and I hollered back where I was and was going.

Ned met me at the corner of the alley where 50 gallon drums of seed potatoes were stored next to bins of onion sets. The smell was musty and sweet, reminded me of early spring planting in Mum's small veggie garden.

"You ready?" he asked and I hesitated. "If I just leave, Mr. P will look for us."

"Tell him you're going to meet your dad," he suggested.

"Okay." I went in search of the farm manager and found him talking to the feed dealer ordering a gross ton of sweet feed for the show heifers. Mr. Braithwaite said hi and handed me a sucker from the jar on the counter.

"The wheat's doing well," Mr. P added. "Yield will be double this year with that new hybrid seed."

"Mr. P, I'm going to meet Da at the Bubble and Squeak for lunch," I said and tried not to blush while lying.

"Tired of this place already? Tell his Lordship, I'll be another hour. I have to order more hi-tensile fence."

"Da said he'd buy me an ice cream," I said. "Can I go? It's not far and I know the way." I looked up at him with my eyes wide and my best pleading smile and saw him melt.

"Go on then. Keep to the sidewalks," he warned. "I'll be along presently."

"Ta," I said and ran off. The coach stop was on the corner of Main near the Apothecary, the post office customers were already waiting for the coach, and when I asked when it was due, a matron smiled and told me the express was due in any minute. She asked me if I was off to Holcombe and I nodded.

“You have your sixpence?” she asked, smiling and I dug into my pocket for the shilling I’d set aside.

“Where’s your nanny?”

“Don’t need a nanny,” I said affronted. I was too old for a nursemaid.

“Ooh, a big grown up lad you are to be sure,” she agreed, blue eyes twinkling. “What lovely pansy purple eyes you have.” I heard the hiss of air brakes and a large old coach pulled up to the curb and the doors slid open. I tripped up the steps with her, paid for myself and the driver in his neat uniform and cap assumed was with the lady.

Ned told me to sit in the way back where we could stay unnoticed as the coach lurched and wobbled on the village streets until we reached the main highway. Ned pointed out the signs mounted on great metal poles and painted green and white. Some of the names we puzzled over, especially the ones in Welsh, which I could read, and he couldn’t, being English.

My Mum spoke both Gaelic and Welsh and sang to me in each so I was familiar with them.

“Wish I’d brought some biscuits and tea,” I mourned. “I’m hungry. You got anything?” He shook his head. “Guess we’ll have to wait till we reach Holcombe-on-the-Moor.”

One of the passengers ahead of us turned round; he was short, chubby with rough homespun and smelled of sheep. His eyes were faded blue, his hair under his cap an iron gray and his cheeks were rosy with a button chin and blowzy sideburns.

“Holcombe-on-the-Moor! That’s a long way on this coach, lad. Where’s your mum?”

“I’m meeting her,” I said quickly. “My Da sent me off.”

“On your own? A wee lad like you? How old are you?”

“Nearly six,” I answered proudly.

“Six! What mum would let a six-year-old ride to Holcombe by his own self? Where’s your mum meeting you? At the Coach stop?”

“At Holcombe. Pennyroyal Court.”

“Pennyroyal! Lad, there’s nothing there but a great big hole and some stones. The walls fell in years ago. Even the National Trust don’t want that ruin. Besides, the coach don’t stop there but twelve miles away in town.” He got up, lurched his way forward to the driver, and spoke to him, glancing back at us.

“Uh oh, Ned,” I murmured. “I don’t think they like that we’re on the coach.”

“Well, they can’t throw us off until they stop,” he said. “I think this one goes straight to Truro before it stops.”

“I don’t know. I didn’t check the route on the front,” I said uneasily. “Do you think Dan

will be mad at us?”

The farmer came back down the aisle and sat opposite us, studying me with deliberation and now; several others joined him, a woman who looked like a shopkeeper, the woman we'd sneaked in with and an Anglican reverend.

“What's your name, lad?” the farmer asked. Ned told me to lie and use his name. So I did.

“Ned. Edward Plantagenet.”

He hooted. “Him that's been dead these four hundred years? You can't be one of the Tower Princes, boy. What's your real name? Tell me or we'll call the Bobbies on ye.”

“Ned Pendennis,” I returned using Mr. P's last name. I knew better than to use my own, they'd be on the phone to my Da that next minute.

“You hungry?” he asked and handed me a cloth wrapped parcel, which unfolded to reveal a sandwich of farm cheese and mutton spread with horseradish. I took a bite and chewed. It was delicious and I was very hungry. I offered half to Neddie, he declined, and the farmer smiled.

“What's your friend's name?” he asked.

“Neddie,” I chewed another bite and lost some down my shirtfront.

“Pleased to meetcha, Neddie,” he said and stuck out his hand. Of course, Ned ignored him, his noble sensitivity affronted by his common mien. Ned was a bit of a snob.

“My name is Sam Tregarth; I run a sheep farm on the Dales. On my way to Connemara to pick up a new ram and visit my daughter.”

“Hullo,” I said remembering my manners. “Thank you for the sandwich. Dorset or Shropshire?”

“New Zealand,” he answered. “You know your sheep.”

“Oh, aye. We have a Rambouillet buck.”

“I've heard they double your wool and meat crop.”

“Mr. P says so. Worth X-breeding he says.” I finished the sandwich and looked hopefully for more. He handed me an Anjou pear and it was so sweet and juicy, my first bite ran down my chin and he topped it off with a small bottle of home brew, tart and sweet. I was suddenly sleepy and leaned against the window, rested my head and closed my eyes. The droning of his voice and the tires lulled me into a doze.

Chapter 4

Neddie and I stood surrounded by coach passengers on the depot strand and the driver had his big hand tucked into my coat so every time I tried to wiggle free, he brought me

up short. No one believed my mum was meeting me and he wouldn't let me run off. I'd tried to stamp his foot as Ned had told me and drew the line at biting him. He handled my twists and turns with an ease that told me he'd done it before. His accent was broad and he dropped his 'he's; he was a Cockney from London and I barely understood him. "Just you sit still, laddie," he barked. "The coppers are coming for you. I can't mess with you, I gets me route to run."

We were in Strathgallant, the first town the driver was able to exit off the highway. He'd left the coach, made a call, and driven to the depot, apologizing to the passengers for the delay. No one grumbled but teased me about our adventure. Ned was whispering all kinds of strategies in my ear.

He marched us both into the station and set me down behind the counter with the ticket master explaining what had occurred and where I'd gotten on. By now, it was late afternoon, almost high teatime and my stomach was loudly complaining. Both of them heard it and laughed. The ticket master was a young lady with white blonde hair, light lavender eyes and freckles across her generous nose. She gave me a wink and a candy bar with a cold soda pop. My eyes grew wide. I wasn't allowed to have soda and it was a rare treat.

"What's your name?" she asked handing it over opened. "Mine's Pansy. I love your pretty purple eyes."

"Aidan," I answered without thinking and Ned groaned. "Shut up," I told him and swallowed. He sulked and wouldn't say anything to me after that.

Pansy's eyes widened. I said, "Sorry. Wasn't talking to you, Pansy."

"O ooh, who then?"

"Neddie. He's a bit of a snob, sometimes," I shrugged and drained half the glass. "Him being a royal Duke and all."

"Royal Duke?"

"You know, Edward Plantagenet, Duke of this and that. He's my friend."

"Well, say hello to his Highness for me," she smiled and I nodded to him but he was still mad at me and wasn't talking.

"What town do you live in?" she asked.

"Penhallow," I stared at the counter where the brochures for the routes were stacked next to her stamps. She had a large radio on the side blaring out the Beatles new hit, 'Yellow Submarine.'

'Oh aye. And what does your Da do?'

"Farmer."

"Sheep? Crops?" she persisted.

“Beef, wheat, barley, sheep, and horses,” I answered, looking for more food. I usually ate High tea and was starving.

“Want a sandwich, scones, too? I forget how little boys eat. What’s your farm name?”

“Cryllwythe Farms.”

“You stay right here and I’ll get you something to eat. And tea. Don’t move, okay?”

“Yes, mum,” I agreed and she got up off the stool to enter the lobby where the vending machines were lined up against the wall. I waited until she was bent over and sneaked out behind Ned to disappear into the trunk room. We found a chute leading out and crawled through into the backyard of the station where old houses lined the streets and rubbish bins overflowed onto the cobblestones.

We hadn’t gone far before I heard her shouting and Ned broke into a run hollering for me to hustle. He knew his way and slipped by the alleys like a shadow.

“Where are we going?” I panted, my shorter legs having trouble keeping up. He paused to let me catch up and sneered at me.

“You are an idiot, Aidan. You told them the farm’s name. You might as well have told them who you were and where you live. Now we have to run all the way to Pennyroyal Court instead of taking the coach.”

“It’s too far!” I protested but he ignored me and I was too afraid of getting lost so I shut up and followed where he led me.

There was nothing but a great hole in front of us with old stones piled inside it. Grass grew thick and rich up to the edges and only a strand of ancient oak trees remained of the original avenue that had lined the drive.

“I used to play under those,” Ned mourned. “My mother’s knot garden was just to the right. There was a lily pond there and a boxwood hedge where we tunneled through to the maze. A sundial marked the center and read VERITAS. Over there,” he swung to my left where there was a footpath to the moors, “Was the kennels and to the right of that was where we buried the dogs.”

“Where did you bury your treasure?” I looked around; saw only a broad expanse of overgrown grass and encroaching moors, the small stand of regal oaks and the rambling path that hikers used on their treks.

“Follow me.” He led me towards the stand of oaks and counted footsteps, turned round and pointed. “Dig here.”

“With what?” I asked and he frowned. I sighed and went in search of a rock, flat enough and pulled one out of the soil near the foundations. Of course, he wouldn’t soil his hands, being royalty and all so the entire task was left to me.

I dug for an hour, over the years the soil had built up enough to raise his remembered depths by a foot or more until finally, I hit the remains of a metal box rusted into pieces. It had been brass at one time and was now green and pitted. The only thing inside still recognizable was his gold signet ring, a heavy gold necklace, gold christening spoon and some coins.

His toy soldiers made of lead were a gray clump minus paint or portrait. I handed them over and he told me to stuff them in my pockets.

“Uh oh,” he said, staring off towards the lane we’d followed to get here. I turned and saw the flashing lights and police cars come barreling down the lane towards us to pull up in a slide that tore the grass into ruts. Doors popped open and Mr. Pa and my dad were the first ones out to snatch me up in their arms, their words tumbling out so intense I could not understand them.

The police were next, demanding to know if someone had taken me or how I’d managed to get some hundred and fifty kilometers away.

“Aidan, are you alright?” Dad asked. “What happened? How did you get out here? Why?”

“Neddie said he used to live here, Dad. He buried treasure so we decided to go look for it,” I explained and he was angry and upset.

“Aidan, Ned is an imaginary friend. He’s not real. You can’t go haring off on his say so,” he snapped, his eyes flashing.

I set my lips and answered hotly, “He is too real, Dad.” I dug into my pockets and pulled out the remains of the box and his treasure. My dad took it from me, his mouth opened, closed and he said slowly, “This is a royal seal on this signet ring. These coins bear the date, 1475, ‘88. Where did you find this, Aidan?”

I pointed to the hole I’d dug and where a smug Ned was seated. “I told you, Dad. Ned showed me where to dig.”

No one said anything, just bundled me off into the police car and drove us home

Chapter 5

My bedroom never seemed so lonely. My toys were all locked away in the chest, Ned was mad at me and banished from my presence and I was grounded for the whole month of April and May, the best time of the year. It was when all the baby animals hit the ground and I wasn’t allowed to watch or help.

No matter how I explained, no one believed Ned had shown me the way to Pennyroyal Court and his treasure; especially after Mum found the book of Castles in my room with

the thumb marked page.

My punishment was to stay in my room unless Sally was with me and then I could only wander the house. Most of the time, she was busy with chores and didn't have any spare moments to give me attention and I was thoroughly bored. Finally, after whining incessantly, Dad put me down in his study and turned on his brand new color telly and told me to stay there until he, mum or Sally came to get me, or else.

I hated the 'or else.' my fertile imagination conjured up all sorts of horrifying scenarios that were always worse than what he did.

I amused myself by changing the channels not that I had much choice. We got three, BBC being the strongest.

After that, I wandered the line of bookshelves and climbed to the top reading the titles. Mum had started me early; I had been reading since the age of three and chose more adult books than childrens choose. I did like the illustrations, though. I found one that seemed interesting, pulled it from the stacks, and made myself a perch atop one nearly empty shelf where I stretched out on the flat top and read. Hours passed and I was deep into Sir Edmund Hillary's conquest of Everest when the faint sounds of a door opening disturbed my concentration.

"Aidan? Christ in heaven, where is that boy? I told him not to move!" My dad's exasperated tones rose to my ears. My Mum's were quieter, placating.

"Aidan, where are you?"

I popped my head over. "Here, Mummy."

Her shriek startled me and I dropped the book to scramble after it, reaching the carpeted floor in seconds. I picked up the book and the spine had broken. "Sorry, Dad, I'll fix it," I apologized and his eyes went to the stacks soaring two stories above us, the second landing of his study/library with the rafters lost to our sight.

"Aidan," he sighed. "Don't do that again."

"Do what, Dad?" I was puzzled, looked at both of them.

"Climb the shelves without the ladder. In fact, don't climb the ladder. Aidan, you'll be the death of me."

"Da, I'm fine. Climbing's keen. Easy. I'm going to grow up to be a Sir Edmund Hillary."

"Last week you wanted to be a fireman," he sighed. "Come along, it's time for dinner. Sorry, you missed High Tea; I was helping Roger with the new bull."

"No wonder I'm so hungry," I complained and Mum took my hand and walked us all out to the dining room; the informal one that seated only the farm staff and family as we all ate together. I said hullo to Mr. P and he handed me a heavy silver whistle on a lanyard.

"For the new collie," he said. "He comes to it."

“Oh, aye? What color is he? What’s his name?” I climbed up onto the Sheraton chair and hid my dusty hands under the damask tablecloth but Mum saw and sent me to wash. By the time I was back, wet sleeves and all, the food was already going round the table and my plate filled.

Yummy. Filet of beef, home-grown. New potatoes, green beans, rolls and beets, all produced on the farm, even a glazed ham cut, sweet, pink and smoked.

I ate my way through the respectable pile and washed it down with milk, didn’t stop until my plate was nearly licked clean and I let go an enormous burp. “Scuse me,” I gasped as they all laughed.

Dad pointed his fork at me. “You still have room, belly boy? Mrs. C has made strawberry shortcakes with clotted cream.”

Ned said in my ear, “I love shortcakes, strawberries, and clotted cream. Save me a piece.”

“Where have you been?” I snapped.

“Oh, here and there. I’ve been keeping an eye on you.”

“You got me in trouble,” I complained under my breath because my parents were giving me the fish eye. “Go away. I’ll talk to you tonight.”

“Aidan?” my mum said and I smiled, grabbed for another dessert and that distracted them enough so they didn’t comment on Ned’s appearance.

“Sally’s waiting on you in the bathroom, Aidan. Tonight’s bath night.”

“I’m not dirty,” I complained. “I haven’t been outside in the yards or the stables.”

“You’ve been climbing in the stacks, dear boy; you’re full of dust and cobwebs. Ah, Sally, make sure he scrubs and does his teeth. In bed by seven, Aidan. You’re up early tomorrow. We’re off to Lostwithial to pick up roses.”

“Why can’t I stay here?” I whined as she pulled me out of my chair and pushed me down the hallway.

“Because you’d just find something nasty to get into,” Mum returned. “I’ll be in to say goodnight right after your bath. Don’t keep Sally waiting. It’s Friday night and she’s off to Truro for her gentleman caller and a movie.”

“Sally has a date?” I squealed and rushed off to tease her. She was waiting in the cloakroom watching the tub fill with bubbles. “Sally has a date!” I chortled and she sighed as she latched onto my collar and halted me.

“Here now, your lordship,” she said, long suffering. “No lip out of you or I won’t tell you all about the cinema when I come back Monday morn.”

“What’re you going to see?” I shucked my clothes and dove in, hollered as the heat hit my thingie and then ducked under, splashing the floor. Sally mopped up with my clothes, hurried me past drying and dressing. She had me tucked into bed in half the time I usually

took and her last words were to behave or she'd scare me with details from the movie, *The Birds*.

Ned sat at the foot of the bed and mocked me.

Chapter 6

Mum was kneeling in the soft dirt of the garden patting soil around the roots of the dozen rose bushes we'd unloaded from the Range Rover. My dad was driving the tractor over in the North hay field and we caught occasional glimpses of him as he meandered by the fence line.

The garden was a small square off to the side of the Solarium, bordered by boxwood hedges and yews carved into griffins, lollipop shapes and geometric designs rather than the common everyday animals. An ornate wrought iron fence with spears separated the flowerbeds from the old herb garden.

"Are you hungry, Aidan?" Mum smiled. "You've been helping me for ages."

I was covered with mud from head to toe, filthy and enjoying the sensation of dirt between my toes. My shoes were buried somewhere.

I looked up at the East wing of the house, the part that jutted out over the gardens and had a small veranda off one of the upper rooms; saw Ned up there waving down at me. That part of the roof was copper clad and had sundry chimneys and vents spoiling the outline of the pitch.

I ran inside and Mrs. C was just coming down the marble tiled hallway with a platter of goodies and tea. She was a short, rosy-cheeked lady that made delicious scones and bread and always had an extra goody for me.

"Go into the kitchen and sit down," she said, looked and then ordered me to wash up at the sink. I splashed water on my hands, face half-halfheartedly, and plunked down at the table in front of the platter of tarts, biscuits, eggs, rashers of bacon.

"Where is everybody?" I asked, swallowing my cup of tea in one long gulp.

"Ate earlier, your lordship. Go on up, Sally's waiting to help you change. His Lordship and Lady Mo are taking you out to dinner for being such a big help this week and not getting into any mischief."

I pushed the chair back so hard; it fell over and scrambled up the Grand Stair, scooting around Harold, the butler who'd been with my Da and his Da forever.

"Slow down, young Aidan," he scolded. "Annie just waxed the floor and you'll come a right cropper."

"Gotta go, Harry," I yelled and hit the top of the step on my palms, swung round and down the great hallway lined with ancient family portraits. Ned stood near the double doors to the Grand Salon on the third floor and distracted me as I ran by the bathroom door. It was never open, off limits to me, and represented an irresistible challenge.

I sneaked inside and climbed the short set of steps to the third floor. I heard the door latch behind me but paid it no mind as I delighted in exploring forbidden realms.

Here was where the old suits of armor lay in neat piles next to saddles cracked and medieval, old swords and halberds piled with lances and bows. Piles of furniture so hideously Victorian and bizarre that no one wanted them---hassocks made from elephant legs, chairs of ivory tusks, trunks filled with musty old clothes.

A sarcophagus rested against the wall near the French doors with velvet drapes so moth eaten they looked like lace. I hoped it still had its resident mummy and my hearty shove dislodged the case to fall against the doors and sent them crashing open.

I was able to pull the lid off but the only thing inside were blackened scraps of cloth that smelled dry and dusty, and dead spiders curled into tiny pill bugs. I squeezed past the open doors and saw the roof below me over the wing of the house that jutted out above the gardens. An easy drop and easier climb to one who fancied himself Sir Edmund Hilary so I climbed over the railing with perfect confidence and strode along the ridge and down to the edge of the slates to see my mother on her knees in the dirt, scraping soil around the roots of small seedlings. I heard someone approaching, his footsteps loud on the newly raked gravel.

Mum stood up. "Roger," she greeted the farm manager. "I was expecting Griff."

"He's stuck in the brook. I came to tell you he'll be late, not to wait."

"Alright," she said agreeably. "I was just going in. I'll put in a few more plants, then."

"Where's the imp?"

"I sent him in for tea and to wash up. Sally's after him."

"Sally went to town for Mrs. C," he said.

"I'd better go after him, then," she sighed.

"Oh, you stay. I'll go find him."

I saw him walk off and leaned closer, trying to keep him in sight, and realized if I didn't want to be caught, I'd better sneak back inside. I turned, stood up and Mum looked up at that moment. Her gasp of terror made me jump.

"Aidan!"

I swallowed. "Hi, Mum."

"Aidan, what are you doing? Get down this instant!"

My feet slipped just as Mr. P stuck his head over the railing and shouted at me. I slid towards the edge of the roof unable to stop my knees and palms skating on the mossy slates, hit the eaves, and somersaulted over. I heard the horrified shouts of Mr. P and my mum and something huge and crushing hit my back. The sky whirled, darkened; I opened my eyes wide on the blue sky above me. A crushing sensation filled my chest and I

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