

ONE



Lady Genevieve

1412 A.D., Mawgan Porth

Lady Genevieve paced the balcony of her brother's castle. Birds sang their dusk song in the topmost branches of the trees; otherwise, the grounds were quiet. The servants had gone for evening prayers in the chapel. A sole fawn scampered through the gardens below. Genevieve took a deep breath of fresh air. The rising moon caressed her skin with its cooling light as she waited for her brother, Geoffrey, to return home from London. Geoffrey was the Duke of Cornwall and her guardian. He had inherited the fortress at Mawgan Porth when their parents died of the plague four years earlier.

Genevieve, at sixteen, had fine and delicate features. Her blue eyes were brilliant like an autumn sky. Her complexion was soft and radiant as moonlight. Silky blonde hair rippled over her pale blue dress, falling just past her waist. She turned and faced the distant sea that shimmered in the twilight. *Why is the duke late? What could be keeping him?*

As a young girl, Genevieve liked to be independent, free from the dictates of other people. *I've been fortunate thus far*, she thought, scanning the horizon. Heaths and hills sloped away from the fortress to the dukedoms of the north. *I could be there*, she mused. *Most girls my age are already married.*

The distant clatter of hooves pounded the cobblestone as Geoffrey and his entourage galloped along the winding road toward the castle. A cloud of dust trailed behind them. Genevieve raced down the spiral staircase and greeted the duke in the courtyard as he dismounted.

“War has broken out with France again,” Geoffrey announced grimly. “I’ve been called to the King’s standard.” He turned to the servants and ordered, “Prepare my armor.”

In the hall, the duke stretched out in front of the fireplace. His collection of swords and spears hung on the wall beneath a brocade tapestry of scenes from the crusades. His freshly polished suit of armor stood tall in a corner of the room with the visor open, a window into its black emptiness. Flames blazed in the hearth, but a cold draft still blew through the large banquet hall. Genevieve shivered and pulled her wool shawl tightly over her shoulders. She poured Geoffrey a goblet of wine and took a seat near him. A great black bearskin covered the floor under his feet. Deer antlers hung on the wall. The duke was proud of his conquests, both in battle and in sport. Genevieve reflected on the fawn she had seen playing in the garden earlier and shook her head, wondering why anyone would want to take the life of such an innocent creature.

“Since I go to battle immediately,” Geoffrey said, “you must now marry, Lady Genevieve. The best marriage proposal comes from the Welsh Earl of Pembroke, Allan Tudor. He is twenty-five and needs an heir. You leave tomorrow. I will accompany you overland to St.

Ives, in northern Cornwall. The journey will take two days by horse. From there, it is but a day's voyage by ship to Pembroke in South Wales."

Genevieve sipped her drink, refusing to look in her brother's eyes. "But I don't want to go, brother," she said. "Mawgan Porth is my home." She faced the fire so Geoffrey couldn't see her tears and forced a smile as she refilled the duke's goblet with spiced wine. Firelight played across his thin, aquiline nose and dark moody eyes. Genevieve tilted her head and looked at him curiously. She knew she might not see him for months, perhaps years.

The duke glumly stared into the fire.

What will happen to me in Wales? She tried to push aside her chilling worries. Finally, hearing her brother snore, she grabbed a lamp and tiptoed out of the room.

Genevieve swung open the oak door to her bedroom. The fire in the hearth was burning cheerfully and the room was warm. Clothes were strewn across her bed; Evelyn, her maid, folded the dresses and linens as she packed Genevieve's trunk. Evelyn was the same age as her mistress. She picked up a lace blouse and pressed it to her cheek.

"Très élégant, my lady! You will dazzle the court in Wales! Your new Welsh husband will be jealous of all the attention you will garner."

Genevieve flinched. She sank into the velvet armchair beside her dresser and closed her eyes, waiting for the maid to finish. She cupped her face in her hands and leaned on the dresser for support. Glass bottles of perfume lined the vanity; their sweet fragrances revived her. The sound of the sea reached her through the windows and Genevieve breathed deeply, trying to stay calm as she listened to the muffled sound of the waves crashing onto the beach.

A lone nightingale sang on a tree branch outside the window. At last, the door closed behind Evelyn.

Genevieve opened her eyes and stared in the mirror. As she pulled a silver comb through her hair, she remembered when her mother would stand behind her and brush her curls.

“How beautiful you are, my child!” The echo of her mother’s words soothed her. She had thought nothing would ever change their lives together.

Who am I? Genevieve’s reflection seemed to say now. Who will I be in a year? I’ll be married to a foreigner in a faraway land.

She glanced around her bedroom one last time and reflected on how she loved this old English castle, her home. The castle, built with rose-colored granite, loomed four stories high, with bell towers facing north and south. As a child, Genevieve had loved to climb the spiral staircase of the north tower and survey the estate from there: the turgid moat, the boxwood maze, the manicured gardens, deer sprinting through the distant forest. Genevieve loved the musty smell of the castle’s walls; they seemed perfumed with a scent of history—of ancient times, other ages, other generations.

She threw all the windows open for one last look at the moon reflecting on the waves as they rolled in along the Cornish coast. Gazing out, Genevieve shook off her cares by turning to pleasant memories.

One day, five years earlier, Geoffrey and Cousin Thomas had left her playing on the beach a few miles from the castle. She had been unable to find her way home. Then, only eleven years old, she cried bitterly until she saw the figure of a tall teenage boy in the distance. The shepherd approached slowly, with his bleating flock of sheep trailing behind him. When he reached her, he knelt down beside her and offered some water. “Why do you cry, child?” he asked tenderly. Genevieve explained what had happened, and he promised to take her home. After she smoothed her hair and washed her face with his water, he took her hand and pulled her

to her feet. “Look over there, child.” He spoke in a broad Cornish accent. “That massive rocky mound is called Arthur’s Seat. Named after King Arthur. I myself am named after him.”

“Truly?”

“Truly. I am Artur. What is your name, lass?” His voice was calming, and he smiled down at her in a kindly manner. Her eyes were filled with wonder now, and she wouldn’t let go of his hand until they reached the castle gate.

Genevieve often met him that summer and in the years that followed, whenever her brother was away. Artur, who was only two years older, seemed infinitely wise. He showed her the ocean inlets where the water was calm and safe for swimming. He took her to see the ancient caves, which could only be entered when the tide was out. Most astonishingly, he led her into the realm of the faerie folk. He confided to Genevieve that he had first encountered the people of Fay when he was a child. He knew all of their secret places. They were small, slender figures, exquisitely graceful. Soon, Artur taught Genevieve to see them, to get near them, and even to speak with them.

Genevieve longed to see Artur before she left for Wales. She slipped into bed and pulled her blanket tightly around her. Though it was summer, the night was cold.

“Genevieve! Genevieve!” Geoffrey’s voice startled her. “In two hours, we depart for St. Ives.” She sat up groggily, shoved aside her blanket, dragged herself to the window, and pulled open the curtains. Geoffrey was calling up from the courtyard. The sky was still dark.

“I’ll be ready. I promise.”

It was the only lie she had ever told him, for it was a promise she must break.

Four hours later, she was with Artur in his cottage by the ocean.

TWO



Escape

1412 A.D., Mawgan Porth

The wind was rising. Thunder rumbled over the hills. Genevieve's hand brushed Artur's arm. At eighteen, he was now a bearded young man with piercing green eyes. His red hair tumbled to his shoulders and he had a wild look about him, perhaps because he had lived on his own since he was fourteen, after his father died. He had never known his mother, for she had died in childbirth, and he had no siblings.

“Artur, tell me more about your friend, the hermit.”

“He is an old man. For years, Martin belonged to an order of monks, but he was too unconventional for the community, so he left. For the past two summers, he has lived in a secluded cave on the beach at Mawgan Porth. He is like a father to me. I often visit him, especially when I am in need of help, because he always knows what to do. The villagers say he possesses magical powers, and they have nicknamed him *Martin the Marvelous*. When I visited

him yesterday, I told him about you and your escape from your brother. He advises that you remain disguised until we depart tomorrow. You have been missing for three days, and Geoffrey's search party is now lodged at the village inn."

"It is a hunt! Not a search party. They want to snare me and marry me to a stranger in Wales."

"Why should anyone be forced to marry against their will?" Artur squeezed Genevieve's arm sympathetically. "Listen," he began. "If you like, we could revisit the holy hill tonight one last time, before we leave Mawgan Porth tomorrow."

"Yes," she replied. "It is an auspicious time and might bode well for our journey. It is, after all, the summer solstice and the moon is full tonight, too."

Late that night, a few miles from Artur's cottage, Lady Genevieve stood on the summit of the holy hill. Her hooded cape blew in the wind. Druid stones surrounded her. They rose fifteen feet high and formed a semi circle on the hilltop. The light of the full moon touched the tallest monolith, and Genevieve wondered how the ancient stones had been brought there – some said it was by magic – hundreds of years earlier. The druid priests and priestesses had worshipped their gods on the site, long before the villagers began to worship Christ.

She said, "I had a yearning to return to this place. I have not been here since we came two years ago."

"I knew we would be safe here," said Artur. He stood beside her within the circle of stones. "No one from the village would dare visit the holy hill at this hour on the eve of the solstice."

"But what are those lights over there?"

Ethereal figures shimmered across the wet grass. Artur squinted at them in the moonlight.

“I do not know, my lady, if they are male or female, but they are certainly not human. I believe the Fay folk have joined us here tonight. ”

Then Genevieve heard music ring out from the sky. It sounded like the chimes of a distant church bell. She tossed back the hood that had half-covered her face and, inspired by her newfound freedom, began to dance. The heavenly music seemed to have no end. Loosened by gusts of wind, her hair flew freely. The Fay folk joined her, and the music and dance reached a fevered pitch. Suddenly, the music stopped. Her head spun from dancing. She fell onto the ground beside the tall monolith and sank into a dream.

In the dream, she saw that she was in Cornwall, but in another time. Her features were almost the same, but she had gray eyes. She wore a white gown and a silver tiara crowned her blonde hair. Delicate Celtic amulets encircled her slender arms, wrists, and ankles. This was her wedding day. Her husband, King Arthur, sat beside her. But before she could see any more of the vision, she felt her forehead being dabbed with a wet cloth. “Lady Genevieve!” Artur was saying. His voice sounded faraway. “Are you all right, my lady?”

She opened her eyes. “I’m fine. What happened?”

“One moment you were standing there, and the next moment, you fell to the ground.” He pulled her to her feet and said, “What would your brother say? A lady standing with a common shepherd at a pagan site of worship!”

“Geoffrey would be furious!” she laughed. “But,” she continued, “I am my own mistress.”