

A Heart for Every Fate Proposal

A HEART FOR EVERY FATE

An "If-World" Regency Romantic Adventure

by

Andre Norton and Rosemary Edghill

Here's a sigh to those who love me  
And a smile to those who hate  
And whatever sky's above me  
Here's a heart for every fate

---George Gordon, Lord Byron

James Bond meets Jane Austen in this alternate-history adventure set in a Regency that never was.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: The names of actual historical persons are given in FULL CAPS wherever they appear in the manuscript.

---

A HEART FOR EVERY FATE

An "If-World" Regency Romantic Adventure

by

Andre Norton and Rosemary Edghill

SETTING: England and France in the year 1806, in an alternate-history Regency England. Henry IX, four times great-grandson of CHARLES II, is King of England, and has a troublesome and hot-headed heir, Prince Jamie. France is under the dominion of the tyrant NAPOLEON, who has another nine years as Emperor before the battle of Waterloo. Though America is still an English colony, the map of Europe -- and the occupants of its thrones -- remains as we know it.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: The "If Theory" of history is that oftentimes in world history distinct and radical changes rest upon a single event or person. From that particular point two worlds then come into existence, one in which the matter goes one way and one wherein it goes the other.

The point of divergence here is the affair of the DUKE OF MONMOUTH in the days of CHARLES II. The majority of the English people at that time were bitterly opposed to the return

of a Catholic ruler. Unfortunately, CHARLES II had not been able to produce a living heir by his Portuguese wife, though he had a number of illegitimate children by various mistresses, upon whom he settled dukedoms and other major honors.

CHARLES' brother and heir presumptive, JAMES, is a Catholic and is narrow-mindedly determined to return England to the Catholic fold. JAMES is a severe, arrogant man, unlike CHARLES, who has all the Stuart charm in rare abundance.

There has always been a rumor that the DUKE OF MONMOUTH, the eldest known of CHARLES' by-blows, is actually legitimate -- that Charles, while in exile, did marry MISTRESS WATERS, the Duke's mother.

MONMOUTH has much of his father's charm and is strongly Protestant in his religious views. In the real world, following CHARLES' death MONMOUTH led an uprising against his uncle, JAMES II, failed, and was beheaded.

In this "If-World," CHARLES II, during his protracted dying, realizes that JAMES' inheritance of the throne will mean trouble for all, and finally admits to a selected body of his strongest council that the rumor was true, that he had made a marriage (there was no Royal Marriage Act in those days!) with MISTRESS WATERS and thus the DUKE OF MONMOUTH is the legitimate heir of his body. Thus, upon CHARLES II's death, the DUKE OF MONMOUTH is crowned Charles III!

The new king has difficulties with a diehard group of strong Catholic lords, and with JAMES, his uncle, who believes the throne of England should be his. This will have a bearing on the events of later years, but immediate events are similar to those in the real world. The strongly Whig-Protestant English fight against France. The DUKE OF MARLBOROUGH comes to center stage as a military leader -- he is also a bosom friend of the Duke of Clarence, the late king's illegitimate second son and Charles III's half-brother. (The Stuarts continue their merry custom of producing bastards and granting them titles, so the highest grades of the English peerage are frequently expanded.)

After the reign of three more Stuart kings (Charles IV, James II, and Charles V) we reach the 1800's, and a world like -- and unlike -- our own. The English government is strongly Whig and the King depends on that party for backing. Without the weak and unpopular Hanovers on the throne, political relations with the American colonies have never degenerated into warfare; in 1806 America is simply the westernmost of England's possessions. Its citizens are English citizens with full representation in Parliament. It is governed (similarly to Ireland) by a Lord Protector; in 1806 the Lord Protector of America is THOMAS JEFFERSON, the Earl of Monticello. Like Irish titles, American titles are considered "second class" titles, but many of the nobility hold both English and American titles, and America is a popular destination for land-hungry younger sons. But the ties between mother country and vast colony are becoming thinner with time, and political theorists predict that someday America will govern itself practically free of any strong supervision from the motherland.

One major divergence from history as we know it is that the Louisiana Purchase will not take place, and the thirteen colonies' western expansion is halted in the vicinity of Kentucky (or, as it is known in this world, Transylvania).

The French Revolution of 1789 was a shock to both England and her New World colony. There were suggestions at the time that England intervene -- which she did not. In 1795 NAPOLEON BONAPARTE began his climb to power and France's ambitions became imperial. England went to war once more. Though plagued by civil and religious unrest at home, it is Britain's funding that keeps the Triple Alliance -- England, Prussia, and Russia -- in the field against Napoleon. The simmering unrest might break out into full-fledged civil war, however, were England suddenly left without an heir.

Just as in the Real World, many European nations considered making a "separate peace" with NAPOLEON. A key player in this political arena is Denmark, which, as a member of the Baltic League, vacillated between neutrality and a pro-French position. A French-allied Denmark would cause Russia to withdraw from the Triple Alliance.

In the Real World, England sent fleets to Denmark in 1801 and 1806 to keep French sympathies at bay. In our world, the widowed King Henry IX of England hopes to accomplish the same thing by betrothing his only son, Charles James Edward David Henry George Stuart, Prince of Wales, to Princess Stephanie Julianna, granddaughter of the weak and vicious KING CHRISTIAN VII, whose eldest son, PRINCE FREDERIK, is currently his Regent. This marriage, to one of the few Protestant royal houses in Europe, will link Denmark firmly with the Allied cause.

**PROTAGONISTS:** The heroine of our tale is Sarah, Marchioness of Roxbury in her own right, illegitimate granddaughter of King Charles V, the father of the present king. Sarah has been brought up quietly and far from court, at Mooncoign, her Wiltshire estate. Sarah has light brown hair, large grey eyes (her best feature), and a clear ivory complexion, but alas, these advantages do not conspire to make her any more than passable. Her income derives from country rents and, while a sound amount, is not a dowry of dazzling size. Having been raised outside of political society, Sarah has a distressing tendency not only to see things as they are, but to call them what they are.

Her one acknowledged fault is a certain timidity; though Sarah has strong principles, she fears she will lack the courage to stand up for them if the occasion should ever demand it.

Our hero is Rogier St. Ives Dyer, the Duke of Wessex, the grandson of Sarah's godmother, Jocasta, Dowager Duchess of Wessex.

Though he is some years older than Jamie, in a dim light Dyer could be mistaken for the Prince of Wales. The two men share the lanky height and dark eyes of their common ancestor, King Charles II, though Dyer's hair is a dark wheat color rather than Jamie's rose-gold and he possesses the Stuart charm rather than Jamie's Plantagenet charisma. Rendered rather cynical by his insider view of Crown policy and English political maneuvers, he trusts no one and suspects everyone.

Dyer is a captain in the "Cherubims," the 11TH HUSSARS, a cavalry regiment currently posted to the Peninsula under GENERAL WELLINGTON. Dyer, however, is in London, where he functions as advisor to King Henry on matters of the Army . . . and is one of the Home Office's most valued spies.

Dyer is not particularly proud of this last aspect of his royal service, as in 1806 espionage is a shameful practice, and no task for a gentleman, let alone one with royal blood (albeit on the left hand) in his veins.

Unfortunately Dyer seems to have a real talent for it, and moreover, the danger and the risk excite him. He knows he will continue doing it, and knows that it will mean utter social ruin if he is ever exposed -- even if he should escape such exposure with his life. Under such circumstances, Dyer cultivates a brittle wit and a cynical facade, which successfully conceal his bitter self-contempt.

CONFLICT: Sarah and Dyer make an arranged marriage at the behest of King Henry IX. Henry wishes Sarah to run the royal household of Princess Stephanie of Denmark, easing the foreign Princess's entry into English society. The position of Mistress of the Robes cannot be held by an unmarried woman, so Sarah must marry, and Dyer is the husband chosen for her by the King.

Sarah takes an immediate dislike to Dyer, privately apostrophizing him as "a hatchet-faced harlequin." She tells herself that she thinks he has too much wit and too little heart; but instinctively she knows that it will take courage to love this man, and courage is the one trait Sarah is certain she does not possess. Raised in the peace and quiet far from Court, Sarah shrinks from harsh words and avoids conflict of any sort. In the course of the book's events, Sarah will be forced by love and loyalty to search deep within herself and tap unrealized wells of courage, leading her to a greater self-confidence: enough confidence to love the man that Fate and her heart have chosen for her.

Dyer believes that his chosen profession makes him unworthy of love. But in order to move in the highest circles close to the Prince, Dyer must cut a figure of married respectability -- and who better to provide a listening post in the household of the Prince's new bride than the wife of the Duke of Wessex?

Despite this, Dyer's entire soul and honor rebels against offering his name to Sarah, whose entire future he must naturally put at risk with his every breath. From the moment he meets her, he tries to hold her at arm's length with brittle wit and crushing satire. Raised in the center of the political world, it never occurs to Dyer that a woman could love him for himself and not his position, and still less that he is worthy of love. But through accepting Sarah's love, Dyer will learn to forgive himself for what he does, and love her in return.

SUPPORTING CHARACTERS: Prince Jamie is the only son of King Henry. Beautiful as the day and proud as Lucifer, the charming, charismatic, and army-mad heir is neither to hold nor to bind. With the red-gold hair and flashing eyes of his Plantagenet grandmother, the tall and commanding 22-year-old Jamie is certain that whatever he wants is his by right -- and what he wants right now is to lead a troop of horse against NAPOLEON BONAPARTE, who is ravaging

the Continent with the Grande Armee. At the opening of our tale, Jamie has just been formally betrothed (though he has never seen the lady in question) to Princess Stephanie, eldest daughter of KING CHRISTIAN VII. The Court of Denmark is noted both for its strait-laced attitude and its Napoleonic leanings: a lot could go wrong if there were any scandal.

GEORGE BRUMMEL is Prince Jamie's impeccable valet and hopeful arbiter of fashion. BRUMMEL, the son of a valet, came to Jamie's attention through his exquisite attention to the toilette of a former master. Like an unholy distillation of Oscar Wilde and Ambrose Bierce, BRUMMEL the valet has a low and acidic opinion of most of the human race, a judgment which sails right over the head of the sunny-tempered Stuart prince.

Ilya Kosciuszko, a minor member of the Polish aristocracy, is Dyer's closest friend. Kosciuszko appears to be a highly disreputable young moonlight blond hiding out, so the story has it, from enraged fathers and a military career. Poland was eradicated by Russia in 1793 and annexed by Napoleon in 1807, but unlike so many of his pro-French countrymen who fill Napoleon's court and army while awaiting the day of Poland's liberation, Kosciuszko is Dyer's partner in espionage, going where the highly-visible Dyer cannot, and, with his innate talent for machinery, codes, and ciphers, securing lines of communication in the field. Much of the gossip he ferrets out in his low carouses finds its way first to Dyer's ears and then to the highest quarters.

Jocasta Marie, the Dowager Duchess of Wessex is, in her grandson's words at the beginning of our tale, "the only woman [he] will ever love." In her youth, the frail (she has a heart condition) and lovely Jocasta braved scandal to marry Andrew, Duke of Wessex, another of Charles V's bastards. Andrew's son perished in a failed attempt to rescue the French royal family: some believe that he succeeded in placing the Dauphin into friendly hands before he was killed, but the Dauphin's whereabouts remain a mystery today.

Richard, Earl of Ripon, is one of the greatest Catholic lords of England. His youngest brother, Lord Stratford, is a confidante of the Prince of Wales. John, old Lord Ripon, is dead and his brother Richard has ascended to the title -- and a very close relationship to Hroswitha, Meriel's stepmother, the ambitious Dowager Countess of Ripon, whom Richard has loved for many years. Ripon's dream is to see England Catholic once more, but though he bears no love for Henry, still less does he wish to see Napoleon set forward. Ripon hopes to wed the Prince of Wales to his niece Meriel.

Meriel Anne Bulleyn is the only daughter of the late Catholic Earl of Ripon and his first wife. She has been raised from birth as a pawn to her step-mother and uncle's ambition (her uncle, Richard, is the current Earl), and now, at the tender age of seventeen, Meriel is ready to be placed upon the board. Ripon's hope is to entangle Jamie in a scandal that will destroy the Danish marriage and force him to marry the Catholic daughter of the Earl of Ripon. Jamie has an eye for the ladies, and Meriel is undoubtedly beautiful: small and dark, with the black eyes of her Spanish mother and hair like a fall of silken night. But whether she is the catspaw of her uncle's devising, or a loose cannon that will confound all plots, no one can say. Meriel keeps her own counsel.

Sir AARON BURR, the Parliamentary Member for the province of New York, is an ambitious political who hopes to turn the Continental Tyranny to the American Colonies' advantage.

THE STORY: In the opening scene, we find Sarah overseeing the packing at Mooncoign, her Wiltshire home. Sarah is a young woman in her early twenties, who lives quietly upon her estates. She has just finished a year of mourning for her guardian, Great-Aunt Alecto, and has just been summoned to Town, and to attendance on her godmother, Jocasta, Dowager Duchess of Wessex. It is established here that Sarah is a linguist and translator of note, as her gift for languages will prove vital at a later stage in the story.

As Sarah readies herself for her journey, she speculates on what the future will bring: marriage of course, but, especially in these troubled times, a woman with the royal blood of England flowing in her veins must be careful when contemplating marriage. Sarah has been raised by her great-aunt far from the bustle of the rowdy Stuart Court at her dead mother's request. She hopes her godmother will have some helpful gossip regarding available young men.

We are next introduced to Rogier St. Ives Dyer, Duke of Wessex, arising in his Albany rooms after a night of gambling. The Duke is in his late twenties/early thirties, blond, black-eyed, and lanky. He is highly attractive to women, and knows it, but so far has shied away from any liaison with a "respectable" woman. While dressing, Dyer spares a thought for his regiment, currently occupied in chasing the French around Portugal, and wonders when he will ever see them again. Once awake and tidy he peruses the post, and discovers that his grandmother, the Dowager Duchess of Wessex, desires him to wait upon her directly. After discarding the other billets common to a popular young man of fashion, Dyer opens a secret compartment in his desk and pulls out a thin pamphlet. Dipping a curious pen in a special inkwell, he begins adding to its pages, character by laborious character.

We next see an interview between Meriel and her uncle the present Earl of Ripon, in which Ripon, speaking coaxingly and as if to a very small child, assures Meriel that she shall like Jamie very much. We also meet Ripon's younger brother, Lord Stratford, a dandy, a fop. . . and a spy for France (Ripon would be horrified at the thought of spying for France. A true monarchist and believer in the divine right of kings, Ripon abominates Napoleon even more than he loathes the Protestant Stuart line. Stratford, twenty years the Earl's junior and raised seeing everything going to his eldest brother Guildford and then to brother Richard, sees no reason to love either title or primogeniture and has decided Republican leanings.)

Sarah arrives in London at the home of her godmother the Dowager Duchess of Wessex, and becomes Jocasta's guest. Jocasta is widow to Andrew Dyer, first Duke of Wessex and one of the early royal bastards. The duchess is highly worldly-wise but much taken with Sarah, in whom she senses a lively intelligence. Since Sarah is to be presented to King Henry at a Court Drawing Room at Buckingham House, the next month and more passes in a blinding frenzy of shopping and fittings. Only two things of particular note occur during this period:

Sarah first meets Dyer, and decides she cannot care for a man with so much wit and so little heart to his conversation. While Sarah can't quite dislike him, she feels disturbed and uncomfortable in his presence and isn't precisely sure why.

In the course of her regular Wednesday outings to Hatchard's, Sarah meets and makes the acquaintance of a young lady she comes to know as Miss Bulleyn, who is stopping in town for the Season, but is, alas, not to be presented at Court because her family does not "approve." Sarah urges Miss Bulleyn to call upon her, little knowing that Miss Bulleyn is in reality Lady Meriel, nor what part Lady Meriel is to play in her future.

During this period we are introduced to Jamie, Prince of Wales, as he badgers his father the King for an Army commission or, failing that, leave to travel to observe the fighting. TZAR ALEXANDER I OF RUSSIA and PRINCE FREDRICK WILHELM III OF PRUSSIA both continue to place pressure on King Henry to let Prince Jamie take a place on the Alliance General Staff. They would actually welcome Jamie's presence on the military side, where they could better judge his mettle. In their opinion, there is no certainty that the Danish marriage will go forward, nor that even if it does it will bring Denmark into the Allied fold. Political influence might run the other way, placing pressure on Henry to make a separate peace with France. Worse yet could be Prince Jamie's sudden inheritance of the English throne. In the event of England's political collapse, Russia and Prussia would bear the brunt of Napoleon's victorious retaliation.

Equally worried about the future of England is America, which is bordered on two sides by French colonies -- Quebec and Louisiana -- and fears to be bartered away in a shady political deal.

It is clear that Jamie's high spirits require some sort of outlet. Jamie's betrothal to Princess Stephanie, eldest daughter of Frederick, the Prince Regent of Denmark, is an event of the recent past and a sore point with the Prince: he is certain she is a dull Danish herring and he loathes the clinical pragmatism of his arranged political marriage.

During this time we also see more of Dyer, both advising Henry and trying gently to discourage Jamie from following the drum. At first Dyer believes that his beloved grandmama's goddaughter is nothing to do with him, but soon Jocasta makes it known to him that Sarah is his future bride. We also see Dyer meeting some rather peculiar people in the Limehouse district, and at a tavern at Dover. It becomes clear to the reader that Dyer is a player in the Tournament of Shadows, the great game of espionage, and that he has ambiguous feelings about what he does so very well indeed.

At last the great day of Sarah's presentation comes, and King Henry is quite friendly. The only thing that mars the occasion is the presence of Dyer, who all but snubs her, being far more interested in some secret matters and what seems to be a combination spy system and a sabotage action which he is reporting to the King in connection with some security arrangements for Princess Stephanie's convoy (Napoleon being the sometime master of the seas at this point, even as far north and west as the Orkneys). But soon Sarah forgets Dyer's chilly reception in the presence of her never-to-be-acknowledged uncle, King Henry IX.

A genuine affection springs up between Sarah and the King; they chat for quite fifteen minutes, and suddenly Sarah's reputation is "made." Vouchers for Almack's will surely follow.

At the evening's party which follows her presentation, the Duchess begins to tell Sarah something, but the arrival of guests causes her to break off.

Notable at the party is the uninvited and unannounced presence of Prince Jamie, arriving with a scandalous widow in tow and an overabundance of scapegrace charm. He proclaims loudly and variously that Stephanie may sail for England or not as she pleases, it makes not one whit of difference to him.

A day or so later, Jocasta finally succeeds in telling Sarah that the real reason she has been summoned to court is to take up certain duties for the King. She will be assigned to the household of the future Princess of Wales and aid her in adjusting to the English Court. In addition, Sarah is to marry -- as soon as possible -- Dyer, the young Duke of Wessex.

Though she knows such arranged marriages are common and she has been raised to such a fate, Sarah is quite shocked at how strong her feelings are upon hearing this "sentence" of matrimony. Escape is her first thought, but common sense prevails; she will keep her own counsel for a while and let matters proceed.

In an interview a few days later, Dyer approaches and proposes to Sarah in a very remote fashion, intimating strongly that theirs will be a marriage of convenience only. Sarah accepts with such surface coolness that Dyer is pleased at a future that will not involve too much emotion.

Though Dyer has always known that one day he must marry and secure the line, the stark reality of it is more unwelcome and unsettling than he might well imagine. Thus, on the day when he proposes to Sarah, giving her the family heirloom ring, a salamander in flames wrought of rose gold, Dyer is three-quarters drunk and nursing a hangover of stupefying proportions.

However, the next night when Sarah and Jocasta are in the drawing room waiting for the tea tray, Dyer makes a sudden entrance and, showing some impatience and controlled anger, says that he must take them into his confidence, since the King has had word that trouble is already well on its way.

Jamie has for some time been surrounded -- in spite of King Henry's efforts -- by some of the Old Families whose power was great under the Catholic regime before the Civil War and who still regret the loss of Charles II's Catholic younger brother James for their king. The Earldom of Ripon has produced a daughter carefully schooled in her part and intended to entangle the Prince past his being able to free himself, causing a scandal to break up the proposed royal marriage and eventually seeing him married to this girl, who is very much under the thumbs of her extremely ambitious mother and uncle.

Sarah and Dyer's own marriage is to be put forward, and then they are to make their way into society as powerfully as possible, to see what they can do to discredit the plotters.

Sarah sees little difference between diplomatic intrigue and outright lying. She makes her opinion known to her betrothed, and she and Dyer quarrel -- coldly -- and part; Dyer thinking

that Sarah is willfully stupid and Sarah thinking that Dyer is vicious and has a lack of moral character.

Despite this, both have been raised to the concept of an arranged marriage, and duty before self. In public they are impeccably polite as plans for their wedding rush forward at a pace all but scandalous.

Sarah and Meriel continue to meet, while Sarah now begins to suspect that Meriel is no Miss Bulleyn, but instead the Catholic catspaw that Dyer fears -- assuming such fears are justified. Sarah, stung to unreason by the proddings of her treacherous heart, now automatically doubts every statement that issues from Dyer's lips.

The betrothal ball of the Duke of Wessex and the Marchioness of Roxbury is the first event of the 1806 Season. Meriel's uncle is there, and Sarah takes an instant dislike to the Earl of Ripon.

Meanwhile, Town buzzes with talk about the impending arrival of the Danish princess, of whose character no one has any clear impression. Through all of this Sarah and Dyer circle warily, neither feeling that the other is a suitable matrimonial object. Their marriage is a hasty affair, set less than a month later, in mid-April, and while waiting for their house in one of the fashionable New Squares in London's West End to be constructed, the Duke and Duchess of Wessex reside with his grandmother.

The marriage is not consummated. The Duke spends his wedding night at his clubs -- an action which earns him a harsh rebuke from the King, who is counting on Dyer to be a pattern-card of virtue -- and Sarah spends it reading in her rooms, feeling very guilty for the pain she is causing her beloved godmother but unable to love her husband.

Matters are made worse when Dyer returns home a few days later to find Sarah entertaining Lady Meriel in the drawing room.

Sarah has lived all her life by the axiom that Reason can conquer all. Fairly certain that her friend is the dark seductress of what Sarah privately believes to be Dyer's rather gothic imagination, Sarah has taken advantage of the freedom of her married state to invite Meriel to tea, hoping to deepen the friendship and perhaps turn Meriel away from Ripon's path without revealing her own or King Henry's suspicions about her.

Unfortunately, all she succeeds in doing is to introduce Meriel to Jamie under her husband's roof, since Jamie has come home with his friend Dyer. Though Meriel quickly takes her leave, it is obvious that Jamie has fallen, and fallen hard.

There follows a blistering row between Sarah and Dyer, at the conclusion of which she decides to abandon the Court and her marriage and retreat to Mooncoign. She is prevented from doing so by the arrival of a Royal Courier who whisks Dyer away to impart his news.

When Dyer emerges from his study, his face is grey. Word has just come from Denmark. Princess Stephanie has vanished.

Dyer had been supposed to travel to Denmark to escort Stephanie to England. Since his marriage plans prevented this, Illya Kosciuszko went in his stead. It is Kosciuszko's report that Dyer has heard: his friend is safe, but the all-important Danish Princess has vanished.

Sarah and Dyer's marriage may be marred beyond repair, but these events leave them no time to dwell on the fact. Evidence seems to point to Stephanie's kidnapping by some of the radical Jacobite elements of the Imperial French government. Dyer must go and see.

On the heels of Dyer's leavetaking, Sarah is presented with a bitter treat: an invitation to the Earl of Ripon's ball, in honor of his niece making her bow to Society. Of course she goes, hoping someone will listen to sweet reason. Jamie is there, dancing attendance on the lovely and flowerlike Lady Meriel, to the delight of the Catholic lords and the appreciation of no one else. And yet, Sarah wonders, if the laws regarding Catholics were not so mercilessly unfair, would the Catholic lords not be more loyal to their king?

While at Ripon's ball Sarah meets Lord Stratford, who has just had word from his French masters that Dyer is becoming a dangerous annoyance. Talleyrand, chief of Napoleon's spymasters, believes that the story of Princess Stephanie's disappearance is merely a cover story for Dyer's real mission; to find and rescue LOUIS-CHARLES BOURBON (LOUIS XVII), the Lost Dauphin of France.

Over ten years ago, Dyer's father died trying to rescue the French royal family. Louis and Marie were recaptured and executed, but their son -- the rightful king of France -- simply vanished. TALLEYRAND believes that the Old Duke was able to spirit the boy into hiding with a loyal royalist family, but not to safely remove him from the Continent. It is more useful to TALLEYRAND that the Dauphin remain lost; his reappearance could rock Napoleon's unstable coalition government, no matter what is done with him thereafter.

So the order goes out: the meddling Duke of Wessex is to be brought to heel -- before making any contact with the Dauphin.

Dyer, exempt from the universal knowledge that he is sailing forth to rescue the Dauphin, takes ship for Denmark. Hugging the Scottish coast, the H.M.S. Widowmaker makes landfall in Roskild where Dyer hears Kosciuszko's report before sending him back to England. Kosciuszko enquires after Dyer's marriage, and is told that "pariahs should never marry." Dyer seems to be in a particularly foul temper, and Kosciuszko is happy to board the Widowmaker on her return trip to England.

Soon Dyer is at the court of Stephanie's father, PRINCE FREDERIK, who is regent for his father, CHRISTIAN VII, a king known for his weak mind and vicious temper. FREDERICK is being courted by Catholic France, and the COMTE DE SAINT GERMAIN, a turncoat member of the Ancien Regime, a noted sorcerer and rumored Satanist, is NAPOLEON'S advocate at the Danish Court.

Dyer is there to offer England's formal commiseration on the disappearance, and to uncover what information he can. What Dyer finds out there is little more than Kosciuszko told him: Stephanie

was on the ship when it left. The majority of her suite, and the wedding gifts, traveled in a second, more elaborate ship in the hopes of fooling Napoleon. The second ship made landfall in the Orkneys. The first ship -- and Stephanie -- are nowhere to be found.

Dyer comes to believe the other ship may, by accident or design, made landfall in France. He leaves the Danish court and heads south, trying to trace the last voyage of the Queen Christina.

Meanwhile Sarah -- and the returned Illya Kosciuszko, who has come to see the woman who can so annoy Dyer -- are left to do whatever they can to keep Jamie on the straight and narrow.

To no one's surprise but Sarah's, her friendship with Meriel turns cool; apparently Meriel shares her uncle's ambition and fancies a crown. As Jamie recklessly throws himself at Ripon's niece, Sarah becomes slowly aware of precisely how disastrous to England -- and all of Europe -- this dangerous liaison will be, should it come to fruition. Sarah comes to depend on Kosciuszko more and more -- he is so much more the sort of man she saw herself marrying than Dyer. She believes that she may be falling in love with Kosciuszko, and is depressed by her lack of moral scruples. Why, she thinks, she is becoming quite as depraved as her husband. Wherever he is. . . .

Then one night she is awakened by Meriel, who has climbed in through Sarah's bedroom window. Meriel begs Sarah to help her to flee -- she was supposed to meet Prince Jamie for an assignation that was to blossom into scandal, but has had a failure of nerve and cannot go through with her uncle's plan to entrap the Prince of Wales. What she may or may not relate to Sarah at this time is that she has also aided Jamie to achieve one of his dearest ambitions, and is terrified of being caught out.

(What Jamie has done, with the aid of Meriel's expert forgery, is alter a royal warrant to give himself passage to the war on the Continent. He is quite certain that once King Henry sees how perfectly safe and entirely useful he is in the prosecution of hostilities, he will forgive all.)

Meriel's plan is to join her mother's family in Spain, and as hard as Sarah tries to discourage her, Meriel will not be budged. In these days of the Napoleonic blockade, ocean-going traffic is a chancy business. Though Meriel assures Sarah that she has friends to help her, Sarah doubts very much the plan will work, but seizes eagerly on this rather flimsy pretext as a way to remove Meriel from the Prince's attentions. Rising at once, she has her carriage put to. Soon the two women, and Sarah's abigail, Cartland, are in a coach bound for Dover.

They stop, by Meriel's direction, at an inn at the outskirts of Dover just after dawn. Sarah finds out that a coffee room has been reserved for them, and who should be there but Lord Stratford, Meriel's uncle. Meriel is surprised and angry to see him; he is mocking and sardonic. He pours coffee for both of them, and assures Meriel she is doing quite the best thing: bloody-handed old King Henry will not let his Jamie marry her. Not when death is such an easy out, and Henry's hatchet-man, Dyer, is so available.

Sarah wishes vehemently to protest this slur upon her husband's character, but finds she cannot. The coffee was drugged, and stupefied by laudanum, Sarah knows no more.

Meanwhile, Dyer finds himself in France, hot upon the most peculiar trail he has ever followed. All his spy instincts assure him that something more important than even a missing Danish princess is afoot here, but Dyer has no idea that the intelligence services of three countries believe that his true quarry is the Dauphin.

As he nears the walled city of Verdun, where all captured foreign nationals are interned, the assassins who have been following Dyer catch up to him. Dyer takes a bullet to the shoulder, but the villains are driven off by the sudden appearance of Kosciuszko, who has followed Dyer to France because Sarah has vanished. Kosciuszko does not yet confide this to the Duke, but instead scolds Dyer for the inconvenience he has put Kosciuszko to, assuring Dyer that if he had wanted to swamp around in freezing mud he could have stood home in Poland. The two men sneak into the city, where Kosciuszko gets a doctor for Dyer and puts him in possession of the worst of the news: Ripon seems pretty well to be working for the French, and Jamie and Meriel have vanished, probably together. And so, for that matter, has Dyer's wife.

Sarah awakens during the choppy Dover crossing, and is drugged once more by Lord Stratford. She comes to herself in an moldering French chateau, TALLEYRAND'S prisoner.

Unfortunately TALLEYRAND can't find Dyer to let him know that his immediate withdrawal from the Tournament of Shadows is the price for Sarah's life. TALLEYRAND has no interest in Dyer's death -- the assassins sent after Dyer were Lord Stratford's idea, not his.

In an interview with Lord Stratford, Sarah is put in possession of all of these facts, as well as of the information that Meriel is lost somewhere in France, having escaped from Lord Stratford at one of the changes of horses.

Meriel, fleeing through the rain, is taken in by a kindly country abbe who lives in a tiny village seemingly untouched by the Terror, and, having been raised in worldly circles, Meriel realizes at once that the Abbe's young protege is either LOUIS-CHARLES BOURBON or someone being groomed to impersonate him.

Young LOUIS-CHARLES is also older than his twenty-one years, and very familiar with the dubious joys of being a political catspaw. The two young people form an immediate bond, and Meriel confides everything she knows of the current situation to LOUIS-CHARLES, including what Lord Stratford has let slip about Dyer's mission to France.

LOUIS-CHARLES feels that if Dyer is in France, he should try to contact him in order to seek asylum in England and help in leaving the country.

Meanwhile in Verdun, Dyer is finally put in possession of the "real" reason he has come to France. He is entirely astonished, having long since been convinced that the Dauphin is dead. "Well, someone thinks he isn't," says Kosciuszko. "And if Princess Stephanie continues missing, that means farewell to the Danish alliance, and hello to Citizen Bonaparte's perfect staging ground for an invasion of both England and Russia."

"In that case," replies Dyer, "I think it is almost obligatory that we provide L'Empereur with something to distract him, and a Found Dauphin seems about right, don't you think?"

Also while in hiding in the walled city, Dyer discovers that Princess Stephanie's entourage is there, but the lady herself is missing. About this time, word reaches him that Sarah is being held prisoner in the Chateau Reage -- and not by the ambitious but nationalistic Ripon, as previously advertised, but Lord Stratford. Though Dyer tells himself that a person as depraved as he has become would welcome the death of an inconvenient wife, he cannot convince himself, and for the first time admits how much he loves Sarah.

And so, though Princess Stephanie's trail beckons on the one hand and rumors of the Lost Dauphin's whereabouts beckon on the other, Dyer sets love above duty and he and Kosciuszko strike for the chateau to rescue Sarah.

Within the chateau, Sarah, who finds herself living her worst nightmare, she finds that she is braver than she thought. She also begins to gain some insight into what Dyer's life must have been like, and more understanding of his character.

Dyer and Kosciuszko gain entrance to the chateau. There follows a pitched sabre duel between Lord Stratford and Dyer, Sarah's liberation, and escape for the travelers by means of a hot-air balloon which Kosciuszko has discovered somewhere in the castle.

The balloon carries them only a few miles before crashing, and Kosciuszko pitches it into a river, hoping it will drift far from there and not reveal their presence. At last Dyer and Sarah have the chance to talk openly and honestly, without secrets, and so, in a leaky barn in the midst of Napoleonic France, Dyer and Sarah finally consummate their marriage. Though Dyer is sorely tempted to drop everything to smuggle Sarah back to England, she encourages him to stay -- and if he does find the Princess Stephanie, he will certainly need Sarah there to act as chaperon!

They decide to break into the town once more to interview the members of Stephanie's suite (Kosciuszko: "And hope one of them speaks English. Or at least French.") But when they arrive at their safe house, what they find is Meriel, distracted to madness, who tells them that TALLEYRAND has the Dauphin in Paris, and is about to execute him.

Dyer does not want to believe her, but Sarah pleads for Meriel's truthfulness. And even Dyer has to admit that there is no point looking around France for the missing Stephanie. She isn't in Verdun, so the only other place to find news of her is in the spider heart of the French spymaster.

Through great hardship the four of them make their way to Paris. Dyer is certain that his facility in duplicity is causing his wife to loathe him, but in reality Sarah is falling deeper in love with her husband each day, even while she fears that someone so brave and resourceful can never love such a priggish mouseheart as she knows herself to be.

Reaching Paris, they go to ground in one of Dyer's safe houses, where he dons the alter-ego of Citizen Orczy, a stolid merchant who travels frequently. Painstakingly, Dyer ferrets out the Dauphin's whereabouts. He is imprisoned in the Tulleries; once a palace, now the most dreaded

prison in all France. To free him requires a grand impersonation and forgery: to sneak into the Tulleries, gain access to the secret prisoner, and break him out. It will take all of Kosciuszko's technology, Meriel's forgery skills, Dyer's generalship, and Sarah's gift of languages -- and new found bravery -- to rescue him.

In a dazzling stroke they -- impersonating an embassy from the Danish Court, with Sarah masquerading as a Danish translator -- enter the Tulleries, exchange Kosciuszko for LOUIS-CHARLES, and leave. Once the others are safe, Kosciuszko quickly escapes and joins them, and now the only problems remaining are what to do with the Dauphin, and how to get out of France.

Amidst much talk of what political hay can be made with a resurrected heir, LOUIS-CHARLES points out that he hasn't been raised to be king, Napoleon doesn't look like getting off the throne any time soon, and he has no desire to be a pensioner at a foreign court. He wants to go to the New World and start again -- with Meriel, whom he married while they were still guests of the Abbe's.

As the five adventurers make their way to the French coast, to a spot where a British ship can be signaled to take them away, they encounter a French patrol escorting a dashing-dressed young Danish hussar toward the capital. They attack the patrol, with the hussar's enthusiastic help.

Once the French have been routed, the Dane retrieves his pistols and proclaims himself ready to follow any adventure.

Or HERself, rather. Princess Stephanie has been found. When the betrothal ship was blown off course, she changed clothes with one of her guardsmen -- a frequent practice of hers -- and set off to find England and adventure.

Kosciuszko looks at Dyer. "Somehow I doubt the Prince will be disappointed in his future bride."

Below are the first three chapters to the original novel

## A HEART FOR EVERY FATE

An "If-World" Regency Romantic Adventure

by

Andre Norton and Rosemary Edghill

#

Prologue: The English Fox (France, 1805)

The tall man with the dangerous eyes knew that someone was going to die tonight.

Rupert St. Ives Dyer, Captain His Grace the Duke of Wessex, coolly surveyed the salon from the privileged vantage-coign of the entry-hall. Somewhere among these privileged New Men and successful turncoats of the Ancien Regime was the man he had come to meet. Only, when he had agreed to meet Avery deMorrissey three days ago, Wessex had been reasonably certain of retaining both his liberty, and his life.

Now he was less so.

A note smuggled up the backstairs of the Hotel des Spheres, Wessex's residence on this trip to the City of Light, had tipped him that the Jacquerie -- the Red Jacks -- Talleyrand's secret police -- wished very much to have speech of the Comte de Reynard, which nom de guerre was Wessex's own for the moment. He did not know if it was the foolish loyalist Reynard or Rupert Duke of Wessex, King Henry's political agent who had earned M. Talleyrand's emnity, and at this moment, it did not matter. The Jacks were only a few minutes behind him. He had left his lodgings in the Hotel des Spheres by way of the roof, but it was only a matter of time before they ran him to ground. The carte de invitation for this evening's party was still on his dressing-table, after all.

But without him deMorrissey had no chance of reaching England. DeMorrissey was English, a naval officer interned at Verdun. Holding the information he had been sent into French waters to procure of more importance than his life, deMorrissey had managed to escape.

But he hadn't a word of French, and if the Loyalist Underground had not managed to put him in touch with Wessex/Reynard, deMorrissey would have been dead long since.

And if the Red Jacks had anything to say about it, he might yet be.

Wessex lifted his quizzing-glass and surveyed the room with maddeningly languid affectation. La Belle Paris was not what she had been in the days of Wessex's boyhood, but she had made a phoenix-like recovery from the bloody events of the "glorious" '93 -- assuming one had no memory of her original glory. Now the appointments were a little too opulent, the talk a little too loud, and dress and manners veered self-consciously between Republican and Imperial.

Wessex allowed his quizzing-glass to drop and flicked imaginary grains of snuff from the lapel of his wasp-waisted celadon silk evening coat as he shook out his ruffles. He was dressed slightly beyond the cutting edge of fashion. On a lesser man the mode might have appeared ridiculous, but not upon my lord Wessex. He had the height, the carriage, the killdevil black eyes to support any freak of fashion, and enough cold swords-edge charm to beguile any lady save Madame la Guillotine herself.

Wessex descended the three shallow steps to the black and white tiled floor of Princesse Eugenie's drawing room. The Red Jacks were only moments behind him -- and deMorrissey was in the miniature summer house in the Princesse Eugenie's garden. He might, just, have enough lead time to winkle demorrissey out of the garden and along the route prepared for him.

DeMorrissette had shared his information with Wessex. One of them must reach England and King Henry without fail.

A hand fell heavily upon the immaculate brocade of Wessex's coat. "My dear Comte, how fortunate indeed that I should find you here."

Wessex turned, and raised his glass to regard the smaller man. So now I know who it was that gave Talleyrand my scent.

M. Grillot was round, red-faced, and ambitious. He was a frequent visitor to the shadowy half-world in which Wessex had his real life, and had managed, it seemed to lay his gaff upon quarry of note.

"Fortunate, my dear Grillot? Fortune favors the brave, it is said."

"And my very dear Comte -- it was brave of you indeed to venture among us!" Grillot could not quite repress a smirk at the cleverness of his own double-meaning.

Wessex-as-Reynard made an elegant leg, slowly. Almost he reached for his quizzing-glass again, but not quite.

"Monsieur Grillot," he said cordially to his betrayer, "but what a delight it is to encounter you at a party with such a potential for dullness. Do let us celebrate my good fortune in a glass of wine."

Wessex's French was flawless, but then, French had been one of the civilized accomplishments only a generation ago. Before the little Corsican had embarked upon his conquest of half the world.

"But of course, my dear Comte." Grillot was minded to relish his triumph. "The Princesse keeps an excellent cellar and a dull guest-list, eh?" He linked arms with Wessex and the two men strolled away. No one would expect "Reynard" to make the bow to his hostess. The license of Eugenie's gatherings was nearly as proverbial as their dullness.

Wessex smiled. Certainly Madame la Princesse should thank him -- after tonight no one would ever call one of her soirees dull.

Grillot and Wessex passed a number of small knots of conversants, debating everything under the sun in fervent obsessed voices. The attraction of Eugenie's salons -- aside from the excellent table -- was that one might meet anyone and talk of anything here. Only a few of them glanced up from their talk to mark "Reynard" and Grillot's passing. From crop-headed Incroyables and their slovenly damsels to the properly corseted and bewigged haute bourgeoisie, eyes and tongues burned with the light of the Idea -- the Idea that France had the moral obligation to enslave half the world.

The two men reached the buffet. Wessex shook back his lace and poured wine for them both. Grillot stared with distaste at "Reynard's" affected mode of dress.

"But my dear sir, what would you have me do?" Wessex protested blandly, catching the direction of Grillot's gaze. "All the world knows that Man's natural state is to be at war, and yet some of us are not meant for rude martial exercise. We must each choose our battlefield where we may."

Grillot snorted and tossed off his wine. Wessex poured him another glass. Above the buffet the wax candles in their gilded wooden garlands burned with a steady white light, multiplied in the mirrors that hung upon the walls. The bright pinpoint flames burned like captive stars in the black glass of the french windows at the end of the room.

"Ah, the battlefield. . ." For some reason, Wessex's choice of words was a source of particular amusement to M. Grillot. "But there are battlefields and battlefields, are there not, my dear Comte?" Grillot was not a subtle man. Any person not already awake to his treachery would surely be alerted by the gloating in his voice.

"It is entirely as you say." Wessex continued to act the part of the foolish and oblivious Reynard.

"But you doubt me, my dear," Grillot's smile grew more feral as he spoke. "Perhaps you will find a walk in the garden a spur to the intellect?"

If Grillot had expected Wessex to deviate from Reynard's persona by one iota he was disappointed.

"Certainly my good Grillot, if such is your desire," Wessex said urbanely. But in his pocket, where no one could see, his fingers tightened upon the butt of a small derringer.

#

The Princesse Eugenie's little garden was meant to be seen at night. On this late summer evening the hot perfume of night-flowering plants was on the air; a wild perfume as cloying in its way as the hothouse atmosphere of ideolation just left behind. Narrow paths surfaced in white stone and crushed seashell curved around ornamental plantings designed to conceal assignations. A high wall concealed the garden from the street and from the prying eyes of neighboring houses.

Grillot stopped just short of the tiny ornamental gazebo. "But you will wonder, my dear Comte, that Madame la Princesse's garden is so quiet?"

"Will I?" asked Wessex politely. He glanced behind him. They were out of sight of the house. Good.

"The English boy who was here now awaits the Jacquerie in the kitchen -- but he will not be lonely long. Madame la Guillotine's kiss is one he will not live to forget -- thus perish all such enemies of France!"

There was a sudden shout from the house. Grillot fumbled a bulky and obvious pistol from his pocket. Wessex waited patiently while he did it. The Duke had no intention of grappling with him for it -- not while he was trying to avoid the attention that pistolfire would surely draw.

"My dear Grillot, now that you have discovered all, there is one question I should like to have answered," Wessex said in English and a voice quite unlike "Citoyen Reynard"'s. He spoke to cover the soft clicking sound as he pressed down on a hidden button on the shaft of the quizzing-glass held between his fingers. A snap of the wrist, and the lens hung free, connected to the ornate golden handle only by a thin cord of braided silk. It was not meant for the work he was about to put it to, but it would have to serve.

"Soon you will answer questions, English pig -- not ask them." There was crash from the house and Grillot turned toward it, forgetting, in that fatal moment, to beware of his companion. As he turned, Wessex flung the invisible coil of silk about Grillot's neck and jerked it tight, pulling the smaller man back against him, muffling Grillot's death-struggles with his own long limbs.

"Nevertheless, I shall ask. Did you actually believe that you might sentence an Englishman to death with impunity? It is not done, my dear Grillot; you must hold me your preceptor in this." Wessex spoke to cover the bitterness in his own soul. Clean death on deck or battlefield might be any man's fate, but this sneaking soft-handed game of shadows, fought with weapons that were not even honest steel--!

The outcry from the house was louder now. There was a sound of breaking glass and a woman's squeal. The Jacks were quite as crude in their methods as their predecessors at the height of the Terror had been; their motto: Extremism in the defense of Liberty is no vice.

Wessex wished their countrymen much joy of them. He lowered Grillot's body to the ground, and drew the silk cord into the shaft of his quizzing-glass once more. He dragged the body into the cover of some of the Princesse's ornamental shrubbery, then stripped off the gaudy coat and waistcoat of the Comte de Reynard. With a few deft motions he turned the waistcoat inside out, concealing the lurid vermilion of the embroidered Chinese silk behind a veil of dully respectable ecru satin. Then Wessex pulled out the whalebone stays that gave his coat its fantastic shape, tossed them into the bushes, and shrugged himself back into a coat of dull brown velvet that had only a faint acquaintance with fashion. Five gold napoleons in the heel of each slipper should be enough to see him through to the inn on the Calais road where new clothes, ID papers, and a fast horse awaited him -- if the Jacks had not discovered them.

But deMorrisset -- if Grillot could be believed -- lay a prisoner in the house beyond. It might be possible -- just -- to go in by the servants' door while the Red Jacks were smashing the teacups and extract deMorrisset.

Wessex's lips parted in a deathly grin. So be it. And we shall see what run an English fox can give these French hounds.

## Chapter One: A Lady Not In The Common Way

(Wiltshire, March 1806)

Sarah Cunningham, Lady Roxbury -- which was to say, Marchioness of Roxbury in her own right -- gazed in exasperated amusement about her dressing room.

There was nothing in the elegant Jacobean room itself to earn her censure. The oak wainscoting glowed golden with long and loving application of beeswax and turpentine even in this pallid early Spring sunlight, while higher upon those same walls the fanciful plasterwork ornamentation spread its delicate lacelike tracery against the darker cream of the limewashed background. The room's furnishings were simple; solid, well-loved unfashionable pieces that might have occupied this very chamber when Charles Stuart had used it to shelter from his Roundhead persecutors one hundred fifty years before.

No, there was nothing wrong with the room or its furnishings. The contents, on the other hand, were a different matter altogether.

Every available space was jammed with with trunks, some of which hadn't been out of the Long Attic since Sarah's grandmother's day. One might think her going to Timbucktoo rather than London, and a lady of the highest fashion rather than a quiet country-mouse scarcely out of mourning for her dear great-aunt Alecto, that great lady of the London Stage who had been the only mother Sarah had ever known.

Sarah regarded the toe of one sensible jean boot peeping from beneath the hem of her sober-colored morning dress. The grey-blue gown with its demure broidery of pimpernels worked by her own hand upon the bodice suited Sarah's vision of herself and her station in life. No flimsily-fashionable muslins for Lady Roxbury, not in the depths of the country and with winter barely gone. Sarah's dress was honest English wool spun from the fleeces of Mooncoign's own flocks, cut and sewn by Mooncoign's own servants -- all calm and orderly and just as it ought to be, just as it had been for all the five-and-twenty years of Sarah's whole existence.

But all that was about to change. Witness the trunks.

"Knogle!"

At Sarah's call the abigail bustled into the room, arms filled with gowns two years old and more that had been relegated to the back of the clothespress when Sarah had gone into mourning, and which had not been fashionable even when new.

"Yes, m'lady?"

The reason for the plenitude of trunks was now revealed, and Sarah tried very hard to stifle a laugh. Knogle had served her since babyhood, and filled with as many admirable qualities as Knogle was, among them could not be counted a sense of humor.

"I am afraid I am quite overwhelmed by the size and quantity of my luggage," Sarah finally said. "And I cannot see what profit there might be in packing those old rags," she added, trying for a flash of Town-bred spirit.

"Rags!" huffed the literal-minded abigail. "When these-here dresses was new not the very month dear Mrs. Kennet -- God rest her -- passed on of the pneumonia? They hasn't a month's wear on them, begging your la'ship's pardon."

"Well yes, Knoyle, I know, but--" Sarah, trapped by honesty, was momentarily at a loss for words. "But perhaps the fashion will be different in London. I am certain Her Grace of Wessex will wish to be consulted about my wardrobe."

Knoyle fixed her charge with a gimlet unbeguiled eye. "And I'm supposing that this mort of dresses being unsuitable for your la'ship's London goings-on, you'll be wishful that I present them root and branch to the vicar for the care of the parish unfortunates?"

"We are put upon this Earth to minister to one another," Sarah murmured with specious gravity. Turning to the nearest trunk, she lifted its heavy lid, only to discover a nest of garments of even greater antiquity, why, here was the shell-pink calico she had worn to the Bath Assembly two years ago, and lying beneath it were. . .

"Sheets? Surely we may suppose that Her Grace is well supplied with such."

"Oh, aye, so you'll say, m'lady, and that Mr. Bulford has charge o' the sheets you'll be wanting for the two nights lying-up at inns and suchlike. But all as one might imagine isn't all as might happen, as my own dear mother always said!"

"Oh, Knoyle!" Sarah said in fond exasperation, realizing that her servant's misgivings, in their own way, matched her own. Once she left Mooncoign and the safe secure circle of friends and dependents among whom she had grown up, anything might happen.

"While it is naturally important to heed the teachings of childhood," Sarah said, removing the sheets from the trunk, "if we were to prepare for everything that might occur upon our journey, we should have to transport all of Mooncoign and more with us! I wish to take no more than two trunks -- and my books of course."

A glance at Knoyle's guilty face confirmed Sarah's worst suspicions.

"My books are packed, are they not? My papers, and the translation of Xenophon I was working on?"

"Oh, m'lady, you won't be needing all those nasty pagan books when you come to London! Greeks and all; if dear Mrs. Kennet, God rest her, were here today--"

"She would encourage me to go on with my studies, Knoyle, or have you forgotten that it was Aunt Alecto who engaged my first tutor?"

"It isn't seemly," the abigail repeated stubbornly, and Sarah felt a quick flare of prideful temper, strive though she might to suppress it.

"Besides, I have that Danish translation to prepare for Dr. Sheridan; and you know how kind he has always been to us. How could I disappoint him? The poor man hasn't a word of any of the Icelandic tongues, you know."

Knoyle hung her head in defeat and Sarah, secure upon her Parthian shot, swept from the room upon a stern adjuration to the abigail to pack only two trunks, if you please. As for the papers she was working on, and her grammars and dictionaries, it seemed best to secure them herself if she wished them to accompany her when she left Mooncoign tomorrow dawn.

After all, London might be dangerously flat, and she would require some consolation for a disappointing Season!

#

At half-past-twenty, as Alecto Kennet used to say, Lady Roxbury was not on the shelf for the sheer and sole reason that she had never been anywhere near such arbiters as might pronounce her upon it. In all the years of Aunt Alecto's chaperonage, Sarah had never ventured anywhere near the dazzling flame of London society and the glittering rowdiness of King Henry IX's Stuart court, nor, to be perfectly truthful, had she felt the slightest desire to do so.

Sarah's Aunt Alecto had had care of Sarah from the time she was scarcely two years old, when Sarah's mother, the second Marchioness of Roxbury and illegitimate daughter of James the Second, the present king's grandfather, had died in childbed along with the babe who would, had he lived, have been Sarah's younger brother. Now mother and child slept in the small family burial ground at Mooncoign, and Sarah had attained her present advanced age without any more worldliness than occasional journeys to Oxford and Bath might afford her.

Until last month, when the just-barely-passable roads had yielded a messenger with a not-to-be-refused command from Sarah's dazzling godmama, Jocasta, Dowager Duchess of Wessex. As if its arrival had only awaited Sarah's putting off her mourning blacks, the missive commended Sarah to wait upon the Dowager Duchess at her earliest possible convenience -- as it was time (the Dowager Duchess had written) that young Lady Roxbury be 'taken in hand'.

Sarah did hope that being taken in hand would not be as disagreeable and uncomfortable as it sounded. She knew she had been raised to the taste of an uncommon amount of freedom, and that, coupled with the bluestocking nature that Aunt Alecto had done nothing to thwart and everything to encourage, did not leave her entirely sanguine about her sojourn among the social dragons of the ton.

Still, Sarah could not entirely suppress a tiny thrill of anticipation at the prospect of entering that fairy-tale world at last, though she could hardly expect to attain the glittering heights of popularity that the lady novelists painted so seductively.

Sarah, after all, was plain, and well she knew it. Though her eyes (quite her best feature) were speaking and grey, her correspondents assured her the fashion was all for eyes of pansy-brown. Worse, her hair was straight rather than fashionably curled, and light brown rather than guinea-gold or raven-black or any of the other unlikely hues so beloved of the romanciers. She was tall, and slender, and rather better acquainted with Latin, Greek, and Hebrew than many a young scholar who came down from Oxford.

In short, hers was a hopeless case, save for one small matter.

By King James' own creation, Sarah was Marchioness of Roxbury in her own right, with Mooncoign and all its rents and lands entailed upon the heirs of her body, male or female. Granddaughter of a king, Sarah Roxbury was not minded to spend herself lightly, and Aunt Alecto had always told her that those who held themselves valuable were valued in turn. This spring she would have the opportunity to prove Aunt Alecto's wisdom upon the ton, that most stringent of judicial bodies.

She only hoped that her courage did not fail her. For Sarah had a secret -- or, rather, a fear -- too dread to be confided to Knoyle, or to her most trusted of correspondents, or even to her *Commonplace Book*.

Sarah Cunningham, Marchioness of Roxbury, feared herself to be a coward.

It was not that Mooncoign and its environs offered any particular scope for the exercise of feats of derring-do. Nor had there ever been any particular occasion upon which Sarah had fallen short of displaying the amount of resolution warranted by the circumstance. Rather it was that Sarah, who lived others' stirring deeds in books and letters, knew in the secret chambers of her heart that she, self-acknowledged to be of strong opinions and firm principles, would somehow fail of their defense if called upon to do so. It was one thing to give orders to one's servants and dependents, none of whom had ever shown any concerted opposition to her wishes. It was quite another to air her views in circles where the Roxbury name would not command instant acquiescence.

Sarah hated rows of any sort. Even quarrels among the servants caused her to retreat to her library until the storm clouds had blown over. To be, not the observer, but the object of another's harsh words and raised voice was a circumstance before which Sarah felt she would capitulate utterly.

And that betokened a shocking want of moral fiber. To suspect it was the case was bad enough. To know it beyond doubt. . .

Sarah sighed. There was nothing she could do to avert the dreadful day of her unmasking. In fact, waiting upon her godmama would surely hasten it. But as she could see no way of avoiding Her Grace's summons that would not only be ungrateful but intolerably rude, the only thing left was simply to go forward and hope for the best.

Besides, wasn't it rather puffed up of her to think that the ton would deign to quarrel with the country-bred Lady Roxbury? The ton, in all probability, would refuse to notice her entirely, Sarah decided hopefully.

Having argued herself about into a better humor, Sarah hurried off to complete the task she had set herself -- before Knoyle surprised her standing here woolgathering, and in all likelihood read her a thundering scold!

#

Gaining the safety of the library Sarah moved among her beloved books, taking first one, then another down from the crowded shelves and stroking their ornate calfskin bindings as if to assure herself that all was well. A spray of winterberries in a cut crystal bowl on one of the long oak side tables was the only mark of the servants' intrusion into this room which, above all others, was Sarah's private domain.

Family legend swore that, in the time of the martyred King Charles the First, before ever a Roxbury had walked these halls, this room had been, not library, but chapel to the manor's Catholic folk. Puritan storm and Glorious Restoration had destroyed most of the evidence of this -- if ever there had been any -- but what remained were three glorious high-crowned windows in the north wall, the center one surmounted by a small but magnificent Rose Window that had surely never been meant as any secular ornament. Now Sarah gazed out the tiny diamond-shaped panes at a world now red, now blue, now greener than grass, now a strange blank amber.

She walked to the window and leaned her forehead upon the cool antique glass. Beyond the glass stretched the meadows and gardens, the copses and rides, the stables and farms and cottages of Mooncoign. When, after tomorrow's dawn, would she see them again?

And who would she be when she saw them again?

Sarah turned back to her books, snatching volumes from the shelves and clutching them to her as if they were talismans to prevent the future from exerting its wiles upon her. Latin and Greek; Hebrew; Chapman's Introductory Russian Grammar; Some Preliminary Notes Upon the Solution of the Egyptian Writing; old friends and new acquaintances in a Babel's-tower polyglot of eras, languages, and alphabets. Soon the books she wished to bring covered the whole of the library table and the bowl of winterberries was displaced to the floor.

Above the pile, Grandmama Panthea's painted visage gazed mischevously down from above the fireplace, magnificent in satin and lace, her bejeweled hands toying with a key, a dagger, and a rose, in sly allusion to the Roxbury arms, and their motto: 'I open every door.'

Look at this! You're just as bad as Knoyle! Sarah chided herself. If there were gowns and sheets a-plenty in London, even more certainly there were books: thousands of books in hundreds of shops so that she might pluck any title that struck her fancy from the shelf at once, and not wait weeks upon the Post to hold it in her hands.

But she could not bear to leave any of them behind.

Shaking her head at her own foolishness, Sarah turned to her desk and brought forth those things for which there truly was not a match in London: her papers.

The translation she had promised Dr. Sheridan of a journal a Danish captain had kept of a certain voyage to Russia almost a century before; her notes toward a comparative grammar of the Icelandic tongues; the half-finished translation of a handful of ancient pagan poems in one of those same so un-English languages; the file of letters attesting to her tedious and painstaking quest for the precise meaning of this archaic word or that peculiar phrase.

When all was said and done, these notes and papers and what they represented were as much a part of her as Mooncoign was. And no matter what lay before her, Lady Roxbury would still have her learning with which to face it. All else might change, but never that.

Insensibly heartened, Sarah left the library, turning back only once to survey her domain before going to inform Mr. Bulford that indeed, in all of Mooncoign there still remained one last thing to pack.

#

Chapter 2: The Fox Unearthed (London, March 1806)

They ought to take pity on a poor man, Rupert thought groggily, and not let the sun off its leash so early in the morning.

Were he wider awake, Captain His Grace the Duke of Wessex would know that it lacked but an hour of noon, but the night had been long and the play had been deep, and His Grace of Wessex still recalled weeks of sleeping in ditches and sheltering beneath hedgerows vividly enough to find his feather bed a powerfully seductive lure.

He might, in fact, have successfully rejoined my lord Morpheus, had Atheling not chosen that moment to ever-so-discreetly make his presence known.

Atheling was His Grace's most superior and long-suffering manservant. He kept His Grace's Albany rooms precisely as they should be kept, and His Grace's wardrobe fit to embrace any occasion from a Royal Drawing Room to a night spent steeplejacking across the roofs of London Town.

And he possessed a singularly remarkable absence of curiosity.

But despite such a sterling and acquiescent disposition Atheling knew his duty when he saw it. And so, surveying his master in his master's disordered bed, Atheling coughed.

Rather than movement, there was a cessation of movement beneath the thick wool blankets. Encouraged, Atheling essayed a slight clearing of the throat.

"Very well, Atheling," the mounded counterpane announced. "I'm awake." There was a creak of the bedstead, and His Grace made his delinquent appearance.

Rupert St. Ives Dyer, Duke of Wessex, was the third of that line -- although his grandfather, before being so ennobled, was heir to the Earldom of Scathach, a dignity that had been old when William the Conqueror first beached his boats on Saxon shores.

The Dukedom of Wessex, like so many English peerages, was the whimsical creation of a Stuart King -- in this particular case, of King Charles the Fourth, upon the memorable occasion of Wessex's grandfather's birth. Andrew, the second Duke, had died some fifteen years before in a vain attempt to winkle the French King and his pretty, foolish wife out of blood-mad Regicide France, and Wessex had succeeded to his father's honors -- and his father's obligations -- before he was out of his teens. Now His Grace had weathered some thirty summers, and those ducal honors sat more comfortably upon his broad shoulders.

As might be expected from the nature of the creation of the title, the mark of Stuart kinship was writ plainly upon Wessex's long-jawed countenance. Though the wheat-gold hair in its fashionably tousled crop marked the Plantagenet strain in the line, the hot black eyes were purely Stuart, and Wessex was as stubborn and inflexible of purpose, as feared an enemy and as loyal a friend as were all the descendants of that kingly race.

Now Wessex ran a hand through his hair, restoring it to as much order as the current mode called for. He gazed down at the bosom of his impeccable linen nightshirt as if he could not precisely recall to mind the occasion upon which he had purchased such a garment, and then turned his regard upon his valet with a levelness that was in itself accusatory.

"Will Your Grace take tea or chocolate this morning?" Atheling asked austerely. Wessex winced.

"My Grace will take an explanation of the crise de coeur that causes you, my good Atheling, to cry the view halloo through my bedchamber before two of the afternoon." An unpleasant possibility took strong possession of His Grace. "I was not promised to anyone this morning, was I?"

"Indeed not, Your Grace; as Your Grace has often instructed me, I am to take measures to restrain Your Grace from engaging himself to any party commencing before the late afternoon. I shall heat the shaving water at once, as Your Grace will wish to peruse the morning's post before breakfast."

His objective achieved, Atheling retreated from the chamber. Unsatisfied curiosity finished the task of bringing the young Duke to full wakefulness. Now what could have come in the post to warrant this display of amateur theatrics on Atheling's part? Wessex wondered.

Before Wessex could arrive at any particular conclusion, Atheling returned to the room with a basin and a can of hot water, the case containing His Grace's razors tucked beneath one arm.

Wessex swung his long legs out of bed and reached for the dressing-gown laid ready to hand upon the chair. He shrugged himself into it. Through the open door to the dressing room, a pier-glass caught slivered and angled impressions of the tall blond man with the swordblade face.

Atheling set the basin down upon the battered oak sideboard and placed the can beside it. He ladled a stoup of the water into a small bowl ready to hand, then labored soap and brush until the bowl was filled with stiff lather. When that was ready, Atheling poured the contents of the can into the waiting basin. Steam began to rise in opaque spirals, covering the mirror behind in a brief mist.

"If Your Grace will--"

"My Grace will not, Atheling. As you know." Wessex opened the case and picked up the razors.

#

It was a continuing affront to Atheling's sense of fitness that his charge continued to insist upon shaving himself. All Atheling's pleas upon the subject were in vain; merely causing His Grace to assure Atheling that Wessex dared not become used to Atheling's ministrations, lest he lose the barbering knack entirely and be thus forced to present himself at foreign courts unshaven.

Atheling believed none of this. He believed, merely, that His Grace was obstinate, as His Grace's father had been before him. On the other hand, such obstinacy was a character trait in which Atheling took secret pride, as only a most superior manservant could manage such a stubborn man.

#

When at last Wessex presented to his mirror and the world a clean-shaven countenance, he entered his dressing-room, where Atheling stood ready to assist him with such details of dressing as the rigging-out of a gentleman of fashion required.

The morning post, as yet, was nowhere to be seen. That, Wessex knew, would come with breakfast, and God help any man who attempted to remove things from what Atheling conceived to be their proper order.

So be it. His Grace turned to matters of dress.

Contemplating an afternoon trot through Green Park and an evening spent in company exclusively male, Wessex approved white doeskin inexpressibles and high-top oxblood Hessians with bullion tassels, the latter an exquisite product of Hoby's workroom. A shirt of dazzling white lawn, moderately pleated and ruffled, was eclipsed by a waistcoat of pale yellow Egyptian linen ornamented with buttons of Russian enamelwork that glimmered russet and scarlet against their demure backdrop. The cravat was a matter of some concern, but His Grace favored a simple style and achieved it upon the first attempt.

Atheling cast an inquiring glance toward the repository of His Grace's coats, only to be warned off with a small shake of the head. His Grace would select his other accessories first.

Reaching behind the frame of a picture to extract the concealed key -- placed there more to foil sneak-thieves and overcurious visitors than to inconvenience his valet -- Wessex unlocked and then pulled out the topmost of three shallow drawers that occupied the top of the cabinet. He regarded the contents of the specially-constructed niches lined in oyster glove-suede with the disinterest of long familiarity.

Here was the ducal signet -- and here an exact copy, whose stone pivoted to reveal a device that very few in the realm were privileged to carry.

Wessex took up the second ring and rotated the stone with the ball of his thumb. The carnelian cut with the ornate arms of the dukedom lifted up and out on an armature that had seemed, moments before, to be the rim of the bezel, and, under Wessex's control, spun to reveal its obverse.

In precise, exquisite enamelwork, an oak tree in summer foliage glowed against a silvery field. At its foot, a unicorn slept, its head upon the ground. In the branches, a crown in glory burned. Boscobel -- the King's Oak.

And a symbol of loyalties that might at any moment be divided.

What Wessex did, what he had done in France, had been done at the behest of his masters in The Order of the White Tower. Half a club of the most exclusive, half an order of chivalry sprung full-flowered from a most unlikely century, the Order of the White Tower, founded by Charles the Third, was King Henry's official clandestine organization, dedicated to gathering the information to keep the peace in Europe and England free of Continental entanglements. The Order was only a slight formalization of the espionage network that Lord Walsingham had run in Gloriana's time, and that ever since had served to defend England from her enemies. Of this group Wessex was a member, by induction and formal oath.

But beyond the Order of the White Tower lay another company, formed by Charles the Second upon his Restoration and loyal, not to England. . .

But to her Monarch.

Its founder had seen his father executed by those for whom he ruled, had himself spent long years of penurious exile in all the courts of Europe while his birthright suffered beneath Cromwell's iron heel. When he had come into his own again he had been balked at every turn by Lords and Commons determined that the Crown of England would dance to their piping, and not they to that of any King.

And so Charles Stuart had danced, smiling and bowing and keeping his tongue behind his teeth as he painstakingly forged the sword to defend England against herself at need. The Boscobel League: Twelve men and one woman, never more and never less -- each new member chosen by

his predecessor and approved by the Crown. Drawn from the highest and lowest in the land, loyal to King -- or Queen -- before Country.

It was by the decree of their founder that their numbers should not be greater, that they should be funded from the Privy Purse directly, that each ruler, upon his accession, should be given one chance, and one chance only, to disband them. Five kings had not. And the sword remained sheathed.

Thus far.

For now, the bonds of one duty did not pull Wessex in a different direction from the next. Service to the Nation was still service to the King, and in his infrequent resorts to prayer, Wessex hoped that would never change. But the duty was still there. The tower and the oak.

Wessex replaced the sigil within the drawer, beside another ring, rather more obvious than he was wont to wear, whose carven amethyst slid aside to free a sleeping powder from its loaded compartment. But the trompe l'oeil mysteries of the cabinet did not end with these. There were others:

A pocket watch that, in addition to telling time, could end time for some -- it was a single-shot pistol to those who knew its secret.

A fan whose sticks and carven end-pieces were weighted lead, heavy enough to bludgeon a man into unconsciousness.

A snuffbox that, when inner tray had been removed and secret lid lowered, could function as a heliograph.

Another watch, whose secret this time was a compass and market measuring-line.

Expensive and curious toys; some merely inventive. . .

Some deadly.

All gained through his allegiance to the White Tower.

But such allegiance had its price. Almost against his will Wessex reached out and selected a quizzing-glass from the half-dozen nested in the drawer. It was of enameled gold; the twining ivy on the shaft concealed a small button. . .

It held the silken cord with which he had murdered Grillo.

Because it so revolted him, Wessex forced himself to fondle the exquisite little device. It had not been meant to serve as a Thuggee's cord, but now it had, and would be forever associated in his mind with murder.

Extremism in the defense of Liberty is no vice. The watchword of the Red Jacks came back to haunt him. If they were privileged to kill for their masters, what truly made him any different? Any better?

With controlled precision Wessex replaced the quizzing-glass in its place, and selected with quick decision a watch, a fob, a dangling seal, and a small gold cravat pin, all of which were no more than what they seemed to be. He then slipped the original of the ducal signet upon his finger and closed the shallow drawer with finality.

The choosing of a deep-pocketed coat of claret-colored superfine was almost an anticlimax, and indeed, Wessex regarded it only slightly. His sojourn with the Army had made him perhaps more cavalier about such matters of tonnish importance than his fellows.

Wessex turned a bleak eye upon the cabinet with its myriad niches, and for a brief fervent moment wished he were back with his men -- fleas, bad water, chilblains, and all.

Captain His Grace the Duke was a captain in the Eleventh Hussars -- the Cherubims -- which was currently with General Wellesley doing what they might to render Napoleon's possession of Europe a matter of doubt. Wessex himself fought a very different war, his captaincy almost a formality; a liveried carte blanche that provided him the conge to some of the circles in which he must move. A rich Duke -- such as Wessex was -- might have sought higher rank, but a colonelcy would carry with it responsibilities which Wessex did not have the leisure to discharge. A captaincy was sufficient. It allowed him, among other things, to approach the King upon Army matters without particular notice from the Home Office myrmidons, something that must never be.

A discreet clearing of the throat called His Grace back to himself.

"Breakfast, one supposes," said Wessex. "And the breakfast post at last."

#

His Grace was not, customarily, a strong believer in breakfast, and if he had been he would certainly have, on this occasion at least, allowed it to wait upon the post.

With a strong cup of bitter chocolate at his elbow, and the prospect of buttered muffins in the not too distant future, His Grace turned to the contents of the heaped silver salver with the keen interest of a hound on the scent.

The topmost letter, on lilac vellum insistently redolent of a lily-scent bordering upon the funereal, Wessex tossed unopened into the fire of sea-coals burning on the grate. He felt no compunction about doing this; Ivah only wrote to ask for money, and Wessex felt he had already subsidized her pleasures liberally enough. God knew a liaison with a woman of his own class was unthinkable, but there were limits. Mrs. Archer was a good deal coarser than she had originally appeared to be in the social circles where she and Wessex had first met.

Wessex frowned over the matter momentarily, and then dismissed it. A parting gift, an intimation that the acquaintance would not bear furthering, would end the connection. His mind was already elsewhere as he turned to the next items.

Bills: from Tattersall's and Weston's, Asprey's and Talmadge's; from his cellarer, his tobacconist, his glovemaker. Wessex put them all aside, to be settled punctually at the quarter-day. The Duke of Wessex had an un-aristocratic punctuality about settling his debts. It would, Wessex had always reasoned, be one less thing to trouble his heir.

Although if Wessex died without issue, the heir to Wessex's goods and lands -- such as they would be -- would also be untroubled by the ducal coronet: the creation was entirely explicit that the title might descend only through the direct line. Only the Earldom would continue, and the new Earl of Scathach would hardly mourn the omission of Ducal honors; the Earldom was both old and rich. The family seat, Greyangels, was nestled in the wild and beautiful Cheviot Hills, and his cousin and heir presumptive was already installed there by Wessex's own wish, not to be dislodged even if Wessex did manage to produce an heir to the dukedom.

Wessex shook his head at the unwonted direction of his train of thought. There was something about wakening at odd hours that drove a man's mind to freakish fancies. He had long since determined that Dukedom would end with him.

Now what was in this pile of paper that had so maddened Atheling?

Ruthlessly Wessex drove through the rest: cards of invitation to parties certain to be deadly dull; two thick bundles of letter that had come by hand after faring far in diplomatic pouches--

Ah. This was it. A faint sunny odor of orange blossom clung to the paper, just as it did to her clothes.

She did not write often, this remarkable woman who had been the center of Wessex's whole existence after his mother had died. When his unique gifts had called him to a wider stage, they had agreed that letters were very nearly pointless; he could not, for safety's sake, tell her how he spent his days, and the circumscribed sphere in which she still moved would seem merely petty to him after his worldly journeyings.

Instead, they chose to hold their feeling for one another a thing apart; not to be buried in exchanges freighted with the minutiae of daily life, but to be savored on the rare occasions when they could be companionably together, as they had been before his father had followed his mother into Hades' chill kingdom.

Wessex paused on the verge of tearing open the letter from his grandmother.

Why should she write him here?

He had not been to Wessex House for Christmas; he had, in fact, been peculiarly elsewhere for Christmas. It was not their custom to announce their comings and goings to one another; in fact,

though heading of this billet placed her in Town, until this moment he had possessed every reason to suppose the Dowager Duchess in Bath, as was her unvarying custom during the winter months.

In turn, it ought to have been impossible for her to direct a letter to his Albany rooms with any degree of certainty that he would receive it; Wessex had returned to Town four weeks ago, in the bleak drizzle-tail of an English winter, and if he had made no secret of his presence, he had hardly published it in the Gazette, either.

Interesting. Interesting enough for Atheling to awaken him. Wessex tore open the packet from the Dowager Duchess of Wessex and read his grandmother's letter carefully. His faint inquiring frown became a black glare of puzzlement and then stupefied horror he read the brief missive; first once, then twice.

The Dowager required his presence Thursday, at half-past two of the clock, for tea. There was no explanation for the request, extraordinary in its uniqueness, simply the unadorned summons.

And the Thursday she required him for was today.

"Atheling!" A spasm of sheer panic took momentary possession of His Grace. He rose to his feet, all thought of breakfast banished.

The manservant, still swaddled in the apron he donned to perform the more domestic of his duties, appeared in an instant.

"I have been mistaken," His Grace said austerely. "The coat will not suit. And I shall not be riding today."

#