



THE TUTOR

a novel

ANDREA CHAPIN

“A sumptuous, page-turning account of William Shakespeare’s
muse in 1590s England. I was completely captivated.”

—PAULA MCLAIN, bestselling author of *The Paris Wife*

THE

Tutor



ANDREA CHAPIN

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Version_1

*Saint Cathern favours learned men, and gives them wisdom hie:
And teacheth to resolve the doubtles, and always giveth ayde,
Unto the scolding Sophister, to make his reason stayde.*

—Thomas Naogeorgus, *The Popish Kingdome*, translated from the Latin by Barnabe Googe, 1570



*. . . for there is an upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his Tygers hart wrapt in
a Players hyde, supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blanke verse as the best of you:
and being an absolute Johannes fac totum, is in his owne conceit the onely Shake-scene in a
countrey.*

—Robert Greene, *Greene's Groats-worth of Witte, Bought with a Million of Repentance*, 1592

*For
David, Brandon and Carden*

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LANCASHIRE, ENGLAND, 1590



lies were at him, but the larger animals hadn't gotten there yet. Richard and his men were out hawking when they found the poor priest next to a clump of gorse. If he'd fallen victim to robbers, they were scared off, for the blood-smeared purse he clutched was swollen with gold. Field and vale, even the bosky banks of the river, were parched and rattling from weeks without rain. And now, word of the deed spread through the estate as quickly and willfully as a torch to dry scrub.

Mercy came running, eyes wide, fresh milk spilling from her pails. She tried to curtsy.

"Speak," said Katharine. She held a basket of herbs and had just cut a sprig of thyme with her thumbnail.

"His throat is slit, my lady," the dairymaid said, looking down at her milk-wet wooden shoes.

"Whose?"

"The sad fellow . . ." Mercy's raspy voice sounded older than her years. Her russet hair was plastered to her sunburnt forehead. "Who learnt the lads yonder," she said, cocking her head in the direction of what used to be the family chapel but was now the schoolhouse.

"Master Daulton?"

Mercy nodded. "He's on a plank behind the kitchens," she said, then added, "Stabbed in the heart, too."

If Mercy knew that Father Daulton was a priest, she was not letting on. That was the protocol at Lufanwal Hall. He was Master Daulton to the outside world and Father Daulton to the family.

By the time Katharine reached the courtyard, the men had covered his corpse with a cloth. She knelt, made the sign of the cross and placed the herbs she had gathered on the body. It was the fifteenth of August, Assumption Day. In the past, these sweet bundles of nature would have been blessed by a priest and then used as remedies and to ward off harm. But the blessing of the herbs and the feast to celebrate the Virgin's ascension had been banned.

Richard approached on horseback. In spite of the heat, he wore a black cloak flecked with dirt. When he saw his cousin he frowned. "Nothing you need to see," he said, dismounting.

"I came to pay my respects," Katharine countered, still kneeling.

"Don't worry, we'll give him a proper funeral," he said, stalking into the house through the kitchen and knocking into one of the scullery maids. A pot crashed to the floor.

Father Daulton had left that morning dressed as a schoolmaster in a white cambric shirt, black line jerkin and large black-rimmed hat. He had said he would be gone less than a fortnight. He did not say

where he was going, and Katharine had not asked, thinking perhaps he was on a mission for the Jesuits. While she'd watched him set out on his journey, she had prayed for his safety. Now she wished that weeks ago the young man with the chiseled chin had burned the forbidden chasuble and fled—that he'd gone to France, Italy, Spain or the Low Countries on the North Sea. He often said he wanted to live where he could hear the waves, breathe the salt air, and she'd taken to imagining him in his life after Lufanwal, alone, reading, in a whitewashed cottage by the sea.

Katharine was tempted to pull the cloth back and place her lips on his forehead, but she'd seen too much death over the years, and she wanted to remember Father Daulton alive, not as he was now: a reliquary of bones and rotting flesh. She pushed herself up, wiped the tears from her eyes and brushed the dust from her skirt. On his last evening, the young priest had given her a copy of the New Testament in English, translated by a group of exiled priests. The inscription was in Latin . . . *date et dabitur vobis* . . . give and it shall be given unto you . . . *Dei gratia* . . . by the grace of God . . . *amicus usque ad aras* . . . a friend until the altars, until death; and below those words he had signed his name. Then as a postscript he had added, *Deus nobiscum, quis contra?* God is with us, who can be against us?

Who indeed? Katharine thought as she walked toward the house.

The priest sent by the Molyneux family had skin so pale that Katharine wondered if he was a visitation from the great beyond. In the dim light of the secret chapel his face was translucent, a stain of blue beneath the white. He was tall but frail—the space between skin and bone hid no fat—and he seemed no wider than the flickering taper next to which he stooped. His chasuble dripped from his arms like wax. “*Domine, Jesu Christe, Rex gloriae . . .*”

Katharine recalled how Father Daulton believed the hidden chapel was a triumph, a symbol of their resistance. The entrance looked like a grand fireplace and was constructed between the great hall and stairway to the second floor. The cross, the altar cloth, the altarpiece, the missal and the chalice had been brought from the old chapel. A large painting of the Virgin Mary with John the Baptist, Michael the Archangel and the Saints Anthony and Paul hung on the sidewall. In truth, Katharine had never liked this inner chamber, for the narrow walls and want of windows made it feel cramped and confining.

Only the De L'Isle family, their steward Quib, the chief usher, Sir Edward's valet, Lady de L'Isle's gentlewoman and a boy from the kitchens were present at the requiem. Father Daulton's head faced the altar; the tapers' yellow flames outlined his bier. The shroud had been tied at the head and the feet by the women who had bathed the body. The scullery boy with knuckles red and raw had been hastily pressed into service. Fear filled his eyes as he swung the incense pot: the heady smell of spice cloaked the scent of white roses strewn upon the wood floor.

Lord Molyneux's priest had arrived disguised as a groom. No servant had walked through the estate that morning ringing a bell to call the mourners to mass, nor had the bell tower in the old chapel tolled before the service—both rituals were stamped out when the reformers took hold. The preparations for the mass had been furtive. The family had filed into the chamber in silence.

The borrowed priest's solemn prayers hovered with the haze of incense above Father Daulton's shroud. Katharine watched the purple clouds lift into the air and evaporate.

When Katharine was ten and her daub-and-timber house burned to the ground, she tumbled awake to black smoke forcing its way through the walls and wild flames darting through the floorboards like knives. She didn't try to find her little sister, her brother or her parents. She tried to find a window. She tried to find a door. After stepping off the stairs, she turned to see the whole staircase collapse behind her—it was then she heard her mother call. She didn't stop. Outside, before rolling down the frozen hillside, she smelled her own flesh burning.

The fire was in 1569—the eleventh year of Elizabeth’s reign—a few weeks after the Northern Rebellion when the earls of Northumberland and Westmorland tried in vain to rescue their faith. The times for Catholics turned sharply for the worse after the uprising. No mass was held for Katharine’s family. Trust was thin, fear thick and worry constant that at any moment servants might betray their masters. Now, one and twenty years later, their church was still condemned, and the torture and slayings continued.

Father Daulton had described the horrors fellow seminarians—charged with high treason for refusing to take the Oath of Supremacy or for allegedly plotting the queen’s death—endured at the hands of Her Majesty’s interrogators: rackings, whippings and mutilations, being shackled to the wall for hours on end. The tortured were lucky if they could ever walk again. Father Daulton had recounted a friend’s plight, where after the rack the priest’s hands and feet were numb—he could not rise. When he could finally hold bread, he looked akin to an ape, for he had to use both hands to eat. And those were the poor priests who lived to tell their tales. Others were burned at the stake or hanged, drawn and quartered, with their dismembered remains fixed atop poles on the major roads for all the world to see.

Since the discovery of Father Daulton’s body, Sir Edward had held meetings behind closed doors with his older sons, Richard and Harold, other relatives and various Lancastrian lords. Edward’s wife Matilda, looked hard at everyone; Lady de L’Isle had never been a woman of warmth, Katharine could count on one hand the number of times her aunt had smiled, but now her large blue eyes were edged with worry. Was it the young priest’s murder? Or the scorched wheat, barley and rye? Or was it that their son Ned, dear, sweet Ned, was somewhere in Italy, drinking too much wine and spending every coin he wrapped his beautiful, slender fingers around?

“*Dies irae, dies illa,*” the priest pleaded, day of wrath, day of mourning, “*solvet saeculum in favilla*” . . . day the world will dissolve in ashes. What sorrow was this, what sadness, what sins? In the Bible, in Zephaniah, *dies irae* was a day of whirlwinds, calamity, darkness, distress and misery. What would this deadly battle between the churches bring? Day of wrath or day of judgment? Or would it beget the end of the world? This sickness, this canker King Henry had passed on to his heirs was now eating the flesh of his people.

Sir Edward, Matilda, their daughter Isabel and Matilda’s mother, Priscilla, were closest to the bier—their married daughter, Grace, lived too far north to journey for this day. Behind Edward were Richard and Harold, his sons by his first wife. Richard stared ahead, his brows knit, his jaw hard. At one point he turned and spat on the floor. His blond wife, Ursula, waved her fan while staring up at the ceiling, then occupied her time by changing the many rings around on her fingers. Her eldest daughter Joan, tried to keep the three younger children quiet.

Harold, whose mother died giving birth to him, had red hair and freckles that spoke of Scottish blood. His left arm was smaller than his right, and he often hid his hand by resting it on a dagger in his belt. Harold’s wife Mary’s dark hair was neatly coiffed and her somber attire without satin or lace. She was no beauty, but she was perhaps the most pious member of the household after Sir Edward. Katharine sat next to their two sons. The trusted household servants stood in the back.

When Katharine first came to Lufanwal, Matilda barely spoke to her, and Sir Edward’s two oldest sons completely ignored her. As time progressed, Katharine never penetrated those particular fortresses, but she made loving inroads with Edward’s younger children, Grace, Ned and Isabel. Her cousin Ned was the special one. As children they had created imaginary worlds with long and ever-changing stories of adventure; they would play knights and ladies, whose bravery and cunning helped them survive tempests and plagues, cruel kings and dragons. With Katharine’s own family gone, Ned had seemed a gift from heaven, and she cherished him. But Ned had been away from Lufanwal for seven long years.

“*De profundis clamavi ad te, Domine,*” the mourners recited. Out of the depths I have cried unto Thee, O Lord. “*Domine, exaudi vocem meam.*” Lord, hear my voice . . .

A black bird swooped down, darting above the heads of the mourners. Katharine soon realized it was not a bird but a bat with winged limbs opening for height, then closing as it dove. As the priest groaned on with the mass, Katharine watched the flying creature. Its movements were sharp and erratic. At one point it dropped quickly and she could see its bared teeth. Finally, it disappeared into crevice in the rafters.

“*Non intres in iudicium cum servo tuo,*” chanted the priest. Enter not into judgment of thy servant . . .

Katharine could not concentrate on the rest of the mass. She shut her eyes and tried to focus on the *Pater noster*, but saw the grinning bat instead, with wings spread and claws sharp and ready.

Katharine did not go down to supper that evening. Wishing solitude for her sorrow rather than company, she slipped out the door and strolled through the rose garden and past the ivy wall to the orchard. The lack of rain had dwarfed the apples, turned their skins a mottled brown. Many had fallen to the ground. As she stood under an apple tree, breathing in the savory scent, she remembered a moment with her father on a warm autumn day. She was a girl dancing, twirling round, and he said, “Kate, I fear for the man who marries you, for you are a horse that will never be tamed.”

Her father could have said *filly*, but he had chosen the word *horse*, a grown animal, solid and not necessarily feminine. Had she now—at one and thirty years—been tamed? Not by a husband, surely, for he had died too soon. By what, then? Time? Loss? Loneliness? The books she read? The plodding of the days? She ate well and slept comfortably most nights, and her tiffs and annoyances with the women at the hall were petty, not painful; she never let them ruffle her for long. People visited and reports arrived from contacts at court and abroad, but most days were little affected by the queen and her constant wars—though the grisly discovery of Father Daulton could prove that was changing.

For the five years Mary Tudor had ruled, with much torture and bloodshed, she’d brought back priests, inquisitors and the Church of Rome. When her half-sister Elizabeth became queen, she returned the country to Protestantism. Elizabeth had reigned for more than thirty years since, and at every instance pressed on with her father’s battle against the foreign Pope.

Katharine walked through the orchard to a path that wound behind the house to the old chapel. The old chapel had two doors: one that opened to the path she was on and another that led internally to the great hall. When open worship became impossible, her grandfather had built the hidden chapel and converted the old chapel to a schoolhouse. The wall paintings of Saint George, the dragon, the princess, the king and queen, two images of the Virgin Mary, and several saints were whitewashed, and the old papistical books, the chest full of vestments, damask copes and tapestries, and all the other relics of the family’s long bond with the Roman Catholic Church, were removed. Even stripped of its finery, the old chapel still felt holy, and Katharine was comforted every time she entered.

She already missed Father Daulton. He was quiet, but they had taken long walks and sat peacefully reading in front of the fire. When he did speak, he’d chosen his words carefully. As Katharine stood on the threshold of the old chapel now, she thought of how the young priest had been a good man and a brave man, and he deserved to be remembered as such. These were not times for the tame or the meeple. Her father’s words from long ago rushed back to her again, and she said them out loud as she pushed the door open.

The chancel and the stained glass from the old chapel still remained, and in the early evening the windows caught the light in a maze of ruby, sapphire, emerald and topaz. Katharine had the urge to genuflect and started to walk down the aisle, but stopped. A man was laid out on the long wooden

table in the center of the room. The colors shining through the windows glittered across his body like scattered gems. She moved closer. Another corpse? She leaned over the man and peered into his face—at the same moment his eyes opened wide. She gasped and pulled away.

“A horse that will never be tamed,” he said. “Did you speak those words just now?”

The young man rose up, swung his feet over the side of the table and sat staring at her. His green eyes gleamed with an unnatural light.

“I pray I didn’t frighten you,” he said, pushing himself off the table. He did not move toward her.

“I expected no one here,” she said.

There was silence—save the chorus of crickets outside in the dry brush.

“I was startled,” she continued, focusing on the table now empty behind him. “I thought you might be . . .” she began.

“Asleep?”

“Dead,” she said. “Were you . . .”

“Dead?” he asked.

“No, asleep?”

“No. I was thinking.”

“I see,” she said, standing, not looking him in the eyes. “Good. Sorry to disturb—”

“Was that you, then? Shouting about the horse?” he asked.

Katharine tried to place his station by the cut of his cloth: his doublet traced the line of his broad shoulders, but the fabric was coarse and the stitching not particularly fine. Her eyes traveled from his boots, which were rather worn, up the hose and shape of his legs, and from his breeches back to his doublet.

“I was not shouting,” she said.

“I was lying here in the quiet when those words came galloping at me from somewhere. I do think was your voice.”

“I . . .”

“So tell me about this fine horse. This *Equus caballus*. Was it a courser? A stallion? A charger? A scudding steed?”

“My good sir, I . . .”

“A stud.”

“No,” she said.

His gaze was fastened upon her.

“Me,” she said.

“You.”

“My father said it of me ages past.” She regretted this confession the minute the words flew from her mouth.

“You frown,” he said. “But come, ’tis a compliment. Cannot be tamed. No iron bit ’tween your teeth.”

“Pray, sir, do you know me?”

“Aye. You leap, you neigh, you bound, you care not for curb nor pricking spur.” He paused. “Round-hoofed, sure-jointed, broad breast . . .” He began to walk round her, his hand on his chin, gathering her, appraising. “Legs—I imagine—are passing strong, round buttocks, tender hide, thick chestnut mane, crest rising, slender head . . .” He was standing in front of her. “Wondrous eyes, aquiline nose, dimples . . .”

“I crave your pardon . . .”

“Ruby lips.”

“Who *are* you?” she asked.

“A horse trader,” he said.

“From?”

“Warwickshire.”

In a flash, equal to a few breaths in and out, she felt the contest, but she had lost the round, turned soft when she should have stayed strong. An odd feeling swept over her swiftly and without warning, like the onset of a fever. She glared at the stranger, then sucked in her courage, walked past the danger, and, indeed, as a horse breaking free from a stable, she burst out of the old chapel into what was now night.



Mr Edward sat in the library. He was holding a book, but his focus was elsewhere; he was staring at a moth circling the flame of an oil lamp on the table before him.

“May I come in?” Katharine asked from the door.

“Dear Kate, I would treasure it.”

Her uncle was not a man to boast, except when it came to his books. The walls of his favorite room were lined with many volumes, and as far as the family knew he had the largest library in the north. New books arrived weekly from the bookstalls at St. Paul’s churchyard in London, and new shelves were added every year. What would happen when the shelves reached the ceiling? Katharine wondered. Where would Edward put his books then? It was in this room, when she was a child fresh from the loss of her own family, that her uncle taught her to read and to write English, then Latin and Greek. He had found her one morning surrounded by his beautiful leather-bound books. She had pulled the books off the shelves and was looking through them—before she could even read a word on their pages.

Edward did not scold her, nor did he make her put the books back, but he sat down on the floor with her, picked up his prized volume of Chaucer and started to read “The Knight’s Tale” to her. Katharine remembered listening to the story and the powerful authority with which the strange words issued from her uncle’s mouth. Her own father had never read to her, so this listening was new.

Lufanwal Hall had been altered several times over the centuries. When Katharine’s grandfather expanded the old Norman manor, he built the library that her uncle Edward turned into a magnificent book-filled sanctuary. The white plaster ceiling was festooned with patterns of honeysuckle and vine that echoed the frieze around the oak-paneled walls. Two tapestries framed the carved alabaster chimneypiece: one depicted the suicide of Lucrece, and the other, smuggled from a doomed monastery by old Father de La Bruyère—who had tended to the family before Father Daulton—showed the winged and feathered Saint Michael, his sword raised, weighing a departed soul, while the Virgin Mary, in crown and golden halo, placed her rosary on the soul’s side of the scales in an attempt to save it.

Katharine sat across from her uncle, put her elbows on the table, cupped her face in her hands, and watched him gaze at the moth.

“It will burn its wings,” he said finally, “and our sport will come to an end.” He looked over at her. “You look five years of age.”

“The light does not serve you, Uncle. The lamp needs a new wick. And you scarce knew me when I was five.”

“You still hold the curiosity of a child. You keep the rest of us young, my sweet Kate, or at least from remembering we are ancient.”

Edward’s straight blond hair had gone white in the last years, and his once-fair cheeks were stained red, but his azure eyes were still spirited and bright.

“You are kind,” Katharine said. She didn’t confess she felt her youth had gone stale. “I met a curious fellow last night in the old chapel. He claimed he dealt in horses.”

“I’ve exchanged no gold for horses this fortnight,” said Edward.

“He was lying on the table and did comport himself in an odd and familiar manner.”

“I’ll speak to Quib. Let us pray he knows of this stranger’s business. We are not safe, Kate, we may never be.” Edward was quiet for a moment and then said, “Did you know Father Daulton well? I saw you sitting in the gardens with him, at other times walking.”

“He found solace, I believe, in my company,” she said.

“I never warmed to Father Daulton. He rarely broke bread with us. I suppose my allegiance stuck with De La Bruyère. Thank the Lord it was nature that took De La Bruyère from us.”

Old Father de La Bruyère had been caught in another time. He had come from the abbey at Furness when King Henry dispatched the monasteries. Katharine remembered the old priest sitting with his wine, shaking his white head and sighing over the dashed dreams of Queen Mary’s reign. “All too brief,” he’d mumble wearily. “All too brief.”

“Father Daulton was not a man of flattery or false words,” Katharine offered. “It was a struggle for him to say his thoughts. He found it easier to speak the word of God.”

“Indeed, he seemed a solemn fellow.”

“One time he tried to make a joke, but the words hung together all wrong—like an ill-fitting doublet. I tried to make him laugh. It was a task.”

“If any person could bring a stone to life, it would be you.”

Katharine was caught by Edward’s wistful tone and looked closely at him. He seemed to talk of one thing while his mind pursued another path.

“A shame to think laughter such a rare commodity,” he said. “Let us hope, before the hardness too hold, this man of the cloth knew how to make merry.” He paused, then added, “Methinks, my dear Kate, our young priest was in love with you.”

“No,” she said.

“Yes,” he said simply.

She’d never thought of that before.

“One would have to be blind to miss the way his dark eyes fixed on you.”

“I assumed his intensity was religious, not amorous.”

“He would never have said anything.”

Katharine thought of the Bible Father Daulton had given to her.

“Whatever the direction of his heart,” Edward continued, “he was a noble soul.”

They were silent.

“Kate, why have you never married again?”

Katharine was not expecting this. Sir Edward was her father’s older brother, and when she came to the hall as a child after the fire, her grandfather was still alive and lived at Lufanwal as well. At eighteen she had married Thomas Hightower, who died two years after they wed. He was thrice her age, the second son of the Earl of Danby and a widower, and his wealth and property went to his sons who were older than Katharine. After Thomas’s death, she had returned to Lufanwal and lived there ever since. Why had she never married again? Edward’s question seemed a labyrinth with each path blocked and no apparent exit.

“I have a million reasons but no good answer,” she tried.

“Lend me one,” he said.

“I am set in my ways.”

“Another.”

“I am a widow with a meager dowry.”

"I promised I would augment it."

"No man I've met is cunning enough or . . ."

Sir Edward waited for her to continue.

"Has adequate wit."

"True cunning takes time to measure, and wit is dangerous when it masks the soul."

"I haven't met a man who reads . . . as much as you do."

"I've spoiled you rotten with the honey'd words of others."

"'Tis true. I live too much in the tales by men who write of war, fairies and romance. You've ruined me."

"Reading, my sweet Kate, is no replacement for living."

She narrowed her eyes and pretended to frown, then said, "I have your answer, dear uncle!"

"Speak."

"There is no man equal to you, my lord, no man even close, and I'd rather stay sans husband than have to leave you."

He chuckled, then reached over and patted her hand. "Did Father Daulton talk of his family, Kate?"

"I learned not to ask him too many questions. Much was locked inside. He seemed to take comfort in knowing I was an orphan, and I came to believe he was an orphan, too. Perhaps the plague took his family. He mentioned study abroad at the Catholic colleges in Douai and then Rheims. I gathered he was one of the students who helped the priests with the translation of the English Bible. He moved on to Rome and became a Jesuit. He was clearly English, but he mentioned a Spanish grandmother, never a mother. He spoke of his desire to live in a cottage by the sea, but I don't believe he had ever lived by the sea. He knew his profession put his life in danger. He accepted that possibility."

"There was pain in the young priest. I regret I did not take the time nor make the effort to open him up a bit," Edward said, "help him with that which he kept hidden."

Edward was usually precise with language—his mind one step ahead of his words. But tonight Katharine noticed he was circling something but couldn't quite get at it. She was distracted by this tension but mesmerized by the moth, for now she, too, couldn't pull her eyes from the flutter of its gray velvet wings.

"The Tudors have opened a Pandora's box that will never be shut," Edward said, rising from his chair and walking to the open window. He was wearing his favorite robe, gold and red brocade, fraying at the hem, and a simple white linen shirt and black breeches. Age had not diminished his presence. He still had an athletic build and sat a horse well.

"I was served with the Oath of Supremacy. I refused to sign, and now this blood on my doorstep." He gazed out the window. A bullfrog's gloomy horn heralded from the brittle reeds below.

"But you are no priest," Katharine said, looking up from the flame.

Edward turned to her. "No, but my coffers are full. In spite of what the queen has stripped from me in spite of the land I've had to sell to pay preposterous fines for my religion, I still have quarries, forests crowded with timber, fields of plantings and hills rich in minerals. I still have my turf, and I still have my faith. She needs what I have. She imprisoned me for a year and could not keep me, and when the Mary business was on, I am sure the queen was convinced our northern geography meant we had a hand in that poor Scottish queen's conspiracies. If Her Majesty or her spymaster Walsingham could have pinned any of that on me, they would have seized the chance."

"Sir Edward, I must caution . . ." Katharine rose quickly, shut the door, and sat down again.

"My own servants? Spies? Oh, Kate, I am too old for this. Our queen wishes me as barren in land as she is in babes. And now rumors of another Spanish-led armada against our shores feed the queen's flame anew and bring trouble to our door. I've never cared for life at court. I have no ambition for it. I'd rather open a book than bow to a queen. I have stayed out of her way. The old virgin must need

new targets now, so she threatens me.”

“You are certain Father Daulton’s death was by her orders?”

“Why else the gift of his corpse on our land?” Edward returned to the table and sat down. “The official report is that our schoolmaster was attacked by robbers. The village doctor said his wounds were so fresh that he met his fate where he lay.”

The moth took this cue to fly into the flame, where its wings caught fire. Katharine wondered if the fiery show was a sign from the dead priest—his soul finally released to heaven. The moth struggled, fell into the oil, slowed its movements and then sank to the bottom.

“We are all Icarus,” Edward said wearily, staring at the oil-entombed creature.

“I shudder to think the ill-mannered stranger I met last night was connected to this gruesome deed.”

“The murderer lodging here? This tale tears further at our house. I’ll send my men to search the grounds.”

“He’s gone by now, I imagine,” Katharine said. “Perchance he was a traveler, a wanderer, seeking shelter for the night, whose nimble words did mollify the men at the gates.”

“Let us hope,” said Edward. He picked up a gilt-tooled leather-bound book and showed it to her. “You speak of nimble words, my dear. Well, here is the new work by Edmund Spenser.”

“It arrived!” Katharine exclaimed.

“I could not resist,” Edward continued, “though I don’t relish the thought of lining that scoundrel’s pockets. Spenser would brand us papal-lovers and slit our throats if he had the chance.”

Katharine had heard at one of Sir Edward’s lively banquets how Spenser, the king of English poets had traded on his lyric title to take advantage of land stolen from Irish Catholics by the British Crown. He became one of the new English settlers, making his home on thousands of acres on the Munster Plantation, next to the tens of thousands of acres appropriated by the newly emigrated, Catholic-hating Sir Walter Raleigh.

She reached for the gleaming book, which Edward playfully held from her.

“This volume commences with a letter from Raleigh. ‘And all for love, and nothing for reward,’ he says. ‘All for love.’ I would like to think that is true,” said Edward.

“Oh, Uncle Edward. You miser.”

“Let me tonight, while the earth is opening beneath my feet, let me sit here awhile and read his *Faerie Queene*. I am tired of mortals.”

“Will you read to me?” she asked.

“A changing of the guard,” he said, smiling, for several days a week Katharine read to her cousins’ children. She was neither nurse nor governess, but reading was what she could offer.

“*Lege, domine,*” she said. Read, master.

She crossed her arms on the table and laid her head down. And Edward began to read.



Katharine sat on a stone bench in the orchard, mopped her brow with a kerchief and swatted at flies. “But, for the Sunbeame so sore doth us beate,” complained the sunburnt shepherd in Spenser’s *Calendar*, “Were not better, to shunne the scorching heate?” Scorching, indeed, thought Katharine. Ned had sent her an *ombrello* from Italy, but the midday hour was sultry, and the pigskin no shield for the pounding heat.

Was this unnatural summer an augury? More death? More destruction? Would the drought be followed by forty days and forty nights of rain? She plucked a gnarled apple from a low branch and pitched it at a pear tree. The day before, she’d taken the children down for a dip in the water that wound through the three-thousand-acre estate, only to discover the river had shrunk to a trickle.

As she lifted her skirts above her ankles to let in air, she heard the strumming of a lute and singing

*“When I was a bachelor
I led a merry life,
But now I am a married man
And troubled with a wife . . .”*

She rose and walked toward the music’s source. High-pitched laughter rang through the air, and cries for “another, master, another!” The old chapel door was open. Katharine paused at the threshold and peered in. None of the boys were seated at the table: their hornbooks were dormant, their quills likely dry. A stack of books lay unopened on the old pulpit. The boys had gathered round the balladeer, who was standing with one foot on a bench and a lute in his arms. Six-year-old Robert, Ursula and Richard’s youngest son, had climbed onto the table and was dancing to the hoots and hollers of his kin.

The rude fellow she’d found lying on the wooden table now tipped his head at her and smiled, but did not put down his instrument. He shoved his foot from the bench and started walking around the room, embarking on another tune.

*“If ever I marry, I’ll marry a maid:
To marry a widow I’m sore afraid;
For maids they are simple, and never will grutch,
But widows full oft, as they say, know too much.”*

He stepped this way and that in what looked like a jig.

“A maid ne’re complaineth, do what so you will;
But what you mean well, a widow takes ill;
A widow will make you a drudge and a slave,
And cost ne’ so much, she will ever go brave.”

Katharine snapped her umbrella shut and marched through the door. He bowed so low his knee almost touched the floor.

“What is this?” she demanded.

“Why, ’tis school, madam.”

“You are . . . ?”

“The new tutor.” He bowed again.

“I meant, what may I call you?”

“A rogue, a rascal. I pray not knave or a cur.”

The boys tittered.

“Your name!”

“Will Shakespeare.” He bowed once more. “We met. You tutored me on a breed of horse that can never be mounted.”

“I did nothing of the sort,” Katharine said, wondering if the steward Quib was responsible for hiring this jester, who seemed to mock her with every bow.

“Forgive me, a breed of horse that can never be broken.”

“Master Shakespeare, you dissemble. Not of the equestrian trade as you led me to believe, but a lesson-monger.” She shook her head, looking directly into his moss-colored eyes, and continued in a voice not quite her own. “Is this what the lessons are now? Pipers and fiddlers and filthies?”

“No piper here, my lady, and filthies . . . well . . .”

“These hours are for you to teach these precious young minds Latin, Greek and mathematics, not to regale them with your musical cunning.”

“The orders issued me were that these *precious* young gentlemen must sing their part sure and at first sight and be able to play the same on a viol or lute.”

“And these ditties will suffice?”

“Madam, next you’ll catalogue dancing a plague and piping a pox. Singing is a knowledge easily taught and quickly learned where there is a good master and an apt scholar. The exercise is delightful to nature and good to preserve the health of man. The better the voice, the better ’tis to honor and service God therewith. Whom God loves not, that man loves not music.”

“I see no music sheets here,” Katharine said, sounding much the sheriff, even to herself.

“’Tis here, my good Minerva.” Shakespeare tapped his temple. “When I was a child I lived music—I did not have to learn it. The barber in our town drew teeth, bound wounds, let blood, cut hair, trimmed, washed and shaved, but a lute and a cittern hung on his walls and virginals stood in the corner of his shop. Every day I went and played, while the other poor sots sat in their chairs and brayed.”

Katharine glared at him.

He seemed to be awaiting a response to his little speech and, not getting one, he paraded on. “I crave your pardon, my lady, time passes and we must launch into Latin, for if we do not, then you’ll have to sit through several rounds of ‘Hey, nonny, nonny, nonny, noes,’ and perchance even a ‘Sing willow, willow, willow.’” Shakespeare hung the lute on a peg on the whitewashed wall. “Back to the benches, you louts!”

Little Robert hopped down from the table, and Master Shakespeare picked up the leather-bound books from his pulpit-turned-lectern.

“Come, my gentle jade. Now that you have charged into my school, why not graze in the pasture of the ancients and regale us with your learning?”

Her cheeks flushed. His eyes were fixed on her: they had changed color, seemed a lighter green now, like fresh grass.

“Art thou cunning in Latin?” he asked.

Katharine nodded. The children were staring at her. She was trapped in this man’s volubility. “My good Minerva” was one thing, but “my gentle jade” was an utter insult.

Shakespeare held up a dark brown leather book, with gold tooling on the cover and down the spine.

“William Lily’s lovely *short* introduction to Latin grammar, which always seemed to me too long. *Amo, amas, amat.*” He put the book down on the pulpit without opening it, then held up another book. “*Sententiae Pueriles*. I pray, madam, you approve of this volume. No ditties here, I assure you.” He placed *Sententiae Pueriles* on top of Lily’s grammar book.

Katharine had studied both books.

“Ah, but my heart is tender for this.” He held up a book. “Ovid. Pray, my patroness of heavenly harmony, be seated.”

My patroness of heavenly harmony? From where did he pluck these words? He had a calling, surely, not as a schoolmaster but as a court fool. He riffled through the pages of a worn copy of Ovid, muttering, “We might read this. Or this. Or this. Aha, this, yes, this. ‘Pygmalion.’” He addressed his pupils: “I will read the Latin, repeat after me, then try to pen its equivalent in English. Those who are not as proficient, try a word or two you recognize.” Then he turned to Katharine: “Will you join us, my lady?”

“No, gramercy. My duties at the hall await me.”

He bowed and began: “*Quas quia Pygmalion aevum per crimen agentis . . .*”

Katharine started to leave. When he finished the fourth line, she stopped, turned and translated out loud what he’d read: “Pygmalion had witnessed the wicked ways of the women, and, disgusted by their sinful and deceitful nature . . . offended by their shameful conduct . . . their life of vice, he had forsworn all women.” She glowered at the tutor. “Ah, a lesson in the wantonness of womankind. Was this an order issued you as well, Master Shakespeare?” she asked, and, not waiting for his response, she trotted out the door.

After supper she hunted down Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* in the library. She hadn’t read “Pygmalion” in years. With two candles lit, she read the original Latin. Pygmalion takes no wife. To pass the time, he carves a maid out of ivory. His skill is so great, when he kisses the statue it seems to kiss him back. He fears that if he holds her hard, there will be bruises where his hands have been. He caresses her, whispers words of love and lavishes her with gifts. He drapes her with rich robes and gives her rings with fine gems. He hangs pearls from her ears and sets her on his couch, her head on feather cushions.

At the feast of Venus, Pygmalion prays at the goddess’s altar, and Venus hears and understands him. He has wished for a wife of flesh like his maid of ivory. A flame leaps forth from Venus’s altar three times, darting high into the air. He races home and kisses his ivory lover. Under his lips, there’s warmth. He puts his mouth to hers again and touches her breast. The ivory becomes soft, like wax beneath the sun. With his hand, he satisfies his wishes, again and again. Her pulse throbs under his thumb. He presses his mouth to the maid’s: lips on lips, she blushes, then raises her timid eyes to him.

The words warmed Katharine right down to her very loins, and she worried the tale was too lewd a conceit for young boys, with the kissing, the touching *again and again*, the hard ivory turning into pliant flesh. “Pygmalion” was surely a lesson of Eros, with all its tantalizing passion. The new tutor seemed determined to shock and to make his mark at every occasion.

By the time Katharine replaced the book on the shelf and made her way to her chamber, the grand house was dark and mostly quiet—though she could hear singing and laughter coming from down in

the buttery or maybe from out in the barns.



he hour was hot, the house hushed. Even the servants hid from the sun, staying within the cool confines of wood and stone. No pots clanged in the scullery, no dogs barked in the courtyard, even the stables were silent.

Katharine had written to Ned. She'd been careful in her letter—for it could fall into the wrong hands—saying only there had been trouble and that it had passed. After

Katharine returned to Lufanwal a widow, she and Ned were—as they had been as children—inseparable, walking, reading, laughing, lying on her bed for hours telling each other tales. When Ned left, she inured herself to his absence. The first year was the most difficult, for they were accustomed to sharing every shred of their lives, and to be unable to seek him out was indeed a bitter draught. She tried to keep a steady correspondence with him, but as time went on their letters grew farther apart. Several years earlier he had sent a sketch an Italian friend had drawn of him. She kept it framed by her bed. There was no taming Ned's beauty: it burst through the lines. Whenever she gazed at his portrait, she painted in the violet color of his eyes and the sable sheen of his thick black hair.

Katharine's room had originally been part of the keep built by her Norman ancestors: the turret used as quarters for sentries, who slept on hay. Her oak bed with four carved columns and canopy overpowered the scant space. A few centuries back, the circular walls had been paneled in wood as gloomy as the rest of the dark oak furniture—the cupboard, small table and a chair—that crowded the room. When Katharine returned to Lufanwal after her husband died, she'd tossed out the faded red and green curtains and bedcover and replaced them with muslin, canvas and bleached linen, hoping the blond cloth would brighten the room, for there was only one small window.

The ink dry, she was dripping wax when shouting, sharp and sudden, made her spill the red liquid across the paper. Quickly pressing the seal, she went to the door—left open with the hope of a breeze. She would have expected Ursula and Richard to be the players of these harsh chords, but it was not their voices that rang through the halls. The unlikely duet was Sir Edward and Lady Matilda.

Katharine stepped from her room. She had never heard her aunt and uncle raise their voices, yet she recalled all too clearly how her own parents had battled hard into the night: sometimes the walls and floors of their timber house seemed as thin as parchment. As a child, she would climb out of bed, venture to the stairs, sit on a step and listen; often her brother and sister, awakened by the clamor, came to her side. She had, those nights, put her arms around them and vowed to let no harm come to them.

As she crept toward Edward and Matilda's lodgings, she heard fragments of what they were saying: *Informers . . . a plot to kill . . . the enemy within . . . Sir Edward, Sir William and Sir Rowland Stanley. Thomas Langton charged with harboring seminary priests . . . imprisoned in the Tower . . . Oh, Edward, you mustn't, you mustn't . . . What will we do? . . . What will I do?*

Katharine was at the door of their antechamber when Edward burst out.

“Sir Edward, I . . .”

He put his hands on her shoulders, his eyes brimming with grief. “Kate, Lord Molyneux’s priest is dead, murdered with his men on their way back from our estate. His head was piked on Preston Road.”

“Dearest uncle,” Katharine began.

Edward sighed and added wearily, “’Tis a wretched world we live in.”

Katharine was searching for something of comfort to say when he turned abruptly, went back into his rooms and shut the door.



Three nights later, Katharine awoke to the sounds of horses neighing and to her uncle’s grave and commanding voice. She rose from her bed and went to the window. A group of men were on horseback, Sir Edward’s hair lucent in the moonlight. She could see his noble profile. There was urgency in the way the horses moved, nervously clattering on the stones, then thudding away on the hard earth. She watched the band of riders drop below the rise. One second they seemed a small army and then they were gone.

There was no bloodshed, yet Katharine felt the night oddly pillaged. She stayed at the window. Before the first cock crowed, when the moon was down, the stars fading into the hoary blue, she heard the raucous sound of rooks cawing. The noise grew, becoming loud and fierce, and then the rebellious birds burst forth from the rookery, swooping and plunging, steering wide, then rising into the sky. She waited for them to settle down and come back round again, but they did not. Instead, they shot out into the distance, in the same direction as Sir Edward, and then they, too, vanished. Had the rooks deserted the rookery? Never before, to Katharine’s knowledge, in the history of the De L’Isle family, had they lost their rooks. It was a disturbing sign.

The first beams of light were now climbing the rough-hewn façade, creeping into her room and warming her skin. She untied the ribbons of her smock and watched the crimson streaks kindle the sky. A thrush started singing. She was about to pull her head in, when she saw the tutor walking swiftly. When he got to the gatehouse he turned, retraced his steps, then turned again and embarked on the path anew. His mouth was moving, as if he were talking to himself. She watched him walk back and forth, again and again. At one point he tore off his doublet and threw it onto a bush. Then, after another round, he unbuttoned his blouse. His skin glistening in the morning heat, he looked more a chanting druid than a schoolmaster. When he finished whatever ritual he was enacting, he grabbed his doublet and blouse and disappeared from view. Katharine pulled the window shut and knelt down to pray.



Her cousin Richard called a meeting in the great hall. The darkness blinded Katharine when she came in from the sun-baked gardens, but once the lamps were lit and she was sitting, her eyes adjusted to the dimness. The cool gritstone provided some relief from the heat, but the linen hanging in the windows did nothing to keep the flies out.

Richard, his short legs dangling, looked like a child perched on his chair. The large Flemish tapestry of a boar and bear hunt that hung behind Richard only dwarfed him

further: the hunters woven into the piece were twice his size. The family was sitting on chairs and stools, fans aflutter, with the younger children scattered on the stone floor. The rest of the household stood in back.

If only Ned were here, Katharine thought, to stand by his mother during this troubled time. But he had never taken any real interest in family matters. He loved his painters and his poets, and the way the light in Italy made “everyone and everything look as if they had been kissed by gold.” Barred from attending Oxford and Cambridge because of his Catholic faith, he had pursued his studies on the Continent. After touring Paris, Venice and Vienna, he had circled back to Italy, where he took up residence in Florence and then in Rome.

A servant rang a bell and the room hushed. Richard started to speak. “Our great family . . .” He coughed and cleared his throat before continuing. “Our great family has resided in Lancashire for centuries upon centuries. Our esteemed ancestor, the courageous Walter Grancourt, was a great companion to William the Conqueror, and our lineage on the maternal line is descended from the great Lady Wenlock, wife of Prufroc, Earl of Bucknall. The good Lord has smiled upon our deeds and our lands have grown and we have as a great family prospered. We are now and always have been the most loyal of subjects to great England, our motherland. Thus it is with great sadness that I relate to you that certain recent events have caused us great concern and that because of these events, my esteemed father, Sir Edward, has found it necessary to leave this country for France. He has safely made passage . . .”

It was true, then, the rumor Katharine had heard from her maid Molly, who had heard it from Ursula’s maid Audrey, who had heard it from Harold’s manservant. That was how news traveled at Lufanwal: as if the dairy barns, hawk houses, chicken coops, stables, kitchens, nursery, schoolroom and maids’ chambers were all inns along a post road, where tales of indiscretion, sickness and death stopped for a brief rest.

Richard droned on. How many times could he use the word *great* in one address? The word should have been hoarded and used only once, to describe Sir Edward, for he was a great man and certainly more eloquent than his eldest son. And “certain recent events” seemed a tame way to describe the gruesome tales that arrived daily: the beheading of Lord Maltby on Shrove Tuesday for his supposed ties to the Irish rebels; the jailing in the Tower of the Jesuit Christopher Bagshaw, upon his return from France—Bagshaw would probably never make it out of his cell alive.

On the way back to her chamber, Katharine heard Harold's youngest son, Thomas, say to his older brother, Henry, "I think it shows a weakness, the running away. I would have stayed. Even if they locked me in the Tower. Even if they chopped my head off."

Henry, who was now fifteen, tapped the side of his little brother's head and said, "'Tis complicated, Thomas. You are still a child and know nothing of this world."

I know nothing of this world, Katharine thought as she climbed the stairs. She had felt Sir Edward's exile the night she watched him leave under the moonlight but had not wanted to admit it to herself. He was gone. He was across the sea.

Ursula rarely played with children, hers or anyone else's, but today she was gamboling across the tilth field with her little spaniel Guinny, and the younger children were running after her.

Lufanwal Hall was on a hill. When it was first built in the eleventh century, the steep incline made it a natural fortress. The surrounding valley was rich with rectangular fields, apple orchards, plots of woad and weld and madder. Even with the dearth of rain, the land below seemed the stuff of a weaver's loom, with warp and weft of orange, red, purple and green.

"Put that book down and join us!" Ursula squealed as she scampered past Katharine, who was reading *The Faerie Queene*.

After Sir Edward left, a servant had brought Spenser's leather-bound volume with a note tucked in its pages: *Though we started this together, you may take the virgin read. I will resume when I return.*

Ursula wore no cap, and her blond hair was spilling out of its pins. She looked more a girl than a mother of four. She had tiny hands and tiny feet, and her waist was the size of a man's neck. Katharine reckoned she could put her hands around that waist and her fingers would touch. Ursula's eyes were light blue and her skin naturally white. She began to twirl, and the children watched her with glee.

"The world is turning," she cried, her skirts and her petticoats swirling around her. "Round and round and round." Ursula kept on so long Katharine began to worry. She finally came to a giggling stop, walked unevenly toward Katharine, fell to her knees beside her, then dropped all the way onto the grass, her chest heaving. "'Tis still spinning!"

The children were twirling now, with Guinny nipping at their heels.

"I might vomit," little Lucy said.

"Perhaps you all should play another game," Katharine called.

One by one the children dropped to the grass, then they started rolling down the hill.

"See what you've started?" Katharine said, smiling.

"'Tis better than wine!" said Ursula.

Katharine chuckled. They were quiet for a time. Ursula turned on her side facing Katharine, who was sitting on a stool.

"I want your life," Ursula said solemnly. The blue of her bodice and the white of her skirts and skin made her look like a piece of china.

"My life?"

"You are free."

"How so?"

"You have no husband and no children and you can lose yourself in all those books you so love."

"All true. But my life is nothing to covet."

Ursula rolled onto her back and gazed up. "'Tis endless."

Katharine wondered if Ursula was talking about the sky or her marriage to Richard or her life.

"I married young because I was with child," Ursula continued. "I should have become a nun."

When Richard had traveled to Antwerp to meet Ursula for the first time and to marry her a week

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