

12 “There you are!” Lexie said as she came to stand next to Toby. “Why are you out here? And what is extraordinary?”

Toby didn’t look at Lexie, but put her arm out to motion her to get out of the light. “Sssh. I’m hiding.”

“So am I.” Lexie moved behind Toby and peered around the doorway. “Who are *you* hiding from? For me, it’s Nelson and Plymouth.”

Toby shook her head no when the waitress held up some white bread with tongs, then yes at a whole wheat roll.

Lexie followed Toby’s line of vision. “Isn’t that the guy we saw in the bar? The one you were so nasty to but who walked you down the aisle anyway? You stood so far away from him you were practically off-island.”

“It wasn’t quite that bad,” Toby said. “But then, there are *two* of them.”

“So you snubbed *both* of them?”

Toby nodded at some coleslaw the waitress held up. “What’s his name? I can’t remember it.”

“Which one? The guy in the bar or the one you walked down the aisle with?”

“This one, the aisle one,” Toby said. “What’s up with you? You sound like you’re angry.”

Lexie stepped away from the tent opening. “Four people told me that Nelson bought an engagement ring.”

“For you?”

“You’re not funny,” Lexie said.

Toby gave her last nod at the food, then stepped away to look at her friend. “You knew this was going to happen. You’ve been dating the guy for years, so of course he’s going to ask you to marry him. Do you think he’s going to do it tonight?”

“Probably. Which is why I’ve been avoiding him. And it doesn’t help that Plymouth is here. I’ve been hiding from him too.”

Roger Plymouth was Lexie’s boss and it was Toby’s opinion that he thought a great deal more of Lexie than just as his personal assistant. Toby kept glancing around the side of the tent, wondering when the man was going to show up with the food.

Lexie was watching her. “He went off into the bushes with someone.”

“Who?” Toby asked.

“The man you’re so fascinated with. His name is . . . Grayson. No, it’s Graydon Montgomery. What made you stop sneering at him?”

“I’ve never sneered at anyone in my life!”

“Ha!” Lexie said. “I’ve seen you turn men into whimpering idiots with that how-dare-you-even-think-of-touching-me look of yours. I wish *I* could do that! I’d give it to Plymouth and watch him crawl.”

“He’d crawl along behind *you*,” Toby said. “So who is Graydon talking to?”

“I didn’t see and they went into the bushes. It’s not a female, if that’s what’s worrying you. When he gets here I’ll leave. Tell me what to do about Nelson and his ring.”

“You should say yes or no to him,” Toby said. “Let him know one way or the other. Do you love him?”

“Sure. I do, but he doesn’t make my heart skip a beat. But maybe that’s good. We’d get married, move into the house he inherited, and have two kids. It’s all great. I couldn’t ask for anything more in my life.”

Toby glanced around the side of the tent but saw no one. “But you would like an adventure,” she said to her friend.

"I would. I was thinking that maybe you and I could go on a cruise together. I got my passport and . . ." She didn't finish as she was looking at Toby. "So what's with you and this guy Graydon? I take it you forgave him for lying about saying he was his brother. And by the way, how did you know they weren't the same?"

"Because pirates and lawyers are not alike," Toby said, smiling.

"What does that mean?"

"Nothing. It's just a joke." She looked at Lexie. "I hope you know that you're going to have to face your problem head on. Nelson is a very nice man and if you marry him you can keep your job with Roger Plymouth and you'd never have to leave your beloved island."

"I know," Lexie said. "I guess the sane and sensible thing would be to say yes to Nelson and let you plan our wedding. Think I could wear black?"

"Lexie," Toby said firmly, "if you feel that way, you shouldn't even think about saying yes to Nelson."

"I'm sure you're right. It's just that tonight I don't want to decide my entire future. Oh no!"

"What is it?"

"I think I saw Plymouth. I still can't believe you invited him here. Where's he staying since his house is filled with guests? Or has he jumped into bed with one or two of them?"

Even though they'd been roommates for over two years, Toby had only recently met Lexie's boss. She'd heard not even one good thing about him so she was shocked when she saw him. Roger Plymouth was tall, muscular, and drop dead gorgeous. He was so beautiful that people often just stood and stared at him. But Lexie was immune to his external assets and swore that he was the biggest pest on earth.

Besides his beauty, he was also very rich and owned a multi-million dollar house on the water. Since the original plan was that he was to be away at the time of the wedding, he'd agreed to allow his six bedroom house to be used for guests. But because of the last minute changes in the wedding, Toby had called him and asked if he would walk Lexie down the aisle.

"I don't know where Roger is staying," Toby said as she looked around the tent again.

"You like this guy, Graydon, don't you?"

"I don't know," Toby said. "I just met him, but he seems nice enough. He wants to stay on Nantucket for a week so I said I'd help him find a place. Maybe he could stay in Kingsley House since Jared will probably be in New York."

Lexie quit thinking about her own problems and gave her full attention to her friend. "Why did he ask *you* about housing? Why not one of his own relatives? I'm a cousin too and then there's his aunt Jilly. She's in the guesthouse with Ken, and the last I heard it has two bedrooms. And besides that, why didn't he plan this trip beforehand?"

"He was only asked to be a groomsman three days ago," Toby said. "I think he likes Nantucket. Maybe he wants to see the island. It does happen." Many people came to visit and ended up staying for years.

"You do know, don't you, that he stared at you through the whole ceremony?"

Toby was glad for the darkness to cover the way the blood rushed to her face. "I did see him look at me a few times, yes."

"Look at you?! Ha! That man hardly blinked. So now he wants to stay on Nantucket for a while and he's asked *you* to help him find a place. How very interesting."

"You know," Toby said calmly, "I do believe I just saw Roger and he's heading this way. Or was it Nelson? Is that a ring box he's holding open? I think I saw the flash of a diamond."

Lexie moved farther into the darkness. "You haven't heard the end of this," she said before she disappeared.

"I'm sure I haven't," Toby muttered, but then Lexie's question of should she or shouldn't she marry Nelson had been going on for years. When Toby was alone, she looked around the tent but there was no sign of Graydon. With a sigh she started to go inside. It looked like he wasn't going to return, so it was time to go back to work.

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33 She was cut off because Lexie threw back the tent flap and looked at Toby. "Sorry to interrupt, but people are getting worried about you. They won't cut the cake without you there, and if another kid asks me when they're going to get cake I might throw them on top of the thing — except that they'd like that too much. Brats! Do you know where the keys to Jared's truck are? And Plymouth wants me to leave tomorrow morning to go to the South of France to chaperone his sister." Lexie looked at Graydon. "Oh, hi. You and I are cousins." She looked back at Toby and waited for an answer.

Toby took a breath. "I'll be there in ten minutes. Give the kids the cupcakes stored in the blue cooler at the back corner of the tent. The truck keys are over the visor. You want to leave *tomorrow*?"

"Yeah," Lexie said. "Tomorrow." She held up her naked left hand. "Now I have a reason to postpone everything." As she turned away, she looked back at Graydon. "Toby is great, isn't she?"

"I do believe she is," Graydon said.

Smiling, Lexie left the tent.

The instant Toby stood up, so did Graydon. "It looks like I'm needed," she said.

"Who is Plymouth?"

"Lexie's boss."

Graydon's eyes were intent. "What does he do?"

"For a living? Nothing that I know of. Family money. I think he plays all the time. A lot of people who come here are like that." She glanced at the table. "I'll send someone to clear this away."

"I can arrange that," Graydon said.

Toby remembered how he'd easily commandeered three of the wait staff to put everything out for him. At the time she'd not understood how he'd done it, but a prince would be able to do that. "Should I curtsy?" she asked, trying to keep a straight face.

"Yes, please do," he said. "I love it when women bend before me."

"Hold your breath." She was laughing as she left the tent.

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40 She looked around the tent at the many guests. Alix and Jared were cutting the cake and everyone was focused on her. Lexie was behind the caterers and Toby had an idea she was still hiding from the men in her life. She maneuvered around the crowd of the guests and went to her friend. "Could I talk to you?"

"Gladly," Lexie said as she grabbed two plates of wedding cake. "Get the forks."

Toby got forks, napkins, and two cups of punch and they went outside the tent. "I want to know what's going on," Toby said as soon as they were out in the clear, clean, salty Nantucket air.

"I should ask you the same thing," Lexie said. "That scene in the tent with that guy was out of a novel. Candlelight and chocolate. All you needed was a rose in your hair."

"Are you trying to avoid telling me what you're up to?"

"Completely," Lexie said, and gave a great sigh. "Toby, I feel really bad about this, but Plymouth said he needs someone to stay with his fourteen-year-old sister in the South of France and he asked if I'd consider doing it."

"I thought you didn't want to travel with him."

"He won't be there. He's going off to do something with a car, race it somewhere, I

guess, but he promised his sister he'd take her to France."

"Doesn't the child have parents?"

"Plymouth's dad is on his fourth wife. This one is barely twenty. She doesn't want to be stuck babysitting for three months."

"Three *months*?"

"Yeah," Lexie said, looking guilty. "It's until the first of September so technically it's only two and a half months, but still . . ."

Toby knew that this was one of those times when she had to work to be unselfish. This was a great opportunity for Lexie. Maybe if she got away from Nantucket and Nelson she'd be able to figure out what she wanted to do with her life.

On the other hand, the backyard of the house they shared had been made for their business of raising flowers to sell. There was a greenhouse and many raised beds, all of them needing weeding and fertilizing and constant care.

"I'll send you my half of the rent," Lexie said. "Plymouth is doubling my salary for these weeks, so I'll be able to afford it."

Toby would have liked to tell her to forget about the rent, but she couldn't. Jared owned the house, and he let them have it for much less than it would bring if he rented it to an off-islander. But still, Toby's half took a lot of her pay.

"Jilly can help you with the flowers," Lexie said, her expression pleading with Toby to agree to this. "I know I'm letting you down, but I would really like to do this. I met Plymouth's sister last year and she's a sweet kid. She likes to read a lot and he says she wants to visit museums. Can you imagine Plymouth in a museum?"

Since Toby didn't know the man at all, she couldn't imagine anything about him. As for Jilly, she was in the early stages of being in love and all she seemed able to see was Ken. And besides, Ken's teaching job was off-island, so they'd be there a lot of the time. Toby didn't think Jilly would be much help at all.

Toby took a deep breath. "Of course you should go. You can't miss an opportunity like this. Who knows? Maybe this time next year you'll be married to Nelson and living out in Madaket. You can look back on your trip as —"

"Thank you!" Lexie said as she set her plate on the ground and hugged Toby hard. "I need to go pack. Can you handle things here?" She nodded toward the tent and the wedding.

"Sure," Toby said as she picked up the plate and watched Lexie disappear into the darkness.

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45 He'd called his assistant and minutes later he was dressed just like his brother. Quietly, he stood on the sidelines of the party, sipping champagne, while he waited for Graydon's dinner to end — which is where Roger Plymouth found him. With a grin of triumph, Roger said his sister had come up with a way to get Lexie off the island for most of the summer and as far as he could tell, Lex was going to agree to it. "I had to promise that I wouldn't be there, but I may break my leg and have to recover around them," Roger said, laughing. "Let's hope that when I stay at your place, she'll be with me."

When Rory went back outside, he was just in time to see Lexie run to the tent where Graydon and Toby were dining, and he heard her excited voice. Rory knew that as soon as his brother heard that Toby's roommate had been called away by her rich, playboy boss — a man Rory was likely to know — he'd know who had done it. Graydon didn't believe in coincidences, especially not when his brother was nearby.

Sure enough, when Rory's phone buzzed it was a single word from his brother. NOW.

That meant Graydon wanted to talk *now*. Rory wrote back. I'M AT KINGSLEY HOUSE. MEET ME THERE. Since his brother had sneaked away, leaving all his staff in Maine, that meant

he was without transportation. It was a long walk from the site of the wedding, through town, and up Main Street to Kingsley Lane. Even if Graydon got a ride with someone, it would still give Rory time to find out what he needed to know.

He straightened his jacket, put his shoulders back, adjusted his face to the I-am-going-to-be-king expression, and started toward the big tent. He was going to do his best to impersonate his brother.

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89 When Toby got back to the truck she had some difficulty pulling her clothes on over her wet underwear but she did it. "Bath," she mumbled as she struggled with the damp elastic that didn't want to move.

She looked in her bag for her phone and saw that she had an email from Lexie.

I'M IN NEW YORK NOW. PLYMOUTH WENT TO CA SO I'M STAYING AT HIS APARTMENT. IT'S NICE, COZY EVEN. WHO WOULD HAVE THOUGHT THAT OF HIM? I FLY OUT TOMORROW MORNING.

HOW DID YOU LIKE THE PRINCE'S COOKING? AND DID YOU LIKE WHAT HE DID TO THE SUNROOM? HE COULD STAY IN PLYMOUTH'S BIG HOUSE AS IT'S EMPTY. BUT THEN, ARE YOU STILL PLANNING TO SEND YOUR PRINCE AWAY? TELL ME ALL! LEXIE.

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107 The other thing missing was how she was coming to feel about him physically. She remembered her last phone call with Lexie.

"So?" Lexie asked in her usual blunt way. "Have you leaped into bed with him yet?"

"No and he hasn't asked," Toby said, trying to keep her voice light but not succeeding. "He's not interested in me that way."

"I don't believe that," Lexie said. "Why would he go to all the trouble of staying with you if he weren't dying to get into bed with you?"

"Friendship," Toby said. "We're great friends. And besides, he's about to become engaged. Really, Lexie, could we talk about something else?"

"You haven't fallen in love with him, have you?"

"No," Toby said. "He's a friend but nothing more. When he leaves, we'll wave goodbye and that'll be it. What about you?"

"Bored," Lexie said. "This kid never wants to go anywhere. I guess I'm too much of a Nantucketer and too used to a big social family. I thought when I got here there'd be invitations and meeting people. But I can't even get her to go on a driving trip to see some of the countryside. She says she's seen it all."

"Too bad," Toby said. "The poor child has probably been dragged around everywhere in her short life, while you want to see the world. If you get too lonely, you should come home."

"But only after Saturday," Lexie said. "After *he* leaves, right? Will you drive him to the airport or will a limo pick him up?"

"He's not a limo sort of guy," Toby said. "Sometimes it's hard to remember that he's a prince."

"Especially since he spends his days helping you with Victoria's wedding."

Toby knew Lexie was trying to make her feel better with her insinuation that maybe Graydon didn't like *any* females. But she'd seen him smile at pretty waitresses, seen his eyes widen at some girl in a nearly non-existent bikini. He seemed to like every woman on earth except her.

She and Lexie promised to keep each other informed and hung up.

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204 Toby walked down to the end of Straight Wharf and looked out at the water. Right now she wished with all her might that she had someone to talk to about all this. She called Lexie in France. "I miss you," she said as soon as Lexie picked up.

"What's wrong?" Lexie asked.

"Nothing," Toby lied. "What's going on with you?"

When Lexie started talking, she didn't seem to take a breath. Her boss, Roger Plymouth, had arrived last night. He'd been injured in a car crash and his left arm was broken. "He can't drive," Lexie said, making it sound like the biggest tragedy on earth. "He brought a nurse with him, but —"

"A nurse? Was he that badly injured?" Toby asked.

"No, but Plymouth can't do anything by himself. But it seems the nurse knows his sister and the two of them haven't stopped laughing together — in French, no less. I didn't even know the kid *could* laugh. With me she just does a lot of heavy sighing. She's not at all the girl I met last year. I am so *bored!*"

"What are you going to do? Come home?" Toby didn't know if she liked that idea or not. Right now she was so angry at Graydon that she hoped Lexie returned and the others went back to Lanconia.

"I . . . uh, I . . ." Lexie said.

"Tell me," Toby said.

"Plymouth wants to go on a driving tour around the country. It was all planned. He was going with a college buddy of his, but the guy backed out at the last minute. Plymouth can't drive his stick shift car with only one hand, so he's asked *me* to go with him."

"You can't drive a manual," was all Toby could think to say.

"He's going to teach me. It's either go or stay here with his sister. I know Plymouth and if he isn't moving he gets restless. If I don't go, I'm afraid I might be relegated to maid status. At least if I go I'll get to see some of the countryside."

"Do it," Toby said. "Take any chance you're offered and be glad of it."

Lexie was quiet for a moment. "You sound bad. What happened?"

"I guess I took off my rose colored glasses, that's all."

"Want to tell me about it?"

Toby thought of trying to explain the ideology of another country, but had no idea where to begin. "Not yet," she said.

"You haven't committed the ultimate sin and fallen in love with him, have you?" Lexie asked.

"Far, far from it. In fact, I'm thinking that after the dinner party on Saturday I may kick the lot of them out of the house."

"What dinner party?" Lexie asked.

Toby was glad of a subject she could talk about freely and she launched into a description of her plans for a historical wedding. But she didn't tell Lexie about her dream encounters with Victoria/Valentina. That was too much to explain over the phone. Instead, Toby said the idea came from Victoria's historical novels.

"I always knew you were brilliant," Lexie said, "and I think Victoria will love the idea. Is Dr. Huntley getting the costumes for you to wear?"

Toby told of Graydon asking his grandparents to raid the palace closets.

"Sounds like he's rather involved in your life. Have you been to bed with him yet?"

"Yes and no," Toby said. "Kissing, rolling around on the bed, but no sex."

“Sounds like high school.”

“Yeah, doesn’t it?”

“As much as I’d like to hear every detail, I have to go,” Lexie said. “Plymouth wants . . . I don’t know what he wants but it’s something every minute. Toby, hang in there and let me know if anything, you know, happens.”

“Same with you and Roger.”

“Plymouth?! Are you crazy? He’s the *last* man I’d —” She broke off because Toby was laughing.

Lexie was still saying it wouldn’t happen when they said goodbye and hung up.

Toby put her phone away and realized she felt much better. She walked to the florist shop where she worked and talked to her boss. Maybe next week she’d go back to her job. No more hanging out with Lanconians and trying to understand their ways.

But her boss didn’t need her. The young woman Victoria had found to replace Toby was doing exceptionally well. What he didn’t tell Toby was that he’d made a deal with Victoria that all her wedding flowers would come through him if he didn’t rehire Toby until September.

“Sorry,” he said and he was. All of them liked Toby and her work was excellent.

Toby spent some time with her co-workers, sharing hugs and stories of the work they’d been doing, but when she began to feel in the way, she left and walked to Jetties Beach. But it was where she and Graydon had walked together and there were too many memories.

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268 One morning before she was fully awake, she reached out for Graydon and was disappointed when he wasn’t in the bed beside her.

She hid all of the visions from Graydon. Nor did she tell Alix about them. And when she talked to Lexie on the phone she didn’t mention them. But then, all Lexie could talk about was Roger Plymouth and all they were doing on their long car trip. “I thought he’d insist that we stay at five-star hotels,” Lexie said, “and there I’d be in jeans and a T-shirt looking like the worst of the American tourists. But we stop at places that have only three or four bedrooms and usually the food is grown and cooked by the owners. It’s all wonderful! But how are *you* doing?” It was easy to get Lexie back on the subject of her and Roger, so Toby didn’t have to tell the whole truth of what was happening in her life.

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347 Roger Plymouth’s big, glass-fronted house was on the water at the south of the island. It was the kind of house that appeared in *Architectural Digest*. Inside, the furniture was all perfectly placed and everything was white and blue, the colors of the water and the clear air.

Lexie hated the look of the interior. People who lived on Nantucket wondered why the expensive off-island decorators could think of nothing except white furniture with blue pillows. The walls were artistically covered with cute reproductions of whales, with an anchor here and there. There wasn’t a breath of creativity in the whole house.

Lexie had already told Roger that after they were married she wanted to redecorate the entire house. His reply was, “Tear the place down and get your cousin Jared to build a new one if you want.” Lexie’s reply had been a lecture on useless extravagance. It had taken four hours in bed together to make up that argument.

Right now Lexie was sitting on the white couch across from the white couch Graydon was sitting on. They were both in eighteenth century costume and ready to go to the chapel for the wedding ceremony. She knew that he’d spent most of the day on the phone, talking to people in Lanconia. It looked like it hadn’t gone well because right now Graydon was slumped down, sitting more on his spine than upright. It was almost impossible to believe that he was descended from kings.

“Roger bought this for me in Paris,” Lexie said of her pink dress with the white embroidery overlay.

“It’s very pretty. Nice ring too.”

Lexie held up her left hand and looked at the five carat engagement ring Roger had given her. “I would have said I’d never like a ring like this. It’s too gaudy, too flashy, but . . .”

“But it’s like Roger?”

“Yes,” Lexie said. “I seem to be wearing him on my finger.” When she looked at Graydon, there was a small frown on her face.

“Are you concerned about telling Toby of your engagement?” he asked.

“I’m worried that she’ll tell me I’m an idiot.”

“She would never do that,” Graydon said.

“I know, but my being here and engaged is going to be a great shock to her.” Lexie stood up. “I better go . . .” She couldn’t think of anything she had to do. “You’ll be all right here alone?”

“Perfectly,” Graydon said, then reached out and took Lexie’s hand in his and kissed the back of it. “Toby will be very happy for you. You don’t need to worry.”

“I wish you two could —” She broke off, gave Graydon a smile, then left the big living room.

From the speed of Roger’s appearance, it seemed that Lexie had sent him downstairs, probably with orders to cheer Graydon up. Last night when Graydon had shown up late, one suitcase in his hand, and asked for a bed, Roger had gladly opened the door to him and pointed him toward a bedroom. When he got back into bed with Lexie he hadn’t bothered to tell her who was at the door. She’d assumed it was one of his racing buddies and gone back to sleep.

Early the next morning she’d gone downstairs to see a morose Prince Graydon leaning over a bowl of cereal.

It took only moments for them to figure out that they were both going to drop bombshells on Toby during the wedding. Lexie was going to tell her friend that she no longer despised her boss but was engaged to marry him. As for Graydon, his unexpected presence was going to be more than enough to shock Toby.

Later that day, Lexie told Roger that he needed to talk to Graydon — but he was *not* to put his foot in his mouth by saying something he shouldn’t. “Those two have *serious* problems.”

“Not like us, you mean?” Roger asked, grinning. “It took a while but I grew on you.”

“Like a fungus,” Lexie said and moved away from his grasp. “Just be nice to him, that’s all I’m asking.”

“I’m very nice all the time.”

“Ha! You’re only kind and considerate to whatever’s wearing a bikini.”

“Speaking of which . . .” he said, and caught Lexie before she could leave the bedroom.

So now Roger and Graydon were alone in the living room, both of them wearing tan breeches and short coats. Graydon had on slippers that his ancestor had worn while Roger had on tall boots. Roger offered Graydon a drink, but it was refused. He couldn’t help thinking how different the brothers were. He’d spent a lot of time with Rory and always had a laugh but Graydon could depress a clown.

“Oh the hell with it,” he said and sat down across for Graydon, drink in hand. “Lexie wants me to baby you but I can’t take your gloom anymore. You can’t give up. Do you hear me? You *can’t*. Just look at what I did. I wore Lexie down. It took me years but I did it. This whole trip that she thinks just happened took a lot of work on my part. I got my little sister to lie for me so Lexie would go to France with her. Then she had to be so boring that Lexie was

ready to jump off a building.” Roger took a drink. “To get her to do it, I had to promise the kid that Bobby Flay would cook at her next party. Anyway, I showed up in France wearing a cast when there was nothing wrong with my arm and I got Lex to go on a driving trip with me.” He leaned forward to look hard at Graydon. “You know what I did? I let Lexie drive. You know it’s True Love when you hear the grind of the gears of a V12 overhead cam engine and you don’t say a word about it.” He paused to let the horror of that image sink in. “If you give up just because a woman says she won’t marry you, you lose the right to call yourself a man.”

Graydon gave Roger a look of great patience. “In this instance, there are extenuating circumstances involved.”

“Yeah, yeah, I know,” Roger said. “You’re going to be crowned king. So what? We all have handicaps. Mine is that girls think I’m useless. They think I’m pretty and rich, but of no real value. Part of why I like Lexie is because she makes me *do* things. So what’s this Toby girl do for you?”

“She keeps me from believing that I actually am a prince.”

“And you’re going to give that up because . . .? Why *are* you giving her up?”

“For a country?” Graydon’s voice was sarcastic.

Roger gave a scoffing laugh. “I don’t know a lot about history but I think miserably unhappy men don’t make good kings. You think about it. Are you a man first or a king first?” He drained his glass, set it down, and left the room.

Graydon got up and went outside to look at the water and think.

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