

# Cavalier Queen

FIONA MOUNTAIN



preface

Published by Preface Publishing 2011

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Copyright © Fiona Mountain 2011

Fiona Mountain has asserted her right to be identified as the author of this work under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, resold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition, including this condition, being imposed on the subsequent purchaser

First published in Great Britain in 2011 by Preface Publishing

20 Vauxhall Bridge Road  
London SW1V 2SA

An imprint of The Random House Group Limited

[www.randomhouse.co.uk](http://www.randomhouse.co.uk)  
[www.prefacepublishing.co.uk](http://www.prefacepublishing.co.uk)

Addresses for companies within The Random House Group Limited  
can be found at [www.randomhouse.co.uk](http://www.randomhouse.co.uk)

The Random House Group Limited Reg. No. 954009

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Hardback ISBN 978 1 84809 168 9  
Trade Paperback ISBN 978 1 84809 167 2

The Random House Group Limited supports The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), the leading international forest certification organisation. All our titles that are printed on Greenpeace-approved FSC-certified paper carry the FSC logo. Our paper procurement policy can be found at [www.randomhouse.co.uk/environment](http://www.randomhouse.co.uk/environment)



Typeset in Fournier MT by Palimpsest Book Production Limited,  
Falkirk, Stirlingshire

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

**H**enrietta was not ready to die. But she had lived with the threat of death often enough to have thought much about it and she knew exactly what she wanted inscribed upon her tombstone.

*Here lies Henrietta Maria de Bourbon. Daughter of France. Queen of England. Widow of the martyred King Charles I of England and Scotland. Mother of the restored King Charles II.*

That was the sum of her life. Who she was. All that she was.

Except . . . It was at least how she wished to be remembered.

But would it be?

A hundred years from now, two hundred, three hundred, what would the history books say about her then? Would it all be forgotten, this gossip mongering and speculation that had gone on now for nearly half a century? Or had it been repeated so loudly and so often even now, that it had already become accepted as fact.

That she was Harry Jermyn's whore and her sons his bastards, not princes. That theirs was a shameful attachment that had led to the downfall of the English monarchy and the death of the King of England. That his blood was on their hands.

People like to gossip, they love a scandal. More than that, it seemed to Henrietta that they always needed someone to hate. For a long time, for the people of England, that someone had been her, and still she didn't understand why.

And so she wondered. When she and those she had known and loved were all dead and buried, would anyone honestly believe these rumours, even if they were written down and recorded somewhere? Did people truly believe them now?

Should they believe?

Princess Henrietta Maria gave an impatient and dramatic little sigh as she looked out of the large rectangular windows of the palace of the Louvre for what felt to her like the hundredth time that morning. All that was to be seen still was the moat and the palace guards and the pointed slate roofed towers and pavilions.

Oh, how much longer until the Englishmen arrived? She had been waiting for hours. Well one hour at least. Henrietta hated waiting. It felt more like ten hours to her. She had been counting down the minutes.

Abruptly turning her back on the offending window, since it did not offer the sight she wanted, and making sure her spaniel pup was paying proper attention, she threw the ball down the long gallery again, ignoring the scornful gazes of the dead kings and queens of France who watched from the gilt-framed portraits that lined the long panelled walls, linking the Louvre to the Tuilleries.

‘Well go on, Mittie,’ she commanded. ‘Fetch it.’

The dog just sat there, looking up at her mistress with eyes every bit as black and doleful as those of Henrietta’s royal ancestors, as if the girl was not to be taken at all seriously. The sides of Mittie’s brown and white furry body pumped in and out like a bellows and her pink tongue was lolling, despite the fact that the thick stone of the walls behind the wainscoting and the proximity to the Seine made it so icy cold in the gallery that the leaded glass in the windows was frosted on the inside as well as out. Mittie was weary of this game now and she was not the only one.

Henrietta scooped the dog into her arms, passionately kissing the furrowed, velvety head. Mittie was not yet fully grown but her claws were sharp and they dug into the pale silk sleeve of Henrietta’s gown as she received an equally exuberant wet lick on her cheek.

Henrietta giggled and wiped her face with her palm. 'I suppose I'll have to get it then, won't I?'

As she picked up the half chewed ball she glanced again to the windows and what she saw now made her heart thump with excitement against the tight bones of her corset. Excitement and more than a little trepidation. They were here. At last. The Ambassador and his gentlemen attendants from England.

Quickly setting the dog down, Henrietta ran across to the glass, bouncing up on tiptoes the better to see.

The view was often obscured by the swirling mists that rose from the River Seine, but not today. Today she could see very clearly the bright cavalcade of horses drawing the crested coach as it passed beneath the tall row of cypress trees and came clattering towards the frosty drawbridge. The Swiss guards in their white-feathered hats snapped to attention and there was a fanfare of trumpets. But the importance of these foreign visitors needed no proclaiming, at least not for Henrietta. She knew very well who these gentlemen were. She knew exactly why they had come with instructions all the way from London. The ambassador's name was Henry Rich, Lord Kensington, and the purpose of his semi-informal visit was to discuss Henrietta's betrothal. To the English Prince of Wales.

Henrietta was fourteen years old now. A child no longer, but a woman of perfect marriageable age and she had been preparing for this day since she was born. She had been raised with the single purpose of becoming consort to a king. To be a queen, so her mother, who had been Queen of France did constantly tell her, was for a girl like Henrietta, the summit of all earthly ambition.

Henrietta was the youngest of three princesses. Her eldest sister, Elizabeth, had been wedded to King Philip of Spain at the age of thirteen and it had been the plan for the girls' other sister, Christine, to marry King James of England's firstborn son, Henry, who was said to have been extremely handsome and athletic. But tragically, the prince had died of typhoid when he was sixteen. So Christine went to the Prince of Piedmont instead and had gone off to live with him in Turin.

Now it was Henrietta's turn.

She had always known, of course, that as a princess of France, her betrothal, when it was arranged, would be of far greater importance than

just a union between two people under God. It must be a strategic military alliance between two nations, used for the advancement and protection of France against the power of her long-time enemies, the Spaniards and for the benefit of the Catholic faith. Which was all very well. Just so long as the Prince of Wales was handsome, as his brother had supposedly been. Henrietta hugged Mittie tighter, lifted the little dog up closer to her own face and pressed her cheek against the soft head as she whispered fervently into one floppy ear, 'Let him be handsome.'

The prince's name was Charles and one day, when his father King James died, he would be crowned King Charles I of England and Scotland and Ireland. This much at least she did know. He was reputed to be one of the finest princes in all of Europe and was said to be deeply religious and scrupulous in attending prayers, which was of course imperative. But even if he were not so fine, it was Henrietta's duty to love whosoever was chosen to be her husband. And if that was to be Prince Charles, then it was Prince Charles whom she would love. But oh, she so wanted to know what he looked like.

She had in fact glimpsed him once, about a year ago, from a distance, but she had had no idea who he was at the time and so had taken absolutely no notice. Unbeknown to her, he had watched her dance. He and his companion, the Duke of Buckingham, had arrived in Paris in disguise, wearing bushy wigs and going by the names of John and Tom Smith. But they hadn't been very interested in Henrietta then either. They were on their way to Madrid, on a dashingly daring adventure to win the hand of the Spanish Infanta for Charles, and they had simply stopped off at the Louvre en route, where they had been admitted to the vast, dimly lit hall to join the spectators at the rehearsal of a masque. Next morning they had been recognised by a maid who had once been a linen-seller in London and the news of the secret soon spread around the entire court.

Henrietta had been captivated by the drama and the romance of the story which had appealed to her vivid imagination, fed as it had been since infancy on the troubadour poems and tales of chivalry that inspired the whole idea of courtly love that was very popular in the French court. She had chattered excitedly about Prince Charles with her brother's wife, Queen Anne. Anne was sister to the Spanish Infanta the Prince of England was so determined to marry and Henrietta had laughed about what a pity it was that he had

gone so far as Spain to seek a wife when he might have found one much nearer.

Now he was doing just that. The trip to Madrid had proved fruitless and negotiations with the Spanish had broken down for religious reasons, the Catholic Spanish king declaring he would rather send his daughter to a nunnery than let her marry an infidel, a Protestant heretic.

Henrietta's family had no such objections, so long as her marriage might be advantageous to Catholics. So when Charles had failed to find his queen in Spain, he had turned instead to France. To Henrietta.

These past days she had done little else but think about him and daydream about him and try to imagine what he might be like. Her tutor, Monsieur de Brevis, had once made her trace in her copybook a Latin text composed by her brother Louis, listing the virtues of various kings, namely truthfulness, courage, temperance and grace. Henrietta prayed that the would-be king she was to marry would be blessed with all these qualities and more. That he would be everything that a future king should be. Tall and strong and brave, obviously. With a happy, smiling disposition and a good sense of humour, since Henrietta was inclined to gaiety herself. Her brother Gaston, Duke of Anjou, swore she had laughed up at him from her cradle on the very day she was born. She liked people who laughed a lot, who made her laugh back. She wanted to marry a merry man just like her father, King Henri. Henri le Grande, as he was known, Henry the Great. She wanted to marry a good, wise man, who would make a good and wise king, respected and beloved by all his subjects. A man to whom she could devote her whole life and her whole heart, as any wife should.

She hoped also, if this was not too much to ask, that he might share her passion for music and theatre.

As soon as she could walk, Henrietta had eagerly joined in the little ballets and comedies that were staged by the troupe of her father's legitimate and illegitimate children who all grew up together at the chateau of St Germain en Laye a few miles from the centre of Paris.

She had always loved to dress up, to sing and to dance. More than anything in the world, she loved the great court masques, the music and the poetry, the drama and the make-believe of it all. And the fantastical settings. Like seascapes and pyramids and gilded chariots drawn by enormous swans carrying children dressed as gods of love, angels and demons

with burning sceptres who duelled while lightning flashed around them in the pretend sky. The archers always had to hold back the crowds who besieged every doorway for a glimpse, still more watched from tiered scaffold stands round the wall and Henrietta enjoyed every second of every minute, even the long hours of rehearsing and costume-fittings. They must have such masques and theatricals at the English court surely? And dancing? Life in England could not be so very different to Paris.

Henrietta remembered how her sister Elizabeth had sobbed and clung to her mother and the other little princesses when the time came for her to kiss them all goodbye before she left for Spain and she wrote such sorrowful letters home still, telling how she cried nearly every day, because her husband was short and fat and kept leaving her on her own. It would be even harder for Henrietta. She would be exiled to England, which her godfather Pope Urban had said was as good as delivering her to hell and the devil, it being full of heretics who despised and persecuted all followers of Rome.

Henrietta touched the smooth rosary beads at her waist and fought down her fear. Never in her life had she sought to avoid a thing because she was frightened and she was not about to begin now. She was, after all, a Bourbon with the blood of the powerful Medicis also running through her veins. She was Henrietta Maria, named for both her parents. King Henri IV who had earned the title of Henri the Great because of the immense courage he displayed in military battles and Marie de Medici, who was known throughout all of Europe to be utterly indomitable. Henrietta was regularly accused of taking after her mother in that, which Marie told her she should regard as a compliment, since obstinacy, or determination as Marie preferred to term it, would serve her daughter well in life.

Besides which, Henrietta could not really believe that bad things could ever happen to her. She had spent her childhood in an enchanted world of gilded palaces filled with the finest Italian art, of ornamental gardens filled with lemon trees, lilies and tulips. She wore bejewelled silk and danced in cloth of silver. As Madame of France the senior remaining royal daughter, she had her own grand suite of rooms in the Louvre. She slept in a state bed upholstered in silks and velvets and embroidered in gold; she travelled in velvet-seated coaches, was serenaded by orchestras of violas and flutes and ate feasts which ended in desserts of spun sugar and candied almonds.

She had never known any different and so could not imagine anything different.

She curled her fingers around the cool smoothness of the small ivory crucifix. In any case, God would grant her the strength and courage she needed to face whatever trials life might have in store for her. Her future was in His hands. Or else in the hands of her mother. In truth it was Marie de Medici rather than King Louis, Henrietta's brother, who had extended this invitation to the English Ambassador.

Whose coach was even now rattling into the courtyard.

There were so many questions Henrietta was burning to ask, about the man who would be her husband and the country that would be her home.

She quickly set Mittie down and lifting her skirts, turned and ran down the length of the gallery, Mittie's paws skittered as she chased behind and the tap-tap of Henrietta's silk-slipped footsteps echoed on the polished wooden floor. At the foot of the wide, curved marble staircase she nearly crashed headlong into Mamie St. George. Mamie's mother was Madam Montgalat, or Mamangat as Henrietta and her brothers and sisters affectionately called their governess. Mamie was not really called Mamie either. Her real name was Jeanne but the children all called her Mon Amie, Mamie for short. Mamie had been Henrietta's nurse since she was a baby and was now a maid of honour.

The same age as Henrietta's eldest sister, Mamie was Henrietta's most favoured companion, besides her brother Gaston, even if she did take liberties sometimes. She was overly fond of ordering people about, as if she were a governess just like her mother. She was serene and elegant with sharp features and sharper eyes. They now came to rest disapprovingly on the ball in Henrietta's hand. Balls were not allowed inside, nor running for that matter, for dogs or for princesses.

'I was just coming to find you, Madame,' Mamie said. 'You are wanted immediately by the queen, your mother.'

'To greet the gentlemen from England?'

Mamie smiled. She knew how desperately Henrietta had been longing for them to arrive. 'They have gone directly to the apartments of the Duke de Chevreuse, who is a friend of the Ambassador's apparently. Your mother and Queen Anne are waiting for you in the Grand Salle, so that they may escort you there.'

‘Now?’

‘Yes now.’ Mamie picked up Mittie to stop her from trying to follow Henrietta, as the pup was wont to do. ‘Well?’ Mamie asked, shooing at Henrietta. ‘What are you waiting for? It’s not like you to willingly wait for anything.’

This was quite true. Henrietta had a reputation for doing everything, from talking to walking, in a tearing hurry. But now she hesitated. ‘How do I look?’

‘Like a princess.’

‘There are some ugly princesses,’ Henrietta pointed out.

‘Well you are a very pretty one.’

‘Thank you, Mamie.’ But Henrietta looked doubtful. She was accustomed to flattery and never tired of it, vanity being another sin of which she was sometimes accused, unfairly she felt. It was true that she had a great liking for pretty dresses, but so did any girl her age, unless they were very strange. She didn’t have a vast number of dresses to choose from, considering that she was a princess, and she preferred plainer styles to the gem encrusted silks and brocades that both her mother and Queen Anne tended to favour. In anticipation of the Ambassador’s arrival today, she had on her absolute favourite. It was of white silk with a tight bodice closed in front with bows of cherry-pink satin ribbon and finished at the waist with large richly embroidered tabs. The sleeves were full, with flounces of lace ruffles at the elbows. She had a string of pearls around her neck and a cherry ribbon twisted with pearls in her hair.

She knew the dress was very flattering and on good days she was ready to believe people when they told her that she was exceptionally pretty. But she suffered the crushing insecurities typical of most young girls and now even Mamie’s reassurance was not quite enough.

There was a large gilded looking-glass hanging on the nearby wall and she went over to it, tried to see herself through strangers’ eyes, strangers who had come here expressly to judge if she was fit to be their future queen. She had scrutinised her reflection often enough recently to hold out a hope that she had some features that Lord Kensington, reporting back to the prince and the king in England, might describe as very pleasing.

In fact she had many. Her complexion was pale and clear, delicately flushed now with excitement, and in her small face her eyes were very large

and very dark. The Comte de Soissons, who had professed undying love for her for several months, had told her they were black as ebony but sparkled as bright as stars and she was willing to take his word for it. Her hair was long and thick and black too and she wore it curled forward in intricate ringlets around her temples and cheeks, with a single lock left to tumble beguilingly over her left shoulder in a fashion that was currently very popular in Paris.

Henrietta was eternally thankful that she did not have what in her family was called the 'Austrian lip', the slightly protruding jaw which her brother Louis had had the misfortune to inherit from their mother. She did think her own lips a little too wide, though the beautiful Duchess de Chevreuse had assured her, with saucy smile on her perfectly painted face, that most gentlemen would see that as an asset. Henrietta had not understood why this caused some of the ladies to titter behind their hands but she guessed it had something to do with what went on between men and women in their bedchambers, since that was the glamorous Duchess's favourite topic of conversation, as indeed it was the whole court's.

Nobody though, would ever convince Henrietta that any man would think it a good thing she was so small. At less than five feet, she was tiny as a doll, and so very slight as to appear as delicate as china. She looked much younger than her fourteen years, more child than woman. There were, in fact, little girls of no more than ten years who were considerably larger than she. She wished every day that she were taller. But she could be very pragmatic when she needed to be and decided now that since she could not suddenly grow five inches or gain five and twenty pounds in the next five minutes, there was no use worrying over it.

She spun back to Mamie, making her skirts twirl. 'Wish me luck then.'

Mamie gave the princess a quick tight hug. 'Bonne chance, Madam. They will all love you, I know it.'

'Mamie, I do hope you're right. For all our sakes.'

As her portraits clearly showed, Marie de Medici, Henrietta's mother, had been a strikingly attractive girl with bright gold hair, a perfect oval face, flawless skin and heavy-lidded almond eyes. But she had grown exceedingly plump since the death of her husband King Henri, when Henrietta was just a baby, and now Marie had at least three chins. She dressed always in black with a great veil of crepe and around her neck a

huge cross, encrusted with diamonds. Queen Anne was wearing a gown of dark green satin embroidered with silver and gold and studded with gemstones and diamond buttons, looking every inch the Queen of France. She was Spanish, fair and curvaceous, and was said to have the whitest, most beautiful hands in all of Europe.

Henrietta felt rather insignificant as she left the grandeur of the Grand Salle to follow in the wake of these two truly majestic queens, with a train of ladies to accompany them. The tall double doors of the Duke de Chevreuse's apartments were flung open and, regally, they all swept through.

The Ambassador's visit was unofficial and exploratory, which was why he was not being received in full state. But this informal reception was more than usually informal. The Duke and Duchess de Chevreuse were in the process of dressing for the masquerade that was to be performed after supper, so their salon was in disarray, with leather masks and high-heeled dancing slippers and feathered plumes scattered here, there and everywhere. Elaborate costumes were draped over oak coffers and chairs and tables, colourful as the fine tapestries which hung upon the walls.

Lord Kensington and his attendants were equally gorgeously attired, in bright silk slashed doublets, with capes swinging from their shoulders. They were all standing around, talking and laughing loudly, faces still flushed from the cold February air outside, or else from the heat of the sweet-scented juniper logs blazing in the hearth and the plentiful cups of warm Hippocras wine they had been served. English footmen in tan livery, pages and valets, musicians and costumiers were milling amongst them and there was a general air of anticipation.

But a hush descended as the royal party entered and the English gentlemen turned and bowed low with a sweep of their plumed hats. They looked not at the two queens but at the little princess, since she was the sole reason they were all there. Realising this, Henrietta's cheeks flushed far pinker than theirs beneath their appraising gazes and she was struck with a desperate urge to run away and hide, except that there was nowhere to go.

She so wanted to make a good impression, not to let her mother and brother down, but any confidence she'd previously felt utterly deserted her now, leaving her feeling acutely self-conscious and exposed, as if every

facet of her character was on display, along with her pretty face. There flashed through her mind all the taunts and teasing she had endured from her brothers and sisters over the years, as well as all the loving but sometimes exasperated criticisms and complaints of her governesses, tutors and confessors. Of which there were several.

Besides having no patience, Henrietta suffered from a quick temper. Since being a baby she had liked having her own way. She was also criticised for being too giddy.

But she also had many admirable qualities, including a wit that was just as quick as her temper and impeccable manners. Sister Madeleine, the Carmelite nun who was in charge of her religious instruction, commended her for having the kindest, warmest heart. In addition to that she sang and danced exceptionally. Not that she could very well demonstrate that right now, much as she did like to sing and dance at every opportunity.

Lord Kensington stepped forward and bowed low. He had shoulder length brown hair that was very tightly curled, a pointed chin emphasised by a pointed beard and the most neat and elegantly arched eyebrows Henrietta had ever seen on a man. 'I am charmed to meet Your Majesties,' he said to the two queens in smooth and very precise French. 'And the little Madame,' he added, addressing Henrietta.

Her cheeks burned hotter still. She wished she had some command of English so that she could welcome him with a word of it, but being a poor linguist, she did not, so she quietly bid good day in her own tongue.

There followed the expected polite exchange, in French again, about the crossing, which had been rough, but as Henrietta had never been on board a sailing ship or even so much as seen the sea, she was unable to contribute. Lord Kensington then informed Henrietta's mother that he had brought a miniature portrait of the Prince of Wales with him.

'Oh, how thrilling,' Anne exclaimed. 'Where is it?'

'Right here.' He patted his upper chest. 'I am wearing it around my neck.'

'Do please show it to us right away, sir,' the Duchess de Chevreuse encouraged, giving Lord Kensington her most captivating smile.

Henrietta's heart was beating frantically, but entirely pointlessly, since she knew that etiquette forbade her from being shown the prince's likeness until he had formally requested her hand. She didn't even bother to ask if

she might see it too, but when the Duke and Duchess, her mother and Anne and the ladies hurried off with the Ambassador into the closet, laughing and chattering away, leaving Henrietta behind, her patience, such as it was, was tested almost beyond endurance. She was so consumed with curiosity she felt as if she might burst.

She also felt a little lost, stranded amongst all those unfamiliar foreign faces. But since she was their host she knew that she must try to make polite conversation, so she turned to the portly, greying English envoy who stood nearest to her, rocked back slightly on his heels with his hands linked lightly behind his back. 'How do you find Paris, sir?' she asked him shyly, but keen to know. 'Is it very like London?'

The only answer Henrietta received was a blank smile. 'Pardon, Madame?' He spoke in such an appallingly bad accent that it was evident he could speak about as much French as Henrietta could English. Which was to say, barely a word. At a loss, she turned to another gentlemen, who appeared equally uncomprehending.

'I think there can be nowhere in the world so magnificent as Paris.'

It was a deep, velvety voice, and it had come from the far side of the room. Henrietta saw that it was one of the Ambassador's young gentlemen attendants who had spoken, though in French so perfect that he might have been born here at the Louvre. Relief flooded through her and she felt almost ridiculously grateful to him. She smiled at him and he smiled back, the most warm and friendly smile.

She was thrown into utter confusion.

It was if her eyes were playing tricks on her, or else she was caught up in the most wonderful dream. The Prince of Wales was supposed to be hundreds of miles away, across the seas, in England. Only his portrait had been brought here to France. This gentleman was not he. He was not dressed in princely robes, nor had he courtiers hovering around to attend to his every whim. Nobody had bowed to him, or announced his presence. And yet . . . despite all that, he so closely resembled the image of a tall, elegant, golden prince that Henrietta had come to nurture and cherish in her heart, that for one disorientating moment she was certain that the English were playing some great and clever trick upon them all, and the prince himself had returned incognito, to win *her* hand this time, just as he had once journeyed in disguise to Spain.

Henrietta felt such a rush of happiness, such a strong sense of connection that she had mentally to pinch herself, hard and sharp, to remind her that this was not the man with whom she was destined to share the rest of her life. That he was but a lowly ambassador's attendant.

Even so . . . how had she not noticed him before, the instant she had come into the apartment? He was stylishly but unostentatiously dressed in black silk, his doublet slashed at the sleeves to reveal a creamy satin shirt underneath, with high white buckskin boots on his feet. But what made him so striking was that he was very tall, easily over six foot, and broad with it, with shoulders like a drayman. But despite his imposing stature and the mature timbre of his voice, he was clearly no more than a few years older than Henrietta, could not yet be twenty. He had a fresh face, bright blue eyes. His hair was much longer than the Ambassador's, of golden brown, flecked with red and copper, loosely curly and thick. He had a strong, square jaw with a dimple right in the middle of his chin, partially concealed by a short beard.

He walked over to Henrietta with all the easy grace and bearing of a prince, and yet with a deference and humility that was the opposite of regal conceit, so that she understood immediately how it was that he had escaped her earlier observation. He was the perfect servant, with the uncanny ability to blend into the background, to remain out of sight until the instant his services were required.

Close to, he seemed taller still, towering above her so that she had to lift her face to look at him. He in turn looked down, silently, into her eyes. It was almost as if he was feeling as shy and disorientated and confused as she. Here was the perfect opportunity to ask all those questions she had been so keen to ask. Only now, for some strange reason, her mind had gone completely blank and she couldn't recall a single one. Similarly, he was behaving as if he'd suddenly lost his tongue.

'It is my first time in your country, Madame,' he said eventually. 'I sincerely hope it is not the last.'

He had such a melodious voice that it felt as if she were listening to her language being spoken as if for the first time. She had never realised it could sound so beautiful. 'You speak such excellent French, sir,' she told him quietly. 'I assumed you must have been here many times.'

'That is very kind of you to say so.' He seemed delighted by her compliment. 'I am told I had a talent for languages from a very young age. I

could count up to ten in French almost before I could do it in English. It is what secured me my position here at the embassy.'

How could she resist? 'What?' she asked, quick as a spark. 'Being able to count to ten?'

He laughed the merriest laugh. It was very infectious and Henrietta giggled up at him, liking that she had amused him so much. She glanced round at their straight-faced companions. None of them had been able to understand the joke, had no notion of what the pair of them were talking about. It made it feel almost as if they were alone. 'Who are you, by the way?' Henrietta asked. 'What's your name?'

'It is very remiss of me not to introduce myself. Please forgive me.' He gave a courteous little bow and said just as courteously, 'I am Henry Jermyn. My friends call me Harry.'

Henrietta's big black eyes widened in surprise. 'Really?'

'You think I would deceive you, Madame? I assure you, I would never do such a terrible thing.'

She had not meant that at all. 'It's just such a coincidence.'

'That you are Princess Henrietta and I am Henry?'

She giggled again, shook her head. 'That your name is Jermyn.'

'I'm sorry, I don't quite understand . . .'

'Jermyn,' she repeated. 'As in . . .?'

'It derives from St. Germain.'

'I was raised at the chateau of St-Germain-en-Laye. It is my favourite place in the whole world.'

He looked a little stunned, as if the revelation of this link between his name and the name of the chateau where Henrietta had spent the majority of her childhood was somehow significant. She felt it too, in a way. It was almost as if they had just discovered that they were related, that there was a bond that had been forged between the two of them long ago, long before they had ever met.

'For what reason do you so favour St Germain,' he said. 'If I might ask?'

'The hanging gardens mostly. They are like a wonderland. With so many lovely things it's impossible to describe.'

'Will you not at least try?' he smiled. 'For my sake.'

Actually, she was only too glad to, having inherited a great passion for gardens as well as for architecture from her mother. 'There's a summerhouse

on a wooded hill,' she began enthusiastically. 'It looks right out over the River Seine and there are steps leading down from the terraces and underneath them there is a little grotto, with a fountain in the middle, made of seashells and coral and the water from it hits the roof with such force that that it falls again like heavy rain.' She broke off to take a breath. She had always had a tendency to speak quickly and because she was still nervous she was aware that she was practically babbling now. In French. To an Englishman. Though Henry Jermyn was not looking at her with any lack of understanding, but as if he had followed every word with ease and was genuinely interested in everything she had to say. 'No matter where you stand,' she finished more slowly. 'You get very wet. It is refreshing on a hot day.'

'I'm sure it must be.'

'There are marble and shell work figures in alcoves in the walls that also spout water,' she added. 'Many of them move.'

'They move?'

'Yes.' She giggled again, wondering why she kept doing that and thinking she must stop herself or he would think her giddy like everyone else did. Why she cared so much what he thought, she really didn't know. But care she did. 'There's a blacksmith who strikes an anvil. And nightingales which sing and flap their wings about and. . . .' She was about to tell him how, in the middle of the grotto, there was also a figure of Neptune with his trident, who came out of the pool riding a chariot, but she was prevented by her mother and Anne and her ladies who annoyingly choose that moment to come flurrying back into the room with Lord Kensington. Henrietta realised only then that she had missed her chance, had not asked one single question about England, or about the Prince of Wales. She didn't care about that really, but she would have liked very much to go on talking, no matter the subject.

'I should like you to know, sir,' her mother was saying to Lord Kensington, 'The king my son is very much in favour of this marriage, and now I have seen the prince, I myself cannot commend him more highly.'

Henrietta thought how if only he turned out to be like Henry Jermyn, even just a little, then she would be very happy.

What was it he said his friends called him? Harry. 'Arri,' she tried softly, to herself.

\* \* \*