



# THE GOLDEN CUP

MARCIA WILLETT

TRANSWORLD  
BOOKS

## About the Book

### **How far would you go to protect the ones you love?**

*Paradise*, the house at the head of a sheltered Cornish valley, is where Honor Trevannion lives, surrounded by her family. Frail and elderly, she is inexplicably anxious and distressed by the arrival of a young American bearing an old black and white photograph of a double wedding and looking for a long-lost relation. Her family try to protect Honor, unaware of the secrets which she keeps from those closest to her, and which are found in a cache of letters hidden for fifty years.

Too late to hear the story from Honor herself, the family are faced with revelations which could destroy the tranquility of life in their beloved valley. Will they be torn apart or can they unite in admiration for one woman's courage in standing by the life-changing decision she made so many years ago?

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# THE GOLDEN CUP

MARCIA WILLETT

To Clare Foss

## ST MERIADOC - FACT AND FICTION

First, the facts:

Meriadoc was a wealthy Welshman who lived in the fifth or sixth century. At some point, he gave all his money to poor clerics and his land to the needy. Setting aside opulence and the purple silks he loved to wear, he dressed in rags, ate simple food and lived in complete poverty. He came to Cornwall, where he founded several churches, before crossing over to Brittany to continue his ministry. Elected to be Bishop of Vannes, he accepted the post with great reluctance and continued to live a life of abstinence. To this day, he is remembered in both Cornwall and Brittany - the parish church at Camborne is dedicated to St Martin and St Meriadoc, a miracle play in Cornish still survives recounting his legendary exploits and there is an infant school named after him. His feast day is 7 June.

'Poverty is a remover of cares and the mother of holiness' St Meriadoc

Now for some fiction:

St Meriadoc's Cove, the well (there is no known well ascribed to the saint) and Paradise are fictional, as are the osteopathy practices in Bodmin and Wadebridge. The cove is 'situated' on the north coast of Cornwall between Com Head and Carnweather Point, overlooking Port Quin Bay and almost directly north of Polzeath. There are two lanes leading down to the cove, one from the east is disused and leads directly to the house: 'Paradise'. The other, from the west, drops down to the head of the cove, passes the old boatyard and 'The Row', crosses the stream that runs down

from the well and divides to the left, leading to 'The Lookout', and to the right, to Paradise.

## PROLOGUE

The two figures, leaning together beneath the bare boughs of an ancient beech, were barely distinguishable in the fading, wintry light. They stood quite still, a smudge of darker grey against the high granite wall that separated the sheltered garden from the sloping meadow. As he stared across the frosty grass he heard the arched, wrought-iron gate open with a clang and saw a girl pass through, closing the gate carefully behind her. He straightened, recognizing her from the brief glimpse he'd had earlier when he'd called at the house. A soft plaid was wrapped about her shoulders and she wore green gumboots beneath the long, knubbly-textured skirt.

The donkeys plodded to meet her with their familiar head-dipping gait and she spoke quietly to them, holding out her hands, bending down so it seemed as if she might be kissing their suede-soft muzzles. He hesitated – longing to call out to her, to make a connection with her – but his courage failed him. Instead, he pictured her as he'd first seen her as she'd come in through a door half hidden in the shadows at the back of the hall: a straight, uncompromising glance from beneath dark, level brows, her arms crossed over something that she held to her breast – a book? or a box? – and an air of wariness. She'd paused, watching, listening, and then had vanished through another door, leaving him with the older woman who'd smiled with such sweetness and sympathy.

'I *am* sorry. It would be quite impossible for you to see Mrs Trevannion today. She's got this wretched chest

infection on top of everything else. If only we'd known that you were coming.'

'I wrote Mrs Trevannion,' he'd answered quickly, unable to hide his disappointment. 'I sent a copy of a photograph with the letter. I think - I'm really hoping - that she knew my grandmother's sister way back during the war. She emigrated to the States in 'forty-six, my grandmother, and then they just lost touch. We were so excited when my mother found the wedding photograph, all four of them together, the names on the back of it clear as clear. Hubert and Honor Trevannion ...'

'I'm afraid she's been too ill to answer any correspondence. A broken ankle, you see, and now this infection.' She'd frowned a little, crushing his enthusiasm kindly but firmly. 'Perhaps in a week or two ...'

'I'm only here for the week,' he'd told her, dismayed, 'staying over at Port Isaac. I'm working in London for a spell and taking the opportunity to follow any leads I've managed to find while I'm over here. But I've been interested in this for a long time now and the photograph was a real find ...'

Once again, at the mention of the photograph, he'd sensed a faint withdrawal.

'I don't see how we can help you at the moment.'

He tried a different tack. 'What a magical little valley this is; so secret and so green. And what a great name for a house. "Paradise". You really do have strange names in Cornwall, don't you? Indian Queens. Lazarus. Jamaica Inn.' He shook his head as if in amused puzzlement. 'And then there are all these Saints. But I love "Paradise". And it certainly looks like it is one.'

'We think so too.'

Her courtesy was as blank as a stone wall and, in the end, he'd given her his card and she'd promised to contact him, smiling farewell, closing the door quietly. The sense of anti-climax was almost overwhelming and, walking back

down the drive to the narrow lane, he'd felt oddly hurt, thinking that she might at least have offered him a cup of tea. As he stood at the five-bar gate watching the donkeys he tried to be more rational, persuading himself that Honor Trevannion was probably very ill; that the older woman and the girl were too concerned with her wellbeing to have time to spend with an unexpected stranger hunting for an ancestor. He hunched his shoulders against the chill of the evening and rested his arms along the top bar of the gate. The shadowy group at the far side of the meadow was hardly visible now as the twilight, creeping across the grass and thickening beneath the trees, blotted away the glimmerings of sunset and dimmed the last bright reflections slanting from the west. He frowned, still thinking about the interview. Had he imagined that slight tension? A reluctance to discuss his letter and the photograph? He shrugged. More likely she hadn't a clue what he was talking about and was too worried to be interested.

He heard again the metallic clang as the gate closed: the girl was gone and the donkeys had moved into the small open-fronted barn. Frustrated, but still driven by curiosity and a determination to follow his lead through, he walked on to the disused quarry where he'd parked his car and drove away.

# PART ONE

## CHAPTER ONE

The grassy track from the meadow twisted between rhododendrons as tall as trees, whose woody arms, stretching along the hard, bare earth, were supported and propped upon deep-rooted, knuckly elbows. The tough, lance-shaped leaves shivered in the chilly, gently shifting air and, at the edge of the path, clumps of snowdrops gleamed dimly in the gathering shadows. Light shone suddenly from an upstairs room and a figure stood with arms wide-stretched, pausing briefly to look out, before the brightness was quenched by the sweep of curtains drawn swiftly across the windows.

By the time the girl had reached the garden door, kicked off her boots and crossed the hall to the drawing-room, Mousie had come downstairs and was piling wood onto the open fire.

‘So there you are, Joss.’ There was an odd note of relief in her voice. ‘I wondered where you’d disappeared to. Were you putting the donkeys to bed?’

‘I took some apples.’ She sat on the wide fender, curling her toes in their thick, cosy socks, relishing the warmth from the flames that licked with greedy yellow and orange tongues at the rough-sawn logs. ‘How is Mutt?’

‘Sleeping peacefully. I shall take up a tray of tea and sit with her for a while. Would you like to join us?’

Joss shook her head. ‘I’ll go up later and read to her. She gets restless after supper and it distracts her. Who was that man who was here just now? What did he want?’

Mousie hesitated, as if making an effort to formulate an accurate answer. ‘He’s an American tracking down a relative. He seemed to think that your grandmother might

have known his great-aunt during the war. Something like that. Not a particularly suitable moment, I'm afraid.'

'And does Mutt know her?'

'I haven't asked her,' answered Mousie crisply. 'Do you want some tea?'

'I'll come and get mine in a minute, just leave it in the pot.' Joss smiled at the small upright figure, whose high-necked jersey was slung about with several pairs of spectacles all mixed up on long pieces of cord. 'You know I can manage perfectly well if you want go home, Mousie.'

'I know that, my darling.' Mousie relaxed visibly, tension flowing from her shoulders and smoothing away the lines of anxiety: her slate-blue eyes were bright and warmly affectionate beneath the unruly crest of soft white hair. 'But perhaps just one more check to make sure that she's settled. This new antibiotic ...'

Joss chuckled. 'Hopeless,' she said. 'It must be all those years of nursing and being in charge. Old habits die hard. I'm qualified too, you know. OK, I know I'm not a *proper* nurse, but I can lift Mutt and I promise you that some gentle massage will really help now that her foot is out of plaster.'

'And you also know very well that I am *not* prejudiced against osteopathy,' said Mousie firmly. 'I have no anxiety about you looking after your grandmother; I'm just rather worried about the chest infection. And she's in a rather confused state, although that's mostly due to the antibiotics.'

Her eyes were anxious again and, watching her, Joss had no desire to tease her further but felt instead a stomach-sinking fear.

'We have to give her time,' she said. 'It was a bad break and this horrid infection isn't helping. She'll be fine, Mousie.' It was almost a plea for consolation and Mousie swiftly responded to it.

‘Of course she will, my darling. Thank goodness you can spend some time with her. Having you here is the best medicine she could have.’ She smiled mischievously, her sense of humour and natural resilience returning. ‘That and the massage, of course.’

Left alone, Joss drew her feet up onto the fender, rested her chin on her knees and began to think about the good-looking American. She’d been attracted by the eagerness that had informed his gestures and expression, and was already regretting her own wariness. How simple – she told herself now – to have joined in the conversation; offered him some refreshment. She’d seen him standing at the field gate but this newly acquired reticence – so foreign to her character but necessary to protect herself – had made it impossible for her to call a friendly greeting. She’d been surprised, however, at Mousie’s uncharacteristic caution and the guardedness with which she’d parried his enquiries, although, under the circumstances, it wasn’t terribly surprising that Mousie was preoccupied.

Now, as Joss gazed into the bright heart of the fire, she imagined a different scene: a scene in which she’d strolled forward, smiling in response to his friendly glance, saying, ‘Goodness! This sounds fascinating. What’s it all about?’ They might have had some tea together and he could have shown her the photograph of his long-lost great-aunt. She felt frustrated by this new constant need for wariness that clamped her tongue and inhibited her gestures, although, she reminded herself, she was at least able to remain open and confident with her patients.

This was because they rarely asked about her private life and so there was no need to be on guard. If the dreaded questions – ‘Are you married? Do you have a boyfriend?’ – were to be asked, she was able to deal with them more casually with patients than with those she loved. Relationships with her family had become more complicated since she’d moved out of the bed-sit in

Wadebridge to stay at Paradise whilst she renovated the tiny cottage at the end of The Row. Yet how could she have foreseen that a childhood friendship would flower so abruptly into a love that must be kept secret?

‘Tea’s made,’ Mousie called on her way upstairs.

Joss went out into the hall, pausing to revel in the atmosphere of this house that she loved so very dearly. It was such a perfect little place, elegantly proportioned with high sash windows, and she’d sometimes imagined tilting back the roof and looking down inside as if it were a doll’s house. Mousie’s voice could just be heard, murmuring comfortingly beyond the closed bedroom door, and Joss wondered whether her grandmother had once known the American’s great-aunt, way back when they’d both been young. She understood his interest in this vanished relative, dimly recognizing in him a need for security that is centred in family. Her own heart was much more at home here in this tiny valley of St Meriadoc, where her mother’s family had lived for centuries, than in her parents’ house in Henley or the London flat where her father spent most of his working week.

She decided to ask Mousie if she might see the photograph, hoping that there was some connection that would encourage the young man’s quest. Still thinking about him, she poured tea into a mug and carried it back to the fire.

Upstairs, Mousie removed the tray, saw that Mutt was dozing again and looked about the room. A small but cheerful fire burned in the grate, safely contained behind a tall meshed guard, and a pretty painted screen had been set so as to shield the elderly woman in the bed from the brightness of the tall lamp set on a gate-leg table near the window. It was at this table that Mousie kept her vigil and it was piled with books, newspapers and the paraphernalia of letter-writing.

She stood for a moment, her back to the bed, tidying the bulky newspapers, squaring the loose sheets of a letter she'd been writing before folding them into the leather blotter, collecting stray pens and a pencil and putting them into a blue and white ceramic jar. Presently she slid the print from beneath the blotter and stared down at it. It was evident that it had been recently copied from an original photograph itself, rather than from the negative, and it bore the marks of scratches and creases. Nevertheless she'd recognized it at once: in 1941 her cousin Hubert had sent an identical print all the way from India to his aunt in Portsmouth.

He'd written:

I was deeply horrified and sad to hear about Uncle Hugh and the loss of HMS *Hood*. But I am so pleased that you're going to St Meriadoc to be near Mother and Father... I can't wait for you all to meet Honor, she's a darling. Give my love to Mousie and Rafe ...

Even now she could remember the shock and misery she'd felt at this news coming so soon after the death of her father. From her earliest memories she'd loved Hubert with an overwhelming devotion, willing herself to grow up quickly, imagining the glorious, much-dreamed-of moment when he would see her as an adult and realize that he'd loved her all the time. It was Hubert who had given her the nickname 'Mousie' and, though he had teased her, he could always make her laugh: there was no-one else like Hubert. She'd gazed at the face of Hubert's new wife, mistily smiling beneath the charming, silly hat slanted over one eye, and had silently, bitterly, hated her. As the war dragged on, news had filtered back to St Meriadoc from India: Honor had given birth to a son, Bruno, and, three years later, to a daughter, Emma. Mousie was seventeen when they'd heard that Hubert was trying to book a

passage to England for his wife and children in an attempt to protect them from the riots and upheaval of partition. He'd planned to follow them when his discharge came through, later in the year, but he had died of some kind of food-poisoning days before his family were due to sail and Honor – whom Hubert had nicknamed Mutt – and the children had come back to Paradise alone.

Mousie slid the photograph beneath the blotter and glanced across at the bed. Mutt was lying on her side, watching her with calm intelligence. Mousie concealed the tiny shock that these switches from feverish confusion to brief moments of lucidity caused, and smiled.

'I'm afraid that tea must be cold by now,' she said. 'Would you like some more?'

Mutt made a faint negative shake of her head on the pillow and Mousie moved back to the bed, sitting in the low upholstered armchair so as to be nearly on the same level as the sick woman in the high bed.

'Poor Mousie,' the words were barely stronger than a breath and Mousie had to bend closer to catch them. 'What a nuisance I am.'

'Not a bit of a nuisance.' She took Mutt's weakly outstretched hand and held it warmly between both of her own. 'You're getting better by the minute. And Joss will be up soon to read to you.'

There was a little silence whilst the logs crumbled together in a soft ashy explosion of flames and the shadows streamed across the ceiling.

'Odd, wasn't it,' Mutt murmured, 'both of us being nurses?'

'It was all Hubert's fault,' Mousie answered lightly. 'You know how he was my hero when I was small. Once he'd qualified as a doctor I was determined that I would train to be a nurse. I was always foolishly pleased that he knew I'd started my training before he died. It was as if it made some kind of connection between us.'

Mutt stirred restlessly, turning onto her back and pulling herself higher up the bed.

‘I might try to sleep again,’ she said.

The tranquil moment had passed, although there was no sign of fever, and Mousie watched her thoughtfully for a moment before putting the handbell beside her on the quilt, and going quietly away.

## CHAPTER TWO

The Porch Room, given its name because it was situated directly above the front door, looked south across the secret, sheltered garden to the lane and the hillocky, gorse-edged little fields beyond. A sturdy wisteria grew beneath the window, so that in early summer the scent from its grey-blue flowers drifted into the room through the open casement. Here Mutt had placed a wicker chair at an angle from which, on a June evening, she could be ravished by the exotic crimson and white flowers of the rhododendrons and watch the full moon, egg-yolk yellow, rise above the distant thorn trees at the head of the valley.

As she entered the room later that evening Joss felt a sense of pleasure at its peaceful, elegant comfort, although, privately, she preferred her own room at the back of the house, which looked north towards the high rugged cliffs. At night she could hear the restless, rhythmic sighing of the waves, as they pried and dragged at the resisting rocks with foamy fingers, and tumbled hugger-mugger into the caves to carry out the grey shaley sand with them as they retreated. Now, the cold, frosty night was closed out behind thick, velvet curtains and her grandmother's room was as quiet and self-contained as a little space ship rocking on its way through a silent universe.

She glanced towards the bed and its motionless occupant and, seized by sudden terror, moved quickly. Mutt opened her eyes as Joss stooped beside her, feeling for the thin wrist, checking the light, fast pulse. She grimaced, as though guessing at her granddaughter's momentary fear and mocking it.

'I'm still here,' she murmured.

‘Yes.’ Joss silently expelled a little gasping breath of relief. ‘So you are.’

They smiled at each other, the deeply special love that had defined their friendship from the earliest days flowing between them. Mutt’s frail grip tightened a little on Joss’s warm hand. Nothing now must harm her plans for this dearly beloved grandchild: the natural inheritor of Paradise. She and Joss had always been a team: occasionally defying the middle generation and making their own fun. Joss touched the thin hand lightly with her lips and smiled at her grandmother.

‘It’s nearly time for your medicine,’ she said, ‘but I wondered if you’d like some massage first?’

‘Mmm.’ Mutt acquiesced readily, accepting what she recognized was an offering of love as well as relief and comfort. It was she who had enabled Joss to heal – taking her side against her father’s prejudice and helping out financially – and now she reaped the benefits. ‘Did I hear the telephone?’

‘You did.’ Joss edged her carefully into position so as to be able to treat the lower back and spine. ‘Mum’s coming down tomorrow.’ She took a small bottle from the bedside table, tipped a little oil into the palms of her hands, let it warm for a moment and then began to knead the muscles and soft tissues with dextrous, confident gentleness. ‘She’ll stay down at The Lookout with Bruno but she’ll be up to see you as soon as she can.’

Mutt showed no change of expression at this proposed treat; her concentration was fixed elsewhere.

‘Did someone call here earlier?’

Joss hesitated, wondering if her grandmother knew about the American and his photograph, realizing that she must have heard the ringing of the doorbell. It was not in her nature to dissemble, however, and she could see no harm in a truthful answer.

‘There was an American here who’s trying to trace his great-aunt. He has some idea that you might have known her during the war.’

She was turning her again, so as to deal with the lower leg, and saw a spasm of pain pass across the old woman’s face. Joss paused, watching her anxiously.

‘Did that hurt?’

Mutt shook her head, frowned and began to cough convulsively. Joss lifted her, cradling her thin frame in one arm whilst pouring medicine into a plastic measure with the other hand. Presently, the attack over, Joss laid her back carefully, supporting the injured leg on a pillow.

‘I must wash my hands,’ she told her. ‘Shan’t be long.’

Left alone, Mutt rolled her head on the pillow, staring across at the table where Mousie had been sitting just a few days ago; opening the morning post and reading, at Mutt’s request, the messages and letters that she was too weak to deal with herself.

‘Great grief!’ she’d said, amused. ‘There’s a letter here from a young fellow who wants to know if you’ve ever met his great-aunt. He’s enclosed a photograph.’ There’d been a moment’s silence and when she’d next spoken, her voice had been different, tender and hedged about with emotion. ‘How extraordinary,’ she’d said. ‘Remember this, Honor?’ and she’d got up and come over to the bed, holding out the paper.

The shock had been very great: to see her own youthful, merry face laughing out of that little group of friends, recalling with a sharp twist of painful joy that happy day and the grief and fear that followed after – these sensations had deprived her momentarily of any rational thought. It was some moments before she’d remembered the letter Mousie had read aloud to her.

‘I can’t see him,’ she’d cried apprehensively, cutting across something that Mousie was saying. ‘I simply can’t. It’s all too painful, too long ago,’ and Mousie had calmed

her, agreeing that she wasn't fit enough yet for visitors, and had given her some medicine to soothe the wretched cough that racked her. Alone afterwards, she'd eased herself out of bed, making her trembling, uncertain way to the table, but neither the letter nor the photograph were to be seen and she'd had barely enough strength to climb back into bed.

Now, waiting for Joss to return, she thought of something else – a foolish, secret thing, long forgotten – and fear crept and tingled in her veins. Her muscles flexed involuntarily, as though she might rise from the bed, but the medicine was beginning to have an effect and, instead, she grew drowsy. She imagined she was in India again, visions and noises jostling her confused memory: the sounds of rumbling wheels and the carters' cries, shuffling footsteps and shrill voices; the pungent, acrid smells; brown bodies and bright bougainvillaea; soft, warm dust and the relentless heat.

The telephone bell shrilled suddenly, muffled but insistent in the hall below, and was silenced abruptly as Mousie lifted the receiver. Mutt mumbled and cried out in her sleep and Joss, sitting beside her, raised her eyes from time to time from her book and watched her.

'I've just been thinking whether I ought to stay up at the house,' Emma's quick, light voice was saying into Mousie's ear, 'instead of with Bruno. If Mutt really is, well, *really* poorly with this chill, Mousie, perhaps I should be a bit more available. It's just that I don't want to butt in on Joss. I feel it's *her* territory at the moment, not just because she's living there while she's renovating her little cottage, but also because she's actually been in charge since her grandmother broke her ankle. She and Mutt have always got on so well, haven't they?'

Mousie smiled to herself, picturing Emma hunched over the telephone, gesturing with her free hand: warm, scatty,

lovable.

‘You’ll be fine with Bruno,’ she assured her. ‘Great grief! It’s only ten minutes away and Honor isn’t in a dangerous condition ...’ She remembered the doctor’s words and bit her lip. ‘Although, given her age, we should be prepared—’

‘That’s what Raymond’s been saying,’ Emma cut in, anxiously. ‘That I should be with her. You know he doesn’t have much confidence in Joss. He can’t be doing with all that alternative medicine stuff and he feels that we’re relying too much on you.’

Mousie’s lip curled. She could well imagine that Raymond Fox would prefer it if his wife were to be very much on the spot at this critical time.

‘Tell him not to get too stressed about Honor,’ she answered drily. ‘He can certainly rely on me to know my place on these occasions.’

‘Honestly, Mousie,’ Emma was almost breathless with a mixture of embarrassment and amusement, ‘he doesn’t mean to, dear old Ray, but he goes on a bit, sometimes. It’ll be heaven to see you all. My dear brother is only *quite* pleased at the prospect of my arrival; he’s wrestling with a tricky bit of the book, apparently, and I can tell by his voice that he’s totally wrapped up in it. Never mind. It’ll do him good to have a bit of distraction.’

‘If you say so.’ Mouse felt a fleeting sympathy for Bruno. ‘I think you’re very wise to leave Joss in charge here. You can assure Raymond that she’s more than capable and Honor feels very comfortable and safe with her. This is very important just now.’

‘Bless you, Mousie. I’ll tell him. The trouble is that he can’t take on board that she’s grown up, and it’s not as if she’s a qualified nursing sister like you are, although I keep telling him that she’s done brilliantly. But she was always such a caring, sensible child, wasn’t she? Not like me at all. Of course, Father was a doctor and Mutt trained as a nurse so I expect she gets it from them...’

‘Joss is fine,’ said Mousie firmly, ‘and Raymond should be proud of her. She’s been to Truro Hospital to check Honor’s X-ray results with the physio and she knows exactly what she’s doing. I promise you, she’s extremely professional.’

‘You are such a comfort,’ said Emma fervently. ‘I’m hoping to be down in time for lunch. Give everyone my love.’

Mousie replaced the receiver with the familiar sensation that she’d been for a brisk run, and returned to the drawing-room. Two small, comfortable sofas were set at right angles to the fireplace and a third, longer, sofa made the fourth side of the square. Mutt’s love for quiet, formal elegance informed each room in the house and nowhere more than here and in the small parlour where she sat to read or work. She was well known locally for her beautiful needlework and had received many important commissions; lately, however, her failing eyesight had made her reluctant to take on too much, although the tapestry in the small rectangular frame, which she stitched away at each evening by the fire, still lay half-completed on the rosewood table that stood behind the long sofa and on which she kept magazines and a few books.

Mousie sat down in the corner nearest the fire and leaned to open her big carpet-work bag. Carefully she drew out the photograph with its accompanying letter and looked at the four laughing faces: Hubert and his wife and another couple.

The American had written:

It was a double wedding because the four of them were such close friends. My grandmother remembered that both girls were nurses but thinks my great-uncle ran some kind of company in India. It’s all a bit vague but my great-aunt’s maiden name was Madeleine Grosjean. I know that the two sisters were very close, but shortly after my grandmother

moved to the States there was a complete silence from the Indian end. From enquiries made at that time it seemed that Madeleine and her family had just disappeared. We suspect that they died during the unrest in 1947.

Perhaps, by that time, you and Dr Trevannion had already returned to the UK. It would be terrific to find out the truth and I hope you might spare me a moment if I were to visit next weekend, say on Saturday round three o'clock?

She folded the letter and stared ahead, remembering Honor's arrival at St Meriadoc. By 1947, Hubert's mother was dead, his father rather frail, but they'd all done their best to make the travellers feel at home: the small Bruno, so like his father, dazed by the events of the last two months, and sweet Emma, too young to understand what had happened but good-naturedly ready to embrace her new family. From the first moment Mousie had adored the children – but as for Honor ... Mousie sighed regretfully. There had always been some kind of barrier between them, a reservation that Mousie had found impossible to breach. She'd feared it might be the result of her own love for Hubert, and had worked hard to overcome it, but she had never succeeded. She hadn't even been able to use the silly nickname that the children used: to Mousie she was always 'Honor'.

She heard footsteps on the stairs and bundled the letter and photograph back into the capacious bag so that by the time Joss opened the door Mousie was sitting with the newspaper open, apparently absorbed, relaxed and comfortable beside the fire.

### CHAPTER THREE

Travelling the familiar road past Launceston, turning off at Kennards House, waiting for a sight of the distant, shining sea, Emma - bored with the radio and her tapes - talked aloud for company, encouraging herself: nearly there now, nearly home. Despite the very early start she felt alert, full of energy and looking forward to seeing her family - especially Joss and Bruno.

'And dear old Mutt,' she said aloud. She was anxious and miserable about her mother's condition but her anxiety sprang from the fact that she felt so useless with ill people: not like Mousie, who had the knack of being caring and practical without getting worked up.

'She looks terrible,' Emma had cried privately to Mousie, the last time she'd seen Mutt. 'She looks so frail and old.'

'She *is* frail and old,' Mousie had answered with her typically sharply humorous look that always comforted Emma. 'She's nearly eighty and she's had a bad fall. What did you expect?'

'She's always been so ...' Emma searched for the right word, '... so independent.'

'True,' agreed Mousie wryly, 'but independence is tricky when you can't walk and you're in a very confused state.'

The thing was, thought Emma, as she drove through Delabole, that it had been much more than a shock to see the cheerful, capable Mutt confined to her bed and under sedation. It was as if a secure, reliable point of reference had been destroyed overnight and she'd found herself adrift, untethered. There was no question that Mutt loved her children but there was on occasions a strictness to her love and the odd thing was that she, Emma, always needed

Mutt's approval. However old she grew, she felt a glow of pleasure when Mutt smiled that loving, warm smile of approbation upon her daughter.

'Crazy, isn't it?' Emma would cry over the years, down at The Lookout with Bruno, as she helped him to prepare a meal in his kitchen, getting in his way. 'I'm twenty ... thirty-three ... forty-two ... and I still need to feel that she approves of what I do.'

At intervals in her busy social life - the daily round in Henley and entertaining Ray's business clients at lavish dinner parties in the London flat - it was always a bit of a relief to be with Bruno, to kick off her shoes - metaphorically speaking - and indulge in an orgy of unburdening: oh, what stories that strange stone house could tell.

She passed through St Endellion and Porteath, turned right into the lane that led down to St Meriadoc and pulled abruptly into a gateway. Opening the car door she stepped out into the pale sunlight, delighting in the familiar scene. Startled sheep with lambs at foot stampeded away over the field, their cries echoing in the cold, clear air as she gazed across rough, open land to the cliffs that ran north to Kellan Head and west to Rumps Point. By climbing a few rungs of the gate, so that she could stare down into the steep valley, she could make out the slate roof of the house surrounded by tall shrubs and trees; to its west lay the tiny, scooped-out bay with the disused boatyard and a row of cottages which, together with The Lookout perched on the cliff above it, made up the estate known as St Meriadoc. She realized that she was listening for the sound of the lark's song, although she knew it was far too early in the year. Mutt referred to this quiet, secret valley as 'the golden cup'; a phrase taken from George Meredith's poem about a lark, which she'd read to them as children. Emma could still remember a few lines of it:

And ever winging up and up  
Our valley is his golden cup  
And he the wine which overflows ...

She'd always loved to look down on it like this, coming home from school or, later, from London; this scene was one she carried in her memory.

'Why on earth do you want to stop?' Raymond Fox would ask impatiently, on visits during those early years of marriage. 'We'll be there in a minute.'

And there was no answer, she told herself. At least, no answer that she could give to *him*. Bruno understood that moment of glorious anticipation when, for a brief moment longer, you'd postpone the excitement of being a part of that scene below: looking down on all the promise to come.

'Never mind,' she'd mutter, acceding as usual to his will - Raymond was so mature, so sensible - and he'd reach to pat her hand or knee, unaware of her instinctive shrinking, her momentary absolute rejection both of his physical presence and of his values.

'Silly girl,' he'd say with patronizing affection whilst she'd press her own hands between her knees and pretend to be absorbed by something beyond the car window. Moments later, however, some deep-down early conditioning would be rousing her guilt and she'd be reminding herself of his sound qualities - a rather clumsy kindness allied to a natural tendency to protect, his ability to provide the necessary comforts whilst carefully husbanding his resources - qualities, Mutt pointed out, that were just as important as mutual passion. Twelve years her senior, good-looking and already successful, he'd seemed so glamorous to her inexperienced twenty-year-old eyes and his determined pursuit had been very flattering. Remembering, Emma made a little face; the point was that, once Bruno had announced his engagement to the waif-like

gamine Zoë, a Juliette Gréco look-alike and photographer's model, Emma had felt rather left out of things. Zoë had a way of making her future sister-in-law feel gauche – clumsy and raw – and Raymond had been conveniently at hand to soothe this sense of inadequacy.

'You can't marry him,' Bruno had said flatly, after the first meeting with Raymond – and they'd stared at each other resentfully.

'Mutt really likes him,' she'd said stubbornly. 'She thinks he's reliable and steady.'

'*Reliable?*' Bruno had stared at her in disbelief, shaking his head. 'For God's sake, Em! Do me a favour.'

Now, still thinking about the ensuing quarrel, Emma climbed back into the car and drove down the steep, winding lane, slowing down when she reached the boatyard beside the row of cottages and, finally, pulling into the disused quarry opposite.

The cheerful tattoo, thumped out on the car's horn, roused Rafe Boscowan from his work and drew him to the window of his study.

'It's Emma,' he shouted to his wife. 'I'll go.'

Pamela continued to sit at the kitchen table, carefully peeling vegetables, a look of expectant pleasure lighting her face. She heard Rafe reach the bottom of the stairs, open the door and shout a welcome, and then turned in her chair as they came in together. She could smell Emma's flowery scent, felt her face taken between gentle hands and her cheek kissed: a little pause – and she instinctively knew that Emma was studying her closely.

'You look so good, darling. Such a pretty jersey – and a new haircut? I love the blonde streaks.'

Pamela's hands went straight to her head: how like Emma to notice the change.

'D'you approve? Rafe says it's good but I'm not sure I can trust him to tell me the truth. Olivia said I was looking