

The Countess Arrives

by Jessica Carter

In perspective of character Countess Catherine of Lake

The County known as Lake was not too far from Bristol. It was a large and mostly peaceful plot of land, with many inhabiting it and laboring upon it. In the northern part of the county was a rather large estate with impressive stonework and gates. Who else's home could it be besides for the very Countess that owned the land? Inside at this time, the Countess herself, Catherine, sat herself at her writing desk, quill flying with speed over a mostly full book. She was too focused on what she had been writing to notice that feet slowly began traversing the stairs to her current location.

"Your Grace?" a voice called from the top of the staircase, peering over at the well dressed woman. She delicately set down the quill, eyebrow raising somewhat. "Yes, yes, what is it, Briarwood? Speak." she spoke, addressing her servant by their last name. Said servant in butlerly garb moved to the desk. "My Lady. You hath received a message. It is most urgent, I do believe." he said, quietly. He held out the folded and sealed letter towards the woman which she accepted. "Grammarcy. Thee may dismiss thineself." Catherine noted, making a dismissive gesture. The man bowed and once more descended the staircase.

Catherine let out a light sigh, thin and ring adorned fingers releasing the set seal of the letter, opening it. Her amber shaded eyes traced the text. Her expression became more and more shocked as she read. The Queen was coming to the nearby town of Bristol for their Faire?? She looked down at her current comfortable attire. No no no. This will NOT do. Catherine stood immediately, calling down the stairs, "Briarwood, call for Nicholas of Illinoisia. He will want to hear of this. We shall be headed to Bristol anon."

The youthful looking Countess moved to her chambers, looking through her attire, trying to find the best she could wear to meet the Queen herself. She pursed her lips as she searched. She slowly removed a deep burgundy tinted dress from her wardrobe. A smile came over her expression. *This will do nicely. Haven't worn this since that one ball yesteryear. Let's hope this will not be as much of a disaster as that ball was...* she thought to herself, leaving out the dress, preparing herself for sleep. It was already quite late into the evening. She would have to get plenty of sleep to have enough energy for the Bristol Faire.

Light filtered in through the window in Catherine's chambers, though the woman herself remained in sleep until she grimaced hearing sounds of footsteps approaching her door. She began to sit up in her bed, silk making way for her rising body. A hand tapped upon her door, which she called out, "Enter." in return. The same servant from the prior night entered. "Sir

Nicholas was informed. He is said to arrive shortly." Catherine nodded to him. "Grammarcy. Set on the tea if you would." she said, yawning. The servant bowed, closing the door behind him as he departed for the kitchens.

Catherine slowly stood from her bed. It took a moment to remember that today was the day she would travel to Bristol, but as soon as the memory came upon her she rushed to call her ladies in waiting to help her with her dressing. Fortunately enough they were nearby. It didn't take too long for Catherine's burgundy...or was it purple? ...Burgundy colored dress to be put upon her after layers of different undergarments. Once she was properly prepared she viewed herself in her mirror. The dress was beautiful, fabric of her skirts adorned with hearts and the like. She smiled into the mirror before reaching out to grab ahold of her glasses. She slowly placed them before her eyes so she had a much better view of her attire. She grinned enthusiastically, admiring the dress before turning to the ladies. "Grammarcy to thee... now. Nicholas shall arrive soon. My hair if you would."

She sat before her vanity, two of the peasantly dressed women working upon the woman's short brown hair, making sure it looked sufficiently fluffed and curled before moving to apply her cosmetics. Once this was done she asked for a dagger from the maids. They were, obviously, quite confused. "A...dagger, Your Grace?" one asked. Catherine scoffed. "I need to look mine best now. I must look a tad paler." she grumbled. Soon the realization came upon the maids as they nodded, one rushing downstairs to grab a knife.

Nicholas of Illinoisia, however, was sitting down in the lounge area of the home, being instructed to wait. The maid swiftly returned, knife in hand. "I beg your parden, my Lady, but it seems that Nicholas has arrived." Catherine sighed. "Eh. Not much longer until I'm ready anyhow." She reached out for the knife, taking it from the hand of the maid. The other had offered up a small bowl and held a cloth. Catherine bit on her lip slightly as she rose her skirts slightly, the maids looking the other way. She brought the knife to her leg... surely nobody would see a mark there. She cut into the skin, the red liquid soon presenting itself, dripping loosely into the bowl. One of the maids offered out the cloth but she declined... just a bit more.

Eventually, Catherine began to get somewhat dizzy. "O-Okay. The cloth now." she held her hand out, receiving the small cloth with her somewhat bloodied hand. She held it over her wound, a small smile coming over her once more. "Grammarcy..." she chuckled a bit weakly. After the bloodflow successfully stopped, Catherine lowered her skirts and departed her room for the lounge area. She walked carefully on the steps, mary jane covered feet shaking a bit with excitement. She grinned towards Nicholas as he came into sight. "Ah, good morrow!" she called. He stood, smiling towards her, wearing a red tunic and short trousers. "...You do realize this is a venture to meet the Queen, yes?" Catherine asked, inspecting her friend's clothes. Nicholas merely chuckled. "My apologies, I don't have many options." Catherine chuckled along, reaching to grab her travel bag, black laced fan resting within. "Shall we go at once then?"

Nicholas rested the teacup that he had in his grasp upon a small table. The butler from before approached, lifting it from its spot and moving off with it. "By cart, correct?" he asked. Catherine snickered. "Why, what other way could it be? Walking to Bristol?" Nicholas laughed nervously, "Ahaaaa...I see your point." The two exited the home, horse with cart and driver already outside upon the trail. Catherine carefully got onto the cart, sitting, Nicholas soon joining her as it began to move.

Catherine didn't speak much on the way to the Faire. Her mind had been wandering too much, staring out at the scenery, but neither did Nicholas. He never was one to talk a lot. They exchanged idle chat on some occasion on the jousting tournament, Catherine's studies, and other topics before the medium lengthed trek came to a stop at the Faire. The two dismounted from the cart in a field. Catherine removed and unfolded her black laced fan from her bag before moving forwards to purchase tickets for the Faire itself. Catherine could feel a set of eyes upon her but, of course, she ignored it. It was only natural someone would recognize her of being nobility.

Upon retrieving her ticket and Nicholas retrieving his, they walked to the front gates. Many people of different walks in life and obviously different places came and went rapidly. They found themselves in the line of those wishing to enter, handing over the tickets, and stepping forward. Suddenly, Catherine stopped in her tracks, rocks being kicked up with her sudden stop. Nicholas had kept walking, not noticing, but slowly turned back and returned to her.

Catherine's grip on her fan wavered, it shaking slightly in her grip. Voices prodded into her mind. First, it was a voice of a woman who whispered to her, "Help my children..." Catherine gulped slightly, another voice speaking to her, this time somewhat distant. "Save my creation..." the male voice spoke. Nicholas stared at her look of shock. "Er...my Lady? How now?" he asked, obviously getting worried and nervous, looking around them.

Catherine suddenly gasped, fan dropping from her hand. Her friend immediately dropped to the ground to retrieve it. "M-My Lady? How do thee fare?" He offered it out to her, her slowly accepting it. "I..." she stopped her speech for a moment, collecting herself, heart racing. "I am well. Pray put this behind you." Nicholas looked puzzled before giving a nod. "Of course."

The two went deeper into the town of Bristol. At first there were no problems until the sudden stop occurred again. Catherine winced, trying to keep moving forward but the voices continued to play into her head. Nicholas this time noticed something was wrong, but didn't know anything to do, merely staring at her. "I can feel the power within you..." the woman's voice coaxed her. A cold chill went down her spine. "You are braver than anyone knows." speaks the man's voice. Catherine bit down on her now colored lip. "My children can teach you how to hone your skills... join us and you can lead all mankind out of bondage." As soon as Catherine could react to this voice, the male spoke, "For generations, we forged the downtrodden into heroes. Join us and bring peace to all."

Nicholas wanted to do something to help, hand going out to her but then retracting, not sure if it

would be proper to actually touch her or not. In a triumphant manner, the woman exclaimed, "My Draco Disciples wait for you!" while a humble male whisper spoke to her, "The Band of the Twisted Claw will guide you to victory." Slowly, their voices fade. Catherine took a deep breath, letting a shaky exhale leave her. Nicholas was still conflicted, hand going back from going to touch her shoulder to retracting to his side. "Um. Er. Eh. Hm. Uh. My Lady." he stuttered out. Catherine blinked, fan moving to her mouth as she moved closer to him, the fan facing the group of others that were passing by as she whispered, "Did...Did you hear that?"

Nicholas seemed confused. "Hear what?" his brow furrowed. Catherine sighed, gently slapping herself atop the head, grumbling various words under her breath. "Nothing. Nothing. Let's go." The pair continued walking, however the red tuniced man was getting more and more concerned for the Countess's safety and health. Soon...they found themselves at a red vardo, near a small camp. Countess Catherine's eyes moved to a pleasantly dressed man and woman inside of the vardo. She slowly folded her fan, putting it to her bag.

"Good day."