



*Coming Home*

*by*

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*Dedicated to Donna Arven.*  
*My friend. My mother.*

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## *Prologue*

*Gadwynne Keep, Angevin England, 1157 A. D.*

Lord Dagan Bainbridge glared long and hard across the opulent expanse of the antechamber. The man Dagan had forever seen as an ally sighed into the stilted silence as a sharpening pang stabbed through Dagan's gut as the repercussions of the king's edict permeated his incredulous mind.

Plantagenet stood, eyes belligerently locked on Dagan's grim, shocked expression as the young knight groped for some understanding of the decree that Henry had rendered.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas a Becket, stood uncomfortably at Henry Plantagenet's side, deliberately casting his eyes away in an attempt to refute Dagan's obvious anger. The decree to which Thomas had borne witness a fortnight prior to this unpleasant encounter laid on the table, ignored.

Henry cleared his throat, "Do you have naught to say for my generosity, Bainbridge? This union has already been blessed, the banns posted."

Lord Dagan was renowned for his inability to accept edicts that didn't agree with what he had in mind. His simple grunt in response spoke volumes.

But Henry wasn't considering Bainbridge's legendary temperamental demeanor when he had decided to grant half of Dagan's petition. Of course, the young man could marry, as was his wont. But the lady he had in mind for Lord Dagan wasn't the woman he had asked to wed.

The woman in question, Lady Wilhelmina Pointau, was the daughter of a native Frenchman and his wife. Lord Pointau had come to England hoping to find his own way in the world. Having four older brothers had been a hindrance in his native homeland, and he had come to England to serve Henry's father in his bid to garner support for Henry's own rise to power that had signified the change from the Norman house of rule to that of the Plantagenets.

Lady Mina, as she was called, was one of the fairest maidens in the land. In all of England, there were three women whom Henry could truly describe as beautiful. Two of them were at the heart of this matter. Lady Mina Pointau was one. The Lady Moira DuVale was the other. Both were stunning creatures, as lovely as the darkest night, as fresh as the sweet dew of the newest dawn. And Henry would have loved to grant the young man's wishes, for truly Bainbridge had served Henry well since he had come into his majority, and he did so love to favor those who did him honor. But . . .

Had it been a perfect world where one could marry the person whom they loved, it could be so. Unfortunately, it was not.

And Henry would have granted the request if he could have done so. But the girl's father was adamant in his insistence that Dagan Bainbridge wasn't good enough for his only child and thus the heir to the

magnificent dynasty that, in her father's outspoken opinion, would only fall to ruin in Bainbridge's inexperienced hands.

So the girl's father, Lord Arthur Pointau, a man who had fought brilliantly for Henry when called upon to do so, not to mention was one of Henry's barons besides, had asked that his daughter be married instead to Lord Kinsey Gadwynne. What could Henry have done but grant his baron's request? Arthur Pointau was a very powerful man. To displease that particular baron was only begging for trouble.

And that was the real reason Henry was here. He had come to speak with Lord Kinsey about the situation. It had been a complete surprise when Dagan had arrived hours after Henry's discussion with Kinsey Gadwynne. It shouldn't have surprised him. Kinsey and Dagan were as close as brothers. Henry had thought that Kinsey had been ungracious about the whole affair. That was until he had spoken to Dagan Bainbridge.

It seemed that Dagan had his heart set on marrying Lady Mina, and Henry had informed Gadwynne that he would have Kinsey marry her instead. Most ironic, however, was that Henry decided Dagan would marry Lady Moira, who harbored dreams of marrying Lord Kinsey.

But Henry wouldn't go back on his word. These two marriages were important to the growth and strength of England on the whole. Just because the people involved would rather be marrying others didn't change Henry's mind in the least. The country needed it.

Kinsey Gadwynne was one of Henry's newest barons, the youngest at a score and ten. Lord Pointau was one of Henry's most trusted and loyal advisors. The marriage would reinforce Henry's power immensely. Kinsey had come to view it as a reluctant honor. So would Dagan Bainbridge, eventually. The young knight had a bright future. He was a natural leader as well as a devoted subject. Henry had high hopes for

the man.

“I will not do it,” Bainbridge finally growled, his lime green eyes flashing with irate fire as his hands balled into fists at his sides. “I will not marry at all if I cannot marry Mina.” Even as he heard the words he had uttered, Dagan could feel cold resignation seeping through the dark cloud that had engulfed his thoughts at the sound of Henry’s cryptic words.

The damndable truth of it all was that Dagan would eventually marry Lady Moira, no questions asked, and, did Henry will it to be so, Dagan would even dance at their celebration afterward. Did the king order something, then it was done.

Henry sighed again at the stubborn outburst. He had expected no less, considering how familiar he was with the Bainbridge’s temper. Still, it would behoove him to nip this show of belligerence at the bud now before Bainbridge began to think he could do so at will.

Very deliberately, Henry lifted the heavily bejeweled chalice to his lips, draining its contents in a swallow. “I beseech you to calm yourself ‘ere I see the necessity to have you shown the error of your ways. I have always been kind and fair in my dealings with you, have I not?”

Dagan bristled, for indeed, the king had been. “Aye, Your Majesty,” he conceded in a tone as humble as Dagan could manage. His eyes slid away from those of his king, falling to the rushes beneath their feet. He would do whatever the king might order. But that did not mean that he had to like it.

After what seemed like years, Dagan nodded slowly, still averting Henry’s direct stare as color infused itself into his cheeks in tiny threads that spread outward in every direction until it covered the man’s entire face in a ruddy hue. “As you wish, Majesty.”

Nor did his compliance mean that Dagan had to care for his wife.

He had sent his request for marriage in good faith, his hopes and plans for a future filled with happiness and laughter there in the hands of a man who cared more for power and prestige than he did for the men who secured Henry's place in the elite.

And from this day forward, Dagan Bainbridge would never forget that.