

War For A Rose: 1459

By scotjock1

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Four Years Have Passed, But War Has Come Back To England Over The Throne

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Four years had passed since St. Albans, and the small battle there between the House of York and House Lancaster on 22nd May 1455, where the Yorkists triumphed over the Lancaster army based there and captured King Henry VI in the battle. Bartand and Lady Lott "Pixie" had evaded Yorkist forces and safely made it back to Lancaster controlled lands. There they made their goodbyes, hoping and intending to meet once more when Mason thought it the time to partner them both together for an assignment. They had not met again since the day they departed from one another's company, Lady Lott returned to Court with her noble family with her orders from Mason in the interests of King VI and House Lancaster. Bartand's last orders from Mason were simply "Keep yourself content Bartand, go to the coast and work to protect the trade merchant's ships at sea against the French. I will contact you when you are needed once again in this war." Bartand simply did just that, travelling to Dover and Southampton in search of Sellsword work. He found it, with merchants who were having problems and troubles with French raiding parties in the English Channel. Trade ships transporting valuable goods from England to Europe, and vice versa. Good trade, and good profit came from it which was why they were hiring Sellswords and men to protect their ships at sea. Bartand spent the next four years at sea protecting ships against the French, and fought for coin as best he knew. September 1459, The English Channel, A Few Miles off of The French Coastline Bartand stood on deck, on the ship Merryweather looking out into the sea at a blur on the horizon. However the blur was moving and moving fast towards Bartand and the crew of the Merryweather. "Alright lads; axes, swords, and bows at the ready. These French bastards are coming at us again, and will be here soon enough." Bartand roared out, commanding the small force of armed guards aboard the ship. This wasn't the first battle Bartand had been involved in, with these men. The Merryweather had been at sea for almost three months, trading between France and even Germany with English goods. Majority of the piracy stemmed from the French coast, and most of the skirmishes Bartand fought in were along the Calais coast. In the four years he worked for the merchants and the trading companies, Bartand had cut down more than his share of pirates and only a handful of times was he forced to abandon the ships he was on due to fire, or pirates outnumbering them. Bartand wore faded blue breeches, his swordbelt hanging loosely at his hip. His boots were

faded from the salt water, and air. He chose not to wear armor in battle aboard ships at sea, even the ships he protected. It made him a big target on the ship for the attacking pirates, and the armor weighed the wearer down against the cold wind and the sudden jerks and movements of the ship in the water. It was also too risky to wear armor aboard a moving vessel at sea, and attempting to fight off attackers. All it would take were a swipe from a sword or an axe, sending the wearer of the armor overboard into the waters below where the weight of the armor would double in the waters and pull the man down below and drown him in a painful death, as he would attempt to get the armor off while underwater. He told his men the same thing, but it took a battle to convince the stubborn ones; many of their fellow guards falling into the waters in their armor and drowning. After that battle, they took Bartand's advice to heart and were now wearing the same as he was; simple shirt and breeches with their swordbelts. The air was crisp, and windy with a slight sun shining down on them from between the clouds. The crews of all the vessels Bartand served on, went by calling him Sir Bartand even though they did not know if he held lands, or titles but it was a mark of respect from the men who served with him and in battle saw his skill. Bartand had saved a few of the men now standing alongside him, from death at the hands of the French pirates. "Archers, prepare to dot their hull with arrows and strike anyone you can see on their decks. They'll barge us with the full force of their vessel, and board us!" Bartand ordered, the half dozen archers who wielded their longbows and crossbows aiming them, or loading them with bolts. The archers aboard the vessel, aimed their bows high in the air and memorising their training and experience of distance, aimed to allow the arrows to drop onto the ship from above. The blur was now clear and coming upon them hard, the hull of the incoming enemy ship bored slightly into the air like a knife out of water directed at them. The water rushing and splashing around the tip of the hull, like blood dripping off of a blade. "Archers, litter their decks with bolts! Slaughter those French bastards!" Bartand shouted unsheathing his steel sword, with a bolbol of red metal at its pommel. The archers on command loosed arrows at the French boat, the arrows flying high into the air as they turned and came down sharp into the French ship's deck and hull. The arrows splintered, and bored into the wood as Bartand could see some of the shapes of men aboard the French vessel drop and not get up again. "Thats it lads pin the fucking French bastards to their decks!" Bartand shouted, but even with the arrows raining down on the French ship it continued bearing down on them readying to board the English vessel by force. "Small arms out now! They are bearing down on us, prepare for boarding!" Bartand gripped his steel sword hard, with both hands on the hilt. The French ship was now simply yards away, as the large hull of the ship now dotted with arrows came down crashing onto the deck of the Merryweather. The sudden blow, make the Merryweather shake violently, sending a few of the men-at-arms on the deck sprawling to the floor, but Bartand held his balance. As the movements settled, Bartand helped a man clutching his bow to his feet. "No arrows now, we're too close for that! Sword out now!" He ordered the man, gaining his balance again. He threw down his bow, and on Bartand's advice unsheathed his daggers; two of them in hand. The French vessel crashed into the front of the Merryweather sending the attacking vessel, to crash side by side alongside the English ship. Bartand thought that was excellent sailing. The grappling hooks came overhead, and over the bannisters of the ship's side hooking onto

the Merryweather pulling it alongside the French ship. Bartand turned and saw men in armor breast plates, leather jerkinings and other armors carrying weapons climb onboard the Merryweather. "To arms! With me!" Bartand called out over, the salt sea and the sounds of wind. The men turned on his order alongside him, several of his fellow guards armed and clutching clubs, swords, axes and daggers. The French pirates climbed aboard, pulling their fellow pirates aboard in aid. Bartand dashed across the deck towards the French pirates, and centering on one wielding a war axe brought his steel sword down with both hands striking the man's breast plate with a clash of steel on steel. The Frenchman wobbled backwards, attempting to bring up his sword to block Bartand's strikes but as expected the sudden movements of the ships on water made it impossible for the man wearing such a large thick metal armor plate from standing his ground stable. Bartand sensing his chance, brought his sword back up and down striking the man's bare and unprotected arm striking flesh hard, tearing it almost off. The Frenchman recoiled in pain, as blood splattered covering the deck heavily. Bartand struck one more, with his sword this time across the man's exposed throat as he had his head high to scream out. The blow literally tore out the man's throat, sending blood and flesh to the decks of the ship. The Frenchman slumped to the floor motionless, as Bartand turned breathing hard and sweating on his brow he saw the skirmish unfold aboard. The archers onboard, had thrown down their bows and had taken to their swords and daggers. The fighting was mainly kept at the bannisters of the ship, if the French got into the centre of the upper deck they would have control of the ship from there. "Keep them away from the cabins!" Bartand shouted over the clash of steel and iron. A guard Bartand could call a friend, who he drank with regularly when they docked was pressed into the bannisters of the Merryweather under attack by a large French pirate clad in leather from neck to toe. The large breastplate the man wore was made of rough sewn leather, held together roughly. Bartand ran to aid the man, and brought his sword down the back of the Frenchman's leather armor splitting it open and the backflesh of the man underneath. He squealed, the flesh opening like an orange would be sliced open. Blood began to seep down the man's torn armor and his back, before the guard Bartand had helped grabbed hold of the French pirate and threw him over the bannister of the ship into the sea below. The numbers of the French pirates boarding the Merryweather dwindled, due to Bartand's training and leadership with the crew. Soon the French were all killed, their bodies strewn across the deck of the ship. There were a few stragglers left, a few of the men finished them off slitting their throats. Their screams and shouts for mercy, for aid were met with steel. "Search the men, take what loot they have on them before we search their ship. We will be pushing off from their wreckage within the hour men." Bartand said aloud over the screams of pain and suffering. The looting followed the battle, the guards left searched the corpses of the French pirates. The Merryweather crew lost just three men, which was good fortune for Bartand and those who hired him. "Three dead Sir Bartand, not too bad for a day in the English Channel." One of the crewmen said to Bartand, with a smile. Bartand wiped his steel sword clean of the blood he drew, and slid it back inside its scabbard. Bartand as fit a soldier, knew he was entitled to the loot of the men he killed and so found the first man he killed. The Frenchman who wore his steel chest plate, he was lying on his stomach motionless with a pool of blood beneath him. He grabbed hold of the corpse's sides, and flipped him

onto its back. Bartand was used to murder and death, the stench and the image of blood did not falter him even with the throat gaping open. Bartand turned out the corpse's pockets, and found a few French coins. Bartand thought. I can sell these coins to the French merchants when we make port or perhaps use them to buy me some wine. My headaches are worsening, but the wine helps. Bartand turned out the man's pockets and found nothing more except some foul meat and bread wrapped in linen. He checked the man's breast plate, it was good steel and still useable with blue markings across it and a few scratches but it would fetch good coin at a market. He literally ripped it off the dead man's body, undoing the straps around the man's armpits. He slid it off, and threw it to the deck. He found the man's longsword, it had a jewelled pommel and felt good steel, even after striking it on his own sword. Bartand thought. I could break loose the jewels and sell them, keep the sword for myself or sell it in its entirety to some trader. I will decide at port. Soon the hour passed, among the corpses aboard the Merryweather every crewman earned a good few coins, or something worthwhile to trade. The ship before being pushed off, was found to contain stolen goods from other ships the pirates had successfully targeted. Everything from fine linens, silver, gold, rich wines that would fetch a high price to merchants. Bartand observed the goods, listed them for value and began to move the goods aboard the Merryweather with his men's help. "Jesus, the goods aboard their vessel are worth hundreds in coin. We may even get a raise in coin from the merchants for our work." A crewman laughed beaming with excitement. Bartand did not share his excitement. "I doubt it my friend, the merchants we work for are not known for their charity not even to the men who steer their ships or defend them. Even if we return to Southampton docks with what we found, they will not share a single coin with us. They'll pocket this, and send you all on another ship bound for Calais." The man's smile disappeared as the truth set in. "Bastards and we did all the work! We retrieved stolen goods from these French bastards, and we don't even get a share of it." The man babbled. Bartand smiled, a smile all knowing of the reality of the situation; one he had been in more times in the past than he could count on a single hand. As a sell sword he had been betrayed more times that he could count, both in battle and after. As a sell sword he worked for a fee, but that fee never changed regardless of how well he performed his skills in the field. He could slew an entire army, but he was held in contempt by soldiers of the Lords that he served. He was a Sellsword and his loyalty was valued only by those willing to pay the coin, and most suspected and feared he would turn to the faction offering the better coin. This always made soldiers keep him at distance, none drinking with him or even breaking a meal with him. He stayed with other fellow Sellswords, even pirates and smugglers under the Lord's orders. He broke bread with notorious pirates who ravaged the coasts, but whom also had the boats and ships the armies needed to sail for battle. Smugglers who were renowned for their skills in avoiding the Royal navy at sea as they smuggled goods and illicit trades. It was unusual for Lords and ladies of Noble Houses to see, but they feared him and only looked for him to do what he was being paid to do. It made him the way he was, keeping a distance from those he fought with. They pushed off the French vessel from the Merryweather, and made their way back to Southampton with both their own cargo intact and the cargo they retrieved. September 1459, Southampton Docks, England The docks were busy, smoking pires where fisherman cooked their finds on burning coals

and cook fires. Traders sold their wares from wagons, stalls and even carried them around hailing for customers to see what they were selling. The Merryweather docked against the wooden dock, and tied up by its crew. Bartand carrying his loot in his large satchel filled to the brim with the steel armor he took from the dead French pirate, and even jeweled sword that he planned to sell as well as the French coins he was sure he could find a French trader to sell to. Bartand disembarked from the Merryweather along the gang plank onto the docks, the salt sea air filling his nostrils as he looked at the large port which was Southampton. He had been back here almost three months before, setting sail with the crew of the Merryweather to Europe. Now things seemed to be different, a new air to the port and it was clearly visible even to him and the crew; Royal soldiers patrolling in numbers and rank around the docks. Double, perhaps even triple the number of soldiers he had seen three months before. Bartand spotted a fisherman, selling his wares from his wagon on a bed of stones soaked in cold water to keep the fish fresh through the day, and he was cooking the fish on a cook fire nearby to sell ready edible fish to anyone with coin. The man looked to be in his forties, balding but with a thick white beard stretching almost down to the collar of his grey dirty shirt. He was gutting a fish one moment, and just as quickly he was leant over the cook fire smoking a fish for a waiting customer. "You there, fisherman. Why such a busy day at port, what brings the Royal soldiers here?" Bartand asked humphing the satchel laden with loot over his shoulder. The fisherman looked up, handing the man his cooked fish with a knife onto a clay plate and pouring some sauce over the fish for the customer before turning back to gutting his fish. The customer walked away swallowing chunks of blackened cooked fish. The fisherman with his knife cut open the fish's gut and began to empty its insides into a basket. "Where have you been these past weeks Sir, do you not know the news spreading all over England?" He asked Bartand. Bartand pulled his swordbelt up, as it slipped down. "I'm afraid Sir, I have been at sea protecting galleys and trade vessels against French pirates. Will you tell me this news Sir?" Bartand explained. The fisherman smiled with missing teeth, and gummy. "I would Sir, if a man would buy my wares I think a hungry mercenary needs a good bit of fish in him after such a long time at sea." The pry fisherman grinned, knowingly trying to sell his fish to Bartand in exchange for information free to anyone asking. Bartand smiled, smelling the fish smoking. The wry old fool, trying to make me buy his fish for such free news. Although... that fish is smelling really good, hes put spices and pepper on it. I haven't had a real meal in weeks aboard the Merryweather. Bartand slipped a single copper coin from his purse, and handed the fisherman it. "Fine you win fisherman, give me one of your smoked salmon you have over there cooking." The fisherman smiled, and began to break up the fish on the cook fire sprinkling spices and salt onto it, before placing it on a crude clay plate and handed it to Bartand. Bartand gingerly took grasp of the clay plate, and shoved a mouthful of seared smokey fish between his teeth chewing the hot meat. "Information fisherman, I kept my end of the trade." Bartand said between gasps of pain from the hot fish meat on his tongue and lips. The fisherman smiled conceding. "Alright sellsword, word is the truce between the King and the House of York is failing after four years of peace. Both the King and the House of York are recruiting soldiers and armed supporters to their cause, preparing for war it seems once more. Queen Margaret herself is raising an army from noblemen across all of England. The House of York are

finding support among those against the King, it won't be long before another battle will be fought. If you ask me, England has enjoyed its peace why must we go to war once more." The fisherman claimed, placing the fish he gutted onto the cook fire and allowed it fry. Bartand listened intently biting down chunks of the spiced salmon, pulling out his leather canteen of water and washed down the fish. "Thank you Sir, for both the fish and your news." Bartand bid the man farewell, but the fisherman was already gutting another fish from the wagon to cook once gutted. Bartand began to walk along the docks, looking out into the English sea. Abruptly soldiers shoved past Bartand, almost making him drop his fish but he held onto it as the soldiers walked past. Bartand looked back to see them, they were the King's men wearing the sigil of House Lancaster and a lesser Lord's sigil loyal to the King. They wore chainmail and surcoats, carrying spears, swords and even bows intent on getting somewhere in a hurry. The man who barged into Bartand, as he walked away turned to look at Bartand before shouting over the sound of heavy footsteps from the men's boots. "Watch where you step Sellsword!" "Is that how Royal soldiers act in the presence of the king's people?" I said aloud, the column of soldiers stopped marching and the pious soldier who barged Bartand turned to him. "Did I not just tell you to watch your step, now must it be your fucking tongue!" The Royal soldier stepped out of column and turned to face Bartand. Bartand had his hand on the pommel of his steel sword, he did not want to fight the King's soldiers but the soldier should have apologised. "Are you a bastard, as well as a money grubbing mercenary!" The soldier padded over to Bartand, as the soldier took hold of his sword Bartand simply unsheathed his own steel sword. "I advise you soldier, I fight for your King as well and I don't think your liege Lord would take satisfaction in knowing you spoke to others like this including a sellsword I think he would hire into the King's service. I am in all my rights to defend myself against attack soldier." Bartand rehersed. The soldiers turned alongside each other to face Bartand, hands on their pommels. Bartand had one hand on his steel sword, and his own resting on the dagger sheated on his belt. Bartand was well trained and versed with swords, daggers, bows and even axes so he could fight with two weapons at a time. "If you feel like you need to answer steel with steel soldier, then come at me then. We will see who walks home tonight, to their wives. I'll wager you could kill me, but I shall take most of you with me to the halls of the dead." Bartand said gripping his steel sword in one hand, and in the other the dagger. The Royal soldiers did not move, they were not stupid and knew from the way Bartand stood and presented himself that he was experienced, well trained and could match all of them in combat. "Like I said sellsword, watch your step next time. The King's soldiers have duties to attend to, and you will not deter them." The captain of the soldiers said, turning on his heel and began marching away with the rest of the column attempting to catch up pace. Bartand sighed, he wasn't happy he wanted a fight; to take out his frustations. But this fight, it was better he had avoided it; attacking a Royal soldier brought down the King's justice which was beheading for such a crime. He didn't want to lose his head for fighting a few King's cloaks. Bartand looked out into the English sea, as seagulls flew overhead quarking he ate his fish. "So you still think the need to pick a fight with just about anyone don't you." A female voice called from behind him. Bartand turned slightly to see the girl speaking to him, but even her voice triggered a memory; he knew who it was before he even turned around completley. She stood in a grey and white dress,

tightly fitting around her chest and waist with a bodice around her upper torso over the dress made of leather and bound tight with strings pushing her breasts up to the air. Her short blonde hair was now braided, but shielded by her cowl pulled over her head, with her blue piercing eyes bearing down on Bartand. She was smiling slightly, as she wore her own swordbelt discreetly beneath her robes, and a dagger swung in its scabbard on her hip. "Lady Lott, by god I haven't seen you in four years. You have changed haven't you." Bartand observed, noticing her slightly bigger bust, more womanly legs and hips but also the complexion she wore on her face more shrewder. "Nor have I Bartand, I did not think I would find you at the docks protecting trade ships at sea. The duty suits your... demeanor I would say." She smiled beaming. She is still as coy as ever it seems, god she has not lost her beauty that is obvious. Bartand thought. "Well I always thought a life at sea, beyond me but it has kept me busy these last four years Ma'Lady." Lady Lott, also known as "Pixie" to some for her cute and petite body and frame smiled. "I think we have both changed Bartand, come walk with me." Pixie beamed, her eyes awash with blue sea in them. Bartand nodded and followed her as they walked along the dock edge. "I wonder Ma'Lady what brings you here to Southampton?" Bartand mused. Lady Lott looked over at Bartand, as they walked side by side. "War, i'm afraid Bartand. Our King's war to be exact, Mason sent me to find you. We have been given a task by him." She said walking, her heels clicking on the stone cobbles. Bartand took a moment to stare at her legs, encased in white cotton stockings. "I had heard of war coming, once we docked the Merryweather. I saw more Royal soldiers patrolling these docks, than I did three months ago when I sailed off. Also a local spoke of both the Queen and House of York recruiting soldiers for war." Bartand explained his own account of events since landing. Pixie nodded gently as they walked. "It is true, Queen Margaret is rallying support from the noblemen and those loyal to the King as House York finds support among the commoners. This past year has seen a lot of heated exchanges between the King and those of House York. Lords loyal to both sides are calling in their bannermen, buying sellswords even. War is coming once more Bartand, Mason knows this and he wants us to target a Lord loyal to the Yorkists. A Lord by the name of Walters, of Dover. A land Lord, yet he has no issues in taxing the pirates and smugglers who come to his docks and he has used that saved coin to hire Sellswords from France, Spain, Germany and even Norway into the service of House York. A lot of coin is being spent by Lord Walters, and others loyal to York. They are hiring smugglers, to prepare to move forces via the sea to the coasts of England quicker than by road." Pixie knew what she was talking of, she had heard it all in Court from both those supporting the King and York. She was a Lady, and privvy to such information; and as Mason's courtesan in Court she could wiggle the information from most men with a few wry stares and flash them a bit of her thighs. Other times a dagger was needed to be held to the man's throat in his bedchambers, but either way she got her target and the information she needed. Recently, in the last few weeks the information she heard from her targets made her fret and even Mason knowing war was igniting once again. One Lord spoke of House York making an alliance with Scotland, France, and even Spain to send forces over to help them oust the King from power. This may have been rumors, but Mason took them seriously enough regardless and sent envoys to those countries to make their own alliances for House Lancaster. Bartand finished the blackened cooked fish he had

bought, and threw it into the sea as they walked. "Seems the cards are dealt finally Ma'Lady, the King and House York will face off again in battle it would seem. Question is now where will they face off, St Albans was different it was a matter of defending the town but I would assume both armies are on the move with so many King cloaks around these docks. They on the offensive now, at least we know that much." Bartand observed, seeing Royal soldiers on the ramparts of the nearby Fort and even watch towers flying King's colours. "You are a shrewd man yourself Bartand, you have noticed such a large force here in town belonging to the King's service. Do you still serve our King, Bartand?" Pixie asked gently, turning to face him noticing his own rugged build and warrior body. It made her feel weak in the legs slightly, and the feel of butterflies in her stomach. "I always serve the King, Ma'Lady. My loyalty is to House Lancaster, they pulled me up from service and put coin into my pockets when I needed it. I do not forget that, nor do I forget that Mason puts more coin in my pockets. As long as they pay me well for my services, my loyalty is theirs Lady Lott." Bartand vouched himself. Lady Lott smiled, but it wasn't a happy one more of a realisation. "So your loyalty can be bought it would seem Bartand, who ever has the most coin. Indeed who are you truly loyal to, if they do not have the coin to pay you." Bartand thought gently, only one person he would ever stay true to for what ever they paid him; even if they paid nothing. It was her, Lady Lott. "Only one Ma'Lady, she can have no coin in her pocket but I stand loyal to her until the end of days." Pixie gently laughed, composing herself as she rubbed her cheek. "Who indeed is this lucky woman, your wife or mother?" She asked him. Bartand stopped in his tracks, and halted walking as Pixie stopped alongside him. "It is you Ma'Lady, you saved me that night in those woods and I am indebted to you for it. You are the only woman in this world, I shall protect for no coin but appreciation. I am honor bound by blood to you, a blood promise." Pixie no longer smiled, she had no words to say as she looked all around her for something; whatever it was it was lost on Bartand to see. "Well... that is something I did not expect to hear sellsword, me being the one you would truly protect for no coin. I am... honoured." She stuttered. Bartand knew he had nothing else to say, he had said what he wanted to say. Its what has been on my mind these past four years Pixie, and its killed me not being able to tell you that evening we departed from each other. These four years have been a nightmare without you, the headaches worsen since I last saw you and only wine mulls the pain for me. Bartand thought to himself. They began to walk together once more. "We need to make our way to Dover, best we take the roads by horse and make that we are a travelling couple." Pixie explained. Bartand liked the idea of pretending to be her husband on the road, he had many dreams at sea of her being his wife. "By all Ma'Lady a wise choice, but indeed you are much younger than me and appear so. Many may question our story." Lady Lott nodded, and took from her pocket a silver garnet ring and placed it in Bartand's hands quickly. "Put it on Bartand, I have mine on already." She explained. Bartand observed she had a matching ring on her finger to his, to persuade those who saw them as being husband and wife. Now Bartand felt butterflies in his own stomach at the thought. He took the ring and slid it onto his finger, and looked at it vividly. This may be a decoy to deceive people, but I feel like I am married to her. God if only this was more than a deception. "As for weapons, you better sell that chestplate you have there before we leave. Same goes for the jeweled sword you took from the French, if people

see that then the facade of us being married will be destroyed. We will be staying a night or so, at Lady Cornish's Fort en route to Dover. She goes by her Christian name Jessica, and she is a supporter to the King's cause and we can trust her. She will allow us under her roof as guests, before we make our way to Dover. She can be trusted, but she is known for seducing men to tell them their secrets. She is unaware of what we are doing, and it is best we do not tell her." Pixie explained. Bartand nodded, holding his satchel over one shoulder and his other hand on the pommel of his steel sword. "Does Mason fear she could sell on this information to House York?" Pixie shrugged. "Most likely not, but she is an excellent seducer and Courtesan. She will most likely use the information to her own goals, perhaps blackmail Mason or the King's council for more powers, lands or titles. The council would probably grant them to her if she told them what she knows we are doing in the name of the King. She also believes we are husband and wife also so we must keep the facade of marriage up in front of her or she will know we are simply free agents for Mason. She may leave us both alone in her castle, thinking we are married and not push us for information." Bartand, was intrigued if Lady Cornish was known for her blackmailing ways why they would stop at her lands for rest. "And if she attempts to squeeze information from me about our mission?" Bartand asked. Pixie turned facing him again, patting down the skirts of her dress. "Then don't tell her, make up a story perhaps. Say we are trading for ourselves, but that on the King's business we are poaching information from all corners of the realm that could affect the King. She knows Mason does have his scouts and spies patrolling the realm, gathering information for the war effort. So that's the story we stick to in her company." In front of them both, a stable where horses were naying for food and attention from the horsehand. "We need to purchase horses, and supplies for the journey." Pixie said pulling from her pocket a pouch of coins. Unzipping the pouch, they walked over to the horse hand to purchase two horses for their journey. September 1459, On The Road To Dover, England A day had passed since leaving Southampton, Bartand had sold his steel breastplate and the jewels in the pommel of the sword he had taken from the French pirates for over two dozen coins; a mix of gold, silver and copper. The horses weren't cheap either, but a few coins made the horsehand happy and they packed and saddled their horses. The horsehand believed they were indeed married, and the pair of them told the man they were on their way to meet family following the wedding for celebrations. Within hours they were in the woods and open fields between them and Dover, riding alongside each other along the roads. Not much was said for the first few hours on horse, except basic questions. Now they were in a wooded area, riding along a stream with the sun now in the sky beating down on the trees and leaves bouncing rays onto the dirt path. The horse nayed and slowly padded their hooves into the dirt and mud, when Lady Lott turned to him still in her white and grey dress, a bit dirtier than before but still radiant on her. Her blonde hair braided, but tied up now under her cowl. Her piercing eyes still visible below the shroud. "Bartand, Mason told me you have been at sea since we last saw one another fighting French pirates... what did you think of on those seas, of home?" She asked him coyly. Bartand wondered, it was an unusual question she asked him. She knew what he had been doing for these past four years, why did she want to know what he was feeling whilst on the sea. "Well... the usual really Ma'Lady, being on sea meant we did not have many of the luxuries we have

on land. Most meals were salted fish, and bread. Some wines that I purchased when docked in Calais. I've been having headaches since leaving England for sea, only thing that really helps is wine so I drank my share of it onboard ships. Food well, reason why I bought the cooked fish the moment I was off the Merryweather. " Bartand responded holding the reigns of his horse. Pixie looked away to the stream, and then back to Bartand. "What about your lover, perhaps a real wife in Scotland waiting for your return?" She smiled slyly. Bartand smiled, his swordbelt slightly bouncing due to the horse's movements. "I'm afraid not Ma'Lady, I have never been married except on this occasion." Bartand joked showing the ring, and the irony of the situation. Pixie smiled beaming, he could make her smile that was a given. "As for lovers, most of those I have been with are married now or indeed still plying their trades." Bartand said, meaning most of his lovers were prostitutes in brothels. Pixie nodded, feeling sad that Bartand was alone with no one. "What about you Ma'Lady, anyone waiting in your lands. A lover, or perhaps a husband in waiting?" Bartand asked looking at her thighs, covered in the white cotton stockings. Pixie let out a giggle, even the thought of having someone never crossed her mind; her whole life was about training to be an agent and assassin for the King, and also a spy in court for both her House and House Lancaster. There was never any real time to find someone, and those who were interested in her were only so as they wanted a beautiful trophy wife to parade around court. It was never love with them. "I've spent my entire childhood training with swords, daggers even poisons. Then my teenage years were spent learning to be a courtesan in Court, and now my adult years I am a Lady of my House since my mother passed away. I guess I haven't taken the time to find a lover, or husband." She smiled sadly. Bartand saw a chance, a chance to see how she would really feel or react to what he would say next. If she responded well, it could mean more things to come and if she responded badly then at least he would know. "That is hard to believe Ma'Lady, someone as beautiful as you and as nice... you still alone. It does not merit a thought, you should be with someone. If I had even the smallest of chances with you... I would take it with both hands." Bartand said, gently choosing his words carefully. Well now its out there, however she responds is how I shall see the rest of my life. She has been on my mind for four years, and since she left me all I have are headaches. Maybe my headaches will now stop, if I know the truth. Pixie kept her eyes ahead, as if she was thinking and perhaps trying to not let her eyes meet Bartand's. "Well... if I had the chance also with you Bartand, I would take it with both my hands too. If I did indeed had such a chance." Pixie too chose her words carefully, they both knew words could become acts very easily as words of war became acts of war. "So... we would both like... the chance if we had one together. That is true correct Ma'Lady?" Bartand asked. Pixie simply nodded. "Uh huh." She moaned. Bartand felt his manhood grow in his breeches, as his eyes wandered all over her body from her stockings to her chest. "What... if I did take such a chance with you Ma'Lady? In the VERY near future I would say?" Bartand enquired. Pixie deliberated her choice of words again. "I would not say no Bartand, and I would really like if you did take the chance... with me." Bartand nodded, he had been give the green light to go for it with her. He couldn't do it now, not with the assignment and the journey by horse. Perhaps he would take the chance at Lady Cornish's Castle, and even add strength to the deception of marriage between them. "That is good to know Ma'Lady, and I shall take the

chance when time best fits it. I hope that will be very soon." He smiled eyeing up her breasts and legs, Pixie caught him and beamed with a smile as she gently bit her bottom lip. Pixie was breathing hard, biting her lip as she got excited. "I can't wait..." She moaned. Bartand wanted to play the dirty soldier. "Maybe I will shove my big manhood in your mouth Ma'Lady, deep so you taste my meat." Pixie shuddered smiling and moaned. "I will have to fight to get you that deep in my throat, Bartand." She grinned, the words making her moist between her legs and Bartand's manhood harden in his breeches. The rest of the journey on horseback was soon over, as they neared the town where Lady Cornish's Castle fort was situated. As the two of them neared the town, they saw townspeople hurrying around with their business; selling their wares from stalls, and herding their animals. Bartand observed the colours flying from the stone fort's walls; the King's sigil and colours, the only other flag flying was of a black raven standing perched on a dead mouse. "Lady Cornish's sigil, the raven that is. Her husband's arms; he has about six hundred bannermen loyal to him and the King. But he is usually away on King's business, leaving Lady Cornish by herself here. She makes do; her husband knows she is the true power behind House of Cornish, he is the public face in court. Be careful she is known for her beauty; I would not want her... stealing you from me, husband." Pixie smiled, as Bartand turned to her. Bartand smiled back, as they slowly worked their way into the town on horseback. As they worked their way around the townspeople's stalls, and the marketplace Bartand spotted soldiers loyal to Lady Cornish patrolling the streets to keep the King's peace. They wore a black cape with the House of Cornish sigil, and their armor was sleek black steel plates with the same sigil bore upon the breast plate. Chainmail was worn underneath, and helmets were sleek black steel with a face guard. Six of them were walking in rank towards Bartand and Pixie's horses, they pulled up and halted their horses in front of them. The captain of the column opened his helmet's face guard from the rear and pulled it wide open showing his brown hazel eyes. "Lady Lott?" The Captain of the guard called slightly lower than his usual voice level, so only the soldiers could hear. The soldiers knew who Pixie truly was, and so acted accordingly. Lady Lott brought her horse up sideways so she could speak to the guard. "That I am Captain." Lady Lott replied. "Please follow me Ma'Lady, and your companion. We will escort you to Lady Cornish." The Captain said. Pixie looked at Bartand, and the ring on his finger all part of the deception. "This companion of mine Captain is my husband, Sir Bartand." Lady Lott pointed out, the Captain looked hard at Bartand and simply nodded. "As you say Ma'Lady, please follow me." The Captain said turning the horse around to face the stone fort and began to ride onwards with his men following him. "He does not believe we are a married couple." Bartand observed, as he and Pixie soon followed the guards. Lady Lott nodded gently, as she rode. "Then we must prove we are one, perhaps in front of Lady Cornish and her guards. Then our story may earn its weight." Pixie answered. Bartand nodded, as the soldiers led the way to the Fort. September 1459, Fort, House of Cornish Residence, England The guards brought Bartand and Lady Lott to the gates of the Fort, and took their horses to the stables to be tied up for them. Their supplies and belongings were taken off the horses by servants, and were told they were being taken up to their quarters. The Captain of the guard, showed them both to the gate to the Fort. Inside the Captain of the guard called a male servant over with short black hair. "Please inform Lady Cornish, her guests

have arrived." The Captain of the guard said, the male servant scurried off to tell Lady Cornish. "I will leave you both Ma'Lady, Sir. Lady Cornish will be with you soon. Good day." The Captain of the guard bowed, and left through the oak doors out into the courtyard. Candles burned along the walls of the hall, and the windows allowed light into down the rest of the hall in light. They waited a few minutes, until the same male servant entered the hall once more and calling out as he walked in. "Lady Jessica Cornish, of House Cornish and wife of Lord John Cornish. I present to you Lady Lott, of House Lott and the King's Court." The servant finished, as a young, beautiful, tall raven hair woman followed the servant. She had piercing dark eyes, and dark make-up around her eyes and cheeks with deep dark red lips. She was extremely tall for a woman, standing at 5'10 even in her heels. She wore a tight sached dress, that clung to her curves and frame in black and purple colours. Around her stomach and just over her breasts, she wore a bodice in dark leather tied up tightly around her mid-drift. She had almost non-existent breasts, but they were there just simply small and almost flat. It did not blemish her beauty, with her extremely white pale skin and face. As she came into view, Bartand noticed she wore black lace gloves that ran up to her elbows. "Ah Lady Lott, it is an honour for my home to be your roof for the evening and any longer you need. Your father is well I assume?" Lady Cornish gracefully stepped down the few steps onto the marble floor as she approached them both. "He is indeed, he plans to take another wife in the Spring come next year." Lady Lott gracefully answered. "Ah a good man your father, he has mourned your mother long enough I think. She too was a good woman I believe." Lady Cornish said with grace and a smile. Lady Lott nodded, in a bow beside Bartand knowing her courtesies. "Indeed he has, I have met the woman he wishes to marry and I am pleased to say I accept her into my House and I am honoured to." Lady Cornish smiled, the cut along her leg down the dress exposing a pair of purple stockings with a bow at the top in black. Bartand tried to look away, not wanting her to catch him staring at her and destroy the facade he and Pixie and worked on. "And who is this amazing specimen of a man I honour in accepting under my roof tonight?" Lady Cornish asked, halting and stopping in front of them both only a few dozen inches away. "I am pleased to present to you Lady Cornish, my new husband Sir Bartand." Pixie carefully said noting Lady Cornish's reaction. Lady Cornish did not flinch or show any expression showing her surprise at this revelation. "Well... then I am honoured to have Lady and Sir Lott to my home. When did you marry Lady Lott?" She asked smiling. "A month passed, a small affair in a chapel outside of our holdfast. My father, his soon to be wife and my cousins attended us for the event. It was quite a small quiet celebration. Me and my new husband are travelling in the King's service, finding anything being said of value to the King." Pixie explained. "Ah Mason sent you I am guessing, quite a man I would love to get to know a lot more than I already do. He is quite an interesting man, my sources cannot find any true information about." Lady Cornish said wryly, knowing all to well that Mason indeed had sent them. Pixie had to hope, she believed them being husband and wife. "Indeed he has, in the King's service." Bartand added, finally giving his weight to the conversation. Lady Cornish's smile widened even more, as she noted Bartand's accent. A Scottish accent, very unusual in England. "Wow... indeed, you have married a Scotsman Lady Lott. Quite something, I would never have thought you would have married someone so... rare, exquisite and so untamed." Bartand

noticed her smile, that was aimed at him primarily. "Love can be found in many places, Lady Cornish. I was lucky to find it with Bartand." Pixie said biting away her anger. Lady Cornish smiled. "Indeed, infact I don't blame you... a Scotsman like Bartand is truly a find. Wish I had found him first indeed, and made him a lover." There was an awkward silence, between the three of them as a wide naughty smile crossed Lady Cornish's dark red lips. Pixie was right about her, she's a temptress trying to get me to tell her what I know for her assets. Lady Cornish smiled conivingly, she was going to enjoy Lady Lott and Bartand's company. "Well I shall let my servant take you both to your quarters, as man and wife I assume you will be sleeping together." Lady Cornish smiled Lady Lott nodded gently, watching Lady Cornish carefully. Lady Cornish called for her manservant, and told him to take Lady Lott and her husband to their rooms that had been prepared for them. Lady Cornish excused herself, saying she had to check on the meal being prepared for them for the evening and as she turned to walk towards the kitchens she grinned at Bartand, winking before disappearing. The same man servant who brought Lady Cornish to meet them, told them to follow him and they began to mount a staircase to the higher floors of the Fort. As they followed the man servant, Pixie slowly turned her head to look at Bartand as they walked together. "She is a temptress, I warned you." She said in a hushed voice. Bartand nodded solemnly, he was ashamed of having felt aroused at her seductions after telling Pixie how he truly felt about her. "You liked her didn't you? How she was trying to seduce you?" Pixie said, not bringing herself to look into Bartand's eyes. Bartand said nothing, ashamed. Pixie let out a small sigh and began to walk ahead of him a few paces avoiding him. I've betrayed her, I told her how I felt on the road and now i've destroyed any chance I had with her. "My love?" Bartand called for her, in his husband role but she ignored him and continued to walk up the stairs. I love her, and i've hurt her. Bartand thought as he followed her. The journey to the higher floors of the Fort's tower, to their bedchambers only took a few minutes but felt hours long as Pixie ignored him following. The man servant finally stopped in front of a large thick Oak door, and opened it stepping aside allowing them both to enter. "Lady Cornish will send me to find you here, when the meal is ready. Hand maidens shall come and dress you Ma'Lady for the meal before we go to the great hall to dine." The manservant said, in his speech voice before departing leaving them both inside the bedchambers where their things were piled up against the walls of the room. Bartand was about to close the door behind them both but spoke. "Should I even bother closing the door Ma'Lady, or would you rather I left you alone?" He asked her, but Pixie had her back to him staring out of the room's small stained glass windows into the courtyard below. "Just... do what you want Bartand, leave me for a while please." She sighed. Bartand nodded. "As you wish Ma'Lady... and I am sorry." Bartand said stepping out of the bedchambers into the staircase closing the door behind him. She will never forgive me for this, i've lost her when I had her. Bartand thought making his way down to the Courtyard, and the armourer. He would pass the time until the meal training in the Courtyard. End of Part One, to War For A Rose: 1459 as this will most likely be a trilogy perhaps of three parts to this specific year in England's history. Hope you enjoyed it, and can't wait for the next part.