THE BRIDE

THE STORY OF
LOUISE AND MONTROSE

By

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Foreword

THE BRIDE is one of four books about certain people in the seventeenth century whose lives were linked together. When I began *Royal Flush* I meant it to be a very short book, taking about three months to write. That was nine years ago, and only now, in finishing *The Bride*, have I accomplished what I then began. For Montrose was mentioned in *Royal Flush*, and I grew so much interested in him that his story had to be the theme of my next book, *The Proud Servant*. There followed *The Stranger Prince*, Rupert of the Rhine, who had already met Minette in *Royal Flush* and Montrose in *The Proud Servant*.

Rupert's artist sister, the Princess Louise, who came into *Royal Flush* and *The Stranger Prince*, was betrothed to Montrose (as her sister Sophia of Hanover tells us in her own Memoirs) four years after the death of his wife, Magdalen. I could not bring another woman after Magdalen into *The Proud Servant*, so left it to this book, *The Bride*, to tell the story of that betrothal of Louise and Montrose. It also tells what happened afterwards to many of the people in the three other books, to Rupert, to his mother Elizabeth of Bohemia and his sister Sophia of Hanover, to Charles II, to Minette's husband, Monsieur, to that supreme soldier of fortune, Colonel Sir John Hurry, and others.

All the characters in the four books are historical, and the quotations from letters and documents, except where someone destroys a letter as soon as written, in which case it is necessarily invention! People's own words are used a good deal, especially Sophia's and Hyde's, for they spoke so copiously and characteristically for themselves in their letters, journals and histories that for the most part they had only to do the same when they spoke in this book. Montrose's own words, too, have been used to a great extent, particularly at the end of this book.

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BOOK I

'BEYOND SEAS'

I

A FAT man sat writing sadly in a cold room; his purple fingers stiff and clumsy, his swollen feet swathed in flannel, damp-chill in spite of their wrappings, itching to be nearer the fire, yet shrinking from the inevitable torture that the tingling warmth would bring to his poor man's gout.

He wrote 'The Hague. Thursday, at 3 o'clock of the afternoon' at the top of his paper. Though Sir Edward Hyde was an English lawyer, and Chancellor of the Exchequer, without an Exchequer, he was singularly unbusinesslike in the dating of his letters, and since he could not remember what day of the month it was, it was not worth while to put 'January 1649.'

He wrote: 'My Lord; The Prince of Wales has given me a private command to wait upon Your Lordship in any place and at any time you please to appoint. You may believe me very glad of this employment, and to have the opportunity of kissing the hands of a person who has acted so glorious a part in the world.'

Here he blew on his fingers, tried to twiddle his toes, and uttered a sharp groan at the twinge that followed, shivered at the draught from the high closed window, got up to fling another faggot on the fire, which was puffing out more ashes and smoke than heat under the gusts of wind down the chimney, but counted what were left in the basket and reflected he had better not; opened a cupboard instead and brought out a jug of thin ale and a large silver cup which he filled and drank; then decided that the ale was getting flat and he had better finish it off, so filled the cup again and carried it over to his writing-table, then drank, then sighed, then drank again, then thought that if he sold the cup he would be able to buy at least one more cask of tolerably good wine, then remembered that the cup had been a school prize and that his mother had been prouder of him for bringing it home to Dinton than when he began to make a name for himself as a rising young bencher of the Middle Temple.

It had been a long time since he had thought of his father's parsonage at Dinton, the cottages there snug as mice burrowing down into the hollow, even the garden walls cosily thatched against the weather; they and the squat little church tower, and the barns built like fortresses of solid stone with slits for windows, had all stayed the same for the past three hundred years or so, and would stay the same for another three hundred years. He might have gone down and seen it again and again in those last few years at the Middle Temple, and he had only done it once. Now that it was impossible, now that he dared not set foot in England and had no notion when he ever could again, he found himself longing with an agonized passion of homesickness, such as he had not felt since his schooldays, that he could go jogging once again down that long Salisbury road over the downs, turn his nag in through the rectory gates, and roll his aching body between the smooth lavender-scented sheets of his own goosefeather bed behind the blue dimity curtains in the little west room; and there he would hear his mother come slowly, carefully up the stairs with a mug of warm ale brewed by herself between her sturdy hands, and the soft white froth of a roasted apple spread like lamb's wool all over the top of it.

So entirely had he become again that tired, happy, home-returning schoolboy, that the tears filled his eyes; he could no longer bear to think of Dinton, or that King Charles was prisoner in England and his son Charles the Prince of Wales an exile here like Hyde himself, as were most of Hyde's friends who had not been killed in the Civil War. Now that war was over, few had cared to remain in England at the cost of compounding with Cromwell's party.

Hyde himself preferred to remain here in such desperate poverty that he and four of his friends now joined together to share their single meal a day, and even the price of that had been owing for months to their kind-hearted hostess. As long as he had bread and books he had all he really wanted, so he said, not quite truthfully. But it was true enough that no money could make him even wish to forsake his loyalty, and that that shrewd brain of his told him

even more positively than his heart that his discomfort in these miserable conditions was nothing to what his wretchedness would be if he bettered them at the expense of his conscience.

There is a point at which logic becomes inspiration, and Hyde reached it when he wrote to a weaker friend: 'Think, think! think how little it will mean to you to die the richer by a thousand pounds!'

'To *die* the richer'—there he showed the foresight not merely of the thinker but the seer.

But that was no reason why he should not in all honour and peace of conscience consider what chance there was, or that he could make, to leave this pestilent, squabbling, slandering, mischief-making company of poverty-ridden exiles in this cold northern, perpetually windswept town of The Hague, built up by the positively inhuman industry of its inhabitants, ant-like, beaver-like, out of the very sea.

What a country! Where not even a stone happened of itself; the very soil was sand, and the gravel for the garden paths was nothing but sea-shells, brought from the sea-shore two miles away in carts or barges—always barges, pushing slow and blunt-nosed along the canals, silent and endless as the procession of a dream. A country of wind and water, water all round him, water beneath the house, water in canals above the level of the road, and nothing but a few low sand-dunes in constant need of repair between the whole flat low land and the sea.

No wonder his bones were racked and rotted with rheumatism; no wonder he was sick with longing for the sight of a hill, for the rolling chalk downs round Salisbury and the dimpled valleys purple with cool shadow in the high summer, and the rich red-brown of English earth. A hide of land was the old measurement of terrain in England; never had he been so proud of the origin of his name as now when he had no chance of owning a hide of English land—an outcast, a wanderer, he told himself pitifully, then brisked up, drank again, remembered the many dispossessed landowners who

were growing maudlin in exile, and his bracing contempt for them, and thought that though he could not return to England he might yet contrive to go on a mission to some warm and pleasant, natural-growing country such as Spain.

Big oranges, such as the artist fellows here loved to paint on dishes of blue and white porcelain with a curling strip of their ruddy-tawny peel dangling down over the edge of the table, red wine in tall glasses, women with dark eyes gleaming behind their mantillas, now ousted his homesick vision of England for an instant, but were even more quickly dismissed.

The place he had got to think of now was some convenient rendezvous with the Marquis of Montrose.

So, picking up the cup and finding it empty, and cursing it and setting it down, he wrote:

'I shall very greedily wait your summons and attend you accordingly. Only, give me leave to inform Your Lordship, that there is now so great jealousy of a treaty betwixt the Prince of Wales and Your Lordship, and your countrymen are so scattered over all the neighbouring towns'—('these damned Scots' I had all but written, but no I can't say that to him, and he the proudest Scot of the lot)—'that it will not be possible for Your Lordship to be in these parts without discovery; and in this conjuncture the *highest secrecy is absolutely necessary*.'

He scribbled down the names of possible meeting-places, but someone was coming up the stair, the firm, clanking tread of a boot was coming along the passage (how long was it since he himself had been able to walk as freely as that?) and so he hastened to sign himself, before the interruption of a visitor, as 'Your Lordship's most humble most obedient servant, EDWARD HYDE.'

The door opened, a very tall man bent his head under the lintel, and stood there an instant looking at the dim room, the dull fire, the empty jug, and the little fat man so busily writing. The bleak wind from outside seemed to have blown into the small room, ruffling its dismal yet self-satisfied air; Hyde felt agitated, defensive,

as he flung down his pen, heaved himself gingerly on to his feet again, and bowed low to the Lord High Admiral of the Royal British fleet; then squared his shoulders truculently, facing up at that great height as at something beyond his ken.

He saw the dark lean face of a man who had passed his twenty-ninth birthday only a month ago, but who looked as though he had lived through more than twenty-nine, and more winters than summers; a man of great strength and power and still greater courage, who had never sought his own ends, but who in all things expected and took his own way. It was a face that women used to call as beautiful as an angel, but that men were beginning to call saturnine and grim, for it had been scarred deep, not only by resolve and fixed purpose, but by savage anger and pride, and by his remorse for these and for the evil results they had had.

To Hyde, after years of shared struggle and endeavour in the same cause, this Prince was still 'a strange creature'; just as his name with most Englishmen was still Rupert of the Rhine, though he had fought far longer and harder for his uncle King Charles I in England than for his dead father's principality in Germany. Even now that the English Civil War had been over for two and a half years, and he had been summarily dismissed from the country by command of his uncle, yet Rupert had since refused all the honours and wealth offered him as Field-Marshal of France, in order to take over a few leaky, ill-equipped, undermanned ships that had mutinied from the English Parliament; and in the last four months he had built them up, without help or naval advice, and above all without money, into a fleet in the service of an imprisoned King and an exiled Prince of Wales.

Oh, it was admirable, amazing, incredible to any who had not seen it done, and so Hyde freely admitted, in writing, to all his important friends; and that was what gave him this uncomfortable sense of indignation whenever he met him—that Rupert never appreciated (or even perhaps never cared) how much Hyde now appreciated him.

Here he was writing letter after letter to Lord Ormonde in Ireland, with whom Rupert and his ships were to join forces, telling him of 'the extraordinary arts' employed by treacherous and jealous friends as well as foes 'to bring this fleet to nothing,' so that the crews melted away almost as fast as they were got together. That was why it had been decided on all sides, in spite of the prejudices of the 'true English' courtiers, that Prince Rupert of the Rhine was 'the fittest person to undertake so shaken a design,' for no other would or could attempt it.

And Hyde had publicly admitted how the very existence of the fleet, let alone its preservation, was all due to the unwearied industry and dexterity with which Rupert put all things in order when he took charge. 'Seriously,' he had written, very seriously, his plump cheeks puffing out with the effort of his commendation (which never came as easily to him as criticism), 'he has expressed better temper and discretion in it than you can imagine.' *There* was praise for a hot-headed young half-foreigner whose violent temper only a few years ago had offended half the English Court and the King, his uncle, most bitterly of all.

But just because the Prince stood six foot four in his stockings and had the strength of a tiger, would he ever see the value of Hyde's friendship, of his tremendous and balanced intellect—did he indeed ever see him as anything but a fussy, pursy little man?

This appalling question did just flash into the back of the Chancellor's mind but was instantly expelled, for there are some things that no human being can recognize in himself, and though a man may know himself to be a villain, no man has ever yet known himself to be fussy and pursy, even in the eyes of an abrupt and casual young man.

"Your Highness—" he began in polite greeting, but Rupert did not wait for that, though he swung in a hasty "Sit and spare your feet, man," in the same breath that he asked if there had been any fresh report from England. 'From England' meant 'of King Charles,' who had given himself up to the Scots Covenanters, had

been sold by them to Cromwell's English army, and had been since then their prisoner.

No, Hyde had had no news since they had heard that the King had been removed from Carisbrooke Castle in the Isle of Wight to Hurst Castle on the mainland, 'a gloomier prison and unhealthy—the guard changed all the time for sick leave. And they say he is being far more closely guarded there.'

There might be good, or rather bad, reason for that, as Rupert knew better than Hyde. He had had a message from King Charles at the end of this autumn, of such urgent secrecy that the King dared not trust it to paper: not even Hyde nor any of the Privy Council were to be told of it, nor yet his own son Charles the Prince of Wales, unless Rupert thought fit—a proof of such complete trust in his nephew as might well have won the war for him, had he only given it earlier.

His message to Rupert had asked him to send a ship to wait off the coast of the Isle of Wight on a certain night when the King had planned an escape from his prison. Rupert could not go himself, for the ship was bound to be searched and examined, and his presence on board so near his uncle's prison would rouse suspicion. So he had sent the wisest of his captains, who actually managed to stay five or six days on the excuse that he lay to all that time while waiting for a wind, but at last was allowed to stay no longer and had to come away.

What had happened inside the Castle of Carisbrooke that night late in November when King Charles should have escaped? His attempt must have been discovered, since he had been moved to the closer guard of Hurst Castle. And a horrible further fear now haunted Rupert—was the whole plot of the escape a plot of the enemy's, a 'draw,' arranged through an agent provocateur, that Charles himself might wind the noose tighter about his throat?

He still dared not speak of his fears and conjectures, he said only as he marched restlessly up and down, "I don't like this calm in the news. *Something* should have happened by now," then plunged into

what he himself had been doing. His ships were still at Helvoetsluys; he had hurried from there first to Rotterdam, where he had paused for the night to arrange the sale of one of his ships to help fit out the rest. "Those brass guns on the *Roebuck* will fetch as high a price as all the tackling of her sails and anchors put together."

"But Your Highness has no first-rate ships, and the *Roebuck* is your finest of the second-rate."

"She *was*."

"That collier you captured from the Yarmouth roads with £800 on board——"

"A month ago, and all the bills of the previous months to pay. How far do you think £800 goes among three ships of the second rating, four frigates, and a couple of pinnaces?"

"I am not accusing Your Highness of extravagance," began Hyde stiffly.

"Nor I you of bad mathematics. I am wondering how pirates make it pay—I can't. So I have to sell the *Roebuck*. I have got a Dutch merchant coming here, willing to buy, but these Dutch are slow as death; if I wait to finish the bargain I'll find the whole fleet melted away by the time I get back to Helvoetsluys."

"Is Your Highness still having trouble——?"

"There's not enough pay nor food for them, and though their fleet's left, the Parliament agents are at 'em night and day bribing them to desert or mutiny or damage their own ships. They've rotted in harbour all the winter, and if I don't get 'em to sea quickly and over to Ireland, why, then there'll be none left to get there. So will you finish this deal for me, in two days if you can?"

"I, Your Highness? But I know nothing of the rigging of ships."

"You'll learn," said Rupert simply. "I knew nothing of it myself four months ago."

"You learned to con your own flagship in less than a week, I've heard. You must have pity on us born landlubbers."

"Born landlubbers be damned! If they've got to have a bow-

legged old trooper like me for admiral, surely the Chancellor of the Exchequer can be ship's chandler?"

"Well, well," observed Hyde more indulgently, "I suppose even a statesman may 'suffer a sea change.'"

"He *must*—now the royal cause is all at sea."

Hyde chuckled, but discreetly. Even in making a mild joke, His Highness' expression was not encouraging; it was, in fact, at this moment intent to the point of ferocity. He was staring at the table, at Montrose's letter. From where he stood he could not read a word of it, but no doubt he recognized the handwriting, for he shot out:

"When is Montrose coming here?"

"He is not. We daren't risk it. The Hague is full of his enemies."

"You might trust him to look after himself."

"The danger is to the cause as much as himself. Since the Scots lords are here who have changed sides and fought for the King last summer——"

"—they are to be valued more, I suppose, than those who have always fought for him, instead of against him. Is that what you are telling him?"

Hyde's round eyes and ruffled air made him look like an owl.

"On the contrary, I am writing on behalf of the Prince of Wales to entreat his help. As I've told Prince Charles myself, Montrose is the clearest spirit of all his servants. And he is very impatient to be up and doing."

"He can't do much if you tell him to go on kicking his heels at Brussels," muttered Rupert, but before Hyde's indignation could swell up to bursting-point he went on, "He has been writing to me. He hopes to raise Scotland again for the King, and this time in conjunction with Ormonde and myself in Ireland, with my ships to bring over fresh troops from there. It might be done—what do you think?"

The question, flung suddenly over his shoulder as Rupert walked

restlessly up and down, surprised and mollified Hyde into a most polite answer. "To me, the only prospect that has any light or pleasure in it is that of Ireland, and Your Highness' fleet." He paused, but as Rupert did not even bow his acknowledgments he transferred his compliments to Rupert's ally. "Ormonde is the best Lord Lieutenant we could have in Ireland—if he can unite the country for the King and combine with Scotland——"

"It needs close co-operation—not easy to work out at a distance——" Rupert flung himself into a chair which squawked out a sharp creak in protest.

"Is *all* your furniture broken?" he demanded as he sprang up again and pulled out the leg which had cracked in its socket.

"It soon will be, sir, if that is how you treat it."

"I? I'm treating it like a doctor."

To Hyde's amazement he had begun to mend it with a splinter of broken wood for splicing, the rusty nail he had extracted, and the heavy bronze paperweight on the writing-table for hammer, sitting on the edge of the table and working with remarkable neatness and quickness as he talked.

"Young Charles hopes to go to Ireland with me later. It might be a good plan."

"To have the Prince of Wales with you would certainly help the scheme. Your Highness, I beg you not to trouble with that chair——"

"No trouble. It's all but done. It's something to have got him away from his mother in Paris. That woman has the morals of Machiavelli without the brains."

The Chancellor's eyes looked as if they would pop out of his head at Rupert's opinion of Queen Henrietta Maria. For an instant he seemed about to share it, but swerved to matters less dangerous. "Prince Charles' friends here do him no good. They are rotting under the continued disaster, the enforced idleness that they, and he, have to bear."

"Charles bears that last pretty well," said Rupert with a chuckle,

giving his final blow to the chair and running his hand over the joint to make sure that it was sound.

"As all his friends bear it. They are always hopeful of the future, not to say certain. They drink to it in company with every whore and blackguard in The Hague, they bet on it, roar out tipsy songs in honour of it, keep despair at bay by deafening it—but they can't banish it. Misfortune is not ennobling in itself, and it is a very hard thing for people who have nothing to do, to keep from doing something they ought not to do."

Rupert smiled at the portentous utterance.

"So you want me to take the Prince to Ireland to keep him out of mischief. At eighteen that is found anywhere and is not serious."

"It is serious, sir, when it might endanger the succession. A young woman of no character is already claiming here that when her bastard by Prince Charles is born it will be his legitimate heir."

"Shall I kidnap her, then, instead of him and drop her overboard?" He swung the chair round in his hand to the floor and tried sitting on it, but this time more carefully. "This plan of Montrose," he said, "I must see him about it before we sail. Since he can't come here, I shall go to him."

"Your Highness, I beg of you, consider. If you do this, you give everything away to his enemies, you show them that he is in our councils, you frighten them away just as they are coming round entirely to our side. Lauderdale and Lanark——"

"That red swine and his shadow! Look how they bungled their campaign in Scotland last summer. *Their* service won't help us."

"Their money and influence in Scotland will. We can use it to help Montrose himself if we go about it carefully. I shall go into the whole matter with him with entire frankness——"

"Letters, letters, letters," muttered Rupert, glancing dubiously at the papers that littered the table, as though in disbelief of their ever being read.

"*No*, sir. *I* am going to him in person to Sevenbergen or some such place that will be free of the other Scots. This letter I am