

THE ROAD TO PARADISE ISLAND

Victoria Holt

FAWCETT CREST • NEW YORK

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THE NIGHT OF THE STORM

On the night of the great storm, our house, like so many in the village, was damaged; and it was due to this that the discovery was made. I was eighteen years old at the time and my brother Philip twenty-three; and in the years to come I was often to marvel at what followed and to speculate how different everything might have been but for the storm.

It came after one of the hottest spells on record when the temperature soared into the nineties, and there was hardly a topic of conversation which did not concern the weather. Two old people and one baby died of it; there were prayers for rain in the churches; old Mrs. Terry, who was ninety and after a frivolous youth and less than virtuous middle age, had taken to religion in her seventies, declared that God was punishing England in general and Little and Great Stanton in particular by starving the cattle, drying up the streams and not providing enough moisture for the crops. The Day of Judgement was at hand, and on the night of the storm even the most sceptical of us were inclined to think that she might have a point.

I had lived all my life in the old Tudor Manor House on the Green, presided over by Granny M. The M stood for Mallory, which was our family name, and she was called Granny M to distinguish her from Granny C—Granny Cresset—for at the time of my mother's death,

which coincided with that of my birth, the War of the Grannies had waged.

"They both wanted us," Philip had told me when I was about four and he a knowledgeable nine. That made us feel very important to be so wanted.

Philip told me that Granny C had suggested that she have one of us and Granny M the other—dividing us as though we were two strips of land over which the generals were fighting. It was a long time before I could trust Granny C after that for the person who mattered most in my life was Philip. He had always been there, my big brother, my protector, the clever one, possessed of five glorious years of experience beyond my own. We quarrelled occasionally, but such differences only made me realize more fully how important he was to me, for during the periods of his displeasure I suffered acute misery.

The suggestion of parting us had fortunately aroused the indignation of Granny M.

"Separate them! Never!" had been her battle cry, while she stated with no uncertain emphasis that as the *paternal* grandmother she had the greater claim. Granny C was at length vanquished and forced to accept the compromise, which entailed brief summer holidays once a year at her home in Cheshire and the occasional day visit, gifts of dresses for me and sailor suits for Philip, stockings and mittens for us both and presents at Christmas and birthdays.

When I was ten years old Granny C had a stroke and died.

"A nice state she would have got us into if she had had the children," I heard Granny M comment to Benjamin Darkin. Old Benjamin was one of the few who ever stood up to Granny M, but he could afford to because he had been at the "shop" from the day he was twelve

years old and he knew more about the business of map making than any man alive, so said Granny M.

"The lady can scarcely be blamed for the acts of God, Mrs. Mallory," he said on that occasion with mild reproof; and presumably because he was Benjamin Darkin, Granny M let it go at that.

Granny M behaved as the lady of the manor in Little Stanton, and when she went into Great Stanton, as she did at that time every day, she rode in her carriage with John Barton the coachman and little Tom Terry, a descendant of that prophet of doom, the now virtuous nonagenarian Mrs. Terry, in his place at the back of the carriage.

Philip said, when he was about eighteen and as far as I was concerned the wisest man in Christendom, that people who "Came into things" were often more dedicated to them than those who had been born into them. What he was implying was that Granny M had not been born into the squirarchy. She had merely married Grandfather M and thus had become one of the Mallorys who had lived in the Manor House since it had been built in 1573. We knew this because the date was engraved on the stonework on the front of the house. But there could not have been a prouder Mallory than Granny M.

I had never known Grandfather M. He had died before the great Battle of the Grannies had begun.

Granny M managed the village as efficiently and autocratically as she did her own household. She presided over fêtes and bazaars and kept our mild vicar and his "woolly-minded" wife in order. She made sure there was a good attendance at morning and evening services, and every servant was expected to be in his or her place at church every Sunday—and if certain essential duties prevented attendance, there must be a rota so that anyone who missed one Sunday must be there the next. Needless to say Philip and I were always present and

walked sedately—Sunday fashion—across the Green from the Manor to the church, on either side of Granny M, to take our places in the Mallory pew at the side of which was the stained-glass window depicting Christ in Gethsemane, presented by one of our ancestors in 1632.

But perhaps what claimed Granny M's greatest devotion was the "shop." It was unusual for squires to be connected with business and pay such respect to a shop. But this was no ordinary shop.

It was a shrine, as it were, to the glory of long-dead Mallorys, for the Mallorys had been great circumnavigators of the globe. They had served their country well since the days of Queen Elizabeth and it was Granny M's conviction that the country owed a great deal of its maritime supremacy to the Mallorys.

A Mallory had sailed with Drake. In the seventeenth century they had also gone off on their adventures; but there was one great interest which set them apart. It was not their determination to capture the ships of enemy Spaniards and Dutchmen, but their fierce desire to chart the world.

They, said Granny M, had carved their name on the world's history, and not merely that of England; they had made navigation easier for hundreds—no, thousands—of great adventurers all over the world; and what these intrepid sailors—and not only sailors but those who explored the terrain of the Earth—owed to Mallory's maps was inestimable.

The "shop" was situated in the main street of Great Stanton. It was an ancient three-storeyed building with two bow windows on the ground floor, one on either side of the stone steps which led up to the front door.

At the back of the shop, across a yard, was another building in which were situated three steam-driven machines. This was forbidden territory unless we were accompanied by an adult. The machines did not greatly interest me but Philip was immensely interested in them.

In one of the bow windows was a great globe painted in the most beautiful blues, pinks and greens, which in my early days had held immense fascination for me. When I was a child and had visited the shop in the company of Granny M, Benjamin Darkin would show me a similar globe which was in the front room and he would twirl it round and round and show me the great blue seas and the land and its boundaries; never hesitating to point out the pink bits on the globe—the parts which were British. Made so, I presumed, by the glorious Mallorys who had made the maps to show the explorers the way.

Philip had been equally excited by visits to the shop and would talk to me about it. We had maps in our schoolroom and when she visited us there, Granny M would ask us questions about the atlas. Geography was a subject which took precedence over all others, and Granny M was delighted by our interest in it.

In the other bow window of the shop there was a huge map of the world. It looked magnificent spread out before us with the continent of Africa on one side and the Americas on the other. The sea was a vivid blue, the land dark brown and green mostly. There were our own islands looking quite insignificant just to the left of the funny-looking tiger which was Scandinavia. But, most glorious of all, was the name of our ancestor written in gold on the right-hand corner: *Jethro Mallory 1698*.

"When I grow up," said Philip, "I am going to have a boat and I am going to measure up the seas. Then I'll have *my* name in gold at the bottom of a map."

Granny M overheard that remark and her face was one deep happy smile, for it was just what she intended; and I guessed she was congratulating herself that she had rescued her grandson from the clutches of Granny C who might have tried to make an architect or even a politician of him, for her family had harboured people in these professions.

I learned a little of the family history over the years and discovered that Granny M had never entirely approved of her son's marriage to Flora Cresset. Flora, judging by her portrait which hung in the gallery, had been very pretty but frail, which seemed to have been borne out by her death at my birth; but then so many people died in childbirth—babies too—so that to survive was, in a way, a minor triumph. I said to Philip that it was an indication of the tenacity of women that the human race went on, to which he replied: "You do talk nonsense sometimes."

Philip was more down-to-earth than I was. I was a dreamer, a romancer. He was interested in the practical side of map making, calculations and measurements, and his fingers itched to take up compasses and such scientific instruments. For me it was so different. I wondered who would be living in those remote places. I wondered about their lives; and when I looked at those islands in the midst of the blue tropical seas, I wove all sorts of stories about my going there, living among the people and learning their ways.

We were quite different in outlook—Philip and I. Perhaps that was why we got on so well together. We each supplied something which the other lacked. No doubt because we were motherless—fatherless in a way, although our father was not dead—we had turned to each other.

When my father had brought his bride to the Manor, he was working in the family business. Naturally he had been brought up to it as Philip was being. Perhaps if my mother had not died he would still be there, doing more or less what Granny M wanted him to. But when my mother had died he had been unable to endure life at the Manor. There must have been too many memories. He might well have a dislike for the child who had seized her place in the world at the expense of one who was

more greatly loved. However, he decided to go away for a while, to work in Holland with another firm of map makers—just for a short time to enable him to recover from the loss of his wife. Holland was a country which had given birth to some of the leading map makers from the earliest days and Granny M had, at the time, thought it was a good plan to help him recover from his grief and acquire new experience at the same time.

But my father stayed on in Holland and showed no desire to return, and in time he married a Dutch girl, Margareta, whose father was a wealthy export merchant, and to Granny M's disgust my father joined him in his business, deserting the glorious profession of map making for one to which Granny M contemptuously referred as "Commerce." I had half brothers and a sister whom I had never seen.

There was talk about Philip's going over to stay with his father, but Granny M always prevented that. I think she was afraid that Philip might be lured away by the fascination of the export business. So my father settled down with his new family and seemed content to leave his first one in the care of Granny M.

On my eighteenth birthday, which was in May and about three months before the great storm, the governess whom I had had for seven yers left, and since I was no longer in need of such services, I knew that Granny M was beginning to think about finding a husband for me. Not one of the young men who were being invited to the house appealed to me so far. Nor did I see romance in such a prosaic charade. There were the Galtons from Great Stanton who had a son, Gerald. They were very wealthy and had interests in London—which was some twenty miles from Great Stanton—and not so far off as to cut Galton père completely off from his family. Gerald accompanied his father on trips to London where they often spent several weeks, and their

visits to the country house were of fairly short duration. Gerald, as a husband, would not be at home a great deal and when I realized that was a point in his favour, I saw at once that he did not fit into my dreams of romance.

There was Charles Fenton, the son of the squire of Marlinton—a fox-hunting, shooting, sporty type. Quite jolly, laughing at almost everything, so that one longed for a little gloom in his company. I enjoyed being with both of these young men but the idea of spending my life with them was far from exciting.

Granny M said: "You must learn more social graces, my dear. A young woman has to make a choice sooner or later and choose from what is available. Those who delay the choice too long often find there is nothing to choose from."

Dire warning, which fell on deaf eighteen-year-old ears.

What was wrong with life as it was?

Granny M was more wary about Philip. His wife would be brought into the Manor. She would become a Mallory, whereas when I married I would relinquish that illustrious name. I had no doubt that Granny M had thought with some misgivings of the coming of Flora Cresset into the Manor. True, she had provided Granny M with two grandchildren, but the frailty of Flora had cost Granny her son who now, as Granny M put it, had been "Commandeered by that Dutch woman."

After the marriage she had not had a good word to say for the Dutch.

"But Granny," I reminded her, "you used to say that some of the best map makers came from that part of the world. Some of the earliest explorers . . . and Mercator himself was Flemish. Think what we owe to him."

Granny M was torn between the pleasure she always felt when I showed interest in the business and her dislike of being contradicted.

"That was long ago. Besides it was a Dutchman who first started buying old black and white maps and colouring them. Then selling them at a great price."

"A practice which those who came after followed to great advantage," I said.

"You are very perverse," said Granny M, but she was not displeased, and she did what she always did when not sure of winning the point—she changed the subject.

She was delighted that I considered it a treat to visit the shop, and on certain afternoons, after lessons in the schoolroom of course, I and my governess would go into Great Stanton where I would spend some very pleasant hours in the shop.

For one thing talking to Benjamin always intrigued me.

His life was maps. Sometimes he took Philip and me over to the building where the printing was done and he would ramble on about modern improvements and how in the old days they had used wood blocks which they called printing in relief because part of the wood was inked and that was transferred to the paper so that it stood out in relief.

"Nowadays," he said proudly, "we use copper."

I was rather bored by the technicalities but Philip would ask innumerable questions about various processes while I stood by not really listening as I gazed at the maps on the walls. Most of them were copies of those which had been made in the sixteenth, fifteenth and even fourteenth centuries and I would be thinking of those intrepid explorers going to those places for the first time, discovering new lands.

Philip spent a lot of time in the shop and when he was twenty-one and had finished with his education, he was there all day, working with Benjamin, learning about the business. Granny M was delighted with him.

I hated to be left out and Benjamin sensed that. He, like Philip, seemed to be very sorry for me because I had been born a girl, which prevented me from taking an important part in this most fascinating business.

One day Benjamin was talking about the colouring of maps and he said that very soon he believed there would be a breakthrough and we should be putting coloured lithography on the market.

He showed me a print—not a map but a rather sentimental picture of a family scene. It was in colour.

"It was done by a man called George Baxter," said Benjamin. "Just look at those colours. If we could get those into our maps . . ."

"Why can't you?" I asked.

"He kept his method a great secret. But I have a notion how it was done. I think he used a series of blocks of different colours, but he would have to have had the correct register. It would be more difficult with maps. You see you cannot afford to be a fraction of an inch out. If you were you'd make a country miles bigger or smaller than it actually was. You see the difficulty."

"So you will go on colouring by hand?"

"For the time being, yes. Until we get the breakthrough."

"Benjamin, I could do that."

"You, Miss Annalice? Why, it's not an easy task."

"Now, why should you think because it is difficult I could not do it?"

"Well, you're a young lady."

"Young ladies are not all stupid, Mr. Darkin."

"Well, I wasn't saying that, Miss Annalice."

"Well then, let me try."

The outcome was that I was given a trial. I did well and after a while I was given a real map to colour. How I enjoyed it! That blue, blue sea . . . a colour I loved. As I worked I could hear the waves pounding on coral

beaches. I could see dusky girls with flowers about their necks and ankles; I could see little dark children running naked into the sea, and long canoes cutting through the waves. I was there.

Those were afternoons of adventure. I climbed mountains and crossed rivers; and I wondered all the time what new lands had yet to be discovered.

Benjamin Darkin thought I should get tired of the work but he was wrong. The more I did, the more excited I became about it. Moreover I did it well. They could not afford to spoil those maps by careless colouring. Mine were examined by Benjamin himself and declared to be perfect.

I began to learn something about the art of map making. I studied those maps of the past and I became interested in the men who had made them. Benjamin showed me a copy of Ptolemy's map of the world which had been made round about 150 A.D. and he told me how even the great Ptolemy had learned from Hipparchus who had lived some three hundred years before. I became even more absorbed and spent those magic afternoons dreaming of far-off places and the men who had been there years ago and made their maps so that others could easily find their way.

Granny M came sometimes to watch me at work. There was speculation in her eyes. Her grandchildren were a credit to her—both of them caught up in the fascinating world of maps. She could not have asked anything better. She was a schemer by nature and there was nothing she liked better than managing other people's lives because she was always sure she could do it so much better than they could themselves.

At this time she had made up her mind that Philip should marry a sensible girl who would come to the Manor and bear more Mallorys to continue in the business of map making in Great Stanton and at the same

time making sure that squirrel status was kept up in Little Stanton. As for myself she was beginning to see that neither Gerald Galton nor Charles Fenton was the man for me. She would wait until she found someone who would fit more neatly into her ideas of suitability.

This was respite for me—to pursue my vicarious adventures in the shop and enjoy life at the Manor.

The Manor was a house full of interest which one was apt to forget having been born in it and lived one's life in it. For one thing it was said to be haunted. There was one dark corner on the second floor where the structure was rather unusual. It was at the end of a corridor which seemed to come to an abrupt termination—almost as though the builder had decided he had had enough of it and wanted to cut it short.

The servants did not like to go along that corridor after dark. They were not sure why. It was just a feeling one had. There was a rumour that someone had been walled up in the house years and years ago.

When I tried to find out something from Granny M, I was told: "Nonsense. No Mallory would be so foolish. It would have been most unhealthy."

"Nuns were walled up sometimes," I pointed out.

"They were nuns—nothing to do with the Mallorys."

"But this was long ago."

"My dear Annalice, it's nonsense. Now I want you to go over to Mrs. Gow and take some of that calf's foot jelly. She's poorly again."

Mrs. Gow had been our housekeeper for many years, and was now living with her son over the builder's yard which was situated between Little and Great Stanton.

I could never fail to admire Granny M who dismissed walled-up ancestors as decisively as she had Granny C.

But I used to wonder about that spot in the corridor. I would go up there after dark and I was sure I felt a sensation—a little frisson . . . something. Once I imag-

ined that something touched me lightly on the shoulder and I heard a sibilant whisper.

I was trying to create something out of a long-ago rumour just as I dreamed of those coral beaches when I coloured my maps.

I used to go down to visit my mother's grave and make sure that the bushes there were well tended. I often thought about her. I had built up a picture of her from Granny C who had always wept a little when she talked of her Flora. Flora had been beautiful, too good for this world, said her mother. She had been a gentle, loving girl. She had been married at sixteen and Philip had been born a year afterwards so she had been only twenty-two when she died.

I had been able to tell Granny C how very sad I was because it was through me that she had died. That was the sort of thing one could never have said to Granny M who would have immediately retorted: "Nonsense. You knew nothing about it and therefore had no say in the matter. These things happened, and she was a weak creature."

Granny C was more sentimental. She had said that my mother would willingly have given her life for me. But that worried me even more. There is nothing that makes one feel worse than having great sacrifices made for one.

So I had not talked nearly as much as I had wanted to to Granny C about my mother.

However I did visit her grave. I planted a rose bush on it and a rosemary "for remembrance," and I used to go down rather secretly for I did not want even Philip to know of my remorse for having caused her death. Sometimes I would talk aloud to her and tell her that I hoped she was happy where she was and I was so sorry that she had died bringing me into the world.

One day when I was there I went to get some water

for the bushes. There was an old pump some way off and a watering pot and jugs. As I turned away from my mother's grave I fell sprawling, for I had caught my foot in a jutting stone. I had grazed my knees a little, but nothing much, and as I was about to pick myself up I examined the stone which had been the cause of my fall, and I saw that it was part of a curb.

I delved beneath the weeds and discovered that it was part of a surround of a plot which must have been a grave. I wondered whose it was. I had always thought that piece of land was waste ground. Yet it was among the Mallory graves.

I set to work pulling up the tangled growth and there it was—a grave. There was no headstone, otherwise that would have betrayed its existence. But there was a plate on the grave. It was dirty and the letters were almost obliterated.

I went to the pump and brought back water. I had an old rag with me which I used to wipe my hands on after I had watered the plants, and with this I washed the grime from the plate.

I started back with dismay and I felt a shiver run down my spine for the name on the plate might have been my own.

"Ann Alice Mallory. Died the Sixth Day of February 1793. Aged eighteen years."

I was Annalice, it was true, and on the plate there was a division and a capital letter for Alice . . . but the similarity shocked me.

For a few seconds I had the uncanny feeling that I was looking at my own grave.

I stood for a few moments staring at it. Who was she—lying there silent for ever among the Mallory dead?

I went back to the Manor. Normality returned. Why should not one of my ancestors have a name like mine? Names continued through families. Ann Alice. And

Annalice. Eighteen years. She had been just about my age when she had died.

At dinner that night I said to Granny M, "I saw a grave in the cemetery today which I hadn't seen before . . ."

She was not very interested.

I looked at Philip. "It was someone with my name . . . or as near as makes no difference."

"Oh," said Philip. "I thought you were the one and only Annalice."

"This one was Ann Alice Mallory. Who was she, Granny?"

"Ann is a name that has been used a great deal in the family. So is Alice."

"Why did you call me Annalice?"

"I chose it," said Granny M, as though it was therefore the best possible choice and that settled the matter. "It was because there were so many Anns and Alices in the family. I thought either name a little commonplace, but as you were a Mallory I combined the two and made something which you must admit is somewhat unusual."

"As I said," put in Philip, "the one and only."

"This grave has been neglected."

"Graves do become so after the occupant has been dead some time."

"Nearly a hundred years ago she was buried."

"That is a long time to be remembered," said Philip.

"It was a queer feeling . . . finding the name under all the weeds and then . . . my own almost . . . looking up at me."

"I must go and look for a Philip there," said my brother.

"There are Philips, several of them."

"You have this morbid fancy to read the gravestones, I know," said Philip.

"I like to think about them all . . . all the Mallorys