

Runeday, 21 Planting 1851, Fairfax Manor

I am considering dangling Tymothi out a window by his toes. If only we lived in a proper castle with a tall tower to do it from. The man spent nearly a candle harassing me about taking a husband (and what if I prefer a wife, Tymothi, did you consider that I wonder?) and producing an heir. I half wonder if he wanted the job himself!

He's not wrong, of course. Which is why I am so angry with him. How dare he tell me true things I do not want to hear !? Mother hasn't brought the matter up at all. She seems perfectly content for me to marry, or not, as suits me. Bless her for that.

Waterday, 4 Newbloom 1851, The Counters Inn

I should visit with the villagers more often. I love my family. but they drive me crazy sometimes. Today I played a cutthroat game of cards with Ursula and Sapphire. They're so polite to one another I forget that they're technically rivals in business; they were certainly rivals today!

It's good to learn from both these women: they see firsthand who comes into our village, and have a better understanding of the flow of commerce through the county than even they know. I think.

Also I always eat very well when I visit.



Fireday, 17th Newbloom 1851, Fairfax Manor

Phillip and I spent today in the village. Phillip set hinself up on the edge of the green with his charcoals and the scraps of paper he keeps filching from Celyse. and I visited with Marques, the village clerk, to go over possible sites for a new nill. The old one is too far outside the village, I think, and time has not been kind to it. Marques is entirely in favor of a new nill but has a host of reasons not to situate it anywhere I choose. He wants it to go on his brothers farm, from what I can tell, which means mother would have to buy that land back from him at a pretty price. I know the yeomanry are the backbone of the realm and all that, but at times I admit I wish we went back to the days when the nobles owned all the land.

When I came back to check on Phillip he had that dwarf girl in his lap, doing her very best to draw an owl. Phillip is such a sweet young man. Some days I wish he was going to inherit the county: he's certainly not going to be a knight like Rochelle. In the afternoon I stopped by Fiore Brightmaul's to see how Rochelle's new sword is coming along. I'm no judge of weapons but she showed me that the blade is finished and now it just wants binding and mounting and all that. The blade looks lovely: Rochelle will be very pleased. And surprised I hope!



Sunday, 8 Greentide 1851, Gold Sheaf Inn. road to Highcrest

I've just realized that Appledash is, in fact, in her season and I've ridden her straight away to the Cunningham stallion. Also, I an regretting taking Deakon with me on this trip. Mother insisted I take a guard but why did I choose the one who won't stop telling me all about his (imaginary) accomplishments? Just focus on the healer. This is all worth it if the healer is as good as they say.

Moonday, 9 Greentide 1851, Highcrest Temple of Light

The healer promised to come visit bragonholt immediately. I didn't even get around to offering her money. I tithed it here at the temple instead. Even Deakon can't ruin this mood.

Strange man stopped me on the street and asked my name. Scar on his face. He seemed thoughtful when I left him there.

Skyday, 12 Greentide 1851, the Tree of Tales

The healer spent an hour cloistered with mother in the shrine. She came out and shook her head, then sent me in to speak to my mother.

Mother explained that there is no healing what ails her. "My time is coming," she said. "Everyone dies, Sonia. So I will die younger than most. But still older than many, and I don't regret a single moment of my life that brought you and your sister and brother into this world." So mother's at peace with her coming death but I'm not, damnit, and I don't want to be. This isn't fair.

Runeday, 7 Highsummer 1851, the Chatty Archer

Not sure how to feel. A little drunk. Helps. Hunter is very handsome. So's his wife.

Mother more or less confirmed Kyric's story! She is my grandfather's bastard daughter, and Kyric's older sister. But she claims that Lord Holland named her as his heir because when the county needed saving, she saved it, and Kyric did nothing. He "abdicated his responsibilities," according to her. "Kyric sees a county as a privilege, as something to own. But in truth, it's a duty, a job that is yours for the rest of your life. And if you fail in that task, people suffer and even die."

Or words like that. A little drunk. Mother said that if she thought I'd be a bad countess, she'd pass the title on to someone else. But apparently she's certain I'll be a good one. I'm not so sure. It would be easier to let Kyric take the throne and go run an inn somewhere. I think I'd like running an inn. I like working in the kitchens.

Waterday, 11 Highsummer 1851, Fairfax Manor

I got into it with Celyse today, talking about inheritance and lordship. If nother was going to pass over me for inheritance if I were bad at the job. pass it to whom? Rochelle? Phillip? Either would make a fine ruler of Dragonholt. I think, but what if they were as bad as me? (Pretend me.) Maybe the best person for the job is someone the peasants choose themselves. One of the innkeepers. or the more successful farmers. They're used to making lots of decisions and leading large groups of people. Celyse said that what I was describing was called "democracy" good archers and spears in time of war, but that's no substitute for actual men-at-arms. (And women-at-arms, thank you, Rochelle.) Maybe we can attract a knight-errant or two, or create a knight household in Evesmoore or Carun's Cross.

Sunday, 22 Highsunner 1851, The Library

Does our library have a name? "The Library?" "Dragonholt Library?" I suppose it's the only public library in the county, so it doesn't precisely require one.

I wrote to Kyric with yet another refusal. Then I found Celyse and told her everything. She seemed concerned and said she had

some friends she could ask for help.

Appledash is with foal, so I'm stuck with this new horse for the foreseeable future. Gawin assures me that I'll be fine.

Skyday, 26 Highsunner 1851, Fairfax Manor

I need to take my mind off all this nonsense. Phillip and I are going riding today in Eventide Forest. Maybe I'll find the mythical catfolk village! Or maybe they really are just forest spirits. Tymothi looked at me like I'd developed a bad smell when I mentioned my plans and asked if I'd like to take one of the young men from the Belmont or Cunningham families with me on one of these rides. What a petty little man.

Gawin offered to saddle my horse for me today. How nice! Usually he insists we all do it ourselves because "if you can't saddle a horse you surely can't ride her."

Sunday, 1 Planting 1850 1851, Fairfax Manor

Celyse gave me this book for New Year's Day and suggested that a "young lady of my station" should keep a journal. It seems unlikely that anyone will want to read my thoughts in days to come, but I suppose we'll give it a try.

So, a new year has begun. "A new year is given to you. What will you do with it?" Who said that to me? One of the priests at that school mother sent me to in Highcrest, I think. So. What will I do with it?

- Get nother to let Rochelle take a knighthood. - A new mill.

- Settle the Longcreek dispute with the Belinonts.
- I think it's time to breed Appledash.
- I know there's catfolk in the forest. I'm going to find them!
- -Read at least 13 new books. (Celyse would insist.)
- -Find a cure for mother's illness.

Skyday, 5 Planting 1851, Tree of Tales

I saw a catfolk woman in a red tunic run away from me. I don't want to scare them away entirely, so I didn't chase her for long.

I've come to the tree to pray. I received a letter today from the physician in Greyhaven. He had nothing useful to say about mother's illness.

Mother insists that all will be well, of course, and that when her time comes she will die, just as anyone else must. But she has barely fifty years! She is too young. And I'm not ready to be countess.

Sunday, 8 Newbloom 1851, Fairfax Manor

Gawin thinks he has found a likely mate for Appledash in the Cunningham stable. I'll have to see the beast myself, but I'm glad he's taken a keen interest.

Tending to the bloodlines of our horses makes me think about the county. I wonder about our goats, if we're doing all we can to keep those herds healthy, if they could be more productive. I wonder about our crops, are there better seeds we should find elsewhere? People seem so happy to just do as they have done in the past, but there may be a better way. We can breed our horses to be stronger; we can improve our county by bringing in new

blood - or new ideas, at least - as well.

I'm grateful that we have so many wanderer gnomes, orcs, and others in our villages, bringing their connections to the outside with them.

Tulips blooming in the garden today. My heart is full.

Moonday, 9 Newbloom 1851, Fairfax Manor

Gawin is quite correct, the Cunningham stallion will do very well. Count Cunningham even turned down a stud fee; I think he's hopeful I might marry one of his sons. No thank you. Albyrt Cunningham seems less than thrilled with the entire affair, or possibly just with me.



Skyday, 26 Newbloom 1851, Fairfax Manor

Notes to myself:

- If I'm right, Appledash should come into season in early Greentide: make sure Gawin knows to send her to the Cunningham stable for studding. - Rochelle's sword ready. How to wrap it? Nameday in less than

a week!

- Sapphire says her niece is a good apothecary. Good enough to cure mother? Ask Sapphire to send for her. - I thought I had another note but I forgot what it was.

Fireday, 3 Greentide 1851, Evesmoore

This is my first time coming out for the blessing of the flock without mother. Everyone's doing their best to ignore it but I can feel them wondering where she is. I want to cry but a countess mustn't cry.

I did my best. The sheep are as blessed as I know how to make them. I wish someone would bless me.

Stoneday, 6 Greentide 1851, Fairfax Manor

Rochelle loved her present, nameday went well. I've just heard that there's a new healer in Highcrest impressing everyone with her skill. She uses some sort of magic. I'm leaving immediately.



Runeday, 28 Greentide 1851, Fairfax Manor

A strange letter arrived today. At first I thought it was a suitor, because the writer said I was "as beautiful as Eventide Forest." But the letter claims to be from my uncle Kyric, who I've never met before in my life.

My uncle suggests I not tell my mother that he's written to me, because there is no love lost between them. I imagine not! I don't believe mother has ever said two words about Kyric to me. I'm to write to him in Highcrest if I want to know more. I believe I shall do so straightaway.

Skyday, 5 Highsummer 1851, Fairfax Manor

Appledash is back in season, so Ive just returned from the Cunningham stable riding a horse Gawin chose for me. A bit of a wild one, but I do like his spirit. And what should I find on my return but a letter from my uncle!

But not a very nice letter. Kyric claims that mother isn't the rightful countess of Dragonholt. He is! According to him, mother is his half-sister, and bastard-born at that. So by the laws of the realm, Kyric should have inherited the county from my grandfather. Kyric says that he didn't want to press his claim by force and wage war against his own blood, so he went into exile when his sister stole his throne. But now that mother is dying, he asks use to back his claim and step aside for him. This must be a pack of lies and I must speak to mother about this. I'm in no hurry to inherit the county but I'm hardly going to place the lives of my people in the hands of a stranger.

and it worked for some people in some parts of the world, but mother couldn't just do that because her choice of heir would need the support of not just the people of the county but also the nobles of the barony and the baroness herself. And that meant it had to be someone of noble blood with at least a nominal claim to the title. So one of her children, or Kyric.

I talked the matter through with anyone who'd listen over the last few days. Tymothi, Mathilda, Gawin, Phillip. Gawin thinks I should let Kyric have the place - I guess his father was one of Kyric's friends. Tymothi reminded me that I should get married sooner rather than later. Mathilda claimed that it was all too much for a simple serving girl like her, which is her way of saying she wasn't listening. And Phillip made fun of me. I think he was trying to cheer me up.

I don't know what to do. But I have to decide, and then I have to stick to it.

Skyday, 12 Highsunner 1851; Fairfax Manor

I wrote Kyric a letter turning him down. Hopefully that's the last I'll hear concerning the matter.

Going for a long ride later. This new horse is still wild, but I'm learning.

Stoneday, 20 Highsunner 1851, Fairfax Manor Kyric wrote me another letter! I think he was threatening me! I know mother doesn't like asking men and women to fight and die for her, not after the Two Barons War, but it's really time we mustered a few more guards. The county can levy quite a few

