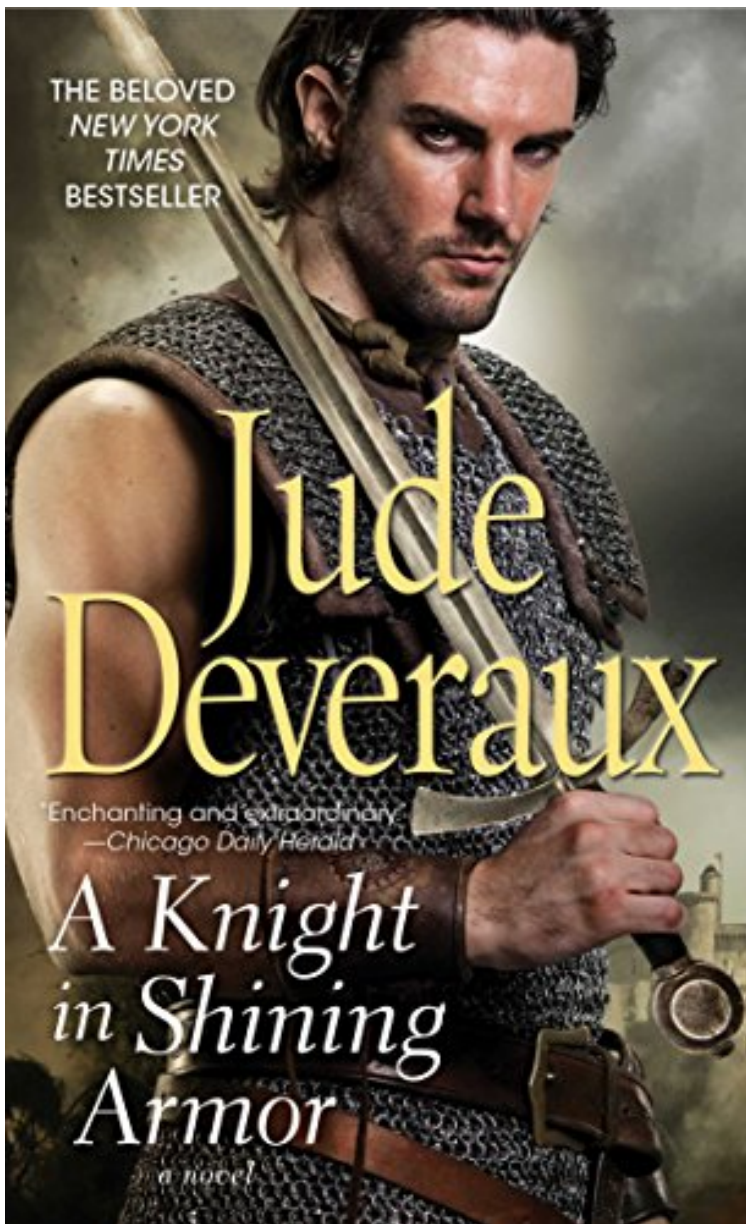


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A Knight in Shining Armor



Par Jude Deveraux
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Description : Description du produit Abandoned by a cruel fate, lovely, thoroughly modern Dougless Montgomery lay weeping upon a cold tombstone in an English church. Suddenly, as if in answer to her prayers, the most extraordinary man appeared. He was Nicholas Stafford, Earl of Thornwyck...and according to his tombstone he had died in1564. Tall, broad of shoulder, attired in gleaming silver and gold, he was magnificent. Drawn to his side by a bond so sudden and compelling it overshadowed reason, Dougless knew that Nicholas was nothing less than a miracle: a man who would not seek to change her, who found her perfect, fascinating, just as she was. Yet she could not imagine how strong were the chains that tied them to the past...or the grand adventure that lay before them....

Prsentation de l'diteurNew York Times bestselling author Jude Deveraux will capture your heart with signature classic novel, a time-travel romance featuring a present-day heroine and a dashing hero from the sixteenth century!Abandoned by a cruel fate, lovely Dougless Montgomery lies weeping upon a cold tombstone in an English church. Suddenly, the most extraordinary man appears. It is Nicholas Stafford, Earl of Thornwyckand according to his tombstone he died in 1564. Drawn to his side by a bond so sudden and compelling it overshadows reason, Dougless knows that Nicholas is nothing less than a miracle: a man who does not seek to change her, who finds her perfect, fascinating, just as she is. What Dougless never imagined was how strong the chains are that tie them to the pastor the grand adventure that lay before them. Hailed worldwide as one of the most romantic novels of all time, A Knight in Shining Armor is a glorious love story that spans centuries, worlds, and souls. It is the epitome of every womans fantasy (Chicago Daily Herald).ExtraitChapter One: England 1988Dougless Montgomery sat in the backseat of the rental car, Robert and his pudgy thirteen-year-old daughter, Gloria, in the front. As usual, Gloria was eating. Dougless shifted her slim legs to try to make herself more comfortable around Gloria's luggage. There were six large pieces of matched leather luggage to hold Gloria's belongings, and since they wouldn't fit in the trunk of the little car, they were piled in the back with Dougless. There was a makeup case under her feet and a big wardrobe on the seat beside her. Every time she moved, she scraped against a buckle, a welt, or a handle. Right now, she had an itch under her left knee, but she couldn't reach it."Daddy," Gloria whined, sounding like an invalid four-year-old, "she's scratching the pretty suitcases you bought me."Dougless clenched her fists, closed her eyes, and counted to ten. She. Gloria never said Dougless's name, but just called her She.Robert glanced over his shoulder at Dougless. "Dougless, could you please be a bit more careful? That luggage is quite expensive.""I am aware of that," Dougless said, trying to keep the anger out of her voice. "It's just that I'm having a difficult time sitting back here. There isn't much room."Robert gave a great sigh of weariness. "Dougless, do you have to complain about everything? Can't you even allow a vacation to be pleasant? All I asked was that you make an effort."Dougless opened her mouth to reply but closed it. She didn't want to start another argument. Besides, she knew that it would do no good. So, instead of replying, she swallowed her anger -- then rubbed her stomach. It was hurting again. She wanted to ask Robert to stop to get something to drink so she could take one of the tranquilizers the doctor had prescribed for her nervous stomach. "Keep this up and you'll give yourself an ulcer," the doctor had warned her. But Dougless wouldn't give Gloria the satisfaction of knowing that she'd yet again managed to upset Dougless and to, yet again, drive a wedge between Dougless and Robert. But when Dougless glanced up, she saw Gloria smirking at her in the makeup mirror on the sun visor. With determination, Dougless looked away and tried to concentrate on the beauty of the English countryside.Outside the car window she saw green fields, old stone fences, cows and more cows, picturesque little houses, magnificent mansions, and...and Gloria, she thought. Dougless seemed to see Gloria everywhere. Robert kept saying, "She's just a child and her daddy has left her. It's only natural that she's going to have some hostility toward you. But please try to show some sympathy for her, will you? She's really a sweet kid when you get to know her."A sweet kid, Dougless thought as she looked out the window. At thirteen, Gloria wore more makeup than Dougless did at twenty-six -- and Gloria spent hours in the hotel bathroom applying it. Gloria sat in the front of the car. "She's just a kid and it's her first trip to England," Robert said. "And you've been to England before, so why not be generous?" That Dougless was supposed to read the road map when she could hardly see around Gloria's head didn't seem to count for much.Dougless tried to concentrate on the scenery. Robert said Dougless was jealous of his daughter. He said that she didn't want to share him with anyone else, but that if she'd just relax, they'd be a very happy threesome. "We could be a second family for a little girl who has lost so much," he said.Dougless had tried to like Gloria. She'd tried hard to be an adult and ignore, and even understand, Gloria's hostility, but it was more than Dougless could do. In the year she and Robert had been living together, Dougless had made every possible effort to find that "sweet kid" that Robert had told her of. Several times, she'd taken Gloria shopping and spent more money on Gloria than Dougless's small elementary school teacher's salary allowed her to spend on herself. Several Saturday nights Dougless had stayed at the house she shared with Robert, babysitting Gloria while he went to professional functions, usually cocktail parties or dinners. When Dougless had said she'd like to attend with him, Robert had said, "But time alone is what you two need. You need to get to know each other. And, remember, babe, I'm a package deal. Love me, love my kid."Sometimes Dougless had started to believe that it was beginning to work because she and Gloria were cordial, even friendly, to each other when they were alone. But the minute Robert appeared, Gloria changed into a whining, lying brat. She sat on Robert's lap, all five foot two inches,

one hundred and forty pounds of her, and wailed that She had been "awfully mean" to her. At first Dougless had laughed at what Gloria was saying. How absurd to think she would ever harm a child! Anyone could see that the girl was just trying to get her father's attention. But to Dougless's utter disbelief, Robert believed every word his daughter said. He didn't accuse Dougless. No, instead, he just asked her to be a "little kinder" to "the poor kid." Immediately, Dougless's defenses had gone up. "Is that supposed to mean you don't think I'm a kind person? You do think I would mistreat a child?" "I'm just asking you to be the adult and have a little patience and understanding, that's all." When Dougless asked what he meant by that, Robert had thrown up his hands and said that he couldn't talk to her, then he'd walked out of the room. Dougless had taken two of her stomach tranquilizers. After the arguments, Dougless had wavered between guilt and rage. She had a classroom of children who adored her, yet Gloria seemed to hate her. Was Dougless jealous? Was she somehow unconsciously letting this child know she didn't want to share Robert with his own daughter? Every time Dougless thought of her possible jealousy she vowed to try harder to make Gloria like her, which usually meant she bought Gloria another expensive gift. And she'd again agree to babysit on the weekends when Gloria stayed with them. While Gloria's mother had a life, Dougless thought with bitterness. At other times, all Dougless felt was rage. Couldn't Robert just once -- one time -- take Dougless's side? Couldn't he tell Gloria that Dougless's comfort was more important than the blasted suitcases? Or maybe he could tell Gloria that Dougless had a name and wasn't always to be referred to as she or her? But every time Dougless said something like that to Robert, she ended up apologizing. Robert said, "My God, Dougless, you're the adult. And I only see her on alternate weekends, so of course I'm going to favor her over you. You and I are together every day, so why can't you stand to play second fiddle now and then?" His words sounded right, but at the same time, Dougless fantasized about Robert telling his daughter to "be more respectful" toward the "woman I love." But that didn't happen, so Dougless kept her mouth shut and enjoyed the time she and Robert had when Gloria wasn't around. When Gloria wasn't with them, she and Robert were perfectly suited, and she knew, through age old intuition, that very soon she was going to receive what she wanted so much: a marriage proposal. Truthfully, marriage was what Dougless wanted most in life. She'd never been burning with ambition the way her older sisters were. Dougless just wanted a nice home and a husband, and a few children. Maybe someday, after the kids were in school, she'd write children's books, something about talking animals, but she had no desire to fight her way up a corporate ladder. Already, she'd invested eighteen months of her life in Robert, and he was perfect husband material. He was tall, handsome, well-dressed, and an excellent orthopedic surgeon. He always hung up his clothes, and he helped with the housework; he didn't chase after women, and he always came home when he said he would. He was reliable, dependable, faithful -- but, most important, he needed her so very much. Not long after they met, Robert had told Dougless his life story. As a child, he hadn't been loved very much, and he told Dougless that her sweet, generous heart was what he'd been looking for all his life. His first wife, whom he'd divorced over four years ago, was a cold fish, a woman who Robert said was incapable of love. Just three months after he met Dougless, he told her he wanted a "permanent relationship" with her -- which she took to mean marriage -- but first he wanted to know how they "related" to each other. After all, he'd been hurt so badly the first time. In other words, he wanted them to live together. What he said made sense to her, and since Dougless had had a number of "unfortunate" previous relationships with men, she happily moved into Robert's big, beautiful, expensive house, then set about doing everything she could to prove to Robert that she was as warm and generous and loving as his mother and wife had been cold. With the exception of dealing with Gloria, living with Robert had been great. He was an energetic man and they often went dancing, hiking, bicycle riding. They entertained a great deal and often went to parties. She'd never lived with a man before, but she had easily settled into a domestic routine, feeling as though it was what she was made for. They had problems other than Gloria, of course, but Robert was so much better than any of the other men Dougless had dated that she forgave him his little quirks -- most of which revolved around money. True, it was annoying that when they went to the grocery together he nearly always "forgot" his checkbook. And at the ticket window of theaters and when the check was presented in restaurants, half the time Robert found he'd left his wallet at home. If Dougless complained, he'd talk to her about the new age of liberated women and how most women were fighting to pay half the expenses. Then he'd kiss her sweetly and take her somewhere expensive for dinner -- and he'd pay. And Dougless forgave him. Dougless knew she could stand the small problems -- everyone had idiosyncracies -- but it was Gloria that sent her screaming. When Gloria was with them, their life turned into a battleground. According to Robert, his daughter was perfection on earth, and because Dougless didn't see her that way, Robert began to see Dougless as the enemy. When the three of them were

together, it was Robert and Gloria on one team and Dougless on the other. Now, on this holiday in England, in the front seat Gloria offered her father a piece of candy from the box on her lap. Neither of them seemed to think of offering any to Dougless. Still looking out the window, Dougless gritted her teeth. Perhaps it was the combination of Gloria and money that was making her so angry, because, with this trip, Robert's little "money quirk" as Dougless had always thought of it, had turned into something more. When Dougless had first met Robert, they had talked for hours about their dreams and they'd talked many times of taking a trip to England. As a child, she had often traveled to England with her family, but she hadn't been back in years.

When she and Robert had moved in together, in September of last year, Robert had said, "Let's go to England one year from today. By then we'll know." He hadn't elaborated on what they would "know," but Dougless was sure that he meant that, in a year, they'd know whether or not they were compatible for marriage. For a whole year, Dougless had worked on planning the trip, which she'd come to think of as their honeymoon. A "pre-honeymoon," she called it in her mind. "The decision maker," she said to herself, then smiled. She made reservations at the most romantic, most exclusive country house hotels England had to offer. When she had asked Robert's opinion of a hotel, he'd winked at her and said, "Spare no expense for this trip." She had ordered brochures, bought travel books, read and researched until she knew the names of half the villages in England. Robert's only stipulation had been that he wanted an educational trip as well as fun, so she'd compiled a list of many things to do that were close to their lovely hotels -- which was easy to do, since Great Britain is like a Disneyland for history lovers. Then, three months before they were to leave, Robert said that he had a surprise for her on this trip, a very, very special surprise that was going to fill her with joy. His words had made Dougless work even harder on the plans, and she found their little game of secrecy exciting. As Dougless planned, she thought, Will he propose here? Or maybe here. This place would be nice. Three weeks before they left, she was balancing Robert's household-accounts checkbook when she saw a canceled check for five thousand dollars made out to a jewelry store. As she held the check, tears of happiness came to her eyes. "An engagement ring," she'd whispered. That Robert had spent so much was proof that even though he was a tad stingy on small things, when something really counted, he was generous. For the next few weeks Dougless had walked on clouds. She cooked wonderful meals for Robert and had been especially energetic in the bedroom, doing everything she could think of to please him. Two days before they were to leave, Robert punctured her bubble a bit -- not enough to burst it, but it had certainly been deflated. He had asked to see the bills for the trip, plane tickets, advance reservations, whatever she had. He had then added the amounts and handed her the calculator tape. "This is your half of the cost," he'd said. "Mine?" she'd asked stupidly, not understanding what he was saying. "I know how important it is to you women today to pay your own way, so I don't want to be accused of being a male chauvinist pig," he'd said with a smile. "You don't want to be a burden to a man, do you? You don't want to add to all my responsibilities at the hospital and to my ex-wife, do you?" "No, no, of course not," Dougless had mumbled, feeling confused, as she often did when confronted with Robert's reasoning. "It's just that I don't have any money." "Dougless, baby, please tell me that you don't spend everything you make. Maybe you should take a course in accounting." He lowered his voice. "But then your family has money, doesn't it?" That was one of the times Dougless's stomach had begun to hurt, and she remembered the doctor's warning about giving herself an ulcer. She had explained to Robert about her family a hundred times. Yes, her family had money -- lots of it -- but her father believed his daughters should know how to support themselves, so Dougless was on her own until she was thirty-five, then she'd inherit. She knew that if there was an emergency, her father would help her, but a pleasure trip to England hardly counted as an emergency. "Come on, Dougless," Robert had said with a smile when Dougless didn't reply to his question. "I keep hearing what a paragon of love and support that family of yours is, so why can't they help you now?" Before she could speak, Robert raised her hand to his lips and kissed it. "Ah, baby, please try to get the money. I so much want us to go on this trip because I have such a very, very special surprise for you." Part of Dougless had wanted to shout that he wasn't being fair. He should have made it clear that she was going to be required to pay for half of the trip before she'd made reservations at such expensive hotels. But another part of her asked why she'd expected him to pay for her share. They weren't married. They were, as Robert often called them, "partners." "Sounds like John Wayne and a sidekick," Dougless had muttered the first time he'd said that, but Robert had just laughed. In the end Dougless couldn't bear to ask her father for money. It would be like admitting defeat to him. Instead, she'd called a cousin in Colorado and asked him for a loan. The money had been given to her freely, no interest, but she'd had to endure her cousin's lecture. "He's a surgeon, you're an underpaid teacher, you've been living together for a year, but he expects you to

pay for half of an expensive trip?" her cousin had said. Dougless had wanted to explain about Robert's mother, who had used money to punish her son, and about his cold ex-wife, who had spent everything Robert earned. Dougless had wanted to explain that money was just a small part of their lives and that she was pretty sure that Robert was going to propose marriage on this trip. But Dougless said none of that. "Just send the money, will you?" she'd snapped. But her cousin's words had upset her, so, during the few days remaining before they left, Dougless gave herself several little lectures. It was only fair that she pay her own way, wasn't it? And Robert was right: it was the day of the liberated woman. Her father, by not dropping millions in her lap before she could handle them, was teaching her to take care of herself and, now, so was Robert. And, most of all, she told herself that she had been an idiot for not realizing beforehand that she was supposed to pay her own way. After Dougless had contributed her half to the bills, for the most part, she recovered her good humor, and by the time she'd packed their suitcases, she was again looking forward to the trip. Happily, she filled her tote bag with necessary toiletries, travel books, and as many gadgets as she could cram into it. In the taxi on the way to the airport, Robert had been especially nice to her. He'd nuzzled her neck until she'd pushed him away in embarrassment when she saw the taxi driver watching. "Have you guessed the surprise yet?" he asked. "You won the lottery," Dougless answered, still playing the game and pretending ignorance. "Better than that." "Let's see... You've bought a castle and we'll live in it forever as lord and lady." "Much better than that," Robert said seriously. "Do you have any idea what the upkeep on one of those places is? I'll bet you can't guess anything as good as this surprise." Dougless had looked at him with love. She knew just what her wedding dress would look like, and she imagined all her relatives smiling at her in approval. Would their children have Robert's blue eyes or her green? His brown hair or her auburn? "I have no idea what the surprise is," she said, lying. Leaning back against the seat, Robert smiled. "You'll soon find out," he'd said enigmatically. At the airport Dougless dealt with checking the luggage while Robert kept looking about the terminal as though he were searching for something. As Dougless tipped the porter, Robert threw up his hand to wave to someone. At first Dougless was too busy to realize what was happening. She looked up at the cry, "Daddy!" and saw Gloria running across the terminal, a porter trailing behind her pushing a hand truck loaded with six new suitcases. What a coincidence, Dougless thought as she checked the tags the baggage handler gave her. Imagine meeting Gloria at the airport. Distractedly, Dougless watched as Gloria flung herself on her father. Moments later they broke apart, Robert keeping his arm tightly around his precious daughter's plump shoulders. Once Dougless had finished with the bags, she gave her attention to Robert's daughter, and it was difficult to keep the frown off her face. Gloria was wearing a fringed jacket and cowboy boots, and a too-short leather skirt. She looked like an overweight stripper from the sixties. Where was her mother and how could she allow the child to dress like that? Dougless thought as she glanced about the airport for Robert's ex-wife. "Hello, Gloria," Dougless said. "Are you and your mother going somewhere too?" Gloria and her father nearly collapsed with laughter at Dougless's words. "You haven't told her," Gloria squealed. It took Robert a moment to sober himself. "This is the surprise," he said, pushing Gloria forward as though she were some huge trophy Dougless had just won. "Isn't this the most wonderful surprise you could imagine?" Dougless still didn't understand -- or maybe she was too horrified to want to understand. All she could do was stand there and stare at the two of them, speechless. Robert put his other arm around Dougless and drew her close to him. "Both of my girls are going with me," he said with pride. "Both?" Dougless whispered, her throat closing down on her. "Yes," Robert said, his voice joyous. "Gloria is the surprise I've been hinting at for weeks. She's going with us to England. I knew you'd never guess! You didn't, did you?" No, Dougless had not come close to guessing. And now that she was finally understanding that the beautiful, romantic trip she'd dreamed of wasn't going to happen, she wanted to scream, to yell, and to refuse to go. But she did none of those things. "All the hotel rooms are just for two people," she'd managed to say at last. "So we'll have a rollaway bed brought in," Robert said in dismissal. "I'm sure we'll manage, because we have love going for us and that's all we need." He dropped his arm from Dougless's shoulder. "Now for business. Dougless, you won't mind getting Gloria's luggage checked in while I catch up with lambykins, will you?" Dougless could only shake her head. Numbly she went off to the ticket counter, the porter and the suitcases following her. She had to pay two hundred and eighty dollars in overcharge for Gloria's four extra bags, and she had to tip the porter. They didn't have much time to spare before the plane took off, and Robert and his daughter were absorbed in each other so, thankfully, Dougless wasn't asked to speak. If she had been asked anything, she wasn't sure she could have answered. With each passing minute, she saw one dream after another disappear. Champagne dinners gave way to fast food eaten in the car. Afternoons spent lazily strolling on wooded paths turned into visions of arguments about "finding

something Gloria can enjoy, too" -- a request that Dougless had already heard too many times. And then there was the privacy issue. The three of them would share one room. When could she and Robert be alone? It was when they boarded the plane that Dougless saw that Robert had put quite a bit of work into Gloria's trip. Her boarding pass said she was in the same row as they were, in the aisle seat. But Robert set Gloria between them, so Dougless ended up on the aisle, which she hated because no matter where she put her arms or her legs, she was always told by the flight attendant that she was blocking the passage of the cart. It was during the long flight that Robert, smiling, had handed Dougless Gloria's ticket. "Add this to our list of expenses, will you? And I'll need a penny by penny -- or should I say shilling by shilling," he added, winking at Gloria, "accounting of all the money spent. My accountant thinks I can deduct this whole trip." "But it's a pleasure trip, not business." Robert frowned. "Dougless, please don't start on me already. Would you please just keep track of the money we spend so that when we get home, you and I can split the expenses in half?" Dougless looked at Gloria's ticket she was holding. "You mean in thirds, don't you? Me one third, two thirds for you and Gloria." Robert gave her a look of horror as he put his arm around Gloria protectively, as though Dougless had tried to hit the kid. "I meant in half. Gloria is for you to enjoy too. Money spent is nothing compared to the joy you'll receive from her company." Dougless turned away. She wasn't going to get into an argument now; they'd discuss this further later -- when they were in private and Gloria wasn't watching them with interest. For the rest of the long flight, she read while Gloria and Robert played cards and ignored her. Twice Dougless took a tranquilizer to keep her stomach from eating itself. Now, in the car, Dougless rubbed her aching stomach. In the four days they'd been in England she'd tried to enjoy herself. She'd tried not to complain when the first night in their beautiful hotel room, Gloria had moaned so much about the trundle bed the hotel had put in the room -- after the owner had crossly lectured Dougless about not having expected Gloria -- that Robert had asked Gloria to get into their four poster with them. After nearly being pushed out of bed twice, Dougless had ended up sleeping on the trundle bed. Nor had Dougless complained when Gloria ordered three entrees at the expensive restaurant. "I just want my baby to have a taste of everything," Robert said. "And, Dougless, please stop being so stingy. I don't know what's come over you. I always thought you were a generous person," Robert said, then handed Dougless the enormous bill that Dougless was to pay half of. Dougless managed to keep her mouth shut by constantly reminding herself that she was the adult and Gloria was just a child. And Dougless consoled herself with the knowledge that somewhere in Robert's baggage was a five-thousand-dollar engagement ring.

The thought of that ring made her remember that he did love her. And she reminded herself that all the things he did for Gloria were done out of love, too. But after last night, Dougless was finding it impossible to keep up her appearance of good humor. Last night at yet another hundred-and-fifty-dollar dinner, Robert had presented Gloria with a long blue velvet box. As Dougless watched Gloria open the box, she had a sinking feeling. Gloria's eyes lit up when she saw what was inside. "But it's not my birthday, Daddy," she'd whispered. "I know, Muffin," Robert said softly. "It's just to say, 'I love you.'" Slowly, Gloria withdrew from the box a wide bracelet made of twisted wires of gold and silver, from which dripped diamonds and emeralds. Dougless couldn't prevent the gasp that escaped her, for she knew that her engagement ring was being fastened about Gloria's chubby wrist. Gloria held her arm up triumphantly. "See?" "Yes, I see," Dougless said coolly. After dinner, in the hall outside their room, Robert had been furious with her. "You didn't show much enthusiasm about the bracelet I gave my daughter. Gloria was trying to show it to you. She was trying to make overtures of friendship to you, but you snubbed her. You've hurt her deeply." "Is that what you paid five thousand dollars for? A diamond bracelet for a child?" "Gloria happens to be a young woman, a very beautiful young woman, and she deserves beautiful things. And besides, it's my money. It's not as though you and I were married and you had any legal rights to my money." It was the first time they'd been alone in days, and Dougless wanted to keep her pride, wanted to tell herself that it didn't matter that Robert bought his young daughter diamonds but gave the woman he lived with half his bills. But Dougless had never been able to conceal her true feelings. With her eyes filling with unshed tears, Dougless put her hands on his arms. "Are we going to get married?" she whispered. "Is it ever going to happen?" Angrily, he jerked away from her touch. "Not if you don't start showing a little love and generosity to both my daughter and me." He gave her a cold look. "You know, I thought you were different, but now I'm beginning to think that you're as cold as my ex-wife. Now, if you'll please excuse me, I have to go comfort my daughter. She's probably crying her little eyes out after the way you treated her." After one last glare at Dougless, he turned and went into their room. Dougless slumped against the wall. "Emerald earrings should dry her tears," she whispered to no one. So now, in the car, she sat with her body twisted around Gloria's suitcases and knew

that no marriage proposal, and certainly no engagement ring, was going to be given to her. Instead she knew that she was going to spend the month-long trip acting as a secretary and navigator for Robert, and being taunted by his daughter. At the moment Dougless wasn't sure what she was going to do, but the thought of taking the first plane home appealed to her. Even as she thought of leaving, she looked at the back of Robert's head and her heart lurched. If she got on a plane in a rage, she knew she'd have to return to the U.S. and move out of Robert's house. She'd have to find an apartment; then she'd -- What? Start dating again? As a schoolteacher, she didn't meet too many men. She could go to her family and -- Admit that she'd had yet another relationship fail?"Dougless," Robert said. "I think maybe we're lost. Where is this church? I thought you were going to watch the road maps. I can't drive and navigate." There was an edge to his voice that hadn't been there yesterday and Dougless knew he was still angry about her reaction to the bracelet. Quickly, Dougless fumbled with the map, then looked around Gloria's head to try to see the road signs. "Here!" she said. "Take a right." Robert turned down one of the narrow English lanes, bushes on either side nearly covering the road, and drove toward the remote village of Ashburton, a place that looked as though it hadn't changed in hundreds of years. "There's a thirteenth-century church here containing the tomb of an Elizabethan earl." Dougless checked her notebook. "Lord Nicholas Stafford, died 1564." "Do we have to see another church?" Gloria wailed. "I'm sick of churches. Couldn't she find something better to look at?" "I was told to search out historic sights," Dougless snapped before she thought to modulate her tone. Robert stopped the car in front of the church and looked back at Dougless. "Gloria's statement was valid, and I see no call for your bad temper. Dougless, you are making me begin to regret bringing you with us," he said, then got out of the car and walked away. "Bringing me?" Dougless said, but he was already halfway to the church, his arm around Gloria. "But I'm paying my own way," she whispered. Dougless didn't go inside the church with Robert and Gloria. Instead she stayed outside, walking around the lumpy graveyard, absently looking at the ancient grave markers. She had some serious decisions to make and she wanted time to think. Should she stay and be miserable, or should she leave? If she left now, she knew Robert would never forgive her and all the time and effort she'd invested in him would have been for nothing. "Hello." Dougless jumped at the voice, then turned to see Gloria just behind her. Maybe it was Dougless's imagination, but the girl's diamond bracelet seemed to flash in the sun. "What do you want?" Dougless asked suspiciously. Gloria stuck her lower lip out. "You hate me, don't you?" Dougless sighed. "No, I don't hate you. I just...It's a grown-up thing." She took a deep breath. She wanted to be alone so she could think. "Why aren't you inside looking at the church?" "I got bored. That's a pretty blouse," Gloria said, her eyelids lowered in a sly way that Dougless had seen too many times before. "It looks expensive. Did your rich family buy it for you?" Dougless wasn't about to take the bait and let the girl get to her. Instead, she gave her a quelling look, then turned and walked away. "Wait!" Gloria cried out, then yelled, "Ow!" Dougless turned back to see Gloria crumpled in a heap beside a rough-surfaced tombstone. Dougless doubted if the girl was actually hurt because Gloria loved drama. Sighing, Dougless went back to help her up, but as soon as she was upright, Gloria burst into tears. Dougless couldn't quite bring herself to hug Gloria, but she did manage to pat her shoulder. She even gave a little expression of sympathy because Gloria's arm was raw where she'd hit the stone. Gloria looked at her arm and began to cry louder. "It couldn't hurt that much," Dougless said, trying to soothe the girl. "I know. Why don't you put your new bracelet on that arm? I'll bet the pain'll stop instantly." "It's not that," Gloria said, sniffing. "I'm upset because you hate me. Daddy said you thought my bracelet was going to be an engagement ring." Dougless dropped her hand from Gloria's arm and stiffened. "What made him think such a ridiculous thing as that?" she asked, trying to sound convincing. Gloria looked at Dougless out of the corner of her eye. "Oh, my daddy knows everything about you," she said, her voice sly. "He knows you thought his surprise was going to be a marriage proposal, and he knows that you thought the check to the jeweler was for an engagement ring." Gloria gave a little smile. "Daddy and I laugh all the time about you and how much you want to marry him. He says you'll do anything he tells you to if he makes you think he's going to ask you to marry him." Dougless was standing so rigid that her body began to tremble. Gloria's little smile turned malicious and her voice lowered. "Daddy says that if you weren't going to inherit so much money, he'd get rid of you." At that remark, Dougless slapped Gloria's smug, fat face. Robert appeared from inside the church just in time to see the slap, and Gloria went screaming into her father's arms. "She hit me over and over," Gloria screamed, "and she scratched my arm. Look at it, Daddy, it's bleeding. She did this to me!" "My God, Dougless," Robert said, his eyes wide in horror. "I can't believe this of you. To beat a child, to -- ""Child! I've had enough of that child! And I've had enough of the way you baby her. And I've had enough of the way you two treat me!" Robert glared at her coldly. "We have been nothing but kind and thoughtful to you this

entire trip, while you have been jealous and spiteful. We have gone out of our way to please you." "You haven't made any effort to please me. Everything has been for Gloria." Tears came to Dougless's eyes and filled her throat until she almost choked. She kept hearing Gloria's words ringing in her head. "You two have laughed at me behind my back." "Now you're fantasizing," Robert said, still glaring at her, still holding Gloria protectively under his arm as though Dougless might attack the girl at any moment. "But since we are so displeasing to you, perhaps you'd rather do without our company." Turning, Gloria huddled against his side, he started walking toward the car. "I agree," Dougless said. "I'm ready to go home." Bending, she reached for her handbag where she'd set it down by a gravestone. But her bag wasn't there. Quickly, she looked behind a few tombstones, but there was no sign of her bag. She looked up when she heard a car start. At first she couldn't believe what she was seeing. Robert was driving away and leaving her! Dougless ran toward the gate, but the car had already pulled onto the road. Then, to Dougless's horror, she saw Gloria stick her arm out the window -- and dangling from her fingertips was Dougless's handbag. In a futile attempt to reach them, Dougless ran after the car, but it was soon out of sight. Dazed, numb, disbelieving, she walked back to the church. She was in a foreign country with no money, no credit cards, no passport. But, worst of all, the man she loved had just walked out on her. The heavy oak door of the church was standing open, so Dougless went inside. It was cool and damp and dim inside the church, and the tall stone walls made the place feel calm and reverent. She had to think about her situation and make some plans about what she should do. But, then, surely, Robert would return for her. Maybe even now he was turning around and driving back to get her. Maybe any minute he'd come running into the church, pull Dougless into his arms, and tell her he was sorry and he hoped she could forgive him. But, somehow, Dougless didn't believe any of that was going to happen. No, Robert had been too angry -- and Gloria was too much of a liar. Dougless was sure the girl would elaborate on how Dougless had injured her arm, and Robert's anger would be refueled. No, it would be better if Dougless made some plans about how to get herself out of this mess. She'd have to call her father, collect, and have him send her money. And again she would have to tell him that his youngest daughter had failed at something. She'd have to tell him that his daughter couldn't so much as go on a holiday without getting herself into trouble. Tears started in her eyes as she imagined hearing her oldest sister, Elizabeth, say, "What has our little scatterbrained Dougless done now?" Robert had been Dougless's attempt at making her family proud of her. Robert wasn't like the other stray-cat men Dougless had fallen for. Robert was so respectable, so very suitable, but she'd lost him. Maybe if she'd just held her temper with Gloria... Maybe... Tears blurred Dougless's eyes as she looked around the church. Sun was streaming through the old windows high above her head, and sharp, clear rays lit the white marble tomb in the archway to the left. Dougless walked forward. Lying on top of the tomb was a full-length, white marble sculpture of a man wearing the top half of a suit of armor and an odd-looking pair of shorts, his ankles crossed, a helmet tucked under his arm. "Nicholas Stafford," she read aloud, "Earl of Thornwyck." Dougless was congratulating herself for holding up so well under her current circumstances when, suddenly, everything that had happened hit her, and her knees collapsed. She fell to the floor, her hands on the tomb, her forehead resting against the cold marble. She began to cry in earnest, to cry deeply from far down inside herself. She felt as though she were a failure, a complete and absolute failure. Her tears were not just for today, but it seemed that everything she'd ever touched in her life had failed. Since she'd reached puberty, her father had had to bail her out of what had to be hundreds of scrapes. There was the "boy" she'd fallen madly in love with when she was sixteen. She had defied her entire family because they hadn't liked him. But her sister Elizabeth -- wise, never-made-a-mistake-in-her-life Elizabeth -- showed Dougless some papers. The boy she loved was twenty-five years old and had a prison record. Defiantly, Dougless declared that she loved him no matter what flaws he had. They broke up when he was arrested for grand theft. Then there was the minister she'd fallen for when she was nineteen. A minister had seemed a safe person for her to love. She ended their relationship when his picture appeared on the front page of the newspapers. He was already married to three other women. And then there was... Dougless was crying so hard that she couldn't remember all the others. But she knew that the list was endless. Robert had seemed so different, so ordinary, so respectable -- but she hadn't been able to hold on to him. "What is wrong with me?" she cried. Through her tears, she looked at the marble face of the man on the tomb. In the Middle Ages they had arranged marriages. When she was twenty-two and had just found out that her latest love, a stockbroker, had been arrested for insider trading, she'd crawled onto her father's lap and asked him if he'd choose a man for her. Adam Montgomery had laughed. "Your problem, sweetheart, is that you fall in love with men who need you too much. You ought to find a man who doesn't need you, but just wants you." Dougless had sniffed. "That's exactly what I want: a Knight in Shining

Armor to swoop down off his white horse and want me so much that he carries me back to his castle, where we live happily ever after." "Something like that," her father had said, smiling. "Armor's okay but, Dougless, sweetheart, if he gets mysterious phone calls in the night, then jumps on his Harley and doesn't return for days at a time, get out, okay?" Dougless cried harder as she remembered the many times she'd had to go to her family for help. And now she was going to have to ask for their help again. Once again she was going to have to admit that she'd made a fool of herself over a man. But this time was worse, because this man had been someone who had her family's approval. But somehow Dougless had lost him. "Help me," she whispered, her hand on the marble hand of the sculpture. "Help me find my Knight in Shining Armor. Help me find a man who wants me." Sitting back on her heels, with her hands covering her face, Dougless began to cry harder. After a long while, she slowly came to realize that someone was near her. When she turned her head, a stream of sunlight coming from a high window hit metal and so blinded her that she sat back on the stone floor with a thud. She put her hand up to shield her eyes. Standing before her was a man, a man who appeared to be wearing...armor. He was standing so still, and glaring down at Dougless so fiercely, that at first she thought he wasn't real. She couldn't help staring up at him in openmouthed astonishment. He was an extraordinarily good looking man, and he was wearing the most authentic looking stage costume she'd ever seen. There was a small ruff about his neck, then armor to his waist. But what armor! The shiny metal looked almost as though it was silver. Down the front of the armor were many rows of etched flower designs, each design filled with a gold-colored metal. From his waist to mid-thigh he wore a type of shorts that ballooned out about his body. Below the shorts, his legs -- his big, muscular legs -- were clad in stockings that looked to be knitted of...there was only one fiber on earth that reflected light in just that way: silk. Tied above his left knee was a garter made of blue silk and beautifully embroidered. His feet sported odd, soft shoes that had little cut-outs across the toes. "Well, witch," the man said in a deep baritone, "you have conjured me, so what now do you ask of me?" "Witch?" Dougless asked, sniffing and wiping away tears. From inside his ballooned shorts, the man pulled out a white linen handkerchief and handed it to her. Dougless blew her nose noisily. "Have my enemies hired you?" the man asked. "Do they plot against me more? Is not my head enough for them? Stand, madam, and explain yourself." "Gorgeous, but off his rocker, Dougless thought. "Listen, I don't know what you're talking about." Slowly, she stood up. "Now, if you'll excuse me -- "She didn't say any more because he drew a thin-bladed sword that had to be a yard long, then held the sharp point against her throat. "Reverse your spell, witch. I would return!" It was all too much for Dougless. First Robert and his lying daughter, and now this mad Hamlet. She burst into tears again and slumped against the cold stone wall. "Damnation!" the man muttered, and the next thing Dougless knew he had picked her up and was carrying her to a church pew. He put her down to sit on the hard pew, then stood over her, still glaring. Dougless couldn't seem to stop crying. "This has been the worst day of my life," she wailed. The man was scowling down at her like an actor out of an old Bette Davis movie. "I'm sorry," she managed to say. "I don't usually cry so much, but to be abandoned by the man I love and attacked -- at sword point, no less -- all in the same day, sets me off." As she wiped her eyes, she glanced down at the handkerchief. It was a large linen square, and around the border was an inch and a half band of intricate silk embroidery of what looked to be flowers and dragons. "How pretty," she choked out. "There is no time for trivialities. My soul is at stake -- as is yours. I tell you again: Reverse your spell." Dougless was recovering herself. "I don't know what you're talking about. I was having a good cry all alone, and you, wearing that absurd outfit, came in here and started yelling at me. I've a good mind to call the police -- or the bobbies, or whatever they have in rural England. Is it legal for you to carry a sword like that?" "Legal?" the man asked. He was looking at her arm. "Is that a clock on your arm? And what manner of dress is it that you wear?" "Of course it's a clock, and these are my traveling-to-England clothes. Conservative. No jeans or T-shirts. Nice blouse, nice skirt. You know, Miss Marple-type clothes." He was frowning at her, but there seemed to be less anger about him. "You talk uncommonly strangely. What manner of witch are you?" Throwing up her hands in despair, Dougless stood up and faced him. He was quite a bit taller than she was, so she had to look up. His black, curling hair just reached the stiff little ruff he wore, and he had a black mustache above a trim, pointed, short beard. "I am not a witch, and I am not part of your Elizabethan drama," she said firmly. "And now I'm going to leave this church, and I can promise you that if you try anything fancy with that sword of yours, I'll scream the windows out. Here's your handkerchief. I'm sorry it's so wet, but I thank you for lending it to me. Good-bye, and I hope your play gets great reviews." Turning sharply, she walked out of the church. "At least nothing more horrible than what I've already been through can happen to me today," Dougless murmured as she left the churchyard. There was a telephone booth beyond the gate, within sight of

the church door, and Dougless used it to make a collect call to her parents' home in the U.S. It was early in the morning in Maine, and a sleepy Elizabeth answered the phone. Anybody but her, Dougless thought, rolling her eyes skyward. She'd rather talk to anyone on earth than her perfect older sister. "Dougless, is that you?" Elizabeth asked, waking up. "Are you all right? You're not in trouble again, are you?" Dougless grit her teeth. "Of course I'm not in trouble. Is Dad there? Or Mom?" Or a stranger off the street, she thought. Anybody but Elizabeth. Elizabeth yawned. "No, they went up to the mountains. I'm here house-sitting and working on a paper." "Think it'll win a Nobel prize?" Dougless asked, trying to make a joke and sound carefree. Elizabeth wasn't fooled. "All right, Dougless, what's wrong? Has that surgeon of yours stranded you somewhere?" Dougless gave a little laugh. "Elizabeth, you do say the funniest things. Robert and Gloria and I are having a wonderful time. There are so many fantastic things to see and do here. Why, just this morning we saw a medieval play. The actors were so good. And you wouldn't believe how good the costumes are!" Elizabeth paused. "Dougless, you're lying. I can hear it over the phone. What's wrong? Do you need money?" Try as she might, Dougless could not make her lips form the word "yes." Her family loved to tell what they called Dougless-stories. They loved the one about the time Dougless got locked out of her hotel room when she was wearing only a towel. Then there was the time Dougless went to the bank to deposit a check and walked into a bank robbery. What they especially loved about this story was that when the police arrived, they discovered that the robbers were carrying toy guns. Now she could imagine Elizabeth's laughter when she told all the Montgomery cousins how funny little Dougless had gone to England and been left at a church with no money, no passport, nothing. "And, oh, yes," Elizabeth would say over the howls of laughter, "she was attacked by a crazed Shakespearean actor." "No, I don't need money," Dougless said at last. "I just wanted to say hello. I hope you get your paper done. See ya." She heard Elizabeth say, "Dougless" as she dropped the receiver into the cradle. For a moment Dougless leaned back against the booth and closed her eyes. She could feel the tears starting again. She had the Montgomery pride, but she'd never done anything to be proud of. She had three older sisters who were paragons of success: Elizabeth was a research chemist, Catherine was a professor of physics, and Anne was a criminal attorney. Dougless, with her lowly elementary school teaching job and her disastrous history with men, was the family jester. She was an endless source of material for laughter among the relatives. As she was leaning against the telephone booth, her eyes blurred with tears, she saw the man in the armor leave the church and walk down the path. He glanced quickly at the ancient gravestones, but didn't seem to have much interest in them as he headed past the gate. Coming down the lane was one of the little English buses, as usual doing about fifty miles an hour on the narrow street. Suddenly, Dougless stood up straight. The bus was coming, the man was walking very fast, and, somehow, she instinctively knew he was going to walk in front of the bus. Without another thought, Dougless started to run. Just as she took flight, the vicar walked from behind the church in time to see the man and the fast-moving vehicle. He too started running. Dougless reached the man first. She made her best flying tackle, the one she'd learned from playing football with her Colorado cousins, and landed on top of him. The two of them skidded across the graveled path on his armor as though it were a little rowboat as the bus flew past them. If Dougless had been only one second later, the man would have been hit by the bus. "Are you all right?" the vicar asked, offering his hand to help Dougless up. "I...I think so," she said as she stood up and dusted herself off. "You okay?" she asked the man on the ground. "What manner of chariot was that?" he asked, sitting up, but not attempting to stand. He looked dazed. "I did not hear it coming." His voice lowered. "And there were no horses." Dougless exchanged looks with the vicar. "I'll get him a glass of water," the vicar said, giving a little smile to Dougless as though to say, You saved him, so he's yours. "Wait!" the man said. "What year is this?" "Nineteen eighty-eight," the vicar answered, and when the man lay back on the ground as if exhausted, the vicar looked at Dougless. "I'll get the water," he said, then went hurrying off, leaving them alone. Dougless offered her hand to the man on the ground, but he refused it and stood up on his own. "I think you ought to sit down," she said kindly as she motioned to an iron bench inside the low stone wall. He wouldn't go first but followed her through the open gate, then wouldn't sit until she had. But Dougless pushed him to sit down. He looked too pale and too bewildered to pay attention to courtesy. "You're dangerous, you know that? Listen, you sit right here and I'm going to call a doctor. You are not well." She turned away, but his words halted her. "I think perhaps I am dead," he said softly. She looked back at him in speculation. If he was suicidal, then she couldn't leave him alone. "Why don't you come with me?" she said quietly. "We'll go together to find you some help." He didn't move from the bench. "What manner of conveyance was it that nearly struck me down?" Dougless moved to sit beside him. If he was suicidal, maybe what he needed most was someone to talk to. "Where are you from? You sound English, but

you have an accent I've never heard before." "I am English. What was the chariot?" "All right," she said with a sigh. She could play along with him. "That was what the English call a coach. In America, it's called a minibus. It was going entirely too fast, but it's my opinion that the only thing of the twentieth century the English have really accepted is the speed of the motor vehicle." She grimaced. "So what else don't you know about? Airplanes? Trains?" It was one thing to offer help, but she had important things of her own to take care of. "Look, I really need to go. Let's go to the rectory and have the vicar call a doctor." She paused. "Or maybe we should call your mother." Surely the people of this village knew of this crazy man who ran about in armor and pretended he'd never seen a wristwatch or a bus. "My mother," the man said, his lips forming a little smile. "I would imagine my mother is dead now." Maybe grief had made him lose his memory.

Dougless softened. "I'm sorry. Did she die recently?" He looked up at the sky for a moment before answering. "About four hundred years ago." At that Dougless started to rise. "I'm calling someone." But he caught her hand and wouldn't let her leave. "I was sitting...in a room writing my mother a letter when I heard a woman weeping. The room darkened, my head swam, then I was standing over a woman -- you." He looked up at her with pleading eyes. Dougless thought that leaving this man alone would be so much easier if he weren't so utterly divine looking. "Maybe you blacked out and don't remember dressing up and going to the church. Why don't you tell me where you live so I can walk you home?" "When I was in the room, it was the year of our Lord 1564." Delusional, Dougless thought. Beautiful but crazy. My luck. "Come with me," she said softly, as though speaking to a child about to step over a cliff. "We'll find someone to help you." The man came off the bench quickly, his blue eyes blazing. The size of him, the anger of him, not to mention that he was steel-covered and carried a sword that looked to be razor sharp, made Dougless step back. "I am not yet ready for Bedlam, mistress. I know not why I am here or how I came to be here, but I know who I am and from whence I came." Suddenly, laughter began to rumble deep inside Dougless. "And you came from the sixteenth century. Queen Elizabeth's time, right? The first Elizabeth, of course. Oh, boy! This is going to be the best Dougless-story ever. I'm jilted in the morning and an hour later a ghost holds a sword to my throat." She stood up. "Thanks a lot, mister. You've cheered me up immensely. I am now going to call my sister and ask her to wire me ten pounds -- no more, no less -- then I'm catching a train to the hotel where Robert and I are staying. I'll get my plane ticket, then I'm going home. I'm sure that after today the rest of my life is going to be uneventful." She turned away from him, but he blocked her path. From inside his balloon shorts he withdrew a leather pouch, looked in it, took out a few coins, and pressed them into Dougless's hand, closing her fingers over them. "Take the ten pounds, woman, and be gone. It is worth that and more to be rid of your spiteful tongue. I will beseech God to reverse your wickedness." She was tempted to throw the money at him, but her alternative was to call her sister again. "That's me, Wicked Witch Dougless. I don't know why I want a train when I have a perfectly good broomstick. I'll send your money back in care of the vicar. So long, and I hope we never meet again." She turned and left the churchyard just as the vicar returned with the man's water. Let someone else deal with his fantasies, she thought. The man probably had a whole trunk full of costumes. Today he's an Elizabethan knight, tomorrow he's Abraham Lincoln -- or Horatio Nelson, since he's English. It was easy to find the train station in the little village, and she went to the window to purchase her ticket. "That'll be three pounds six," the man behind the window said. Dougless had never been able to figure out the English money. There seemed to be so many coins that had the same value, so she shoved the coins the man had given her under the cage window. "Is this enough?" The man looked at the three coins one by one, slowly turning them over, examining them carefully. After a moment, he looked back at Dougless, then excused himself. I'll probably be arrested for passing counterfeit money, Dougless thought as she waited for the man to return. Being arrested would be a fitting end to a perfect day. After a few minutes a man with an official-looking hat came to the window. "We can't take these, miss. I think you ought to take them to Oliver Samuelson. He's just around the corner to your right." "Will he give me train fare for the coins?" "I 'spect he will that," the man said, seeming to be amused at some private joke. "Thank you," Dougless murmured as she took the coins. Maybe she should call her sister and forget about the coins. She looked at them, but they looked as foreign as all foreign coins did. With a sigh, she turned right and came to a shop. "Oliver Samuelson, Coin Dealer" the painted window said. Inside the shop, a bald-headed little man was sitting behind a desk, a jeweler's loupe about his shiny forehead. "Yes?" he asked when Dougless entered. "The man in the train station sent me to you. He said you might give me train fare for these." The man took the coins and looked at them under the jeweler's loupe. After a moment he began to softly chuckle. "Train fare, indeed." He looked up. "All right, miss," he said. "I will give you five hundred pounds each for these, and this one is worth about, say, five thousand pounds. But I don't have that much

money here. I'll have to call some people in London. Can you wait a few days for the money?" Dougless couldn't speak for a moment. "Five thousand pounds?" "All right, six thousand, but not a shilling more." "I...I..." "Do you want to sell them or not? They're not ill-gotten are they?" "No, at least I don't think so," Dougless whispered. "But I have to talk to someone before I sell them. You're sure they're genuine?" "As a rule medieval coins aren't so valuable, but these are rare and in mint condition. You don't by chance have more, do you?" "Actually, I believe there are a few more." Maybe a whole bag full of them, she thought. The man smiled at her as though she were the light of his life. "If you have a fifteen-shilling piece with a queen in a ship on it, let me see it. I can't afford it, but I'm sure I can find a buyer." Dougless started backing toward the door. "Or a double," he said. "I'd like to have an Edward the Sixth double." Nodding at him, Dougless left his shop. In a daze, she walked back to the church. The man wasn't in the churchyard, so she hoped he hadn't left. She went into the church, and there he was, on his knees before the white tomb of the earl, his hands clasped, his head bowed in prayer. The vicar stepped from the shadows to stand beside her. "He's been there since you left. I tried, but I couldn't get him to stand up. Something is deeply troubling that poor man." He turned to her. "He's your friend?" "No, actually, I just met him this morning. I thought he was from here." The vicar smiled. "My parishioners seldom wear armor." He looked at his watch. "I must go, but you'll stay with him? For some reason, I hate to see him left alone." Dougless said that she would stay by him, then the vicar left the church, and she was alone with the praying man. Quietly, she walked to stand behind him. "Who are you?" she whispered. He didn't open his eyes, unclasp his hands, or even lift his head. "I am Nicholas Stafford, earl of Thornwyck." It took Dougless a moment to remember where she'd heard that name before, then she looked at the marble tomb. Carved deeply in Gothic letters was the name, Nicholas Stafford, Earl of Thornwyck. And the full-length sculpture of the man on top of the tomb was wearing exactly what this man was wearing. And the face carved in the marble was this man's face. The idea that this man really was from the past, really was a living, breathing ghost, was more than Dougless could comprehend. She took a deep breath. "You don't have any identification, do you?" she asked, trying to lighten the moment. Lifting his head, the man opened his eyes and glared at her. "Do you doubt my word?" he asked angrily. "You, the witch who has done this to me, can doubt me? If I did not fear being accused of sorcery myself, I would denounce you and stay to watch you burn." Standing there, silent, her thoughts in turmoil, Dougless watched as the man turned away and began to pray again. Copyright 1989, 2002 by Deveraux, Inc. From Publishers Weekly In her hardcover debut, Deveraux (*The Taming*) offers an imaginative romantic historical fantasy, whose virtue of unpredictability is undermined by plodding, graceless prose. Vacationing in England with her lover, Robert, and his spoiled teenage daughter, heroine Dougless Montgomery is abandoned by them in a remote country churchyard near the tomb of Nicholas Stafford, an earl who died in 1564. Almost immediately, an armor-clad swashbuckler materializes--Nicholas himself, reincarnated in the 20th century to clear his reputation, having been unjustly convicted of treason. Intrigued by his plight, Dougless agrees to help Nicholas learn his accuser's identity and restore his good name. They become lovers, and their adventures briefly lead Dougless back to the 1560s, allowing Deveraux to portray that period from a contemporary woman's perspective, as well as 1988 through the eyes of a confounded Elizabethan nobleman. Well-detailed historical highlights and a heartwarming conclusion will enhance the novel's commercial appeal to those Deveraux fans willing to lay out the extra cash for froth bound in hardcover. Doubleday Book Club main selection; Literary Guild alternate. Copyright 1989 Reed Business Information, Inc.