



A Warm Blaze

by MaryPat Campbell

After breakfast I returned to the superintendent's office. He answered my knock promptly, and as I went in, he did not stand on ceremony but turned towards the fire and began to poke it vigorously and throw a few more logs on until it began to burn merrily.

Lady Balloch was no longer there and all I could hear was the loud crackle of the new logs in the grate and the superintendent's quiet movements about the room.

"I like to make use of what I know," the superintendent began, as he sat down in the chair previously occupied by Lady Balloch. He motioned to me to sit in the chair opposite, as I had done earlier. I remained quiet while he continued to speak.

He told me that his friendship with the Bishop of York had been one of the most important of his life, and that any concern of the bishop was also a concern to him.

For the first time since I had arrived in Bethlem Hospital, the superintendent looked me in the eye as an equal and although it was welcome, I was startled to be treated like this. I had become unused to interested and friendly communication such as this over the years.

He then told me that as it now seemed very likely that I was, in fact, the Bishop of York's son and heir, he would look into what this could mean for my future. He invited me to join him in this endeavour, and suggested the two of us should meet weekly from now on, here in his office, to do the work of research that this would require. He looked at me, searching my expression and demeanour for signs that I understood him.

I found myself overwhelmed with feeling, I could not say exactly what mix of feeling, and opened my mouth and then closed it again as I could think of nothing to say that would meet the questioning in the superintendent's manner towards me. He smiled then, and said that he thought that I was most likely feeling overwhelmed, and would need some time to ponder the events of the morning so far.

For this I was grateful, and managed to mumble my appreciation. I asked to be excused to return to the kitchen-garden where my work that week was farm hand to harvest the early potato and beet crop. He nodded his assent, and added that he expected to see me here after breakfast at half past seven on the morrow, so that I could assist him in his work on my behalf. He added that I wasn't to speak of this to any of the other inmates. I nodded my agreement and stood up. The superintendent heaved himself out of his old chair and stood also.

We regarded each other for a moment as two men stood together in the same room while the warmth of the fire drew us together.