

**Hilda Tripp.**

*L H Trevail*

*[NOTE: This is in no way a finished thing! All I've done is sit down and write like improvising a monologue or something. And it should be treated as such. Something that's cropped up in improvisation and is fair game and changeable and just there for you take what rings true and is useful. - L ]*

Hello beautiful, beautiful people. Welcome. You are welcome here. Most welcome. It is my duty to welcome you as visitors here. And also my pleasure. My warm pleasure. Ah my lovelies, come in, be comfortable. Don't be afraid. Don't be afraid of me. Please.

Oh, look at you. So young. All of you, so young. So young, and hot with life. You are welcome here.

Duty or no.

*(looking at picture of the queen – I expect the town hall has one in it).* Look at her. In't she lovely. So busy, and all those jams and cakes made for her special. 'By Royal Appointment'.

They made me a cake. And I got to cut it with a silver slicer. All twiddly little leaves on it, very fancy. And a sun-on-still-river gleamy blade. Cut through the icing like water through rock. Like I was getting married.

I didn't get married.

See, look at this. *(her carnival queen sash)* Nice little sash. Isn't it. Eh? Nice bit o' satin. "Penryn Carnival Queen 1923". I was twenty three myself. Born nineteen hundred. Right on the turn. And the nineteen hundreds came in like a tide, didn't they...

O...you don't know...do you...you don't remember..

You're all so young. You just got caught in the breakers and dumped on the shore.

I remember being young. Twenty three was very young. Twenty three years of looking at the world. And I hadn't seen much, not really. Seen my family, my friends. Some of them go away to war and not come back. Like my dad. He went to fight but as it turned out he wasn't very good at it. Seen my mother be very sad. Seen a bit of town here and there. Course, when you're twenty three, you think you've seen it all. Think you're getting on..

And then, of course, chosen as the Carnival Queen. My brother put me up to it. Reckon he figured I didn't think much of myself cause I wasn't married and everybody knew as I was beautiful. But I knew I was beautiful. I thought alright of myself. I think was happy.

You know.. when I remember back.. I remember myself happy..

But I wanted it all the same.

See, being Carnival Queen was supposed to be a bit of a climb. An opportunity. A leg up. (*aside*) Although for Mary who was queen in Helston that year, it was more of a leg over. More than once.

But I took it serious. There was responsibility attached to this (*indicating the sash*). And I that's what I wanted. It wasn't a lay or a husband I was after, that's for sure. That would come of its own accord or it wouldn't. I wasn't chasing for that.

See, when you're up on that cart everybody's looking at you. Riding down [name of street]. All high up. Waving. Beautiful. And everybody's looking at you. They know your face. They know you.

Ah it was bloody lovely it was, riding along. I can still feel it. That wonderful moment. Like coming up over the brow of a hill. Looking at your future all laid out. Rich, and fertile, and beautiful. And plenty of it to go before the cliff, mind. Beautiful. That high up feeling.

When I was about nine, I climbed the big fir tree in the park. Right up. It was February, I think, and I was still thinking about our Christmas tree. The view the little golden angel on the top got of all the people celebrating. I used to look at that angel a lot. It had a trumpet. And I thought what a place to play.

So I climbed the tree. And I didn't have a trumpet of course. But I shouted down. I shouted out everything I wanted to say. Everything I wasn't allowed to say. I shouted it out from that tree.

'Course there wasn't anyone there. It was February and anyone with any sense was inside.

But I thought I'd learned something.

And no, I didn't fall off. I didn't get stuck. I'd got myself up there. And I got myself down.

And I went home. And had dinner.

But that feeling.. When I was riding in the carnival, I knew I was back up that tree.

And all my family watching so proud. My brother grinning all over his face 'cause it was his idea.

And after. We went to the mayors house. And he shook my hand. He shook my hand! Mine! The mayor! And then he kissed it but.. he shook my hand. And I was about to say something, but then I got taken off to meet some other people. All important folks. And they shook and kissed my hand until it was quite red and I was knackered.

Never mind, I thought. I'll say it all tomorrow.

The next day I opened the fete. I cut a little ribbon with some scissors. Fancy scissors they were. Silver, too. Silver, like a wave parting over uneven sand. And sharp. I cut the ribbon. And I had a little speech to read. It was all written out for me. My voice was very clear.

I read it very well.

Never mind, I thought. I'll say what I want to say tomorrow.

And the next day was another parade. And fireworks. And a big dinner. More food than I'd ever seen in my life – didn't know what half of it was, even. And there was speaking. And people lighting cigars with glittering silver lighters and banging their drinking glasses on the table. But nobody asked me to speak, and I.. I didn't feel it was right to just start talking. With everybody else waiting their turn.

*(pause)*

The duties of a carnival queen last for a year.

I was very good at them all. I was determined to be. Because when I got my chance to talk I wanted everyone to know I was competent. Taking the job serious. Responsible. Someone worth listening to.

I got lent to Falmouth sometimes cause theirs was rubbish. Sickly, she was. Fussy.

And all year, nobody asked me what I thought about anything. Not anything.

My brother said: "They are all looking at you, Hilda. But they don't need to listen to you. And they don't want to neither."

I told him about the fir tree. And he said he remembered me coming in to dinner in the middle of winter dressed as the fairy from off the Christmas tree.

I told him we had an angel on our tree. With a trumpet. Blasting out the word of god.

He just said he always thought it was a fairy. Never really looked at it that close.

When I handed over the sash to the next girl, I was wondering what she was thinking. What she was hoping for. But I didn't say anything. I didn't want to spoil her ride on the cart. Down [street name] with everybody looking at her. Feeling that high up feeling, just the once, even if it didn't come to nothing.

I thought about it a lot though, after. I wondered if I should have said something. Grabbed her hand before everyone started kissing it. Grabbed it hard and warned her. Told her fierce - speak. Speak while you got the chance, love. Speak while they're looking and make 'em listen...

I watched her cutting her cake with the pretty silver cake knife. And I wanted to make them listen then, alright. I wanted to. Cause it was a pretty knife, but it was a knife all the same. It was cutting a pretty cake but it could cut a body good as the bayonet that did for our dad. It could skin a rabbit for dinner same as my brother's knife, if you sharpened it up a little. It could carve wood. Make something beautiful.

And I watched her cutting the ribbon at the fete with the pretty silver scissors. Delicate they were, and opening eager to close again over the soft ribbon and part it. But they were sharp enough to cut to pieces the paper of that speech already written.

They were sharp enough for that.

And I didn't get to go to the dinner. Because I wasn't the carnival queen any more.

But I watched the fireworks. Bright, blazing and high. Elegant explosions, falling away into trailing skirts of bright ember and unseen ash.

And I stole a silver lighter from a gentleman going in to dine.

Tiny, it was. And bright. Like the last drop of water under blazing sun.

I put it in my knickers. And went home.

What? You were thinking I was going to set a fire? Cause trouble? No. Not then.

I just watched everyone all hopeful. All working hard. All building and thinking and talking. I watched the world change.

And then I was thirty five.

Nineteen thirty five.

People don't really talk about nineteen thirty five. They talk about the war. And fighting. And winning or losing. But not about the thinking and the talking that happens before. Because that's where it really happens.

The world was gearing up for something. And we were gearing up. But I didn't know what for. Nobody did, not really.

The nineteen hundreds, covering us like a tide.

And everybody talking.

And my little brother, getting swept away. All his life, swept away. Because he wouldn't hold onto anything. You know, he died fighting badly, same as Dad. Thinking he was doing the right thing then, same as he did all his life. Never looked at anything too closely. I was long dead myself by then though of course.

I used that lighter in nineteen thirty five. I'd been to watch my brother talking in the town hall. He said everything he wanted to say. Everything he thought he wasn't

allowed to say. And it was horrible. He was wearing a black shirt. And talking terrible things. And people were cheering him on.

And after, they congratulated him. And they congratulated me. Like it was me who said it just as much as he did.

Because I didn't say it wasn't.

That night, I burned his leaflets. That's all. Just some paper. With that little silver lighter.

And it caught. And it got out of control. And I couldn't get out.

And I should have just said something.

I could have just said. 'No. That's not what I think at all'.

But its not like that. Not in the middle of things. When its complicated. And sense is mixed all up with madness and hate. And the people you love are saying things that you hate.

But I should have said something. Even if it was only "I don't know."

Because by the time I did know, all I could do was fight.

And I wasn't any better at that than my dad or my brother.

*(makes a casual gesture and sound of being consumed by flames)*

And I come back..looking like this...

*(shakes head)*

And I'm here to welcome you. It is my duty to welcome you. Oh, and you are welcome. All of you. Look at you all. Lovely young people.

And all listening too..

But I can't for the life of me remember what I was going to say..

..and of course any minute now, the carnival's going to start. And I'm going to ride on that cart. All the way down [street name].. and everyone will be looking at me, just like you are now. Everyone will be looking at me.

And everyone will listen..

