

The Importance of Wives

CHRONICLES OF THE HOUSE OF VALOIS
BOOK ONE

KEIRA MORGAN

PUBLISHING FRF ÉDITIONS

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The Importance of Wives

Keira's Renaissance Fiction and History

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This is a work of fiction. All characters, organizations, and events portrayed in this novel are either the products of the author's imagination or are used fictionally.

NOTA: The cover exemplifies the story as a work of fiction. It does not represent the actual characters in the novel, and this is an intentional choice of the author.

Acknowledgments

* * *

I dedicate this book to my husband

Oscar Humberto Lopez Valdez

*without whose support
this book would never have been written.*

* * *

I gratefully acknowledge

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(www.mulliganmethod.ca)

*for her amazing writing and editing talents
and her encouragement.*

Author's Notes

AUTHOR'S NOTES

1. The **COVER** of this book is **NOT** an image of Anne of Brittany with any of her husbands. This may draw criticism from various readers. However, as mentioned above I write fiction not history and that applies to images as much as words. There is no copyright-free image of Anne and a spouse that I considered suitable. I chose this cover to represent the *concept* of the importance of MARRIAGE and WIVES.
2. This book is written in **Canadian** English [and **Canadian** French].
3. The names and titles of nobles change during their lifetimes for any number of reasons. To avoid this problem wherever possible, I have chosen to keep their same names and titles even when this is not accurate. For example, once the Marshal de Rieux is no longer marshal of Anne's army, he would no longer be called that, I still use that name for him throughout the book for simplicity.

4. This is a work of fiction, not history. Therefore, while I strive for accuracy, sometimes my story demands that I veer from the facts. Moreover, I have my views about the personalities of these people which is an author's right, in fact, obligation.
5. At the back of the book, I include a glossary and historical notes.

List of characters

LIST OF PRINCIPLE CHARACTERS

Key:

* indicates fictional characters

(?) indicates dates of birth or death unknown.

CHARACTER NAMES

Anne's Immediate Family & Age at the Start of the Book

Anne, Duchess of Brittany, (1476-1514). (11 years 8 months)

Duke François II of Brittany, died Sept 8, 1488. Anne's late father.

Duchess Marguerite of Brittany, died 1486, Anne's late mother.

Isabeau de Montfort, (1478-1490) Anne's younger sister. (9)

Members of Anne's Immediate Court

Mme de Montauban*, Baron Montauban's wife, Anne's Principal Lady. (45)

Lady Pernette de Montauban*, Baron Montauban's granddaughter, Anne's lady-in-waiting. (12)

Father Lestrac*, Anne's confessor and tutor.

Katell*, Anne's personal maid.

LIST OF CHARACTERS

Aula*, Anne's dog,

Anne's Council

Marshal Jean IV de Rieux, (1447-1518) Anne's *gouverneur*, his son is married to Madame de Dinan's daughter. (41)

Countess Françoise de Dinan Laval. (?-1498), Anne's *gouvernante*, her son is married to Marshal de Rieux's daughter. (52)

Odet d'Aydie, Count de Comminges (1415-Aug 1490), Anne's godfather. (63)

Sire Alain d'Albret (1460-1522) Vicomte de Tarbes. (48)

Baron Philippe de Montauban, (1445-1514) Chancellor of Brittany. (43)

Count François I d'Orléans-Longueville, (1447-1491), Count de Dunois. (41)

Jean IV de Châlons, Prince d'Orange, (1443-1503) Anne's uncle. (45)

Old Vicomte Jean II de Rohan, (father, 1452-1516). (37) Sire Jean de Rohan, (son, 1476 -1505). (12)

Bishop Michel Guibé, (?-1502) Bishop of Rennes, (1482-1502).

Gilles de la Rivière, Rieux's appointment as Chancellor. (?)

Abbé de Pourlet*, Anne's Treasurer.

Allies

Maximilian Hapsburg, King of the Romans, 1457-1519 (29).

Count Wolfgang de Polhaim, (?) King Maximilian's representative in Rennes, (?)

King Henry VII of England, (1457-1509), Ally of Brittany, (31)

Captain-General Vermeulen*, Leader of the mercenaries from England.

Seigneur Triscan de Pennic*, Prisoner ransomed by Dunois.

Commander of Rennes*.

Commander-Captain of Vannes*.

English Captain of Mercenaries in Redon*.

French Enemies

King Charles VIII, (1470-1498) King of France. (17)

Marshal Louis II de la Trémoille, Leader of French forces in 1488 and 1491. (?)

Archduchess Marguerite of Austria [Burgundy] (1480-1530), King Maximilian's daughter, Charles VIII's first wife. (7)

Madame la Grande, (1461-1522) Duchess Anne de Bourbon, King Charles's regent, wife of Duke Pierre de Bourbon. (28)

Duke Pierre de Bourbon, (1438-1503) Prince of the Blood, husband of Madame la Grande, brother-in-law of King Charles. (51)

Duke Louis d'Orléans, (1462-1515) Dauphin, brother-in-law of King Charles. (26)

Duchy of Brittany

Map of Duchy of Brittany 1447



Part One

* * *

Duchess of Brittany

Chapter One

THE NEW DUCHESS

Château des ducs, Guérande, Brittany
Evening, 27 September 1488

Eleven-year-old Anne, the new duchess of Brittany, sank down onto a cushion in front of the hearth, a book in her lap. Beneath her were shiny red tiles bearing the white image of an ermine tail, the emblem of her beloved and independent duchy. Her enemies envied her its rich coastal trade and clever fishermen, its cider and flax, and its fateful location between England and France. It had only been two months since the French had signed a treaty with her father to end the war. Already they were trying to take Brittany from her. She stared into the fire blinking back tears. Papa had only been dead three weeks and now the French were back, like the vultures they were.

She traced her finger over the tiles, feeling their warmth and

solidity. Their strength reminded her of the rocky coast of her duchy. She pulled her black shawl tighter around her shoulders and touched the gold-embossed capital of the first word on the open page of her book. “My regency council should read this, Pernette,” she said, without turning to look at her friend. “It says right here that women *can* govern! This author even gives a queen of France as an example. But my guardians want to force me to marry Sire d’Albret and rule in my place.”

Her friend mumbled.

“What did you say, Pernette?”

Pernette sat on a nearby cushion, embroidering flowers onto a chemise. A black shawl draped over her nightgown, too, to protect against the September chill.

“Surely not, Madame la Duchesse. Mme de Dinan loves you. She’s been like your mother since . . . since . . . She only wants what is good for you, and Sire d’Albret’s her brother.”

“Call me Mme Anne like always, Pernette. Don’t call me duchess.” Anne went back to tracing the letters in her book.

“If I showed this book to *them*, Marshal de Rieux would say women should not read books. And Mme de Dinan would say eligible heiresses like me should marry and let their husbands rule, not govern themselves.”

Anne glanced behind her then. Had Mme de Dinan heard her? She did not see her anywhere, but before Anne could ask where she had gone, Pernette spoke.

“What book is that?”

“It is called *The Book of the City of Ladies*.”

“Is there such a place?” Pernette sounded impressed.

“Of course not, Pernette, it is an imaginary place where women rule. You should read it, too. But maybe not, for you would make Marshal de Rieux cross. He says,” she mimicked his pompous voice, “You read too much, Lady Anne. It gives you foolish ideas about what women can — and should—do.” Returning to her normal voice, she said, “As if ruling is a foolish idea. After all, I am duchess . . .” Her voice trailed off. Each time

she thought about Papa's death, she wanted to burst into tears, but tears were childish.

Lady Pernette clucked. "You are lucky Mme de Dinan didn't hear you. I wonder where she is?" She looked around cautiously and added, "But, Madame la Duchesse, you should not mock the marshal. He is your guardian and he knows how to fight. With the French here, are you not afraid there will be another war?"

"No!" Anne frowned and scrambled to her feet. "I am not afraid. And there will not be war! Papa—

Pernette wrung her hands. "Forgive me, did I remind you that your Papa, that he . . ."

Anne scowled at her. "Are you the only one here? Where is Mme de Dinan? She should be here. She reprimands me when I don't have enough attendants, but where is she?"

Pernette clambered to her feet and said, "Shall I check the sleeping chamber of the ladies-in-waiting, Madame la Duchesse? Should I also ask a maid to get us some mulled wine?"

"No . . . Yes, that would be nice." She looked around. "Yes, find Katell and send her to get a posset and some nice, sweet biscuits. And do not call me duchess! Call me Mme Anne."

Anne watched Pernette go off. The room felt empty and full of shadows and she shivered. Since her court had arrived in Guérande fleeing from the plague near Nantes, Anne had been more and more lonely. Even her trusted gouvernante, Mme de Dinan, had changed and Anne was frightened, although she would not show it.

She stuffed her feet into her satin slippers, careful to put them on the correct feet. The left slipper had a heavily padded sole to make up for her shortened leg. It would only take a single step to realize the mistake, but with her weak left hip it was often enough to make her fall.

She practised gliding as she moved towards the canopied four-poster bed that was hung with black wool curtains; everything in the room was hung with black. Again, tears sprang to Anne's eyes. She snivelled them back, willing herself not to cry. Papa was in

heaven with Maman, and they were happy together. For her to keep crying was to question God's will. That's what her confessor said.

Silently, she parted the curtains and peered inside. It was too dark to see anything, but she heard a rustle and a muffled woof.

"Shush," she whispered to her puppy, Aula, whom Anne had put to bed beside her younger sister Isabeau.

Anne heard a long sigh and more rustling, then soft breathing. She teared up again. She made sure Isabeau was sound asleep, then stepped back, still holding the bed curtain open, and picked up the candle-lit lantern on the table near the bed. Holding it aloft, she saw Isabeau sprawled across their bed with a sleeping Aula at her feet.

Her sister was so tiny—often ailing and as small as a six-year-old even though she was nine. Her hair was almost the same chestnut colour as Anne's own, but Isabeau's skin was threaded with blue veins and so pale it was almost translucent and, so different from Anne's own healthy colour. Satisfied that Isabeau had finally settled into sleep after all her sobbing and endless questions about where heaven was and when Papa would return from it, Anne let the curtain close and set the lantern back in its place.

She pulled her shawl close and circled the room, ignoring Pernette who sat on the cushions near the fire again, although she could feel her friend's eyes pressing into her back. Anne wished she was back in her own spacious rooms in their château in Nantes with its rich Flemish tapestries, comforted by the familiar sounds of boats splashing along the Loire River and of little birds calling to one another outside her windows. Here, the air smelled of salt and seaweed and the gulls screamed at each other as if they were always quarrelling—just like the French envoys who came demanding changes to the treaty they had made with her father not two months ago, she thought. Just like her regency council who kept telling her what to do, as if she was too young to know how to rule even though *she* was the duchess now.

“Madame la Duchesse, Katell brought your drink and it is getting cold. Come sit and—”

“Pernette, I told *you* not to call me that!” She stomped her foot in anger. Why did no one obey her? She *hated* being so short and skinny. People treated her as if she were a child. Or sickly, like Isabeau! She heard Pernette whimper, and her rage vanished as quickly as it had flared.

“I am sorry, I am *so* sorry, Pernette, I do not know why I snapped,” Anne stumbled towards her lady-in-waiting.

Anne fell to her knees beside the Pernette and squeezed her in an embrace. “You are the only person I can talk to, the only one I can trust, and I am so glad you are here. When you call me duchess, it feels like you are pushing me away. Reminding me Papa is dead.” Anne’s voice trembled and she stopped, swallowed, and bit her lips to prevent herself from sobbing.

But Pernette, though she was twelve years old, was wailing like a baby bitten by her pet dog. “I do not know what to do. I do not. Grandpapa tells me I must always call you Madame la Duchesse, but you tell me I must *not*.” Tears poured down her plump cheeks. She wiped her sleeve across her face, choking on her sobs.

Pernette was already a whole head taller than Anne was, and so Anne had to kneel to put her arms around her. Horrified at how she’d upset her dearest friend, Anne hugged Pernette close again, resting her head against Pernette’s, her chestnut hair mingling with Pernette’s blonde tresses. “I did not know, Pernette. Your grandpapa, dear Baron Philippe, is the only one who respects me, and treats me like the duchess. But I didn’t know he had ordered you—” Now Anne was sobbing, too, as she had not for her papa, or for anything else that day.

At Anne’s tears, Pernette stuttered, “Grandpapa would be even crosser if he knew I made you cry.”

Anne snuffled and wiped her face on her shawl. “Well, we won’t tell him.” Her voice hitched. “You will call me Mme Anne as you always have when we are private together. Are we agreed?”

Pernette hesitated, but then nodded and they hugged each other some more.

Pulling herself free, Anne said, "Let's drink our posset. Though it is sure to be cold by now. And then we should go to bed. It must be getting late. I have not heard sounds from the hall for a while. And tomorrow is going to be difficult." She grimaced as she thought about the regency council meeting. What would happen if . . . when . . . if she did confront her guardians over the marriage they were plotting? She did not want to marry, and certainly not Mme de Dinan's brother. Everyone knew he seduced girls and violated them if they refused him.

That reminded her of her *gouvernante*, and she realized she had not seen Mme de Dinan for most of the evening. "Was Mme de Dinan in the oratory when you went through to fetch Katell? Or in the *demoiselles'* room?" she asked. "She should be here, but I have not seen her since she readied Isabeau for bed."

Pernette shook her head. "Shall I look?" She started to rise.

"No. She would have been in here in a minute when we started to screech like . . . like squabbling crows. She could not bear to miss what was going on."

The girls snickered.

"Still . . ." Pernette went to the door and took its key from the hook that hung beside it. She sounded nervous when she said, "I am going to lock the door, even though she's not here. She probably has another."

Anne hesitated before she agreed. "If not, it will serve her right. My maid is here, and Mme de Dinan should not have left us so alone. We should have more attendants even if she isn't here. And she should be. If she's locked out, it is her own fault." She hoped she had hidden her growing fear from her friend.

They sat shoulder to shoulder watching the fire die to coals as they sipped their drinks and munched on sweet biscuits and listened to the small sounds of the castle as it settled for the night. Anne yawned, put a last log on the fire, and poked the embers to damp it down for the night. They braided each other's hair and

ried on their night caps. Then, they climbed into bed with Isabeau. At that moment, Anne heard footsteps thumping down the hall.

“Pernette! Could that be Mme de Dinan at the door?” Anne whispered. “But she would never make so much noise!” Anne slid out of bed and tiptoed across the wood floor to the door, testing each board to avoid creaks. Pernette crept along beside her, carrying a candle.

“There are too many feet,” Anne whispered, as those same footsteps echoed on the stone floor outside and then stopped on the other side of their heavy oak door. Anne held her breath as she watched the lever of the door handle lower slowly, then jerk to a stop. It jiggled, rose a trifle, lowered, and jiggled again until it snapped up. Anne heard a muffled curse. It was not her gouvernante, she knew for certain. She froze and glanced at Pernette, whose face was as white as the linen sheets on the bed.

The door rattled again, the voice on the other side spoke, and Anne’s fear was confirmed. Her belly knotted. The prowler was not alone.

“A lock! *Mordieu*. My sister not say it have one of those new-fangle lock! Find her and get the Godforsaken key.”

Anne fought to stave off her rising panic. The words ‘my sister’ struck her to the heart. It could only be Sire d’Albret. Why did he think her door would be open?

A second voice mumbled something she could not make out.

The first man shouted, “*Sang de Dieu!* Do I have to do all the thinking? How in the devil would I know? Just find her!”

The second voice said something more, and the first man answered, “Be quick! Be quiet. And don’t be seen.”

Anne shook as she turned to stare into Pernette’s terrified eyes. “It’s Mme de Dinan’s brother. He will try to get in. He w-wants to-” She could not say the words. It might make the worst happen.

“No!” Pernette squeaked.

“It is, I tell you. Go fetch Katell!” She pointed to the doorway

leading to the second room. “We need her help to pull that clothing chest in front of the door. And jam something under the handle. What if his man returns with a key?”

When Pernette stood as if turned to stone, Anne gave the girl a push. “Go.”

Chapter Two

A KNOCK AT THE DOOR

Night, 27 September 1488

Anne turned and faced the door. “Sire d’Albret!” she called, gathering her courage. She pulled her shoulders back to stand up straight. She must sound forceful, the way her father would.

The heavy stomp of footsteps in the hall halted. Then they thudded closer and stopped in front of her door once more.

“Mme Anne, you are awake. This is nice. Open the door for me an’ we have a friendly chat.”

It took a moment for Anne to understand him because of his heavy Gascon accent. When she did, Anne gasped at his audacity. He must suppose her stupid if he hoped she would obey. No innocent maiden would open her bedroom door to any man, much less an old lecher like him with dozens of bastards.

She raised her voice. “Why are you at my door, Sire d’Albret?”

“That is what we chat about, no? You open the door,” he wheedled.

Pernette and Katell, her strong-built maid, tiptoed into the room.

“We have a nice visit.” D’Albret called.

The silence lasted only seconds. “Why you wait? Open the door.” He pounded on it, the rattle resounding in her chamber.

“Stop that!” Anne shouted, and then pointed the girls to the heavy wooden clothes chest further along the same wall.

“You, Katell, pull on this side,” she whispered. “We will push on the other side.” They started at once.

“Sire d’Albret, I am an innocent maiden. I will not open the door. Go away. I will see you at the council meeting in the morning. We will talk about the betrothal then,” she called to cover the sounds as they dragged the heavy chest.

“But no. We talk before the council meet. Your father make me a promise.”

Anne’s heart sank. This was just what she did not want to talk about. Another pause and d’Albret said, apparently not to her, “*Mordieu*, man, what take you so long? I do not have all night! Give me that key!”

Anne heard another murmur after which d’Albret’s voice rose in blasphemous curses.

She was relieved, for she was panting already. The oak chest full of clothes and jewels was as heavy as Anne had feared, but her strength had multiplied and so had that of the other two girls. The chest screeched along the wooden floor, but it moved steadily until they had it halfway across the doorway. When they stopped, Anne discovered her nightgown was soaked with sweat.

Then Isabeau poked her head from between the bed curtains. “Anne! Anne! Why are you making so much noise? Why have you moved the chest?”

“Stay in bed, Isa. Keep the curtain closed!”

“Mme Anne!” Sire d’Albret yelled, his voice raised even more.

Hoping Isabeau would obey her, Anne climbed on top of the

chest and motioned the other girls to climb up with her. It was crowded and they clung to one another.

“Why are you still here? Go away!” Anne shouted.

D’Albret now thundered, “Your father sign we will marry. I want to marry now. It is time.” Sire d’Albret pounded on the door again. “Open door. If not, I break it down. I have the axe.”

“Never!” Anne shook with fury. She would have refused him before he came rattling her door late at night intending to force her to marry him, but now she would rather die than marry this old, disgusting man. How fortunate that Pernette had locked the door.

Anne yelled: “You are cruel to speak of it. My father died less than a month ago. Mourning is a year. I will not marry anyone before then.”

Even through the heavy door she could hear him grind his teeth. “It is contract. You sign. Your father sign. You want my army, you marry me.” The door shuddered as he hammered it again.

“There are other mercenaries Brittany can hire to fight France . . . if they attack again.” Anne knew this was bluster but did not care. Her council could negotiate with King Henry in England or King Ferdinand in Spain to send mercenaries. Marshal de Rieux and Mme de Dinan would be enraged, but she would not be obligated to this despicable man.

“Where are our guards?” moaned Pernette. “Why is no one coming to stop him?”

Anne put her finger to her lips and frowned at Pernette. This was no time to moan about what had gone wrong. Probably d’Albret had got them drunk. Or drugged them. Then she shouted to d’Albret, “I am too young. I am only eleven, and my flowers have not yet begun.”

The two girls beside her gasped and Anne realized her words were shameless, but she did not care. The Church decreed a girl should not be bedded before she had bled.

“You lie! My sister say your bleeding start.”

Anne felt as if her tormenter had taken her heart and squeezed it in a vise. Now she was certain Mme de Dinan had betrayed her. She was as false as debased coin. She had been like a mother to Anne since her own mother had died two years earlier, yet Anne could not trust her. The treachery left her speechless.

“So. What do you say now, Mme Dissembler? You can marry. You marry me!”

Close to tears, Anne demanded, “Where are my guards? Where is Mme de Dinan? She should be here with me, not encouraging you to come to abduct me.”

Isabeau’s head popped out from the bed curtains again. Tears ran down her face. “Anne, is that what he is going to do?” She jumped down from the bed and ran sobbing to clutch the clothes chest, her sobs becoming frenzied.

The situation is becoming intolerable, Anne thought. She must take control and end this now. She peered around the room for an inspiration.

As Anne pulled little Isabeau onto her lap, she turned to Katell and Pernette. “We have a copper warming pan in the bed and the iron brazier in the other room. We have a poker for the fire. Find another. We are going to use every metal thing we have to bang and make all the noise we can. Don’t you have a whistle too, Isabeau?” She did not lower her voice. Better d’Albret hear her and go away on his own.

“I break down this door now!”

“Our men will come to our defence before you succeed!” Anne yelled. “In your place I would depart before the whole of Brittany hears of your dishonour.”

“I can help. I will find my whistle.” Isabeau scrambled down and ran back to the bed. As she climbed in, the copper warming pan fell to the floor with a loud clatter.

“That’s the way,” Anne said, clapping her hands as Isabeau looked towards her fearfully. “Grab the candlestick now and start hitting it hard on the warming pan.”

Swiftly, the girls began to clang with candlesticks, poker,

pewter goblets, and a pewter ewer on every metal object they could find: the brazier, the fire basket and andirons, and the silver platter the maid had brought to serve their mulled wine and biscuits.

Then Katell suggested they yell ‘fire,’ too. “Ma *mère*, she tell me to shout that,” she said. “No one come if they think it *un viol*. It may get them trouble.”

“Good idea!” Anne said.

So, together they yelled, “Fire, Fire! Help! Help!” Fear lent volume to their voices and the shrill of Isabeau’s whistle pierced the night.

“*Vous taisez vous!* Shut up!” yelled d’Albret through the door. “I go. But you be sorry, Madame la Duchesse.” They heard heavy footsteps clatter off down the stone corridor, but they did not stop their noise.

It seemed like forever before they heard anxious voices in the distance.

“Burn some things,” Anne said. “You do that, Isabeau. Take that feather pillow. The one on the floor by the fire. It will burn slowly. The stench will be foul and there will be much smoke. Then you and Pernette keep making noise.”

Turning to the maid, Anne said, “Katell, you and I must push the coffer away from the door.”

Just after they had done so, Anne heard running footsteps. Still panting, she said: “Quick, I’m going to unlock the door.”

As they all pushed, Anne said, “I need to think what it is best that we say.” A moment later she decided, “I think we should say I woke, and we were scared by the smoke and fire. Katell is right. If we say it was an attempt at abduction . . . or worse . . . there will be trouble.”

About the Author

KEIRA MORGAN

Keira discovered the Renaissance when her grandmother gave her a book about England's queens when she was five.

Ever since she has been pursuing her subject. It isn't just the history. The clothing, the food, the way people travelled, how they lived, how they brought up their children, what they thought about, and why—all these things fascinate her.

She studied Renaissance and Reformation history in university—either as a major or minor—to the doctoral level. But her favourite reading was historical fiction since its authors explored the feelings and thoughts that motivated people rather than just the facts. So she decided she wanted to write fiction rather than history and accepted that she would never become an academic.

After a career in the Canadian public service, she moved to Mexico where she is pursuing her writing career. *The Importance of Wives* is her third published novel, although the first in the series *The Chronicles of the House of Valois*, about Anne of Brittany.



Picture of Keira Morgan Author

