

*Fallen Angel*



*Daphne Walter*

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# **Fallen Angel**

Tudor Series

*Book 2*

by

Daphne Walter

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**Thank you.**

To **Carrie, Katie, Catie** and the rest of the **Rowdy Girls**, with special thanks for your insights and encouragement; without you this book would never have been written.

To **Asti, Brigitta, Daphne, Liesel, Kira and Roxie**, who burned out their lives waiting for me to turn off the computer, and to **Sophie, Jessie, Zara and Penny**, who still wait.

And lastly, my thanks go to the unknown deceased author who sat on my shoulder and made me take dictation.

## Prologue

22<sup>nd</sup> August 1563

### **I must not fail.**

The slim figure stood proud, her cloak thrust back over her shoulders, at the rail of the barge that wended its slow way down the Thames, defying the unwholesome hours of the night. The hour lacking a few minutes to midnight, a damp mist sheathed the river that gently lapped in shallow waves against the barge's hull.

How different this journey from that other years ago. Then she had had no choice, conveyed there against her will, a helpless prisoner falsely accused of treason. She laughed softly to herself, an ironic laugh. She had not thought to live long enough to reach the prison. She nearly drowned first.

Nor had the long, slow days of imprisonment defeated her. She had stood strong and refused to permit it. Prisoner no longer, the Queen of England yet remained ensnared by the past.

Fate now forced her to imprison another innocent and threaten her with a traitor's death — all for falling in love with the wrong man.

Her mouth tightened. Bess had no choice. England must come first, even when it knew not where its best interests lay.

She sighed to herself. It was a bitter lesson, one of many. Too many. Bess had sacrificed her deepest heart's love on the altar of England. She could not have chosen otherwise.

Marrying him would have bred civil war.

The barge slowed at the river's edge, grating to a halt. The great stone walls of the Tower of London loomed overhead, blotting out the stars.

Bess disembarked at the water steps, followed by two women in cloaks as dark as her own. The two she trusted most. They would take her secrets to the grave.

The Lieutenant of the Tower alone met her on the quay, a torch in hand to guide her way. She needed it not. She remembered this place all too well. It held many memories, good and ill. With intent, Bess averted her gaze from the place where she had once embraced the man she loved and held him against her heart. She blinked back the weakness of tears. She had known even then he could never be hers.

She averted her eyes too from the green, where a scaffold once stood, long ago taken down, where her young cousin, the Lady Jane Grey, had been executed for treason at the tender age of seventeen for daring to call herself Queen of England. On that same scaffold Bess herself had once expected to die. Only by the grace of God had she escaped so terrible an end.

Yet in her mind, she also heard echoing laughter of children playing there, the children of the Tower guards. No, the memories were not all bad. She spared a wistful thought to wonder what had happened to them, those children she had known. Were they young men and women now, eager for life, or had they died as children as so many did? She would never know.

The Lieutenant led her on, past buildings housing armaments, jewels and sleeping prisoners. A sour whiff of animal dung carried on the damp wind reminded her of the African cats that slept here too, gifts to her father, the eighth King Henry. She forced herself on, resolute, implacable. She had not come to this prison to indulge memories of the past. She had not come to exult at outlasting her enemies.

She had come to compel another woman to make the same horrible choice she

herself had made.

Bess shivered. She loathed what she must do, but do it she would. She had no choice. Day by day the common people grew more strident in their demands for Catherine's release and Bess could not keep the throne without their good will. Imprisoned, Bess's cousin was no threat, but free? The crown could not rest easy on Bess's head, not while treasonous whispers claimed that Catherine had the greater right to wear it. Bess dared not free her cousin, no matter what her subjects demanded. Somehow she must convince her people she had freed Catherine while confining her in a prison with stronger walls than mere stone.

Gesturing her women to wait below, Bess followed the Lieutenant up stone steps worn and hollowed from the footfalls of many feet to a cell.

Catherine's cell.

As Bess approached, a faint light flickered under the door. A woman's voice hummed, high and gentle, easing an unseen infant back to sleep. Bess stopped short, a stab of pain piercing through her. She closed her eyes, took a deep breath and thrust aside the tender feeling that longed for a child of her own body to hold, to nurse, to nurture.

It could never be.

Becoming aware the Lieutenant stared at her as though she had grown a second head, Bess drew herself to her full height and composed her face to severity. At her nod, the jailer's key rattled in the lock. The bolt to the door drew back with a screeching sound that echoed in Bess's ears louder than truth and laid open her pain anew. The door swung open with a soft creak.

Lit only by the fire, the cell was large — as cells went. A once fine carpet covered the stone floor. A clutch of puppies slept together as only puppies do in a pile near the hearth. A small white and brown terrier, still wakeful, worried at the fringe at one edge of

the rug, the ragged, chewed off edge proving the carpet had seen better days.

A swaddled baby slept too, in a plain wooden cradle, proof incarnate of Catherine's disobedience. His two year old brother lay tucked up in the red and gold striped coverlet of the lone bed. Bess used her anger to drive away the wave of jealousy that threatened to consume her. Did Catherine think she could do as she pleased with impunity?

The prisoner, a fair woman in her young twenties, stood with her back to Bess. Catherine stretched, rolling her head to work out the kinks from her neck. Though she must have heard the cell door open, she turned slowly in response to her royal visitor, the very delay speaking insults louder than words.

Bess confronted a younger, prettier version of herself, clad in a simple gown. Catherine met Bess's gaze with a lift to her chin, daring Bess to do her worst. She did not curtsy, but stood before the young Queen like an equal. Bess's mouth tightened.

Two years in prison had taught Catherine nothing. She forced Bess into this. There was far more at risk here than a silly girl falling in love with a handsome face. Bess had no choice now but to force Catherine to understand that actions have consequences.

Perhaps even the headsman's axe.

## Chapter 1

**To laugh, to lie, to flatter, to face:**

**Four ways in Court to win men grace.**

**Tudor verse**

25<sup>th</sup> May 1553, Durham House, London

“Catherine!”

Catherine groaned at her mother’s call. She didn’t want to come in yet. Her older sister, Jane, the pious thing, might calmly close her prayer book and obediently leave the garden, but Jane had nothing in her but goodness.

Then again, much was expected of Jane. Only 16, she had lived for over a year with the Queen Dowager, well instructed by prominent evangelical reformers. Catherine had even heard a whisper that her sister might wed the King one day. Catherine shrugged. It meant nothing to her.

As Catherine watched from her perch on the garden wall, a swift rider plunged his horse through the crowds. Catherine held her breath as a heavy hoof almost trampled a woman and her baby begging for alms beside the road, releasing it with a whoosh once she saw they were safe. The woman shouted after the man in coarse

accents, using words Catherine had never heard before.

She whispered the oaths to herself, committing them to memory. They might be useful one day. After all, Catherine could never measure up to perfect Jane — and since nothing she ever did was good enough to please her parents, she might as well be the devil to Jane's angel.

Catherine disobeyed her mother's summons, leaning further over the top of the garden wall, watching the man in blue velvet gallop past. She wished she might be free to gallop outside these walls on a splendid steed. She wanted to see this London, not sit inside the Duke of Northumberland's great house and sew and read stupid books. She wanted to live, to have fun. She was not quite thirteen.

"Catherine!" Mother called yet again, more impatient this time. Catherine's little dog, Dagonet, yapped in reply. Heaving a long-suffering sigh, Catherine hopped off the garden wall, overlooking the London street and its fascinating stream of people going to and fro. Bradgate Park — home — was boring. Nothing interesting ever happened there.

Collecting her dog, Catherine trotted up the garden path, forcing herself to slow at the last to walk in the ladylike manner she'd been taught.

"There you are. What **have** you been doing?" Mother's brow creased at the state of Catherine's gown. She always deplored the state of Catherine's gowns. So it had a rip in the skirt from climbing a tree. So there was a dark green stain where it had rubbed against the moss growing on the garden wall. The next time she saw the gown it would be clean and repaired. Like magic.

Mother was far too heedful that **her** mother had been a princess. A queen, too, but that was far away in France. Catherine wrinkled her nose. It was not like Catherine was a princess, too. Why must Mother always insist she act like one?

"You must change at once. Quickly now." Mother herded Catherine inside and up

to the chamber at Durham House she shared with Jane. Her sister was already there, looking serious, her golden gown immaculate and her hair combed.

In fact, Jane stood perfectly still, the only sign of movement the slight trembling of her hands. Almost as though she feared to move. Catherine tried to meet her gaze, but Jane held hers modest and downcast. Most unlike her.

The maids went to work immediately, stripping off Catherine's soiled gown and putting on a fresh one. She had not seen it before. It was as elaborate as Jane's and very pretty, of the same gold damask, embroidered all over in silver thread by fingers cleverer than her own. Catherine spread the skirt in her hands and admired it. Bored by the proceedings, Dagonet curled up on the discarded gown and went to sleep, leaving short, white hairs embedded in the fabric.

Her nurse came up and handed a comb to Mother. "She is too young," Nurse muttered, her face pinched.

**Too young for what?** Something began to crawl down Catherine's back. Did the gown have fleas in it? Catherine twitched her shoulders. No, Nurse wouldn't let her wear a gown with fleas.

"It has all been said," hissed Mother to Nurse, though her own face was tight. "Nay, no more. 'Tis done."

Taking the comb, Mother herself worked the snarls from Catherine's red-gold curls, tugging hard when they refused to yield. Catherine cried out at a particularly nasty tug. What vexed Mother so?

"Hush!" Mother snapped. A few more passes of the comb and Catherine's hair hung, if not as smoothly as Jane's, at least acceptably tidy.

Father hastened into the chamber, making Dagonet growl beneath his breath. "What delay? His Grace, the Duke of Northumberland, is waiting."

Catherine's eyes narrowed. She had never seen Father so agitated. She looked

at Jane again, but her sister might as well have been made of ice for all the passion she betrayed.

“Waiting for what?” Catherine asked, but her father ignored her, as always.

“The girls are ready,” said Mother.

“Ready for **what?**”

Mother smoothed a nonexistent wrinkle on Catherine’s gown. “You are going to be married.”

**What?** “Nay! I do not wish to,” Catherine protested. She cast a look at Jane, but Jane looked unsurprised. Had she known and said nothing?

“You will do as I deem fit,” Father said curtly.

“I will not!” Catherine cried, backing away. “You cannot force me against my will.” Roused by her cry, little Dagonet leapt to attention and stood alert, yapping furiously, his tail held high.

Father lifted a hand to strike her. Catherine lifted a defiant chin. His hand dropped. “Silence the creature,” he commanded. Catherine stooped and picked her dog up, cradling him against her chest, murmuring calming words. Father drew a deep breath.

Mother made a sharp gesture, cutting him off. “Catherine,” Mother said in reasoning tones, taking her by the shoulders, “you are descended of kings. A princess in all but name. This gives you value beyond yourself.”

Rolling her eyes, Catherine nodded. Mother oft told her this.

Mother’s mouth tightened. “Our young king is dying. Jane will be the next queen.” Catherine looked at her sister with fresh eyes. She had never expected Jane to be queen in her own right, not while the King’s sister, Mary, lived. Jane took a deep, shuddering breath, her gaze still unusually low. “The Duke of Northumberland will pay well to match his son to our Jane.”

“I am not Jane,” Catherine objected.

Mother’s lips compressed with simmering impatience. “You are next in line after Jane. The Earl of Pembroke knows this. He will also pay well to advance himself —”

“Enough of this!” Father broke in. “You will do as you are bidden, girl, or you will feel the sting of my whip.”

Jane flinched. Catherine knew in that moment that Jane’s humble demeanor was feigned. Father had already beaten her into submission. Why? Jane was always good.

This rang false. If they would beat Jane, who never disobeyed, what would they do to Catherine? She bit her lip and hesitated, trembling. Her parents had never been loving — both tended to pinch or slap when displeased with her — but ne’er before had they been this unfeeling.

“There is no need,” Mother said to Father, letting Catherine go. Snatching Dagonet from her grasp by the scruff of the neck, Mother thrust the dog at the nearest servant. “Take this cur away and drown it.”

“No!” Desperate to rescue her dog, Catherine reached for him, but Mother thrust her aside, pushing her to the floor. The serving woman paused, the struggling dog in her arms. “Mother, please! Do not, I beg you.”

“Will you obey your father?”

She had no choice. Catherine tasted the bitterness of defeat. She swallowed hard and nodded. Getting to her feet, she reached to take her dog, but Mother held her back, casting a cold look at the servant.

“Tie the beast up outside.” To Catherine, she added, “You may have it back only after you have married young Herbert.”

\* \* \*

She would not let them see her cry.

She and Jane stood side by side. A third girl even younger joined them, wearing

the same gold cloth as she and Jane, her red-rimmed eyes making her look as frightened as Catherine felt. Nearby stood several men her father's age in costly velvet doublets, all laughing heartily and lifting goblets of wine in ribald toasts. Three young men stood with them, attired in silver doublets embroidered with gold. The bridegrooms, it seemed. Which one was hers?

She crossed her arms over her chest. Did it matter?

Catherine looked them over with narrowed gaze. The tallest had light brown hair and a heart-shaped face. He also bore a distinct resemblance to the Duke of Northumberland, even if he seemed too young to have grown a beard yet. He held his head high, but his gaze kept straying to Jane.

The one standing next to him looked about the same age, judging by the few whiskers on his downy chin. He had the golden hair and the sad, pale eyes of a descendent of the Plantagenets. Had he been chosen for her?

The third boy could not be more than a year older than Catherine. Slender of build, he had brown hair also and his thin face was marred by a generous crop of pustules. Please God, she prayed. Let her bridegroom not be the boy with pimples.

From the hall beyond came the sound of servants setting tables for a great feast. The delicious smells of roasting meats and baking savories wafted up from the kitchens. Musicians had arrived and played their instruments. The noise grew louder as more people arrived for the festivities. Catherine wondered if the King alone had stayed behind for it looked as if everyone from the Court had come.

At last, the Duke of Northumberland clapped his hands for silence. "Welcome all to my home," he announced, "and to the blessed nuptials of my youngest son, Guildford," he clapped the tallest boy on the shoulder, "to the daughter of my good friend, the Duke of Suffolk." The boy grinned as his father led him to Jane and clasped their hands together.

“And to the nuptials of my daughter to the son of the Earl of Huntingdon.” The blond boy took up a position next to the third girl.

That left Sir Pimples for Catherine, plague take him. She closed her eyes a moment, frowning hard, and wished this were all a bad dream from which she might awaken. The boy looked dead-pale and his body weaved slightly as though he had just risen from a sickbed.

“And lastly, the nuptials of Suffolk’s second daughter to Henry Herbert, the son of the Earl of Pembroke.” A cold, sweaty hand clasped hers. It helped not one whit to realize that the boy desired this marriage as little as she.

“Cunning of Northumberland to snare the next queen for his son,” murmured a man behind Catherine. “Shall we see King Guildford ere long, I wonder?”

Catherine watched the ear of her bridegroom turn purple with discomfiture. He must have heard the remark, just as she had. The man’s companion responded in a low, derisive voice, too low for her to make out the words.

The guests raised up their wine-cups in honor of the three young couples, then the priest stepped forward for the ceremony to bind them together.

Guildford Dudley spoke his vows in ringing tones; Jane’s were more measured. Henry Herbert mumbled his. The priest took Catherine’s grunt for assent. She never even heard the third pair of vows.

At least, for mercy’s sake, the whole wretched affair ended quickly. A green-faced young Henry let go Catherine’s hand and bolted, muttering something about needing to use the jakes. She made no protest at being abandoned. Mother took a garland of rosemary and roses and shoved it onto Catherine’s head. The symbol of a new-married bride. Catherine found a moment to take it off unseen and throw it under a table in disgust.

Fawning courtiers offered Catherine’s father and Northumberland their

congratulations. Catherine held her tongue, glaring at them. They deserved no praise. They had not been forced to marry today. The Duke returned to the King's bedside as soon as he might, leaving his brother to act as host in his stead at the marriage feast.

Catherine's bridegroom ignored her, pushing his food around his plate. No wonder he was so thin. She picked at her own meal, secreting a few tidbits in her handkerchief to give to her dog. Dagonet would be delighted to have them.

Soon, the servants carried away the tables and benches, clearing the floor so that the guests might dance. Jane's new husband led her onto the floor.

The Earl of Pembroke came at once to take his leave of the Duke's brother.

"So soon, Pembroke?" a wine-merry Andrew Dudley asked her new father over Catherine's head. "The masking is just beginning."

"The day has been a long one," said the Earl in a heavy Welsh accent, "and I am eager to sleep in my own bed."

Dudley gave in with good humor. "I shall not entreat you to stay then, my lord, but shall wish you pleasant dreams."

The Earl crooked his finger at his son, who followed like an obedient wraith. Catherine hesitated. Was she to stay behind?

"Go, girl." Behind her, Mother gave Catherine a little push.

"Mother?" she asked, confused.

Lady Suffolk took Catherine's empty hand in an unrelenting clasp and led her after the Earl. "You will live henceforth with your new husband."

A trill of alarm skittered down Catherine's spine. "But Mother —"

Mother cupped her chin. "Fear not, girl. You are not yet of age. Your husband will not take your maidenhead until you get your woman's blood."

Twisting the handkerchief she clutched, Catherine cast a longing look over her shoulder toward Jane. They hadn't had a chance to say goodbye. Catherine stuck out

her lip. She didn't want to leave everything she knew for a stranger's home. "Mother, my clothes —"

"Your belongings have been packed up. A wagon is already taking your coffer to the Earl's."

"Dagonet?" she asked about her dog, holding tight to the napkin of food, but Mother did not answer her.

It seemed naught Catherine might say would delay her departure another minute. Outside, the Earl and his son had mounted their steeds for the return home. For Catherine they had provided a horse-drawn litter. Mother thrust her into it. "Be obedient, girl," she said, "and all will be well."

Obedient?

Catherine could find no air to breathe. How could she be obedient? She was not Jane.

With a jolt, the litter started off and she dropped the napkin into the road. A dog began to howl, a high-pitched and mournful whine. Dagonet. "Wait! My dog. We left him behind," Catherine cried, but the Earl did not respond. Had he even heard?

"Dagonet!"

Catherine stood up, making the litter wobble and almost throw her into the road. She held her breath, trying to judge when it would be safe to jump down.

"Sit down." The Earl's angry growl gave her pause.

"But my dog..." she pleaded.

"Sit!" Something frightening in his voice made her obey, slowly sinking back onto the seat. Over his shoulder, her new husband shot her a sympathetic look but did not contradict his father. Satisfied, the Earl turned his back on her.

"Dagonet," she whispered, tears streaming down her cheeks.

The litter trundled on, unfeelingly carrying her away. A part of Catherine's heart

died with each turn of the wheels.

\* \* \*

20<sup>th</sup> July 1553

“Do you see them?”

Catherine looked where her 14 year old husband pointed. All she saw was meadow, baking in the summer sun. “Where?”

“Here.” He gently pulled some gray fluff away to expose a shallow hole in the ground. There, cuddled around each other, were four or five tiny rabbits. They were so tiny, about the size of mice, their eyes closed like young kittens.

“How old do you think they are?” she asked.

“A few days. Mayhap a week.” Henry — Hal — put back the fluff with care.

He had turned out not to be so bad a husband. True, Hal had a face pocked with pimples, but he would outgrow them one day. And he was shy, but he had surprised her, showing her things she had never thought to look at. The beauty in the ordinary. Like newborn kittens and baby bunnies.

Catherine sighed. One day he would become a man like his father and have no use for such things. A tear trailed down her cheek and she dashed it away.

“Why are you sad?”

She made herself smile at him. He was too nice to tell him the truth. “It is sad to think that they will grow up and be hunted and killed.”

Hal shrugged. “The common people must eat.”

Catherine nodded. She had not thought of that. It must be terrible to be poor. When she prayed tonight, she would say an extra prayer for them.

“We also must eat,” said Hal, tugging on Catherine’s hand. “Twill soon be time for supper. Father will be angry if we are late.” She got to her feet.

The Earl of Pembroke must never be angered. She had learned that rule first.

Surreptitiously, she rubbed her backside. It had been weeks since he had whipped her and the welts had long ago healed, but she had not forgiven him nor forgot the lesson. She could only hope Dagonet had been found and cared for, because the Earl refused to send for her dog.

She had never dared ask for anything after that.

Returning inside Baynard's Castle, Catherine went to her room to change out of her gown, while Hal returned to his tutors and studies. Why did her gowns always attract burrs and grass? Hal's hose never did. Catherine wished she might go with him, but the Earl did not hold with females reading books.

To think she would ever wish to be more like Jane.

Catherine might have sought out the Countess of Pembroke, but the Castle had no mistress, for the Earl's wife had died last year. Catherine shuddered. Thank God Pembroke had not thought to marry her himself instead of his son. She would have hated marrying a man even older than her father.

The sound of hooves drew Catherine to the window. A rider in Northumberland's livery rode into the courtyard. "The King is dead," he shouted. "Long live Queen Jane!"

So it had come to pass as Mother said. Queen Jane. Catherine wrinkled her brow. Pious, sermonizing Jane. Catherine tried with some difficulty to imagine Jane a Queen. Jane had the dignity for it, to be sure, and was very, very clever, but for all her fine tutelage, Jane was her sister. A girl just like any other.

The Earl of Pembroke burst forth from the house. "What say you?" he demanded of the messenger.

The man leapt from his horse's back and knelt on one knee before the Earl, proffering a letter. "King Edward is dead, my lord. Queen Jane, the Lady Jane Grey as was, is proclaimed queen by the late King's will. My master sends this letter to you."

Gathering her skirts, Catherine ran down the stairs to join the crowd in the

courtyard, creeping into the place next to Hal. He had no eyes for her. Everyone watched the Earl.

Pembroke broke the seal and handed the Duke of Northumberland's letter to Hal. "Read it, boy."

Catherine lifted her eyebrows. Could he not read it himself?

Hal's eyes scanned the written lines slowly, mouthing the words he read. "We are summoned to attend the new king and queen," Hal said at last. "The Greys and Dudleys will join us there." A slow smile broadened Pembroke's cheeks. His gaze flickered over Catherine and back to Hal.

Catherine was not certain she wished to see her parents again. She still had not forgiven them for threatening Dagonet. Catherine brightened. Perhaps Jane could order them to give back her dog. They could not refuse a royal command. She must be sure to ask Jane.

Excited at the prospect, Catherine ran within to change into her best gown and a cloak to protect it from the dust of the road. Below, she heard the Earl shout for the servants to prepare for a journey.

This time, instead of the rickety old litter for her to ride in, Hal himself led out a pretty black mare to her. "She is your wedding gift."

"What is her name?" she asked.

He blushed dark red. "You may name her anything that pleases you."

Catherine stroked the soft nose. The mare whinnied in pleasure. Catherine stood on tiptoe to peck a kiss on Hal's cheek. His blush deepened. Even the tips of his ears tinted purple. "Thank you, Hal. I must think hard on't and give her a good name."

The Earl strode out of the house and mounted. He uttered a sharp command and Hal sprang into his saddle, leaving a groom to settle Catherine on her mount. They had provided her with a new side-saddle of French design, one where her knee hooked

around the pommel. She had not seen its like before. Catherine held her head high. Now she would ride like a lady.

Still, she wished she might ride astride like Hal and perhaps gallop across the fields, laughing at the wind in her face. Catherine sighed. God had chosen to make her female. She must learn to live with this curse.

Catherine took her wifely place at Hal's side, glad his father had not chosen to board a barge at his house. The Earl rode in front alone. They rode at a slow pace through the London streets, joining up with others like them, forming a grand procession for the common people to watch. In return, she drank in everything she set eyes upon: a boy whistling a jaunty tune as he carried a bundle, a woman selling fresh baked bread from a cart, a trio of nimble acrobats with a performing monkey.

Though seized by the desire to have a monkey of her own, Catherine held her tongue. Even if the Earl did not refuse her — which he would — he would like as not set his own dog upon the poor creature to kill it for his sport.

A cutpurse robbed a stout merchant as she watched, fleeing as the man cried out. Several apprentices ran after him, but the thief disappeared into the crowd on fleeter feet.

Too soon they arrived at a wharf on the Thames where a barge awaited them. "We are going to Syon House," Hal whispered in her ear as he himself helped her down, "where your sister waits. When they tell her that King Edward is dead, we will travel together to the Tower of London to await the coronation."

Catherine digested that. "Does she not know already?" There had been heralds crying that the King was dead on every street corner. Surely word must have reached Jane, even as far away as Richmond.

"Of course," said Hal in a low voice, "but the Duke of Northumberland must bring her the official word from the Council himself."

The journey by barge was a fleet and uneventful one. They pulled up at the wharf where the Duke's servants hastened the new arrivals inside. Several men waited there to greet the Earl and his companions. Catherine glared with displeasure at Northumberland among them, though he made no acknowledgment of her presence. She didn't know the men but they were all grandly dressed in fine clothes too.

The men conferred together, then set off, presumably to break the news of the King's death to Jane.

Hal and she looked at each other. "Should we follow?" Catherine asked. Hal shrugged. She took his hand. "Come, let's."

No one gainsaid them as they entered the room where Jane waited, the Duchesses of Suffolk and Northumberland standing to either side of her.

Jane herself looked no different. No crown, no state canopy over the chair where she sat. Just a simple chair and a prayer book in her lap. "My lords?" she asked as their arrival meant only a pleasant visit on a fine summer's day.

A smirking Duke of Northumberland stepped forward, puffing out his chest and drawing all eyes to him. The other men, spread out in a group behind him, looked equally pleased with themselves. Catherine edged to the side to get a better view, tugging Hal along with her.

"Madam," said the Duke, "King Edward is dead and has named you as our next Queen and heir to his throne. This declaration has been approved by the Council and most of the peers as confirmed by letters patents under the great seal of England. There is nothing wanting but your grateful acceptance of this high estate bestowed upon you by God Almighty."

He dropped to one knee before her. "Therefore you should cheerfully take upon yourself the title and estate of Queen of England."

At these words, all present knelt and cried, "Long live the Queen!"

Catherine responded last, tugged down by Hal. It felt passing strange to kneel to her sister.

Jane rose serenely to her feet — and fell weeping to the floor.

## Chapter 2

**To the Council —**

**The death of the King must remain secret until the Ladies Mary and Elizabeth be taken in safe custody. Mary must never become Queen of England.**

**John Dudley, Duke of Northumberland**

Catherine gasped. This was not like Jane. She never showed so much emotion. Jane was so quiet, doubtless she had not even cried in her cradle.

At length Jane dried her tears and stood, her head proud. Catherine almost snorted. It had all been a pretense and a poor one at that. She looked at the faces of the men and women there but all appeared to have expected the mawkish performance. Catherine's lips curved in a wry twist. She had thought better of Jane, who usually scorned such dissembling.

"My lords," said Jane in ringing tones, "I grieve for the death of the King. Yet the laws of the kingdom do favor the rights of the King's sister. I am wary of burdening my conscience with a yoke that does not belong to me. Besides, I am not so young to suffer myself to be taken by the guiles of Fortune."

The Duke of Northumberland's face darkened with every word. Father, too, grew more livid as Jane spoke. Whatever they had plotted between them, they had not expected Jane to refuse. Who would have thought Jane could be so interesting?

"What crown does Fortune present me?" Jane asked. "A crown shamefully wrested from our late queen, Catherine of Aragon, made more unfortunate by others who wore it after her. Would you have me add my blood to theirs? My liberty is better than the jeweled chain you offer me. I will not exchange my peace for glorious fetters. If you love me in good earnest, you will rather wish me a secure and quiet fortune."

With that, she sat down again, her hands folded in her lap.

Catherine bit the tip of her littlest finger to hide a smile. Northumberland had thought he had bought himself a pawn in Jane? She had just shown him she was not so easily deceived.

"Lady," said Northumberland, all but gritting his teeth, "I honor your scruples, yet I must urge you to reconsider. The crown is your right. Yours alone. Who is the King's sister? Mary, who was declared a bastard by her own father. A follower of the Popish religion. Would you have her bring that corruption back to England and lead us all to damnation?"

Jane visibly hesitated. Catherine watched her through narrowed eyes. They had already found her weakness. She was too devout a follower of the evangelical faith ever to welcome the return of the Catholic one. Could Jane resist a chance to play the role for which she had been trained since birth?

"The Lady Mary is too close to her cousin, the Holy Roman Emperor," Northumberland crooned. "If she marries a Habsburg prince, her children will be three of four parts foreign blood. Whereas your children by my son will be fully English."

"What if I have no children?" Jane objected, gripping the arms of her chair.

"Then your sister, Catherine, succeeds you and her children after her. Strong,

English children.”

Catherine’s ears pricked up and her back straightened. They truly thought to make her Queen after Jane? How silly. She did not want to be Queen.

Father leaned in close. “Would you see England become a small, unimportant part of the Empire, daughter? The people cry out for you, not the puppet of a foreign prince.” Catherine held her breath, praying Jane would not be led into temptation.

“It is your duty,” added Northumberland. “The King had the right to name his own successor as did his father before him. He chose you to succeed him.”

“This is your time, Jane,” urged Mother. “Think of the wonderful things you can do. You will be a great protectress of the Protestant faith. You are our best hope to prevent Mary from restoring the Catholic religion here.”

“If this is God’s will...” said Jane and burst into tears. Real tears this time. Catherine’s mouth tightened in disgust.

“On his death-bed, His Majesty prayed that the Almighty would save the realm from the false beliefs upheld by the Lady Mary,” said Northumberland. “She is unworthy of the crown, bastard-born, cut off from the succession. Her disobedience to both her father and brother proclaims her the enemy of God’s word. You are the only one who can save us. You must save us.”

Jane tottered on the edge, wringing her hands. “If the place where the Lord God calls me is rightfully mine, may He give me grace to govern for the good of my people.”

They had worn her down. Catherine rolled her eyes. They had won.

Afterward, Jane led the way, proud to fulfill her destiny as a religious reformer. They rode again by barge, this time down the river toward the Tower of London, where all English monarchs dwelled until their coronations.

Jane had donned a green velvet gown and a white jeweled headdress for the journey — the Tudor colors — and looked very grand, though her unfortunate freckles

stood out against the pallor of her skin. Catherine smirked. **She** did not get freckles.

After dining at Durham House at noon, they boarded the barges again and completed the last leg of the journey, arriving at the Tower of London.

“Isn’t this a prison?” Catherine asked Hal, looking up with apprehension at the thick stone walls and armed men keeping watch.

“It is many things,” said Hal, his thin chest puffing out a bit. “Here is where our sovereign dwells until the coronation. The Crown Jewels are kept well-guarded here and the Royal Armory —” A loud roaring sound drowned out his voice and Catherine jumped. Hal chuckled, patting her hand on his. “And the menagerie. Haply I may show them to you one day.”

Catherine smiled up at him. “I would like that.”

Jane arrived last, the Duke of Northumberland and the other Councilors having come ahead to be there to greet her at the steps. Her husband, Guildford, stood tall and fair beside her, dressed in white and silver. Catherine wrinkled her brow. He stood in **front** of Jane as the barged docked, not like a consort, but like a king. Why did Jane not command he stand back? She was queen.

During the procession to the Tower, Jane smiled at the gathered crowd, Mother carrying her train, but the throngs did not appear pleased to look on their new queen.

“Where is the Earl of Bath,” muttered Father to the Duke, both of them walking before Catherine with Hal’s father, “and the Earl of Sussex? They should be here.” Catherine cast down her gaze to hide her thoughts. All was not well, it seemed. Perhaps all the chess pieces were not moving as expected?

“Fear not, Suffolk,” Northumberland reassured him. “They are only a few and not important. If they have gone over to Mary, we shall deal with them.”

The Tower gates closed behind them to the mighty peal of trumpets. Then the heralds read out the proclamation declaring for Queen Jane and calling Mary and

Elizabeth Tudor illegitimate. A few voices cried, “God save the Queen,” but not many.

One boy cried out bravely that Mary was the rightful queen. Catherine drew herself up to see who it was. Northumberland stiffened, then ordered the boy to be pilloried and have his ears cut off.

“As an example to any who would dare defy us,” the Duke confided to Father.

Catherine frowned. Jane was the Queen. Then why did Northumberland act as if England were now his to command?

“There are others,” complained Pembroke to Northumberland. “Did you note the mood of the crowd? We cannot silence them all.”

“They matter not,” said Northumberland with a dismissive gesture. “We control the Tower: the treasury, the armory, the crown jewels. What does the Lady Mary have? A few followers of small note and no money. She cannot buy soldiers or arms. Her cousin, the Emperor, will not risk war with England.”

“Can you be sure of that?” Father demanded of Northumberland. “As long as she is free, she can spur the passions of the common people.”

“Peace, my lord. I have sent my son, Robert, with a small force to Kenning-hall in Norfolk. They will take the Lady Mary prisoner and bring her perforce to London to acknowledge Jane our queen.”

“And afterward?”

Catherine did not like Northumberland’s smile. “There will be none.”

\* \* \*

### **Escaped.**

Catherine succeeded in slipping out of the room unnoticed while Mother wrangled with the Duchess of Northumberland over Jane’s coronation gown. Pity Catherine couldn’t leave the Tower, but at least she could explore the courtyard and the other buildings.

Following her nose, she entered one and trod up an ancient spiral stone staircase, so old the treads bore the imprints of the thousands of feet who had marched there before. Reaching the top, she found empty rooms, the walls beautifully scarred by carvings of men who had spent their lives there as prisoners.

“William Tyrrell, 1541.” With her short fingers, Catherine traced the letters writ in the rough stone above his name, unable to guess their meaning. What had William Tyrrell done to be imprisoned here? “Thomas.” The name was carved above a bell. Above that was inscribed “Learn to fear God” with the date 1538. How sad that these men had all worn out their lives here, leaving only these scratches in the stones as proof they had ever lived.

When she bored of looking at the carvings, Catherine amused herself a short while watching out of the narrow window at the to-and-fro-ings of the people in the courtyard below, wondering who they were and where they were going. It soon palled and she went back down the stairs again in search of something more interesting to see.

“The Lady Mary has sent the Council a letter.”

Northumberland’s voice echoed up the stair. Catherine stopped short.

Trapped. She could not pass the men below without being caught. Father would be wroth with her if he discovered her listening. Catherine pulled back into the curve of the stair lest they see her.

“What does she write?” Father’s voice trembled. Catherine wondered at it. She had never heard Father so sore affrighted. Her chin jutted. He deserved it for hurting Jane.

“She has learnt of the King’s death,” said Northumberland, “and wonders why the Council did not inform her of it.”

Catherine nibbled on a nail. Blessed Jesu, the Lady Mary would not willingly

accept being passed over.

“We did not, because she not our Queen,” said Pembroke with a heavy laugh.

“How did she find out?” demanded Father at the same moment.

Northumberland hushed them both with a wave. The shadow fluttered against the far wall of the stairs.

“It matters not. She further writes that she knows our plans.”

“What? How does she know?” asked Father.

“We have been betrayed,” said a shaken Pembroke. “She will take our heads.”

“Not if you keep yours now,” said Northumberland, sounding irritable. Catherine dared to peek around the corner to see better. The Duke’s face looked dark and very angry indeed.

Father snatched the letter from him and held it to the light to see it better. “Mary offers us pardon do we proclaim her Queen throughout the city.”

“What are we to do?” demanded Pembroke, catching Northumberland by the arm.

“Pay her no heed,” said the Duke, with broad confidence. “Of course Mary must put forth her claim. It is a mere inconvenience. I would expect no less. However she can do no more than write weak letters. Mary has neither the men nor arms to mount a serious challenge. I am assured by the ambassador from the Holy Roman Emperor that he will not support her claim against us. Her cause is already lost. We possess the Tower, the Royal Treasury. We control the country, through your daughter, Suffolk.”

Father’s eyes sought reassurance in Northumberland’s. The Duke detached Pembroke’s slackened grip. “We shall send Mary a letter signed by the full Council demanding that she vex Queen Jane no further by her false claims. With no money and no support, she will have no choice but to yield.”

The men all looked heartened by the Duke’s words.

Catherine sucked in her cheeks. How she would like to be there listening unseen when Mary received it. From what she remembered of her half-Spanish cousin, Mary would not receive it with complaisance. It would be fun to watch her temper rage.

“Come, my lords. I have sent for the crown jewels. Let us see if they have arrived.” The men strode out together. Catherine darted out on soft feet as soon as it was safe, hastening back to Jane’s chamber by another route. Neither the Duchess nor Mother had noticed her absence it seemed, for they were still bickering when she returned. Catherine rolled her eyes.

“Your Majesty!” The Duke of Northumberland strutted in and made a deep bow. Catherine crept behind Mother next to Jane’s chair that she might see better without being seen and told to leave. Leaving Jane’s side, Northumberland’s duchess quietly positioned herself beside her husband.

Jane gave him a calm nod. “My lord.”

“Madam, the Marquess of Winchester begs leave to present the crown jewels to you.” Catherine perked up. Were they as beautiful as Mother once said?

The Marquess stepped forward at the Duke’s words, servants bearing a stout casket to place before the young queen, but Jane waved her hand to deny them. “I shall not be crowned for a fortnight, my Lord Treasurer,” she said with serene certainty. “I have no need to see the jewels now.”

Catherine started to protest, but subsided at a stern look from her mother. She fumed, crossing her arms. **She** wanted to see them even if Jane did not.

Winchester opened the casket and withdrew a heavy crown of gold, set with rubies and pearls. Catherine leaned forward to peer at them, awed. “At least, Majesty, try on the Crown Imperial,” he said with an unctuous smile, “to see how it will fit.”

Jane scrutinized him narrowly, lifting a finger to press against her lips. Catherine held her breath. Did Jane realize once she put on the crown, she could never turn

back?

The Marquess came forward as if he would place it on her head. “Your Grace may take it boldly, for I will have another made to crown your husband.” He gestured at young Dudley, who wore an unbecoming smirk.

As Catherine watched, Jane’s face hardened.

“My lord, you are quite mistaken,” said Jane. Winchester froze. “I am queen. My husband is my consort, not a king.”

The chamber became deadly silent.

\* \* \*

“I will be king here!”

Guildford Dudley shouted to the rafters, but Jane looked at him unmoved. Catherine hid a smile behind her hand. They hadn’t expected Jane to have so much mettle.

The Duke of Northumberland looked as though his favorite bitch had just bitten him, but more wisely held his tongue. Had he only now realized his pawn might not be so easily ruled? He ought to have remembered that the queen was the most powerful piece on the chess-board.

Winchester made a sharp gesture at the servants to take the casket and get out. Taking a quick look around, he darted out after them.

“Have you forgot you vowed to be an obedient wife?” Guildford insisted.

Jane rose solemnly to her feet, rising to a queenly, if little, height. Catherine watched her sister don the mantle of power for the first time. “Have **you** forgot the duty of obedience you owe to your sovereign?” She paused, letting the words sink in. “No, you will not be king here.”

Catherine had never liked Jane more.

Guildford turned to Northumberland. “Father, compel her! You promised me.”

The Duke pursed his lips, but said nothing.

“Mother!” Guildford tried again. Catherine barely succeeded in smothering a snort at the would-be king’s whining. What a poor king he would make.

The Duchess crossed to his side and wrapped an arm around her son. “If you do not crown my son King of England,” she said with a fine toss of her head, “I shall bear him home and you shall not see him again.”

Jane shrugged. “Do so if you wish. As queen, I can prevent you but I shall not.” She touched the tip of her tongue to her upper lip, letting an assessing gaze drift down Guildford’s body and back up again. “He has been something lacking as a husband.” Catherine’s brow wrinkled as she tried to guess Jane’s meaning. Young Dudley’s face blackened and he took a threatening step forward, shaking off his mother’s grip.

Heart accelerating, Catherine feared the boy might strike Jane, but Northumberland stayed his hand.

“Will you do nothing, sir?” shrilled the Duchess in her husband’s face.

He stepped ponderously forward, moving her aside. “It serves no purpose to wrangle this way. I am certain that with proper reflection, Queen Jane will see the wisdom of it.”

Jane lifted an inquiring eyebrow.

The Duke spoke slowly, choosing his words with evident care. “You will need sons, Majesty, heirs to your throne....”

“I need not make a man a king to breed sons upon me.”

Northumberland’s lips compressed and he took a deep breath. “Madam, you need a king beside you for more than heirs. Our people will not accept a queen regnant. Not since the days of Empress Matilda has England had a queen who ruled in her own right. Her reign caused war and much strife when her cousin Stephen challenged her for the throne.”

“And seized it from her,” insisted the red-faced Duchess.

“And seized it from her,” Northumberland agreed. He stepped closer to Jane and crooned, “Your reign is young yet and unsteady, Majesty. The King’s bastard sister, Mary, has declared herself queen in Norfolk. You need to deal with her from strength. An English-bred king by your side will give you that strength.”

“God is my strength. I need no king by my side,” Jane insisted hardily, a fervent glow on her face.

Northumberland threw up his hands and whirled on Father. “Suffolk, you and I had an agreement. Make your daughter see reason.”

Father marched forward on command, looming over Jane. “You will do as you are told, girl, or I will...”

Jane lifted her chin. “Take your whip to me? Yet again?” Her eyes flashed fire, daring him to try it. “I shall cut off your hand ere the first stroke falls.” Father deflated and backed away, but Jane pursued, poking him in the chest. “You forced me into this marriage, sir, but you have no more power over me.” She gave a mirthless laugh. “You none of you have power over me. I am queen.”

**Yes!** Catherine gave a silent cheer. Mother frowned at her. Faith, had she heard? Catherine took a quick step back — too far away to pinch.

Jane looked down her nose at Guildford, a difficult thing since he stood the taller. “Please me and I shall make you Duke of Clarence. Displease me and you shall have nothing.”

“And you shall have nothing of my son!” The Duchess of Northumberland seized Guildford by the arm and dragged him from the room. The Duke looked pained.

“I care not!” Jane called after them. She turned a cold eye on her husband’s father. “You shall lead my army, my lord Northumberland, and remove me this threat. Capture the Lady Mary and bring her to the Tower in chains.”

“Majesty, I —”

Jane cut him off. “Do your duty, sir and mind you, do it well. If you succeed, I will consider making your son a king. Fail and he shall remain my consort.” She shrugged. “For now. Our late king Henry, my uncle, taught me how easily an unwanted consort may be divorced. Or...” She let the word hang. Northumberland paled.

Catherine definitely approved of the new Jane.

Northumberland’s lips twisted and he shook his head. “If I fail, Majesty, we must all fear a traitor’s death at the hands of Mary Tudor.”

\* \* \*

19<sup>th</sup> July 1553

“Jane?”

Catherine set aside the lute she had been aimlessly plucking since Mother had ordered her to entertain Jane and left the room with Father, muttering together darkly.

The Duke of Northumberland had departed five days ago for Cambridge and war with Jane’s blessing and some 1500 men, not to cheers and exultation, but instead to the scowls of sullen Londoners. East Anglia, it was said, had declared for Mary and ‘twas rumored Buckinghamshire would rise for her next. Jane had ordered the Tower locked up under strong guard, writing stern letters warning her supporters against betrayal.

At this moment, though, all the disorder had quieted, if only for a while.

“Jane?” Catherine tried again.

Jane appeared not the least disturbed by the informal address. She looked up from the Bible in her lap. “Yes?”

“May I ask you a question?”

“Only one?” A tiny indulgent smile curved Jane’s lips. “Aye?”

“Why didn’t you want to see the Crown Jewels?” Catherine asked, biting her lip.

Jane shrugged. "I have seen them before."

"But they didn't belong to you before."

Jane's expression grew distant. "They belong to England. A true Christian does not hunger after wealth, but rather hungers for the salvation only God can grant."

Catherine absorbed that. She hesitated a long moment then pressed on. "How did you find the courage to stand up to the Duke of — to stand up to all of them? Were you not scared when everyone shouted at you?"

Jane's serene gaze never wavered. "Yes, I feared them, but only for the briefest moment. Once I placed my trust in God," she laid a reverent hand on her Bible, "they could no longer frighten me. Rejoice in Christ, as I trust you do, and do not be afraid."

Looking down, Catherine swallowed. She would never be as virtuous as Jane.

"But come," said Jane, pinning her with a direct look, "this not what you truly wish to ask."

Jane knew her too well. Catherine had so many questions. Did Jane **want** to be queen? Was Mary truly the rightful queen? She dared ask none of them, and especially not **Will we win?**

She opted for the safer road. "I would ask a favor." Jane lifted a suddenly royal eyebrow. "It is about my dog, Dagonet."

Catherine left her cushioned bench to stand before Jane, twisting her hands. "I left him behind at Durham House. I asked the Earl of Pembroke to send for him, but the Earl refused. Now that you are queen, I thought you could order him to send for Dagonet. Will you, Jane?" Her heart pounded in her chest.

"Catherine, dear," Jane said gently, shaking her head, "the Earl has the ordering of his own house. You must bend your will to his."

"But —" Surely Jane understood how important Dagonet was to her.

"Sister." Jane reached out for Catherine's hand. Taking it in her own, she patted

it. "You are married now. It is time for you to put away childish things and become a woman."

As Jane had? To go from girl to woman to wife to queen in a mere six weeks?

Still —

"But Jane, no one loves him as I do." She scuffed a shoe on the fine carpet at their feet. "I know not even if he still lives. He is so small. He might have starved to death with no one to feed him or care for him." Catherine pleaded with her eyes.

Jane gave her a compassionate look. "What if I ask after his well-being? Will that content you?"

Catherine bit her lip. It was not enough. "But Jane, can you not tell the Earl he must —"

"Enough!" Dropping her sister's hand, Jane cut off Catherine's appeal in a strong voice that resounded from the rafters. "I cannot come between you and your husband's father," Jane said with regal severity. "I will not. I will ensure that the animal is looked after. It must suffice."

It could not. Jane's face blurred in Catherine's sight. She looked up at the ceiling, trying and failing to control her tears. Spinning on her heel, Catherine stumbled from the room without the royal permission, unable even to see where her feet led her.

Catherine halted at the sound of men's voices approaching and wiped her eyes. She did not know where she was. She must have bolted a goodly distance from Jane's chamber. Hoping to stay hidden, she backed into a small alcove and pressed herself flat against the wall.

"All is lost!"

"Say not so," said a man's voice. Catherine recognized the Earl of Arundel.

"Surely you overstate, Cobham."

"I tell you, my lords, I ask myself if this is God's punishment for not supporting the

rights of King Henry's own daughter." Catherine peeked around the corner to see some four or five men, including the Marquess of Winchester and Hal's father as well.

"A papist!" cried one of the men. "She would bring back the Catholic religion. None would wish its return." Arundel winced. They had forgotten that Arundel, despite his support for Jane, was himself a Catholic.

The man Cobham shook his white head. "While Queen Jane cries out for men and arms, daily more flock to Mary's cause. There are rumors that Northumberland has betrayed us, making a secret agreement with the King of France. If Jane refuses to bend to his will, he will depose her and bring Mary Stuart from France to replace her."

A squeak escaped Catherine. She crammed her fist against her mouth to prevent crying out aloud.

"Surely not," scoffed Pembroke, not reacting to her cry. Perhaps none of them had heard. "King Henry excluded the Stuarts from the succession. Besides, the child has not a dozen years, yet."

"Ideal for Northumberland," grumbled Winchester. "Unlike Queen Jane, Mary Stuart will not oppose his will. He will be King John in all but name."

"If the French King does not impose his own will upon the girl," said a glum Arundel. "How much truth is there in these rumors?"

"I heard it from the Spanish Ambassador's own lips," insisted Cobham with a significant look. "The men aboard the royal ships are mutinying against their officers. An army is gathering at Framlingham in Suffolk. The people are refusing to take up arms against Mary's troops." He took a deep breath and leaned forward. "Northumberland's own men desert him daily. Take my advice, my lords. Get clear of this as soon as you may and go to your homes. Submit to Mary and beg her mercy before 'tis too late. You might not find your heads on a pike beside Northumberland's."

A pike? Blinding pressure built behind Catherine's eyes.

**Blessed Jesu!** She must warn Jane.

As soon as the men left, Catherine hurried on soft feet back to Jane's chamber, but before she reached it, she encountered Hal, dressed for riding.

"There you are, Catherine." He came and took her by the hand. "Father is calling for our horses. He is returning to Baynard's Castle with me, but I did not wish to leave without you. You must come."

"But Jane —" She must warn Jane of the danger first. Catherine tried to pull away, but Hal did not release her.

"There is no time. Father leaves now. If you do not come, he will leave you behind."

Catherine dragged her feet. "My clothes?"

"Hal!" They could hear Pembroke's voice shouting in the courtyard. Hal blanched.

"Leave them."

Catherine started to follow Hal, then halted, "I do not have my cloak." She was dressed for Court, not a journey.

"Here." Hal took off his own and swirled it over her shoulders. "Take mine." Catherine clutched it together at her throat to keep it from falling off and ran after him.

The horses were already saddled and a purple-faced Pembroke already mounted. "There you are, boy," he said as she and Hal appeared in the courtyard and something in his shoulders relaxed. His jaundiced gaze took her in as well, but he said naught, letting a servant put her in the saddle as Hal scrambled onto his own gelding. Catherine fought to tuck her stiff, billowing brocade skirts beneath her legs, lest they frighten her mare. With a gesture, Pembroke spurred his horse through the Tower gate and into the city.

It occurred to Catherine to wonder if he might not have asked for Jane's consent

to leave. It might account for his hasty departure. Had he bribed the guards to let them out against Jane's orders?

The Earl did not dismount when they reached the Castle. Instead the Lord Mayor and several aldermen awaited them on horseback. "Hal," said Pembroke, "take the girl within."

Catherine's eyebrows lifted. She had gone from the Queen's sister to "the girl." She shrugged. Well, he had never liked her. She and Hal were better off without him.

From the vantage point of her room, Catherine watched as the Earl of Arundel and Lord Cobham soon joined Pembroke. Hal's father stood in his stirrups. "We are bound for Cheapside," he announced to the gathered crowd. "There we shall proclaim Mary Queen of England." Many smiled and burst into tears. Pembroke gestured with a gloved hand and the men trotted off to the east.

Catherine went back outside and asked the Earl's fat cook why she wept. The woman wiped her face on her apron and gave Catherine a pitying look. "Why, because now my son will not be called upon to fight against Mary's men, o' course, and he will not be killt."

The cheering people built a bonfire outside the Earl's gates while Hal ran to the nearby church and vigorously rang the bell. How could they celebrate? Catherine wondered, going inside alone and hiding in her room. Jane was not evil, even if she would not help Catherine get Dagonet back. She would have been a good queen.

Yet the people had turned on Jane, when she only desired their good. Why? Catherine bit her lip. Would they turn on her too? What would they do to her?

Catherine did not go down for supper, having no appetite, but no one missed her. She could not exult Mary's accession. All she could think was that she had run away instead of warning Jane. This was all her own fault.

Soon a messenger arrived with news. Hal sought Catherine out in her chamber.

She knew before he spoke the first word that he brought ill news.

“Your father has declared Mary Queen on Tower Hill,” he told her as gently as he could.

Catherine bowed her head. So, Father had surrendered to fate? She set aside the sewing she had been pretending to work on. The few stitches she had managed to make were all askew anyway.

“Does Jane know?” she asked.

Hal made a face. “He had no choice but to tell your sister she is no longer queen. Then he tore down her cloth of estate while she retired to her private chamber. She was there still when Mary’s soldiers arrived and took her prisoner.”

Catherine shrank as if Hal had struck her. “My mother and father?”

“Fled before the soldiers arrived.”

**Praise God and his mercy.** Something tight between Catherine’s shoulders relaxed. At least they were not imprisoned.

Yet.

Hal laid an awkward hand on her shoulder. It helped, somehow. She was not alone, she still had him. He would not forsake her. Catherine tried to smile her thanks.

“Guildford Dudley and his mother were caught in the same net as your sister, the messenger said.” Hal scuffed a shoe upon the floor. “The Earl of Arundel has been dispatched to take the Duke of Northumberland into custody for treason.”

Catherine tried to feel sorry for the Duke and failed. His attempt to seize power for himself had hurt too many. How many would die because of his greed? Would Mary behead Jane for daring to call herself Queen? Would Father be killed also for being in league with Northumberland? And what of Catherine herself? She twisted her hands hard. She had had no choice in all this. Would Mary punish her too?

“What am I to do?” she asked Hal, but he looked helplessly back at her. He knew

no more than she.

He left her alone soon after, to go below and await his father's return from Cheapside. The Earl would be tired and hungry and in an ill temper. At least the servants would take the brunt of it, not Hal.

Catherine went to the window of her room to wait, her spirits sinking with every passing minute. She blamed her elders for this. They had forced Jane and Catherine both into this plight, then abandoned them the moment their schemes went awry. What gave them the right? She pounded her fist against the stone sill. What gave them the right?

She indulged in angry tears for several moments, but when the storm passed, she felt no better, only as tired as a woman of four score years. Catherine wiped her cheeks with her hands.

So, Jane's reign had ended. A reign Jane had never truly wanted.

She had been queen less than a fortnight.

\* \* \*

"Where is she?" bellowed the Earl. "Where is the girl?"

He had come for her. Catherine felt the blood drain from her face. What would he do? She bent over her needlework, listening as his heavy footfalls trod down the corridor to her room.

The Earl burst into her chamber. "There you be," he said when his gaze alighted upon her. "Get you gone, mistress."

"What?"

"I said, get you gone. Leave my house."

Looking beyond the Earl, she saw Hal in his shadow, gnawing on his lower lip. She stretched a beseeching hand to him. "Hal?"

"Look not to my son. You are nothing to him." Seizing her by the arm, Pembroke

dragged her from the room, Hal on his heels. She fought him every step but she was no match for his greater strength. The servants stared, but made no move to interfere.

Catherine began to weep. "Please, my lord, what have I done to displease you?"

The Earl threw Catherine through the open door of the house. "What have you done?" He repeated as if he could not believe she could not know. "You were born."

Catherine rolled to a stop on her belly and stood, brushing the dust from her dress. "I understand you not."

"Born?" echoed Hal at his father's side. "Catherine cannot be blamed for that."

"Thank God, my son, you never consummated this marriage," said the Earl, stroking his red beard with a shaking hand.

Hal could hardly have consummated it, since he still slept in his father's chamber — not that Catherine had a very clear idea of what consummation meant. Mother had never told her.

"Yes, we have," Catherine contradicted him quickly, thrusting up her chin.

The Earl rounded on Hal. "Does she speak true?"

Hal met Catherine's gaze doubtfully. She gave him a meaningful look. With a barely perceptible nod, he took a deep breath and drew himself up, puffing out a thin but manful chest. "Yea, Father. It is the truth. We have lain together."

Pembroke lifted an eyebrow and took Catherine's chin in a hard grasp, looking her deep in the eyes. She met it with a defiant look. After a long moment, he gave a short laugh and let her go, relaxing an iota. "You lie. You are but children, innocent still."

He laid a fatherly hand on Hal's shoulder. "I ought to whip you, boy, for lying to me, but I forgive you. She is a dainty piece. Were she five years older, I would lust after her myself."

Catherine drew back. The thought of this man near two score years her senior touching her turned her stomach.

Pembroke pierced her with a merciless gaze. “If we have the marriage annulled swiftly, we might survive this yet. If Queen Mary does not already know of it, she must hear of it soon. Better she do so after it no longer exists.”

He raised a supplicating arm to heaven, speaking more to himself than Catherine. “What fiend goaded me to propose the match to Northumberland?”

Turning back to her, he pointed at the gate. “Away! Get you gone!”

Alone? On foot? She knew not in which direction Bradgate lay. Catherine begged Hal with her eyes for help, but his gaze slid away from her. He would not defy his father further. Not for her. So be it. She licked her lips.

“Where am I to go?” she asked with resolution beyond her years.

“I care not, mistress, so long as you reside not beneath my roof.” He spun on his heel to go in the house.

Catherine raised herself to her full height. “Wait!” she commanded like a princess, surprised when the Earl obeyed. “I cannot walk to my father’s house. You will have my maidservant pack up my coffer. Then you will send for horses and men to escort me home. Annul the marriage if you choose, I cannot stop you, but you will not send me creeping home like a penitent. I have done nothing wrong.”

The Earl held her gaze a long moment. She could feel him willing her to back down, but she lifted her chin higher. He might regret his alliance with the Greys, but Catherine’s grandmother had been a queen. She refused to let him bully her.

He weakened first, throwing his hands up in surrender. “Very well, my lady,” he said with begrudging respect. “It shall be as you desire.”

Catherine wished she might exult at the victory.

Ere long, a half-dozen of the Earl’s men came with horses for her and her possessions. Hal himself came to see her off, leading the pretty mare he had given her. Was it even still hers? If there was no wedding, could there be a wedding gift? “I wish

we might —” He broke off his words, his face flushing. Catherine understood. His loyalties were torn between her and his father. “I shall miss you.”

Catherine pecked a swift kiss on his cheek. “Farewell,” she said through a tight throat. She wished she might have come to know him better.

He nodded, his eyes glistening with unshed tears. Standing back, he let the servant lift Catherine into the saddle.

She guided her horse into a place directly behind the leader of her escort, holding her head high. Catherine did not look back as they walked the horses out of the courtyard.

People gawped at her as they passed, but she paid them no mind. The crowd muttered darkly amongst themselves, but only one hand threw a stone at her. It missed her cheek by less than an inch, striking one of the men harmlessly on the thigh. “God save Queen Mary, I say! Let no puppet of Northumberland rule us.”

Concealing her fear, Catherine held her head high while the Earl’s men drove back the rabble, keeping them away from her.

As soon as the menacing crowd had been left behind, she allowed herself a tear for Jane, swiftly dashed away. Poor Jane. She had wanted none of this. What vengeance would Mary take on her?

This was all the Duke of Northumberland’s fault, Catherine decided. If he had not forced Jane to marry his son and proclaim herself queen, Jane might be sitting at home now, reading a book, instead of sitting in a prison cell, wondering how soon she would die because of one man’s greed.

Well, Catherine had learned an important lesson. Never again would she let any man use her. When she married — **if** she ever married — she would marry only to please herself.

*End of Sample ~ Want to read more?*