

## KINBOROUGH

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“Kinborough! Who on earth is Kinborough?” the nurse exclaimed, “I have heard nothing of this arrangement.”

The man sighed. “It has been decided, that considering the young princess is growing, she needs a young lady to converse with.”

“It is not essential!” the nurse puffed.

“Well, you know, another lady’s company can be good for another lady,” the man stuttered.

“When is she to arrive?” the nurse continued, sizing the man up. The man took out a pressed handkerchief and wiped his brow.

“She is to come tomorrow at twelve,” and before the nurse could utter another bitter word the man had turned and hurried down the steps.

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From the moment I arrived I had a place; I had to follow. I remember stepping out the grand carriage and staring awed at the grand Hatfield House before I was face to face with a squat lady who introduced herself as the Lady Elizabeth’s nurse. “You must change” she said, “before you meet Elizabeth.” Must I? I thought mother had always made sure I dressed well. That is how I came to be Elizabeth’s companion; my mother had been one of Anne Boleyn’s ladies in waiting, and when they had needed a child for the Lady Elizabeth, my mother and father had been only too pleased to suggest me. So that is how I ended up all alone at the age of eight on the steps of Hatfield House ready to toil at a job I had no say in doing.

The sunlight seeped through my eyelids. I stretched, and regretfully turned over. Time to awaken. I pushed my feet out from under the covers into the cold of the morning. I lay there for a minute then jumped quickly out of bed and tiptoed across the floor to my wardrobe. My room it is right next to Beth’s, and is half the size with no four poster bed. However it has lovely furniture, panelling and an exquisite carpet. It felt early, a wane light filtered through the heavy curtains. My room had a very Tudor feel, richly full, like good food; touches that distinctly showed your class, like you’re there to impress. Who am I supposed to make an impression on? No one visits me.

This room has held me for far too long. I have my companion duties to fulfil. Amusing Beth, dressing Beth, telling Beth what she wants to hear. I open my wardrobe, I have nice clothes too (though not half as extensive as Elizabeth’s) as I’m with Beth all the time and I can’t look shabby. I begin to get dressed pulling on my underskirts and petticoats. I then put on my corset. Years ago, I had realised that doing up your own corset strings is very hard. The strings always slip and it doesn’t do up properly, so I developed a technique. I locked the wardrobe and tied my corset strings to both handles. Then I took a deep breath, braced myself and pulled. The strings went taut. I pulled until the corset was tight then undid the strings and tied them neatly. After another layer I pulled out my green dress with the fine spider web lace and slipped it on, adjusting the sleeves and smoothing out the creases. I buttoned myself in, then washed my pale face and did my hair, winding my straight brown locks round and round then fixing it in place with a head piece. I was done – time to go and see Beth.

I shut my bedroom door and slid along the corridor. My dress rustled as I came to Beth's room. I knocked gently and an imperious voice called "Kin, is that you?"

I smiled and called, "Yes!"

"Come in then," she called a little louder.

I opened the door and shut it behind me then turned to see the fine room in which my young mistress was. She lay on her grand four poster bed dressed in her nightgown. The Lady Elizabeth was not exactly beautiful, but she was striking with her straight aristocratic profile and ginger hair that waved to her waist. She was my friend and my jailer. I knew my place, I also knew better than to upset Elizabeth, who was stubborn, bossy and domineering, along with having a temper as fiery as her hair. And yet there was something sad about her. All the things she had, all there to try to make her forget that she had been pushed and prodded; that she'd been not wanted. Dusted away in a corner where she couldn't be seen. But I saw her. I saw her plain and clear.

I had dressed Beth hurriedly in a fine parchment-coloured silk gown and we now hastened along one of the many elaborate corridors the house possessed. Suddenly, Beth stopped outside the walking room. "Care to take a turn with me?" she muttered.

"But it's lesson time," I protested.

"I'll ask Blanche to tell Kat to wait," the princess proclaimed (Blanche is one of Elizabeth's favourite servants, and Kat is her much loved tutor.) As Beth explained to Blanche, I turned to stare out of one of the windows. Hatfield House was made of red brick and had extensive grounds, a kitchen garden and a beautiful garden full of flowers with fine topiary hedges framing gravel walkways. Shining fountains full of clear water rose against the sky. I felt a hand on my arm and turned to see Elizabeth. "Shall we go in?" she said. I nodded respectfully before pushing the door open. The walking room stretched away from us, there were windows along the entire length of it. The rush matting had been watered the day before and it smelled wonderfully fresh. I breathed in the clean scent like oxygen. Slowly we began to walk then Beth spoke: "As you know I am getting painted today."

"Yes, I know."

"I shall wear my most elaborate dress."

"I will get it when the time comes."

"And," Beth stuttered, "I am told that perhaps the painting may go to my Father."

I tried not to look sympathetic but I knew how much Beth wanted her father to notice her. She had been raised by wet and dry nurses and her mother had been executed when she was but two. I found it unlikely that the King would want the painting. I just smiled as we turned and walked the length of the room again, talking of other things before we went to Elizabeth's lessons.

From a very young age Beth had been extremely well educated. She was clever and knew several languages. Her tutor was called Katharine, or 'Kat' as Beth called her. I sat at the back of the room listening hard. I was supposed to be doing needlework, but I listened with all my might, reciting the French Beth was learning under my breath. I wanted a good education and this way I was almost getting the very best. The hours ticked by and Beth got more and more fidgety until finally Kat said, "Well, Elizabeth, I think we have done enough

for today, you may go and get ready for your painting.” Beth rose quickly and indicated that I should follow. I got up and hurried after her.

“Pull harder!” said Beth.

“I’m trying!” I cried.

“Well try harder,” came the reply. I set my face, looped the strings several times round my fingers and pulled. I stood back panting. Beth’s bodice was as tight as it could go. I was dressing Beth for her portrait, pulling on several petticoats and attaching her bum-roll before putting on her richly patterned under skirt and hooking on matching sleeves. Then I pulled on her beautiful rich red dress encrusted with jewels and buttoned her in tightly. Then I arranged her skirts while she hung some stunning necklaces round her throat. I could tell she was jumpy as I did her hair and attached a matching head-piece. It was an exquisite dress, so rich and fine.

“There,” I said, tweaking a wrinkle in her shirt, “You look beautiful.” I was trying to comfort Beth as we waited outside the door of the room where she was to be painted.

“Oh, Kin! It won’t go to him. I know he won’t want it. No one notices me and I try and try!” She was getting in to an angry fit, so I said the first thing I could think of.

“One day you’ll show them, Beth, and they *will* listen. Do not despair.”

She smiled.

“Good luck”, I said as she was called in. Beth opened the room door, took a deep breath, and entered.

I spent the next few hours wandering the palace gardens lustily. I went through the topiary garden full of wealthy smells. I went through the kitchen gardens full of cabbages and beans and lavender for medicine, and I was just coming back round the drive when Beth rushed down the steps, now wearing a velvet beret and her riding dress, holding falconry gloves. (I breathed a sigh of relief – I wasn’t going to have to change her again.) She was closely followed by a servant carrying two hooded hobbies, one on each hand. Stag, the house’s great deerhound, loped along silvery grey behind Beth.

“We’re going riding, Kin,” Beth dictated, and she began to walk in the direction of the stables.

“Did the painting go well?” I asked.

“Fine” was the only answer I got.

We reached the stables and Beth handed me a leather glove which I promptly put on. I was then handed Clove, a handsome male hobby, while Beth took Jasmine, the female. We then went to the mounting block and our horses were led over. Beth mounted Kate, her beautiful grey mare, while I got on Pod, Beth’s second best horse a jumpy bay stallion. I settled myself in the side saddle while Beth told the servant that we didn’t need an accompaniment as we were only ground round the grounds, and with that final word we set off.

I love riding; it is one of my favourite things to do. We rode down onto the parkland, talking of things we had always wanted to do. Finally, I couldn’t wait any longer. “Let’s let the hawks fly!” I said.

“Yes, let’s do,” came the reply.

I removed the hood from my bird's head. Keen yellow eyes took me in, and the hobby's mottled head flicked around.

"Ready?" Beth called.

"Yes," I whispered.

We both undid the leather straps that held our birds to us, then I threw my hand up in the air. Both birds rose, riding the air currents. I breathed in. It was so beautiful. Beth leaned over and using her gloved hand, handed me a piece of meat from the pouch by her waist. I held it out and as my bird began to dive, I had a wonderful, unimaginable idea. I kicked my heels into my horse's flank and like an arrow from a bow pod, short forward. I had never felt such speed. I shrieked and heard Beth's cry of surprise, then I heard the pounding of hooves and suddenly Elizabeth was next to me and instinctively my horse speeded up.

"I'm flying! I'm free!" I cried as the wind rushed past my ears, and Beth let out a boyish whoop.

Behind us our hawks flew, chasing the meat in our fingers.

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Epilogue:

Not long after this Elizabeth was summoned to London. King Henry died when she was there. Things immediately changed for Kinborough as Elizabeth was not in London a lot, and very anxious. Then Mary came to the throne. She began burning Protestants, starting with the closest people in her line of vision. This meant servants. Elizabeth saw the danger for Kin, a Protestant, and secretly helped her escape. "But what of you?" Kin asked, "You're as Protestant as I be."

"She's my sister; she won't touch me," Beth replied. Then suddenly she added "You've been a good friend, Kin, a good companion."

"I was just doing my job, Beth. I this day and age, we have little time to follow our choices. Follow yours and they will serve you well. As I, I hope, have done."

Not long after, Elizabeth was taken to the Tower. She then became Queen. She never talked of Kin, considering her to be in the past, at a stage of her life she no longer needed.