

THE AFTERLIFE JOURNALS
THE BLUE RIBBON
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Smashwords Edition

To all the Dreamers of the world.

Foreword

Take it from someone who has been alive for almost five hundred years, society and its people never really change. We have all heard the cliché “History repeats itself.” In my many years I have discovered this tired saying to be true. Technology improves, power changes hands, but yet the same mistakes are made over and over again. If one were to take a look back into history, one would see that, though the object of desire may be different, wars are often fought for the same reasons: money, power, freedom, and resources. Many events in history seem to reoccur. It is also amazing that the way we as humans love never really changes either. However, I am not writing my memoir in an attempt to change society, though I do hope that it is educational to some degree. I am simply putting into writing what I have seen for those who find it interesting and so I will not forget. In doing so, I imagine even the most uneducated readers will recognize the historical trends that humanity seems doomed to repeat. My plight cycles around the matters of the heart, and the mistakes I was doomed to repeat. Of course, before anyone reading this will take me seriously, I must first explain who I am and more importantly what I am.

I am nearly five hundred years old. My birthday is April 17 1511. Yes, this means that I spent what can now only be described as my infancy in the age of Henry VIII. I have revealed myself to few, but tend to get the same questions each time. So, no, I am not a vampire or lycanthrope. Although, I would most undoubtedly be classified as an immortal, I do not fit into the pop culture depictions of them. I do not run around chopping off other immortals’ heads on a quest to be the only one. To the best of my knowledge, I have yet to ever meet one like myself. If other immortals do exist, I would imagine I have never crossed paths with them because of our inability to stay in one place for very long. Although, I do have my suspicions about certain famous people whose lives were inexplicably cut short.

I did not experience some catastrophic event after which I arose from the dead. Yet, I have died eleven times according to public record. I believe that I can die if I suffer a fatal blow or terminal illness. I must admit that it has been some miracle that I have not fell victim to this. Other than my appearance of being somewhere around twenty-six years of age, I claim no special powers. Subsequently, I do seem to heal quickly and do not get sick very often. Other than this, my body and brain operate no differently than yours.

I have been a wife and mother many times over. I have taken on many different names, nationalities, and cultures. My status as an immortal aside, I am still a human. I still enjoy many human things like chocolate, music, drinking, eating, love and lovemaking. Though old in sprit, I pride myself in being able to evolve with the trends. I have taken sides in many political battles. I have been both a peacemaker and peace breaker. Having long life is both a blessing and a curse. I have watched my own children die and suffered much sadness. Yet I found peace in knowing “that this too shall pass,” especially for me. Once you realize that you will never age and potentially never die, you begin to take a much more objective view of the world. My core belief in God has not really changed. My views have evolved to include more possibilities. I have to believe that I still have some manner of a purpose on this earth. Considering that even the Bible mentions individuals that lived to be more than nine hundred fifty years old, my condition is not all that unheard of. Without having been there, I cannot tell you if these individuals became frozen at a certain age, but the text leads me to believe they did not. So, am I special? I would like to think so.

My name at birth was Sarah Walden. I have many fond memories of my childhood. I was an only child. I have retain memories of many people from the past; however, I miss my mother the most. I can still hear her voice offering up words of wisdom that would never fail me.

Chapter One

Coming of Age

“Sarah, you may be a young girl now, but soon it will be time for you to take a husband. When this time comes you will want to be known as graceful and obedient, not as the heathen child. Your past transgressions will haunt you.”

“Yes, Mother. I know, but must I always put on this ridiculous kirtle? It bunches up under my gown.” She frowned at me and shoved her arm forward at me with my kirtle in hand. I took it from her reluctantly and began to dress myself for the occasion.

Today was the Sabbath. This was typically a good day for me as I did not have to do any chores. However, I was always reluctant to put on the appropriate attire for mass. Still my mother was right; in this day and age appearance was everything. Today was particularly important because my cousin’s engagement was to be announced. Elizabeth was to marry a gentleman usher in the house of the Earl of Shrewsbury. His name was Edward Annesley and he was a good man.

Elizabeth’s parents had both died from the sweating sickness, so she was now my father’s ward. We were practically sisters and yet distinctly not. Still I always referred to her as my sister and continue to do so even now. Elizabeth was twenty-three and I the precocious age of eighteen. She was a far better lady than I could have ever hoped to be. Such a marriage would elevate her and our family greatly. Yet I wondered if she even wanted to marry Edward and if she had ever even been asked. Though it made no real difference, I took it upon myself to ask her. “Elizabeth, do you really want to marry Edward? He is so much older than you and you barely even know him.”

“Of course, I do. You may not fully understand this now, but his status will greatly help our family. Besides he is kind to me, and to you I might add.”

“I understand what he can do for our family. That is what I’m afraid of. Once you are married, all focus will shift to me, and with our new elevated status, it will only mean that I have to put this damned kirtle on more often.”

“SARAH! That is not the language of a cultured young lady.”

“Forgive me, Mother.” To this day I could never understand how mother seemed to be in more than one place at a time. Nonetheless, she always made sure that I acted appropriately.

If you can picture a thin, short girl with long strawberry blonde hair who typically had a smudge on her face, then you can picture me. I was considered pretty or at least I was told that by houseguests. My father referred to me as his little jewel. My mother was convinced that with a little refinement I would be the prize of our household. Not that there were many other options being that I was the only child. Though I tested my parents’ patience often, they never gave up hope in me. After some of the stunts I pulled, most parents would have shipped me off to boarding school never to be heard of again. Yet, my parents, even when boarding school was our last option, never allowed me to feel like a burden. Most families wanted men to carry on the name. My parents however seemed happy that God had blessed them with a child at all.

My father, though a very kind man, was often absent during my childhood. He was a steward for the Earl of Shrewsbury. This meant that he would often run errands for the earl. In all, my family was well positioned. I knew it was only a matter of time before I would be forced into some kind of obligatory position in the king’s court. At present I was saved from holding position, but Mother and Father were already making arrangements.

Today, however, it was most important that the family be seen together. Even Father, who always seemed to be very busy, accompanied us to the church on this day. This was a rare event in itself, as he would typically meet us there. On the way to mass that day, I can recall that my mother held my hand particularly tight. She did not want me running off and getting into mischief, as I was prone to do. As we arrived at the church, Edward and his family also arrived.

Mass was always a grand affair. Everyone was dressed in their best. I never understood as a child why it was so important to dress up. Now, I know that Mass was not just about worshipping God. The entire event was fashion show of sorts. Who could afford the newest fashions? Who was invited to sit by whom? Most importantly, who was seen giving the most at offering each week? I don’t think that much has changed over the years. Although I do think churchgoers have gotten better at hiding their competition.

Elizabeth was given a new gown for this occasion. The gown was a rich coral color with a square neckline. It had a split front that revealed the silk kirtle decorated with a floral embroidery pattern. The sleeves were fitted

to the elbow and then puffed out with black velvet and a billow of lace coming out of the cuff. Elizabeth was a moderately plump young woman. She stood approximately five-feet five-inches tall. Her hair was a chestnut brown and her eyes were also brown. She was pale skinned and by most accounts considered to be attractive. She was lucky to escape the gaze of Henry VIII during her time as a maid; this is perhaps because his sights were set firmly on Anne Boleyn.

“Lady Elizabeth, you look lovely. Truly a very fitting gown for such a joyous occasion. Lady Walden and Miss Walden, you are also looking very well this morning.” As was customary, my mother answered Edwards’s compliments for us all. “Thank you, sir. I am glad Elizabeth appears to your liking.”

“She is lovely indeed, Lady Walden. Sir Walden, would you and your family grace my family by sitting next to us during mass?”

“It would be an honor, sir,” replied my father.

The service I remember seemed to drag on, as did every service in my opinion. I knew the importance of today and did not want to do anything to ruin it for my sister, but I was very uncomfortable in my clothes. “Stop fidgeting,” Mother said in her hushed voice as she nudged me with her elbow.

“I am trying!” I replied in a not so hushed voice. Of course at that moment four or five heads turned to look at me including Edward’s mother. She looked very displeased with me. I sank down farther in the pew. As I did so, I kicked the pew in front of me. Mother shot me one of her looks that made me want to hide in shame. For the rest of the service I played a game in my own head that I was a statue and therefore was unable to move. I often got lost in my own head. In this situation it was to my benefit.

Finally the service was over and the time for the announcements had come. Father John began reading from his list until he finally arrived to ours. “Sir Walden and Sir Annesley, would you please join me in the front?” said Father John. Both men made their way to the front. My father looked quite large next to Sir Annesley. His black doublet was decorated with gold embroidery. He looked very distinguished. I briefly caught a glimpse of my mother’s face in that moment and her smile could not have been any bigger. The two fathers shook hands and began to speak. Sir Annesley commented first.

“Sir Walden and I have come to an agreement regarding my son Sir Edward Annesley.”

“And my niece, Lady Elizabeth Walden.”

Both men stretched their hands forward as to invite Edward and Elizabeth to join them in the front. Edward stood next to his father on his right, while my sister stood next to our father on his left. “I speak for the entire Walden family when I say with great excitement that my daughter Lady Elizabeth, maid to Queen Catherine, is to be married to Sir Edward Annesley, gentlemen usher in the house of the Earl of Shrewsbury.”

“The king and queen have affirmed this union and are pleased with the pairing,” Sir Annesley added.

My father took Elizabeth’s hand and placed it into Edward’s. Clamors of applause followed. Now both my sister and Edward were in between their fathers. As the two turned to face the crowd Elizabeth took a small step back and tucked herself behind my father and Edward. She did not do this out of shyness; it was improper for a woman to stand in front of a man. No one but me noticed her gesture but in that moment it annoyed me slightly. Edward began to speak now about his engagement to Elizabeth. “While it is true that my father was the first to bring Elizabeth to my attention as a potential wife, I already knew her by reputation. Elizabeth has always behaved in the most respectable manner. She is a virtuous woman. I was more than pleased with the suggestion and found myself even more delighted during my time getting to know her. She and I will be very happy together.” Elizabeth did not speak at all. She smiled at Edward and curtsied to him to accept his compliments to her. She had every right to speak at this time, but she did not because she did not want to appear outspoken or upstage her fiancé.

I was never one to really subscribe to the idea that women had to be subordinate. The women of this time, I believe, had more power over men than they were ever given credit for. I must admit that I never rebelled against this system during this era. If there was one thing I never wanted to do that was cause problems for my family. Fate and nature were cruel to me with regard to this desire.

Later that week, we attended the engagement party at the home of George Talbot, Earl of Shrewsbury. This party was also to serve as my official coming out. Coming out meant that I was now eligible for marriage. Mother was thrilled and I was absolutely disgusted. “Mother, everyone knows who I am. They have seen me before, and they all know how old I am. Why is this necessary, and why do I have to dress up?”

“The earl gave you this garment to wear tonight. To not be seen wearing it would be an insult. You knew this day was coming.”

The gown was a dark blue color with a sort of quilting to it with a high waist and square neckline; it was different from my other gowns because my white satin kirtle could be seen through the split in the front. The sleeves were fitted to the wrist but had small vertical slits all the way down. I actually liked this gown as far as style goes but would never admit that to my mother. She continued her lecture on my fast-approaching separation from childhood.

“I allowed you to be boyish long enough. It is time for you to take on responsibility. Your father and I have already begun to negotiate your arrival at court.”

“WHY! Why did you do that? Have you ever considered that I do not want to go to court? Besides, I will only embarrass you. I have no skill in the ways of being a lady.”

“You will just have to learn. Sarah, I know that you do not enjoy being told what to do. However, without position all you will be doing is taking orders.”

“Is that not exactly what would happen to me? Taking orders! How is this any different?”

“At least in at court you are granted some freedom to speak and be heard. As much as you like to engage in conversations on politics and other such topics, I would think you would jump at the chance to be present at court. How else will we find you a good match?”

I want to clarify at this point that my mother never condoned any kind of underhanded behavior or false representation of one’s self. My parents always acted with nobility and required their daughter to do so as well. I am proud to say this, as it is a rarity in these times. Most families were fighting for and pushing their own agendas. Whoever had more influence with the king and queen had the power. As history shows, the king was very susceptible to the charms of women. So many fathers would parade their young daughters in front of him at court hoping to strike his interest. The concept of virtue was second to power.

Reluctantly I put on my new frock and we all left for the party. I remember the earl’s home being much nicer than ours, as to be expected. The walls of the foyer were adorned with paintings of past and present family. The candelabras were silver in color and buffed to a mirror like shine. I actually enjoyed looking at all the embellishments around the room. My wandering about the house on this night would actually lead to the fated meeting of a very important person in my life.

“Oh, excuse me,” I said after I bumped into a particularly tall young man.

“No, no, forgive me. I saw you and assumed you had seen me.”

“So you ran into me on purpose then?” Immediately after saying this I bit my lip. Realizing that my joke may not be well received.

The man smiled at me and replied. “And I would do it again.” To my memory this was the first time I was ever flirted with. At that moment I heard my mother calling my name.

“Sarah! It’s time for your introduction.”

I took off in the direction of my mother as the man said, “Until we meet again.”

Being the opportunist she was, my mother promptly asked me if I knew who he was.

“No, Mother, I did not ask his name.”

She smiled and took my arm. “Come along, people are waiting.”

“Who is he, Mother?” She did not answer. I asked again, “Who is he?” Before she could answer, my father appeared and took my hand leading me to the head table in front of the dance floor in the Grand Hall. The music stopped and my father began to speak.

“I am the proudest father on this night. My eldest daughter is getting married and such is cause for this celebration. It is also my pleasure to introduce formally to you my daughter Lady Sarah Walden. She is to begin her duties at court soon.”

As was custom, my father then offered my first dance of the night to our host. The earl complimented my dress, which seemed almost boastful since he was the one who bought it for me. After this dance more pomp and circumstance ensued. My second dance was essentially auctioned off to the highest bidder of position. The first to step forward was James. James was the son of another one of the earl’s men. He and I had grown up together. He was like a brother to me. There had been many talks that James and I would end up getting married. Neither he nor I really wanted that. Thus this was really just a gesture, as he did not really want to

dance with me. The painter in the earl's house came forward and relieved James. A few moments went by and then Francis Annesley, Edward's brother, stepped forward. He seemed certain that he outranked everyone in the room and therefore would win the dance. Again we waited a few moments, and just as the earl was going to announce Francis as the winner, the flirtatious man from the hallway stepped forward

"I believe I will claim this young lady's dance!"

The people in the room all seemed to gasp together then fall silent. The earl himself looked a bit astonished. "Sir William Sedlow, secretary of the Duke of Suffolk, has won his prize and shall dance with the Lady Walden." Francis looked astonished and almost angry but he passed me on to Lord Sedlow. Again I caught a glimpse of my mother's face and she was smiling. Sir Sedlow had direct contact with the duke and held his confidence. The Duke of Suffolk, as we all know, was Henry VIII's best friend. True nobility rarely came this far north in England. The fact that Sir Sedlow offered to dance with me was possibly the greatest honor my family had ever received.

I know my face turned flush as we began to dance. William had dark hazel eyes with a splash of green in them, and tan skin. He was dressed extremely well. His doublet was also dark blue with silver embroidery. He wore a light leather jerkin. The buttons looked like silver coins and had the duke's crest imprinted on them.

Dancing was one thing I was good at. I had always had a good feel for rhythm. As we moved across the floor, other couples joined in. Sir Sedlow danced very well also. I expected that he would, being a regular at court. Still he had a more simple air about him. I had met other lords and ladies before. They all seemed so pompous and full of themselves. Sir Sedlow, however, noticed what was going on around him rather than being engrossed in his own majesty.

I liked him. There was an instant connection between us. Though he was six years my senior, we seemed to have similar personalities. We both believed that people took themselves too seriously. I believe that the reason, as I later heard from rumor that William had yet to take a wife was because no one interested him. He, as with any man, wanted a beautiful wife, but he also wanted one that could entertain his flair for the unusual. I am getting ahead of myself. I tend to do this when I speak of William. I may have recognized a kindred spirit in William, but I played very coy with him right from the start.

"Are you impressed with me, Lady Walden?" William said as we danced.

"Why would I be?" I responded.

"Well most women in this room would die to have an audience with me."

"I am not most women."

"No, you are not."

"And what is that supposed to mean?"

"I meant no offense. I only meant that you are different. Unique, if you will."

"I will take that as a compliment then. I want nothing more than to be different from these women. They follow blindly the rules set down by men." My voice began to get louder, but William continued to smile at me. The other couples, however, began to stare. "Forgive me, sir. My passion gets the best of me at times."

"Apology not needed. I have no use for a woman without passion." Most women would have taken offense at his forwardness. I just, however, found myself smiling and even flirting back.

Our dance was over and it was time to be seated for the meal. The earl sat at the head of the table with his wife on his left and my father on the right. To be seated here was an honor to my father on this night. One's position at the dinner table was extremely important. It was a symbol of status and a way to separate feuding families. For example, this event was attended by some who had begun to express their displeasure with the Church and its decadence. These individuals could not be seated next to the devout Catholics.

The meal was extravagant. Even in this time and age we were no strangers to excess. There was a roasted pig and plenty of bread. We drank wine and conversed. Then as with now, alcohol and dinner conversation could become a very interesting situation. Directly or indirectly, comments were made about the king's infatuation with Anne Boleyn. This eventually led into conversations about marriage, specifically marriage contracts and annulments.

What constituted a real marriage contract and on what grounds could a marriage be annulled were very sensitive topics during this time. Aside from the religious ramifications, there were also personal loyalties at stake. I myself harbored no real loyalty to anyone, but my opinion favored Queen Catherine.

"I believe that the only circumstance an annulment should be granted is in the event of dishonesty and treachery," Edward said boldly.

"Hear, hear!" replied my father.

"Yes, but what constitutes dishonesty? If a woman promises you a son and she fails to do so, has she not been dishonest?" commented Thomas.

I chuckled and shook my head.

"It appears that the young Lady Walden has an opinion in this matter," said William.

I know he did this to test me. I was very annoyed with him for doing this. "My opinion is of no consequence, sir." I replied.

"Well, I for one would like to hear a woman's point of view on this matter," he poked back. My mother and father had a distinct look of fear on their faces as I began to speak.

"What exactly would you like to know, Sir William? Would you like my opinion on conceiving a son or on the matter of what constitutes dishonesty?"

"Very interesting, Lady Walden. Please regale us with both."

"As you wish."

"If a woman truly had the ability to control the outcome of her pregnancy, then I fear this world would run short of mothers to bear children at all. Men being obsessed with having an heir would require a son every birthing. Therefore I do not believe that women play any part in the gender of their offspring and this is a concern best left to God. Yet, many women do not share my belief and feel that they can influence their pregnancy. Thus, they make promises to produce a male child to their husbands. Herein lays my opinion on dishonesty. If one believes what they say to be true and has no intent to lie or hide the truth, then can you really call them dishonest? Dishonesty implies knowledge of the truth and then concealing it. Since, said women truly believe they have the power to affect the gender of their child, they are not in fact lying or giving false information but have sadly been misguided by those who came before."

This was a perfect example of how I could get myself into trouble by talking too much. My mother was staring at me in complete disbelief that I would even have dared to say what I did. Some might have claimed that I was wise beyond my age and gender; others would simply say that I had not been taught my place. Both were true. I did seem to have a better understanding of the world than most women of that time. I also was allowed to be much more outspoken by my parents. I think they hoped that if I got it all out at home that I would not continue the trend in public. At that time, I did not understand that certain opinions were best kept to oneself.

Still, William seemed very intrigued. He was looking at me with a smile and intent in his eye that I had never seen before, or least it had never been directed at me. He seemed to recognize that the entire party was flabbergasted by my rant. He responded by standing up from the table and clapping. No one was sure what he was doing, but since he was the most prestigious guest of the evening, they all followed suit except for Francis. He stayed seated. Once the applause had stopped, Francis began to speak.

"I think the lady raises a good point, but she is still a bit naive. The topic is not as basic as she seems to believe. Many women use the promise of a male child to lure their husbands. Some even use it for financial negotiations. It is often customary to pay a reward to a mother for having a son. When money is involved, morality is often abandoned. If it is as you say, then the poor women of the world are only one of two things, completely powerless or completely conniving. Either way it seems that such discussions are better left for the men to decide and it is of no use asking the opinion of a woman."

William recognized that Francis had basically just told me that I had no right to have even spoken on such matters and should never have been provoked to do so by a man.

"Lady Walden, I applaud your honesty and your understanding of dishonesty. I have to agree that one's intent is paramount when determining dishonesty. It appears that young Lord Talbot fears the opinion of a woman and so therefore he has starved himself of the bounty it might hold." He took his seat again but continued to speak. "However, on occasion, Lord Talbot is right. Even when someone is knowingly dishonest, the intent is not to harm but rather to please or protect. I am sure you have an opinion on this as well."

I nodded my head in agreement to his statement. I had no intention of speaking anymore tonight. I had already abused that privilege enough for my parents to handle. "Alas, I think I have directed the conversation

enough for one night,” William continued. “I would be interested in hearing your thoughts on this.” He looked directly at me and then at my father as if to confirm a future commitment of my time.

For the rest of the meal, I remained mostly silent. I retired to my own thoughts, so that I did not really hear what was being said at the table. Although I did notice William looking at me from time to time. He seemed to watch my every move at the table. It made me nervous to even finish my meal.

After the meal it was customary to take a walk in the gardens around the home. I noticed that my father, with my mother, approached William. It was very clear what was about to happen.

“Sir Sedlow, I apologize for my daughter. She can speak out of turn at times.”

“Sir Walden, Lady Walden, forgive my forwardness, but I find your daughter to be immensely intriguing. Would you permit me to walk with her?”

“It would be an honor,” Mother blurted out with excitement.

“Yes, it would be an honor,” Father confirmed. “Honestly dear, you wonder where she gets it from.”

I began walking with my sister and Edward. The other three were close behind us. “Sarah, you caused quite a stir tonight,” said Edward.

“Yes, it was,” Elizabeth said in agreement.

“I am sorry, Elizabeth. I had no intention of taking the spotlight on your special night. I should have resisted, but I felt so provoked by Sir Sedlow.”

“You did seem to catch his eye, Sarah,” Edward said in a joking tone. Edward glanced back over his shoulder quickly. “It would appear that you are still in his sights.” Edward took my sister’s arm and led her to walk farther in front of me.

Moments later my father and William came up to me. “William has requested to walk with you, Sarah,” said my father.

“As you wish, Father,” I replied.

Internally my heart was racing and I was so excited I could barely control my breathing. I am not sure why I was so excited. I think it might have been the thought of walking with a man who had already provoked me to behave foolishly. I did not want to do so again. Externally I maintained a very cold demeanor toward him. I came to realize later that this only encouraged him more to try and break me down. In truth I liked his attention and wanted it to continue.

We walked silent for a while. Not because either one of us was shy, but because we knew that my mother and father were still listening eagerly. Mother, being very intuitive, realized that they were walking too close and being too quiet. She stopped walking and pointed at the moon. “John, would you look at that moon.”

“What about it, dear?” Father replied.

“It is beautiful,” Mother said thinking as quickly as she could.

“You think everything is beautiful,” gaffed my father.

“No, I don’t. Only certain things. Like our daughters, flowers, the moon, new dresses....” she went on and on to where eventually their voices trailed off, but they were still within eyesight.

“I hope I did not make you uncomfortable at dinner, Lady Walden.”

“You did not embarrass me, Sir Sedlow. I am afraid I did that to myself. I should know better than to speak my mind like that in public or ever really.”

“Nonsense. I enjoy a woman who knows what is going on in the world around her and is able to articulate a true opinion about it; it is even better when she is beautiful. And please call me William.”

I smiled faintly, and he noticed. “You may call me Sarah, if you like.”

“No, I think I will continue to call you Lady Walden.”

“Why is that Sir Sed—I mean, William?”

“For two reasons, Lady Walden. First, I would never presume to be informal with such a lady as you so soon after meeting. Second, because I like the way you cringe every time you hear it; as if coming into society actually hurts you somehow.”

“I see. Well, you are right on one count. Coming into society is absolutely painful.” He laughed at me, but I think he knew exactly what I meant.

“I would like to finish our discussion from dinner, if you are truly interested in my opinion.”

“Ahhh, yes. What are your thoughts on lying to protect someone?”

“I believe that lying is wrong no matter what. In the end, the lie only makes the situation worse for the recipient. They end up acting in accordance with false information. This can be very embarrassing when one isn’t aware of the truth.”

“I will have to disagree with you slightly on this topic, Lady Walden. Some information is best kept secret because it is not yours to tell. Therefore, you lie in order to keep that secret. The truth may come out in time, but hopefully it is not due to your own fault.”

I did not know it then, but this topic would haunt my life forever given my supernatural status. Then, just as it is now, I have yet to find the perfect solution.

We had reached the part of the evening where we would all sit in the grand hall and listen to poetry and music. This was the only event that I typically enjoyed at parties like this. Tonight would be the first time, however, that I was allowed to stay up and listen and not have to hide outside the door straining to hear. I sat next to my mother on a long cushioned bench. I loved the music and singing. The viol and the harp are my favorite. I would close my eyes and just listen. I could always escape with music. Even now at my age music is something that can touch the very soul of me.

The musicians often played King Henry VIII’s favorite music. I must admit he had impeccable tastes. They began to play Farewell my Joy by Robert Cooper. I loved this song. I closed my eyes and began to drift away with the music. As I swayed slightly to the harp, I felt someone watching me. I scanned the room and found William’s eyes fixed directly on me. He did not even attempt to hide his gaze. I smiled and then went back into my trance. Not even the alluring stare of the dashing Sir Sedlow could steal me away from the music.

The night had finally come to an end. Elizabeth, Mother, and I returned home. Father stayed behind to finish last-minute business. On the journey home, Mother was filled with questions. “What did you talk about, Sarah? Please tell me you acted like a lady. Did he request to see you again?”

“We finished our conversation from dinner.” Mother shook her head with disappointment. “No, he did not ask to see me again.”

“Well, no wonder. You probably made him think that you are too outspoken to be a potential wife.”

“Is that all you think about, Mother?” I said as I folded my arm around my body in annoyance.

“Oh, Aunt, I do not know about that. Did you see him staring at her during the music? He will ask to see her again, I am certain.” Elizabeth often came to my defense, and I did for her as well.

“Well, I don’t care if he asks to see me again.” Mother and Elizabeth looked at each other and rolled their eyes. They both knew I was just being stubborn. I hoped that he would ask to see me again and was a little concerned that he had not already done so.

The next morning a courier came to the door with a letter for me. My father who had not yet left for the day accepted the letter and called me down to the sitting room to receive it. I could not see who it was from, but I hoped it was from William. As I took it from my father’s hand, I could see that it did not bare the seal of Suffolk on it but rather the seal of Shrewsbury.

Dearest Lady Walden,

I would like to invite you to attend court with me in a fortnight. You are now a lady and should be presented as such in front of the king and queen. I have sent a small purse with my letter, so that you may acquire an appropriate dress for the event. Please read this request to your father and send response posthaste.

Sincerely,

Lord Francis Annesley

I had no desire to go anywhere with Francis Annesley. He was exactly the kind of man that would have me sitting silent knitting his shirts. I had no problems knitting, but it was of my own free will. Still somehow I know that I had no choice but to oblige him. My father was in his father’s service; to refuse would be a direct insult. I would not do that to my father, so I wrote back that I would attend with Francis as my escort but would require my father come along to attend to my virtue. Father delivered my letter and the plans were made.

Chapter Two

A Night at Court

Two weeks went by so fast. The day to leave for court was here. Mother helped me pack my things into a chest. She could not help but give me some last effort advice. “Sarah, you must be on your best behavior. Your

first appearance in court must be one of grace and virtue. Remember not to drink too much wine and do not be caught alone with any man no matter who he is.”

“I would never do that, Mother. I plan to be of no interest to any man on this voyage.”

“That is not what I said, Sarah. You must be charming but also respectful. Do not sit in a corner and sulk, but do not act like a girl void of proper upbringing.”

“Yes, Mother, be perfect. I know.” I turned to walk out of my room.

“One more thing, Sarah. Have fun, and if you see Lord Sedlow, be sure to give him the invitation to your birthday party that I packed in your luggage.”

I looked back to see my mother grinning. I had not even thought about the possibility of seeing William on this trip. I was too occupied with the dread of spending time with Lord Francis. I thought to myself, “Why had he invited me to go with him at all? Was it merely a gesture due to our families’ closeness or for some other reason? I certainly hope he has no hope of wooing me. Of that I have no interest.”

A trip to London was not a day venture. I would be staying in the earl’s home in London with my father and Francis for four nights. The journey alone would take a day or so. We left at first light. The carriage ride was bumpy and long. My father and Lord Francis rode alongside on horseback. Every time we stopped to water the horses or other reasons, Francis insisted upon asking me if I was enjoying the journey. To which I would reply, “Yes, the ride is very pleasant.” Of course that was a lie. The road was bumpy and the carriage would creek and sway. Truthfully, it was nauseating.

As we arrived in London I peeked my head out the window. I had been to London before but only as a little girl. This trip was different. I was a woman now and therefore would not have to stay at my mother’s side the whole time. Still I missed that she was not here with me. I often needed my mother to remind me how to behave. She set a great example for me. I was not sure I could pull off my first appearance at court without her.

The earl’s home in London was just as nice as his home in Shrewsbury. The entrance was simpler but the décor was just as grand. It made me wonder how people came by such beautiful things. I realized they would buy them or commission an artist to create for them, but still I wondered how it all came to be collected by one family. Now in my old age I realize that people collect many things in a lifetime. Some are sentimental and some are simply the knickknacks of the time and era. If you look around the room you are in now I am sure you can point out a representation of both.

Nostalgia is inspired by many different things. My memory of this trip conjures much nostalgia. I was shown to my chambers by Lord Francis himself. My father’s chambers adjoined mine. I took some time to unpack my things and freshen up before dinner. There was a tray of scented oils on the vanity with a note that said “A gift for Lady Sarah Walden.” The first bottle I opened smelled like lavender. I am not a fan of lavender. The next bottle smelled like roses. This scent I could stand but before I made my choice I smelled the last bottle. This bottle smelled like cinnamon and vanilla. It was my favorite. I placed a dab on my neck, chest and both wrists. The aroma was strong at first, but by the time I walked down the stairs, I could hardly notice it.

Dinner was set out on the table. It was a modest meal. We had some pork and potatoes. There was also a soup and bread. I spoke very little at dinner. My father and Lord Francis talked about business and political matters. I enjoyed listening to them but dare not speak my mind. I was a guest in this house. I may be an independent thinker, but I am not rude or ungrateful. Lord Francis would on occasion ask me if I was having a good time or if I enjoyed the meal. I smiled at him and graciously said yes each time. When the meal was over, Lord Francis asked my father if he could take me on a tour of the rest of the house. My father agreed, of course.

Lord Francis rose from the table and walked over to me. Reaching out for my hand, he said, “Shall we?” I placed my hand in his and he helped me rise from the chair. As we walked through the halls, Francis pointed out his many great ancestors whose faces decorated the walls. He boasted about his families’ great wealth and accomplishments. I enjoyed the walk and even the history lesson, but I grew bored of the condescending tone in which Francis spoke. It was as if he was selling me something but also telling me how stupid it would be to not want it in the first place. I may have been too hard on Francis, I admit. Looking back now perhaps I should have been flattered that he was trying to impress me. The problem was that I already knew he was wealthy. What I was not sure of is if he had a good heart.

We stopped on a terrace that overlooked the gardens. The wind blew softly and the scent I was wearing was caught in the breeze. “You chose the vanilla oil. I like that scent but my favorite is the lavender.”

I nearly laughed because the lavender was my least favorite. "If I had known I would have worn the lavender," I replied. I was lying, but once again I was trying to be gracious. My comment seemed to please him and that was all that mattered.

The tour came to an end at my chamber door. Francis kissed the top of my hand and wished me goodnight. He started down the hall to his chambers when he stop and turned around to face me again. "I almost forgot. Tomorrow a clothier will be coming to the house with a selection of gowns for you to choose from. I assume you have the purse I gave you?" I nodded at him. "Good. Well then, good night."

"Goodnight, sir."

The morning came quickly. I was awaked by a opening the curtains in my room. She quietly laid out a housecoat for me to wear and then softly spoke to me. "Lord Annesley and your father have gone out for the day. They instructed me to assist you with anything you might need. Your schedule for the day is very busy, so I took the liberty of having break fast brought up for you." She pointed to a small table with a tray of fruit, cheese, and bread.

"Thank you. I am sorry I do not know your name."

"My name is Bess, ma'am."

"Thank you, Bess. Can you tell me what my busy schedule is?"

"Yes, ma'am. After you eat, you must dress for the clothier. Once you have selected your dress, lunch will be served. Then your presence is requested at the home of Lady Stanton for afternoon tea. After which Lord Francis will collect you and bring you home."

"What can you tell me about Lady Stanton, Bess?"

"She is, from what I hear, the nobility matchmaker. The only reason Lord Francis would have you go there is to get her opinion on you."

"Her opinion on me?"

"Yes, ma'am, for marriage and such."

"I see. So I should be on my best behavior." Bess nodded and left the room.

Not long after I finished my meal did the clothier arrive. He had two trunks full of beautiful gowns for me to choose from. He began to pull them one by one and lay them across furniture in the parlor. There were red, blue, green, and even gold gowns to choose from. I complimented him on his work as I began to touch and scan each one. My eye was caught by a light blue and ivory gown. It had a circular pattern in blue fabric and the ivory fabric was a soft satin. It was the most exquisite gown I have ever seen. "Awe, yes, I suspected that this might be the one. You have a good eye." I smiled at the clothier as he lifted the dress and held it in front of me. "Try it on and I will adjust the fit for you." The clothier stepped out and Bess helped me put on the gown. It was a little too big for me. The clothier returned and began to fit the dress to my body. He stitched the bodice so that it fit tight. He said that the sleeves and the length of the gown would have to be shortened. He pinned each layer to the correct length and the stepped out again for me to change.

The clothier reentered the room and began to pack up his things. He informed me that my gown would be delivered here tomorrow. Then he laid another dress out on the chaise lounge. It was a bronze color with pea green accents. The dress was not as extravagant as the others, but it was still beautiful. "I understand you are going to see Lady Stanton today. Might I suggest you wear this to tea?"

"Thank you, sir, but I am afraid I do not have enough for both dresses."

"My lady, this dress is already paid for and made to your measurements."

"By whom?"

"I am afraid he wishes to remain anonymous." I had no idea who might have bought the dress for me. My father could not afford it and Francis would never have wished to remain anonymous. It was a mystery, but I was determined to find out.

I was torn on how I should behave in front of Lady Stanton. While I had no desire to marry Francis, I did not want bad rumors to spread about me that could ruin my chances with someone I did want to marry. I also did not want to displease my mother and father. I decided to do my best to make a good impression. If the subject of Lord Francis came up, I would be polite but still express my disinterest in marriage.

Lady Stanton was an older woman. She wore a ridiculously large feather in her hair. When she spoke it sounded like she had a cold or something. Still for all the comedy that her appearance provided she was the

perfect host and lady. The afternoon seemed to move like clockwork. When I arrived, I was greeted by two butlers on each side of the carriage. Each wore a pea green coat. They assisted me to the ground and then walked with me in to the grand foyer. In the foyer one butler took my gloves and the other took my overcoat. Finally a third butler wearing the same pea green coat ushered me into the sunroom where Lady Stanton was waiting. I did my best curtsy and thanked her for inviting me to tea. Once seated the tea was brought in on silver platters.

“So Lady Walden, I understand you will be attending court tomorrow evening.”

“Yes, ma’am, I am looking forward to it.”

“I remember when I first went to court. It was far more refined that it is now. Only true nobility was invited. What do you think of King Henry and his inviting of commoners to court?”

I was shocked by her question. I was not a commoner in my opinion but to her that is exactly what I was. I took a moment to think. “The king has the right to invite whomever he pleases I suppose.” She did not seem pleased with my answer, so I added. “Still I hope he does not take it too far. Some things are sacred.” She smiled and took a sip of tea. I could tell that my every move was being recorded. Finally she arrived at the topic of suitable marriage.

“Now that you are of age, I am sure your parents are searching for an advantageous marriage for you. Your cousin married very well.” I nodded as I took a sip of tea and prepared myself for the next question. “Have you given any thought to who you might wish to marry?” In truth I had not thought about whom I wanted to marry, only whom I did not want to marry; but that would not be an appropriate answer. “I am sure my parents will guide me well in that matter.”

“Come now, girl, you must have some opinion on the matter. You can tell me. I am just an old woman trying to live through the youth around me.” I wanted to trust her, but something told me not to. “What about your host Lord Francis Annesley? He would be a very advantageous match for you.”

“I have known Lord Francis for many years. He is like a brother to me.”

“Surly you recognize he has taken an interest in you?”

“I would never assume that the kindness he has shown me to be anything more than that. He is a man of great nobility. He could marry any woman he chose.” I hoped my answer would prompt her to tell Lord Francis that I saw his kindness as pity on me, and that he was too good for me.

“You are very humble my dear, and clever. You will need both, tomorrow night at court. You will be a new young face in a crowd of people judging your every move. I hope you keep your wits about you as well as you have with me. Even without your knowledge you have already caused a stir amongst some very highly regarded members of his Royal Highness’s court.” I was not sure what she meant. She must have been talking about Francis, but her phrasing seemed to suggest more.

A butler arrived and announced that Lord Francis was here to collect me. I rose from my chair and thanked Lady Stanton for a lovely afternoon. Francis entered the sunroom and greeted us both. “Are you ready to go, Lady Walden?”

“Yes, Sir Francis. Let me just gather me gloves and coat.” The butler walked with me to the foyer where he handed me my belongings. I waited there for Francis. Sadly I was too far away to hear what they talked about.

Once in the carriage Francis commented on my dress. “Lady Walden, you must of the gift of foresight. The dress you chose to wear has Lady Stanton’s favorite color in it. She is more than fond of pea green. I have never seen that gown before. It is quite lovely.”

I was now certain that he had not purchased the dress for me. We chatted about basic things on the way back to his manor. As we pulled in through the gate, Francis smiled at me. “I have a little surprise for you, Lady Walden.” He pointed out the carriage window. I looked to see what he was pointing at. There standing on the front stoop was my mother. I smiled and thanked Francis. Once the carriage stopped I sprang from it like a child. I hugged my mother tight. “I did not think it right for your mother to miss seeing you off to your first night at court,” said Francis. As we walked into the house, my mother commented on my dress. “Lord Francis spoiled you, my dear. That dress is beautiful.”

“He had been most kind to me.” I looked at Francis to see if he heard us. He must have, because he had a very confused look on his face.

The rest of the evening was quiet and pleasant. After dinner my mother came to my room to tuck me in like she always did. "How was tea with Lady Stanton?" I could have guessed this would be the first question she would ask. "It was nice, Mother. She was very kind to me."

"I am sure she was pleased with the dress you wore. It was beautiful. Lord Francis must have wanted you to make a good impression."

"That's just it, Mother; the dress was not from Lord Francis. The clothier already had it made for me at the request of an anonymous benefactor."

"Really, and you don't know who it was?"

"I have no idea. I am not well known at court, so who else might know that I am in London and would be in need of a proper dress to see Lady Stanton?"

"I am not sure, my dear, but we must tread lightly. We would not want to anger Lord Francis. It is rude to accept gifts from other men while under the roof of one. If it happens again, you must turn it away. I will talk to your father about this. Perhaps we can say that your father saved some money to buy you the dress without telling me and that is why I assumed it was from Lord Francis." I agreed with my mother on this matter, but it was not going to stop me trying to find out who my benefactor was.

At breakfast the next day, the scenario played out just as my mother said. My father asked me if I liked my new dress right on cue. He then apologized for keeping it a secret from my mother and our host. Francis seemed appeased by our story, and the day went on without issue.

Most of my time was spent preparing for the evening to come. I was bathed and covered in scented oils. My mother and Bess helped me arrange my long hair with pins. Once the gown arrived, my mother seemed more excited than I was. The clothier stayed to make sure the dress fit just right. When I was finally ready to go, my mother began to cry. I had never been in such fine clothing. "I used the trimmings from the gown to make you this. I hope you like it." The clothier handed me a small purse made of the same fabric as the dress.

Suddenly my mother ran back up to my room. Just as quickly as she had left she returned with the invitation to my birthday for Lord Sedlow. "You cannot forget this," she said as she placed it inside my purse. She kissed me on the forehead and then took my arm to walk me in to the parlor where Lord Francis waited for me. As we entered, both Father and Lord Francis stood up. "The dress suits you well, Lady Sarah," Francis said. It was not exactly a compliment, but I knew it was the best he could do. My mother took her place beside my father. Francis took my hand and led me to the carriage outside.

As we made the trip to Hampton Court, Francis offered up some last-minute advice. "Sarah, you must present yourself as a proper lady tonight. This being your first appearance, it is important that you make a good impression. Not to mention your behavior will reflect directly on your family and me."

"Lord Francis, I will not make a fool of anyone tonight. My plan is primarily to observe."

"Do you remember the proper etiquette to use when you are introduced to the king and queen?"

"I do."

The carriage stopped in the large courtyard. The palace was beautiful. The grounds were immaculate. I was in awe of all the flowers and greenery. There were shrubs carved into shapes I had never thought possible. This was an image that would stay with me for the rest of my life. Lord Francis exited the carriage and then lowered the stairs for me. He instructed me to leave my topcoat in the carriage for the evening. I untied the tie from around my neck and removed the hood from my hair and let the cape fall to the seat of the carriage. Then reaching for Francis' hand, I took my first steps onto royal soil. The sun was low in the sky but had not yet completely set for the night. Lit torches lined the walls of the palace. Guards and butlers stood waiting for each and every guest to arrive.

With my arm in his, Francis led me inside the entrance. It is hard to describe after so many years exactly what I saw as we passed through the corridors leading to the grand hall. I remember large paintings and tapestries. I also recall large flowerpots sitting on ornate furniture. The furniture I recall was very fine. The handles were made of fine metals. The carvings in each drawer were something to look at, though it seemed we had no time to stop and admire. Much of it is a blur because of the adrenaline running through my veins. I was very nervous but also extremely excited. I had heard so many rumors about being at court. I was curious to see if any of them were true. I was most interested to see if the rumor I heard about women being able to engage

freely in conversation was true. While I was certain that some subjects would always be taboo, I wanted to hear from myself the topics women were allowed to discuss here.

As we entered the grand hall, the party seemed well under way. "Are we late, Lord Francis?"

"No, my lady, this is just common practice before dinner is served. The guests all mingle until the king and queen join us. I am sure the king is finishing some last-minute business." I nodded my head to show that I understood. Then I took a deep breath as we crossed the threshold in to the grand hall. A few heads turned to look at the new face in the room. Some smiled at me; others didn't even take notice at all. I scanned the room for any familiar faces but saw none. That is not to say that I did not recognize the guests in the room. In fact I knew many of them from other parties that I had spied on from behind closed doors. However, I was not on a conversational basis with any of them. The room was full, but it had a flow to it. It was easy to make out who was with whom. Little clusters formed all around the room of people talking and laughing and drinking wine. It was not so different from the other parties I mention before except for one major difference. At the front of the room were two very large thrones. Both were marked with the royal crest. I tugged at Francis' arm to take me closer to the thrones so I could take a better look. He smiled at me and led me in that direction. "I remember my first time seeing the royal thrones. They are magnificent, are they not?"

"They most certainly are. Some of the carvings are very large and stick out rather far. They do not look very comfortable."

"Took the words right out of my mouth." Suddenly a large tap hit the floor and King Henry was announced. He sat right in front of me in his uncomfortable throne. Francis and I quickly took a step back and bowed to him. He spoke to me directly. "I have told my throne maker that this chair, though grand and beautiful, is dreadful to sit in. If a young girl such as you can see that without even sitting in it, then I think it is time for a new one. Alas, I must suffer through tonight. Lord Francis, who is your companion?"

"Your Majesty, this is Lady Walden." I curtsied again as he said my name. "It is an honor to meet you, Your Majesty."

"The pleasure is all mine," said the king as he took my hand in his and kissed the top of it. "I heard rumors that you would be here tonight. I am glad to see that they were true. Still, they did not do you justice." The king smiled at me and I smile back in return. I was very confused about his comment, but it would not have been appropriate of me to question the king.

Lord and I took our seats for dinner. We were positioned rather far away from the king. This was the order of things. Those who held more favor with the royal family tended to be seated closer to them at dinner. I noticed that the queen's throne remained empty for the entirety of the night. However, to the left of the king sat Lady Boleyn. They laughed and smiled at each other most of the night. It seemed rather common to the rest of the room, but to me it was scandalous. My sense of right and wrong was very ridged back then.

The meal was delicious. We had roasted duck with potatoes and bread. The wine was far better than any I had tasted. I remembered my mother's warning to not drink in excess. So I took small sips. After dinner small desert trays were placed around the edge of the room. I managed to eat an apple something. I am not sure what exactly it was. All the food was wonderful. The music that played was enchanting. I was enjoying myself very much. Lord Francis was being a kind and gracious escort. He answered my questions and even included me in some of the conversation as we ate. However once the meal was over and the dancing and real party began, Lord Francis was hard to come by. Some man whose name I did not know came over to Lord Francis and asked him to come and chat with him alone. My understanding was that many private conversations took place at court.

I stood alone swaying to the music and watching people as they moved around the room. No one came to speak to me. I was a nobody, so why would they. Still I was enjoying the evening. Then a voice spoke to me from behind. I recognized the voice and my heart began to race. I was too afraid to turn around and I could not make out what was said. He spoke again. "Lady Walden, may I have the next dance?" This time I was certain it was William and I heard what he had said. I turned to see his face smiling at me with an outreached hand. I took his hand and he led me out onto the dance floor. Dancing in this time was far different than it is now. Though you had a partner you barley touched each other. You would twirl around each other and step to one side often with only a hand touching your partner. Though physical contact was minimal, eye contact was in abundance. I stared into William's eyes and he back into mine. I could feel my heart pounding. He looked so dashing in his

black jerkin. As the music played, it is safe to say that I got lost in the moment. I was out of breath by the end of the song for no other reason than I felt completely exhilarated by the chance to dance with William again.

We stepped off the floor and William handed me a glass of wine. I had yet to even say a word to him. As I caught my breath, he spoke again to me. "My aunt said she enjoyed having you for tea." I nearly choked on the wine. I looked at him in shock. "Lady Stanton is your aunt?"

"Yes, by marriage of course. She was truly enchanted by you. She told me that you reminded her of her at that age."

I began to put the pieces together. "So the dress I wore was from you then?" He smiled but he did not confirm.

"It appears your escort is looking for you." William pointed across the room to Francis who was making his way over to us.

Just then I remembered the invitation in my purse. I quickly reached into my bag and handed the envelope to William. "I am sure you are very busy, but it would be an honor to me and my family if you could come."

He took the parchment from me and slid it inside a layer of his jerkin. "The honor is mine."

"What honor, Sir Sedlow?" said Francis as he approached. "The honor of holding Lady Walden's glass while you take her to dance." William was clever and very astute. He knew that Francis would be offended if he discovered that I personally delivered an invitation to my birthday to William. Both men did a customary bow to each other and then Francis took my hand and led me once again on to the dance floor.

After the dance, Francis and I went over to William again. William handed me my glass. Just as he did so, Francis side-thanked him for me and then insisted that he must introduce me to some of his friends. I found it humorous that now that William had found me Francis decided he was going to introduce me to people. I curtsied to William and went all the way to the other side of the room with Francis. Though I did not care to be introduced to anyone, it would have been rude of me not to comply with the request of my escort. I met the Duke of Suffolk and even Thomas Boleyn. Though they were just men to me then, history would have great roles for them.

I did not get a chance to speak to William again. Francis made sure I was never left alone the rest of the night. I saw him once or twice as we moved around the room. I would catch him smiling at me or vice versa. I cannot say I was disappointed by the evening as a whole. It was a lovely time and I think I did well with my manners. Lord Francis called for our carriage to be brought around to take us home. I was glad it was time to go. I beginning to get sleepy and I think all the wine was starting to get to me.

Francis helped me into the carriage and as I sat down on the seat I heard the sound of crackling paper. I lifted myself and pulled my topcoat out from under me. Place inside the hood was a note. I did not recognize the seal. Francis stepped into the carriage and I quickly covered the parchment. Francis instructed the driver to take us home. "Did you enjoy yourself, Sarah?"

"I did very much, sir, but I am glad to be going home. I am very tired."

"I would imagine so. You are not accustomed to staying out this late I imagine. Well, I am glad you had a good time. Perhaps you will accompany me again some time?"

"If you wish," I replied.

I nearly fell asleep in the carriage on the way home. When we finally arrived, my father was waiting on us and he walked me to my room. He kissed me on the forehead and closed the door behind me. I could hear his footsteps move down the hall and then I heard his voice and Francis' voice begin to talk about something. I did not have the strength or the concern to listen in on what they said. I tossed my topcoat over a chair. As I did, the note fell out onto the floor. I had almost forgotten about it. I picked the note up and inspected the seal once again. I still could not place it. I opened the note to see that the correspondence was very short.

Dearest Lady Walden,

Thank you for the dance. I hope to see you again very soon.

Sincerely, Lord William Sedlow

That was all it said, but that was all it needed to say. My heart was overjoyed. My mind went spinning. How did he manage to get this in my topcoat? How did he know that Francis would not find it first? I had so many thoughts in my head, but none of them could keep me from falling fast asleep.

Chapter Three

When a Door is Closed

My birthday was right around the corner. I would soon be nineteen, which meant that I could take my place in the royal court. Although I was not excited about taking this position, I did relish the fact that I would potentially get to see William more. I had not seen him since the party, but my father did mention that he had inquired about me once. Mother was busy now planning both my birthday party and Elizabeth's wedding. My party was to be a small event. It was also going to be masquerade themed. This meant that everyone would wear decorated masks to conceal their identity. However, it was always easy to tell who everyone was because of their clothing and jewelry. This suited me because, as you might have guessed, I did not like large public events. So in theory I could hide behind a mask.

During this time I found myself trying my best to stay out of the way. People were in and out of the house every day. My mother loved all the hustle and bustle. "I have so much to do today. I think I am going to need both you and your cousin's help," Mother said as she walked into my room. "Can you take a look at your party guest list and tell me if anyone is missing?"

I took the list and began to scan the names. I was really only looking for one name: Sir William Sedlow. His name was not there. "What's the matter, Sarah? Is someone missing?"

"No, Mother, it looks fine."

"Great! Thank you." As she walked out of the room she said, "Sir Sedlow sends his regards. He wanted to come, but the duke has him elsewhere." I do not know why I even tried to hide my feelings from my mother. She always knew what I was going on inside my head anyway.

My only concern for my party was the music. I wanted to have the best music any one had ever heard. I compiled a list of composers that I wanted to be played. Of course Robert Cooper made that list and even a few of King Henry VIII's songs were to be played. Mother approved the list. Music was one thing that I could enjoy and still be considered a lady. Needless to say music would always be an outlet for me.

Today my father came home unexpectedly. As he walked in the house, we all tried to greet him, but he seemed consumed with thought. He pulled my mother into the sitting room and closed the door. I could not really hear their conversation, but I know it had something to do with me.

"Jane, there is a problem with Sarah's placement," my father said in a hushed voice.

"It can't be! Did the queen reject her?" replied my mother. She sounded like she would cry.

"The queen has—"

"Sarah, get away from that door. If he wanted us to hear, he would not have closed the door," Elizabeth said as she pulled my arm. I did not hear the rest of what my father said, but history would reveal it in time.

For the rest of the week, Mother was in a somber mood. She continued to plan for my party, which was now only days away. Today a gift arrived for me. I was reading when my mother and sister burst in the room with the box. This was the first time that I had seen a smile on my mother's face that week. "Sarah!" Elizabeth said in a taunting voice, "Sir Sedlow has sent you a birthday gift." My heart jumped and I almost dropped the book I was holding.

"Oh really. Well that was nice of him."

"Stop playing coy, Sarah! And open the thing," Mother said as she placed the box on my lap. I smiled at them both for just a second. Elizabeth plopped down on the window bench beside me like a giddy child.

I opened the letter first and read it aloud.

Dearest Lady Walden,

I hope this letter finds you well and excited about your approaching birthday. It saddens me that I will not be able to attend and celebrate with you. However, I still felt compelled to send you a token of my appreciation, for your time and company last month. Please wear this in my absence and know that I am thinking of you fondly. I look forward to seeing and conversing with you soon. I hope your birthday is all you hoped for.

With the Upmost Respect,

Sir William Sedlow

I opened the small gift box to reveal a medium-sized gold pendent with a black stone in the middle, and a red ribbon to serve as the chain. The pendent was about the size of a button on an overcoat and round with a lacelike pattern around the edge. The black jewel in the center was smooth and about the size of the tip of my

little finger. This was the nicest thing I had ever owned up to this point. If William had given this to me in person, I would have never accepted it due to its extravagance.

“Put it on. Put it on,” Elizabeth said excitedly. She helped me tie the ribbon around my neck. “I know exactly what gown you can wear with this. Elizabeth’s black and red gown with the gold accent sleeves would be perfect. It is too bad he will not be there to see how exquisite you look.” Mother left the room with more pep in her step. I was happy that she was back to being herself. “Are you OK with me wearing your gown, Elizabeth?”

“Of course, you can, and you will look beautiful.”

The day of my party had arrived and I must admit I was excited. Since this was to be my last birthday as a “child” I was excited to see what kind of gifts people would bring. No one would be able to top William’s gift, but I still wanted to open them all.

Father came home early to prepare and to greet arriving guests. In attendance were the Earl of Shrewsbury and his wife along with the rest of the earl’s gentlemen ushers. Many other noble households sent their stewards and some attended themselves. In total there were about fifty guests that came the event. Everyone looked very beautiful in their masks. My gift table was really stacking up. The guests were mingling and seemed to be having a good time. My sister and Edward were talking to Edward’s father. They seemed to be discussing the wedding.

My gift from my father was the harpist that hired to play for the evening. The music was wonderful, but I could barely hear it. I had to sit near the entrance and basically be greeted by each and every guest as they walked in. Many offered birthday well wishes to me as they walked by. Everyone was very polite in this time almost to a fault. Many of the guests had never even spoken to me before.

I noticed that James was speaking to a very well dressed man, but I did not know who the man was. He had not stopped to greet me at the door. I watched as they both walked around the room until I could not see them anymore. “Happy birthday, Lady Walden,” another guest said as they walked in. I had not the slightest clue who they were and they weren’t even wearing their mask yet. “Thank you. Please, enjoy the party.”

Finally my greeting duties were over and I could join my own party. Since this party was a masquerade, there was to be no formal sit-down dinner. Hors d’oeuvres were being passed and also placed on tables around the room for guests to eat. This was also less expensive for my father. I did not mind skipping the formal meal. You have already seen how dinner conversation can get me in trouble.

My father took my hand to dance. I enjoyed dancing with my father. I may not have known him very well, but I knew that he loved us all very much. Twirling on the floor with him amidst all the other guests in their masks almost seemed like a dream. As we drifted around I kept catching glimpses of the well-dressed man James was speaking to before. My curiosity was growing. Why did he always seem to be looking at me? Father turned me over to Francis who insisted he had the chance to dance with me. “Happy birthday, Lady Sarah,” he said.

“Thank you,” I replied while still looking over his shoulder scanning the room for the other man.

“I have a gift for you, lady.” He placed a medium carved wooden box with a purple ribbon tied around it in my hand. “I hope you like it, as I intend to fill this box with letters to you while I am away.” I barely heard what he said because James was on his way over to dance with me.

“Thank you for the dance and the gift, Lord Talbot.” I placed the box on the gift table. Francis seemed disappointed at my flippant manner. I did not mean to hurt his feelings, but the intrigue of this mystery man was just too luring for me.

I made my way over to James. “James, who were you talking to earlier?”

“Who, Sarah? I have had conversations with many tonight.”

“A man,” I replied “with a black mask and red string. He was also wearing a black doublet with a red Jerkin.”

“Oh! You mean this man,” James said as he passed my hand to the mystery man.

“Forgive me, sir but I do not know who you are.” He said nothing in response. “Sir, please tell me your name.” Again, he did not respond. “Sir, it is very rude to dance with a lady and not declare yourself. Please tell me your name.” The song was coming to an end and my mystery man had still not told me his name. I was extremely frustrated with this man. I knew that he could sense my anger. Suddenly he leaned in and whispered

in my ear. "I am glad you liked my gift. It looks lovely on you." Of course, now I knew who he was and my heart began to race.

"I thought you were not able to come?"

"The duke did not require my services any longer. So I felt it necessary to attend or else risk the news getting back to you that I was free and still did not attend."

"Well, I am glad you came." Just then I realized that I was smiling absurdly, and exposing my true feeling of excitement that he was here. I released his hand and took a step back. "Thank you for the gift. You are much too kind." The music stopped and we both executed the traditional bow and curtsy.

My father instructed the musicians to hold on playing the next song. He had some kind of announcement to make. "Excuse me, honored guests, may I have your attention," he shouted. Father motioned for me to join him at the front of the room. I looked to my mother, who also had a look of confusion on her face. None of us seemed to know what this was all about. We all faced him in anticipation.

"First, thank you all for coming. As you all know I take great pride in my daughter. My announcement is both of sadness and joy. It is common knowledge that the situation surrounding our queen has grown bleak. With this being said Her Highness will not be taking on any more maids to her service. This means that Sarah, sadly, will not have the opportunity to serve her any longer. However, when a door closes a window is often opened. After speaking with Lord Talbot about this sad occurrence, he has assisted in arranging for Sarah to receive further education in France.

Applause began to circulate around the room. My mother seemed very pleased with this development. I now knew what she and my father had discussed behind closed doors and why she was so upset. I had very mixed feelings about this. On one hand, going to France seemed like an adventure and an opportunity to receive further education. On the other hand, I did not want to leave my family and everything I had ever known. There was also the matter of Sir William. I searched for his face in the room. He was still wearing his mask, so I could not gauge if he was saddened by this news.

"Do not worry, little Sarah. I get the feeling that he will not be easily swayed away from you." I had not noticed that James had moved next to me. I looked at him with surprise. I had not realized how transparent I had been with my concern for William. It was in that moment that I decided to no longer try and hide what I felt for him. If I was not going to see him for an extended amount of time, I at least wanted him to be certain of how I felt.

As the commotion died down and the music began to play once again, I walked straight to William. "Are you excited, Lady Walden?" he asked before I even had a chance to say a word. "This is a wonderful opportunity for you to see the world."

"I suppose you are right, but the timing is unfortunate," I replied.

"Did you have other plans, Lady Walden?" I was not looking directly at William when he said this, and I must admit that I was a bit disappointed by his comment. I thought to myself, "Does he not think of me the same way? Have I made a fool of myself?"

I turned to look at him and just as I did he removed his mask and looked me directly in the eyes. I thought for a second that he might kiss me. I was terrified because the room was full of people and to kiss in this setting would be very inappropriate. Yet, I was exhilarated by the idea that he might break all the rules and do it anyway. We looked at each other for what seemed like an eternity, but he never kissed me.

Even without a kiss I knew what that extended gaze meant. He did feel the same for me as I did for him. He was saddened that I would not be joining him at court. This was the way it was going to be and neither he nor I had any say in the matter.

The rest of the party was a blur. I remember dancing a few times more with William and some other gentleman guests. I guess my mind was in a different place after my father's announcement. I opened my presents at some point. Most of the gifts were simple items such as books of poetry and sewing items. These items were customary to give to a young woman of my age. I was happy to receive the books because I did enjoy reading.

Later that night as I settled into bed, my mind was spinning. I had never really thought about being kissed before tonight. In fact I was never really concerned with men until tonight. I had many questions I wanted to ask with regard to this topic. "Elizabeth, Elizabeth," I whispered to see if she was still awake.

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