



*Lady
in Waiting*

A NOVEL

SUSAN MEISSNER



Author of *The Shape of Mercy*

*Lady
in Waiting*

BOOKS BY SUSAN MEISSNER

White Picket Fences
The Shape of Mercy
Blue Heart Blessed
A Seahorse in the Thames
In All Deep Places
The Remedy for Regret
A Window to the World
Why the Sky Is Blue

Rachael Flynn Mysteries

Widows and Orphans
Sticks and Stones
Days and Hours

Lady
in Waiting

SUSAN MEISSNER

Author of *The Shape of Mercy*



WATERBROOK
PRESS

LADY IN WAITING

PUBLISHED BY WATERBROOK PRESS

12265 Oracle Boulevard, Suite 200

Colorado Springs, Colorado 80921

Scripture quotations are taken from the King James Version.

Apart from well-known real people and real events associated with the life of Lady Jane Grey, the characters and events in this book are fictional and any resemblance to actual persons or events is coincidental.

ISBN 978-0-307-45883-4

ISBN 978-0-307-45884-1 (electronic)

Copyright © 2010 by Susan Meissner

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Published in the United States by WaterBrook Multnomah, an imprint of the Crown Publishing Group, a division of Random House Inc., New York.

WATERBROOK and its deer colophon are registered trademarks of Random House Inc.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Meissner, Susan, 1961–

Lady in waiting : a novel / by Susan Meissner. — 1st ed.

p. cm.

ISBN 978-0-307-45883-4 — ISBN 978-0-307-45884-1

1. Self-actualization (Psychology) in women—Fiction. 2. Grey, Jane, Lady, 1537–1554—Fiction. I. Title.

PS3613.E435L33 2010

813'.6—dc22

2010009570

Printed in the United States of America

2010—First Edition

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



*For Bob,
the one my heart beats for.*

LADY JANE GREY'S ROYALS & NOBLES

Henry Grey

Marquess of Dorset, Duke of Suffolk

Lady Jane Grey's father

Frances Brandon Grey

Marchioness of Dorset, Duchess of Suffolk

Fourth in line to the throne after Henry VIII

Jane's mother

Lady Jane Grey

Fifth in line to the throne after Henry VIII

Thomas Seymour

Lord Admiral

Married Henry VIII's widow, the Queen Dowager, Katherine Parr

Uncle to Edward VI

Edward Seymour

Duke of Somerset and Lord Protector to Edward VI

Brother to Lord Admiral Thomas Seymour

Uncle to Edward VI

Edward Seymour the younger

Son of the Lord Protector, the Duke of Somerset



Henry VIII

King of England

Edward VI

First in line to the throne

Son of Henry VIII and Jane Seymour

Princess Mary

Second in line to the throne

Daughter of Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon

Princess Elizabeth

Third in line to the throne

Daughter of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn

John Dudley

Earl of Warwick,

Duke of Northumberland

Lord Protector after Edward

Seymour the elder

Guildford Dudley

Son of John Dudley

*I saw the angel in the marble
and carved until I set him free.*

—MICHELANGELO BUONARROTI

*Lady
in Waiting*



Jane

Upper West Side, Manhattan

One



The mantel clock was exquisite, even though its hands rested in silence at twenty minutes past two. Carved—near as I could tell—from a single piece of mahogany, its glimmering patina looked warm to the touch. Rosebuds etched into the swirls of wood grain flanked the sides like two bronzed bridal bouquets. The clock's top was rounded and smooth like the draped head of a Madonna. I ran my palm across the polished surface, and it was like touching warm water.

Legend was this clock originally belonged to the young wife of a Southampton doctor and that it stopped keeping time in 1912, the very moment the *Titanic* sank and its owner became a widow. The grieving woman's only consolation was the clock's apparent prescience of her husband's horrible fate and its kinship with the pain that left her inert in sorrow. She never remarried, and she never had the clock fixed.

I bought it sight unseen for my great aunt's antique store, like so many of the items I'd found for the display cases. In the year and a half I'd been in charge of the inventory, the best pieces had come from the obscure estate sales that my British friend, Emma Downing, came upon while tooling around the southeast of England looking for oddities for her costume shop. She found the clock at an estate sale in Felixstowe, and the auctioneer, so she told me, had been unimpressed with the clock's sad history. Emma said he'd read the accompanying note about the clock as if reading the rules for rugby.

My mother watched now as I positioned the clock on the lacquered black mantel that rose above a marble fireplace. She held a lead crystal vase of silk daffodils in her hands.

“It should be ticking.” She frowned. “People will wonder why it’s not ticking.” She set the vase down on the hearth and stepped back. Her heels made a clicking sound on the parquet floor beneath our feet. “You know, you probably would’ve sold it by now if it was working. Did Wilson even look at it? You told me he could fix anything.”

I flicked a wisp of fuzz off the clock’s face. I hadn’t asked the shop’s resident-and-unofficial repairman to fix it. “It wouldn’t be the same clock if it was fixed.”

“It would be a clock that did what it was supposed to do.” My mother leaned in and straightened one of the daffodil blooms.

“This isn’t just any clock, Mom.” I took a step back too.

My mother folded her arms across the front of her Ann Taylor suit. Pale blue, the color of baby blankets and robins’ eggs. Her signature color. “Look, I get all that about the *Titanic* and the young widow, but you can’t prove any of it, Jane,” she said. “You could never sell it on that story.”

A flicker of sadness wobbled inside me at the thought of parting with the clock. This happens when you work in retail. Sometimes you have a hard time selling what you bought to sell.

“I’m thinking maybe I’ll keep it.”

“You don’t make a profit by hanging on to the inventory.” My mother whispered this, but I heard her. She intended for me to hear her. This was her way of saying what she wanted to about her aunt’s shop—which she’d inherit when Great Aunt Thea passed—without coming across as interfering.

My mother thinks she tries very hard not to interfere. But it is one

of her talents. Interfering, when she thinks she's not. It drives my younger sister, Leslie, nuts.

"Do you want me to take it back to the store?" I asked.

"No! It's perfect for this place. I just wish it were ticking." She nearly pouted.

I reached for the box at my feet that I brought the clock in along with a set of Shakespeare's works, a pair of pewter candlesticks, and a Wedgwood vase. "You could always get a CD of sound effects and run a loop of a ticking clock," I joked.

She turned to me, childlike determination in her eyes. "I wonder how hard it would be to find a CD like that!"

"I was kidding, Mom! Look what you have to work with." I pointed to the simulated stereo system she'd placed into a polished entertainment center behind us. My mother never used real electronics in the houses she staged, although with the clientele she usually worked with—affluent real estate brokers and equally well-off buyers and sellers—she certainly could.

"So I'll bring in a portable player and hide it in the hearth pillows." She shrugged and then turned to the adjoining dining room. A gleaming black dining table had been set with white bone china, pale yellow linen napkins, mounds of fake chicken salad, mauve rubber grapes, plastic croissants, and petit fours. An arrangement of pussy willows graced the center of the table. "Do you think the pussy willows are too rustic?" she asked.

She wanted me to say yes, so I did.

"I think so too," she said. "I think we should swap these out for that vase of gerbera daisies you have on that *escritoire* in the shop's front window. I don't know what I was thinking when I brought these." She reached for the unlucky pussy willows. "We can put these on the entry table with our business cards."

She turned to me. "You did bring yours this time, didn't you? It's silly

for you to go to all this work and then not get any customers out of it.” My mother made her way to the entryway with the pussy willows in her hands and intention in her step. I followed her.

This was only the second house I’d helped her stage, and I didn’t bring business cards the first time, because she hadn’t invited me to until we were about to leave. She’d promptly told me then to never go anywhere without business cards. Not even to the ladies’ room. She’d said it and then waited, like she expected me to take out my BlackBerry and make a note of it.

“I have them right here.” I reached into the front pocket of my capris and pulled out a handful of glossy business cards emblazoned with *Amsterdam Avenue Antiques* and its logo—three *A*’s entwined like a Celtic eternity knot. I handed them to her, and she placed them in a silver dish next to her own. *Sophia Keller Interior Design and Home Staging*. The pussy willows actually looked wonderful against the tall, jute-colored wall.

“There. That looks better!” she exclaimed, as if reading my thoughts. She turned to survey the main floor of the town house. The owners had relocated to the Hamptons and were selling off their Manhattan properties to fund a cushy retirement. Half the décor—the books, the vases, the prints—were on loan from Aunt Thea’s shop. My mother, who’d been staging real estate for two years, brought me in a few months earlier, after she discovered a stately home filled with charming and authentic antiques sold faster than the same home filled with reproductions.

“You and Brad should get out of that teensy apartment on the West Side and buy this place. The owners are practically giving it away.”

Her tone suggested she didn’t expect me to respond. I easily let the comment evaporate into the sunbeams caressing us. It was a comment for which I had no response.

My mother’s gaze swept across the two large rooms she’d furnished, and she frowned when her eyes reached the mantel and the silent clock.

“Well, I’ll just have to come back later today,” she spoke into the silence. “It’s being shown first thing in the morning.” She swung back around. “Come on. I’ll take you back.”

We stepped out into the April sunshine and to her Lexus parked across the street along a line of town houses just like the one we’d left. As we began to drive away, the stillness in the car thickened, and I fished my cell phone out of my purse to see if I’d missed any calls while we were finishing the house. On the drive over, I had a purposeful conversation with Emma about a box of old books she found at a jumble sale in Cardiff. That lengthy conversation filled the entire commute from the store on the seven hundred block of Amsterdam to the town house on East Ninth, and I found myself wishing I could somehow repeat that providential circumstance. My mother would ask about Brad if the silence continued. There was no missed call, and I started to probe my brain for something to talk about. I suddenly remembered I hadn’t told my mother I’d found a new assistant. I opened my mouth to tell her about Stacy, but I was too late.

“So what do you hear from Brad?” she asked cheerfully.

“He’s doing fine.” The answer flew out of my mouth as if I’d rehearsed it. She looked away from the traffic ahead, blinked at me, and then turned her attention back to the road. A taxi pulled in front of her, and she laid on the horn, pronouncing a curse on all taxi drivers.

“Idiot.” She turned to me. “How much longer do you think he will stay in New Hampshire?” Her brow was creased. “You aren’t going to try to keep two households going forever, are you?”

I exhaled heavily. “It’s a really good job, Mom. And he likes the change of pace and the new responsibilities. It’s only been two months.”

“Yes, but the inconvenience has to be wearing on you both. It must be quite a hassle maintaining two residences, not to mention the expense, and then all that time away from each other.” She paused, but only for a

moment. “I just don’t see why he couldn’t have found something similar right here in New York. I mean, don’t all big hospitals have the same jobs in radiology? That’s what your father told me. And he should know.”

“Just because there are similar jobs doesn’t mean there are similar vacancies, Mom.”

She tapped the steering wheel. “Yes, but your father said—”

“I know Dad thinks he might’ve been able to help Brad find something on Long Island, but Brad wanted this job. And no offense, Mom, but the head of environmental services doesn’t hire radiologists.”

She bristled. I shouldn’t have said it. She would repeat that comment to my dad, not to hurt him but to vent her frustration at not having been able to convince me she was right and I was wrong. But it would hurt him anyway.

“I’m sorry, Mom,” I added. “Don’t tell him I said that, okay? I just really don’t want to rehash this again.”

But she wasn’t done. “Your father has been at that hospital for twenty-seven years. He knows *a lot of people*.” She emphasized the last four words with a pointed stare in my direction.

“I know he does. That’s really not what I meant. It’s just Brad has always wanted this kind of job. He’s working with cancer patients. This really matters to him.”

“But the job’s in New Hampshire!”

“Well, Connor is in New Hampshire!” It sounded irrelevant, even to me, to mention the current location of our college-age son. Connor had nothing to do with any of this. And he was an hour away from where Brad was anyway.

“And you are here,” my mother said evenly. “If Brad wanted out of the city, there are plenty of quieter hospitals right around here. And plenty of sick people for that matter.”

There was an undercurrent in her tone, subtle and yet obvious, that

assured me we really weren't talking about sick people and hospitals and the miles between Manhattan and Manchester. It was as if she'd guessed what I'd tried to keep from my parents the last eight weeks.

My husband didn't want out of the city.

He just wanted out.

Two



Sometimes, during those first few weeks after Brad moved out, I'd wake in the middle of the night and forget I was now alone in my bed. I'd instinctively move toward Brad's side, and when I'd feel the emptiness there, a strange kind of vertigo would come over me, and I'd grab hold of the sheets to keep from falling.

It happened every night the first week. I'd lie awake afterward until the alarm went off hours later, unable to stop contemplating why Brad wanted distance from me. And why it took me by such stinging surprise. By the third week, I wasn't waking up in the middle of the night with vertigo anymore; I was just waking up. Sometimes at two in the morning. Sometimes at three. And I'd still be awake when dawn broke.

I hadn't known Brad was suffocating in our marriage. That's the part that made me shudder as sleep skittered away from me night after night. Brad had felt like he was suffocating, and I hadn't seen it. Sometimes doubt kept me awake. Sometimes grief. Sometimes anger. And sometimes a messy mix of all three.

We were sitting at our kitchen table the morning Brad told me he was leaving. The Sunday paper was strewn among our coffee mugs, and the aroma of the western omelet I had made for us still lingered. Onions, peppers, and diced ham. It was mid-February, but the sun was bold that morning, and its flashy tendrils spilled across our shoulders from our bal-

cony windows as if it wanted in. Brad said my name. I looked up; thinking he perhaps wanted me to pass the french press to freshen his cup.

But he was looking off toward our front door, not at me.

“There’s a position in radiology at a hospital in New Hampshire,” he said.

Several seconds passed before I realized this was a circumstance that mattered to him. “New Hampshire?”

He looked at his coffee cup and stroked the ear-shaped handle. “Manchester. It’s in diagnostics, working alongside oncologists. Part of the job involves research and clinical studies. I was asked to consider it.”

He raised his head, and his eyes slowly met mine.

“You were?” Scattered thoughts ran through my head. I hardly knew which question I really wanted to ask. *Why are you telling me this?* seemed like a good place to start, but he spoke before I could decide.

“Actually, I was specifically approached. They’ve read my articles in the *Journal*, and they want me to come on staff.”

Perhaps I should’ve said something affirming, something that would let him know that I was proud he’d been handpicked for something, but all I could think was that Brad might actually take this job and we’d be leaving New York. Just like that. I was already wondering how I’d tell my mother and Aunt Thea I wouldn’t be able to manage the antique store anymore. Thea, tucked away in her assisted-living apartment in Jersey City, would probably insist my mother take over the store, since she wouldn’t trust it to anyone but family. My mother wouldn’t be happy about that. Antiques were not her thing. And the very idea of moving, of leaving everything that was familiar, was unsettling.

“But it’s in New Hampshire,” I said.

He resumed stroking the arc of the mug handle. “It’s a great career move.” His gaze was on his mug.

My thoughts zoomed to my parents. They'd probably see this as a stellar promotion, even if it did mean leaving Manhattan. My dad would anyway. My parents adored Brad. They always had. Perhaps they wouldn't flip if I told them we were moving. But my mother would definitely be annoyed about my leaving the store. . . .

"So, are you going to look into it?" I finally asked.

My question was met with what seemed like a long stretch of silence. When Brad finally looked up at me, I knew.

He'd already accepted the job.

My elbow knocked my mug. A tiny wave of coffee winked out and dotted the sports section. "You already said yes? Without even checking it out?"

"I interviewed last Thursday. They flew me up for the day."

My face instantly warmed with a weird jumble of embarrassment and surprise. Brad had been to New Hampshire and back, on a day I assumed he'd been in Manhattan working a twelve-hour shift.

"Why didn't you tell me?" I murmured.

He pushed his mug away. "I really wanted to check this out on my own."

The air in the room seemed to still. "Why?"

Brad rubbed his hand across his morning stubble. "Because. . . because I knew I would not be asking you to make any changes for me."

My mouth dropped open. "What do you mean?"

But I knew. He meant he wanted to go to New Hampshire alone.

He sighed the tired exhale of someone who has to explain something that shouldn't have to be explained. "I think it's time we were both honest with each other." He said it like he'd already imagined saying it a hundred times. "I think we need a little break."

My first thought was that he was joking. But no one jokes about something like this. The worst of it was he thought I was in the know. He

thought I also felt the need for distance, that our marriage had hit a dead zone, and that we needed some time away from each other, and that I'd been pretending I didn't see it. He must've been feeling this way for quite a while. And I had no idea.

The tears formed immediately. Two slipped out and slid down my face. Brad looked away.

"A break from what?" I whispered. "You want a break? From me?"

"Jane—," he began, and it suddenly occurred to me, with nauseating force, that he was having an affair.

"Is there someone else?" I blurted. "Are you seeing someone? Are you having an affair?"

"No."

He said it quickly. But in that same tired voice.

"You're not having an affair?" I wanted to believe him but was afraid to.

"I'm not having an affair."

For a split second, I wished he was. I wished he was having an affair, that someone had stolen his attention away from me. Then there would be someone else to be angry at. Someone to blame for yanking him away.

More tears slid down my face. Brad reached for a tissue on the breakfast bar behind us and held it out to me. I ignored it and wiped the tears away with the sleeve of my bathrobe.

"I don't understand any of this," I said.

He tossed the tissue onto the table. "Can you honestly tell me you think everything is fine with us? Don't you know it's not? I shouldn't have to spell it out. I never wanted to hurt you."

"Well, how did you think I would feel when you told me this?" Resentment rose within me, fueled by hurt and bewilderment. "How did you think I'd feel when you told me you wanted to leave me?"

"I didn't say I was leaving you. I said we needed a break."

“But you’re leaving me!” I put my hands in my lap to try to still them.

“I just think we both need some time apart to see if there’s anything that is keeping this marriage alive.”

My face stung as though I’d been slapped. “What?”

“I think maybe Connor has been the only thing keeping us together. When he went away to college, it’s like he pulled out the last nail. It hasn’t been the same for us. And I think you know it.”

I opened my mouth to protest, but there were no words ready. In that instant I knew I had done nothing to address the void in our lives when Connor packed his bags for Dartmouth. And neither had Brad. For the last eighteen months, we’d been holding our breath in between Connor’s semester breaks and visits home. Well, at least I had been. Brad had apparently been doing something else—imagining life without me. But what he was suggesting made no sense.

“How will being apart help us see what’s keeping us together?” I asked.

“Because being together isn’t doing it.”

This, too, stung me. I reached for the tissue, and he handed it to me. “Shouldn’t we try counseling?”

He hesitated a moment. “Maybe. In a little while. Right now I just need some space. I think we both do.”

I grabbed the french press and rose from my chair. I stepped into the open kitchen and slammed the press onto the counter. Coffee sloshed onto our breakfast dishes.

“Jane?”

“For how long?” I kept my back to him.

“I...I can’t answer that.”

“What about Connor? What are we supposed to tell him?”

“We tell him as much as he needs to know. That I’ve been offered a great job in New Hampshire and I am taking it while we see if it’s a move we both want to make.”

I turned around and stared at him, my radiologist husband who spent his days looking inside people. “Is this really what you want to do?”

He closed his eyes, as if I had asked the wrong question and he was trying to find an answer that would make the question work. “It’s what I need to do.”

For a long stretch of seconds, neither one of us said anything. Then he methodically told me, as if he’d rehearsed it, that he’d rented a furnished condo near his new hospital, that he’d given notice at Memorial and asked for an early out so that he could start on Tuesday. Memorial had granted it. He asked me if he could take the car, even though it was his anyway. Then he told me we’d use the time away from each other to see where our hearts were headed.

“What am I going to tell my parents?” My cheeks were wet with tears, spilled as he spelled out the arrangements he’d made.

Brad stood. “This has nothing to do with your parents.”

“What am I going to tell them?”

“Tell them this is my fault.”

He started to walk past me, probably to start packing. I reached out to touch his arm, and he stopped.

“You made love to me last night,” I whispered.

When he said nothing in return, I looked up at him. He was looking down on me, at my arm on his arm, waiting for me to let him go.

He didn’t say it, but I suddenly knew his thoughts.

What we had shared the night before was the most visceral vestige of our oneness. He had considered it, and it wasn’t enough.

We’d been sharing the same house, the same car, the same friends, the same bed for twenty-two years. And it was Connor who’d kept the loose threads tied together.

I let my hand fall.



I had missed the signs that Brad was bored with our life. Surely they had been there. But I'd missed them. My best friend, Molly, upon whose shoulder I'd leaned daily after Brad's departure, said I probably distracted myself with managing Thea's shop, because I didn't know what to make of the signs, didn't know how to address them, so I'd pretended they weren't there. But there had been no pretending. I just didn't see them.

After he left, I had no choice but to consider them. The signs that I didn't see, morphed into the reasons he left. My empty bed coaxed me into pondering them night after night while the rest of Manhattan slept. Morning would come and I'd drag myself down to the shop, woozy as a victim of malaria. The week Brad moved out, I hadn't hired Stacy yet. It was still just me and blunt, Hawaiian-shirted Wilson, the retired high school history teacher and self-taught repairman who'd been Thea's only other full-time employee.

"You hung over?" he asked, the first morning Brad was gone, appalled at my morning stagger.

"No, Wilson. I didn't sleep well."

"Pity. I'll make you coffee."

"Thanks."

"My pleasure, of course. You know, if you didn't consume so much refined sugar, you wouldn't be up at night, Jane."

I slowly took off my coat and hung it on the hall tree by the cash register. "I'm sure you're probably right."

He had stared at me. "I am totally kidding. Want an éclair with your coffee? I picked up some on the way in."

Over dark roast and pastries, I'd quietly confided in gray-haired Wilson. I told him Brad had taken a job in New Hampshire and wanted to move there alone for now.

“So he left you.” Wilson wiped a bit of cream from the corners of his mouth.

“Not exactly. But that’s sure what it feels like.”

He stood and tossed the wax papers that had been around the *éclair*s into the trash. It was nearly nine. Time to open. “That’s because that’s what it is.”

I flipped on a table lamp at the register. “Remind me not to come to you for sympathy.”

He began walking toward the front door, keys jangling in his hands. “Oh! Is that what you wanted? You wanted sympathy? Do they sell that here in New York?” The key went into the lock and he turned it.

“Tell me again why Thea hired you?” I called over to him, enjoying the slight grin he’d extracted from me. It had felt good to smile, even for just five seconds.

Wilson began walking back toward me. When he got close, I could smell his favorite pipe tobacco in the fabric of his tropical shirt. The many wrinkles in his seventy-five-year-old face stretched into arcs as he grinned. “I was her paramour, of course.”

The phone had rung just then, and he picked up the handset to answer it. A set of customers came in the next moment, and I didn’t have the courage to ask him later if he’d been totally kidding.



My mother and I arrived at my shop from the East Village town house, and she double-parked while I dashed inside for the gerbera daisies. A late morning sun was warming the busy street, and cars zipped past her left and right. Someone honked at her as I opened the passenger door and positioned the vase on the floor of her car.

“Don’t forget we’re celebrating Leslie’s birthday next weekend. And get some sleep, for heaven’s sake. You don’t look well, Jane,” she called to

me and then added that my sister didn't want any nasty black balloons or milk of magnesia or denture cream for her fortieth birthday. I assured her I'd find something in the shop that Leslie would like and that wouldn't suggest she's an old woman.

"Too bad that clock back at the Village house doesn't work!" my mother yelled as another car honked at her. "She'd love that."

I closed the door and waved her off.

That clock was mine.



Lucy

*Sudeley Castle, Gloucestershire,
England, 1548*

Six



Jane waited for me at the window, her wee head bowed as if something lay beyond the glass that she could not bear to look upon. Her small hands rested on the sill, folded one over the other in the relaxed pose of someone who has no appointment to keep. Beneath her line of vision, I could see the sweeping lawn at Sudeley Castle and the tracks in the dirt my carriage made. A faint swirl of dust caught up against a bit of black as the carriage disappeared from our view, on its way back to Bradgate.

I should have made my presence known, but I stood at the threshold as one struck dumb. The little lady was lost in sadness, this I could see even from the doorway where I stood, and this was foreign to me. In the two years that I had been in the employ of the wealthy, I had not seen such raw sorrow. In my arms I held a garment soft as down and black as pitch. The lady's mourning gown, which the marchioness insisted I carry on my lap the entire two-day journey from Leicestershire so that her daughter's dress wouldn't be crushed in the trunk. The marchioness did not tell me this directly; Bridget relayed the marchioness's demands, and it was plain in her eyes and in her tone that it would be foolishness to let the dress out of my sight for even a moment. The little lady was to be chief mourner at the funeral of the Queen Dowager, Katherine. The gown couldn't be anything less than perfectly appointed.

Already I could see that the dress would have to be altered to fit the

wee maiden. And I instantly wondered if I had the skill to do it. Bridget must've thought I did. She would not have sent me if she did not.

I was amazed the marchioness believed the gown would fit her daughter. Lady Jane must not have grown much in the months she had been living with Lord Admiral Seymour and the widow Queen here in Gloucestershire, at least not as much as her mother expected.

Or perhaps in her haste, the marchioness selected the wrong dress to be brought. Bridget had wondered if perhaps the marchioness borrowed the dress because there hadn't been time to make a new one. No one expected the poor Queen Dowager would succumb to childbed fever. No one expected the household of Sudeley Castle would be wearing black that day. Not black. Somewhere in the castle, the Queen's healthy newborn daughter lay in the arms of a wet nurse. Bridget told me not to ask about her.

I took a step into the room, cautiously, and the dress in my arms swished my name. *Lucy*. The Lady Jane at the window did not turn her head toward the sound. I poked my head farther into the room, letting my eyes adjust to the vastness of the room's size and the absence of the warming rays of the sun.

Lady Jane and I were alone in her sitting room at Sudeley Castle, a great home whose exterior stones were the color of toasted bread and which were festooned with emerald vines that would soon turn copper, crumple, and skitter away. The maid who escorted me to this room had left to see after the trunk the marchioness had me bring for her daughter, as well as my own small case. I was not accustomed to stepping into a room where the only other occupant was of nobility. I hesitated.

I had asked Bridget, as I prepared to leave, how long the Lady Jane had been away from her parents, since she was already gone from Bradgate when Bridget made me her apprentice. In truth I wanted to know *why* the Lady Jane was living away from Bradgate. Lady Jane had eleven years,

naught but a year older than my sister, Cecily, who at that moment was at our Haversfield home in Devonshire, surely combing wool one moment and chasing butterflies the next. I did not think the Lady Jane had chased a butterfly in many years. Perhaps never. I had only been in the employ of one other nobleman, and his children remained at home until they married. They had not chased butterflies either. But they were not whisked away to other households. Bridget told me that it was no concern of mine why the Lady Jane left Bradgate to become the ward of Lord Admiral Seymour.

Then Bridget told me a nobleman like our esteemed Marquess of Dorset—the lady’s father and my employer—has much to consider when God gives him daughters, and that I was not to be listening to gossip below stairs while at Sudeley or she would hear of it and have me dismissed. She very nearly winked at me.

So it was because the Lady Jane was a girl that she was sent to live with Lord Seymour. It was because she was a daughter whose betrothal was a matter of politics and posturing that she lived in a castle more than a day’s carriage ride from her home.

On the long journey here, I’d wondered how the Lord Admiral figured into the marquess’s betrothal plans for his eldest daughter. The Lord Admiral was himself already married when Jane came here, having wooed and won the widowed Queen Katherine four scandalous months after King Henry’s passing. And the Lord Admiral had no sons. I didn’t know the Lord Admiral personally. I only knew that he was brother to the Lord Protector, the man who managed the affairs of the young King Edward, Henry’s only living male heir.

Bridget had supposed it was for marital prospects that the marquess placed his daughter in the household of the lord whose brother directed our sovereign’s associations. Young King Edward was eleven, like Jane, and not yet betrothed. Also like Jane.

It would not be the first time a monarch married a cousin. And Bridget told me the Lady Jane was fourth in line to the throne, in her own right. The marchioness, her mother, was King Henry's niece.

But as the carriage had rolled along, I endeavored to imagine myself eleven years old—not so hard, as I was not much older at fifteen—shuffled about in clandestine marriage campaigns, handed over to a man I perhaps did not esteem and made to share his bed and bear his children, all for the prosperity of the young male heir that I simply must produce.

I'd fingered the delicate beading in the mounds of black organza and silk in my lap and wondered what it must be like to wear a dress so heavy, bejeweled, and bedecked, and which, if sold, could feed a family in a croft for nigh a whole winter. Could have paid for my father's medicine. Could have paid the doctor who cared for him, while my mother and I did what we could—she at my father's tailoring shop and I at the marquess's household—to keep him well. I had once thought I would sew happily alongside my father until the end of his days, perhaps marrying late, if I married at all. But there I was, many miles from my childhood home in Haversfield, my parents, and what I had thought would define my quiet life. Everything that mattered to me waited for me in another place.

And now that I stood gazing at the young maiden who would wear the dress I'd carried—a wisp of a girl whose melancholy filled the cavernous room—the gown weighed like lead in my arms, holding me fast.

I took another step, and at last she turned her head.

She had her father's eyes and her mother's Tudor bearing. Her hair under her hood was brown like mine, unremarkable like mine. The dress she wore was the deepest green, very nearly black. Whispers of white lace peeked out from the sleeves and neckline. A gold sash at her waist glittered in the only spill of sunlight penetrating the dark stillness of the room. At her throat lay a necklace of pearls and tiny emeralds. Her cheeks were wet.

I fell to a curtsy.

“Beg your pardon, my lady. Shall I come back later?”

She didn’t answer, and I slowly raised my head.

The Lady Jane was looking at the folds of fabric in my arms. Staring at them. Willing the dress, it seemed, to fill itself with bones and muscle and walk out of the room to find some other person to trifle with.

“You came from Bradgate?” she finally said. Her voice was thin and smooth. Cultured. But immature.

“Yes, my lady.”

“Did my mother send that gown?” Her eyes were still on the dress. The room was not so dark that I could not see her unease.

“Yes, my lady.”

“She is not coming.”

It was not a question. But I answered as though it was. “No, my lady.”

She turned back then, back toward the window. She hadn’t dismissed me, so I stood there with the yards of fabric wanting to spill out of my arms like buckets of water and waited for her. Her head was cocked in a childlike way, as if she was wondering when she would wake up from this dream.

It was inconceivable to me that one so young should be the chief mourner at the funeral of the Queen Dowager, King Henry’s widow. Bridget told me protocol forbade the presence of the widowed Queen’s new husband, the Lord Admiral Seymour, at the funeral. King Henry’s younger daughter, the Princess Elizabeth, who had lately lived here at Sudeley and who had left amid troubling rumors, would not be in attendance either, nor would the young King Edward, nor the Princess Mary, King Henry’s eldest daughter.

Instead, an eleven-year-old girl would lead the procession to the chapel, wearing the borrowed gown I held in my arms.

From behind us, deep within the castle, I heard the faint sound of an

infant's wail. A faraway door opened and closed, and the sound disappeared. Jane raised her head, and her gaze traveled past me to the hallway and the other rooms.

"There will be no one to love her," Jane whispered.

"My lady?"

"The Queen's child."

"Beg your pardon, my lady?"

"Lord Thomas won't even look at her."

"L-lord T-thomas?" I stammered.

"Lord Admiral Seymour. He won't even look at the babe."

I repositioned the dress in my arms. I could not tell for whom she grieved. A moment earlier, I thought her sadness was due to missing her home and family. Then, no, it was the unnamed baby. And now, was it the Lord Admiral's sorrow that clutched at her heart?

I said nothing else. I didn't know what to say.

"You need for me to try on that dress?" she said languidly.

"Yes, my lady. I am afraid I do."

"Why didn't Bridget come? I do not know you."

I did not tell her Bridget was losing her eyesight and couldn't travel alone as the dressmaker. Bridget needed to stay at Bradgate where she could blend in with the rest of the wardrobe staff. No one but me knew she struggled to see her own stitches.

"I am new to Bradgate, my lady. Bridget sent me. And the marchioness."

"What is your name?" Her young voice rang with subtle authority.

"Lucy Day, my lady."

"I like that name." But her voice was sad.

"Shall we?" I hefted the dress in my arms.

She nodded, turned, and we headed to her wardrobe room, which adjoined her sitting room.

I helped her remove the green dress she wore. As I began to lift the black dress—so she could step into its skirt—Jane, with the folds of the black dress now all around her, began to tremble. I held the dress open and waited. Her eyes misted over and her trembling increased, and she stepped away from the ballooning fabric.

“My lady?” I said.

“I cannot stain it!” she gasped, savagely wiping away tears lest they should fall onto the material.

She grasped at her heaving chest, flat and narrow underneath her chemise, as grief silently pounded its way out of her. She sank to her knees as a sob erupted from deep within.

I dropped the dress I had carried on my lap for one hundred miles and knelt down by her, sisterly instinct sending me there before I could think clearly. Jane leaned into me, and I nervously slipped an arm around her and patted her shoulder, vaguely aware that if anyone came into the room, I would surely be dismissed for not knowing my place.

Her tears and anguish were innocent and raw.

“I miss her,” she whispered.

“Your mother?” I whispered back. Lady Jane shook her head.

The child grieved for the Queen.

where Mrs. Ellen had left us, and she seemed to be speaking to no one. But then she turned to look at me, and I knew I had been spoken to. She waited for me to comment.

“Back, my lady?” I said.

“To Bradgate.” Jane said the name of her home with equal parts longing and dismay.

“You...you don’t like Bradgate?”

She’d sighed quietly. “I love Bradgate.”

I made a mark on the skirt where I would need to take it in and waited. I didn’t know what to say to her.

“But I was happy here with the Queen. She was happy too. Even with everything...everything that had happened.” Jane stopped for a moment as if she had said too much. Then she went on. “The Queen loved the Lord Admiral, and she loved this child...and she even loved me. At Bradgate it is...different.”

She tipped her head and looked at me. “How long have you been at Bradgate?”

“Since the new year, my lady.”

“And where were you before then?”

“In London. At Whitehall.”

She seemed then to work out an equation in her head, measuring the odds of my understanding what it was like to live as a child of privileged birth inside your parents’ home. And outside it. It occurred to me we were not talking about the home itself but the expectations within its walls. I do not know if she arrived at a satisfying conclusion. Mrs. Ellen stepped back into the room, and Lady Jane fell silent.

“Are you still at it, lass?” Mrs. Ellen had frowned at me, clearly disappointed that Jane still stood, dwarfed by yards of fabric, while I tucked and pinned. “Could not Bridget have come?”

I straightened and then whispered to my lady that I would help her

out of the gown. “Miss Bridget felt constrained to manage the rest of the wardrobe staff at Bradgate,” I said as I helped Lady Jane step out of the skirt. Mrs. Ellen had said nothing, so I curtsied and left the room with the dress before she could ask me anything else.

Now, an hour later, Mrs. Ellen had come to the wardrobe room to inspect my progress.

I slipped the last bone into place and began to thread the needle to sew the seam shut.

“Have you news of Bradgate?” she finally asked me.

Not knowing Mrs. Ellen, I did not know if she was asking for below-stairs gossip, of which there was surely plenty. Since I worked above stairs, Bridget had endeavored as best she could to shield me from it, lest I spill something unpleasant in front of the marchioness or Jane’s little sisters. But there is always whispering on the stairs. Those of us who work above stairs pretend we do not hear it. Those below stairs know we do.

I responded that the marquess and marchioness were very well and had been entertaining hunting guests.

She set her cup down. “Who were the guests?”

I poked my finger with the needle as I tried to remember who had been guests of late. There had been several. They had had no wardrobe needs that I was charged with meeting. Bridget had seen to those. Mrs. Ellen cocked her head, waiting.

“The Lord and Lady Darlington were guests the week before last. And...and a nobleman from Leeds. His name escapes me now.” Mrs. Ellen looked down at her cup, bored.

And then I remembered.

“Oh. And the young Edward Seymour, the Lord Protector’s son, and his mother were there.”

She raised her eyes to me at this and set her cup down. “The Lord Protector’s son? Are you quite sure?”

“Yes, madam.”

“He and his mother were hunting-party guests?” Mrs. Ellen frowned.

“I believe so, yes.”

It was clear she wished to ask me what conversations I had been privy to, but she could not. She did not know me yet either.

I did not tell her that talk in the kitchen on the days that the Seymours were at Bradgate revolved around the Lord Admiral’s and the Lord Protector’s insane sibling rivalry and that since the admiral had not been able to advance the Lady Jane’s prospects, her father, the marquess, was entertaining the notion of a marriage between Jane and young Edward Seymour. The admiral’s nephew.

The jealousy between the two Seymour brothers was legendary. Mrs. Ellen already knew this. We all did. And she guessed young Edward Seymour’s reason for being at Bradgate without my even hinting at what I’d heard below stairs.

“Poor Jane,” she whispered, but I heard it. I’d observed the young Edward Seymour as a guest at Bradgate. He was polite to the staff, gracious to the marquess and marchioness, and respectful of his mother. He seemed a gentleman. I chanced a question to let Mrs. Ellen know she could speak freely if she wished.

“Is Edward Seymour not a kindly young man?” I dared not to look up from my stitches.

Mrs. Ellen did not answer, and I raised my eyes to see if she was forming a reprimand for my boldness. I saw not anger there, but disquiet, as if she could already see that we were to be paired, she and I, intertwined with the life of the young Lady Jane as her destiny was decided—and that neither one of us would be able to do anything to hold back its progress.

“He is a fine young man.” Her answer was slow and measured, inviting me into our partnership, albeit begrudgingly. “But you and I both

know that is seldom a consideration of betrothal for young women of royal blood.”

She waited for me to nod my head, to acquiesce that I knew whomever Lady Jane married, it was no concern of mine or hers, or even Jane’s, for that matter.

“Yes.” I held her gaze a moment and then fell back to my stitching.

She stood there a moment longer, and then I heard her turn and leave the wardrobe room. I raised my head just as her skirt swished out the door.

I looked at the curved bodice before me, thinking of the tiny bosom that would fill it and wondering what Jane thought of her father’s strategies to first have her wed to the King and now possibly the son of the King’s Protector. Did she even know of these campaigns? Bridget told me the Lady Jane was all the time reading, writing, and translating texts. Her tutors were brilliant men. The young lady could speak five languages. She was intuitive and clever. Surely she knew.

My thoughts naturally flew to my sister, Cecily, the same age as Jane, whose marital prospects were of no consequence to anyone.

Like my own.