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Honors Project

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February 25, 1525

Diary,

Today Master Cabot gave me this little book to keep my daily thoughts in, to “improve my scribbles” he says. Personally I do not think my penmanship is all that bad, and besides, I will no doubt have secretaries and scribes of my own someday, just like mother does now, so I feel like my time could be better spent elsewhere, but there is no point in arguing. Mother says Master Cabot is teaching us important skills to know as a lady, so I suppose I will have to adjust.

I have never kept a diary before, so I am not altogether sure what to write. Master Cabot suggested daily routines, personal thoughts and the like. I just hope he never asks to read it. I can start with my family I suppose.

I am the fourth child and second daughter of Mary and William Woodhouse, Duke and Duchess of Bedford. My two older brothers are both married themselves with William inheriting the dukedom of Bedford, and my older sister Anne is currently a Maid-of-Honor in Queen Catherine’s household, although she will take her leave soon as she is betrothed. My younger sister Joan and I still remain in the household.

My father passed on two years previously, and my mother has recently remarried to the Duke of Suffolk. He has three children, although only the youngest, Thomas, lives in the household.

Master Cabot says it is time for my sewing now. I will write again later.

March 31, 1525

Diary,

The most exciting news reached us today. It came from Anne in the form of a letter from the royal court. As she is leaving her Majesty's household soon to marry the Duke of Somerset's eldest son a position has opened up, and she has been working to recommend me to her Majesty as her replacement!

I would adore the opportunity to live at Court. I have been there only twice, when mother felt it necessary to bring me into the sight of the nobles there. It is a very splendid place full of music and dancing. His Majesty King Henry VIII has always been an avid patron of the arts and music.¹

Mother, of course, is very excited at the prospect at the honor and privilege of having another daughter serve her Majesty Queen Catherine as a Maid-of-Honor. One meets all the important nobility and court, and is even paid a wage for her services!² Better yet, the King and Queen sometimes have a hand in arranging a match for their servants; that is how Anne became engaged to such a perfect noble. His Majesty even granted her 300 marks as a dowry!³ I truly hope I am chosen by the King and Queen for this role. Of course, many other nobles will

¹ Barbara Harris, *English Aristocratic Women 1450-1550* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002), 234.

² *Ibid*, 223-227.

³ *Ibid*, 226-227.

present their daughters to the Queen as well. Mother intends to send along gifts of wine to sway her Majesty to our cause. One can only hope she will succeed. It is fortunate Anne was a very beloved Maid-of-Honor for Queen Catherine; that will help our case tremendously.⁴

June 3, 1525

Diary,

Ever since the letter from Anne regarding her Majesty's search for a new Maid-of-Honor Master Cabot has been much sterner with me in terms of my education. I have just managed to escape two grueling hours of French.⁵ Finally, after incorrectly reading a passage from our French book, Master Bernier threw up his hands, exclaimed my French to be "absolutely dismal", and shook his head before excusing me to leave for my other duties. I suppose I will have to learn it adequately if I wish to be at court, many ladies there do speak it, but I admit I do not enjoy a single moment. I much prefer to be learning the lute or learning the galliard or other such dance. Fortunately, these pastimes are also common at court.⁶ We shall see what becomes of Anne's request for my position. Thus far we have had only one other letter from her on the matter, namely that the Queen is seriously considering my position but that there are other candidates as well. I want to know more but Nurse Jane says it would not be wise to pester her, and besides, she will be thinking of her wedding to the Duke's son. "Patience", Nurse Jane says, "is a quality every young lady is expected to have."

⁴ Ibid, 237.

⁵ Ibid, 36-37.

⁶ Ibid, 230-237.

June 18, 1525

Diary,

Master Cabot had me reading Biblical stories today, and I am proud to say my reading has much improved. He says I have a talent for understanding the written word which will serve me well when I am a wife and managing my husband's estate. "It will not be long now", he says.

I spent the latter part of the day following our housemistress, Mistress Beatrice as she oversaw our many maids and servants. She is quite stern with them, but not unkind. "A lady of the house must always keep the servants in check", she tells me constantly. "A well run house is a harmonious house."

I do not mind watching the servants and keeping a mindful eye on them, but I do not think I will particularly enjoy doing the arithmetic necessary to keeping the house under control. I have been tutored in arithmetic of course, and have been watching Mother as she carefully updates the inventory of our household items, as well as trying to settle on a dowry for Anne.⁷ Mother and my late father had spent quite some time in speaking of the size of Anne's dowry; this is after all one of the most important components of the marriage contract.⁸ In truth, it all seems dreadfully complicated and dull, but as a lady it is a skill I shall have to learn. One thing is certain however, it is easier than French.

⁷ Ibid, 32-33.

⁸ Ibid, 44-48.

July 23, 1525

Diary,

It is done! My mother and stepfather have been summoned to court and I am to accompany them as Queen Catherine's new maid-of-honor. I am excited to finally have the chance at serving Her Majesty as a member of her household. According to Anne, the Queen was apparently indecisive when the decision had to be made between myself and the daughter of the Duke of Norfolk, but was swayed to my favor when she met the young lady. It was deemed that "I was the lovelier of the two", and it has always been insistent that the Queen's household be comprised of beautiful ladies that are pleasing both the court and foreign dignitaries. The King, after all, is partially judged by the physical beauty of the Queen's servants.⁹

To that end, mother has instructed my maids to report to her every piece of clothing I own. We have been going through my wardrobe quite faithfully for the last few days. In her letters Anne has cautioned us that wearing the wrong attire at court can mean certain social disaster, and Mother does not intend for such careless mistakes to be made. She has already ordered the purchase of four new dresses for me before I appear at court: two made of black satin, one of velvet, and one of taffeta. She has also arranged for another white bonnet to be added to my wardrobe, along with two pairs of sleeves, a new petticoat, and a silver pomander

⁹ Ibid, 221.

for the front of my gown. She is also allowing me to wear her gold brooch to court.¹⁰ “A Queen’s maid-of-honor must be one of the best-dressed ladies at court,” Mother cautioned me.

When I told Joan the good news, she cried. Poor little thing, she is only seven and does not yet understand the great opportunity I have been given. She is upset to see me go, but I assured her that her time will come soon enough and then she will be at court too. For the time being, I can only hope that I make a good enough impression on the Queen that she will consider making Joan a part of her household when she gets older.¹¹

We leave for the royal court in four days. Emma, Lucy, and Cecily, my three favorite maids, will be coming with me. As a maid-of-honor I am allowed servants of my own.¹² I can only assume there will be others when I arrive. It will be good to see Anne again: she is at court now with her husband-to-be. Mother and my stepfather are excited to be going to London too, I can tell. They do not say so but it is clear that they are eager to make their presence known at court once more. And why should they not be? After all, lots of important social connections are made there, and there is a chance to gain the favor of the King.

¹⁰ Louis Wright et. al, *Life and Letters in Tudor and Stuart England* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1962), 383-427.

¹¹ Barbara Harris, *English Aristocratic Women 1450-1550* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002), 218-221.

¹² *Ibid*, 224.

August 12, 1525

Diary,

I am now an official maid-of-honor to Queen Catherine of Aragon, and it is absolutely splendid.

We arrived at court four days ago after a bittersweet farewell to members of my stepfather's household in Suffolk. Even Master Cabot seemed rather solemn beneath his usually gruff demeanor, and after a proper goodbye advised me to continue writing in my diary daily to further improve my writing skills.

Upon our arrival I was immediately given an appointment to be brought to the Queen's personal chambers. When we entered the Watching Chamber, Queen Catherine herself greeted us with her vast assortment of her gentlewomen and maids.¹³ I must admit I was extremely nervous but managed to remember to courtesy and show due deference to Her Majesty. I was then taken by the other maids-of-honor and shown my chambers. There is plenty of room for my maids as well as myself, and they are of course situated within the Queen's privy household. I was then instructed to attend Her Majesty with the other maids-of-honor.

This new position of mine will be the first time that my education will be put into practice. The other maids-of-honor will of course help me by setting the example of what is expected; Anne told me that she learned the most by simply watching the others interact with each other, Her Majesty, and the nobles of the court. From what I have observed thus far we

¹³ Ibid, 215-216.

will spend a good portion of our time here in Queen Catherine's chambers, waiting on her and keeping her company.¹⁴

The Queen herself seems quite lovely and is a fascinating woman, but already I have heard rumors that King Henry is dissatisfied with his marriage to her as she has given him no sons.¹⁵ This is quite a difficult situation for any woman, but for the Queen it is quite distressing. Furthermore, Queen Catherine is nearing her fortieth year; the time for having sons is quickly fading.¹⁶ I do not know what this is likely to mean for Her Majesty, only that it would be in her best interests to try and conceive an heir to the throne as quickly as possible.

August 26, 1525

Diary,

I once again spent the day in the Queen's chambers, sewing and playing games with the others and Her Majesty. I have begun sewing stockings for mother back home: they will go nicely with her red velvet gown she enjoys wearing at court.¹⁷

I enjoy interacting with the other ladies of the Queen's household, especially when we relax by playing games. A favorite of mine is cards, particularly when we place bets. Yesterday I won 4 shillings in a card game with the ladies-of-honor.¹⁸ I could get used to this.

¹⁴ Ibid, 218-233.

¹⁵ Richard Rex, *The Tudors* (Gloucestershire: Tempus Publishing Limited, 2005), 57-58.

¹⁶ Ibid, 57-58.

¹⁷ Barbara Harris, *English Aristocratic Women 1450-1550* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002), 226-230.

¹⁸ Ibid, 228-229.

Today I entertained myself by playing chess with another maid-of-honor by the name of Anne Boleyn. She is a very entertaining woman; we spoke to each other with ease and familiarity. As it so happens Anne was sent to France by her parents and lived at the French court for over a year.¹⁹ This is good news for me as my French is sadly no better than it was in Suffolk. Anne has kindly offered to help me master the language, especially the pronunciation. She herself is a very eloquent speaker and can sing it as masterfully as she can speak the language.

In a week's time King Henry has ordered a large banquet to be held here in the palace. The Queen will of course be in attendance, as well as all of her household. The maids-of-honor and ladies-of-honor have been in a flurry of excitement over the news. We have been busy planning our wardrobes for the occasion and practicing our singing and dancing.²⁰ King Henry plans on watching the performance of a masque at the feast, and it is tradition that some of us perform in the event.²¹ I would love to be chosen, but perhaps not yet. For now I would be content to watch and learn until I become more knowledgeable in ways of court life and music.

September 03, 1525

Diary,

What a night! I am writing now in the still hours of the morning before the rest of the Queen's household rises. There is so much to tell of the previous evening.

¹⁹ E.W. Ives, *Anne Boleyn* (New York, New York: Blackwell, 1986), 22-43.

²⁰ Barbara Harris, *English Aristocratic Women 1450-1550* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002), 228-237.

²¹ *Ibid*, 234-237.

As promised, the feast was magnificent. His Highness the King has a taste for the decadent, and it showed. As a member of the Queen's household, I was seated at the High Table with the King and Queen.²² I must admit I was extremely nervous. I've seen His Highness before, of course as he visits the Queen's chambers, but I had never dined with him at the same table. I was thanking Nurse Jane for drilling proper manners into me all night, especially as the King seemed to enjoy glancing down at the Queen's household quite frequently. It is well known he enjoys female company quite often.

Some of the ladies-in-waiting performed in the masquerade dance for the King's pleasure.²³ It was quite a sight to behold: the King had given the ladies fabulous jewels and expensive clothing in which to catch the eyes of the onlookers.²⁴ The French ambassador in particular was very impressed: I overheard him exclaiming to the King that the ladies "are the fairest and most graceful of any I have seen at court." It is no wonder that everyone considers it an extreme honor to be involved in the dancing of this sort; the ladies not only catch the eye of distinguished gentlemen such as the French ambassador, but very often the King himself joins in: who could ask for more than a dance with the King? It was quite obvious that he had his favorite partners as the evening wore on; he danced with Anne Boleyn seven times! I've noticed he seems quite taken with her. The Queen has noticed as well: as His Highness danced with her more and more often Her Highness got a darker and darker look on her face. It is no secret the King is unfaithful to his wife; still it obviously upsets the Queen when he is so blatant about it.

²² Ibid, 234.

²³ Ibid, 230-237.

²⁴ Ibid, 236.

After the dancing and festivities were drawing to a close for the majority of the court, the Queen and King's households both returned to the Queen's chambers where the banquet continued.²⁵ Naturally many musical instruments were brought out, and a good portion of the ladies played or sang for the King and Queen while the dancing continued.²⁶ I personally was able to play the lute quite well: I could tell the Queen was quite pleased at my skills. Apparently some members of the French ambassador's delegation were as well: I danced with six of them as the evening progressed.

After the King had retired to his own chambers and our guests had left, we helped the Queen undress for bed. She believes we represented the court well tonight: everyone looked marvelous and was extremely charming. All things considered, the banquet was an immense success. I cannot wait until the next.

October 14, 1525

Diary,

The most interesting occurrence happened to me today; I am truly beginning to feel fully involved in court politics. The whole incident involves my friend Anne Boleyn.

Last time I wrote I mentioned how the King seemed to favor Anne above the other ladies of the court. Now I know for certain: he fancies her quite a lot.

²⁵ Ibid, 235-236.

²⁶ Ibid, 235-236.

We were spending the day in the Queen's chambers, as per usual. Lady Margery was entertaining us with her singing, when Anne tugged my sleeve slightly and motioned me to follow her. I quickly curtsied to the Queen and gave a small excuse before following Anne to her own chambers. There she turned to me with an excited look on her face.

"Margaret, can you keep a secret?" she asked. Of course I replied in the affirmative. She then pulled out a letter from underneath her bedding and presented it to me. The contents were quite shocking. It seems I was correct in assessing the King's affection for Anne: he had written a love letter by his own hand intended for her! It was quite poetical too: he admitted he was "stricken with the dart of love" and promised to take her as his only mistress if she agreed.²⁷ Needless to say I was quite speechless, and a little jealous. Anne, however, was, given the situation at hand, uncharacteristically calm.

"I will not be his mistress," she announced with surety. I was appalled: to be the King's mistress would be a great honor, but she was insistent. "My sister Mary became his mistress, only to be cast aside when he tired of her." She told me.²⁸

"But he promised to take you as his only mistress," I reminded her, holding the letter up as proof, to which Anne laughed at me.

"Sweet little Margaret," she said, "the King may say that now, he may actually mean it, but it will not remain so. If I am to be involved with the King, I will need more assurance of his devotion. I will need something more...concrete."²⁹

²⁷ Henry VIII Tudor, *Love Letters of Henry VIII to Anne Boleyn*, 2010. http://www.gutenberg.org/files/32155/32155-h/32155-h.htm#Page_i.

²⁸ Richard Rex, *The Tudors* (Gloucestershire: Tempus Publishing Limited, 2005), 57-59.

Naturally I asked her what she meant, but she refused to say any more, except to swear me to secrecy. Of course I obliged, but now I wonder. The Queen would not be pleased to learn of these developments. But surely the King would be even more displeased if the Queen were to find out? I fear this situation will get out of hand quickly if not stopped soon.

March 17, 1526

Diary,

I had a private discussion with Queen Catherine today. She believes it is high time I was betrothed: I am now sixteen years of age and ready to be married. I could not agree more: I confess this has been on my mind for some time. It gives me great pleasure that the Queen has taken an interest in my affairs, but then I am a member of her household, and thus a good match for me represents her well. It is one of the many advantages of being a maid-of-honor for the Queen.³⁰

Her Highness has apparently spoken to the King about this matter, to which he helped arrange a match from his own household: the Duke of Norfolk, Lord William Rutland. I could not be happier: the Duke is among the King's favorites at court and is good-looking and fairly young. He recently lost his wife two years ago during the birth of their third child; he has since been looking for another wife. Queen Catherine believes I would be most happy in this union,

²⁹ E.W. Ives, *Anne Boleyn* (New York, New York: Blackwell, 1986), 102-107.

³⁰ Barbara Harris, *English Aristocratic Women 1450-1550* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002), 226-227.

and the King seems set on the match.³¹ I will write mother tonight with the news. Imagine, marrying one of the most sought-after bachelors in the country!

April 07, 1526

Diary,

Mother arrived at court three days ago in response to my letter. She is positively ecstatic over the news: a better match could not be asked for, she had said confidently.

I have seen the Duke in court multiple times. After the very likely possibility of our union he has seen fit to engage me in conversation when appropriate, as well as lead me in many of the dances the King has ordered. He is quite a good dancer, and is very complimentary of my abilities as well. He is also quite well spoken, and I can tell he is very clever. I believe we would make a fine match. I can see being fond of him.

The one thing he is apparently injurious about is my ability to effectively run a large estate. While he admits he is very pleased with my musical talents and charms, he has indicated to my parents that he needs a wife who is not only good, chaste, and true, but can manage his households with an expert hand and firm guidance.³²³³ His estates are quite large, and as a member of the King's household it is imperative that his wife be intelligent and confident

³¹ Ibid, 226-227.

³² Ibid, 64-70.

³³ Joan Larsen Klein, *Daughters, wives, and widows: writings by men about women and marriage in England, 1500-1640* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 112-113.

enough to manage on her own in his long absences. My parents have assured him that I can rise to this challenge.

Of course another important matter that came up was that of my dowry. My father provided for me well in his will: 1500 marks for each of his daughters. This is quite a handsome dowry by anyone's account: it certainly is larger than many.³⁴ On top of this, the King and Queen have generously added 300 marks to my dowry as both an acknowledgement of the good service I have already shown Her Majesty and an incentive to continue as part of Her Majesty's household.³⁵ Of course, this point is already moot: I have no desire to leave the Queen's side. I only hope that if these negotiations go through that my future husband will not object to this. Queen Catherine has already informed me that should I marry, I would become a lady-in-waiting.³⁶

May 18, 1526

Diary,

The negotiations are complete! I am to marry Lord William within seven months. Things could not have developed more splendidly.

Of course, once I become the Duchess of Norfolk I will initially be required to spend some time away from the court, as I will be journeying to my new husband's estates. I suppose

³⁴ Barbara Harris, *English Aristocratic Women 1450-1550* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002), 47.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 226.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 217-222.

they will be my estates by then as well. I will also be the stepmother of his three children, and will be expected to have children of my own. I admit I have mixed feelings about this. I do not know if I will make a good mother, certainly not as successful as mine own, but mother, in her usual calming way dismissed my fears when I voiced them. “No woman is ever completely ready to be a mother,” she assured me. “But it is our duty to our husbands to give them heirs, Margaret. You have been trained for this your entire life. You will be just fine.” I only wished I shared her confidence.³⁷

The other maids-of-honor and ladies-in-waiting have been congratulating me on my fine match. There is no finer man in all of England, they tell me, except of course the King himself. I am quite lucky to have had the Queen’s help in this matter.

August 23, 1526

Diary,

I once again spent the day amusing myself in the Queen’s chambers with games of dice and chess. Anne Boleyn still remains an expert chess player: I have yet to beat her at a game. However, I am pleased to report that my French is much improved since meeting her; she has quite the tongue for the language and the patience to help me with my own pronunciation. As we played, we naturally took to gossiping about the recent events at court and in our lives. My good news is always a splendid topic of conversation (especially for me), but Anne has just as

³⁷ Ibid, 64.

much excitement in her life. It was early this year that the King officially announced his courtship of her: his affection and love have now been made public.³⁸

It is interesting to see how members of the Queen's household are reacting to this. Most continue to serve the Queen faithfully without any spite towards Anne, acknowledging that the King has had many such affairs in the past. However, a few seem quite offended on the Queen's behalf: Lady Jane Rochford is quite obvious with her disdain towards Anne's relationship with the King.³⁹ The Queen herself is quite reasonably unhappy with the affair, but there is little she can do to change this. It is well known the King desires after younger women than his wife, and her inability to conceive a son is frustrating to the King.⁴⁰

As I was discussing all this with Anne, she seemed silent on her own thoughts about the matter. I reminded her of the discussion we had when she first showed me the love letter written to her by the King, to which she replied, "Nothing has changed, Margaret. I will hold a special place in the life of our great King." I hastened to inquire what she meant by this, to which she simply replied, "wait and see, Margaret. I daresay you will be surprised before long." With that comment, she used her Queen to checkmate my King with ease. When I took the opportunity to comment on how she seems to favor the use of her Queen to win, she laughed and remarked, "The King may be the most important piece on the board, Margaret, but the Queen is the most powerful. She holds a vast amount of influence over the outcome of the game. Of course I favor her to checkmate." I will say this for Anne, she is quite shrewd: a master strategist in every sense of the word.

³⁸ E.W. Ives, *Anne Boleyn* (New York, New York: Blackwell, 1986), 99-110.

³⁹ Barbara Harris, *English Aristocratic Women 1450-1550* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002), 238.

⁴⁰ Richard Rex, *The Tudors* (Gloucestershire: Tempus Publishing Limited, 2005), 57-58.

January 10, 1527

Diary,

It is done. As of last week, I am a married woman. My official title is Lady Margaret Rutland, Duchess of Norfolk.

I had not given much thought as to how it would feel to be a married woman, but so far the difference is not startling. Both my husband and I initially remained at court in our service to the King and Queen respectively, but that will be interrupted very soon. Within two weeks we will travel to his estates, where I will begin running his household.⁴¹ This is what unnerves me the most, but he assures me that the servants are supportive and there will be plenty of guides there if ever I need the help.

January 20, 1527

Diary,

We are on the road now travelling to William's (and I suppose my) estates. We have been travelling for three days: I had forgotten how tiring journeys can be. The carriage is comfortable enough, but each tiny bump in the road jostles its inhabitants quite severely. I should be glad to see this journey at its end.

The Queen's household was quite sad to see me go. The farewell was very emotional: even Queen Catherine herself seemed subdued. She reminded me that I am now a lady-in-

⁴¹ Barbara Harris, *English Aristocratic Women 1450-1550* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002), 61-67.

waiting and will be obligated to return and continue to serve her as the need requires in the future.⁴² I am only too happy to oblige.

Anne was very tearful as well. She hugged me quite hard and made me promise to return soon, "after all," she exclaimed, "who else can I defeat at chess so easily?" A back-handed compliment, to be sure, but I will miss her too. I have made many good friends at court these past few years.

We seem to be stopping at an inn now for the night. William is motioning me to accompany him outside. I shall write again later.

January 26, 1527

Diary,

At long last the end is in sight! I have spotted my new home from the carriage window. A good thing too: I was about to go mad inside this cramped little transport. William's estates are farther from the palace than my father's ever was.

The estates themselves are enormous. The house (though for all intents and purposes it is a mini-palace) sits right in the center of it all, surrounded by gardens and green lawns. The stables are off to the right, with the woods encircling the back portion like a crescent moon. Of

⁴² Ibid, 217-222.

course, as it is wintertime they have no leaves, but William assures me they are the greenest woods around in the spring and summer and breathtaking in the autumn.⁴³

As we approached the mansion by way of the main gate, the bumpy road turned to a smoother gravel driveway. As we crunched along I peered out of the window again and saw a large mass of people lined up just outside waiting to meet us. They looked to be of all sorts, judging by their attire. I recognized what must have been a cook, scullery maids, stable boys, and the housekeeper.⁴⁴ What caught my attention the most though were three people fashionably dressed much more nicely than all the rest. Two of them were young children: I assumed them to be the products of William's first marriage, and an older woman with long gray hair tightly pulled back. At first I thought it was perhaps the nurse of the children, but she was dressed too finely for that.

Upon pulling up to the mansion, William again offered me his hand and I stepped out of the carriage. The sun was very glaring: after the darkness of the carriage I had to squint to see the faces of those present, even with my bonnet on shielding my eyes. I could however feel the eyes of all present upon me, sizing me up as the new mistress of the house. I admit it made me very uncomfortable and I began to fidget slightly (sorry Master Cabot: that was a habit I was never entirely able to break). William obviously sensed my discomfort, for he gave me hand a reassuring squeeze before walking to the front of the line and introducing me to his household, one at a time. The servants all bowed and addressed me as, "Duchess Rutland" or "My lady Norfolk"; both strange but not unpleasant titles to my ears. The servants all behaved in the

⁴³ Mark Girouard, *Town and Country* (UK: Yale University Press, 1992), 1-288.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 1-288.

manner servants do: with a quiet and cool respect. The last three people in line however, were not servants.

William introduced his children, both young daughters, first. Isabel is four years of age and Joan two. I told them I had a younger sister named Joan, who always went hill rolling in her dress when she thought no one was watching, to which the two girls laughed. I smiled at that; seeing as I am their step-mother it seemed important that we at least try to get along.

Just as I was beginning to suspect I could handle this new role however, I heard a disbelieving snort come from the third and final member of the party. I looked up and saw the older woman watching me with obvious disdain, her mouth drawn in a thin line that made it nearly disappear amid her wrinkles. Her eyes were very hard, like blue stone; she was obviously not pleased with my presence here at all. I looked at William questioningly. For his part, he seemed to get very tired very quickly, but introduced the woman as Duchess Agnes Hereford; mother of his late wife Judith. Suddenly her animosity towards me made sense.⁴⁵

“Pleased to meet you, Lady Agnes,” I began tentatively, dropping into a quick curtsy. Lady Agnes’ eyes narrowed even further, and remarked to William, “She is young. I hope she can manage the estates satisfactorily,” before shoing the children into the mansion and closing the door behind her. I looked questioningly at William, thinking I had done something wrong. He seemed to read my thoughts and shook his head.

“Do not worry about her, Margaret,” he said with a deep sigh, “Agnes is merely extremely protective over her grandchildren; the daughters of my first wife. She is afraid that

⁴⁵ Ibid, 142-228.

you will bear me a son to inherit my estates.” With that, he motioned me to follow him into the mansion, where a number of maids showed me to my quarters.

I am writing now just before I drift off to sleep. I keep thinking about Lady Agnes and my new step-daughters. It may seem silly, but I did not really consider the family dynamic of having children from William’s first marriage in my new household: my mother’s stepchildren generally interacted peacefully with the rest of us. Then again, I have older brothers: it was obvious from the start which child was to inherit the dukedom. However, if I bear a son by law he will inherit the title, and Lady Agnes’ granddaughters will receive their dowry and marry.⁴⁶ If however I do not bear a son it is possible (if unlikely) that one of them may inherit at least a portion of the estates: at any rate their dowry may increase greatly.⁴⁷ The children are obviously far too young to understand any of this, but Lady Agnes has made her feelings on the matter quite clear. I suppose we shall just have to wait and see. One thing is certain: William desperately desires a son and heir.

January 29, 1527

Diary,

I spent the vast majority of the day following the housekeeper, Mrs. Green, around as she performed the many duties of running a household. In the absence of William, it appears that she had the authority over the servants (although Lady Agnes also shared power in this

⁴⁶ Ibid, 43-45.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 17-23.

regard). I admire how confident she was in barking orders to the staff, and how they followed them without question: an admiration I remarked to her later in the day. She seemed quite pleased with my compliment, and smiling, said, “Do not worry, my Lady. Very soon this will all seem like second nature to you. The staff is quite ready to obey your commands. You need only give them.” For my part, I am still trying not to get lost with these estates: they are simply enormous.

I have not seen either much of the children nor of Lady Agnes in the past few days. This does not particularly trouble me: the less I see of Lady Agnes the better as far as I am concerned. As for the children, they will undoubtedly be under the ever watchful eye of their nurse, as my siblings and I were at that age.⁴⁸ I would enjoy spending more time with them, I believe: they both seem like sweet young girls, and besides, as their new mother-figure I will have to teach them how to be a good lady and wife in the future. I only hope I will learn enough to adequately teach them when the time comes!

February 16, 1527

Diary,

Today I have made the suggestion of having a small get-together for the ladies of surrounding estates here. Mrs. Green could not have agreed more: she believes it is high time that I meet some of the other mistresses in the area. Of course, this party will not only be to meet new friends and drink tea, but has another, more strategic angle. In the life of a lady, the

⁴⁸ Ibid, 29.

more connections one has with wealthy, powerful families the better: this will not only help in me in my own social circle but will allow any children I may have to make the best match possible.⁴⁹ After all, that is how I had an ideal match made of my own: through knowing the Queen of England. Needless to say, it is important that I get along with these ladies. I do not know much about my new neighbors; we are fairly isolated here at Norfolk from others, due to the sheer size of my husband's estates. However, I believe this will make my efforts to make new acquaintances here at Norfolk seem all the more impressive and will cast me in a friendly light. I shall send out invitations tomorrow with riders to the neighboring estates.

March 1, 1527

Diary,

The ladies whom I have invited have all promised to attend my small party tomorrow. They will arrive for lunch and will stay until late afternoon, at which point they will have to return to manage their own estates once more. I have been busy minding the servants all day, making sure each and every small detail is prepared to my liking. I have been particularly busy in the kitchen. The food here is absolutely divine, and although the kitchen staff is more than prepared to manage on their own without my constant supervision, I find that my presence allows for samplings of the food at regular intervals. Needless to say, I spend quite a bit of time there.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 200-201.

Mrs. Green remarked today that she is quite proud of my progress in managing the household. Of course, I am far from perfect yet in this regard, but I have been making vast strides in the difficulty of this challenge. She has said many times that my education in my youth must have been excellent, for I have picked up many of the necessary components quickly. I must write mother and thank her for her careful tutoring in my youth, as well as Nurse Jane and Master Cabot.

William is leaving for court again next month. When we first arrived he seemed unsure of whether he could leave me to manage his estates so soon after our arrival, but after speaking with Mrs. Green his confidence in me has grown. "He believes he has chosen well for a wife," Mrs. Green told me as we discussed the managing of the grounds. "He is very pleased with you." I am very relieved to hear this: William and I do not see as much of each other I had originally suspected we would. Nevertheless, life here is beginning to be very pleasant. Now, if only we were to conceive a son!

September 26, 1535

Diary,

I received a letter from the royal palace today. Anne (I suppose, her Majesty now) expressed her regret that I have not as of late been able to attend the court and sent her condolences when she heard I have recently taken ill. It all seemed natural enough on the surface, but it did make me wonder a little. For one thing, Anne seems quite fixated, almost

desperate, about her lack of son by the king. Apparently His Majesty is quite fond of little Princess Elizabeth, but the fact remains that she is not a male heir. To make matters worse, Anne suspects an affair, or at the very least a strong attraction between her husband and one of her maids-of-honor, Jane Seymour.⁵⁰ I can tell what she is thinking: an affair of just this nature is how Anne eventually rose to prominence as queen consort. I just hope Anne's jealous nature and suspicion do not make things worse for her. I would love to see Her Majesty in person; it has been far too long since I have been to court, but alas I have felt ill for the past month and have been keeping to the house mostly. Hopefully I find myself in a better condition soon.

October 6, 1535

Diary,

A joyous day! The doctor finally arrived at the estates today to check into my health, and he confirmed a suspicion I have had for a while. I am pregnant!

William is beside himself with happiness: this may finally be the male heir he is hoping for. It is something he prays for constantly: if it is a son our estates are secure.

I have been thinking about the whole idea of motherhood as of late, and there are many different facets to consider. To begin, I will insist on educating my children in the ways of the Bible and Our Lord. I have already determined that, regardless of gender they will learn to read

⁵⁰ E.W. Ives, *Anne Boleyn* (New York, New York: Blackwell, 1986), 335-338.

using the Bible, as both William and I did in our childhoods.⁵¹ I have also been giving thought to some names. A religious name is obviously the most fitting, such as Elizabeth or Philip, for these designate humble, virtuous children and will no doubt give a good impression on others.⁵²

I am feeling tired now. I shall doubtlessly write more on this subject later.

December 3, 1535

Diary,

Ladies Stanford and Lisle came by this afternoon to check on my health and pregnancy. William was attending to business elsewhere, so we had tea and talked about my child for quite a long time. Both women are quite impatient to know the gender of the child: it will make all the difference in the world.

Lady Stanford is personally hoping for a girl. Her son, James is just over twelve years old now: a suitable match could be made that would join our families in matrimony.⁵³ I believe she would also enjoy the role of godmother to a daughter of mine. If I were to have a son, he would have only one godmother, but a daughter would have two, and she might very well be named after one of them.⁵⁴ The benefits of course are reaped by both parties: the godmother would have the honor of having a child named after her and the goddaughter would have the

⁵¹ Joan Larsen Klein, *Daughters, wives, and widows: writings by men about women and marriage in England, 1500-1640* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 295-300.

⁵² *Ibid*, 296-299.

⁵³ James Daybell, *Women and Politics in Early Modern England, 1450 - 1700* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2004), 27-29.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 27.

beginnings of an influential social female circle for success in life.⁵⁵ Of course, it is too early to tell what gender my child will be.

January 18, 1536

Diary,

I received a lovely present from Mother today: a beautiful silver cup in celebration of my pregnancy.⁵⁶ She also sent along some fine blue silk: I believe I will make a shirt for William. The color is quite superb.

I feel as if I am getting bigger every day: it is getting to be more of a chore moving around the house supervising the servants. Nevertheless, my lie-in period is still nearly three months away: until that happens I will continue to perform my duties to the best of my ability.⁵⁷

January 28, 1536

Diary,

The time for my lie-in is nearly upon me. At times I think this will be a blessing: I get tired quite easily nowadays, but I know that I will be very bored once the time comes.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 27-29.

⁵⁶ James Daybell, *Women and Politics in Early Modern England, 1450 - 1700* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2004), 30.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 23.

William has become fussier the closer I get to giving birth. The quickening stage is well past: earlier anxieties of a miscarriage have therefore lessened; nevertheless he has been keeping an extremely close (almost too close) eye on my welfare.⁵⁸ Today I went to walk around the estate grounds, thinking the fresh air would do me good, and William nearly burst into tears. I had just gotten past the front walk when he came running out behind me, with no shoes and a panicked expression on his face, took me by the hand, and forcibly guided me back into the house. He then sat me down and gave me an hour long lecture about how it was very important for me to avoid, “stinging winter winds, cold temperatures, and the frights outdoors that could hurt the child.”⁵⁹ Of course I protested that it was our estates: I had been outdoors an uncountable amount of times before, and that I was more than adequately wrapped to be comfortable, but William would hear none of it. He has insisted I remain indoors, where both I and the child will be “safe”. Inconvenient as this is, I admit it is also rather endearing.

February 1, 1536

Diary,

I received a letter of congratulations from her Majesty today, as well as a gift of an ivory chess board. “So I may teach your children to play,” she wrote in her letter. Of course I burst out laughing upon reading this: Anne always did have a sense of humor. Despite the light-heartedness of the letter, I sense that Anne is growing quite desperate; the tone of her letter

⁵⁸ David Cressy, *Birth, marriage, and death: ritual, religion, and the life-cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 44-45.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 45-46.

merely sounds like someone putting on a front. By now it is quite plain to her that her husband is courting Jane Seymour, nevertheless Henry has surely courted other women besides his wife; he is well known for it.⁶⁰ Perhaps this is what scares Anne the most. I just hope she does not do anything foolish in retaliation; there are times she does overstep her boundaries. For the Queen's own sake, I pray she keeps an even head about this and proves herself as intelligent as I know her to be.

March 3, 1536

Diary,

I have found a wet nurse today for my child. It has been determined she will give birth less than three weeks prior to myself; the timing could not have been better. William in particular is very pleased that I have found a good wet nurse; he absolutely refuses to let me nurse the child myself.⁶¹ Better yet, the wet nurse has agreed to live at our estate for as long as she is needed, therefore the tiresome task of taking my child to her daily will be avoided.⁶²

The physician informs me that my lie-in period will begin within a week. Mother has written that she is already on her way, and the many local ladies in my social circle are eagerly preparing to help me through this time.⁶³ Overall, I find myself overwhelmed by the help and

⁶⁰ Henry VIII Tudor, *Love Letters of Henry VIII to Anne Boleyn*, 2010. http://www.gutenberg.org/files/32155/32155-h/32155-h.htm#Page_i.

⁶¹ Mary Prior, *Women in English society, 1500-1800* (New York: Methuen, 1985), 27-28.

⁶² *Ibid*, 28.

⁶³ James Daybell, *Women and Politics in Early Modern England, 1450 - 1700* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2004), 23.

support of my social circle as well as my husband. I could not ask for more devoted friends and family.

April 6, 1536

Diary,

It has begun. My lie-in period started today.

Mother arrived yesterday, along with my dear sister Anne to see to it that everything goes smoothly during this last month of my pregnancy.⁶⁴ Today all the ladies from surrounding estates also joined us at the house as I was placed in my bedchambers to await the birth of my child. As for William, he gave me a kiss on the forehead and then left me in the hands of my very capable family and friends. "This is now a task for women," he said, before adding, "Ladies, take care of my wife."

Of course he should not be worried. Besides all the help I am receiving from my family and friends, I have a small army of midwives to tend to my needs. They are quite skilled at their profession, particularly where herbal medicine is concerned.⁶⁵ Upon feeling light-headed and dizzy this evening for instance the midwives immediately concocted a mixture of sowbread and

⁶⁴ Ibid, 31-33.

⁶⁵ David Cressy, *Birth, marriage, and death: ritual, religion, and the life-cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 21-22.

lilies, which I then drank while they said a prayer over my head for, “a speedy delivery and healthy babe.”⁶⁶ I just hope those prayers are answered.

May 27, 1536

Diary,

I am expecting any day now. Indeed, perhaps it is for this very reason for the attitudes of the women with me upon receiving a letter today.

Apparently last night a rider approached the estate with a letter from the royal palace. It was from Her Majesty Queen Anne, and was to be given to me immediately. William of course had it delivered to my mother to give to me, upon which she opened it to make sure the contents would not upset me nor affect my pregnancy in any negative fashion. I could see the contents startled her: she went very pale and was made to sit down quickly. Of course her reaction was a signal to the other ladies; they all gathered around to read. When I finally demanded to see the correspondence they all got very quiet and assured me it was nothing (very unconvincingly I may add). Eventually however my sister Anne spoke up in my defense and the letter was given to me.

The correspondence was dated the 16th of May, 1536 and was from Queen Anne. This was not unusual; we have kept in regular contact with each other via letters. The message however was shocking: Anne had been arrested for adultery on the 2nd and found guilty on the

⁶⁶ Ibid, 21.

day before the letter was written.⁶⁷ She admitted that she was to be beheaded the following day. What is more stunning than even this: Anne's marriage to Henry was nullified, effectively making her daughter Princess Elizabeth a bastard.⁶⁸ What will become of the former Princess is only a guess at this point. As for herself Anne only had one request. "Remember me, Margaret," she wrote as a farewell. I was completely stunned. The effect of the letter must have made the ladies worry, for immediately after the midwives were handing me another solution to drink and the ladies were engaged in a prayer, both for my well-being and the late Queen's soul.⁶⁹

Most of the women are asleep now, but I have not been able to close my eyes. I keep thinking about Anne, and how she was in the days we were in Queen Catherine's household together. She seemed so young and sure of herself, and she did accomplish all the power and glory she had so aspired to. No one who knew her could ever doubt her intelligence. The question that remains is then same I have been asking myself all night: what went wrong? She had everything; how had she fallen so far? Some of the women around me now shake their heads, saying if only she had given the King a son her death could have been avoided. Others say it was the affections the King had for Jane Seymour that were Anne's undoing. Still others say she was guilty of the adultery she was accused of. As for my own feelings on the matter, I do not believe for one second Anne was guilty of adultery, but I do fear she may have tried to arouse the jealousy of the King; such was her nature if she felt she had been scorned.⁷⁰ She

⁶⁷ E.W. Ives, *Anne Boleyn* (New York, New York: Blackwell, 1986), 358-408.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 404.

⁶⁹ David Cressy, *Birth, marriage, and death: ritual, religion, and the life-cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 21.

⁷⁰ E.W. Ives, *Anne Boleyn* (New York, New York: Blackwell, 1986), 349-350.

could have been so successful, my dear friend, whatever her faults she did not deserve to die in such a manner. I suppose there is nothing left to be done now; she has already passed on, and the King I hear is engaged to Jane Seymour. There is one thing I am certain of however; if I do indeed have a daughter I will name her Anne.

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