

Chapter 1

Royal Crisis

“**Y**our Majesty! You must awake. Your Majesty, this paper is of great import. Please, Your Majesty!”

The queen opened her eyes and saw her maid’s chubby face creased with anxiety. Mary Odell’s light brown eyes had a gleam of fear, and her full lips wore a frown. She had parted the red velvet draperies around the queen’s bed and now stood by its heavily carved Corinthian columns.

“Good morning, Mary.” The queen yawned, stretched her slender figure and sat up adjusting her black silk nightdress. Even at thirty-four, she retained her youthful beauty. Her light brown hair, now in braids, had a touch of auburn and her big gray-green eyes set off her oval face and fair complexion. “It is a lovely morning.”

Sun streamed through the tall multi-paned window beside the bed. Its rays glittered over the gold candlesticks on the carved pedestal table at her bedside and on the gilded frame of Henry’s portrait which hung on the wall across the room. In contrast, Mary, a commoner, wore a simple gray floor-length dress with long, narrow sleeves, and a white vest laced over her very full bust. A white cloth cap covered her graying hair.

Mary held up a rolled parchment. “Your Majesty, you must read this.”

Struggles and Triumphs

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The queen yawned and snuggled back into the covers which smelled of her home-made lavender and rose potpourri. "I had a late night at court, Mary. It is much too early to read. You read it to me. You should be able to decipher most of the words." Kateryn, whose name was pronounced Katherine, married Henry VIII of England three years before in 1543. As a devout Protestant she believed that every person should be educated. She had a Bible study each day with her maids where she also taught them to read.

"Oh, n-n-no, Madam. No, I cannot." She shook her head.

"Mary? This is unlike you." She cocked an eyebrow while reaching for the paper. "Here let me see. I shall show you some words you recognize."

After another yawn, she unrolled the parchment. Once she began to read, however, she gasped and threw a hand over her mouth.

Mary trembled. "Something is amiss. I knew it. Those long words, I just knew."

Her eyes on the paper, the queen did not answer, but the color drained from her face.

"Your Majesty?"

Kateryn looked at her sharply. "Where did you get this?"

Mary, a deep crease between her brows, pointed toward the door. "I found it in front of the door."

"Which door?"

Mary Odell pointed to the door that led to the hallway.

The queen, her face almost white, leaned toward her and put a hand on her arm. "When?"

"I-I-I do not recall. Ten minutes, maybe." Mary shrugged.

She released Mary and dashed to the window where she examined the paper in the sunlight. "This *is* the king's signature."

"Madam, is this *quite* serious?" Mary clasped her hands together and tried to see Kateryn's face.

The queen put the paper on the pedestal table by her bed and crossed her arms. "Did you see anyone in the hallway?"

Royal Crisis

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“No, Madam!”

She moved closer. “Are you sure you saw no one? Think!”

“No, Madam. The hall was empty.” She shook her head. Her frown deepened. “Is this truly grave?”

“Yes!” Kateryn plunged into the bed, and ducked under the covers. “I am ill!”

“Ill?” Mary frowned.

“Yes, I am ill. Send word to my sister straight away!” Kateryn’s sister, Lady Herbert, served as her lady-in-waiting.

“Oh, yes Your Majesty!” Mary curtsied. “What should I tell her?”

“Tell her I must see her now!” She shivered in spite of the blankets on her bed.

“Would you like me to bring you—”

Kateryn turned her face away. “I require nothing. Please send someone to fetch Lady Herbert *now*.”

“I shall do so, and return anon.” Eyes widened in fear, Mary rushed from the room.

I must face this. Kateryn swallowed several times and reached for the paper with shaky hands. *This is a warrant for my arrest and it has the king’s signature. It is my fault. I should have been more careful in speaking with Henry on religion.*