



CATHERINE PARR

July 1544; Windsor Castle, England

“Your Majesty!” called out the servant, his slight form bouncing in his horse’s saddle as he turned toward the queen and her companions in the carriage. “Since we are about ten minutes from the castle, I can ride ahead and announce your coming presence if you so desire!”

So eager was the servant that he nearly slipped from his horse, catching himself in time and heaving several deep breaths into his stocky frame as his face grew red in the summer heat. The horse-drawn carriage which he approached drew to a halt at the coachman’s order. Slowly leaning toward the open window frame and graciously making no comment on the servant’s clumsiness, a fair-skinned, dark-haired woman beamed a reassuring smile.

“Thank you, Thomas,” she said. “We will be well-protected with the remainder of our guard. If you could please ask His Majesty to meet with me in the gardens, I would be grateful to you.”

Tipping his cap and bowing slightly, Thomas wheeled his horse around and began a dash westward. The carriage began moving forward again, and, drawing back into her seat, Catherine Parr, Queen of England and Ireland, gave a weary sigh.

“Given your late nights reading and writing, m’lady,” said the young woman across from her, “I am surprised you have not chosen to nap the entire journey from Richmond!”

The queen’s eyes shone, suddenly sparkling with renewed energy at the mention of her evening labors. “It

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is true I have burned many candles over the past month, dear Lucy, but I am not sleepy. Somewhat tired, yes. But God gives sleep to me when I require it. My business today is much more urgent, so my Lord shall sustain me with the health and strength that comes graciously from His hand.”

“And given that you brought along many sheaves of your inscriptions, one might justly assume that you are to share them with the king?” asked her companion seated at her side.

“Some in particular, good Margaret,” Queen Catherine replied. “Not all, for I know he would like to leave with his army by the end of the year!” She smiled at her attempt at humor. “I have been thinking intently ... No, that is not the proper word. I have been considering prayerfully what to bring to his ears this day. I am very emotional about his departure for France, and given that it is with his army, the chance exists these could be the last moments we spend together.”

“I have heard the news is encouraging from France,” said Lucy, “if the gossip of stable boys is anything to swear by.”

“You should think quite highly of stable boys, Lucy,” the queen noted, “for I would tend to believe what they said more than, say, the words of courtiers and political advisors. Those in the palace can often proclaim what they want you to believe; the humble of the earth give the truth unvarnished more often than we imagine.”

“Is this why you speak so little to members of the King’s Council?” inquired Margaret.

“I simply mean that truth is not the sole possession of the high and lofty,” responded Queen Catherine, “but we find it in droves in the humble of the earth. They may be our servants, but they are also our teachers more than we might imagine.”

The ladies sat quietly, digesting the words of their queen. Since she had appointed her stepdaughter Margaret

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Neville as her lady-in-waiting and Lucy Somerset, her stepson John's wife, as her maid of honor, the two women had often remarked that conversation with Catherine was a rich education in itself. Although she did not brandish her views loudly and openly, both women acknowledged that the queen was a woman of deep wisdom and goodness who outranked almost every man they knew in those regards.

"I must confess, m'lady," began Margaret, "that when you married the king, I did not imagine this depth of devotion from you toward him. Please do not misunderstand me. This is not in regards to your character. But, in all confidence, his reputation was, dare I say, questionable."

"Thank you, Margaret," the queen answered, "and I know you were not speaking ill of me. There were times when I wondered if this was indeed what God desired of me. But I obeyed the king when he proposed marriage, and in spite of some differences, we have made a decent way forward the past year. I know that since I am the sixth wife he has had, any joy on my part would meet some detractors, but God has made it a good union."

"Although you are clearly siding with the thought of Luther and not with Rome?" asked Lucy.

"I side with where Scripture takes me, my good and dear maid," Catherine replied. "And I have meditated on this greatly in my late nights in the recent past. Why else would our Lord Jesus Christ be that Light of the world unless the darkness of sin and rebellion dwelt in our hearts from birth? Why would He be our Prince of Peace if there were no war between us and heaven? How could He be our Great Physician unless our souls are plagued with the fever and illness of sin which we cannot break by our best works?"

"Truly I have not seen anyone live with such confidence in that hope for so long, m'lady," replied Margaret.

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“Because the grace of God is so starkly clear and glorious, when I see my wretchedness that places me in such need, I know Christ’s mercies are the only security for me. Oh Margaret! Oh Lucy! There is no other place I could direct my hope. I could have confidence in nothing in heaven or earth, but in Christ, my true and only Savior! I come to Him, sick and grievously wounded, and he heals and restores me. I do not ask for bread, but for the crumbs that fall from His table, and yet He sets before me a delicious and satisfying feast of His goodness! I deserve to be cast into the fires of hell, yet He seeks me to save me, and because of His faithfulness, He is unwilling that I should be cast out of His presence! If I should look upon my sins and not the mercy of Christ poured out in His death on the Cross, I would only despair. But He appeased His Father in His death and sacrificed Himself for me. For me, my dear ladies!” The queen, undone by her emotion, sank back in her cushioned seat, joyful tears splashing from her eyes.

Several moments went by before the ladies spoke again, and by then they could see the form of Windsor Castle as it rose before them. “I do hope, m’lady,” Lucy offered, “that this will not be the final meeting between you and the king.”

“He goes to France to fight and lead as a soldier,” said Queen Catherine, “and whatever occurs is out of my hands, but in God’s. And my Savior has overcome death by His own death. Yes, if my lord the king should die, it would be hard. But what if we had to face it without Jesus’ death?”

“I am certain, m’lady,” said Margaret, “that you are not finished with your writings if these truths are what Almighty God has laid on your heart.”

“Perhaps not,” the queen replied, “but we are here and I must go to my husband. I will pray, though, that the same Jesus who opened my heart to receive salvation from Him will continually soften your hearts to His Word every day.”

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Thomas approached the carriage door and bowed. "Your Majesty, the king is in the gardens."

Catherine had Lucy and Margaret accompany her into the spacious gardens. Although Thomas had said the king would be spending a great deal of time here, it was several minutes before they discovered him. King Henry had hobbled a few feet away from the rosebushes and was smelling a collection of cornflowers when he looked up and saw his bride approaching him.

"My gracious and fair queen," Henry spoke, his voice quavering slightly, "it is good of you to come." He drew near Catherine, nodding politely to Lucy and Margaret, and surprised his wife when he placed his hand in hers. "May we sit together? I would suggest a walk, but this blasted leg would prevent me taking many steps."

"You are my king," Catherine replied. "Your wish is my pleasure."

On a nearby bench, they sat in companionable silence for several moments before Henry sighed and looked at the distant trees. "I am to depart tomorrow to take the road to Dover and join the remnants of our army on this side of the Channel. By August, we intend to be in France to subdue Boulogne for good."

"The siege is a success?" asked Catherine. She had been named regent¹ for when Henry would be in France, and she thought it helpful to know as much as possible about military matters.

"That is the news so far. Norfolk sends word that more men could insure victory. I am not worried about defeat." He stopped, gently squeezing the queen's hand. "I am worried about an untimely death."

"All death is untimely, my lord," she responded, placing her other hand on top of his. "It is not how this world was

1. Being regent meant that Catherine would govern England while Henry was away.

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intended to be. Sin has caused it to be otherwise.” She paused. She had to tread carefully with her husband. It was one thing for her, Archbishop Cranmer, Prince Edward, and others to hold unswervingly to the Protestant faith; it was another to be too public about it under Henry’s authority.

“I think,” Henry’s voice called her back to the present, “that going away has forced me to take stock of my life, my dear. I have gained power, have a dynasty secured through Edward’s succession after I die, have solidified support from the gentry, and have broken with Rome and now I rule over the Church of England. Yet I sometimes sense a great emptiness clutching at my soul.”

“It might be emptiness,” Catherine offered, “or it could merely be a passing shadow of the heart.”

Henry clutched his leg and winced. Catherine looked at him, keeping silence and waiting for him to reply.

“I am not a good man, my queen, and you certainly know that,” Henry continued, “but I know people who seek to treat me well, who are the ones who do good. My Archbishop Cranmer is one such soul. There are others. You, my bride, are such a light in the midst of my darkness, much of which I tend to create myself.” “You should take courage from the words of Christ, my husband,” Catherine said slowly, with much emotion.

Her husband winced, though whether his flinch was from Catherine’s words or his ghastly physical pain who could tell. Many looked at the king and saw a lumbering, obese form dragging his feet and weathering an ulcerated wound. Catherine looked at him and saw her monarch and husband. *To love, to cherish, and to obey, till death we do part*, she thought. She stroked the top of his hand.

“I don’t know,” he finally groaned, “how comforting they might be. The Lord Christ would likely expose my sin to the light.”

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“It is precisely by doing the former that He shall do the latter, O king,” Queen Catherine said soothingly. “The apostle Peter knew it well.”

“I am hardly in the same realm as Peter,” Henry grumbled, gritting his teeth.

“Neither would I make that claim for myself,” Catherine admitted, “but you do remember the Scriptures when the Lord told the disciples to put their nets into the lake for a catch. Peter, ever resistant, ever the fisherman who knew better, said they had caught nothing, but he would take Jesus at His word. And their catch was then so numerous that Peter was overcome by his unbelief. He said to our Lord, ‘Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!’ Do you recall?”

“I do,” Henry grunted.

“And then Jesus told Peter ‘Do not be afraid, from now on you will be catching men.’ From sin to comfort. He knew who Peter was. He also knew who he could become by grace.”

“I do not doubt your knowledge of Scripture, my queen,” Henry rasped, “but what does this have to do with me?”

“Because our Lord knows who you are, as you confessed to be,” Catherine said, taking both the king’s hands in her own, “and He knows who He can make you to be. Oh, my husband and king! Fight well, fight faithfully, and may the Savior of heaven give you protection on earth!”

Henry’s eyes softened, glistening. Lucy and Margaret had drawn several paces away but were close enough to hear Catherine whisper, “So allow me to pray for you.”

The heads of four people in that quiet space bowed together, and the queen began to pray:

“O Almighty King and Lord of Hosts, Who have appointed Your angels to minister in both war and peace; and Who granted Your servant David both courage and strength: Instruct and teach my husband the king’s hands to battle, and make his arms strong like a bow of steel. O

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King of Kings, Lord of Lords, and the Ruler of all Princes, who sees all on earth from your great throne, with favor look upon Henry, my king and husband. Renew him with the grace of the Holy Spirit, that he might seek Your will and walk in Your way. Supply him generously with Your heavenly gifts, grant him health, strengthen him to vanquish and overcome all his enemies; and if he dies, may he enter everlasting joy and peace, through Christ our Lord. Amen.”

And Catherine opened her eyes to see her hands wet and shining, for her husband the king was crying.

The sixth and final wife of King Henry VIII, **CATHERINE PARR** was the Queen of England and Ireland from 1543 until her death at thirty-six years of age in 1548. Although Henry’s character was checkered at best, Catherine proved to be both a faithful wife and devoted Protestant queen. Greatly influenced by Lutheran teachings, she embraced the Gospel of Christ and was a lucid defender of justification by faith alone. She worked to reconcile Henry with his daughters Mary and Elizabeth before his death in 1547, helped to oversee the education of Henry’s son (and later king) Edward, and communicated her beliefs with a clarity and passion rarely seen in history. She published her *Prayers or Meditations* (the first published book in the English language written by a woman), as well as her classic work *The Lamentation of a Sinner*, in which she called readers troubled by their wanderings and rebellion to a firm and secure hope in Jesus Christ.