

THREE
SISTERS,
THREE
QUEENS

PHILIPPA GREGORY

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BAYNARD'S CASTLE, LONDON, ENGLAND,
NOVEMBER 1501



I am to wear white and green, as a Tudor princess. Really, I think of myself as the one and only Tudor princess, for my sister, Mary, is too young to do more than be brought in by her nurse at supertime, and taken out again. I make sure Mary's nursemaids are quite clear that she is to be shown to our new sister-in-law, and then go. There is no profit in letting her sit up at the table, or gorge on crystallized plums. Rich things make her sick and if she gets tired she will bawl. She is only five years old, far too young for state occasions. Unlike me; I am all but twelve. I have to play my part in the wedding; it would not be complete without me. My lady grandmother, the king's mother, said so herself.

Then she said something that I couldn't quite hear, but I know that the Scots lords will be watching me to see if I look strong and grown-up enough to be married at once. I am sure I am. Everyone says that I am a bonny girl, stocky as a Welsh pony, healthy as a milkmaid, fair, like my younger brother Harry, with big blue eyes.

"You'll be next," she says to me with a smile. "They say that one wedding begets another."

"I won't have to travel as far as Princess Katherine," I say. "I'll come home on visits."

"You will." My lady grandmother's promise makes it a cer-

tainty. "You are marrying our neighbor, and you will make him our good friend and ally."

Princess Katherine had to come all the way from Spain, miles and miles away. Since we are quarreling with France, she had to come by sea, and there were terrible storms and she was nearly wrecked. When I go to Scotland to marry the king, it will be a great procession from Westminster to Edinburgh of nearly four hundred miles. I shan't go by sea, I won't arrive sick and soporific wet, and I will come and go from my new home to London whenever I like. But Princess Katherine will never see her home again. They say she was crying when she first met my brother. I think that is ridiculous. And babyish as Mary.

"Shall I dance at the wedding?" I ask.

"You and Harry shall dance together," my lady grandmother rules. "After the Spanish princess and her ladies have shown us a Spanish dance. You can show her what an English princess can do." She smiles slyly. "We shall see who is best."

"Me," I pray. Out loud I say: "A basse danse?" It is a slow grand grown-up dance which I do very well, actually more walking than dancing.

"A galliard."

I don't argue; nobody argues with my lady grandmother. She decides what happens in every royal household, in every palace and castle; my lady mother the queen just agrees.

"We'll have to rehearse," I say. I can make Harry practice by promising him that everyone will be watching. He loves to be the center of attention and is always winning races and competing at archery and doing tricks on his pony. He is as tall as me, though he is only ten years old, so we look well together if he doesn't play the fool. I want to show the Spanish princess that I am just as good as the daughter of Castile and Aragon. My mother and father are a Plantagenet and a Tudor. Those are grand enough names for anyone. Katherine needn't think that we are grateful for her coming. I, for one, don't particularly want another princess at court.



It is my lady mother who insists that Katherine visit us at Baynard's Castle before the wedding, and she is accompanied by her own court, who have come all the way from Spain—at our expense, as my father remarks. They enter through the double doors like an invading army, their clothes, their speech, their headdresses completely unlike ours and, at the center of it all, beautifully gowned, is the girl that they call the “infanta.” This too is ridiculous, as she is fifteen and a princess, and I think that they are calling her “baby.” I glance across at Harry to see if he will giggle if I make a face and say “ba-aby,” which is how we tease Mary, but he is not looking at me. He is looking at her with goggle-eyes, as if he is seeing a new horse, or a piece of Italian armor, or something that he has set his heart on. I see his expression, and I realize that he is trying to fall in love with her, like a knight with a damsel in a story. Harry loves stories and ballads about impossible ladies in towers, or tied to rocks, or lost in woods, and somehow Katherine impressed him when he met her before her entry into London. Perhaps it was her ornate veiled litter, perhaps it was her learning, for she speaks three languages, I am so annoyed—I wish he was close enough for me to pinch him. This is exactly why no one younger than me should play a part in royal occasions.

She is not particularly beautiful. She is three years older than me but I am as tall as her. She has light brown hair with a copper tinge to it, only a little darker than mine. This is, of course, irritating: who wants to be compared to a sister-in-law? But I can hardly see it, for she wears a high headpiece and a thick concealing veil. She has blue eyes like mine too, but very fair eyebrows and lashes; obviously, she's not allowed to color them in like I do. She has pale creamy skin, which I suppose is admirable. She is tiny: tiny waist pinched in by tight lacing so she can hardly breathe, tiny feet with the most ridiculous shoes I have ever seen,

gold-embroidered toes and gold laces. I don't think that my lady grandmother would let me wear gold laces. It would be vanity and worldly show. I am sure that the Spanish are very worldly. I am sure that she is.

I make certain that my thoughts don't show on my face as I examine her. I think she is lucky to come here, lucky to be chosen by my father to marry my elder brother Arthur, lucky to have a sister-in-law like me, a mother-in-law like my mother and—more than anything else—a grandmother-in-law like Lady Margaret Beaufort, who will make very sure that Katherine does not exceed her place which has been appointed by God.

She curtsies and kisses my lady mother and, after her, my lady grandmother. This is how it should be; but she will soon learn that she had better please my lady grandmother before anybody. Then my lady mother nods to me and I step forward, and the Spanish princess and I curtsey together at the same time, to exactly the same depth, and she steps forward and we kiss on one cheek and then the other. Her cheeks are warm and I see that she is blushing, her eyes filling with tears as if she is missing her real sisters. I show her my stern look, just like my father when someone is asking him for money. I am not going to fall in love with her for her blue eyes and pretty ways. She need not imagine she is going to come into our English court and make us look fat and stupid.

She is not at all rebuffed; she looks right back at me. Born and raised in a competitive court with three sisters, she understands rivalry. Worse, she looks at me as if she finds my stern look to be not at all chilling, perhaps even a little comical. That is when I know that this is not a young woman like my ladies-in-waiting who has to be pleasant to me whatever I do, or like Mary, who has to do whatever I say. This young woman is an equal, she will consider me, she might even be critical. I say in French: "You are welcome to England," and she replies in stilted English: "I am pleased to greet my sister."

My lady mother lays herself out to be kind to this, her first, daughter-in-law. They talk together in Latin and I cannot follow what they are saying so I sit beside my mother and look at Kath-

erine's shoes with the gold laces. My mother calls for music, and Harry and I start a round, an English country song. We are very tuneful and the court takes up the chorus and it goes round and round until people start to giggle and lose their places. But Katherine does not laugh. She looks as if she is never silly and merry like Harry and me. She is overly formal, of course, being Spanish. But I note how she sits—very still, and with her hands folded in her lap as if she were sitting for a portrait—and I think: actually, that looks rather queenly. I think I will learn to sit like that.

My sister Mary is brought in to make her curtsy, and Katherine makes herself ridiculous by going down on her knees so their faces are level and she can hear her childish whisper. Of course Mary cannot understand a word of either Latin or Spanish, but she puts her arms around Katherine's neck and kisses her and calls her "thithter."

"I am your sister," I correct her, giving her little hand a firm tug. "This lady is your sister-in-law. Can you say sister-in-law?"

Of course, she can't. She lisps, and everyone laughs again and says how charming, and I say: "Lady Mother, shouldn't Mary be in bed?" Then everyone realizes how late it is and we all go out with bobbing torches to see Katherine leave, as if she were a queen crowned and not merely the youngest daughter of the King and Queen of Spain, and very lucky to marry into our family: the Tudors.

She kisses everyone good night and when it is my turn, she puts her warm cheek to mine and says: "Good night, Sister" in that stupid accent, in her patronizing way. She draws back and sees my cross face and she gives a little ripple of laughter. "Oho!" she says, and pats my cheek as if my bad temper does not trouble her. This is a real princess, as naturally royal as my mother; this is the girl who will be Queen of England; and so I don't resent the pat, more like a caress. I find that I like her and dislike her, all together, all at once.

