

A NOVEL OF THE TUDORS

A FAVORITE
OF THE QUEEN

The Story of Lord Robert Dudley and Elizabeth I

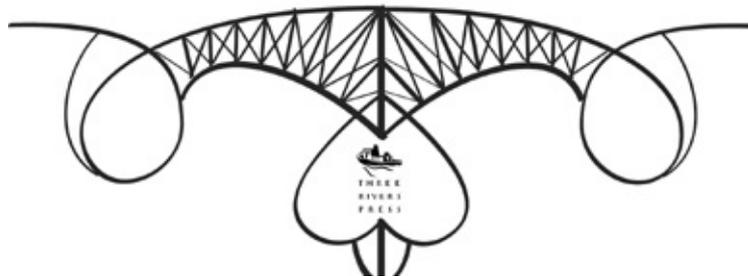
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Author's Note

In writing of what is undoubtedly one of history's most puzzling relationships, it is perhaps advisable to add a few remarks in order to justify the conclusions to which I have come. This is particularly the case with regard to the mysterious death of Amy Robsart.

All that happened on that Sunday morning at Cumnor Place will never be known. Was Amy's death due to accident, suicide, or murder? After studying available records my verdict cannot be anything but murder.

Consider the facts: The Queen was being pressed by her ministers to marry. She could not bear to forgo the attentions of Robert Dudley, and Robert could not give up the hope of sharing the throne. Thus Robert's wife Amy stood in the way of two ruthless personalities. The Queen, in politics the soul of caution, had always been reckless in love. Scandal was circulating throughout the country concerning the relationship of Elizabeth and Robert Dudley. People remembered Thomas Seymour. Before Amy died there was a strong rumor that her death was being planned; and when it was said that Amy was suffering from a fatal malady, many believed that to be a false rumor set in motion in order to explain the death which was to follow. So persistent were the rumors, that a physician refused to attend Amy, fearing to be accused of administering poison should she die. This was the state of affairs when her minister, Cecil, returning from Edinburgh, found the Queen strained and nervous, and, to his astonishment, heard from her lips that Amy would soon be dead. Cecil, appalled, hurried from the Queen, and was so distraught that, coming face to face with the Spanish ambassador, he could not keep his suspicions to himself. "The Queen and Lord Robert Dudley are scheming to put Lord Robert's wife to death!" is what he said—according to the Spanish ambassador. And a few hours later Amy was found dead.

Why should the Spanish ambassador have written those revealing dispatches if the contents were untrue? Spain was no enemy of Robert's at that time, and Robert had won Philip's approval at St. Quentin.

An accident to Amy resulting in her death at such a time so convenient to Elizabeth and Robert is surely too incredible a coincidence to be accepted.

As for the suggestion of suicide, if Amy had wished to kill herself would she have chosen a method which, she must have known, might not result in death, but merely add acute pain and misery to her remaining years? Would any woman destroy herself in such a painful way in order to avoid being murdered?

Everything points to murder, apart from Amy's strange conduct on that Sunday morning in sending all her servants to the Fair. Why did she—in

perpetual fear of murderers—clear the house of all the servants on that day which was to prove so tragic to her?

I have looked to her maid Pinto for the explanation, because from her first came the suggestion of suicide. It seemed that this suggestion came simply and unwittingly from Amy's maid; but was Pinto such a simpleton? What if the suggestion were not wrung from her, but deliberately given? Might she not have known the true reason why the house was deserted on that Sunday morning? Let us consider what a woman would do when the whole country was hinting that she was about to be murdered. How would a devoted maid behave? As for my interpretation of Pinto's feelings for Robert, it must be remembered that, during his two and a half years' exile, he had lived in Norfolk and would have come into continual contact with Pinto; and if we can discover little of Pinto's character, we know much of Robert's.

It is the novelist's task to present a convincing story and, when the characters actually lived, to adhere to facts obtained by research, only diverging from them with good reason, e.g., when they are unknown, and then only making careful and responsible deductions as an aid to the completion of the story. Therefore I offer my views of what happened at Cunnor Place in the summer of 1560.

To reach these conclusions—and others—I have studied many books and documents. The chief among these are:

Calendar of Letters and State Papers (Spanish) relating to English affairs preserved principally in the Archives of Simancas. Published by the Authority of the Lords Commissioners of Her Majesty's Treasury under the direction of the Master of Rolls. Edited by Martin A. S. Hume, FR Hist S.

Elizabeth and Leicester. Milton Waldman.

Queen Elizabeth. J. E. Neale.

Lives of the Queens of England. Agnes Strickland.

Queen Elizabeth (Brief Lives). Milton Waldman.

Natural and Domestic History of England. William Hickman Smith Aubrey.

British History. John Wade.

Old and New London. Edward Walford.

England in Tudor Times. L. F. Salzman, MA, FSA.

King Queen Jack (Philip of Spain Courts Elizabeth). Milton Waldman.

Two English Queens and Philip. Martin Hume, MA.

History of England. J. A. Froude.

ONE

It was hot, even for August; the foul odors from the river, carrying the threat of pestilence, hung in the sullen air that sultry day; but the crowds who were assembling on Tower Hill were oblivious of discomfort. Traders had left their shops or stalls in Candlewick Street, East Chepe, and the Poultry; horse-dealers were coming from Smithfield Square; the goldsmiths from Lombard Street, the mercers of Chepeside had deserted their houses, realizing that there could be little business at such a time. Apprentices, risking a whipping, crept out after their masters, determined to see what could be seen on Tower Hill that day.

Laughing and jesting they came. All men and women believed that the hardships of Henry VII's reign were behind them and the days of plenty were at hand. No more cruel taxes would be wrung from them; no more fines; no more impositions. The old miser King was dead and in his place was a bonny golden boy who laughed loudly, who jested and made sport, and loved to show himself to the citizens of London.

It was he who had provided this day's pleasure for them; and it clearly indicated what they might expect of him.

"God bless King Hal!" they cried. "See how he pleases his people! He is the one for us."

The cheers for the King mingled with the jeers for the traitors. Some apprentices had made two effigies which they held high above the crowd, to be mocked and pelted with refuse.

"Death to them! Death to the extortioners! Death to the misers, and long life to King Harry!"

Jostling, cursing, laughing, they surged about the hill. At the summit, close to the scaffold, members of the nobility were gathered. The bell of St. Peter ad Vincula had begun to toll.

At the edge of the crowd, not venturing into it, stood a boy. He was pale, soberly dressed, and was staring, mournful and bewildered, at the weather-washed walls of the great fortress which seemed to stand on guard like a stone giant. So grim, so cruel did it seem to the boy, that he turned his gaze from it to the green banks where the starry loosestrife flowers were blooming. He remembered a day—long ago it seemed to him now—when he had taken his little brother to the river's edge to pick flowers. He remembered how they had strolled along, arms full of blossom. The flower of the water betony was like the helmet a soldier would wear, and he was reminded that soldiers would soon be coming out of the great prison, and with them would be the men who were to die on Tower Hill that day.

"Death to the traitors!" shouted a man near him. "Death to the tax-

gatherers! Death to Dudley and Empson!”

The little boy felt the blood rush to his face, for his name was John Dudley, and his father was one of those who would shortly lay their heads upon the block.



He would not look, this little John. He dared not. Why had he come? He knew not. Was it because he had hoped to see a miracle? His father had seemed to him the cleverest man in England; and not only did he seem so to John, but to others, for Edmund Dudley, a humble lawyer, had become chief adviser to the King. But kings die, and often favors die with them; and a friend to one king may be a traitor to another; and if that king is desirous of winning his people’s love, and those people demand a man’s head as a symbol of *his* love—then that head is given.

He was standing up there now, the father of the boy. Little John stared at the ground, but he knew what was happening, for he heard the shouts of the people. Then there was silence. He looked up at the sky; he looked at the river; but he dared not look at the scaffold.

His father was speaking. The well-remembered voice rose and fell, but the boy did not hear what he said.

Then all was silent again until there came a shuddering gasp from the crowd. John now knew that he was fatherless.

He stood, helpless and bewildered, not knowing whether to turn shuddering away or to run forward and look with the crowd at his father’s blood.

Now the executioner would be holding up his father’s head, for he heard the cry: “Here is the head of a traitor!”

He wondered why he did not cry. He felt that he never would cry again. The shouting people, the gray fortress, the sullen river—they seemed so indifferent to the plight of one more orphan.

Such a short while ago he had been John Dudley, eldest son of a king’s favorite minister, with a brilliant future before him. Now he was John Dudley—orphan, penniless—the son of a man whom the King had called a traitor.

He felt a hand on his shoulder. “John,” said a voice, “you should not be here.”

Turning, he saw standing beside him a man whom he knew well, a man whom he had looked upon in the light of an uncle, one of his father’s great friends in the days of his prosperity—Sir Richard Guildford.

“I ... wished to come,” said John haltingly.

“I guessed it,” said Sir Richard. “’Twas a brave thing to do, John.” He looked at the boy quizzically. “And not to shed a tear!”

He slipped his arm through that of the boy and began to lead him away.

“It is better for you not to be here, John,” he said.

“What would they do to me?” asked the boy. “What would they do if they knew I was his son?”

“They’d not harm you, a boy of ... how old is it?”

“Nine years, sir.”

“Nine years! ’Tis young to be left alone and helpless ... and your mother with two others.”

“They will take all we have ...”

Sir Richard nodded. “But ’twas not done for the love of your father’s possessions. It was done to please the people. Who knows ...” He looked at the boy shrewdly, but stopped short.

“Did the people so hate my father then?” asked the boy incredulously.

“Kings must have scapegoats, my boy. When a king does what his subjects do not like, that is the fault of his statesmen; it is only when he pleases them that the credit is his. It is the late King against whom the people cry out. Your father and Sir Richard Empson are the scapegoats.”

The boy clenched his fists. “To be a scapegoat! I like that not. I would be a man ... and a ruler.”

Then suddenly he began to cry, and the man, walking beside him, helplessly watched the tears roll down his cheeks.

Sir Richard understood. It was natural that the boy should cry. He did not speak for some seconds, then he said: “This day you shall come home with me. Nay, do not concern yourself. I have seen your mother. I have told her that I would find you and take you to my home.”

They had now reached the river’s edge where a barge was waiting; and as they went slowly up the river, the sobs which shook the young body became less frequent.

At length they alighted, and mounted the privy steps which led to the lawns before Sir Richard’s home.

As they entered the mansion, and crossed the great hall, Sir Richard called: “Jane! Where are you, my child?”

A girl, slightly younger than John, appeared in the gallery and looked down on the hall.

“I have a playmate for you, Jane. Come here.”

Jane came solemnly down the great staircase.

“It is John,” she said; and the boy, looking into her face and seeing the tear stains on her cheeks, knew that she too had wept for his father, and was comforted.

“He has suffered much this day, Jane,” said Sir Richard. “We must take care of him.”

Jane stood beside the boy and slipped her hand into his.

Sir Richard watched them. Let the boy forget the shouts of the mob on Tower Hill in the company of little Jane. He was safe with Jane.



As Sir Richard Guildford watched John Dudley grow away from his tragedy in the months that followed, he recognized in him that strength of character which had been Edmund Dudley's. He was excited by the boy, sensing in him latent ambition, the will to succeed, the passionate desire to bring back honor to the Dudley name. Sir Richard could look with pleasure upon the growing friendship between his daughter and this boy; and nothing less than having John in his own house and bringing him up as his son would satisfy him.

It was not difficult to arrange this, for Sir Edmund's widow and her children were forced to look to relations and friends for help, and Lady Dudley was only too glad that Sir Richard had taken this interest in her son.

It was Sir Richard's custom to talk to the boy, to nourish that ambition which he knew was in him; and one day, as they walked in the City to Fleet Lane and over Fleet Bridge and on to Ficquets Fields, Sir Richard talked of John's father.

"Your father was a great man, John. When he was your age, his position was little better than your own."

"Nay sir," said John. "It is true that my father was the son of a small farmer, and himself but a lawyer, yet he was descended from the Lords Dudley; and I am the son of a man who is called a traitor."

Sir Richard snapped his fingers. "The connection with the Lords Dudley was never proved," he said, "and I doubt it existed outside your father's imagination."

The boy flushed hotly at that, but Sir Richard went on: "Oh, it was clever enough. Dudley needed aristocratic ancestors, but he found them for himself. No doubt he made good use of them. But between ourselves, John, there is more credit due to a man when he has had to climb from the valley to the top of the mountain than when he starts near the top."

John was silent and Sir Richard continued: "Just for ourselves we will see Sir Edmund Dudley as the son of a farmer, himself a lawyer, yet such a master of his profession that the King sought his aid and through him and his friend Empson, ruled England."

The boy's eyes had begun to shine. "The son of a farmer merely—and he one of those who ruled England!"

"What should that teach you? Just this: No matter how lowly you may be, there is no limit—*no* limit—to the heights to which you may climb. Think of the King. Dare he look too far back? Is it not true that his Tudor ancestor was the son of a groom, and a bastard? Think, boy, think! This is treason and I'll

whisper it. Dudley or Tudor? Is one better than the other? Remember it. Always remember it. Your father had great ambition. It may be now that he looks down from Heaven on you ... his eldest son. It may be that he asks himself: What will my son do in this world? Will he rise as I did? Will he learn from my mistakes? Has he the fire within him which will make him a great man? John, I doubt not that your father looks down from Heaven upon you and prays and hopes."

John did not forget those words. He was determined to be as great a man as his father.

In the games he played, he was always the leader. Already he was Jane's hero. Sir Richard was pleased as he watched the growing affection between John Dudley and Jane Guildford.



Sir Richard's position at Court had brought him into contact with the King, who was as yet a careless boy in love with pleasure, yet a boy with an awakening conscience. Sir Richard thought that the King's conscience might play its part in the future of his young protégé.

Henry still frowned at the name of Dudley. He was well aware that the execution of his father's favorite and adviser had been carried out for the sake of his, Henry's, popularity. Henry had not yet come to terms with his conscience. It could not yet persuade him, as it would later, that Dudley and Empson had deserved their fate, so the very mention of the name Dudley brought discomfort to him. But when Sir Richard subtly begged royal permission to ask the Parliament for the repeal of the attainder against the Dudleys, Henry was almost eager to give that permission.

Let the boy inherit his father's wealth. The King did not want it; he had that vast accumulation of riches, which his own father had amassed through his thrifty reign, to squander. Yes, let the attainder be repealed. Let the son of Edmund Dudley have his father's riches. The King could then feel happier when the names of Dudley and Empson were mentioned; he could put aside the thought that those two men had been executed to placate the people from whom much of his father's wealth had been extorted.

The first step was therefore taken. John was no longer penniless. He was a rich *parti* for young Jane; although he could not yet go to Court.

Sir Richard came home full of excitement. "See what I have done for you, John!" he cried. "Now it will be your turn."

"Yes, now it is my turn," said the solemn boy.

Jane watched them gravely, wondering what this was all about. But there was no need to explain such matters to Jane. She was happy because her father was happy; and she saw in John that deep brooding concentration which she respected although she could not share it.

As they went out to the stables together she said: "Something good has

happened, has it not?"

He nodded but he said no more then for he did not wish the grooms to hear.

As they rode across the clover-starred meadows, he said: "I am no longer without means. My father's fortune is to be returned to my family."

"John ... does it mean you will go away?"

He smiled at the fear in her eyes. "If I went away, I should come back. You know, do you not, Jane, that when we are old enough we are to marry?"

"Yes, John," she answered.

"You will be happy then, Jane. So shall I!"

He was sure of her contentment—as sure as he was that one day he would be a leader of men. It did not occur to her that this might be arrogance on his part; if he was arrogant, then, in her eyes, arrogance was a virtue.

As they cantered across the fields she was thinking of their future, of their marriage and the children they would have.

He too was thinking of the future, but not of his life with Jane. Jane's love was something he took for granted. The thunder of horses' hoofs seemed to say to him "Dudley—Tudor!"

Those name implied ambition—the rise from obscurity to greatness.



They were married when John was nineteen and Jane had just reached her eighteenth birthday. They continued to live quietly at Sir Richard's house—so near Court and yet not of it.

The King had changed; he was no longer a careless boy; his conscience had begun alternately to torment and soothe him, and it now assured him that Sir Edmund Dudley had been a traitor who had imposed great hardship on the people. He had deserved his fate, and what, this King could ask himself, would his subjects think of a monarch who honored the descendants of such a man!

No, the King would show no favor to a Dudley; nor could he receive at Court the son of a traitor.

Jane's first son was born; and John, who felt that the shame and humiliation of that day on Tower Hill were branded on him so deeply that only the dazzling accoutrements of dignity and great power could distract attention from the defect, determined that if he could not win favor at Court he would seek it on the field of battle.

Jane was tearful at the prospect of his departure for France.

"Why cannot you stay here?" she asked. "What do you want of fame? We have all we need. We have our little son, your namesake, and we will have more children."

“Aye, we will have more,” said John. Of course he would have more. Children—even girls—were useful to men of power, for through them links with the great and rich were forged. Jane had her task; he had his. She must provide him with many sons and a few daughters; but he must bring power and fame to the name of Dudley.

He distinguished himself in the service of Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk, who had married the King’s sister Mary. John came back from the battlefield *Sir John Dudley*.

An important step forward had been taken.



Quickly the years passed whilst ambition smoldered. Jane was fulfilling her task more successfully than John fulfilled his.

She had given him four sons and three daughters; and she was about to bear another child.

Jane remembered the day long afterward. She was happy enough in the garden of their Chelsea manor house with the river lapping at its edge. She was thinking of her beloved children—and wondering whether the one she now carried would be a girl or a boy.

How blessed she was in her four handsome sons!

There were many rumors about the King at this time. How he would have envied her her four if he had seen them! It was said that his eyes first lighted up, then smoldered when he looked at other men’s sons.

Such excitements there had been of late! Such rumors! Would the King really take Anne Boleyn to wife? Would he make her his Queen? Jane had seen the lovely Anne pass along the river in her barge. The King was growing impatient, it was said; the air was thick with rumor; and here was little Jane Dudley, peacefully awaiting the birth of yet another child, living remote from the Court, though so near it—peaceful and contented with her family about her.

Of course she would have liked John to have his heart’s desire—a share in the affairs of the Court. Sometimes he frightened her. He seemed so fierce in his determination. She would watch him pacing their chamber, pacing the lawns, his eyes narrowing as he looked without seeing it at a barge on the river. Then she would be fiercely glad that he was outside Court matters. She often thought of that great man Cardinal Wolsey who had met his doom and died of a broken heart. She would not have her John become such a one as the great Cardinal. But what a ridiculous comparison! Her John and the great Cardinal! But Wolsey had been humble once, and so had John’s father.

She wished that he were not a Dudley, that he had some happier background, someone who had a humble father who had not risen to greatness but who had died peacefully in his bed.

And that day John came home in great excitement.

The King had decided to forgive him for being his father's son. It was more than twenty years since Henry had beheaded Edmund Dudley; and after twenty years, the King evidently thought, he could forgive a man for reminding him of his own guilt.

Jane watched John alight from his barge, saw him hasten across the turf crying her name; and never had she heard his voice so joyous.

"Jane! Dear wife, I am appointed Master of the King's Armory."

She felt her heart fluttering uncomfortably. She must appear to be glad. She always took her cue from him; she must be what he expected her to be.

"What ... does it mean, John?"

"What does it mean! It means that the King has decided that, if I am worthy of honors, they should not be denied me. It means that we are on the road, Jane, on the road."

"Oh, John ... on what road?"

But he did not answer. He was smiling as he looked along the river toward Westminster and Greenwich.

And it so happened that in her new apartments at the Tower of London, Jane gave birth to her fifth son.

She called him Robert.



He was the most handsome of all her boys. In the first few weeks of his life she knew that he would be the best beloved. He was lustier than all the others; he had been born with a thick down of hair; his eyes flashed more brightly than she believed eyes had ever flashed before; he demanded his own way from the beginning.

His father scarcely noticed him. Why should he? He was "on the road" now. He was preparing to march on to greatness.

Robert was all Jane's in those first months of his life. No nurses should take him from her. He was her baby—her little Robin.

How sorry she was for poor Queen Katharine, living out her lonely life in the Castle of Kimbolton. A boy like Robin would have made all the difference in the world to her happiness, poor lady. As if a baby like Robin would not make all the difference to any woman! But poor Queen Katharine desperately needed a son.

And now another Queen was praying for a son.

Queen Anne was lying-in at Greenwich, and the country was waiting for the birth of a prince to be proclaimed.

When the King passed along the river, Jane watched him from the shelter of an arbor—seeing but unseen—and she held up the little boy, murmuring:

“Look, Robin. There goes a king. They say he would give half his kingdom for a boy like you. But then who would not give all the world for you!”

There was a mist on the river during those September days, and the trees of the orchards were heavy with ripening fruit.

“May the Queen be fruitful,” prayed Jane; for, sorry as she was for the displaced Queen, yet she wished joy to the new one. “May the Queen give birth to a prince as bonny—nay, that were impossible—*almost* as bonny as my Robin.”



The bells rang out in the City. A child was born to the King and Queen.

A prince! said the people. It is sure to be a prince. Nothing but a prince would please the King.

Ah, thought Jane, the King needs a son. It will be God’s way of telling him that he was right to break from an incestuous union and set a new Queen on the throne.

John came home from the Court, sober and unsmiling.

“What news, John? What news of the prince?” asked Jane.

And he answered: “’Twas not a prince that was born this day at Greenwich. ’Twas a girl.” Then he gave that short hard laugh which, she had noticed, had developed lately. “It will not do, Queen Anne Boleyn,” he muttered. “The King married you for sons ... and you give him a girl!”

“Poor lady!” murmured Jane. “Poor lady!” And she thought: Oh dear, she is gay and wicked, they say; but I would not wish to see her suffer as poor Queen Katharine did.

Suffer? How could she suffer? She was young; she was the most attractive of women; she was not the sort to despair because her first-born was a daughter. The King was deeply enamored of her; for her sake he had broken with Rome. Who was Jane Dudley to be sorry for such as Queen Anne Boleyn!

She whispered to Robert: “It is because we are both mothers, my love. But she has a daughter and she longed for a son. And I have you—the most handsome baby in the world.”

She kissed him and he wriggled away. He was nearly a year old and only wished for kisses when he was in the mood for them.

“But what does Robert Dudley care for the new Princess Elizabeth?” crooned Jane.



In the next three years Jane often thought of the little Princess. So much honor was done to her at one time. The King himself delighted to have her dressed in finery that he might carry her round and show her to the ladies of the Court, insisting that they admire his daughter, his little Elizabeth.

But the King still wished for sons; and Queen Anne, it seemed, could no more satisfy his wishes than his previous Queen had done.

Such rumors there were of quarrels between the King and Queen—and she was not humble as her predecessor had been, but fiery and haughty. “The Queen is riding for trouble,” said John.

There was talk of the lady Jane Seymour and the King’s interest in this pale, quiet girl. The King’s conscience, like a monster drugged by the sweet intoxication of Anne Boleyn, was throwing off its stupor. Was Anne really his wife? he was asking now. Had she not betrothed herself to another before she had gone through the ceremony with the King? Was she the virtuous wife he had believed her to be?

If there were no longer a Queen Anne Boleyn there might be a Queen Jane Seymour.

But Jane Dudley’s thoughts were for the little Princess—the once fêted and the honored. What would become of her? Those about the King were already wondering whether she would be designated Bastard, as her half-sister Mary had been.

“Poor little Princess!” said Jane.

But she had her own family to occupy her mind.

A new son was born to her. This son was called Guildford, after her father. Guildford Dudley. That pleased Sir Richard.

And one day on Tower Green Queen Anne lost her head, and with unbecoming haste the King made Jane Seymour his Queen.

Jane wept when she heard the news. Robert and Guildford watched her for a few seconds before four-year-old Robert asked: “Mother, why do you cry?” He was precocious beyond the others. He listened to gossip and his eyes flashed as his father’s did. “Is it because they have cut off Queen Anne’s head?”

She was silent for a while, then she said: “No, my tears are not for the Queen, for she is past her pain. It is for the little one who is left, her daughter, the little Princess Elizabeth who is but three years old and without a mother to love her.”

Robert was the center of his world; he saw everything in relation to Robert.

He said: “I am older than the Princess. She is but three and I am four.”

“Yes, my darling. And you have your mother left to you.”

Robert laughed. He was important. He was the most important person in the world. He saw that, in the eyes of his mother and young Guildford who were watching him with such admiration.



The prosperous years had set in. Jane was rich in children; she bore John

thirteen—eight sons and five daughters; some of them died when pestilence struck London but her darling grew bolder and more handsome every day.

There he was, a sturdy little fellow, strutting in the Tower gardens, calling to the guards and warders. They all laughed at his swagger. “Ha,” they said, “he will get on in the world, will Master Robert Dudley.”

Meanwhile John had continued with his spectacular rise. He had come a long way now from that boy—of Robert’s age—who had stood on Tower Hill and heard the mob, shouting against his father.

Sir John Dudley was handsome, witty, and clever; he distinguished himself in the tiltyard and at all those sports and pastimes at which Henry himself had once excelled.

“I like this John Dudley,” said the King; “and it was ever my custom to reward those who pleased me.”

Others received their rewards from the King. His fifth wife lost her head on Tower Green and was buried in the church of St. Peter ad Vincula beside the King’s second Queen, who had suffered a similar fate. At this time Henry made Sir John an Admiral of his Fleet and with that honor gave him the title of Lord Lisle. John Dudley had proved himself a good servant.

They were indeed rising in the world. Lord Lisle could look at his sons and daughters and be proud of what he had done for them. He talked to them often and his talk was always of ambition. “See how a man or a woman may rise! Your grandfather, the son of a farmer, was a humble lawyer, and he became the King’s right-hand man. As a boy I saw my father beheaded on Tower Hill and knew myself a penniless orphan. And now, my sons and daughters, here you see me: Lord Lisle, Admiral of the Fleet, and for my services in the Boulogne battle I am to become a Knight of the Garter.”

Robert was entranced by his father’s conversation. He boasted to Guildford as they strolled in the Tower gardens or those about their father’s Chelsea Manor house: “As our father rose, so shall we ... higher and higher ...”

There were places for the family at Court; and one day Robert was taken to the royal nurseries, where he met the pale Prince—quiet and delicate, full of wisdom he had learned from books; and with the little Prince were the two eldest Grey girls, Lady Jane and Lady Catharine. The girls were quiet and very pretty; and the Prince was fond of them. Guildford, who accompanied Robert, could not make up his mind who was the prettier, Jane or Catharine. Guildford was too young to appreciate the honor of playing with such noble persons.

One day when they were in the nursery, there was a visit from the Prince’s half-sister. That was a day to remember—a day like no other, Robert thought it. When Edward was in command, the talk would be of Latin verses which he and Jane had composed together, or some such matters. Robert had never taken kindly to such arts and graces; he would show his prowess on a horse or at the games, which he always won.

But on that day when the young girl came to the nursery everything was different. Her hair was red, her eyes blue, and she had a sparkling quality which would bubble into laughter or as suddenly into anger.

Robert was quick to sense that all the children were afraid of her, and that she was afraid of none, even though her brother was heir to the throne and she was called a bastard.

Her governess came with her; the Princess giggled with her and she might have been a serving maid until she remembered that she was the Prince's sister and became as haughty as a queen.

She was a year younger than Robert, and Robert was glad, for he felt that gave him some advantage.

"Who are you?" she demanded. "I have not seen you here before."

"I am Robert Dudley."

"Say 'Your Grace' when you address me. I do not know a Robert Dudley."

"You did not," he said, "but you do now."

"I do not think that I shall continue to do so," she answered, turning away. She approached her brother and said: "Brother, what ill-mannered boys are these that you have allowed to be brought to your apartments?"

Young Jane and Catharine looked on in concern, and Edward was uncomfortable.

Robert was the most important person in the world. His mother and Guildford had always thought so. He was no ill-mannered boy; he reminded himself that the Princess was a bastard, but remembering also the gracious manners which his father had taught him, he knelt before the Prince and said: "Your Grace, I kneel before you. I am not so ill-mannered as to forget the honor due to your Royal Highness."

The Princess laughed and stamped the floor with her foot. "Get up, you fool!" she commanded. "We want no Court manners here."

Robert ignored her: "I was about to say, your Royal Highness, that I would not bandy words with another in your presence. Have I your gracious permission to rise?"

"Yes, yes," said Edward. "Get up."

"If I have the esteem of your Royal Highness, I wish for no other," said Robert pointedly.

Then the Princess looked again at him and she continued to look. His dark hair curled about his neck. Beside him poor Edward looked more puny than ever. Robert's skin was pink and healthy; poor Edward suffered so from spots and rashes. And the other boy, Guildford, was frail compared with his brother.

The Princess then began to think that this Robert Dudley was the handsomest boy she had ever seen, and because of his personal beauty she

was ready to forgive him his arrogance—and in truth she liked his arrogance, for it matched her own.

She went to him and tapped him on the arm; and when he looked haughtily down at her he saw that she was smiling at him in a very friendly fashion.

“Enough, Master Robert!” she said. “What games do you play?”

He showed her how to play “Pope Julius’s Game,” which he had learned from his elder brothers. She sat by him smiling at him. She set the pace; it was she who usually suggested what games they should play; the others, he could see, had always been ready to follow her.

“Now,” she cried, “we shall compose verses. Each member of the party must add a line.” She looked sternly at Robert: “And,” she added, “it must rhyme.”

She beat him at the game, but he said it was a foolish one and not a man’s game. She retorted that if it were indeed a little foolish he must be very foolish since he could not play it even as well as little Catharine.

She herself was expert with her lines; but after a while she grew tired of the game and showed them the newest Court dances, although how she knew of such matters Robert could not understand.

She herself danced with Robert. “You are the only one of a size worthy of me,” she told him, as she paired Jane and Edward, Catharine and Guildford.

“You would dance well, Master Dudley,” she said, “with a little more practice.”

“I would we could practice together,” he said.

She fluttered her eyelashes and said demurely: “Your Grace.”

And just to please her he said it. She was very satisfied, and so was he. It was indeed a very satisfactory occasion.

Often he met her in the royal nursery, but one day she was not there. She had been retired, Edward told him, to Hatfield, where she would stay with her governess.

How dull it was without her!



King Henry died and the puny little Edward was King of England. John Dudley could view the new reign with confidence, for his standing was even higher under the new King than it had been under the old. Henry had appointed him a member of that Council which was to form a Regency and govern the kingdom until Edward was of age. John Dudley was climbing to the summit of his hopes, but there were two men who stood in his way. These were the uncles of the King, the Seymour brothers; Edward, now Duke of Somerset, the sober statesman, and Thomas, now Lord Sudeley, the handsome philanderer. The only characteristic these brothers appeared to have in common was their overwhelming ambition, and if Edward had the power, Thomas had the popularity. He was not only the favorite of the young King,

but the Princess Elizabeth was said to blush when his name was mentioned.

During this time young Robert saw his father become one of the most powerful men in England. He was now the Earl of Warwick, which in itself was significant, for that title had been extinct since the death of the grandson of Warwick the King-maker. Had a new king-maker arisen?

The family was very rich, for the Warwick estate was now theirs. Jane Dudley was apprehensive; often she thought how happy she would have been if her husband could have been content with what he had won. In the last reign no man had been important, except the King; now there were several men all struggling for pre-eminence. She wished she could have talked freely to John; she wanted to warn him. How he would laugh if she did! He had never considered her opinion worth asking for.

Young Robert knew of her fears and tried to soothe her.

“Why, Mother,” he said, “my father will win. He will beat the Seymours.”

“Your father will beat all who oppose him,” said Jane; and her voice trembled. She could not dismiss from her mind memories of that day when her father had brought John home. Such sights as John had seen on that day were often to be witnessed on Tower Hill.

“I’ll tell you why my father will beat them, Mother,” said Robert. “He is now in command of the King’s armies, and therefore his position is as strong as that of the Lord Protector Somerset.”

And Jane had to be content with that.

The new Earl of Warwick lost little time in arranging advantageous marriages for his children. His eldest son John should be affianced to the daughter of the Protector himself; his daughter Mary was to marry the King’s friend, Henry Sidney.

“Your turn will come, Robin,” said his mother.

Robert’s answer was: “I, Mother? I shall choose for myself.”

When he thought of marriage he thought of the redheaded Princess. Was he looking rather high? Robert did not think so. Who could be too high for Robert? Moreover she was a bastard. Yet he did not object to that. He had admired her spirit, the way in which she had commanded the children, the way in which she had cajoled him into calling her “Your Grace.” What impudence, and yet what dignity! What arrogance mingling with a certain promise of ... he was not quite sure what.

“Yes,” he affirmed, “I shall choose for myself.”

Strange rumors were afloat.

The younger Seymour was attainted of high treason. He had plotted, it was said, to seize the government and marry the Princess Elizabeth.

Robert was bewildered by the news. He had, of course, seen Thomas Seymour, Lord Sudeley, rich and magnificent, swaggering through the Court,

the eyes of the women gleaming as they followed him. All had agreed that Thomas Seymour was the handsomest man in England; but at that time Robert was yet a boy and no one had noticed him.

The rumors were shocking, for they involved the Princess. Robert was angry when he heard of them. He did not believe them, he told himself; and yet when he thought of her, smiling at him, fluttering her sandy lashes, how could he be sure that what he heard was not true?

His mother talked of the rumors with the ladies of her household; she would sit in the gardens at Chelsea and talk with her friends.

“Was it true then ... the Princess but a girl of thirteen and a Princess ... so to conduct herself!”

It did not help matters that the man with whom the Princess was reputed to have behaved so disgracefully was the husband of her stepmother, Katharine Parr.

Robert heard it all, the story of the flirting and the rough horseplay; he heard of the occasion when the daring Seymour had cut her dress to pieces while sporting in the gardens of the Chelsea Dower House; there were stories of his visits to her bedchamber, of tickling and smacking and kissing while the Princess was in bed. The Princess Elizabeth had been known to ride in a barge on the Thames like a light woman.

Robert thought of it all, pictured it, saw Seymour and the Princess in that embrace which it was said had exposed the guilty affair to Katharine Parr when she had come unexpectedly upon them and witnessed it.

There was no end to the tales, and snatches of conversation stayed in his mind.

“And have you heard the rumors? I had it from a very reliable source ... someone who knows ... from the midwife herself. Do not speak of this to any other. One dark night the midwife was awakened from her bed by men and women in masks and made to follow them, bringing with her the tools of her trade. She was blindfolded until she reached a certain house, and there she delivered a child. She was warned that if she spoke a word of what had happened her tongue would be cut out. The lady who needed her services was young and most imperious. She had red hair ...”

Robert was more angry than ever then, but his anger turned to sadness when he heard that she was taken to the Tower.

There she was questioned, and it was said at that time that when Thomas Seymour lost his head on Tower Hill, the Princess Elizabeth would soon follow her lover.



Robert, at sixteen, was restless for adventure.

At that time the two most powerful men in England were jostling each

other for first place; one of these was the Lord Protector Somerset, the other was Robert's father, who suddenly found that he had the advantage over his political enemy.

Thomas Seymour had been beheaded without being granted an opportunity to speak in his defense. This in itself was shameful, but carried out at the command of his own brother seemed ignoble in the extreme. The popularity of the Lord Protector was waning; and that of his opponent consequently waxed.

Then came the rising of the peasants of Norfolk who were starving on account of the enclosure laws. They were marching on London when the Earl of Warwick, as General of the King's Armies, set out against them and defeated them on their own ground in Norfolk.

The insurrection had been suppressed with great cruelty, and trouble averted. The country was grateful to Warwick for his speedy and ruthless action. The Norfolk landowners considered themselves deeply indebted to him, and Robert, who was with his father in Norfolk, became a guest at the large country estate of Sir John Robsart, lord of the manor of Siderstern.

Warwick returned to London, leaving his son to follow him; but Robert was in no hurry, and the reason was Robsart's young daughter, Amy.

She was plump and pretty—a girl of Robert's own age—and she had never seen anyone quite so dashing and handsome as this young man from Court circles.

Amy was the youngest of the family and rather pampered by her father and her two half-brothers and two half-sisters, particularly since the death of her mother, which had occurred a short while before the Norfolk rising.

Her brothers John and Philip, and her sisters Anne and Frances Appleyard, were not her father's children; and Amy, being John Robsart's only legitimate child, was also his heiress. She was used to having her own way, and she made no secret of her feelings for the handsome newcomer; and the more openly she admired him, the more good sense and charm she seemed to have in the eyes of Robert.

He liked the country; he enjoyed life in a great manor house; and he appreciated the honor showed to him by all these people. John and Philip Appleyard deemed it a compliment when he rode with them to the hunt. The girls—Anne and Frances—saw that all his favorite dishes were served at table. All the family smiled benignly to see his friendship with Amy ripen. As for Sir John Robsart, he was fervently hoping that Amy would make a good match, but at the same time wondering if he dared look so high as to the son of the most important man in England and the country's real ruler.

Meanwhile Robert and Amy rode out together, hawking and hunting; her simple admiration was enchanting; she never failed to laugh when he indicated that he expected laughter; she always applauded, and she showed him in a hundred ways that he was more like a god than a man.