

Excerpts from the historical paranormal novel “Past Lives” by Chantal Bellehumeur

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever had a dream that is so vivid that it feels real; so real, that when you wake up from that dream you're confused about your surroundings and wonder what's going on? That happens to me a lot.

Shortly after being jolted awake and orienting myself, the dreams (more like nightmares most of the time) always start to feel like faint memories; not memories of the dreams themselves, but rather actual events of my own life.

Of course, deep down I know they can't be memories of my past despite how nostalgic or deeply emotional they make me feel.

I live in the year 2016, and the dreams I am referring to always happen in time periods when I wasn't even born yet.

Also, I noticed that the people in my dreams, including who I am, usually speak in Old English, using words and grammar I am not accustomed to. Plus, they have an accent that I am not used to hearing on a daily basis; a British accent. Being a Canadian citizen who has never travelled outside of my country, it's impossible that I would be remembering glimpses from a life in England unless it was part of something I once saw on television or imagined from reading or hearing something relevant.

That would seem like the most logical explanation.

I began to wonder though, could those dreams be memories of my past lives? It might seem ridiculous to most people, but for those who believe in reincarnation such as myself the idea isn't that unrealistic.

What if my subconscious still remembers the different people I once was? What if yours did too?

For a while, I kept this theory to myself because I was afraid of what others might think of me.

I eventually consulted a psychology professor at my old university to get his opinion on the matter, and he recommended I try being hypnotized. I admitted to him that I didn't see what the relevance was, and he explained to me that I might be able to dig deeper into my subconscious; perhaps get more details about these possible past lives.

At first I wasn't too keen on the idea of being hypnotized, but curiosity got the better part of me and I scheduled a session with a professional hypnotist and psychologist who was recommended to me by the trusted university professor. I was amazed with the results!

During my first session, I was asked to choose a single timeline and to concentrate on it. Under hypnosis, I was able to put some sense into those blocks of dreams and eventually put all the pieces together to know the full story; my story.

It was both exciting and creepy at the same time, and I chose to continue my recorded sessions.

I typed up a lot of notes while replaying copies of the many recordings which I later used to write short memoirs.

CHAPTER ONE

Late 1400s

London (capital of England since 1265)

In my first life, or at least the first one I remember, I was born into a very wealthy family.

My father was a marquis, and my mother a marquise.

We lived in a stone castle on a large piece of land granted to us by King Henry the sixth. In return, it was expected of my father to provide soldiers for the king to fight his battles. That was never a problem and they would gather in our place of arms for meetings when necessary.

As baptized Christians, we had an obligation to God as well so we devoted our Sunday mornings and other holy days to doing prayers inside our chapel after religious ceremonies. During those times, I had to wear my praying veil like all the other women of the household.

There were many other rooms within our castle, some of which were empty. Those that were in use were lit by candles when it got dark.

We had a kitchen where the food was prepared by our cook; the open room was attached to our dining area. We also had a pantry to store food and a larder to keep things cold. Beer was served to lower household members in our buttery. The beer and wine cellars were located right below this room.

Below the castle was also the undercroft where things were stored.

There was a solar which was used as a private sitting area, a boudoir for my mother, and a cabinet for my father.

Although bathing was considered unholy, we did so about three times a year anyways. During the colder months, we bathed in a wooden tub within our bathroom. The water was usually cold. In the summer, when the transportable tub was placed outside and covered by a canopy for privacy, the sunlight slightly heated the water. The rare times we bathed, we all used the same bathwater one after the other.

Our toilet, a simple circular hole on a long plank of wood, was located in the garderobe. Anything that went down that hole conveniently ended up in a trench outside the castle walls.

We also had chamber pots by our bedsides for urinating, and our servants emptied their contents into the toilet.

My parents' bedchamber, located near the great hall, had a large bed with curtains all around it to keep drafts out.

I too slept in a bed surrounded by curtains, but shared my chamber with my three younger sisters as well as our nurse.

My brothers had their separate chamber, but those that did not die of some sickness or another before reaching the age of seven became pages. At least, that's what I was told. I don't think I ever actually met any of my older brothers.

In the centre of our castle was the great hall of which I spoke of earlier. It was decorated with beautiful wool tapestries and painted linen. Each large window was covered with painted panes of glass.

At the centre of the hall close to the stone fireplace, there was a large wooden table which had two long wooden benches on each side. Although chairs were rare because of how expensive they were, both my parents had one at each table end.

On special occasions, they held feasts and requested that wooden platforms be placed under their chairs so that they could look down on everyone including myself, my sisters, and my brothers.

Feast or no feast, we always ate quite well. Beef, mutton, pork, deer, swans, herons, ducks, blackbirds or pigeons were prepared for us by our cooks. Some of the animals had been hunted by my father while the others came from our farm.

On Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays, we were not allowed to eat meat since the church had declared those three days as fast days. We had a pond in our yard, so on those days we simply ate fresh fish.

We always said grace before eating, thanking the Lord for our food.

There were usually musicians present during dinner and supper to entertain us while we ate. I loved hearing the sounds of the various woodwinds and keyboards being played.

Breakfast was always eaten in private.

We used trenchers, stale slices of bread, to eat. When we were done with them they were given to the poor.

Most of our waking time was spent in the great hall, or outdoors near the flower gardens maintained by one of our gardeners. Playing cards during this free time was most popular, although we didn't usually all play together.

We had several servants taking care of us and our home. They slept on the floors of the castle towers.

About a hundred peasants lived in wooden huts on our land and either gave my father a portion of what they farmed, or paid him taxes.

I did the mistake of falling in love with one of those peasants at the age of thirteen.

I met Richard on a sunny spring afternoon during one of my leisure walks. I was often bored and had grown tired of staying within the castle grounds as instructed by my parents and nurse, so I wandered off without any of them knowing.

My sisters were used to me wanting to be alone so paid no attention when I left their sides.

I had recently discovered a secret passage in one of the empty rooms of the castle and decided to go explore inside.

Since I had originally found the inside of the passage to be dark because of its lack of windows, I brought a lit torch with me this time to light my way.

The passage led to a small tunnel with visible sunlight on the other side so I blew out the fire of my torch and excitedly went in, realizing that I had just found a way out of the castle.

I had to crawl through, and almost got stuck in the tunnel despite my petite nature since my long satin dress and uncomfortable girdle were not very practical for moving around the way I was.

I was determined to reach the end of the tunnel. I soon discovered that it led to a wooded area full of tall healthy trees, conifers, and large bushes.

I got back on my feet and walked into the greenery, ripping out strong plant roots and tossing them aside to try and create a path. I used my arms, covered by the long sleeves of my pale green dress, to push away thin leafy tree branches from my exposed face.

Once I reached a clearing full of dry prickly grass and wildflowers, I headed towards the peasant village without a care in the world.

Butterflies and dragonflies flew by me, and birds soared in the clear blue sky.

I ended up reaching a dirt path full of protruding rocks and tree roots.

Unfortunately, during my long walk on the uneven ground I ended up tripping on a large rock. It led me to fall flat on my face in the dirt, ruining my pretty dress further than it probably already was.

Luckily, I managed to break my fall with my covered arms so I did not draw any blood. It really hurt though.

When I tried to get back up, I realized that something was terribly wrong with my right ankle.

I must have shouted out in pain because I soon saw a tall and tanned boy roughly my age running towards me from one of the yellowish fields. His dark hair went down to his round chin, and he was wearing a simple brown tunic as well as red hose and thick beige cloths around his dirty feet instead of shoes.

(Allow me to interrupt a moment to inform you that I have modernized all the speeches as I comprehended them to allow better understanding.)

"Are you alright?" I heard the boy asking me once he reached me.

"No. I'm hurt."

"I shall bring you to see my mother. She can help."

The strong boy easily lifted me up in his muscular arms and took me to his parents' hut which did not smell very good. The look of it wasn't all that impressive either, especially inside.

It was just a single room with a small fire burning in the middle of a circle of large rocks. A black cauldron was suspended above it. Something was boiling inside.

There was no chimney in the hut so the smoke of the fire exited through one of the small open windows.

The furniture was quite basic; four wooden stools, a small square table, and a chest without a lock. A few cooking tools hung on the wooden walls, but no decorations; not even dry flowers.

A few insects were either crawling or flying around.

I was gently placed on the hard dirt floor full of straw, further soiling my dress as well as my long blond hair.

It was originally loosely tied up in the back of my head by two small braids started on each side near the top of my ears. The two braids then turned into a single loose one kept in place by a string, but I imagine that my hair was out of place by this point because of my little adventure. A green oak leaf was actually pulled out of it.

"What is your name?" The boy asked. "Fiona," I told him.

"I'm Richard. Are you comfortable?"

I didn't answer because I did not know what to say. I had never been this uncomfortable in my life, but I had already seen from looking around the pitiful house that nothing could change that.

Richard went to get a log across the room and brought it to me. "You can place your head on it if you want."

I was even more uncomfortable with my head resting on the hard wood, so I laid my head back down on the straw filled ground.

"My mother should be back soon," Richard told me as he took my flat brown leather shoes off my small feet. The thin soles were now completely used and there was a hole near the heel of the right shoe.

I didn't realize how much both my feet hurt from all the walking until then. I also noticed that my right ankle was swollen.

"She's a healer," Richard continued, "so she probably had to tend to somebody."

Moments later, a bulky woman walked into the hut carrying a simple small beige cloth bag. She had her greying brown hair tied up and wore a long beige tunic that went to her ankles as well as a brown linen garment, but no belt.

"What happened dear?" she soothingly asked when she saw me.

I explained about my fall and how much my right ankle hurt.

After taking a closer look, Richard's mother told me that it looked like I had sprained my ankle.

"I can give you something for that," she reassured me. "I heal the men all the time after they wrestle or battle."

She left my side and grabbed a raggedy cloth. She soaked it in something but I am not sure what. She then wrapped the wet cloth around my hurt ankle.

"You should not walk at the present. It might be best to stay for supper and sleep the night."

I slightly raised my upper body and opened my mouth to protest, but the woman spoke before I could. "Don't argue," she told me. "Richard, keep an eye on her."

Richard did as he was told, and recited many stories to entertain me after his mother left the hut. He made me laugh and I almost forgot about the pain in my ankle.

I eventually needed to empty my bladder and was brought outside.

"Don't worry. I won't look," Richard said as he set me down barefoot on the dirt ground a few feet away from the hut. I had to lean on him for support.

Cooing wild pigeons and doves were walking around among their numerous piles of excrements.

"I have to pee here?" I asked, unsure how I would manage.

I couldn't hold it in any longer so I quickly figured out a way to make it work, and Richard carried me back inside the hut.

Richard's mother soon returned home along with Richard's father. He wore a brown tunic and red hose just like Richard. Father and son looked physically alike. The only

major differences between them was that Richard's father had slightly longer hair as well as a beard and moustache. They were both quite long and bushy rather than short and well maintained like my own father's.

"Had I known we would have a special guest tonight, I would have taken the time to groom myself," Richard's father shyly said when he saw me. I told him it would not have been necessary, to put him at ease, and he smiled.

Proper introductions were made, then Richard's family sat around the dying fire on their stools. They offered to set me up on their fourth stool, but I was actually more comfortable on the ground with my legs stretched out because of my hurt ankle.

"We're going to say grace now," Richard informed me. Everyone put their own palms together like we did in my household and Richard thanked the Lord for what we were about to eat.

"Amen," we all said together when he was done his short prayer. We then did the sign of the cross by touching our own forehead, our chest, then our left and right shoulders.

For supper, vegetable broth was poured into a large wooden bowl which we passed around. Richard's father ate first, then me followed by Richard. Richard's mother ate last.

There were no spices or herbs in the liquid for flavour, but a few pieces of carrots and potatoes had been thrown inside. It wasn't enough to fill me up, but I didn't dare ask for more after Richard's mother had finished the portion we left her.

After our small meal, Richard continued his storytelling. I loved each and every one of his stories.

The struggling flame of the fire eventually died.

As the sun was setting, Richard's father brought the mooing black and white cow, three black bleating goats, and two baaing sheep into the hut along with more straw. "It's warmer this way," Richard explained.

I hadn't noticed a drop in the temperature until then and gave a little shiver.

I wasn't sure about the heat improving with the animals inside the hut, but thought it smelled worse than before because of their presence. The family who had taken me in did not seem bothered.

No candles were lit when it got dark and I figured it was because Richard's family could not afford any. The half moon in the sky provided a bit of light.

The wooden window shutters were soon closed though, to keep the drafts from coming in, and we were left in complete darkness to sleep.

Before closing my eyes, I saw two circular things glowing in the air and it scared me. Richard informed me that it was simply the cow's eyes and that it was normal for them to glow in the dark. I still thought it was creepy but managed to ease up.

I tried to get physically comfortable but it wasn't easy.

I missed my soft pillow, feather mattress, warm blankets, and heavy comforter. I was cold as well as hungry but didn't complain. Instead, I snuggled up to Richard in the straw and did my best to ignore the hunger pains.

I ended up tossing and turning throughout the night.

The following morning, I sat up and had to pull straw out of my messy hair. Richard gave me a hand.

He also helped me take care of the few insects that had crawled on me during the night.

We ate dry bread for breakfast which was hard for me to swallow without something to drink. I didn't ask for anything more than I was given though. I knew that Richard's parents could not spare any food and yet they generously did; for me. I didn't want to appear greedy.

My whole life, I had everything given to me and never had to do any work aside from learning how to run a household which I mainly ignored.

I felt lucky, and yet I saw a form of happiness in Richard and his poor family that I did not see in my own.

I doubt my parents ever loved each other the way Richard's parents seem to. They barely paid any attention to me or any of my siblings either. We might as well have not existed.

My thoughts were interrupted by Richard asking me if I would like to watch him play football. "It's our resting day," he said as though it explained his sudden request.

I agreed to be brought to the pitch near the woods and a stream. I quite enjoyed being carried by Richard.

"Be careful by the water," Richard's mother had advised.

"My younger brother drowned here," Richard told me as he set me down in some tall grass. I leaned my back against a thick brown tree trunk.

"I'm sorry," I said to Richard. "Some of my brothers and sister died too."

I then proceeded to tell Richard about my deceased siblings. Needless, to say, it wasn't a very cheerful conversation.

More boys from the village as well as several from another had soon gathered and their game of football began.

An inflated pig's bladder was tossed around as each team attempted to bring it to their marked goals. There were no rules as far as I could tell.

The boys played quite roughly and many of the players, including Richard, got injured.

I let out a gasp when I saw Richard get hurt, and I wanted to run to him but remembered that I could not even walk.

Richard continued playing so I figured he was alright, but I could barely watch anymore since I feared the worst for him.

The game progressed far from where I could see which was fine by me.

Some of the boys had broken their legs or arms playing.

I was used to violence as I had often watched knights fighting each other with lances, swords, or maces, but I never cared for the participants the way I cared for Richard.

Thank the Lord this game only lasted a few hours.

The jousting tournaments I had witnessed many times with my family, other nobles, as well as the king and queen, lasted four days. They included archery competitions which was my favourite.

I wanted to be taught how to use a bow and arrow plus practice to be able to fire thirteen arrows per minute like I had seen the best archers do it. But, I was told that I needed to learn my household duties, not a man's sport.

When the football game was over, Richard carried me back to his hut. His mother gave him something for his injuries and we ate some more dry bread.

When we were done eating, Richard's mom suggested taking me back home as she was sure that I was missed. "Not likely," I thought to myself.

The only person who ever seemed to really enjoy my presence until I met Richard was my older sister Annabelle, but she had gotten married to an earl and rarely visited.

I wanted to stay with Richard and his family, but knew I had to go back home sooner or later. Besides, they could not keep feeding me. They barely had food for themselves.

Richard carried me all the way back home and I gave him permission to enter the castle so that he may help me find somebody, other than one of our armed and armoured guards, who could bring me to my bedchamber.

In one of the halls, we were met by my plump worried nurse, Bertha.

As always, she wore a grey wool dress with a thick overcoat as well as a leather belt around her round waist to carry things on. She had a beige scarf over her mouth and nose as well as a wimple on her head which covered her hair, ears, and neck. Brown leather shoes were strapped to her large feet.

"What have you gotten yourself into this time?" she asked when she saw my wrapped ankle. I told her what had happened.

As Bertha took me from Richard's arms, I promised my new friend that I would visit him soon. "I'm going to pretend I didn't hear that," Bertha told me. I knew she could keep a secret.

"Now off you go," Bertha told Richard before turning around and heading for our bedchamber.

It didn't occur to me until much later that Richard might have gotten lost in the castle, or be seen by a household member and be considered as an intruder.

Since I didn't hear news of anyone being found roaming in the castle, I told myself that Richard was okay.

A week went by before I went to see my friend.

Thinking ahead this time, I decided to wear clothing that was easier to move in and that would not make me stand out so much among the poor peasants.

I did not own any simple dresses so had to take a beige tunic belonging to a girl servant and get changed in the secret passage. I ditched my girdle but kept my practical long cloth belt as well as my golden neck chain with a dangling polished amber stone to avoid losing it. I wore it practically every day and felt naked without it.

I also brought a torch out of the castle with me in case I would need it for my return. I knew how to ignite a flame by using two rocks.

Before going into the secret passage, I snuck some leftover food from supper, wrapped it up in some cloths, and put it all into my beige rectangular cloth bag which was embroidered with a love scene. I closed the bag by pulling the dark tasseled strings at the top. I then tied it on my belt so that I could easily bring it to Richard and his family.

They were quite grateful when I gave them the food, even if it was cold, but were worried that I might get into trouble.

"Plenty of food gets wasted in my household," I told them feeling ashamed. "I don't see the problem in sharing it before it goes bad."

As Richard and his parents ate the roasted pork which they had never tasted before and boiled vegetables, Richard started telling stories again.

"You should write down your stories," I eventually suggested without thinking. "They're quite good and I'm sure people would love to read them."

"I don't know how to write," Richard told me.

"Oh."

I should have known. Not many people were educated; especially not peasants.

As a girl, even from a noble family, I should not have been given an education since there was no need for me to have one. But, I insisted on learning how to read anyways just like Annabelle had done. Afterwards, I taught myself to write from studying the few books my father owned. They were all boring and I wished for fun storybooks. The bible was the next best thing.

"Well, I'll teach you then," I decided.

"Is it hard to learn?" Richard asked.

"I am sure you will be a good student," I said smiling.

The sun was starting to set, so I got up to leave.

"Allow me to accompany you," Richard said.

I accepted Richard's proposal and we were on our way, stopping every so often to admire the beautiful yellow, red and orange sky as well as the perfectly circular burning sun as it made its way down towards the western horizon.

Richard didn't escort me all the way home this time, out of fear of being seen since there was no good reason for him to be with me.

I lead him towards my secret passage and silently went inside, leaving Richard with my lit torch so that he could find his way back home. I could easily get another one for my next trip.

I was careful not to be heard by anyone once I was in the castle halls wearing my usual clothing. I left the servant girl's tunic hidden in the passage for my next escapes.

Of course, my nurse was waiting for me wide awake in our candlelit bedchamber.

"Where have you been?" she asked but didn't wait for me to answer. I think she already knew where and just didn't want to hear it.

"He'll just get you into trouble you know," she finally warned me. "And me too."

I saw my sisters curiously looking at the two of us from their beds. Even though Bertha had whispered, they obviously heard everything she said.

"Who are you talking about?" Henrietta wanted to know.

"Nobody."

"Is it that boy you met?" Henrietta said sitting up. "Bertha's right you know. He'll only get the two of you into trouble."

I wondered how my sister knew about Richard, although I should not have been so surprised since she had a nasty habit of spying on people.

I wanted to know if she was aware of the secret passage I found but didn't ask because I didn't want to have to show her if she didn't.

Instead, I ignored my nosy sister and went to bed. Henrietta took the hint and didn't speak another word.

Despite my nurse's and younger sister's warnings, I snuck out of the castle again with some cooked food a few days later. I picked an assortment of pretty yellow, purple and white wildflowers and tied the long stems together with the string from my hair.

I was welcomed once more into Richard's hut and gave the flowers to Richard's mother. She gratefully thanked me for the bouquet before smelling it, then gently set the flowers on the table.

"They will dry nicely if you hang them upside down," I told her.

Richard's mom took the flowers and attached the string to a protruding nail on one of the wooden walls. I thought about eventually trying to find a vase for the flowers after I had collected them, but they looked nice on the wall and I realized that Richard's family might not feel comfortable with a rich gift. They needed food more than decorations.

After watching Richard and his family eat the food I had brought them, still feeling full from my large meal, I went outside with my friend.

I began Richard's first writing lesson by teaching him the alphabet. I made him practice all the letters in the dirt using a stick.

For months I continued visiting Richard with food, pulling vegetables from the gardens when I could not discreetly take anything from the table or pantry.

His lessons went very well.

When he was familiar with all the letters and their sounds, I showed him how to write my name as well as his in the dirt. He copied me.

The next time I visited, I brought Richard my bible and showed him how to read words and sentences. I left the book with him so he could practice.

By the time autumn came, Richard knew how to read and write. Although he made many mistakes, especially with his spelling, I was quite proud of him.

"Thank you for all your help," Richard gratefully said to me.

"You're welcome. Now I just have to find a way to bring you some ink and paper so that you can write down your stories. You can't keep writing in the dirt. The wind will always blow away your words."

Since paper and ink were not easy to come by, I wasn't able to bring any to Richard during my next visit like I would have wanted. However, I made a quill using a grey pigeon feather I found on the ground near our pigeon coop and gave it to him.

I grabbed a sharp tool within the hut and made a small cut in the palm of my left hand to draw blood. I then let the red liquid run into the opening of the quill.

To show Richard how to use his quill, I wrote my name on the flattest rock I could find outside. Richard picked up another flat rock and wrote his name on it with the quill using his own blood as ink.

Once all the blood had dried up, I gave my rock to Richard and he gave me his. I placed the rock I was given in my cloth bag and promised to cherish it forever.

"I will cherish mine forever as well," Richard told me. That made me smile.

The peasants had organized a dance the next time I came to see Richard. Since I was invited, I stayed in the village longer than usual.

Torches dipped in animal fat got lit up here and there under the starry sky.

Those who owned instruments played them throughout the night. I danced with Richard several times to the sound of wind music. I had never had so much fun.

By the end of the night, I kissed Richard on the lips and told him I loved him. He looked sad and I wondered why.

"I feel the same about you Fiona, but we can't be together." After a short pause, he added: "You are meant to marry a rich Lord and continue feasting, not be with a poor peasant and starve." I knew that socially speaking he was right, but thought I could find a way to be with him anyways.

"I don't care," I started. "I am happy with you and would rather live in poverty in your company than unhappy with riches."

"I want to be your wife," I found myself saying.

"I would love for you to be my wife," Richard told me. "But I wouldn't be able to take proper care of you."

"Your love is all I need," I told him smiling.

"Let's get engaged then," he exclaimed as though he had already forgotten our conflicting statuses. I happily agreed and left him with the promise to return to him again very soon.

Surely somebody would understand me.

Perhaps I could write a letter to my sister Annabelle, I thought. She had strongly advised me to marry for love if I could. I know she would be on my side.

In the meantime, I told my nurse about my desire to marry Richard and she looked horrified.

"Your parents would never allow it!" she told me. "You must not see him anymore!"

That night, I cried in my bed.

Henrietta came to see me and tried bringing me comfort, but her words were no help as she shared our nurse's opinion.

The next day, Bertha told me the most horrible news. My parents had already arranged a marriage for me with a duke. I had never met this older man, but if he was anything like my father or Annabelle's husband I knew that I would lead a dull and boring life like my mother and sister.

I wanted to get married for love as Annabelle had advised me during a confession of unhappiness.

At the time, my sister suspected her husband of having a few mistresses and later found out for sure that it was true but could do nothing about it. Annabelle had to accept that the man she was forced to marry had sexual needs, and that while pregnant she could not always satisfy him. Her husband's behaviour was considered normal.

I knew the same indiscretions went on with my father because Henrietta had seen it then told my sisters and I about it. Our mother who was often pregnant would pretend otherwise, but I could see jealousy in her eyes whenever my father would give any kind of attention to another beautiful woman.

Honestly, I would not be surprised if I had any secret half-siblings.

Rather than agree to meet this duke whom I was forced to marry against my will, I decided to run away; for good this time.

Before doing so, I snuck into my father's study and used his white goose feather quill as well as some black ink to write a short letter to Annabelle, the only person I could confide in.

When I finished, I impatiently waited for the ink to dry and folded the white plant-fibre paper. I then carefully poured some liquid red wax onto the paper and sealed it with our family crest.

I gave the secret letter to our messenger, telling him to deliver it to my sister Annabelle as soon as possible. For his trouble, I handed him a gold coin.

While in my father's study, I found the large iron key that opened his large chest and took a look inside. There were a lot of valuable items inside, including a black leather pouch full of coins and I decided to take it.

I snuck out of the castle through the secret passage with the stolen pouch of coins as well as some food, and headed straight to Richard's hut.

Richard wasn't there when I arrived, but his mother said I could find him working in the wheat field.

Richard ran to me like the day we met when he saw me approaching him.

He could tell I had been crying when he got close, so he asked me what was wrong. I told him about the duke.

"I don't want to marry him," I said starting to tear up again. "I want to marry you."

Richard suggested getting married in secret.

I thought it was a great idea and didn't want to wait, so Richard and I decided to go to the church right away. Our plan was to ask the priest to marry us on the spot.

Shortly after starting our journey, Richard and I both heard the sound of horses galloping.

We turned around and saw my father, as well as six other men wearing chainmail armour, coming rapidly towards us on their horses. They looked like they were heading to a battle, but I suspected they were after Richard and I.

"Hide!" I told Richard and pushed him into the tall corn field to our right.

I wondered how my father knew of my escape and blamed Henrietta. Surely Bertha would not have told on me. She would get severely punished for letting me sneak away.

Thinking of the punishment Bertha might have to endure because of me made me feel awful, but it was too late to do anything about it.

"Find them!" I heard my father say.

Richard and I started running within the tall dry crops, but we weren't fast enough. We were both caught.

Although I fought very hard to get away from the two strong men holding me, I lost and was forcefully dragged towards my father. Richard too.

My bag with the food as well as the pouch of coins were taken from me and given to my father.

Sitting on his big brown horse, he furiously looked at us.

"Stealing is punishable by death," he said looking at Richard.

Richard didn't deny the thefts even though he didn't do it, so I spoke on his behalf.

"He didn't steal those things," I said trembling. "I took them."

"For forcing my daughter to steal and then kidnapping her..." my father started saying to Richard.

Before I could explain that Richard had not asked, must less forced me to steal, nor had he kidnapped me, my father finished talking. "I will have you sentenced to death by beheading."

"No!" I screamed. "You can't do this! I beg you!"

My father looked at me without any pity and angrily asked me why my kidnapper should not be punished.

"Because he didn't do these things," I was finally able to say. "I went to see him. On my own. With the coins and food that I willingly took. It was all my idea."

"And why would you do that?" my father asked unimpressed.

"Because he helped me when I was hurt and I like being with him and... and I love him." After a short pause, I added. "We want to get married."

To those words, my father grew angrier than before. He quickly got off his horse and approached me.

"You are to be married to the Duke of Cornwall!" he yelled near my face making some saliva fly out of his mouth and onto me. "Or you will die along with this peasant."

I didn't want to die, but I didn't want to be married to anyone but Richard either.

"I choose Richard," I whispered in tears.

"No!" I heard Richard say. "Save yourself!" he let out before getting violently hit on the side of the head by my father.

"Perhaps I misunderstood you," my father calmly said looking right at me again. "Will you obey and marry a duke, or die for this insignificant man?" I had never seen him look so evil.

Aside from my sobs, I remained silent.

By then, a small crowd of curious peasants had started to form near us because of all the shouting.

"There is nothing to see here!" my father yelled at them. "Go home!"

I saw the peasants slowly walking away.

"If you want to punish me for wanting to marry the man I love," I told my father in tears, "than do so. But I beg you, don't hurt Richard. He did nothing wrong."

My father laughed as though I had said a funny joke.

"Stupid ungrateful child," he said tossing an unsealed letter towards me.

I gasped at the realization that he had read my words to Annabelle. I cursed at myself for getting her involved.

"If you prefer death over a good life, then it shall be arranged right away."

Without any warning, my father grabbed his long copper sword and plunged it right into my chest near my beating heart.

As I looked into his dark brown eyes, spitting up blood, I saw no regret or pity.

More tears rolled onto my cheeks.

I was let go and fell to the ground where I then watched Richard get stabbed in the chest because of me. He got tossed aside like garbage as my father casually wiped his sharp bloody blade with a white handkerchief.

My father walked back towards me and bent down. For a split second I actually thought he was going to show remorse, but he just came to collect my golden chain with the amber stone.

I then saw my father get back on his horse like nothing unusual had happened. The other men did the same.

"Let's go!" my father ordered. And off they went.

As the sound of the galloping horses quickly faded, I painfully crawled towards Richard with tears in my eyes and told him how sorry I was.

"Don't speak," he told me as he slowly reached for my right hand with his left. It was the last thing I heard him say because he died seconds later.

It must not have taken long for me to die either, because I don't remember anything after that.

CHAPTER TWO

Late 1400s and early 1500s

London, England

After I died by my own father's sword, my soul continued to live. Strangely enough, I can actually recall some of my days as a wandering ghost.

To continue reading this chapter, as well as all the other remaining pages of the fictional book, please purchase a copy of "Past Lives" on Amazon; Available as a paperback and kindle.