

HONORS THESIS 2014

# Elizabeth Comyn A Historical Novel

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Honors Thesis Creative Project

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TO THE UNIVERSITY HONORS COLLEGE:

As thesis advisor for JESSICA COLVIN

I have read this paper and find it satisfactory.

  
Thesis Advisor

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Date

## Précis

History recorded little of Elizabeth Comyn's life, but what it has recorded gives us a glimpse of a young woman who suffered and achieved much in an era where the acts and deeds of women went largely overlooked and unrecorded. I stumbled across Elizabeth's story while researching my own ancestry and discovering that my maiden name, Cummings, is likely a derivative of Comyn. After a bit of reading I became acquainted with Elizabeth's father, John Comyn III, Lord of Badenoch, who was murdered by Robert the Bruce on February 10<sup>th</sup>, 1306 at a church in Dumfries, Scotland. At first, I thought that would be the end of my research as the Comyn clan took a sharp decline in prominence after that, but then I found a quote about Elizabeth explaining that she had inherited a large amount of land but that it was stolen from her by Hugh Despenser, one of King Edward II's favorites. This was all the information I had to go on when I decided to pursue this creative project of writing a historical novel about Elizabeth Comyn's life and using a three chapter excerpt as basis for my honors thesis.

After hours and days of library and internet research I slowly accumulated enough information to begin writing this novel. Applying the techniques I had learned about the genre of historical fiction, I began to craft plot, character, scene, and dialogue from my long list of quotes and references. After writing and even more revising, I completed the three chapters present in this thesis and, which I hope, will become the beginning of a much longer novel detailing the life of Elizabeth Comyn.

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## Introduction and Literature Review

At first the events of Elizabeth Comyn's life were just an interesting story, then it grew into a research obsession, but only after writing over fifty thousand words did Elizabeth Comyn become a person to me. Once she lived and breathed in my mind, I knew my research was successful. Finally, I was ready to condense hours of writing and research into a story, Elizabeth's story. After a summer of research, I knew enough about Elizabeth to know that a nonfiction novel would be impossible for me. Not just due to the lack of available information, but because of my infatuation with her. Through my research and imagination, I came to know her, perhaps not as she actually was, but as she might have been. She became a very real character in my life and I couldn't keep her silent. I knew she would have to have an active voice in her story. That's when I turned to the genre of historical fiction, or, as Althea Reed would call it, 'historic fiction,' for my desire is to "reveal history and the true character of historic figures" more than it is to just bring history to life (Brown 2).

As I began to establish a relationship as a writer with the historical fiction genre, I soon became frustrated. Picking up a guide book to writing historical fiction by James Thom, I found a particularly insightful passage that perfectly described my frustration with research:

"Most historical accounts were written by fallible scholars using incomplete or biased resource materials; written through the scholars' own conscious or unconscious predilections... subtly influenced by entities of government and society...that also wish to maintain certain sets of beliefs. To be blunt about it, much of the history of many countries and states is based on delusion, propaganda, misinformation, and omission."

(Thom 12)

How was I to write a historically accurate portrayal of Elizabeth's life when my facts contradicted themselves? Some of the facts I learned about Elizabeth's life were fantastic, others

gritty and uncomfortable, but all of them were written by someone with an agenda. The contradictions were there and as the author I had to decide how best to maintain historical accuracy and still tell a believable story. “As Mark Twain once said, the difference between history and fiction is that fiction has to be believable” (Thom 45). With historical fiction I’m allowed, and expected, to show the people behind the names and justify the reasons behind their actions that history records. When molding the characters I tried to take in all of the recorded history and present a person. Not an evil villain or a chivalrous knight, just a person who, in a tough situation, sometimes made good decisions and other times didn’t. And when I became bogged down in the complexities of my research, I had to remind myself that my task as an author is to be a “storyteller rather than an anthropologist or historian” (Feign 8).

Even though the author of historical fiction is not a historian, “researching as meticulously as a historian is not an obligation but a necessity” (Thom 20). I thoroughly enjoy the challenge of research and strongly identify with Thom’s statement that “research, if you do it right and if you enjoy learning, can be so engrossing that you’ll be reluctant to quit it and sit down to do the actual writing” (Thom 54). As I began to gather sources, the sheer magnitude of individual facts and the books which contained them literally began to pile up. One source would lead me on the hunt for the next; my notes began to compound exponentially. My Excel spreadsheet, which held all of these notes, was soon highlighted in so many colors it was difficult to make sense of or read. Taming this color coded monster was an enduring challenge for, as James Thom explains, research “data isn’t dead and inert. It is usually changing and evolving...which also means it grows” (Thom 126).

After organizing pages of notes into two sections (a chronology of important events and dates, and technical facts about clothing, customs and food) I started seeing gaps and focused my

research on filling them. Answers were not always forthcoming, as Hayden White explains “when dealing with earlier periods...the sources are limited, have been lost, or never existed. Medievalists and ancientists have the problem of too few sources” (White 4). While I wouldn’t say I had too few sources, I certainly didn’t have all of the sources I wanted. The birth dates of Elizabeth’s two older siblings and the date of her mother’s death were elusive; despite my best efforts, I have yet to find them. I did find all sorts of other useful information and that led to another complication. How much does the reader need to know? Do they care about the exact wording used in a Latin Christmas Mass in 1300’s England; do I need to mention the chamber pot and sewer in the streets, or will they know from the date that modern plumbing didn’t exist? As Joanne Brown explains, “many writers admit that having done the research, there is a real temptation to use too much of it” (Brown 3).

After collecting and organizing all of this research, the next big task is to start writing the novel. But where should it start? “The ways and places to start are infinite. Starting at the beginning is one way, but not the only way” (Thom 137). As my research was organized chronologically starting at the beginning made sense to me, but where was the beginning? Elizabeth’s story is shaped by years of history that happened before she was born, should I start there, or at the day of her birth, or when she’s older? I tried starting the novel when she was just a child, that’s where my 200 pages of backstory came from, but it wasn’t a good place to start, the pace was too slow. Many readers decide within the first few pages whether they will continue reading or put the book down. As James Thom says, “no time is wasted easing the reader into the story, because few readers have the patience that novel readers used to have” (Thom 147). The start of my novel had to be dynamic, had to grab the readers’ attention for long enough to get them involved in the story. But where was such a dramatic hook in the timeline of

Elizabeth's life? I found this hook in the fact that started all of my research, the fact that sparked my interest in Elizabeth's story.

Once the story starts "the history doesn't stop. It's there from the first page to the last, and it's as accurate as my research can make it. The fiction begins where my research can't find or verify any more facts" (Thom 196). As I began to write, the statement above shaped my writing as I crafted the plot, character, setting, and dialogue elements together into a cohesive story.

Plot is the first thing any story needs and for historical fiction the majority of the plot comes directly from the researched facts and events. This plot is then broken down into scenes; some of which have historical basis, others which are necessary to move the plot forward. "A good portion of the scenes in any historical novel are fictional—that is, created by the author's imagination—but so likely to have happened that they aren't necessarily untrue" (Thom 199). Meals are a great example of this; every people of every time has eaten, but rarely are these meals documented in history.

Once you have a plotline drafted into smaller scenes, characters are then needed to experience these historical events and give the readers a set of eyes to view and interpret them from. Writing interpretation of historical events from the characters' point of view can be challenging because while the author has a twenty-first century world-view the characters should not. Any analysis by the characters needs to be presented through the logic and understanding of the times without being colored by modern sensitivities and beliefs. Brown states that "strict adherence to historical accuracy can pose a problem if "accuracy" involves brutal or immoral behavior" (Brown 3). I find that ideas of morality are tightly tied to time and culture, and that when writing of historic times the author should not give their characters twenty-first century

American morality any more than they would dress their characters in twenty-first century American clothing.

Once the author has a plot and characters to act it out, sets are needed for the characters to act in. The hardest part about setting is getting things to look right. Thomas Mallon says “getting things to look right is the historical novelist’s paramount task” (Mallon 5), but how is this done? “The conjuring up of the past requires art as well as information” (White 3); this is where hours of research pays off, because getting things to look right has much to do with making every object described, every thought in the character’s head, and every word said an anchor to the past. Doing this well is an art because the difference between submersing and drowning your readers in the past is a very fine line. James Thom explains to authors that “to put your readers there and make them feel at home in that time, you must teach them what something is the moment they see it, and make it seem like they’ve known it all along” (Thom 153). If this is done well then your readers won’t feel like they’re drowning in “minuscule details about such matters as clothing, food, transportation, and social customs” (Brown 3).

After the setting is filled with all the appropriate historical objects and your characters are performing all the proper actions, they then begin to speak. Dialogue, in some ways, may be the most historically inaccurate part of any historical fiction novel. Larry Feign summarizes the historical fiction writer’s dialogue dilemma when he states that “modern speech seems inappropriate, genuine archaic speech comes across as stagey and hard to read, while speech of certain eras doesn’t sound outdated enough to transport a modern reader into the past” (Feign 3). Dialogue is more about sounding right than being right. Joanne Brown goes so far as to claim that “a narrator whose voice relies too heavily on outdated language, however historically correct, is sure to lose readers” (Brown 4). Finding examples of historically correct language can

be difficult because, as Feign points out, “when writing dialogue for a story set any time before 1930, we have no way to know with precision how people conversed. The best an author can do is guess” (Feign 2). This guess often takes the form of a written dialect which Larry Feign terms ‘Bygonese,’ while it is inaccurate it sounds plausible (Feign 4). To write the basics of ‘Bygonese’ Feign says to “inject formality...Insert archaic words and phrases, but not enough to bog down the pace... [and] Search and destroy anachronisms” (Feign 4).

Anachronisms are things that are out of place and time, like wearing full plate armor in the twenty-first century or the word zipper before the 1920’s. In historical fiction, “there is no margin for errors or anachronisms, each of which can reduce a novel's usefulness or interest” (Brown 3). First of all, anachronisms show that the author was careless or did not do sufficient research and secondly, anachronisms jar the reader and add distance between the reader and the story. Medieval ladies talking about taking a hot shower sounds just as odd as a modern business women gossiping about which knight will win the jousting tournament. “Avoiding anachronisms is almost an art in itself. The historical novelist has to have ways of determining when any particular weapon, tool, procedure, name, idea, or word usage came into being” (Thom 221). Of all these things, I find avoiding anachronisms with words the most difficult. While dictionaries tend to give dates as to the origin and usage of the word, looking up every word in your novel is extremely time-consuming. Also, a balance must be kept between historical accuracy and the readers’ sensitivities. As with writing dialogue, using too many archaic words can easily confuse the reader. One solution to the archaic or anachronism problem is to differentiate between narrative and dialogue. The dialogue is taking place between two people who live in a different time, thus they should use words appropriate to their time. The narrative,

on the other hand, is being written for a modern audience, and for their sake, some word anachronisms may be used for the sake of clarity.

In the end, every novel is written for its readers, and there are some “who want to know the real history, even though they’re caught up in the feel of the story” (Thom 33). For their sake, and for my own integrity, my novel about Elizabeth Comyn will be as authentic to history as I can make it.

## **Creative Project**

My creative project was to research Elizabeth Comyn Talbot and to present her life in the form of a historical fiction novel maintaining historical accuracy while creating an engaging story.

## **Methodology**

Thorough library research was done to gain a comprehensive understanding about the historical facts of Elizabeth's life and the time, people, and places where she lived. A timeline of events was compiled as a useful outline and reference for me and the eventual readers of my novel. From this research and the timeline, a draft of three chapters of my novel was written. I then focused on revising and editing this draft extensively. Once the three chapters were completed, an introduction was written to describe how the techniques of the historical fiction genre were used in my novel. Analysis for how the historical research was interpreted and integrated into my novel was also included in the discussion/conclusion portion of my thesis project.

## Results:

### 3 Chapter Excerpt from

#### Elizabeth Comyn—A Historical Fiction Novel

##### Prologue

*April 1325*

*During the reign of King Edward II*

*Kennington London, in Surrey, England*

Lady Elizabeth's dance weary feet encouraged her to lean, perhaps more than was proper, on the arm of Sir Richard Talbot. He escorted her down London's cobblestone streets, littered with puddles from the afternoon rain. It was dark, and smoke rose slowly from shuttered houses whose inhabitants were long since abed. Normally Elizabeth would not walk so far from the palace at night, but her fine carriage had a broken axle, and she had been forced to hire a new coach. It was functional, but terribly drab.

"I have greatly enjoyed your company this evening, my Lady," Richard said as they turned down a side street.

"As have I yours, my lord."

"Is it too bold to ask the promise of your company at another evening's gathering?"

Elizabeth bit her lip and smiled, "Perhaps my lord. Our King is generous and hosts many such revelries. If I am in attendance, I would surely not refuse your company."

"Then I shall attend all that I may," Sir Richard said.

Their pace slowed as they approached the waiting coach. Elizabeth proffered her hand as she said goodnight. Richard held it to his lips longer than the usual perfunctory kiss, but she didn't mind. No one was near to see. Still, she felt herself blushing as he helped her into the carriage. Settled onto her seat, she watched Richard from the window as the coach pulled away.

A movement in the shadows caught her eye moments before the drape was pulled across the window, shutting out all light from the coach. Elizabeth screamed. A hand clamped down across her mouth and forced her back against her seat. The carriage leapt forward at a dizzying speed as Elizabeth struggled against fear, and her attacker's hand for breath. In the distance, above the pounding of blood in her ears, Elizabeth heard the ragged call of Sir Richard's voice, "ELIZABETH!"

## Chapter 1: Kidnapped

*April 1325*

*During the reign of King Edward II*

*Woking, England*

“Why are you doing this to me? Sir Hugh! Please, my lord! You must not do this! You will surely pay for such an offense!” Elizabeth screamed, beating frantically at the heavy wooden door. But the door was as unyielding as the ears of her kidnapper. She sank to the floor, crying from fear and exhaustion, until sleep shut out the darkness of the room. Her dreams carried her back to London, to the tournaments, feasts, and the music. Back to the dance floor where she twirled in practiced grace, Richard’s friendly eyes and warm hands guiding her every step.



It was late and Hugh hadn’t bothered to light a lamp in the study, the glow of the fire was enough to see by. Tired from the unpleasant trip to London, he sat reclined and half asleep in his chair before the fire, waiting for his father.

“Did you get her, son?” Hugh’s father, Hugh the Elder, asked as he entered the room.

Hugh nodded and relinquished the chair to his father. Walking to the cupboard along the back wall, Hugh drew out a bottle of wine and two silver cups.

“Were there witnesses?”

Hugh shrugged. “Richard was nearby and she screamed, so he probably knows something happened. He’s my retainer though, and owes me fealty. I’ll send him a message and he’ll hold his tongue.”

“Very well,” Hugh’s father said, accepting the cup of wine. “Where’s the girl?”

“Screaming and yelling in the upper room. Honestly, I’m surprised she has not awoken Eleanor.”

Hugh's father frowned and took a gulp of his wine. "We should deal with this tonight then. You care too much for your wife's feelings and I doubt she would approve."

Hugh shook his head. "Eleanor will understand, Father. And no, we should let Elizabeth sleep through the night; she'll be more reasonable in the morning."

"As you say; Bousser should arrive by then. What did the King have to say?"

Hugh finished off the wine in his cup and poured himself another before he answered. "Nothing promising, Queen Isabella is being sent to France to negotiate on England's behalf. Meanwhile, Roger Mortimer is still plotting rebellion and pushing for war. I know not why the man was ever exiled, traitors should be executed."

"True enough, but our King is...kind."

"No. He's not weak, Father, he is just poor," Hugh said, interrupting his father, "this political banter won't solve anything. Armies will, but armies are expensive to clothe and feed. If I had half the lands that that traitor Thomas Lancaster had before we shortened him a head, I could front the money for an army. As it is, Eleanor still feels like she has to mend my clothes."

"Women. Be that as it may, the Pembroke lands will serve us well, and these peace negotiations should buy us a little more time to prepare."



Elizabeth awoke cold and stiff from sleeping on the hard wooden floor. The chamber was plain; white plaster walls, a chair by the window and a hay stuffed mattress elevated on a bed frame. Standing up, she paced back and forth in the dim sunlight that entered through the window. Attempting to coax warmth back into her legs, she braced and stretched them against the fireplace mantel. Wood was neatly arranged in the fireplace. She sought out flint and steel and started a flame. Crouching down near to the growing fire, she finally began to warm up, and

her mind settled on thoughts beyond the cold. She had been kidnapped, betrayed by the man who, for the last eight years, had been her caretaker. It hurt.

“Have I not lost enough?” she whispered to the fire, thinking of her family, all of them, save her elder sister, betrayed, dead and buried. With hardly a knock, the door swung open and two armored guards marched in.

“Come with us Lady,” the man on the left said, his posture rigid, his blue eyes stubbornly refusing to meet hers.

She knew these men, liveried in the Despenser arms of quarterly gules and argent with a fret of sable. They had been her mother’s retainers before her passing. By all rights, they should be hers now.

“Ralf de Sutton, Thomas Pestor, what is the meaning of this? Why am I being held captive?” Elizabeth demanded.

“Orders my lady, we are to escort you to Sir Hugh le Despenser,” said Ralf as he stepped forward and reached out to take her arm.

Elizabeth jerked her arm back, “Lay a hand on me and I will see it struck off!”

Ralf withdrew his hand and frowned.

“Sir Hugh would take more,” Thomas growled as he stepped forward and grasped Elizabeth’s elbow. “Don’t make this more difficult on yourself.”

Elizabeth cuffed Thomas upside the head, with her free hand. “Your wife would be ashamed of you!”

“Better ashamed of me with food to feed our children, than proud of me and starving,” Thomas replied, as he led her through the red brick hallways of what Elizabeth immediately recognized as Woking Manor.

Entering a well lit study, Elizabeth took a sharp breath when she saw the two men. In his distinctive scarlet wool cotehardie jacket, Sir Hugh le Despenser the Younger sat behind a large oak desk, sharpening a quill with a tiny bejeweled dagger. The Royal Justice, John Bousser, stood at Sir Hugh's elbow and smiled. Elizabeth straightened her gown and was silent until she managed a tone with a hint of civility.

“I demand you free me at once, Sir!” she said, addressing Hugh.

Sir Hugh set the knife down, then dipped the quill into an opened well of ink. “By all means my lady, sign and you are free to return to London or wherever you would prefer.”

Elizabeth took the large sheet of parchment.

John Bousser coughed, “Will you require it read?”

“Yes, by mine own eyes!” Elizabeth snapped, glaring at the Royal Justice. Bousser was a white haired, beady-eyed rat that profited from his title, but knew little of justice. That he was involved was not a surprise, but Elizabeth was curious how much Hugh had agreed to pay him for his services. She lifted the parchment into the light from the window and read it. She skipped the first few lines of pleasantries and skimmed the meat of the document. *License for Elizabeth Comyn, to enfeoff (sign over to) Hugh le Despenser, the younger, the castle and manor of Castle Goodrich, in the march of Wales. The like for her to enfeoff Hugh le Despenser, earl of Winchester, the manor of Painswick, county Gloucester, held in chief<sup>d</sup>.* Reaching the end she crumpled the parchment and threw it at Sir Hugh.

“Sign away my inheritance? Never!”

“I had hoped to find a Comyn able to reason, it appears I am to be disappointed,” Hugh mused aloud. “Nevertheless, I will have your signature Lady Elizabeth.”

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<sup>1</sup> (Patent Rolls, Edward II, 116)

“As I’ll have your head Sir! This time you have gone too far, the King’s favor is not without its limits, and seizing and assaulting a lady of his household will have dire legal consequences.”

Sir Hugh looked at John Bousser and spun the quill in his hand. “Perhaps, but I think not, my lady. You see, the King and your late uncle have left your wellbeing in my care, and you have recently become a wealthy heiress of Pembroke lands. That, and how noble – nearly royal – your blood is, makes you a vulnerable target for any young lord seeking to marry into the high society. What with your recent indecencies, well, let us just say that bastards pose a threat to royal lands.”

“What exactly are you accusing me of?”

“Nothing that the whole court hasn’t been gossiping about for months now,” John Bousser jibed with a sharp little smile.

Elizabeth stared at him, flushed and dumbfounded.

“You really thought that people would not talk?” John Bousser chuckled “Especially after you announced yourself at court and have since been unchaperoned? Let’s just say, modesty doesn’t come into mind when people say your name.”

“You’re too old to marry, Elizabeth, yet you flirt shamelessly. No one’s fool enough to think you’re pure, though most believe you’re barren. Your inheritance is all that makes you desirable,” Sir Hugh interjected.

“And your perception of my integrity gives you the right to steal my land before someone marries me to do so?” Elizabeth asked, unable to keep an offended shrillness from her tone. “An unwanted husband would at least protect my livelihood. Marriage would give me legal rights and the promise of a dower should my husband come to an untimely end!” Elizabeth’s voice

dropped to a burning whisper, “No, Sir, that weak bit of reasoning will hold no weight in a court of law. You will release me *and* your hold on my lands and their funds.”

“Well, you certainly lack no amount of passion, though your reasoning is flawed by its furor. You will sign this document to repay the debt you owe me.”

“What debt?” Elizabeth demanded, wishing she could see Sir Richard beat the smirk off John Bousser’s face.

“The debt that you owe for spending the last eight years under my roof, fed from my larders, clothed in my cloth, all of your needs met through the money in *my* coffers,” Hugh said.

“My uncle arranged for the cost of my keep. I owe no debt. You will release me! You have no right to keep me against my will.” Elizabeth said, fighting back the urge to scream.

Sir Hugh’s voice dipped darkly, “No, my lady, I am afraid you misunderstand. You will sign this contract. There is no debate in the matter. The Royal Justice, John Bousser, approves this contract. He will witness you signing it.”

Elizabeth scowled and crossed her arms. “And if I will not?”

“You will, but your resistance will be unfortunate. A pretty face does much to sweeten a marriage proposal.”

“Is that a threat?” Elizabeth challenged.

“More like a promise. Your resolve *will* be broken, and if you delay in signing, the recognizance you owe will increase.” (6.19)

“Pirate!” Elizabeth accused, stomping her foot.

“Guards!” Sir Hugh called. “Escort Lady Elizabeth back to her room.”

Ralf and Thomas entered the room and turned to Elizabeth, their faces hard and set. She searched for a way to flee, but they had hold of her before she could take two steps. “Release me!” she demanded as they forcibly escorted her from the room.

John Bousser exhaled loudly and turned to look to Hugh. “Why do you need her signature again? With the proper incentive, I could sign her name for her.”

Hugh frowned. “She’s not the most timid of women, or prudent for that matter. She would fight it at court. With the barons already against me, it is a risk I cannot afford.”

Bousser nodded, “Will she not still fight if she signs under duress?”

“Not if she’s properly cowed.”

The door shut solidly behind Elizabeth, its lock grinding into place. She screamed and hurled the clay ewer against the wall. It broke; water splattered and dripped. Her eyes burned and she clenched her jaw and her fists, lest she break anything else.

“How dare he!” Elizabeth fumed to her reflection in the window. Her hair was a mess and only half of the pearl pins still held in place. She yanked them out and worked the ends loose until two long auburn braids hung to her waist. Sitting on the edge of the bed she combed her hair free with her fingers. Hugh had a reputation, but somehow all the stories had never seemed real, merely angry gossip. How foolish to think that.

“He’s no more than a greedy pirate!” Elizabeth grumbled. Hugh’s father had been a pirate before coming to court, and five years ago, while exiled, Hugh had also turned to piracy. Elizabeth shook her head looking at the pile of pearl pins in her lap. “These probably came from one of those two ships he captured,” she mused.

Her reflection flashed across the window again. She hardly recognized the wild woman who stared back. Her green houppelande gown hung loosely from her shoulders, its front gaping indecently low. Elizabeth tied her thistle-embroidered sash tighter and pulled the high, fur-lined, collar of the gown closer around her slender neck. Then she repleated her hair and twisted it into a pile at the crown of her head, securing it with the pins. A sudden knock at her door split the silence.

“Enter!” Elizabeth called, standing and turning towards the door with her arms crossed.

The slight frame of Lady Eleanor le Despenser slipped through the doorway. She shut the door so quickly that Elizabeth barely got a chance to see the guards who stood outside.

“Hello, Bess,” Eleanor said, giving her a nervous smile.

Elizabeth’s smile was bitter. They were friends and had spent much time together at court, but kidnapping strained a relationship.

“I am sorry for what has happened Elizabeth. I would have sent word to you if I knew his plans, but I was – and still am – unaware of my husband’s intentions,” Eleanor said.

Elizabeth sighed, relieved that Eleanor had no part of her kidnapping. “Will you help me? I need to get word to Sir Richard. Surely he will come for me.”

Lady Eleanor shook her head causing her pale blond curls to bounce at her temples.

“Don’t ask that of me, I’m too timid to actually help you. Sir Hugh is my husband, Elizabeth, please respect that.”

“I’m not asking you to defy him,” Elizabeth argued. “Just to do what you can. Surely you can send a letter.”

Lady Eleanor bit her lip but nodded. “What would you have it say?”

“That I’m being illegally kept by Hugh le Despenser at the manor of Woking. This is Woking?”

Eleanor nodded.

“And urge him to sue the King for my release and to come in force...”

“Would you have him killed?” Lady Eleanor interrupted, “If Richard came with any sort of force, his head would be struck from his shoulders before he even laid eyes on you.”

“No, not if the King ordered my release, it would be murder,” Elizabeth objected.

“It would be battle, and it would not matter, dear. Murder on Despenser lands, around sworn vassals, of a low ranking knight. Richard would simply disappear.”

“But Hugh has no right!” Elizabeth choked out between sobs, letting Eleanor gather her into an embrace.

“Shush, dear, he had no right to take you, but that didn’t stop him then, and it won’t stop him now. Sign the contract dear and save yourself a lot of pain. You can’t fight him.”

Elizabeth pushed Eleanor away and glared at her. “No, I won’t yield!”

“Don’t be a fool, Elizabeth, I would grieve to see you hurt. Bess, I fear for you,” Lady Eleanor said with a thoughtful frown.

“Why, what can he do? The King will hear of this and send Hugh back into exile.”

Eleanor looked down at her fidgeting hands, “Perhaps. Do you know of Lady Barret?”

Elizabeth took a sudden breath. *Everyone had heard the tales of poor old Lady Barret.*

“No, he wouldn’t, not to me.”

Eleanor just stared at the floor.

“Don’t let him do this. Help me,” Elizabeth pleaded.

“I can’t, you know that, and if you cared you would have known not to ask,” Lady Eleanor whispered as she retreated to the door. “Goodbye, Elizabeth.”

“Wait!” Elizabeth called out, reaching the door and banging on it. It didn’t help, the door was locked and Eleanor was gone.

The silence returned, amplified by the quiet crackling of the fire. Rain tapped against the room’s small window that Elizabeth went to look out. There wasn’t much to see, just the muddy yard of Woking manor. Servants dressed in crude grey linen periodically ran from one building to another, a horseman arrived and another left. Beyond the yard, Elizabeth could see bright green pastures filled with small clumps of sheep. They must have been shorn recently; they were as white as daisies.

Richard had given her a daisy chain years ago in the spring, on the first really warm day in weeks. Birds were singing, celebrating the brightness of the sun and the rich blueness of a cloudless day. It had been her first year living with Sir Hugh and Eleanor le Despenser at Castle Tonbridge in Kent. Sir Richard Talbot was serving as a retainer and companion to Sir Hugh. He had caught her strolling in the rose garden and swept her away to a spontaneous picnic in the apple orchard.

“Oh, dear Richard,” she breathed; wishing he would appear.

Foolishly her heart leapt when she heard a knock at the door. Her hopeful smile faded when she saw Hugh, his father, and John Bousser, enter the room. Hugh looked very much like his father; the same dark, wavy hair, long sharp nose and wide set eyes, but where Sir Hugh the Younger eyes shone with clarity, his fathers were clouded and cold as the arctic seas.

“Lady Elizabeth,” Sir Hugh the Younger spoke. “Have you come to see reason? Are you now prepared to sign the contract?”

“I am yet un-inclined, sir.”

Hugh’s father growled, “There are ways to persuade such a stubborn woman.”

John Bousser frowned, “Why? What does Goodrich offer that makes you so stubbornly refuse to surrender?”

“My mother was once the lady of Goodrich and guardian of those people. I would do right by her memory to care for them as she herself once did,” Elizabeth replied truthfully. “That, I believe, is why Goodrich was given to me as an inheritance. And it is the promise of a decent future, my livelihood. Without Goodrich I am without a dowry, and without that what life lies before me but to be shut away in a convent? I am the descendant of kings! I will not allow myself to be lowered to such a state!”

Sir Hugh frowned and crossed his arms, but the look on his father’s face made Elizabeth shiver. This wasn’t the first time she had met Sir Hugh the Elder, and she didn’t like him; the coldness of his manner, the glint of gold in one ear, his empty sea-washed eyes.

“If I saw you wed and spared the life of a nun devoted to God,” Sir Hugh said, with an emphasis on God that induced a twinge of shame in Elizabeth’s heart, “would you then sign the contract?”

The pressure in the small room suddenly filled Elizabeth with an unreasonable urge to laugh. “You actually expect me to believe you! Unbelievable! You have said such a thing before, to my uncle. I was sent into your care to be wed to a member of your household, a son! And has that happened? No. My youth is fading, wasted in waiting!”

“My eldest grandson is seventeen; I will not betroth my *heir* to an aging Scot of twenty-six!” The Elder bellowed. Stepping forward, Hugh’s father loomed over Elizabeth. She defiantly glared back. That was a mistake. His hand lashed out, hard and flat, and caught her squarely on the cheekbone.

The force of the impact wrenched the muscles of her neck, as the momentum sent her sprawling to the hard wood floor. Silence echoed. Hot tears burned her eyes as she strained to right herself. Slowly standing up, Elizabeth wiped her mouth and stared at the pink smeared along the back of her hand. In the same instant, audible sound rushed back to her ears, a loud rumbling growl that was punctuated by a shrill voice.

“Now, sign the contract, Elizabeth,” John Bousser said, holding out a quill and the parchment.

Unable to stop crying, Elizabeth attempted to steady her voice before speaking to Hugh the Younger. “Or else, what? Will you lock me in the dungeon and beat me until my mind and limbs break like you did to Lady Barret?”

Sir Hugh’s face became stony. “If that is all the honor you see in me, perhaps something can be arranged.”

“Actions speak louder than words, my lord, and honorable titles do not change the heart of a man,” Elizabeth retorted, lifting her chin up.

Hugh’s father stepped forward, but his son caught his hand. “No, Father. You heard the lady’s opinion of my honor, I’ll do it. John, wait in the hall and keep Eleanor away if she tries to intervene.”

The latch clicked behind John and suddenly the room felt hotter.

“Don’t touch me!” Elizabeth spat, backing away as Hugh the Younger approached.

He paused and pulled the rings from his fingers, carefully tucking them into a pocket.

“Sign the contract.”

“No,” Elizabeth said, and took another step back. When he stepped into range she swung her fist at him. Hugh had years of fighting experience, was a champion in the jousting lists, and a formidable presence on the battlefield. He caught her wrist, twisted and jerked. She fell to the floor with a crash.

“Sign the contract!” Hugh said, coming to stand above her.

Elizabeth kicked at his legs ineffectually. Hands clamped down on her shoulders and pulled her to her feet. She screamed.

“Stop that,” Hugh ordered, shaking her roughly.

Dizzy, she stumbled forward. A fist collided with her stomach and knocked the wind from her. She crumpled to her knees and coughed. A hand gripped her braided hair and pulled her to her feet, holding her elbow to keep her there.

“Sign the contract!” Hugh the Younger growled into her ear.

When she didn’t respond Hugh’s father lashed out and hit her across the face. She cried, but he hit her again. She felt her lip swell and something hot dripped from her nose. “Stop,” Elizabeth whimpered, trying to raise her arms to defend herself.

Hugh let go and she fell to the floor. Heat from the fire warmed her back. Kneeling, he forced her chin up until she looked him in the eyes.

“Sign this contract now and we will leave you be.”

Elizabeth reached for the contract. Blood from her nose dripped onto the parchment and ran down in ugly red lines. Rage burned like a living thing and Elizabeth thrust the document

into the fire behind her. It caught flame at the same moment Hugh's silver-spurred boot knocked her to the ground. She cried and tensed into a ball as another boot followed the first. The impacts shook her entire frame and she heard the creaking snap of breaking ribs. Bile leapt into her mouth and mixed with blood on the floor.

She felt the wood splinter and bite at her clothes as she was drug across the floor, pulled to her feet, only to be knocked down again. She flinched at the impact of each further abuse. Sound became distant, and in a moment of pain induced clarity, she told herself she would die.

But she didn't.

A splash of cold water focused her reeling mind. Pressed into a sitting position up against the wall, she was handed an inked pen and a blank sheet of paper pinned to a wooden tablet.

"Sign at the bottom, Elizabeth," a voice above her said.

Slowly, her shaking hand etched her name across the paper. It was sloppy but it was her name.

Hugh let go of Elizabeth's shoulder. "John, let Eleanor in now."

Elizabeth felt herself slump to the floor and watched as the black boots with silver spurs walked away.

▣▣▣

"Let me through!" Eleanor ordered as she pushed through the guards and into her husband's study. "That was an ugly thing to do. Were you trying to kill the poor girl?" Eleanor demanded, glaring at her husband who was hunched over his oak desk.

"If we were going to kill her we wouldn't have gone through the trouble of kidnapping her, woman," Hugh's father said, crossing his arms and glaring at his daughter-in-law.

“Father, please,” Hugh said. Setting his quill down and blowing on the crisp sheet of parchment, Hugh handed the signed document to his father. “Take this to Bousser, he will carry the letter to the King in the morning.”

Hugh’s father took the letter and left the room, slamming the door harder than necessary behind him.

“She’s a bloody mess,” Eleanor accused, her fists propped on each hip.

Hugh ran his hands through his hair and shook his head. “She’ll live; maybe she’ll even learn something. She should have signed when we asked.”

“You knew as well as I did that she wouldn’t. Why didn’t you give her more time?”

“Because it would not have changed things, why didn’t you tell her not to fight?”

“I did, but you knew she wasn’t going to listen. She wanted me to send word to Richard to come with an army against you.”

“Ha, that’s something. If he could find and fund an army we should have kidnapped him,” Hugh laughed.

Eleanor did not.

“Eleanor, I’m sorry,” Hugh said, wrapping his arms around her in an embrace. She hugged him back and rested her head on his chest. “Thank you for caring for her. I didn’t mean to be so rough, she just aggravates me so.”

“She will heal, she’s as stubborn as you are. Think of what she’s been through.”

“I know.” Hugh kissed the top of Eleanor’s head. “I’m thankful the King didn’t send you to France with the Queen.”

Eleanor let the topic change. She knew how much her husband worried about the King’s affairs. “Do you think she will be successful in France?”

Hugh sighed and shook his head. “If anyone had a hope of resolving this through peace talks it was Elizabeth’s uncle, Sir Aymer de Valence, Earl of Pembroke. Now that he’s gone, I see little way for us to avoid war. The King of France will require homage, but it’s too great a risk to allow King Edward to go. Besides, if he left England I’m not sure the earls would accept him back and we for sure would have to travel with him or else prepare for a siege. If this country won’t stand behind its King, I’m not sure how we’re to stand against France.”

Eleanor smiled and kissed her husband’s cheek. “You’ll find a way.”

## Chapter 2: Aftermath

Elizabeth felt like a newly forged sword, sharp all over and still hot from the fire and the pounding hammer. Memories of last night flashed through her mind. *I signed.*

She questioned the darkness behind her eyes. *You took my family. Now You let Hugh take my livelihood. What did I ever do to deserve this? Did You create me for misery?*

No answer came, only the memories.

~1306~

*Elizabeth was in the solarium of Inverlochy Castle. Her mother, Lady Joan, was drinking a glass of wine and working on a new shirt for her father. Elizabeth watched herself being schooled in the art of English dance. She was practicing bowing when the messenger came.*

*Lady Joan dropped her cup. Elizabeth watched as the wine splashed and speckled her father's new shirts with fat red droplets. The shirt fell, and like a washrag, began to soak up the puddle of spilled wine.*

“No, Father!” Elizabeth shouted pushing at the cloth covering her face.

Lady Eleanor's cold white hands pulled the cloth away and grabbed at Elizabeth's flailing arms. “Shhh, don't move, you'll just hurt yourself.”

Elizabeth fell back into her pillow, exhausted, her whole body throbbing.

“What do you remember of last night?” Lady Eleanor asked.

Tears stung Elizabeth's eyes and she started to shiver. "He hit me, I threw the document in the fire when they gave it to me to sign. Then they beat me. Oh Lord, I signed – I signed the document after that."

Eleanor stroked Elizabeth's hair.

"Can I go Eleanor? Please, let me go," Elizabeth whispered.

"When you heal dear. Here drink this." Eleanor held a cup of lukewarm tea to Elizabeth's dry lips.

The fluid was bitter, but warming. Her eyelids became too heavy to keep open.

~1305~

*"Samhain." Elizabeth whispered the forbidden word. John, her red headed brother, had told her that pagan word. Elizabeth smiled. John's the only one who told her interesting things. Samhain was tomorrow though, a Sunday, when scary things had to leave or face the Holy wrath of the Church. Tomorrow was also All Saints Day, and no devil dare stand against the Saints. But it was still a dark day, John said it was because summer was dying and winter was coming. Elizabeth didn't like winter. It's too cold to go outside, and that meant more sewing. From the hallway window, Elizabeth looked out across the golden twigs of the harvested field. Dozens of crows, magpies, and blackbirds fought for the spilled grain, heedless of the scarecrow and its billowing white tassels. Elizabeth shivered; the scarecrow looked like a witch in its white robes, talking to evil spirits in the dark birds.*

*"Aah!" she screamed and kicked.*

*John laughed and set her down. "Scared you, did I?"*

*"No!" Elizabeth said with a frown.*

*“Of course not, you’re too brave to be scared.”*

Elizabeth awoke to Lady Eleanor at her bedside. “You’re too brave, I told you not to fight. You’re a brave fool, Bess; you know that don’t you?”

Elizabeth nodded, her mind trying to bring back the sweet memory of her brother. But his face vanished behind the pounding of her head. Eleanor helped her sit up and drink a cup of salty broth.

*~1314~*

*Elizabeth heard a shout and went out into the courtyard of Pembroke Castle. Margaret, John’s beautiful golden haired wife, lay face down in the yard beating at the dust. Elizabeth saw her Uncle Pembroke holding her mother in a tight embrace while she cried. Little Aymer, her nephew, John’s son, screamed in Elizabeth’s arms. Elizabeth fell to her knees, clutching little Aymer tightly. “No, no-no-no-no!” She cried. “It cannot be, it must not be.” Her world spun and she was falling, her mind filling with images of blood and her brother – his smile, then a cruel sword; his promise to return home, then his crying widow and fatherless son.*

*“You lied! You promised to keep him safe, but where is my son! My only son!”*

*Elizabeth’s mother screeched.*

*“He died honorably in the battle of Bannockburn, felling foes on every side. It is not the worst death a man can have,” Earl Pembroke said in an attempt to comfort a grieving mother and wife.*

*“He was just a boy! My boy, and you let him die!”*

“I will not let her be sent away to die!” Elizabeth heard Eleanor say sternly. Opening her eyes she saw Hugh the Younger standing in an argument with his wife. Elizabeth’s body seized and her heart raced as she remembered. Blood in her mouth, trembling hands, burning paper, the sharp flash of ribs cracking. Fear and dizziness drove her back into unconsciousness.

~1312~

*Elizabeth smiled as she watched her brother John and his wife Margret spin about the dance floor. For a time they danced alone, then were joined by other couples, Margret’s parents, Earl Pembroke and his wife Lady Beatrice, and many others. Elizabeth sat lonely beside her mother as she watched the party guests dance.*

*“My lady, would you care for this dance?” a voice asked from beside her. Elizabeth turned and smiled at the white knight that stood at her elbow. She said, “Yes,” at the same moment her mother said “No.” Offering her hand she allowed the young man to help her from her seat.*

*“You are more beautiful than I remember,” the knight said as they bowed to each other at the start of the dance.*

*“And you, Sir, are a good deal less scruffy. Might I have your name now?” Elizabeth asked, letting her fingers rest on his as he guided her through the dance.*

*He laughed, the rich sort of laugh that comes deep from your belly. “Richard Talbot, my lady. And though I know you for a child of Comyn, what might your Christian name be?”*

*Elizabeth smiled, “Well, it might be Joan, or Johanna, or it might be Elizabeth or Eleanor.” He’s handsome, she thought, as she listened to him hem and haw over which name*

*must be correct. He wore the colors of his family, a white doublet with slashed crimson sleeves. Every time they bowed, his curly brown hair bounced and though he had a plain face and an unfortunate nose, his eyes were a bright hazel and his smile was more perfect than a girl's.*

*“Hmm?” Elizabeth asked, suddenly realizing that those perfect lips were asking her a question.*

*“Your name, my lady, is Elizabeth; it must be, the others do not fit you.”*

*Elizabeth smiled and allowed him to twirl her as the dance called for. “Your guess is correct, good sir,” she said, leaning into his arm and smiling as he spun her again.*

*“Excellent, and is there a prize for such a noble guess?” Richard asked her.*

*She was half inclined to press her lips into his, but her uncle suddenly appeared behind Richard.*

Elizabeth woke with a start. Eleanor was sitting at the end of the bed, mending the hem of a heavy woolen cloak. “Richard. I have to send a letter to Richard,” Elizabeth said as loudly as her dry throat would allow.

Worry lines wrinkled Eleanor’s forehead. “Close your eyes dear, someone is coming. It would be best if you were asleep.”

Elizabeth let her head fall back against her pillow and lightly closed her eyes. A couple of breaths later the door opened.

“Eleanor, wake her up. The carriage is ready and she is leaving now, before the sun rises.”

“My dear husband,” Eleanor said, “Can you not see that she is still injured? Had you wanted her to leave Woking so soon, perhaps you would have been more considerate to a woman’s weaker frame.”

A flicker of rage left Elizabeth feeling uncomfortably warm. Pinpricks of sweat broke out across her body. *I lived with these people. I saw them as family. Did they ever care for me? Was I always just a pawn to be bought, sold or broken?*

“Eleanor, you know what’s happening at court right now. I will not have her this close to London. I’d send her further, but I won’t risk someone intercepting her. Now wake her up. It shouldn’t be too hard; she’s flinched every time I’ve spoken so far.”

Elizabeth opened her eyes and tried to keep the wince out of her face as she pushed herself up and frowned at Hugh.

“Look at that Eleanor, if I had done any real damage, she’d be a bit more timid don’t you think?” Hugh asked, crossing his arms.

“She’s injured my lord, but she’s also a stubborn, foolish, Scot! Now, if you will excuse us, I will help Elizabeth dress.”

“Yes, of course. Here, I brought her a dress since you destroyed her last one,” Hugh said, tossing a bundle of grey homespun on the bed before leaving the room.

“It was torn and bloody,” Eleanor grumbled as she shook out the shapeless grey dress “And this is horrid, but I guess it will do. Can you stand up, Bess?”

Elizabeth nodded and gritted her teeth as she stood. Eleanor held the dress up and Elizabeth raised her arms to slip it over her head. Taking a breath, she found herself on her knees clutching her burning side and blinking tears from her eyes.

“I’m sorry, dear, it’s your ribs. I know how that feels. Can you stand up again so I can lace the back?”

Elizabeth nodded and stood with Eleanor’s assistance. “How do you know what broken ribs feel like, Eleanor?” Elizabeth asked in an accusatory tone.

“Oh no, dear, Hugh has never laid a violent hand on me. I was thrown from a horse when I was twelve. A bush broke my fall and also several ribs; lifting anything or raising my arms was beyond me for months.”

Elizabeth winced as the laces were pulled tight. “A horse, is that how Hugh will explain this also?” Elizabeth asked, motioning at her swollen and bruised face.

Eleanor didn’t answer, but draped a large cloak around Elizabeth’s shoulders and pulled the hood up until it completely hid her face. “For your safety, dear.”

“No,” Elizabeth murmured through the hood, “It’s for yours.”



Hugh sat at the dinner table with Eleanor and his father. The stew was heavily spiced but tasted of ash to Hugh. Reaching into his belt pouch Hugh retrieved a folded letter. “It’s from Ralph Basset,” he explained, handing the letter to his father.

Hugh’s father chewed thoughtfully as he read. “Are we prepared to respond?”

Hugh shook his head. “No, the funds are coming, but soldiers are scarce. Goodrich only had a handful of men-at-arms in fighting condition and I’ve already sent them to secure the coast.”

“Does the King know about this?” Hugh’s father asked, handing the letter back to Hugh.

Hugh nodded. “The royal children are to be left in your care, Eleanor. As soon as things are arranged, you are to travel with them to a safe location. Queen Isabella’s lands have been confiscated and her French household put under guard, but if the French invade it won’t matter. We don’t have the men to ward off an attack in Gascony and at the crossing of Normandy.”

“If the French attack, the Scots will attack as well.”

“Yes, Basset did allude to that, which brings us to the question of what to do with Elizabeth.”

“How does this concern her?” Hugh’s father asked.

“Elizabeth is the daughter of John Comyn, who was a competitor to the Scottish throne until Robert the Bruce slew him. Any child Elizabeth bears would have a better claim to the Scottish throne than Robert the Bruce,” Eleanor explained as she poured the men another glass of wine.

“I don’t see how that concerns us,” Hugh’s father argued.

“It doesn’t, but she could become a political bargaining piece if she fell into the wrong hands. Her mother was the cousin of King Edward I. If the Bruce married her into his household, he would strengthen his claim to Scotland and perhaps win enough support to pose a threat to England,” Hugh explained.

“Fine, send her to a convent.”

“Or marry her to Richard Talbot,” Eleanor interrupted her father-in-law.

Hugh frowned, “Why Richard? He’s a landless knight who can hardly afford to keep his horse, much less a wife.”

“Exactly,” Eleanor smiled. “And she loves him, she might actually want to marry him. Richard’s name has no significance and he owes us fealty; you would have control of the situation and they could live happily.”

“The match is above him, he would be a fool not to accept. Are you sure she would cooperate?” Hugh asked Eleanor.

Eleanor nodded.

“Alright, I’ll write a letter to him on the morrow explaining the situation.”

**Chapter 3: I Do?***July 1326**During the reign of King Edward II**Pirbright, England*

The window kept her sane. Watching people cross the yard, making up stories of who they were and where they were going, imagining she was down there with them, or that one of them was Richard coming to save her. In the hours she spent watching, her wounds healed and her anger grew. She was detained at Pirbright for over a year. While the room wasn't uncomfortable, she was never allowed to leave, and after Lady Eleanor had to return to court, she was allowed no other visitors beyond the servants who would not speak to her. But the day someone knocked on her door, Elizabeth found that fear, not anger, got the better of her.

At the second knock she fled to the corner of the room, and watched the door open. She contemplated if today was the day to make a run for it. At the first glimpse of Sir Hugh's profile, she bolted. Brushing past him she ran into the man who stood behind him, and was caught. "Let me go! Let me go!" Elizabeth screamed, kicking and fighting the arms that restrained her.

"Bring her back in here, Richard. Obviously she's not going to be reasonable," Sir Hugh stated.

Elizabeth looked up at the man who half drug, half carried her back into her room. She wanted to cry. *Oh Richard, I thought you cared for me! Why are you with him?* Richard gently set her down at the foot of her bed and then went and stood next to Hugh.

Hugh frowned. "You will be released today Elizabeth. In what manner will be your choice. I gave you my word I would find you a husband; I am keeping that word. If it is a husband you desire, Richard Talbot is willing. If the past months have made you more pious, you will join a convent, take your vows and be veiled as a nun. Choose wisely, Elizabeth, for

you will not try me in this. I have the King's support and two letters, signed and sealed, that will decide your fate. Be grateful I'm giving you an option."

Elizabeth felt months of built-up anger boiling, the steam clogged her throat, but all she could do was back away like a frightened animal.

"Let me talk to her, my Lord. Alone, please," Richard Talbot said, motioning Hugh to the door.

As soon as the door latched, Elizabeth's anger found a target and lashed out. "How dare you! You abandoned me to that monster and now you stand beside him! Were you privy to his plot all along? Was it you who betrayed me, leading me to the carriage of my kidnapping?"

Richard reached out and grabbed one of her hands in an ill-received comforting gesture.

Elizabeth slapped him. "Don't touch me, sir!" she growled, backing away as far as the wall would let her.

With a sigh, Richard sat at the chair by the window and ran his hand through his tangle of brown curls. "Elizabeth, I'm sorry for what happened to you. When I helped you into that carriage, I had no idea that anything was amiss."

"He beat me, Richard. He hurt me. And you didn't stop him." Elizabeth sat on the floor, her knees tucked tight to her chest as she fought back tears.

Richard stared at her, his mouth moved, but no words came out.

"You were supposed to save me," Elizabeth accused.

Richard clenched his fists. "What did you expect, a knight on a white horse coming to rescue you? I'm not that man, Elizabeth; that man doesn't exist. But I'm here now, let me help you. You have a right to be angry, but don't choose the convent just to spite me."

“What if I want to be a nun and spend my days praying for the souls of my father and brother, my mother and my uncle?” Elizabeth asked, trying to gauge the sincerity of his answer.

Richard sighed and threw up his hands. “Then I will respect your decision, but mourn the life I had hoped to live with you.” He looked at her then. The sadness in his eyes reached her and gentled her fear. He would not hurt her. “Elizabeth, we have been friends for a long time, but in truth I never wanted to be merely your friend. But what could I do? Your rank and your bloodline stood so high above me that all I could honorably do is watch you from afar and steal a dance once in a while. Don’t you see? This is our chance to be happy. We could be married, forget all of this unpleasantness and start a life together, have a family.”

Elizabeth bit her lip. *I can’t forget, I never forget, I won’t let Hugh win in this.* “Richard, you don’t know what he did to me.”

“I do know, Elizabeth, and it makes me sick. If I were a better man I would kill him for it, but I can’t. I can’t change the past, Elizabeth, but I can promise you that I will never intentionally hurt you.”

“I believe you,” she whispered. She fought back the urge to flinch as he approached.

“Elizabeth, will you marry me?” Richard asked. He held out his hand and in his palm Elizabeth could see a tiny gold band, etched with a ring of thistles.

Relaxing a bit she moved to sit beside him. Elizabeth nodded, “I will marry you, but promise me, Richard, you won’t defend him, no matter what happens.”

“I promise you, my lady,” Richard replied, sliding the ring onto her finger.

## Discussion & Conclusions

Historical accuracy is important to me, but much of what I included in these first three chapters are included because it felt right and made sense to me in the context of my research. Every conversation and many of the specific events included are fictitious. The people and places are real, but what they did and what they thought, I can't prove any of it. But that wasn't my purpose in writing. I wasn't trying to write a history book. I wrote the first three chapters of a historical fiction novel. I hope anyone who reads what I wrote finds it entertaining but believable. I hope they learn something about Elizabeth Comyn and the rich history which she lived in, and I hope they will pursue the answers to any questions they have about the story in the list of references I included at the end.

After writing this story I have one fear. That what I wrote might be wrong. That a word or phrase isn't right for the time period the story is placed in, or worse that some insignificant object or task that takes place in the story doesn't belong. I've searched the text again and again, but I'm not a historian, and though I've thoroughly done my research, I know I could always do more. One of my bigger problems with word related anachronisms in the text, is that French and Middle English were the spoken and written languages of Elizabeth's time. I cannot write a novel in Middle English and I don't know a word of French. Writing for a modern audience while trying to stay true to the historical time period, was the single most challenging aspect of writing these chapters. Reading other historical novelist comments about 'Bygonese,' helped tremendously, but I fear I will always have doubts. I will not allow these doubts to keep me from writing, instead I will use them to push me forward and improve my writing.

Starting is always a struggle. I wanted to start at the beginning, and write chronologically, but decided that wasn't the best way to start. The opening scene had to be a

hook and since the quote that got me hooked on Elizabeth Comyn's story was her kidnapping, I decided to begin there. While I searched, the only fact I knew was that she "was forcibly seized at Kennington, in Surrey, by Hugh le Despenser, his son, and others" (Mary Elizabeth Cumming Bruce, 418). The circumstances around this forcible seizure are unknown, which gave me room to craft a scene. I needed to include three things, introduce Elizabeth and a small bit of court life, introduce Richard Talbot who would become important later, and have Hugh kidnap her. Richard escorting her from an evening of dancing seemed an appropriate way to do this.

While Elizabeth being kidnapped at the start of the story is dramatic, I wanted to put it into historical context and introduce Hugh in a way that made him sound like a real person. Hugh Despenser was a 'favorite' of King Edward II and despised by much of the nobility in England. In 1322, the Despenser War was begun by the barons who demanded Hugh's exile. While he was exiled, Hugh was soon recalled and once loyal men like Roger Mortimer were in turn exiled. This began a period where the Despensers essentially ruled the English government. They extorted money, stole land, and imprisoned those who stood against them. No one was allowed access to the King without either the younger or elder Despenser present, this rule even applied to the Queen, Isabella (Warner, "Edward II's other great favourite", 8). Needless to say, the Queen and the Barons were not pleased by this. By 1326, Queen Isabella had joined Roger Mortimer in France and led an army to invade England and put a permanent end to the Despensers. Knowing these facts, I had to use them to create a man who could do all of these horrible things and yet earn the enduring friendship of the King and the love and loyalty of his wife.

To do this, I added in scenes that focused solely on Hugh Despenser and tried to use them to show the political situation in England as well as the person he might have been around his

close family. In these scenes, especially in his interactions with his wife Eleanor, I could show an emotional side to Hugh. I wanted my readers to know that Hugh loved his wife, cared about the King and the country, and was under a great deal of stress. That is the main reason Eleanor is included in this story, to let the readers see how she interacts with her husband. She was also a convenient and plausible character with whom Elizabeth could interact.

Much of the story is told through these interactions of main characters with secondary characters. Elizabeth and Hugh, the younger, are the main characters in this story. All other characters are there either because I found some historical source that said they were present at a particular event, or because I found them necessary for Elizabeth or Hugh to interact with. Of all the characters I included, only one is fictitious, Thomas Pestor the second guard who appears in one scene. I included him because I wanted another guard to interact with Ralf de Sutton who was actually a guard and had been Elizabeth's mother's, Joan Comyn's, retainer at one time. The way the characters interact with each other show their personalities and temperaments. History rarely records people's personalities, so I interpreted their known actions and came up with personalities that made sense to me.

From everything I read about Elizabeth's life, she strikes me as a very strong person. She lost a lot, but had a happily ever after ending that trumps any that Disney has come up with. Elizabeth's father was murdered by Robert the Bruce when seven years old and she was forced to flee her home in Scotland and come to England. Her brother died in the Battle of Bannockburn just after his young son, and the last Comyn heir, died. Elizabeth's mother died sometime before her uncle, Aymer de Valence, died and she became the heiress to a large third of the Pembroke estates. She was kidnapped by Hugh Despenser and her lands were stolen. At the age of twenty-six she was secretly married to Richard Talbot. Then everything changes. The

Queen invades, executes the younger and elder Despenser, among others, and Edward III takes the throne. Elizabeth and her husband, Richard, plead their case to Edward III and regain all of the land that was taken by the Despensers. Richard leads an army to Scotland to regain Elizabeth's lands there, he fails but returns home alive. Then, at the age of thirty-two or -three, Elizabeth gives birth to a son and presumably lives happily until she passes away at the old age seventy-three. Elizabeth was strong; everything about her life makes me believe this. So when writing these chapters where she's kidnapped, I wanted to show that she was strong, that she wasn't easily pushed around, that she fought back. And that is why I eventually included a scene that made me, as an author, angry and uncomfortable.

I don't like violence, but I am not as naive as to think that it isn't common, especially in the 1300's. My sources said that "Elizabeth Cumyn...was *forcibly* seized at Kennington, in Surrey, by Hugh le Despenser, his son, and others, and detained above a year, during which time she was, *by menaces of death*, constrained to pass her manor of Painswicke, in the county of Gloucester, to the said earl, and the Castle of Godrich to Hugh le Despenser, yr, to them and their heirs" (Mary Elizabeth Cumming Bruce, 418) and that "she was threatened with *injury* and *perpetual imprisonment*" (Fryde 115). Sir Hugh Despenser was a knight who was a champion in tournaments and quite capable on the real field of battle. I would have liked to think that chivalry would have prevented Hugh from physically hurting Elizabeth, but after reading the account of Lady Barret, I couldn't believe that. At first I avoided writing the violent scene by leaving the reader with Hugh's threats and then allowing them to see the state Elizabeth is in the chapter 'Aftermath'. After comments from several people I had pre-read the draft of my story, I realized it wasn't working. I needed my readers to emotionally connect and feel sorry for Elizabeth and by leaving out that scene, I was hurting that connection. Besides, I knew in what

horrific manner Hugh would be executed later, for those specifics were very clearly recorded in history. The scene isn't inappropriate for an adult audience and it serves a purpose and adds to the overall story. The scene made me feel was uncomfortable, but then life often is uncomfortable, so I included the scene.

In the chapter 'Aftermath' I wanted to give backstory. Now that the reader was pulled into the story and had got a chance to get to know Elizabeth, I wanted to show them where she had come from. The best way I found to do this was by using her injured and barely conscious state to allow her to relive the critical moments in her past that I thought the reader needed to know if they were to truly understand Elizabeth. I gave Elizabeth four memories because I wanted to cover her father and brother's death, her relationship with her brother and most importantly, a memory of Richard Talbot. This memory of Richard is meant to help the reader understand the last scene at the end of chapter three 'I Do?'

"Richard and Elizabeth married in secret, at Pirbright in Surrey, shortly before 10 July 1326: an entry in the chamber account on that day giving Richard a gift of ten marks says that he [King Edward II] avoit espouses p'ument la dame de Comyn, 'had married secretly the lady Comyn'" (Warner, "Random Moments in the Life of Edward II", 18). Reading this I wanted to write a romantic scene where Richard rescues Elizabeth and the King, seeing how great their love for each other is, marries them on the spot. It's the fairytale ending I wanted, but highly unlikely. Richard Talbot was Hugh Despenser's retainer, meaning that he owed Hugh his fealty. While the exact number of months Elizabeth is kept captive is debated, she was likely released sometime in 1326 from where Hugh was holding her in Pirbright. It doesn't make sense that Hugh would hold her captive for so long after she signed the agreement, only to release her on a random date. Also, the use of the word 'secretly' in Edward II's chamber accounts confused me.

Why would a marriage need to be done in secret? And how was it a secret if no one was allowed audience with the King without one of the Despenser's present? From these facts I was convinced that Hugh Despenser had a hand in Elizabeth's marriage, that she was released because she was married, and that she was married in secret because of what Hugh had just done. What I have no way of knowing is whether or not Elizabeth and Richard loved each other. I understand that most marriages in Elizabeth's time were arranged and done for political gain, but for the sake of the story I'm going to assume that Elizabeth and Richard did love each other.

Chapter 4: Invasion, the story of Elizabeth's life is just beginning at the end of these three chapters. Soon Queen Isabella will invade England with an army from France, remove her husband, King Edward II, from the throne, and take out her wrath on the Despenser family. While Elizabeth likely did not play any direct role in these events, she lived through them, and through so much more history. With these three chapters I have a good start for a much longer novel which I am looking forward to completing.

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### Compiled Annotated Timeline

Event	Date	Quote	Source
Elizabeth's birth	11/1/1299	"Only Elizabeth's date of birth is known, 1 November 1299; Joan and John were older."	(Warner, "Joan and Elizabeth Comyn", 4)
Elizabeth's older sister, Joan, is married to David Strathbogie		"Joan Comyn, probably born around 1295, was married to David Strathbogie (or Strabolgi), the Scottish earl of Atholl. His father John had participated in Robert Bruce's coronation, and was hideously executed by Edward I in London on 7 November 1306. He was hanged on a high gallows, and his head stuck on London Bridge."	(Warner, "Joan and Elizabeth Comyn", 6)
		"Joane, married David de Strathbolgie, Earl of Athol...This earl of Athol had been a hostage in England from 1297, when his father was released after the battle of Dunbar, and was probably married to John Cumyn's heiress at Edward's court, both of them being related to that king; but the Earl of Athol was also the nephew of Bruce, who made him High Constable of Scotland, but becoming a traitor, he lost his Scotch estates, and died in England A.D 1326-6"	(Mary Elizabeth Cumming Bruce, 416)
Elizabeth's father, John Comyn III, is murdered	2/10/1306	"On 10 <sup>th</sup> February 1306 Robert Bruce murdered John Comyn in the Greyfriars' church at Dumfries and six weeks later was inaugurated at Scone as king of Scots"	(Young, 184)
		"On 10 February 1306, at Dumfries, Robert Bruce, earl of Carrick, murdered John Comyn, lord of Badenoch. This dramatic event, with hindsight so obvious in its implications, mystified Edward at first. He learned of it by 23 February, and on the next day described it as the work of 'some people who are doing their utmost to trouble the peace and quiet of the realm of Scotland'. Two Oxford friars were sent to inquire as to what had happened. The reasons for Bruce's actions have been extensively discussed. It seems likely that he had made a bid for the Scottish throne before the murder, and that he received some support. Comyn's death was not premeditated, but was the result of a quarrel over Bruce's plans."	(Prestwich, 505)

		<p>"According to tradition, first recounted by Scottish chroniclers of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Bruce approached John Comyn 'who was then the most powerful man in the country' with his own 'kind hearted plan' to end 'the endless tormenting of the people'. Robert gave Comyn the choice of two courses of action: either Comyn should reign with Bruce gaining all of Comyn's lands or Bruce should become king with all Bruce's lands going to Comyn. According to Fordun, Comyn preferred the latter course and a solemn covenant was made between them but 'John broke his word; and, heedless of the sacredness of his oath, kept accusing Robert before the king of England, through his ambassadors and private letters, and wickedly revealing that Robert's secrets'. After being confronted with his treachery in the Greyfriars' church at Dumfries, 'the evil-speaker is stabbed and wounded unto death'. According to tradition in both Scotland and England, John Comyn was killed in two stages, with Bruce's men returning to the church to finish off the deed. According to Walter Bower, Bruce returned to Lochmaben castle and reported to his kinsmen, James Lindsay and Roger Kirkpatrick, 'I think I have killed John the Red Comyn'. Bruce's men returned to the church to end any doubt that ht deed had, in fact, been done, with Roger Kirkpatrick, according to a wholly fabulous tale, exclaiming 'I mak siccar'."</p>	(Young, 197)
		<p>"It seems probable that their bitter antagonisms of the past--they had come to blows at a baronial council in 1299--were instantly revived and in a heated argument mutual charges of treachery were made. It is unlikely that the murder was premeditated. Bruce struck Comyn with a dagger and his men attacked him with swords. Mortally wounded, Comyn was left for dead. Comyn's uncle, Robert, was killed by Christopher Seton when he attempted to defend his nephew"</p>	(Young, 198)
		<p>"John Cumyn was with his father at Dumfries in February 1305, when it is recorded "that he fled back into England."</p>	(Mary Elizabeth Cumming Bruce, 414)

Robert Bruce is excommunicated		Pope Clement V excommunicated Bruce for the murder.	(Warner, "Joan and Elizabeth Comyn", 3)
Elizabeth's uncle, Aymer de Valence is appointed King's lieutenant and captain in Scotland	4/5/1306	"Appointment of Aymer de Valencia as the king's lieutenant and captain over all men-at-arms, as well horse as foot, in the countries of York, Northumberland, the whole of Lothian (Laudon) and neighbouring places, as far as the bounds of the country of Dumfres, so that they be ready on eight days' notice from him to do what they are required for the safety of those parts and for the repulse of the rebellion of Robert de Brus, sometime earl of Carryk, who, with his accomplices, killed John Comyn of Badenagh and others of the king's lieges in the church of the Friars Minors, Dumfres, have raised war against the king, put in prison some sheriffs, ministers and others in those parts, seized certain castles, towns and lands in those parts and usurped the lordship of that land, to the scandal of the catholic church and the realm, and the disherison of the king and his crown."	(Patent Rolls, Edward I, 426)
Robert the Bruce is crowned	3/25/1306	"At Bruce's coronation there was significant support, according to the <i>Guisborough Chronicle</i> , from 'four bishops, five earls and the people of the land'. The traditional role in the ceremony conducted by the earl of Fife was taken by his aunt, Isabel wife of John Comyn earl of Buchan, a notable desertion from the Comyn cause"	(Young, 200)
Elizabeth and her family are ordered to leave Scotland	1306	"Edward I's personal links with John Comyn were emphasized when he ordered Joan de Valence (his cousin) to send her son, John, John Comyn's son and heir, to England where he was to be in the care of Sir John Weston, master and guardian of the royal children"	(Young, 200)
		"Joan de Valence and her children, John, Elizabeth and Joan, fled back to the safety of England. This was not just because of being family, but also because, through their bloodline, they probably had a better claim on the throne than Bruce himself. As Alianore says: 'By the rule of primogeniture, the Red Comyn had a better claim to the throne of Scotland than Robert Bruce, which he passed onto his children."	(Frusher, "Elizabeth Comyn and the Despencers Pt1 ", 4)

David Strathbogie's father is punished for supporting the Bruce		"Edward responded to the events in Scotland with unprecedented savagery. The earl of Atholl was tried and executed, despite the pleas of the queen and many magnates that he should be spared because of his noble birth. Edward's answer was to order that he should be hanged higher than the rest, though one account does state that he was spared being drawn through the streets of London. "	(Prestwich, 505)
Elizabeth's relative, the Countess of Buchan, is punished for crowning Robert Bruce	6/1306	"Edward's treatment of Bruce's sister Mary and the countess of Buchan (Isabella MacDuff) was highly unusual. The order for their custody specified that they were to be confined in secure cages, one at Roxburgh and one at Berwick. They were to be provided with food, drink and other necessities by Englishwomen; no Scots were to approach them. The cages were to be equipped with privies. One account described that the countess of Buchan as being fashioned in the likeness of a crown, because she had played a leading part (by hereditary right) in Bruce's enthronement, and the chroniclers are clear that the cages were in the open, although Edward's memorandum said they were to be in a tower. "	(Prestwich, 505)
Aymer de Valence becomes the Earl of Pembroke	1307	"Aymer de Valence became Earl of Pembroke in 1307"	(Phillips, 9)
King Edward I dies	7/1307	"on his deathbed in July 1307 Edward I reputedly charged Aymer, the Earls of Lincoln and Warwick, and Robert Clifford with the future welfare of his son...Aymer...was needed for the more urgent business of helping to negotiate the terms of the contract for Edward II's marriage to Isabella, the daughter of Philip IV of France."	(Phillips, 24-5)

King Edward II is crowned	1308	<p>"The ceremony was postponed for a week, and one chronicler alleges that this was because the baronage refused to attend unless Gaveston were banished, while another says that it was on account of the baron's objection to Gaveston carrying the royal crown...Another controversy relates to the language of the royal oath. The king spoke in French and not in Latin, and this fact has been adduced to prove that Edward was illiterate. It is now believed that he spoke in French simply because he wished his audience to understand what he was saying...The coronation ceremony was attended not only by the baronage but also by 'suitable' representatives of the cities, boroughs and shires, and it was elaborate and spectacular. To the general indignation, the crown and the sword of St Edward were carried before the king in the procession by the earl of Cornwall. And a normally joyful occasion--one chronicler states that the Londoners fancied they were seeing the New Jerusalem--was marred by the collapse of a wall which killed one of the attendant knights, and by the fact that at the coronation banquet the earl of Cornwall had the effrontery to wear royal purple instead of cloth of gold. Furthermore, the service at the banquet was apparently not all it ought to have been. The lavish ceremonies could not disguise the fact that the 'community of the realm' was face to face with the problem of the king's wanton affection for and extravagant patronage of Peter of Gaveston...Some distinguished French visitors to the coronation observed that Edward preferred the couch of Peter to that of his queen, and all men resented the fact that there were now two kings in England, one in name and the other in effect."</p>	(Hutchison, 55-7)
Elizabeth's sister, Joan, has a baby	2/1/1309	<p>"Joan and David's eldest son David was born on 1 February 1309, and married Katherine Beaumont, daughter of Edward II's cousin Henry, Lord Beaumont"</p>	(Warren, 8)

Bannockburn : Elizabeth's brother, John Comyn IV, dies	6/24/1314	<p>"The details of the campaign and the disaster at Bannockburn on 24 June have been fully worked out elsewhere and do not require repetition. Pembroke's direct participation in the main fighting during the battle seems to have been small. The most detailed account says that the King drew up his division of the army with Sir Giles d'Argentein on one side of him and Pembroke on the other. When defeat became obvious Pembroke seized the King's reins and led him away from the battle against his will...Pembroke is said by some writers to have fled from the battle barefoot and unarmed, only just escaping with his life. His retinue of twenty-two knights and fifty-nine men-at-arms also suffered severely. John Lovel, John Comyn, John de la Ryvere and William de Vescy were killed..."</p>	(Phillips, 74-5)
		<p>"As well as John Comyn, his kinsman Edmund Comyn of Kilbride was slain, as was the Annandale knight James Torthorwald and the son of Dugald MacDouall. While the bodies of Gloucester and Clifford were apparently handed back to their kin without ransom, the bulk of the dead were buried on the field, 'the gret lordis in haly place honorabilly' and the rest flung into 'gret pyttis'."</p>	(Brown, 130)
		<p>"John Comyn's prominence in the English army is clear. Edmund Comyn of Kilbride was also killed in the battle. The death of the chief of the Badenoch line of the Comyn family, followed two years later, in 1316, by the death of his son and heir, Adomar, while still a child, meant the end of the male line of the Comyns of Badenoch."</p>	(Young, 208)
		<p>"Bannockburn brought to an end not just the manning of Scottish castles against Bruce, but open opposition to his royal rights and title within Scotland. The battle had claimed the lives of some leading enemies, like John and Edmund Comyn, but still more made the decision to recognize Bruce's kingship in the weeks that followed"</p>	(Brown, 137)

Joan's husband, David Strathbogie, switches his allegiances.		"Barbour relates that during the same night a treacherous attack was launched on Robert's camp at Cambuskenneth Abbey by David Strathbogie earl of Atholl. Atholl was a late and reluctant adherent for Bruce, only joining the king in 1312, but he was constable of Scotland in 1314 and his defection was a major embarrassment to Robert. It may have been more than this. Atholl killed one knight and many other men and seized victuals which would have been of value to either side. His desertion may have been due to a personal grievance against Edward Bruce"	(Brown, 124)
		"Bannockburn ended this civil war and destroyed the power of his Scottish enemies. Some of those opponents, like the young John Comyn, were killed in the battle, others were captured, while more fled to England, like David earl of Atholl"	(Brown, 177)
The wife of John Comyn IV, has a son.		"That he married Margaret, and had a son, "Aymer," is proven by a charter recorded in the 'Abbreviatio Rotulorum Originalium,' vol. i. p. 209. It is without date, but of the time of Edward II., and before the death of "Aymer," grandson of John, the Red Cumyn, in 1316. It states that in consideration of the good deeds of John Cumyn of happy memory, the son of John Cumyn, lately deceased, the King (Edward II) had given and granted certain manors in Nottinghamshire and Northamptonshire to him for his sustenance, and for the sustenance of "Aymer," the son of the said John, and of his wife Margaret"	(Mary Elizabeth Cumming Bruce, 415)
Famine		"In the mid-1310s, the climate was bizarre in the extreme, and it rained heavily and constantly for much of the summer of 1314 and most of 1315 and 1316. This torrential rain, inevitably, caused flooding; crops rotted away and livestock drowned in the waterlogged fields. The result was the Great Famine, which is estimated to have killed at least five per cent, and perhaps much more, of the population of England"	(Warner, "The Great Famine, 1315 to 1317", 2)
John Comyn IV's son dies in childhood	1316	"The younger John's little son Aymer, who died in 1316, was the last of the Comyns in the male line"	(Warner, "Joan and Elizabeth Comyn", 5)

Beatrice, wife of Aymer de Valence, dies	9/1320	"Except for passing references to Beatrice in 1312 and again in 1315, when she recorded that Aymer allowed her £50 a year for her personal expenses, there is no further mention of her until she accompanied the Queen to France in Jun 1320. In September 1320 she died and was buried at Stratford in London"	(Phillips 6)
Aymer de Valence marries Marie Saint Pol	7/5/1321	"At the end of May Pembroke was once again preparing to leave the country for the ceremonies of his marriage to Marie de Saint-Pol in France...By 22 June he had joined the members of Marie's family and on 5 July he and Marie de Saint-Pol were married in Paris"	(Phillips 206)
Elizabeth's uncle Aymer de Valence dies	6/23/1324	"Aymer de Valence, Earl of Pembroke, died suddenly on 23rd June 1324 at Compiègne in France, leaving a large inheritance of land and estates."	(Frusher, 3)
		"We are told dramatically that on 23 June he got up after dining, collapsed in the doorway, and died unconfessed in the arms of his servants. The cause of his death is unknown, but there is little doubt that it was both sudden and natural"	(Phillips, 233)
	6/26/1324	"The news reached Edward II at Tonbridge in Kent on 26 June. In show of gratitude to his cousin and one of his most loyal supporters, but whose influence had recently been eclipsed by the Despencers, Edward sent his confessor Robert de Duffeld to break the news to the countess of Pembroke at Hertford. Pembroke's body was received with honour in London on 31 July and was buried in Westminster Abbey near the high altar and the royal tombs on 1 August."	(Phillips, 463)
		"The date of Pembroke's death is known with certainty, but it is much harder to determine the exact place of his death...it does seem likely that Pembroke died somewhere close to Saint-Riquier, a location which also tallies with the short period of three days which elapsed before his death was known in England"	(Phillips, 234)
<b>Elizabeth Inherits</b>		"The Earl of Pembroke had one illegitimate son, who died before him, but no issue by either of his marriages, and his lands were divided up among the heirs of his two sisters Isabel and Joan."	(Phillips, 18)

		"She inherited: Goodrich castle; the manors of Painswick, Noyton and Whaddon in Gloucestershire; the manor of Bampton in Oxfordshire; the manors of Collingbourne Valence and Swynton Valence (Swindon) in Wiltshire, Hertfordingbury in Hertfordshire, Polycote and Doynton in Buckinghamshire, Swanscombe and Nelton in Kent; part of Shrivenham manor as well as property in Fernham in Berkshire. Added to this was also Arnyng in Suffolk various estates and parts of estates in Ireland."	(Frusher, "Elizabeth Comyn and the Despensers Pt2 ", 11)
<b>Elizabeth is Kidnapped</b>	3/8/1325	"Elizabeth Comyn, another of Pembroke's heirs, was imprisoned by the Despensers until on 8 March 1325 she made obligations of £ 10,000 to each of them and then released to them her rights to the former Pembroke lands at Goodrich and Painswick. In similar fashion she was made to give them Swanscombe in Kent"	(Phillips, 235)
	4/20/1325	"on 20 April 1325, they [the Despensers'] deprived Elizabeth of a part of her share in the inheritance by violence. Elizabeth had been kept first at Woking and then at Pirbright, both belonging to Winchester. She was threatened with injury and perpetual imprisonment, until she executed a surrender of her properties giving Castle Goodrich in Herefordshire to the younger Despenser and Swanscomb in Kent and Painswick in Gloucestershire to the elder Despenser. Painswick and Castle Goodrich were surrendered by a final concord before that indispensable royal justice, John Bousser, especially brought to her that same 20 April, and her acceptance of this enforced settlement was consolidated by a massive recognizance of £ 2000 before William Clif, the Despensers' usual clerical aide-de-camp. Even so, she was detained for a further six months."	(Fryde 115)
		"Elizabeth Cumyn, one of the sisters and co-heirs of John Cumyn, was forcibly seized at Kennington, in Surrey, by Hugh le Despenser, his son, and others, and <u>detained above a year</u> , during which time she was, <u>by menaces of death</u> , constrained to pass her manor of Painswicke, in the county of Gloucester, to the said earl, and the Castle of Godrich to Hugh le Despenser, yr, to them and their heirs."	(Mary Elizabeth Cumming Bruce, 418)

	4/6/1325	"Licence for Elizabeth Comyn, to enfeoff Hugh le Despenser, the younger, of the castle and manor of Castel Goderiche in the march of Wales, held in chief. The like for her to enfeoff Hugh le Despenser, earl of Winchester, of the manor of Payneswyk, co. Gloucester, held in chief."	(Patent Rolls, Edward II, 116)
<b>Elizabeth is Married</b>	7/10/1326	"Richard and Elizabeth married in secret, at Pirbright in Surrey, shortly before 10 July 1326: an entry in the chamber account on that day giving Richard a gift of ten marks says that he avoit espouses p'urement la dame de Comyn, 'had married secretly the lady Comyn'"	(Warner, "Random Moments in the Life of Edward II", 18)
		"Between July 1326 and February 1327, Elizabeth finally got married, to Sir Richard Talbot, who was several years her junior, probably born around 1302. He fought against Edward II during the Marcher campaign of 1321/22 and was captured at the battle of Boroughbridge in March 1322, but was released and made his peace with the king and the Despensers, serving in the younger Despenser's retinue. Richard was in fact a second cousin of Despenser, both of them great-grandsons of Sir William Beauchamp of Elmley."	(Warner, "Joan and Elizabeth Comyn", 11)
Queen Isabella invades England	9/24/1326	"When England was invaded in 1326 by Queen Isabella and her consort Roger Mortimer, Despenser was captured and executed at Hereford. He was 40 years of age. Edward II abdicated and was killed in 1327."	(Lewis, 8)
		"In September 1326, Isabella and Mortimer had managed to summon up an army, mostly from Hainault, and invaded England. Tired of the tyrannical regime, English barons, lords and knights joined them, hemorrhaging support from the Crown. Edward and the younger Hugh fled London for south Wales and there boarded a boat. Unfortunately the stormy weather was against them and they were forced to put into land again. They were captured during a terrible storm; Edward was taken to Kenilworth while Hugh was taken to Hereford. The older Despenser, who was holding Bristol Castle for the King was also captured, tried and executed. The younger Hugh, knowing what sort of punishment lay ahead of him at the hands of	(Frusher, "Who Was Hugh Despenser the Younger?", 15-6)

		<p>Mortimer and Isabella, tried to starve himself. The Queen had wanted him to be executed in London, but due to his weakening state it was thought that he wouldn't live that long. Therefore he was put on trial in Hereford where he was not allowed to speak and a long list of charges was read out"</p>	
<p>Hugh Despenser the younger is executed</p>		<p>"The power that Despenser had wielded in the court, and perhaps his personal relationship with the king, had outraged Isabella to such an extent that his execution was particularly public and brutal. His crimes and their punishments are outlined thus: "...as a thief therefore you shall be hanged; as a traitor...you shall be drawn and quartered, and your quarters dispersed throughout the kingdom; and as you were outlawed, by our Lord the King and by general consent, and have come back to the court...you shall be beheaded; and because at all times you have been disloyal and a formentor of strife between our Lord the King and our most noble Lady the Queen...you shall be disembowelled, and after that you bowels shall be burned. Confess yourself a traitor and a renegade! And so go to meet your doom. Traitor! Evildoer!! and Convicted!!!' Hence, on the 16th November 1326, Despenser was publicly humiliated by being stripped and dressed in reversed arms, with a crown of nettles placed on his head. He was then roped to four horses, rather than the usual two, and dragged through Hereford, where he was hanged, or rather choked, on gallows at 50 feet with his body supported by a ladder. Medieval chronicler Jean Froissart reported that Hugh was castrated, with his testicles thrown into the fire below, because he was considered a heretic and suspected of 'unnatural' practices with the king. Still conscious, Despenser was dragged from the gallows, a knife was plunged into his abdomen and his entrails and heart were cut out and burned. The corpse was lowered to the ground and decapitated...On 4th December 1326 his head was displayed on London Bridge and the quarters of his body were sent to be displayed above the gates of</p>	<p>(Lewis, 8-9)</p>

		Newcastle, York, Dover and Bristol."	
Elizabeth regains her property	10/27/1330	"Pardon to Elizabeth, now wife of Richard Talbot, of drivers recognisances made to the Despensers in the late reign while she was unmarried, which have escheated to the king; on trustworthy evidence that she was compelled to become bound therein by force and duress"	(Patent Rolls, Edward III, 14)
	1/13/1331	"Licence for Richard Talebot and Elizabeth his wife to enfeoff Thomas Talebt, clerk, of the manors of Castle Goderich, co. Hereford, and Payneswyk, co. Gloucester, held in chief, and for him to regrant the same to them in fee tail, with remainder to the right heirs of Richard"	(Patent Rolls, Edward III, 51)
	6/5/1331	"[Elizabeth's] husband was summoned to Parliament as "Baron Talbot of Goderich Castle," the chief place of his abode."	(Mary Elizabeth Cumming Bruce, 418)
Richard Talbot tries to reclaim Elizabeth's lands in Scotland	1331	"Prevented by Edward III from invading Scotland by land, in 1331 he [Richard Talbot] invaded it by sea at the head of 300 armed men, and achieved a victory over the Scots at Gladdesmui, but was subsequently made prisoner, and had to pay 2000 marks for his redemption. He was made Governor of Berwick-on-Tweed and Justiciary of that king's possessions in Scotland"	(Mary Elizabeth Cumming Bruce, 418)
Elizabeth's sister, Joan dies	1326	"Joan and David both died in 1326, just after Edward was deposed"	(Frusher, "Elizabeth Comyn and the Despensers Pt1," 7)
	6/11/1332	"Ratification of a demise of David de Strabolgi, earl of Athol..."	(Patent Rolls, Edward III, 308)
Elizabeth gifts her aunt, Mary Saint Pol, her inherited French lands	6/15/1332	"Testification, at the request of Richard Talebot and Elizabeth his wife, niece and one of the heiresses of Aymer de Valencia, earl of Pembroke, and lord of Montaignak, Belak, Rancon and Champeignak of France, that they came before the king and acknowledge a writing [in French] of release by them to Mary de Sancto Paulo, late the wife of the said earl, of the right of Elizabeth under the law of France to inherit on the death of her uncle a fourth part of the castles and castellanies of Montaignak, Belak, Racon and Champeignak"	(Patent Rolls, Edward III, 309)
Elizabeth has a son	1332	"Elizabeth and Richard's son, Gilbert, was born in 1332"	(Warner, "Joan and Elizabeth Comyn", 12)

Elizabeth dies	11/20/1372	"Richard Talbot died on 23 October 1356, and Elizabeth Comyn married again, sometime around 1357 or 1360, to Sir John Bromwich. She died on 20 November 1372, at the age of seventy-three."	(Warner, "Joan and Elizabeth Comyn", 13)
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