Letters From the Tower (5)

written by

Deanna Strasse

DeannaStrasse@gmail.com

CHARACTERS

Reoccurring:

* **Lady Arbella Stuart**, she/her/hers, moves between the ages of 7 and 39
* **Lisolette**, she/her/hers, moves between the ages of 8 and 40

Ensemble:

* **Bess of Hardwick**, she/her/hers, 50s-60s (1, 3)
* **Jane**, she/her/hers, 20s-50s (1)
* **Queen Elizabeth I**, she/her/hers, around 59 (1, 2)
* **A servant to the queen**, they/them/theirs, 20s-60s (1)
* **Sir Henry Brunker**, he/him/his, 40s-60s (1, 3)
* **A servant of Hardwick Hall**, they/them/theirs, 20s-50s (3)
* **Declaration**, they/them/theirs, 20s-60s (3, 4, 5)
* **King James I & VI**, he/him/his, around 36 (4)
* **Queen Anne**, she/her/hers, around 35 (1, 4)
* **Matilda**, she/her/hers, 50s-60s (5)
* **Julian**, they/them/theirs, teens-20s (5)
* **Captain**, they/them/theirs, 30s-60s (5)
* **Servant 1**, they, them, theirs, 20s-60s (5)
* **Servant 2**, they, them, theirs, 20s-60s (5)
* **A Tower guard**, he/him/his, 20s-50s (6)
* **A chambermaid**, she/her/hers, 20s-50s (6)

(Number) denotes the scene(s) that the character is in.

Notes on casting:

** Some of the roles listed above may be played by an actor of any gender or gender identity. The script provides these characters with they/them/their pronouns, and the producing theatre may choose to keep these pronouns or adjust to better reflect the cast.

** The ensemble should be made up of at least five actors. The lines of "declaration" may be played by the same actor in each scene or by different actors in each scene.

SCENE 2

July 1591. Lady Arbella's personal chambers at Whitehall Castle. Arbella, now 16, is seated by the window, reading. Liselotte, now 17, sits nearby. She is attempting to do some needlework, but both women are restless. Arbella keeps looking up from her book and staring out the nearby window. She fidgets.

LISELOTTE
Is something bothering you, my lady?

(Arbella is still staring out the window. She sighs dramatically.)

ARBELLA
No. I am perfectly well.

LISELOTTE
Why do you fidget?

ARBELLA
There is a stone in my shoe.

LISELOTTE
Allow me to remove it.

(Liselotte rises and kneels before Arbella. She carefully removes Arbella's shoe.)

ARBELLA
(Giggling)
This feels so silly. I can remove my own shoe. I feel like a princess in one of those stories-

LISELOTTE
There's no stone in here.

ARBELLA
(Still giggling)
It's the other shoe!

LISELOTTE
There is no stone. Why should a stone in your shoe bother you so much when you are sitting?

(Arbella continues to giggle. Liselotte sighs and rises, crossing away from her. Arbella sees this and stops giggling.)

ARBELLA
Don't be cross with me, Liselotte. It was a harmless jest.

LISELOTTE
I am not cross with you, my lady. If your grandmother were here, you would-

ARBELLA
Do not bring up Grandmother! Do you mean to gossip about me with her? If so, you will only have good news. Everyone was so sure that I wouldn't be able to keep up, but I did. The dances are different here, but I learned them all. Furthermore, I kissed the queen's hand. Did you see that, Liselotte? Did you see me kiss the queen's hand?

LISELOTTE
I saw it, my lady.

ARBELLA
I have surpassed all expectations so if you slither back to Grandmother with any news, it can only be that I burned brightly like a star and brought honour to the Stuart name.
(A beat)
Forgive me.

LISELOTTE
Whatever for, my-

ARBELLA
I said that you "slither", but you don't. Goodness, I was so excited, I forgot where I was for a moment. You, my dear Liselotte, do not slither.

LISELOTTE
(Confused)
Thank you, my lady.

ARBELLA
I suppose I was thinking of one of my tutors or some steward. They are always so keen to report to Grandmother about my *behaviour,* but not you. Forgive me, Liselotte.

LISELOTTE
There is nothing to forgive, my lady.

ARBELLA
Of course there is. You have never doubted me. Fidelity that sound should not be mocked. Furthermore, I barely spoke to you all evening.

LISELOTTE
You were not meant to speak with me, my lady. You used your time wisely and spoke with the courtiers.

ARBELLA
I hope you enjoyed yourself.

LISELOTTE
(Unconvincingly)
I did, my lady.

(Arbella takes Liselotte's hands.)

ARBELLA
My success is your success. I need you to know that. I have felt quite bigger than myself these last few days. It's a delightfully terrifying thing: to want something and then suddenly find yourself within reach of it.

(Liselotte looks uneasy. Arbella notices this.)

ARBELLA (CONTTD) (CONT'D)
You have something you wish to say, Liselotte?

LISELOTTE
No, my lady.

ARBELLA
You are always so quiet, Liselotte, but it's not a quietness that comes from ignorance. My grandmother is not here. You can be honest with me.

LISELOTTE
I am being honest, my lady.

ARBELLA
Oh, come now, my dear! Grandmother could have sent me with any of my ladies, but she allowed me to bring YOU. Do you think I wished to be stuck in London with *Edith*? She is so old, she's practically dust!

LISELOTTE
(Trying not to laugh)
My lady...

ARBELLA
I wanted YOU to come with me because you are young and delightful.

LISELOTTE
I thank you for that compliment, my lady. I don't believe anyone has ever referred to me as "delightful".

ARBELLA
Well, you are. I hope you feel at ease with me. I welcome your insights and opinions. I may not always listen to it, but I welcome it.

(A long pause. Liselotte considers her words.)

LISELOTTE
You have done well, my lady. You charmed the whole court and, yes, you burned so brightly. You have been nothing but courteous and delightful to every nobleman and every noblewoman, including Her Royal Majesty. However, I wish to warn your ladyship: be mindful of how you word things.

ARBELLA
You accuse me of being romantic.

LISELOTTE
Romantic? No. Treasonous.

ARBELLA
How have I acted treasonous?

(Liselotte contemplates how she wants to go on.)

ARBELLA (CONT'D)
I am not my grandmother, Liselotte. *Please* speak freely.

LISELOTTE
(Relenting)
I assume, my lady, that when you say you are within reach of the thing you want, you are referring to the crown.

(A pause. Arbella laughs.)

ARBELLA
Oh no! Goodness no! Not the crown! I was dreaming of something else entirely.
(Playfully)
The Duke of Essex is quite handsome.

LISELOTTE
My lady-

ARBELLA
Do you deny it?

LISELOTTE
What I think of the Duke is of no consequence-

ARBELLA
So you think he is unattractive?

LISELOTTE
My lady-

ARBELLA
(Playfully)
Surely, saying such a thing is disrespectful and-

(Liselotte crosses to Arbella.)

LISELOTTE
My lady, *please*. You said that you value my insight?

ARBELLA
I do.

LISELOTTE
There are certain things you cannot do, things you cannot feel.

ARBELLA
I can't feel love?

LISELOTTE
Not for the Duke of Essex. He is a favourite of Her Majesty's. You were charming tonight, so charming with *certain members of the court* that it bordered on flirtatiousness.

ARBELLA
How am I expected to catch someone's eye if I am not charming?

LISELOTTE
Charming, yes. Flirtatious, no.

ARBELLA
(Laughing)
I do not know the difference!

(Liselotte takes Arbella by the shoulders.)

LISELOTTE
Yes and THAT is dangerous.

(A servant enters.)

SERVANT
Her Royal Majesty commands an audience with Lady Arbella.

LISELOTTE
We shall be along anon.

SERVANT
The queen is on her way.

LISELOTTE
Here?

SERVANT
Yes.

LISELOTTE
Now? In the bed chamber? NOW? You mean NOW?!

ARBELLA
That does seem to be the situation, dear Liselotte.

(The servant exits. Liselotte turns to Arbella and tries to "fix" her up: straightening her dress, moving her hair, etc.)

LISELOTTE
It's not before the court so that's good, but an audience so unexpected cannot be good.

ARBELLA
I am not nervous.

(Liselotte takes Arbella's hands and looks into her eyes.)

LISELOTTE
My lady, you value my opinion, yes?

ARBELLA
(Laughing)
Yes! I have said so various time!

LISELOTTE
(Very serious)
Listen to my opinion now: be worried. One should always be worried when in the queen's presence.

(Liselotte takes a step backwards just as the servant reenters.)

SERVANT
Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth I.

(Queen Elizabeth I, around 59, enters. Arbella and Liselotte curtsy.)

ARBELLA
Your Majesty.

(A long silence. The Queen looks Arbella over, as if sizing her up. Arbella slowly grows restless and begins to fidget.)

ARBELLA (CONT'D)
Your Majesty, I-

ELIZABETH
Why are you fidgeting?

END OF SAMPLE