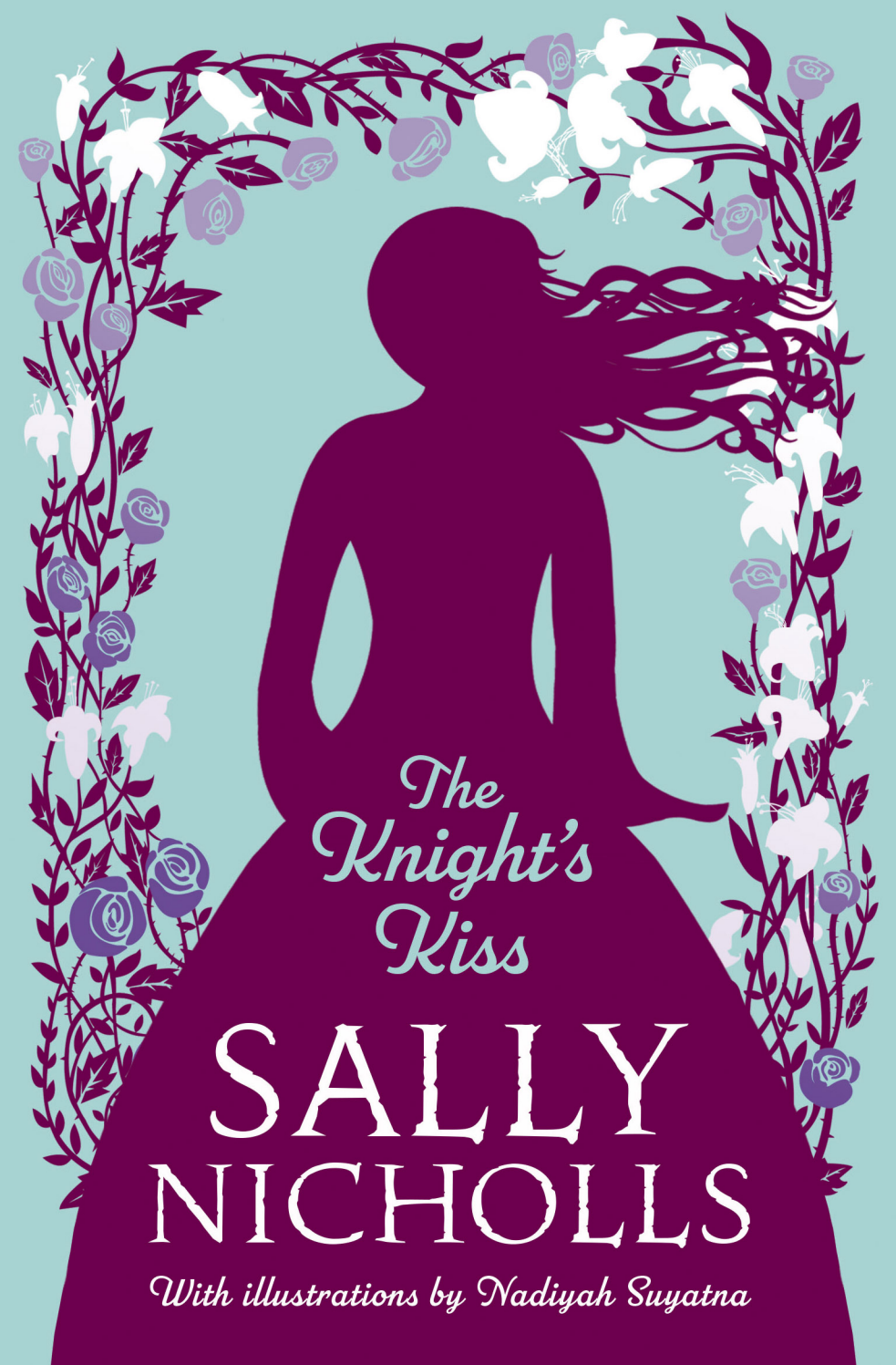

The Knight's Kiss
SALLY NICHOLLS
With illustrations by Nadiyah Suyatna

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Barrington Stoke

To all the many people who play games with me.
You know who you are. Thank you.

First published in 2022 in Great Britain by
Barrington Stoke Ltd
18 Walker Street, Edinburgh, EH3 7LP

www.barringtonstoke.co.uk

This edition based on *A Lily, A Rose*
(Barrington Stoke, 2013)

Text © 2013 & 2022 Sally Nicholls
Illustrations © 2022 Nadiyah Suyatna

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A CIP catalogue record for this book is available
from the British Library upon request

ISBN: 978-1-80090-163-6

Printed by Hussar Books, Poland

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CHAPTER 1
FRIENDS

When I was fourteen, my cousin Dan was my favourite person in the whole world.

Dan came to my father's castle when I was thirteen. He was going to be a knight when he grew up, and his parents sent him to live with us to learn about fighting from Father.

Father was a knight. When I was little, he was away most of the time, fighting in the war against Robert the Bruce and the Scots. But when our new king, King Edward, was crowned, Father came back home.

I was happy to have him home. My mother died when I was small, so I was very lonely when Father was away at war.

I didn't know many people my own age. Before Dan came, my best friends were my maid, Alice, and my horse, Moonlight. I loved Alice and Moonlight, but horses can't talk, and Alice was very bossy. She wanted me to act like a lady.

That's because I am a lady. I am Lady Elinor of Hardford Castle, but I didn't feel like a lady then. Most of the time, I felt like a little girl.

Fourteen is too young to be a proper lady.

When Dan came, I was so happy. We did everything together. We went riding and hunting. We played dice and chess in the evenings. It was lovely to have a friend the same age as me.

One evening, we were all in the parlour. Dan and I were playing chess. I loved chess. I could play it all day long and be happy.

But Dan liked dice better. "I don't see why we always play chess," he grumbled. "You *always* win."

"That's because I'm better than you are," I told him. "I'm better than you at everything! I'm better at riding – and hunting – and dancing—"

"Elinor," said Alice. "Behave yourself. Ladies don't boast."

I stuck out my tongue. Dan giggled.

"I'll always be better than you," I told him. "You'll never beat me!"



“Want to bet?” he asked.

“Bet what?” I said. “That I’ll always be better at everything?”

“No,” said Dan. “That you’ll win this game of chess.”

Had he gone mad?

“Let’s bet,” said Dan. “If I win, you have to give me something. And if you win, I’ll give something to you.”

“Like what?” I asked. It sounded like a trick to me.

"Something nice," said Dan. "The loser can choose what they give. But it has to be something good."

"All right," I said.

That evening, Dan played *really* badly.

"Are you *trying* to lose?" I asked.

"No!" Dan said. But he lost anyway.

"I won!" I shouted. "I won! What do I get? What do I get?"

But Dan didn't tell me.

"Not here," he said. "It's a secret. I'll give it to you tomorrow, after lessons."

Every morning, I had lessons with Father Henry, who was the priest in our castle. I learned Latin and Greek and English and all about God and Jesus. Dan learned knight things, like shooting and fighting with a sword and jousting with my father.

After lessons, I went to the yard to help Dan put the bows and arrows away.

"Where's my present then?" I said. "Is it ready?"

"It's ready," said Dan. Suddenly, he looked nervous. "Close your eyes."

I closed my eyes and held out my hands. But Dan didn't put anything in them.

He kissed me, on the cheek.

