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Opening extract from

A Lily, A Rose

Written by

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

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Contents

1	Friends	1
2	Secrets	8
3	Angry	14
4	A Plan	20
5	Love	26
6	A Lover	30
7	A Kiss	38
8	A Chess Player	44
9	A Prize	51
10	Dancing	59



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 so that he could learn about fighting from Father.

Father was a knight. He'd been in lots of battles in Scotland, against Robert the Bruce and the Scots. When I was little, he was away for years, fighting in the war and living in the King's palace in Westminster. But when the new king, King Edward was crowned, Father came back

home. I knew why. Father was a friend of Roger Mortimer, the man who killed King Edward's father. And Roger Mortimer and his friends weren't very popular in Westminster when King Edward took the throne.

Father minded not being in Westminster, but I liked it. I liked having him home. Mother died when I was small, so I used to get very lonely when Father was away at war.

And then Dan came. I was so excited. I didn't know many people my own age, only the younger servants, and some of the soldiers who guarded the castle. I didn't have any brothers or sisters. There weren't any families near to us with children. 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 was always telling me off for talking too much, or getting mud on my new dress, or running across the yard shouting. She wanted me to act like a lady.

I was a lady. Lady Elinor of Hardford Castle. I didn't feel like one. Most of the time, I felt like a little girl.

Fourteen wasn't old enough to be a lady yet.

When Dan came, I was so happy. We did everything together. We went riding, and hunting. We played dice and chess in the evenings. We read books out loud and giggled at the rude bits. It was lovely to have a friend the same age as me. Dan liked to be silly, just like I did. We used to pull faces at each other in church, and see who could make the other one laugh first. We swam in the castle moat. We spent whole afternoons eating plums and apples from the orchard. It was wonderful.

One evening, we were all in the parlour. Our parlour was a small, warm room, with wooden panels round the walls and pictures of knights and ladies, woven in wool.

The fire was burning in the middle of the room. My maid, Alice, was mending a new hole in my dress. Father was writing at his table in the corner.

Dan and I were playing chess. I loved chess. It was my best, best thing. I could play it all day long and be happy.

Dan preferred dice, or backgammon.

"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? Dan might be better than me at – oh, shooting arrows, and fighting with swords and other boy things. But I was always, always better at chess.

"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. Dan would maybe give me a kick, or a handful of mud, or a dead toad.

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

It seemed like an odd bet, but it sounded interesting.

"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 wouldn'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 our priest, Father Henry. 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 Father. Dan couldn't even say 'hello' in English.

"Why should I learn English?" he said. "Everyone important speaks French."

It was true. But Father told me that a lady should know English as well.

"One day you'll have your own house and your own servants," he said. "And you should know how to speak to the people who work for you."

After lessons, I went to the yard to watch Dan shoot arrows. The yard was a big open space inside the castle walls. It was always full of noise and people. Three grooms were exercising horses, riding them round and round in a circle. A little boy was feeding the chickens by the kitchen door. Two of Father's soldiers were playing with a dog. And Father was watching Dan shoot arrows at a target.

Dan put down his bow as soon as he saw me.

"Are we done, sir?" he asked Father.

Father smiled. "All right," he said. "I'll see you at dinner."

I went with Dan to help 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.