
A DRESS FOR A QUEEN

Even Queens Have Their Secrets

KERRIE NOOR



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First edition December 09, 2016.

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A DRESS FOR A QUEEN

The Secret Apprentice

Lizzie's favourite pastimes were juggling and acrobatics, which she loved to do while sliding down a banister or swinging from a chandelier. After dinner, before the servants even had a chance to grab a tray let alone clear the debris, Lizzie was on the table spinning plates and tossing cups—oblivious to the flying food.

The rest of the family ducked . . .

“Watch out, lovers,” Lizzie would shout in her best Cockney voice before propelling herself onto the nearest light fitting and swinging across the room. The family, grabbing their whisky, would scatter like dogs on a hunt.

She loved to cartwheel, somersault, and juggle, sometimes together. She practiced in the kitchen when the servants had finished, in the garden when the sun was down, and in the reception on the footman's day off, always concluding with a few splits. Lizzie liked to end with panache.

All it took was one vodka, a gin, or a couple of glasses of bubbly and Lizzie, roots forgotten, became the real Lizzie: an adrenaline junkie who loved to shock.

And it was all thanks to Jimmie Black, a distant cousin . . .

Jimmie Black had left the family business after an embarrassing incident with the gamekeeper. He joined a circus, and Lizzie wanted to follow; she was a teenager at the time and thought she knew all there was to know about bunking off.

“I’m sick,” she moaned to her nanny and took to her bed.

Later, with the good ol’ pillows-in-the-bed trick and a “Lizzie is at death’s door” note on her bedroom door, Lizzie escaped. She slid on her red *Annie* wig, pulled on an off-the-peg dress from the Lost Properties Department at the palace, and slid into the night.

That night, as she watched the jugglers and the trapeze artists, Lizzie fell in love. She too wanted to balance on the back of a white stallion in a frilly skirt, swing from the tent tops, and feel the heat of a fire stick as she twirled it about her plump body. She discovered a passion for performing deeper than any feelings for her family—or “the Firm,” as some called them—until her nanny found her.

Lizzie, posed at the front row clutching a bag of leotards, didn’t see her coming. She didn’t recognise the plump woman in a grey tracksuit, the smell of mothballs, or the face beneath the knitted hat. *Nanny also knew about the Lost Properties Department.*

“Leotards are not for the likes of you,” the nanny finally whispered, and the incident was never spoken of again.



The Honeymoon and Beyond

After her marriage to Philip, Lizzie insisted on a private celebration of their own involving chandeliers, a leather rope, and a very large polished oak table. Clutching her bouquet between her teeth and sporting a black outfit designed by Cecil B. DeMille, she swung from the lights, leaving a trail of confetti behind her. Philip’s vision of instructing a shy young girl in the arts of intimacy were shattered as he watched her firm round rump twirl through the air covered in little more than black lace.

He had been warned by the nanny about “our Lizzie and her secret ways,” but nothing could prepare him for what he saw . . .

Or the pleasure it would give him.

Philip soon learnt to expect the unexpected from his wife. He had a trampoline installed in his bedroom, devised a network of tightropes from his den to her bedroom, and regularly cleaned out the fireplaces for Lizzie and her fire stick juggling. With just one ring of a bell, he could have her bouncing, swinging, or balancing—rose in her mouth optional. And if feeling particularly frisky, he'd give the stairs a good polish, toss his hat in the air, and shout . . .

“Where’s my girl?”

Lizzie, in her best working-class persona, would appear balancing a tray of teacakes on her head.

“Afternoon tea, sir?” she’d say.

Philip always said yes.

And when Philip was feeling oppressed with his duties, Lizzie, a woman of surprising intuition, would grab a top hat, slip into her fishnets, and backflip across the hall with one of the corgis.

The servants learnt to run for cover as Philip, clutching his Polaroid, snapped away.

One picture of Lizzie’s round rear sailing through the air was enough to cheer up any dreary day, and Phil had a collection of them—the most recent living in his pocket, making any tedious ceremony a breeze to sit through.

Of course, Phil knew all about Jimmie Black; Lizzie had told him, spread out on the oak table like a Renaissance princess glowing with pleasure.

“It’s all about entrances and exits.” She sighed. “Jimmie taught me that.”

Phil told Lizzie her entrance was the best-kept secret he had ever seen. A secret Nanny kept from Lizzie’s mother until the day Nanny left for the Sunset Retirement Home.



The Burning Question

For years, Lizzie’s antics had gone unnoticed by her mother, a round-faced, cheery-looking woman whose permanent smile and tilt of

her head gave folks the idea she was deaf. Gran was, for the most part, a kindly woman who liked to see people happy.

But she did have her limits.

At night, after a respectable amount of gin, Gran (as she was called by those close) often wandered about the palace. Passing the servants with a regal wave, she liked to breathe the evening air, make sure everyone was smiling, and perhaps sit by one of the open fires Lizzie seemed so keen on. There, alongside Nanny, she would ponder about horses, racing, and her daughter.

What gave her such a glow?

And why did Philip smirk so at the mention of leather?

She had watched her daughter sail through four pregnancies with all the ease of a rustic peasant. She had seen Phil's face, normally as glum as a winter's evening, light up at the mere mention of "I wonder what Lizzie's doing up in her room?"

Lizzie had always been a mystery to Gran, but then as Nanny said, "Aren't all children?" However, since Nanny had left, things had changed, taken on a more mysterious quality; in fact, sometimes Gran felt like she was living in an Agatha Christie novel. Nothing made sense . . .

The high crockery bill, a floor so polished you could apply your lipstick staring at it, and the new burn marks about the fireplaces every night, even in the summer—all they needed was a dead body.

She looked around the living room and counted the fire extinguishers. Somehow, fourteen seemed a little excessive. Gran's womanly intuition worked overtime, and Lizzie sprung to her mind.

Gran cornered Eddie, the most amenable of Lizzie's sons. "What are all those dark marks on the wall about? How did they get there?"

Eddie ran his fingers across his bald spot and talked of an overzealous servant lighting a fire "so big one could roast a hog on it."

Gran didn't see the joke. "But it is on the ceiling, Eddie. Was he juggling it?"

Eddie laughed a little too loudly to be natural.

Gran sat and stared at the fire, vague conversations of the past floating back to her. There were the servants' constant references to

trampolines and the like in Philip's room, and Ann, Lizzie's daughter, refusing to go anywhere near the parents' floor.

"It's the rope," she said to Gran. "It appears from nowhere like a snake. And *he's* always busy polishing things, hardly notices me. May as well be one of those damnable servants," she muttered.

"Polishing?" said Gran. "What on earth is that?"

Ann shrugged her shoulders.

Gran sighed. Coping with more than one child at a time was such a trial.

"I can live with the ropes," continued Ann. "I can cope with the constant use of fire blankets. But could you speak to them about the daily slide down the banister?"

Gran closed her racing guide. "Banister? They slide down the banister?" She sighed. *I have to do something now, but what? If only Nanny were here . . .*

Gran called Lizzie into her inner sanctum, preparing for the giving of a "good dressing-down," as Nanny called it.

"Elizabeth," she said. A full name was always required for said dressing-down. "Do you really think it appropriate for the servants and the like to see you with your dress above your head and your suspenders on show?"

"I don't wear suspenders, Mother," said Lizzie.

Gran sniffed.

"Although I have been known to wear the odd G-string when Phil is a bit down."

Gran closed her eyes. "Phil?"

"Yes, Phil," said Lizzie.

"What is he, a rag-and-bone man?" said Gran.

"My hubby."

"Hubby?"

Lizzie sighed. "My husband, Philip."

"Oh, him."

Gran drained her gin, forcing herself to continue . . .

"And there's the leather, it's everywhere. I thought this family was trying to go *green*."

"That's just the prince," muttered Lizzie.

“Prince? Which one?” said Gran.

“The green one,” snapped Lizzie.

Gran, now confused, drained her glass and changed tact. “Did you think I wouldn’t notice?”

Lizzie said nothing.

“Do you think I’m blind?”

Lizzie looked at her shoes.

One of the servants raced by clutching a fire blanket.

Gran stopped. “Have you lit a fire?”

“No,” lied Lizzie sheepishly.

Gran asked her daughter how long this “*swinging lark*” had been going on, and when Lizzie muttered something about school days, Gran nearly choked on her gin.

Lizzie looked away.

Gran’s hand shook as she poured herself another drink, this time skipping the tonic.

“This is all due to that damnable Jimmie and that bloody wig he gave you. I told George to throw it away, but would he listen? Oh no, not George. ‘Whatever makes Lizzie happy. Let her play her dress-up games, where’s the harm?’ That’s what he said.”

Gran glanced over the rim of her gin and looked at her daughter.

“He always spoiled you, and now look where it’s got you: swinging about the palace, underwear on show for all to see. And the fires! What do you think we are made of, money? Coal does not come cheap, you know.”

Lizzie continued to look at her feet.

“And where is this Jimmie now?” said Gran.

“Don’t know,” lied Lizzie.

“Prancing about on some bit of high wire dressed in tights, I suppose,” Gran huffed.

Lizzie thought about her cousin, living in the Sunset Retirement Home, who had turned into a whisky-swilling, groin-scratching old cynic whose only memory of the past was stuck up on the walls behind his bed: photographs of a dashing young man with a glint in his eye for anything that moved and was over the legal age.

Another servant appeared lugging a fire extinguisher. He tugged at lever.

“Not here,” snapped another servant, depositing a cuff across his co-worker’s ear.

“Well, really,” snapped Gran.



The Health and Safety Man

That night, Gran sat at the top of the great banquet table, squeezed into a pale blue evening gown with an annoying sash stretched across her chest. Her back was close to one of Lizzie’s over-the-top fires, and she was sweating uncomfortably. She fanned her face with a Historic Scotland placemat while listening to the drones of a governor of some godforsaken peninsula about how “the abandonment of white trousers was the ruin of cricket.”

She let out a long sigh. *Who cares?*

She stared at the chandeliers. *Is swinging the secret of a happy marriage? Does juggling brighten up a dull day of ceremonies?* She stared at her superbly chilled white wine, stunned and confused. She thought ropes were for scouts, leather for horses, and fire for sitting by. It never occurred to her that they could be used so . . . artistically.

She pushed her wine to the side. All those days wearing hats she hated and gloves that made her hands sweat, shaking hands with someone whispering in her ear.

“That’s the manager of so-and-so charity, ma’am.”

“Ambassador of so-and-so country, ma’am.”

“The leader of so-and-so, ma’am.”

While her daughter and *hubby* were having a high old time with a Polaroid and the like.

She felt let down.

Maybe she could try this so-called juggling, twirl a few oranges? After all, you’re never too old, so Nanny said.

After dessert, she refused the coffee and dram with a “one felt dizzy” comment and headed down the long corridor to the kitchen.

It took her a while to find the light switch and even longer to take

in what she saw. She had no idea that so many things were required for cooking. She pulled open a large dishwasher, allowing it to snap shut again. She poked at packets and ran her fingers across the shiny pots. It was nothing like *Master Chef* and *The Great British Bake-Off*.

And yet . . . intriguing.

Finally, she came across the larder. She creaked open the door, fumbled for yet another switch, and walked in. *Perhaps there is something juggle-able*, she thought, *maybe an orange or plum?*

She began to rifle through the shelves and was just in the process of sniffing a jar of cinnamon when a footman coughed from behind.

“Ma’am, the health and safety officer is here.”

“Who?”

“There have been complaints about things . . .”

“And what has that to do with oranges and me?” said Gran with her sweetest smile.

“Ma’am, the palace is open to the public, and people do not want to be tripping over ropes and the like or looking at burn marks.”

“This is a job for the man of the house,” said Gran, clutching a bag of oranges, and with a small skid on the polished floor, she headed for her room.



Later that night . . .

Phil, after a quick scout around to see where Her Nibs (Gran) was, set up his ropes for a Lizzie swing.

Lizzie was poised and ready with a new red, white, and blue superhero outfit she had purchased on eBay. It was not her choice, but *Phil* had just discovered Netflix and was completely obsessed with *Wonder Woman*.

She slid down the stairs, grabbed a rope, swung to a chandelier, and then, with a few cartwheels, ended in the kitchen. She was just contemplating a new twist on the old splits position for Phil’s Polaroid when a footman coughed from behind.

“Ma’am, the health and safety officer is here.”

“Who?” said Lizzie.

She turned to see a round man of five foot nothing with a clipboard and a suit too large for him. He didn't smile or bow but looked straight into Lizzie's eyes.

"There have been complaints," he said.

Lizzie looked up with her best coquettish smile, which no one ever noticed.

"And what has that to do with me? Is this not something for the man of the house?"

The health and safety officer had no time for such an argument. He was fed up working his way through the various barriers and guards explaining who he was. No one, as far as he was concerned, was above the laws of health and safety. And if members of the public were at risk of rope-tripping, then it was up to him to save them.

"Is that not you?" he said with a blank face.

"Me? I hardly think so." Lizzie looked at her hubby. "Do you know who the man of the house is?"

The health and safety officer, ignoring *Hubby's* head-shaking, continued . . .

"Ma'am, the 'man of the house' in these modern times is but a figurative term, and you, it would seem, are—is—it."

Lizzie was speechless.

"Is the palace not in your name?" he asked.

"My name?" said Lizzie.

"And the council tax?" he said.

Lizzie was now confused. She looked at Phil.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Isn't there a servant for such things?" she finally muttered.

The health and safety officer didn't hear. He was busy looking about the kitchen, and he could tell with just a glance that something fishy was going on.

The couple watched in silence.

"What is the purpose of this harness?" he said.

Lizzie shuffled her feet.

"Err . . . holding things," said Phil, "one suspects?"

"And you do know that leather can't be sterilised?"

Lizzie fingered a chain swinging from a hook and looked at her husband. He, without a word, removed her finger.

“Sterilised?” she muttered.

“You feed the public from this kitchen, and it must be fit for that purpose, not”—he looked from one to the other—“other things.”

The couple nodded.

“I mean look at this floor,” snapped the health and safety man.

“What of it,” Lizzie muttered feebly.

“This is not a kitchen floor polish.”

“Is it not?” Phil feigned innocence.

The health and safety man glanced at Lizzie’s stiletto thigh-high boots. “More for . . .”

“What?” said the couple in unison.

“Dancing?”

Lizzie staggered on her heel. Phil steadied her.

The health and safety man coughed. “Maybe the splits?”

The couple looked from one to the other . . . no one had ever spoken to them in this manner. How were they supposed to act?

“As if one would *split*—so to speak—before one’s sink,” said Gran, entering and clutching a gin.

Lizzie glanced at her mother; was it not her nap time? She shifted uncomfortably on her feet. She had been caught in her Wonder Woman suit, not only by a man unknown and speaking like something out of one of those soap operas Nanny liked, but by her mother. She felt like a teenager caught snogging in a car, although in truth, Phil always waited until they were in the pantry.

“Us girls,” said Gran, “rarely come into the kitchen except for a banana.” She winked. “Isn’t that right, Lizzie?”

Lizzie looked at her mother making her way to the pantry like she did it every day.

“Us girls?” Lizzie muttered.

Gran placed a couple of bananas into a bag, followed by a ceremonial plopping of oranges, one by one, her eyes focused on the health and safety man.

He coughed and adjusted his tie as Gran, with great pomp, handed the bag to her daughter.

“Is this not what you came here for?” she said. “Some fruit before we do a bit of dressing up and nail polishing—just us girls?”

She looked at Phil.

“That’s what we love, right?”

Lizzie stared at the bag of fruit and looked at her husband. “Nail polish?” muttered Phil with a dazed look.



The Tosser

It was suggested by those who ran things that a ban be placed on all acrobatic sessions in the palace except on the odd public holiday, which was completely useless to Lizzie and Philip. Public holidays were workdays for them.

“How are we to swing and wave at the same time?” said Lizzie. “I mean there are no ropes and such on the balcony, are there?”

Gran talked about lip service. “Just smile and nod,” she said, “you got off lightly.”

“Lightly?” muttered Phil with a downcast face. “They have confiscated my Polaroid,” he huffed. He’d been given an iPhone and told to “download”—*whatever that is.*”

“Yes, imagine those photos in the hands of others,” said Gran with a small burp.

“Photos of us? Who cares?” said Lizzie. “They don’t even miss us on the balcony these days. Do they, *our Phil?*”

Phil said nothing; he was still brooding over his lost Polaroid.

“What with the pipe bands and horses down below, the children *and* grandchildren filling up the balcony, we may as well stay in bed. Isn’t that right, our Phil?”

Phil smiled at the thought.

“Yes, well staying in bed is not what we folk do is it?” said Gran.

“And it’s not like *Hello’s* knocking at our door,” continued Lizzie. “We haven’t been snapped in weeks.”

“Speak for yourself,” said Gran.

“We’re old news, unless you count our Phil’s swearing,” giggled Lizzie.

Phil took a sip of his now-flat real ale and sighed.

How would he get through the day without his Polaroids? Mind you, with Lizzie's ropes packed away and the palace modernised with gas, there was nothing for him to *snap* anymore. *I mean a fire that came on with a switch—where's the fun in that?*

Lizzie, spurred on by Phil's downcast face, took things into her own hands. She decided to give them all a good old-fashioned bunking-off day. She stuck a *Don't knock, I am at death's door* note on her door, a *Busy fishing* on Phil's, and a *One is feeling a bit queasy* note on Gran's.

They tippy-toed into the kitchen like cartoon robbers, opened the larder like they were cracking open a safe, helped themselves to anything juggle-able, and headed for the Sunset Retirement Home.

Lizzie had a plan—a plan that included a disguise that had her in a red wig, tracksuit, and trainers and Gran in tears of laughter, until she realised she too was to wear the same.

Phil watched, for once glad he didn't have his Polaroid.

"Jimmie was always good for a laugh," Lizzie whispered. "Especially with Nanny around to rile him."

"Jimmie?" said Gran. "We're going to see Jimmie?"

"Who's Jimmie?" said Phil.

Lizzie threw him a look.

"Oh, that Jimmie," said Phil. *Could things get any worse?*



Nanny and Jimmie were sitting in the lounge room when Lizzie and her gang arrived. A comedy was playing on TV, Nanny was explaining to Jimmie why it was so funny, and Jimmie had as much interest as he did in her bunions. Old ladies in trainers were the last things he needed to see.

"Is that who I think it is?" said Nanny.

Lizzie giggled like a schoolgirl.

"Surprised you recognise me in this thing," huffed Gran.

"You bring any whisky?" shouted Jimmie.

Nanny sighed and turned the TV down. "Things aren't what they used to be," she said.

“You’re telling me,” snapped Gran.

Phil for once agreed with his mother-in-law.

Jimmie began to complain about his knees “playing up again,” and he was in the middle of singing the praises of whisky, as opposed to “all those friggin’ pills,” when an ol’ boy shuffled by the doorway with a Zimmer. The ol’ boy stopped, stared at the new faces, then moaned about the “so-called food in this so-called establishment.”

“Friggin’ baby food,” he shouted.

Jimmie told him to “*shut it*” and tossed an apple at him.

Gran looked at Jimmie. “You toss apples here?”

“All the time,” lied Jimmie, gesturing to the bowl of fruit ignored by most.

“Knock yourself out.”

Lizzie, unsure of how the *knocking out of oneself* worked, said, “How about a spot of juggling? Our gran’s been practising.”

Gran threw her a look.

“It’ll take your mind off things,” laughed Lizzie.

Phil stared at the dismal room and, for the second time that day, was glad he didn’t have his Polaroid. He pulled out his iPhone and turned it in his hand. He’d been told it was ready, but for what?

Jimmie moaned about his mind being his own business, and he was just about to tell the two funny ladies and the ol’ git where to *shove their business* when he spied Phil’s mobile.

“You can download the cricket on that,” he said.

“What? Cricket on a phone?” said Phil.

The ol’ boy with the Zimmer, inspired by the idea of cricket, hurled his apple into the lounge room past Gran’s head. She, inspired by her tracksuit *and trainers*, couldn’t help herself and made a dive that would stop traffic.

An elderly woman sauntering past caught sight of a regal gran in a pale pink tracksuit and trainers *that flashed on each step*, lobbing a ball like a cricket pro. She stopped in her tracks.

“Mind!” shouted the nurse as the ball shot past the elderly woman’s head, followed by a cartwheeling Lizzie hurling herself into a fringed lampshade to catch the ball.

“How’s that?” she shouted with a spirited high kick.

A small crowd formed.

One resident, clutching his hard-boiled egg nicked from the breakfast table, was inspired.

“Cop this,” he shouted. He tossed the egg into the air, then caught it with his slipper.

“If only I had my Polaroid,” muttered Phil.

Jimmie, transported back to the good old days of cartwheeling and the like, turned to a mournful Phil.

“Did you get that?” said Jimmie.

Phil glared at him.

“On that.” Jimmie gestured to his iPhone.

Phil turned the iPhone in his hand. “Cricket *and* photos, whatever next?”



The next week, Gran donned a caped crusader costume with a passion not seen since her Grand National days and, along with Phil and Lizzie, bunked off to the Sunset Retirement Home.

Phil watched cricket with Jimmie, and when finished, they, under the guise of *old bats have balls*, tweeted sarcastic comments about how “the abandonment of white trousers in cricket was the best thing since sliced bread,” while Lizzie and Gran swung and juggled like there was no tomorrow.

Soon, dressing up and tossing things became a regular part of the day for those in the home, as the trio cheered, encouraged, and brought costumes.

And no one at any time mentioned the health and safety man, because, as one resident put it:

“Health and safety in a home only applies to the staff who work there and the public that visit. It has nothing to do with the residents.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Back in the days before TV had remote controls and Scotland was known for the Bay City Rollers, Kerrie left Australia on a working holiday and fell in love with many things Scottish, including a man and Panto.

After years of performing, Kerrie decided to write some of her experiences down in a series of short stories and plans to write more; along with her Belly Dancing and Beyond series and soon to be published comic sci-fi series.

If you would like to find out more, please feel free to visit-
<http://kerrienoor.com>

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Cheers and Regards

Kerrie Noor



