

Hazell Jacobs, Highly Commended

Surely, the book held some clue. I had seen it somewhere before, yellowed parchment, weathered leather cover, a musty smell, but where, where? Suddenly, it came to me.....California. But, here I was sitting in a very English garden. The book flung from the other side of the ancient tree was not old, but well used. I picked it up. LILY'S LATIN GRAMMAR.

"Prithee, would'st thou borrow my Lily?"

It was a young female voice. Now, a finely embroidered, cream cambric linen bonnet was thrown after the book. A head appeared around the oak. She was probably about ten or eleven years old with golden red curly hair, dark piercing eyes and a rather prominent nose. At eighty years plus, I had no need for such a book.

"No thanks" said I.

Tired after an early start on my Richmond Age UK coach outing, a lengthy tour of Hatfield House, home of the Cecil family for four hundred years, a quick look at the even older building of the Royal Palace of Hatfield, I was resting my weary legs under the old tree. There had been a lot of history to take in. My mind darted back to California, fast forwarding to the 20th century to an American friend who fancied she had spent another life in the 16th century. Have you noticed such previous lives are always of a Romanov princess, Napoleon, or the like, never a poor wretch in the workhouse? My friend had been very excited to find and buy in New York, at an exorbitant price, the very book now in my hands, the Latin grammar book of the good Queen Bess.

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The Royal Palace of Hatfield had been the childhood home of Henry VIII's two children, Elizabeth and her brother for many years and briefly sister Mary. I wonder what the young girl thought of the death of her mother and so many subsequent stepmothers? I could forgive her for throwing her grammar book and bonnet on a hot summer afternoon. She was a diligent student and could speak six languages at eleven. I could hardly manage Amo, Amas, Amat!

My head nodded and my legs were stiff.

There was no book in my hand.

Time to get back on the coach, hand in my identity lanyard and head back to Richmond. There was a sign by the tree saying this was the spot where Elizabeth was told of Mary's death and she was proclaimed Queen. I should have told the young girl she would live to an old age as a successful monarch, overcome smallpox and die in Richmond Palace a few yards from my house.

My Californian friend commissioned an oil painting of her husband dressed as Robin, Earl of Leicester but I fear the marriage did not end happily.

I wonder who got the Latin Grammar?