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A Letter from Jodie Leigh Murray

Dear Book Club Readers,

Thank you for reading *The Duke's Daughter*!

This was a far different story years ago, and it is nothing like what it began. My fascination with this time period goes back to my childhood, and my research of it likely goes back about as far. I think movies like *Ladyhawke*, *Tristan & Isolde*, and *The Princess Bride* prompted my imagination. Medieval times are my favorite and I confess to know a lot of information about those times.

The story goes back to the beginning of the medieval times, when there was not a lot of concrete information. I've included some key people during the time leading up to the Norman conquest and the timeline. This should give you an idea of what motivation William, the Duke of Normandy, had in his quest for the throne. This, combined with the fact that very few women had power in those times, sparked my interest.

I've also included the first chapter I wrote in early 2022 as a start. You'll notice several other changes from the final book such as her name change. This happened many times during my writing process. I didn't start seriously writing it in the form it's in now until late 2022. Happy reading!

Sincerely,

Jodie Leigh Murray

P.S. I would appreciate a review on Amazon or Goodreads. Thanks again!

Chapter One

“Elle...you must wake.”

Elle rolled over in her makeshift bed on the floor, prying open her eyes to see Edythe kneeling next to her. Edythe, who revealed every situation with only the look on her face, looked frantic. She dropped her hands away from Elle, grabbing her smock and wringing her hands within until it wrinkled.

“What is it?”

“Juliana has come.”

Elle sat up, the quilt falling away as she did so. What her sister was doing down in the village in the middle of the night made her as frantic. Juliana had always been a little rebellious, but at only fourteen it was extremely dangerous for her to venture down to where the farmer’s dwelled.

Quilt thrown hastily away from her, Elle bounced to her feet while Edythe struggled to stand. She helped the older woman up and faced her sister. Juliana was pacing near the rough wooden table, her hands wringing her cloak. Something was wrong.

“Elle!” she said, rushing to her and grabbing her hands. “You must leave. You must leave at once. Quickly.”

Still addled with sleep, she shook her head and wondered if this was a dream. She no longer lived in the manor, thanks to her father, but to leave entirely? Leave Westerbury? She wasn’t sure what was happening.

“Gareth is just outside with a horse for you. I have packed some clothing and a bit of food, but oh...you must leave straightaway.”

Juliana was tugging, pulling her toward the doorway to the home that Elle stayed in with Edythe and her husband, Adam. She had slept on the floor for nearly six years now, ever since her father had banished her from the manor.

Elle pulled back. "Tell me what this is about."

"He hired a mercenary. He means to kill you."

"Kill me?"

Juliana nodded. "Aye. I would have come sooner, but I had to wait until he retired for the night. I could hear his snoring, so I went to Gareth. We don't know who the mercenary is, but you need to get away. Tonight."

"Please, Elle. You must leave. Save yourself," Edythe pleaded.

Elle shook her head. She knew her father hated her. He had hated her for most of her life for reasons she had never known. But to hire someone to kill her...it struck her numb.

"Why" she whispered, turning to Edythe.

Tears had long since dried up. Earl Eldwyn was a horrible person, cruel to everyone except Juliana. But he was especially cruel to her. She had cried most of her life, wondering what she had done so wrong. No more. She would cry no longer. Instead, she lived in the village and had thrived.

Edythe shook her head. No one knew why the earl treated his eldest daughter so unkindly. In fact, the people of Westerbury and neighboring manors were as baffled. It shouldn't be a surprise that he would try to have her killed, Elle surmised. All of her life, he had beaten and tormented her.

Edythe helped Elle into her kirtle, then into her cloak before Juliana pulled her through the door. It was dark, the village quiet, with inhabitants long since retired for the night. Farmers rose early before the sun, Elle usually along with them.

Gareth and Adam were around the back of the small hut with the thatched roof, at the end of the row of similar homes. They were crude, but provided sheltered from the weather. Elle and Juliana, followed by Edythe with stealth quietness moved along the side of the hut amongst the shadows.

Elle felt a strong hand slide within hers, pulling her forth until she came face to face with the kind, brown eyes of Gareth. Gareth, who had been the only one to help her all these years, pulled her into the light of the moon.

“Elle,” he whispered.

“Gareth, what is happening?”

“You need to get out of here, and quickly. We don’t know where the mercenary is.”

There was a noise a short distance away, sounding like someone had kicked a door, and Elle, along with her friends, froze. He pulled her quickly around to the horse and gave her a boost up just as she saw a glint of a sword. Gareth gave the horse a slap to the backside and Elle lurched forward, gasped at the sudden hit to her shoulder.

Chaos surrounded them and she hear shouting, hoping that those who had truly stepped forward in her air were safe from this danger. She kicked the horse, the jolt nearly taking her breath away from the pain in her shoulder.

An arrow whizzed past her and she molded herself to the horse, chest to pommel as the horse flew across the field. She didn’t know if the mercenary had a horse and was in pursuit, she only knew she had to continue to get away. If he, or she, found her, she would likely die. She had no weapons. Even if the mercenary didn’t find her, she may die anyway.

Elle rode as fast as she could, as far as she could, as the darkness of the night swallowed her. When she was certain no one was following, she slowed the horse. The pain in her shoulder was unbearable, and as much as she didn’t want to do it, she reached up to feel her shoulder. An arrow had gone straight through.

It throbbed like a wound she had never experienced before, despite a full life of constant pain. This wasn’t a pain she could ever remember so deeply.

Perhaps if she laid down on the horse’s back, the pain would lessen. Wrapping the reins around her hands, Elle laid down so she could see the line of trees to the side. The horse was keeping to the road without her guidance, and she prayed he wouldn’t spook and shake her off as her eyes grew heavy.

It was past the midnight hour, the moon quickly moving to the other side of the sky while she fought against heavy eyelids. If she fell into slumber, she could easily slide out of the saddle. Despite the pain, she couldn’t hang on to consciousness and fell into a blissful oblivion.

The People and Timeline of the Norman Conquest



The People

Hardicanute: Sometimes referred to as Canute III, was the son of King Cnut the Great (who ruled Denmark, Norway, and England) and Emma of Normandy. He was the last Dane to rule England.

Harald Hardrada: Harald was the King of Norway from 1046 to 1066.

Earl Godwin of Wessex: An English nobleman, becoming one of the most powerful earls in England while England was under the rule of the Danish King Cnut the Great. Cnut made Godwin the first earl of Wessex. Godwin was father to Harold, Tostig, and Edith.

Edward the Confessor: Edward was the son of Aethelred the Unready and Emma of Normandy. He was Anglo-Saxon, considered the last king of the House of Wessex and ruled from 1042 until his death in 1066. Edward was married to Edith Godwin.

King Harold: Harold Godwinson came from a prominent family, becoming a powerful earl after the death of his father, Earl Godwin of Wessex. He became King of England after his brother-in-law, King Edward the Confessor, died without an heir.

Tostig Godwinson: He was the third son of Godwin, Earl of Wessex and brother to King Harold. He was the Earl of Northumbria until he was eventually exiled by his brother. He then joined forces with Harald Hardrada to invade England during Harold's reign as King of England.

Duke William: William was cousin to Edward the Confessor, leading to his claim to the English throne. He was known as William the Conqueror and sometimes William the Bastard. He was the first Norman king of Kingland.

Matilda of Flanders: Matilda initially refused William's offer for marriage, but eventually relented. She was left in control of Normandy during William's campaign in England (although I strayed from this fact in the book).

The Timeline

1042: Hardicanute, King of England, dies of alcohol poisoning, ending the Danish rule of the island. His short reign gives his descendants, including Harald Hardrada, a claim to the English Throne.

Edward the Confessor, son of Aethelred II, becomes the King of England. As Edward spent his childhood in Normandy, he knows more about the Norman customs and people than he does the English; the Norman language, and customs begin to be used in England.

1043: Edward is crowned King of England.

1051: An incident occurs that leads to the expulsion of Earl Godwine and his family due to a fight between Edward's brother-in-law, Eustance, and the Godwine's.

William claims that King Edward the Confessor promised him that he would succeed him as the King of England.

Earl Godwine and his sons return to London and demand to be reinstated back to their previous positions. To avoid a civil war, Edward agrees and puts the Godwine's back into the center of power in England.

William marries Matilda of Flanders.

1053: Earl Godwine dies, his eldest son Harold becomes the Earl of Wessex, later becoming the King of England when Edward dies with no heirs.

1055: Harold's brother, Tostig, becomes the Earl of Northumbria.

1060: A meeting shrouded in mystery takes place in Normandy between Harold and William, the Duke of Normandy. In the meeting, it was claimed that Harold agreed William should become King of England when Edward the Confessor dies. From what was known of Harold, it seemed unlikely he would have agreed to such a thing.

1064: Harold is shipwrecked in Normandy. Duke William takes him into his fortress as a “guest”. Under duress, Harold swears on relics of a saint to support William’s claim to the throne of England.

January 1066: Edward the Confessor dies. On his deathbed in Westminster, he designates Harold – foremost among England’s barons – as his successor. Edward is buried in his new abbey church, consecrated only a week before his death.

Harold, Earl of Wessex, is crowned King of England two days after Edward’s death.

Spring 1066: Duke William gains papal support in Rome for his cause, and hires mercenaries from Picardy and Normandy.

July 1066: King Harold gathers the English Army at the South Coast of England in preparation for the Norman invasion while Duke William prepares his fleet at the River Dives in Normandy.

September 1066: Tostig, Harold’s brother, and Harald Hardrada, the King of Norway, launch a Viking invasion against King Harold. With approximately 300 ships, he raids the east coast, burning Scarborough and sailing up the Humber River.

The Battle of Fulford – The Vikings defeat the English led by Morcar then move to overtake York.

Harold marches his army from the south of England to York to defend England against Harald Hardrada. Catching them off guard, Harold is victorious in killing both Tostig and Hardrada.

William sets sail for England, landing in Pevensey on the south coast of England.

Harold marches his army back south to defend England against the Normans.

October 1066: Negotiations between the Saxons and the Normans begin. William demands King Harold either resigns his royalty in favor of William – referring to it as the arbitration of the Pope, or let it be determined by a single issue of combat. Harold declines to resign his royalty.

October 14, 1066: The Battle of Hastings. Norman foot soldiers lead the way, followed by archers and finally the Norman knights on horseback. The Saxon army had no cavalry but stood

in close ranks. A fence and fosse (ditch) were built as part of the Saxon's defense. Normans moved on to the assault, and the Saxons defended themselves well. The armies exchanged blows, with many Norman's dying in the fosse.

The battle rages for hours (between 9am and 3pm). A new scheme is adopted by Norman archers. Arrows were shot upwards into the air, striking the faces of Saxon soldiers. Many had their eyes put out.

An arrow hit Harold above his right eye, and puts it out. Many other Saxon soldiers suffered a similar fate due to the strategy, but the Saxons continue to defend well. The Normans then adopt another strategy that deceives the Saxons. The Saxons believe the Normans are in retreat, and begin to pursue and foolishly break their ranks. The Saxons are unable to compete against the knights on horseback and the Saxon barricades are broken. The living marched over heaps of the dead, and many were crushed in the throng. The wounded King Harold is killed, and his body mutilated by the Normans.

The following day, both Normans and Saxons bury their dead

William and his army march to Dover, as he needed the important Channel crossing point, before marching to Canterbury to overtake it.

William and his army then march to London after being forced back via Newbury and Willingford to Berkhamstead. Here, the Archbishop of York and the Earls meet and accept William as their new king.

December 1066: William is crowned King of England in Westminster Abbey in London – giving the new abby church two coronations and a royal funeral within the same year.

Discussion Questions



1. What was your expectation about the book before you read it?
2. After reading the book, did your expectations change about it?
3. If someone asked you to summarize this book in ten words or less, what would you say?
4. If this book was made into a movie, would you watch it?
5. If you could give this book a different title, what would it be?
6. Is this book's genre the type you'd usually read?
7. How long did it take you to read this book?
8. What emotions did this book cause you to feel?
9. Did you learn something new about yourself after this book?
10. Did this book evoke a new feeling of empathy for other people and their personal challenges?
11. Did you like or dislike this author's writing style?
12. Is there a quote from the book that stayed with you? What is it, and why?
13. Is there a line from the book that you found unsettling or cringe-worthy?
14. If you could interview the author, what questions would you ask?
15. Have you ever met this author in person? What were your impressions or experience?
16. What character bothered you the most?
17. If you were making a film adaption of this book, who would you cast for each main character, and why?

18. What did you think of the characters' names? Did they match their personalities?
19. If you could rename a character, which character and what would it be?
20. Do you agree with the decisions made by the main character and other characters?
21. Is the book's setting somewhere you'd like to travel to, and why?
22. How does the setting impact the story?
23. Did the world the author creates in the story feel realistic to you or lacking in certain details?
24. If you could make the setting a different location, where would it be, and how would it change the story?
25. Did the author accurately portray the time period, or did you notice inconsistencies?
26. How would you describe the pace of the plot?
27. Were there any plot twists? Were they predictable, or did they take you by surprise?
28. If you could change something that happened in the story, what would it be?
29. Is there an event in the story that stands out to you?
30. Do you agree with the ending?
26. What were some of the themes in the book?
27. Do you think the author covered the theme beautifully or missed an opportunity?
28. Did this book cause you to gain a new perspective?
29. How did this book broaden your view of societal, cultural, or worldwide issues?
30. Did this book leave a lasting impression on you?





About the Author

Jodie Leigh Murray is a self-published author of romantic suspense and historical romance novels. She lives and works out of her home in Buffalo, Minnesota. Jodie has spent most of her life writing as a hobby and professionally. Her first novel, *The Gangster's Daughter*, received three 5-star reviews from Readers' Favorite. Find her on Facebook and Goodreads, and learn more at www.jodieleighmurray.com.