

In Hiding

By Amelie Knowland

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I no longer know what date it is. I have been hiding in this small, suffocating hole for what seems like years. When Queen Elizabeth ascended to the throne in all her oppressive glory she pushed Catholics to almost the brink of extinction in England. The few priests that remained had to go scuttling away into sympathetic protestant houses.

I remember a time when my Alb was pure white but now it is discoloured with the dirt and dust of this damp and musty hole that I have been living in for what seems like years. I feel I may never see the sun or the moon again. My mind drifts to a time when Mary 1st was still on the throne when she had let us practice our faith properly instead of using the false faith that Elizabeth uses.

4 days later

My stomach gurgles I feel horrible. I haven't eaten in 3 days as the servants were starting to get suspicious of their master sneaking down to the corner of the attic and squeezing something in between the floorboards so I get a few crumbs at least. Luckily I do not worry for I am faithful to the Lord so he will provide.

I hear a thumping noise as someone walks into the attic I tense and my heart thumps like a storm. I Exhale when I see the masters boots. He won't turn me in yet I am sure of it. Slowly the weak floorboards are lifted and he peers down into the small and dark hole. He holds his candle and I can see his small weasel like face. "You have to leave" he said "it's not safe for me or my family anymore! I sigh inwardly. I hate to beg but I fear for my life so I plead "I will pray for you if you do indeed have the wrong faith but if not then you will have done a kind deed and the Lord will accept you into his kingdom with open arms." He groans and mutters a small prayer. "You can stay but you should change out of your Alb and amice. If the guards come looking and find you they would instantly know you're the priest." "Thank you" I say "I will not forget this." As soon as I said this I suddenly realised how tired I was. The master noticed my drooping eyes and murmured "you should get some rest" then as he was heading up to sort out the floorboards he said "You're going to need it." I wondered what he meant but by then my senses were already dulling and my eyes were drooping. Slowly I succumbed to the darkness that is sleep.

I'm standing in a busy crowd that is jostling and turning. I look around and see an executioners block and next to it is the executioner standing straight as a poker and looking like death incarnate. Then I realise I am in the tower of London and there is going to be an execution here. I sigh. I normally try to avoid these things as it like entertainment to the people. I decide to leave so I turn round but when I do I notice something I hadn't noticed before was that there were guards everywhere blocking the way out. Then suddenly a guard walks up to me and grabs me by the arms. He grunts "You are put to death for false faith!"

he picks me up and carries me over to the dreaded block." I scream and try to run away but he holds onto me tighter and drags me to the tower block. Now everyone is watching some look sick but some look excited. They look like starved animals waiting to pounce on their prey. The guards force my head onto the block and just as the blindfold is put on I wake up.

I wake up panting and sweating. I look around and realise that I am not in the small damp hole that I have been living in for the past few months. It is still dark and damp but it is bigger and it has a small rickety bed pressed against the wall. Slowly my senses come back to me and I realise that there are small windows on the wall and a small locked door in the middle of a dirty, black wall. Then the realisation hits me like a wall. The master had betrayed me and for what he would have been put in prison as well for hiding information from the queen. He should have known.

Suddenly I was brought out of my thoughts by the door slamming open. I looked up and saw a guard march in "Stand up!" he ordered "You are being taken to see the queen." My eyes widened. I was sure I had more time before I would inevitably be killed. There really was no point in saying I shouldn't die I would just be wasting time if I did. No matter what I say I will be killed or tortured.

So I got up and followed him. I was led through a maze of tunnels coated in mould and other nefarious things. As I breathed in I could feel the tiny insects clawing against my skin. My hand reached up to brush a bug off my face but I didn't have time as before I could the guard shoved me through a door and I came out into a grandly decorated room with paintings covering the walls and birdcages on stands with tiny hummingbirds in it.

I began to see easier as my eyes adjusted to the light and I saw a young woman sitting on an ornate throne with flaming red hair and deathly pale skin. Her dress was gold in colour and had hand embroidered flowers over the dress. On her thumb she wore a ring that I knew contained a picture of her mother Anne Boleyn.

I sighed I knew my time had come. I slowly stepped forward and bowed. She looked at me with great displeasure and boomed "You are guilty of not conforming to the true faith!" she pointed a jewel encrusted hand at me and said "Will you conform and live a life of poverty or will you resist and be beheaded?" slowly without a tremble I raised my eyes to hers and announce "I would rather die than conform to a false faith!" she looked straight at me the said "So be it."

My heart is beating like a gong and my blood is racing. Why did I not conform I know there is no escape now. My head is pounding and I can see stars. If the food at masters house was bad than this is horrible. I might even die before the hanging, no they wouldn't let me die in a dungeon not when I could send a message out to all priests by dying publicly and in embarrassment.

After I had seen the queen I had been moved from the small room to an even smaller room. It had no windows and no bed except for some straw on the floor that I knew I would have to sleep on like an animal. Such miserable circumstances made me wish for the small hole under the weak floorboards in the attic. Then I snapped out of the foolish dream. The master had betrayed me. I stumbled towards the dirty straw and flopped down onto it. My mind was a ball of wool and I couldn't think straight so I did my best to try and sleep.

I was running on the luscious green field of my father's country house and I felt the tiny flowers brush against the soles of my feet. I looked up at the azure blue sky and breathed in the sweet heady honey smell from the hives on the tall, strong oak trees. I was playing hide and seek with my brothers and sisters "Robert, Robert Cobham where are you?" I giggled I was only 6 years of age and I thought my full name was hilarious. As quick as I could I ran towards the back door and rushed into the kitchen. All the servants were making little sweetmeats and were arranging them on a grandly decorated plate in a huge hurry. I grabbed one and stuffed it into my tiny mouth then ran off savouring the delicious sweetness. Then I ran into my chamber and hid under the bed crawling on the floorboards with sticky hands that picked up the dust that lay undisturbed on the floor. Slowly I heard light slippers padding into the room and I held my breath, it must be my sister Joan. I stifled a giggle as she walked straight past me. Then backtracked her step until she was right next to me then suddenly she poked her head down and shouted "GET UP!"

I woke up with a start to see a guard frowning at me from the door he was obviously the person who said this and he looked ready to say it again but I pushed myself up and hobbled towards him. He stepped back in disgust and told me to follow him. I hoped that maybe the queen had changed her mind but somehow in my heart I knew she hadn't. I said a small prayer then followed him. I knew we were deep underground and I wished that we weren't because I knew dirt would muffle the screams of the people being tortured.

Suddenly I was shoved into another room this one was much lighter but it smelled almost twice as worse than I realised why. It was because there was dried blood on the walls and on the floor I shivered and took a step back but I was shoved forwards again. I gulped as I realised where I was. Stealthily a man crept out of the shadows and said in a musical Italian accent "Where are the other priests?" I groaned they were going to try and torture me into giving them the hideouts of other priests. Well they wouldn't get it because I didn't know! So I stayed quiet. The guard walked up behind me and muttered "Fabricio, stay quiet let me question him." The man *Fabricio* was tall, dressed all in black and seemed to think it best to follow the guard's orders so he shut his mouth with a loud snap.

The guard seemed to get some satisfaction from this so he smirked at me and asked "So once again where are your little friends?" I spat at him and pronounced with a voice clear as day "I don't know." At this the guard signalled for the man Fabricio to come forward and he said "Convince him." At this Fabricio grinned and said "My pleasure." He grabbed me and strapped me down onto the dark wooden table in the middle of the room where he grabbed a dark black bag and stroked the deadly weapons inside but he stepped away from these with a look of regret and ordered the guards to carry me to the rack. I screamed as loud as I could but nothing would stop him. Gradually I disappeared from the waking world and fell into the cloudy realm of unconsciousness as they carried me over. I woke up a few times in the process from pain but I always went back to the land of dreams as nothing could hurt me there.

When I finally woke up I was lying in my cell and covered in blood stains. I didn't even try to get up I knew all attempts would be futile. I was sure I would catch a disease from this filthy place. Suddenly an old voice said "Are you just going to give up?" I turned and looked into the darkness and whispered "I have no other choice." "Everyone has a choice it just depends if it's the right one" the

man (the voice was obviously male) muttered under his breath. I sighed and pushed my hands into the wet, dirty floor and struggled to get up. Slowly after many hopeless attempts I managed to get up on my knees. I looked around but all I could see was darkness. I must have imagined the man's voice. I knew that if I didn't get water or food then I would probably die before my execution.

Yesterday when the guards were talking I heard them talking about a priest who had managed to hide from the queen and was going to be hanged in four days. When I had heard that I hadn't been sad or angry I had just felt remorse that I will never get to see my family again. Driven by something deep inside me I suddenly got up and decided to feel around the walls. As I felt round them I realised that there was a crack in the brick. So I pushed my fingers through it and started to pull. The old stones started to crumble away so I pushed my eye towards the crack and surveyed the scene. It was snowing! I hadn't realised how long it had been since I was living in the priest hole (it had been spring) as the snow fell down I realised that I wouldn't have any time if I wanted to escape then I should do it now because if I waited any longer than I would be caught by the food rounds.

So I frantically started to scratch at the wall and in a matter of time I had made a big enough hole to crawl out through. Glancing through it at the cold white snow I wrapped a big cloak round me that one of the guards had given me and I squeezed through the hole I had made and I ran as fast I could. When I was about halfway to freedom a guard spotted me and started to chase me. I tried to blend in but the dark grey of the cloak would never blend in with the pure white snow. So I ran even faster and grabbed one of the horses that had been left unattended. Now I was faster than the guards because I was on one of their well-trained horses so I could now beat them to the gate.

The cold wind bit at me as I raced for my life but I never stopped. Slowly as hours went by the shouts faded away and I slowed down to a trot. I hadn't decided where to go yet now that I was a fugitive but suddenly when my horse bent down to drink from a cool moving spring I knew where to go. My old friend who was also a priest (sadly he was caught by the guards) used to live at Harvington hall in a small outhouse. I would go there and disguise myself as a servant.

3 hours later

As I approached the red brick house I grinned. Queen Elizabeth would never find me here. Slowly I brought the horse to a halt and brought it to the small but clean stable. As I fed the tired and hungry horse I stepped outside and laughed. I breathed in the fresh, earthy smell of nature and smiled. My shoes crushed the snow underfoot and then I realised it.

I was finally free.