



QUEENIE'S JUBILEE

by Laura Noakes



June 20th 1887, Buckingham Palace

The day of the banquet dawned bright, sunlight filtering through the ancient windows that Queenie was scrubbing. Everything had to be perfect, Cook insisted, what with it being Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee. Queenie and Dottie had been given a list as long as their arms to complete, but Dottie had disappeared ages ago and still not returned.

Queenie huffed out a breath. She felt as wrung out as the ratty grey rag she was using to clean. *Typical*, she thought fiercely, *Dottie leaving me to do all the hard work*. She was probably off gossiping with the footmen about all the Very Important People due at the palace that very evening. Annoyance curled in the pit of Queenie's stomach.

There was a groan as Dottie limped into the room, each step causing her to wince with pain.

'I'm so sorry!' Dottie said, as she picked up a feather duster and began tackling a cobweb that arched across a rather dour portrait of a pinch-nosed Marchioness. 'I had one of my funny turns and had to sit for a few minutes.'

Queenie huffed and rolled her eyes. Annoyance flickered into anger, and Queenie bit her lip to stop herself from saying something mean and hurtful.

Dottie had more funny turns than Buckingham Palace had rooms, and Queenie was getting sick of it. Cook had mentioned that Dottie had a disability that made her tire more easily and affected her joints.

'I overheard the chambermaids chatting on my way back,' Dottie continued cheerily, oblivious to the raging fury that tornadoed within Queenie's head. 'And they said that there are to be *fifty* foreign Kings attending tonight.'

The words fell out of Queenie's mouth before she could stop them. 'You good-for-nothing, lazy toerag!' she hissed between gritted teeth. 'I wish I could sit down whenever I wanted.'

Queenie half expected her to burst out into tears, but instead the girl fixed an icy, very un-Dottie like glare at Queenie. 'Really? You would wish to be so tired and in so much pain that you can barely make it through a morning's work, only to be told that you're lazy?'

The anger drained from Queenie like water swirling round a plug hole, her rage extinguished with a hiss. She opened her mouth, but no sound came out. Dottie shared a draughty, creak-filled bedroom with her. Queenie had seen Dottie tossing and turning at night, unable to fall asleep. She'd heard the groans of pain as the girl pulled on her joint supports. She'd even seen Dottie's knee crack out of place once—it was horrible, and the memory made Queenie shiver.

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Queenie could imagine that working six days a week on top of all that would be almost impossible. Shame coursed through her.

'Let me finish dusting,' she said, holding out her hand to support Dottie. 'Why don't you organise the cutlery—take the weight off your ankle.'



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