



*My  
Name Is  
Victoria*

CURATOR FOR ENGLAND'S HISTORIC ROYAL PALACES

LUCY WORSLEY

MY NAME IS  
VICTORIA



Lucy Worsley



CANDLEWICK PRESS

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places,  
and incidents are either products of the author's  
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*To Alexandra, Beatrice, Deirdre, and Joanna,  
my own ladies of Kensington Palace*

All the characters in this story — including Sir John,  
Miss V, Lehzen, and the Princess Victoria — are based on real people.  
If you've read history books about the childhood of Queen Victoria,  
you might think you know what's going to happen.  
But appearances can be deceptive. . . .



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PART ONE

—

AT KENSINGTON PALACE



## → Chapter 1 ←

# Journey to the Palace

Goodbye, Miss V.”

I struggled to reopen the carriage door, for Edward had already clicked it shut before I had had the chance to say farewell properly to my mother. But I was too late. Her stooped back was already disappearing towards the entrance of our house, Arborfield Hall. She had one hand raised to her spine, as usual, as if she found it a great effort to walk.

I gazed after her as she went, giving up my struggle with the handle.

“Have fun!” said Jane, my sister, who did at least manage to reopen the door. She climbed up the step to smack a kiss onto my cheek. “Goodbye, Dash!” she said, kissing him too and almost smothering

him under her ringlets. “Come back soon with lots of stories.” She jumped back down onto the gravel. “Maybe you’ll have exciting adventures that you can write down into a book of your own,” she added as an afterthought.

“Goodbye, Jane,” I said, although I don’t think she heard me. Exciting adventures were the last thing I required. Of course she meant well, but Jane never understood what I might or might not want to do.

I thought she had gone, but here she was bouncing up once more upon the carriage’s step. “Mother *will* miss you, you know, Miss V!” she said. And then, this time, she really did disappear, darting back across the gravel to the house.

I am called “Miss V. Conroy” because Jane, as the elder, is “Miss Conroy.”

I am always “Miss V” so that people will know that I’m not the first Miss Conroy. I was disappointed when my mother told me I would have to carry my “V” with me, like a limp or an affliction of the speech. I thought I should like to slip through life as “Miss Conroy”; it sounds more discreet, less noticeable. People always wonder what the *V* stands for, and they try to find out. . . . I hate that. I hate people knowing about me.

I am good at keeping secrets. I like to be neat and

discreet. I like to sit quiet as a mouse, escaping notice. Escaping criticism. And that's how I felt that morning when my father jumped into the carriage beside me, and with a jerk of the vehicle we moved off to begin the whole day's journey to London.

Of course my family might use my Christian name; that would be perfectly correct. But my father says that even when I was only one week old, my nursemaids reported that I was already a well-behaved young lady, a "miss," not a normal, noisy, messy baby.

As our carriage rolled out between the gateposts, it occurred to me that perhaps at our destination for the first time people would call me "Miss V. Conroy" seriously, and not as a joke. I decided I must prepare myself for the possibility.

I'd been up to London before, of course, with my father, in his blue-painted carriage. But we visited the shops and once the theatre, never staying more than one night. Certainly we had never stayed for several days, as was now the plan. I had packed very carefully, as always, and it had been hard to create space in my trunk for the great number of novels I thought I might need. I was a little anxious that the straps might tug loose and that my trunk and hatbox might fall off the back of our carriage. I kept trying to glimpse them out of the window. Dash was worried too, I could



tell, as he sat between my ankles. I rubbed his ears to reassure him.

“Don’t worry,” my father said. “Edward will keep the luggage quite safe.” My father had always had an uncanny ability to read the minds of other people. “And you will be kept quite safe too, you know,” he added.

I tried to raise a little smile to show that I believed him. I thought, as I often did, of my mother’s injunction that I should smile more.

But to be truthful, I didn’t quite believe in the new Edward. He was a recent replacement for the old Edward, who had been my friend. All our footmen abandoned their own names and became “Edward” when they entered my father’s service at Arborfield Hall, but they never seemed to stay all that long. I was glad when the next-to-last Edward had left, for he had been a lazy tattletale. The new Edward was so new that I couldn’t yet tell if we would be friends. I hoped so.

The thought made me sigh. I wished I had more friends, lots of friends, like my sister, Jane. But in truth there was only Dash. It was kind of my father to allow Dash to come with us when it would have been more convenient to have left him behind.

“Now, then, Miss V,” my father said, resting his hands on the round brass knob that topped the cane

standing between his knees on the carriage floor. He was leaning forward so that his chin almost sat upon his knuckles. As usual, his eyes were twinkling, amused. "I think," he said, "that you and I must have a little confidential conversation before we arrive. I want things to go quite pleasantly, you know."

I lowered my eyes to my own hands on my lap. "Pleasantly" was far more than I hoped for from this visit. I wished merely not to disgrace or draw attention to myself.

"You must be excited to be taken to stay at a palace," he went on. "And it'll be easy. All you have to do is to play with another little girl. All the girls in London would be glad to take your place! Eh, Miss V?"

In truth I found the prospect as much terrifying as thrilling. This wasn't just any little girl! How would we "play" together? Could she even play the piano? Would she expect me to entertain her with witty conversation? That would be awful, for I had none.

I glanced up doubtfully.

My father caught this and gave me one of his sharp little nods of encouragement. "Come on! You can count on me!" he said. "You can always count on a Conroy," he added with a tap of his cane on the floor, "which means I know that I, in turn, can count on *you*."

Of course, he was right. Of course I was a lucky

girl, and I was fortunate to have a father like him to help me. I'd get through it somehow. With Dash's help too. He was a great icebreaker. Again I stroked his silky brown ears.

My father sat back on the padded seat, quite at ease. There was a pink carnation in his waistcoat. He was watching me with his usual quizzical look. My mother, Lady Elizabeth Conroy, didn't notice much because she was always so tired. But my father noticed everything.

"I know that you're a shy miss," he said, cocking his head to the side, "but so is the Other Party."

"You mean —?"

He nodded sharply and flashed his eyes towards the box where Edward sat next to the coachman. Of course. *Not in front of the servants.* I'd been brought up hearing these words every mealtime, every time the conversation got interesting.

"The Other Party . . ." I hesitated. "May I ask, please, Papa, how I should address her when we meet?"

"Certainly!" he said. But then a furrow wrinkled his pink forehead. "I thought your mother would have told you that."

He leaned forward on his cane and beckoned me nearer to him.

"She is, of course, a princess," he said very quietly. "And you must say 'Your Royal Highness.' Never say

‘Princess.’ That’s not correct when you’re talking to her. Always ‘Your Royal Highness.’ And wait until she speaks to you. And you know your curtsy?”

I bent my chin again, right down to my chest. My mother *had* said something vague to me about curtsies earlier this morning, but it had been in her usual dreamy manner. She had not been well recently. In fact, I could not remember her being perfectly well in my whole life.

For a second, I had to blink hard to clear my eyes. This had been one of our mother’s bad mornings, when she had gone straight from her bed to recline on the chaise longue in the window, hardly stopping to dress herself properly on the way. On days like these she seemed reconciled to staying put there in her nightgown until dinnertime.

“Of course you know your curtsy, don’t you, Miss V?” she’d murmured, not turning her head, as I’d crept across the carpet towards her to remind her of our departure. Well, I thought I knew my curtsy, but I wasn’t entirely sure. And I hadn’t dared to ask her for clarification.

Now I reminded myself fiercely that it had been a great step for her to have come down from her bedroom to see us off at all.

“I . . . think I know how to curtsy, Papa.”

It was the wrong thing to say. His eyebrows shot forward and his hands tightened on that brass knob as if he wanted to hurt it. “My God!” he said. “My dearly beloved family has cotton wool for brains. Sometimes I think the good Lord has sent them specifically to try my patience.” He fell to looking crossly out of the window, and silence reigned.

I waited, mute, a careful hand on Dash’s head to warn him that now was no time to wriggle or bark.

Eventually my father’s eyes wandered back inside the carriage, and I tensed myself to take the pressure of his gaze. Surely he would not be cross today, with all the excitement and strangeness of departure. I was sitting demurely on the seat, knees squeezed together, my hair smoothly looped up at each side of my head — not falling forward in torrents of ringlets like the fashionable girls — waiting anxiously for the storm to pass.

I was right. He was smiling again.

“Well, Miss V,” he said. My father’s temper tantrums never lasted long. “You certainly have more common sense than the rest of them.” By this he meant not only my mother and Jane but also my three boisterous brothers.

“You at least are quiet and obedient,” he said. “And I know,” he added a little more kindly, “that you’ll miss

that wretched little hound of yours. What's his name, again? Is it Splash?"

"Dash! It's Dash!"

Upon hearing his name, Dash sat up straight and raised his tiny chin as if to look my father in the eye. Dash! He was such a good dog, so well trained, so quiet and clean. He really was a comfort to me as we went about our daily business at Arborfield Hall: the shrubbery walk, piano practice, needlework. When I was sitting behind the curtain in the library with a volume of Sir Walter's in my lap, it was Dash who would first hear and warn me of the tread of the housemaid with the coal scuttle, giving me time to hop up neatly and put the forbidden book back. It was Dash who kissed me before I went to sleep at night.

But what did my father mean about my "missing" Dash? Surely he wasn't going to be sent back to Arborfield Hall? Before I could ask, he spoke again.

"Well, young Dash!" My father prodded Dash with his cane. "How are you going to enjoy being a royal dog? That's a distinguished canine band to be joining, and no mistake!"

I was speechless. What could he mean? I felt the shameful crimson rising up my neck, as it so often did.

"Oh, *Lord!*" he said as he saw me blush. "Confound it! Can it be that my dear wife has failed to explain?"

He knocked his cane on the floor in his exasperation. His eyes always seemed to flash theatrically, like those of the enchanter we had seen in last year's pantomime. "Miss V, my apologies, but I thought you knew. The dog is to be your gift to the Other Party, of course."

"But . . ."

My breath failed me. Give away my dog? To this unknown girl? I gripped my hands tighter together. Dash could sense that something was wrong. He knew his own name, the dear, dear hound.

"It's just a senseless brute, Miss V," my father said with vexation. "And it's of the utmost importance that you make a friend of this . . . erm, this child you're going to meet today," he went on.

Despite my efforts, I felt a fat tear welling up in my eye. I tried to pretend it wasn't there. I felt utterly incapable of reaching for my handkerchief.

"Oh, come, come, my dear!" he said, pulling out his own handkerchief and shoving it roughly into my hand.

"Perhaps I have miscalculated," he said quietly, as if to himself, and once again his gaze seemed drawn away from me, out of the window. I felt sore inside. I loved Dash desperately, but then I loved my father even more.

“I thought that you would be a good girl, Miss V,” he said. “Equal to this task. You can do it, eh? You can give up your dog in order to make a fine first impression? The party has asked me specifically for a dog, exactly like this one! Come, come, don’t let me down. Otherwise I’ll have to send you back to the country and find myself a new Miss V from somewhere else.” He gestured vaguely out of the window, as if daughters were to be picked up anywhere. “And I’m sure I won’t like the new one half as much.”

Now his attention was trained back upon me, like a beam of light concentrated by a prism glass. As always, when he *really* looked at me, I felt the warmth of his gaze.

“You’re a brave little miss, aren’t you?” he said cajolingly. “And you know that it’s your duty to win this little girl over, don’t you? To make friends with her?”

Reluctantly, I sniffed and nodded.

“My post depends on you, Miss V!”

My father was the comptroller to the Duchess of Kent, the princess’s mother. He often spoke proudly of his position in a royal household and the advantages and connections it brought to us.

“You know that the Duchess of Kent is our patroness? And that’s why we can live at Arborfield Hall and drive in a carriage, and why in a day or two, when I



have a moment and when one or two bills have been dealt with, I'll be able to buy you another little puppy to replace that one."

The thought of another puppy was horrible.

"But I love Dash," I cried. "And he loves me!"

"You'll have another puppy, my dear, but the first chance to impress the princess will never come again," he said. "I regret it, but it really is for the best that you give her your dog."

At that he folded his arms, throwing himself back on his seat and returning his gaze to the passing fields and damp meadows.

And so, as we sat in miserable silence, all thoughts of home wiped from my mind by this catastrophe, my hand crept down again to rest on Dash's head. I tried not to think of his life with another girl. I tried not to think of the wet, whiskery kisses he gave me, or of his cushion, his bowl, or his little felt toy mouse that I had last night packed lovingly into the corner of my trunk.

How could I endure our stay in this horrible place where Dash, my only friend, was to be taken from me? How could I possibly return to Arborfield Hall without him? And how on earth could I make friends with his thief?

## → Chapter 2 ←

# The Face at the Window

I hardly saw what was passing outside. Dash, now locked securely in my arms, gave out a whimper from time to time. It was almost as if he knew, clever dog that he was, that he was about to be torn away from the mistress who had loved him so well.

When I did look up at last, we were in crowded streets with tall houses, white like wedding cakes, on either side. There were avenues with trees and a bustling high street. Then we were passing a grassy green and drawing up at a gate in iron railings.

The iron of the gates was wrought into the pattern of a golden crown.

We heard the new Edward exchanging a word or two with some guards, and then, after a jolt that made Dash wince, we were creeping forward again into what

seemed like a small town of red brick. Our own home, Arborfield Hall, was not a large house, but it was built in the up-to-date Gothic style with plenty of pretty decoration and beautiful coloured glass. Kensington Palace, on the other hand, seemed to be an enormous, sprawling building, but sadly out of fashion, with its boring rectangular windows and grimy brick walls. It looked rather like my idea of a prison.

At last we creaked to a halt in a cobbled courtyard. The sound of the horses seemed to echo three times around the high walls before it faded away. Edward jumped down with a thud.

“Remember!” my father said, his eyes twinkling at me once again over the top of his cane. “Your Royal Highness’—that’s what you should say! And I know that you have the cleverness to bring this off, Miss V. You won’t fail me. Will you?”

His confidence forced a tiny smile to raise the corners of my mouth.

Now Edward opened the door and reached a hand to steady me as I stepped out. I lost my footing for a second on the cobbles, and Dash squirmed free of my arms to make a circuit of the courtyard with his light bound. My eyes followed him around the enclosing walls of dull dark red.

There were lampposts in the courtyard, just like a street, and the front doors of many different households. I knew that other members of the royal family lived here too, although the princess's household was the most important. An old lady in a mobcap was sweeping the dirt from the step before one blue door and sending it flying down onto the cobbles below. But otherwise the courtyard was deserted and silent. The biggest door of all was marked by a portico and lay straight ahead.

I checked that all the little buttons were straight on my navy blue travelling cape and settled my bonnet forward so that my vision was restricted to a narrow tunnel ahead of me. This, my mother had told me, was the correct way for a young lady to pass through life, gaze lowered, shielding herself from the hungry eyes of other people.

My father was evidently pleased. He took the crook of my elbow. "Cool as a cucumber again, eh, Miss V?" he said softly. "That's my girl. We can carry it off. Always trust John Conroy for that."

And so, because of my bonnet, I could see only a thin vertical slice of building as he guided me towards the door, and perhaps that's why I looked up. A movement had caught my eye. One of the upper rectangular

windows, towards the top of my field of vision, had bars across it like a cage.

With a tremor, I saw that the courtyard was not as deadly quiet as it had at first seemed. At that shrouded, barred window, a little white face was hovering. And it was watching me. I felt the two eyes boring into me with what felt like such malevolence that I gasped and glanced down instinctively to make sure that Dash was safe at my feet.

But when I looked up again, the face had gone. Was it a girl's face or a ghost's?

Perhaps I'd only imagined it after all.

## → Chapter 3 ←

# A German Welcome

**W**e stepped in through the heavy front door beneath the portico, where another lady, not young, but matronly and plump, stood waiting for us. She was wearing a dark gown and now came forward with her arms outstretched. In one hand was a lace handkerchief that she waved about to give further force to her words. It was as if her hands talked as well as her mouth.

“Sir John!” she cried out before releasing a great torrent of speech. “We are so glad to see you again! This household of women needs a man, you know. You were cruel to leave us for so long! *So long* it has been!”

She had a strange, guttural way of speaking. I wondered if she was German, for I knew that the princess’s

mother and many of her attendants were from the princely states across the North Sea.

“But, dear lady, my dear Madame de Späth!” my father exclaimed. His voice was muffled. He was bowing over to kiss her hand, gallantly, fulsomely, while she whinnied and giggled at the attention. “I have my own ladies, you know, at Arborfield Hall, whom I must go home and see sometimes. I cannot always be here. And this is one of them. May I present my younger daughter, Miss V. Conroy?”

“Ah . . . yes . . . this is the young lady of whom you spoke?” The lady seemed a little doubtful; her hands wavered in midair. I tried to take up as little space as possible on the marble floor, as if to slink back into the shadows of the vast and echoing entrance hall.

“Yes, indeed!” said my father with confidence. “I have brought her to Kensington Palace for a visit, just as I promised. I believe that she will be a great comfort to Their Royal Highnesses.” At this, I drew myself up a little straighter. I did not imagine that I would be much of a comfort to anyone, but if my father thought I could do it, I would try.

All of a sudden, Madame de Späth smiled, and her handkerchief fell still at last. When she stopped fussing and fluttering, she looked like a grinning wooden

doll with rosy apple cheeks, and I felt a bit more comfortable.

“Well, my dear,” she said, “even if you have no other good qualities, you have bravery to come among us in this strange life we have here. Come and meet your new playmate.”

I could not help smiling back as I bobbed down into a curtsy. It seemed safest. At first I had thought this lady a servant, but she seemed rather a grand one, as if a colleague or an equal of my father.

But then, despite her friendly smile, Madame de Späth’s eyes moved quickly onwards, away from me. That often happened. I am not . . . impressive. I am always the least in any gathering, the last to be noticed, first to be dismissed. But that’s just the way I like it. My sister, my father, even Dash: they all love attention, and as far as I’m concerned, they’re welcome to it.

“And this must be the new . . . *Schatz* for the princess,” she said, bending to give him a fluttery pat on the head. All at once my mouth turned dry once more. I knelt to clip Dash’s lead to his collar.

“Yes.” I spoke so quietly that I’m sure she could barely hear me. “This is Dash. He’s a very good dog.”

“He’s also a very pretty dog, isn’t he?” said the German lady, looking at him closely. “Does he bite?”



“Never!” This time my voice came out as a loud squawk, so incensed was I.

She laughed. “Just as pretty as the little lady who has brought him!”

She boldly put out her hand, and I had no choice but to place Dash’s lead into it. I would rather have put my hand into the fire and watch it be licked with flames, but I felt the weight of my father’s own hand on my shoulder. It lay there heavily.

And then my darling traitorously frisked around the old lady’s skirt as she turned to lead us up an enormous staircase. I lowered my eyes to the steps, quite unequal to the task of watching him skip away from me so blithely.

*Concentrate, I told myself sternly, upon just what your eyes can see. This is no time to cry. You can count on a Conroy.*

And so, blinking hard, I gradually came to notice that the broad stone steps were not quite clean and that cobwebs were draped over the oil lamps, which should really have been lit on such a dim and gloomy afternoon.

“Have care!” the dumpy little figure said from the shadows ahead of us. “The marble is slippery, and Lord knows we cannot get the maids to sweep the steps.”

“Madame de Späth,” said my father, “let us not have that conversation again now.”

“*Ach so.* But later, Sir John, later. I have had so many bills come in while you have been away, and no means to pay them, as you know. You are the controller of this household, or at least so you always tell us, so the care of this should fall upon *you*.”

She chattered on plaintively in the same vein. The weary arch of my father’s neck suggested that he’d heard such complaints many times before. In fact, he stealthily turned back towards me and stuck out his tongue so suddenly and so foolishly that, despite the traces of tears in my eyes, I almost laughed out loud.

As we continued to climb, I thought that as well as being not quite clean, the great building seemed unnaturally still. Apart from Madame de Späth’s wheezy breath, I could hear Dash’s claws tapping and my father’s confident, prancing tread. But there were no other sounds, and we saw no one. A smaller, winding staircase followed the big one, and then we were in a carpeted passage. It was a little like the maids’ passage at home, with pretty but stained wallpaper and a dirty carpet.

Madame de Späth at last halted in the corridor outside a dingy door and gave it a smart rap.

Again I settled my bonnet forward on my head

and straightened my shoulders beneath the dark blue wool. This was it. We had arrived.

But nothing seemed to stir inside the room.

We waited, my breath coming faster and faster, even though we were doing nothing but standing there silently.

Madame de Späth put her ear to a panel of the door and then nodded. Despite the lack of an answer, it seemed that we were free to enter, and she slowly started to turn the knob.

Little did I know it, but that pause in the dirty passage was the last moment of my old life. I was nervous as I stood on that threshold, but I had no idea of the surprises that would lie ahead.