

A Lady Grace Factsheet

All extracts from: ***The Lady Grace Mysteries: Assassin***

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Clothing

You: If it's a weekday, you probably wear a school uniform for most of the day then change into more casual clothes when you get home; maybe jeans and a top. For going out with mates you'll have even more choices: skirts, tops, jackets, trousers, smart and casual clothes – but whatever you wear, you probably have more than one pair of jeans and definitely more than one top to your name ... and it doesn't take two people to help you dress!

Apparel (clothing) in Elizabethan times was incredibly expensive. Even ordinary clothes were costly because a great deal of labour was involved in making them (spinning, dyeing, weaving, hand-sewing, etc.). Court clothes were very richly decorated and made from the finest fabrics - often costing as much as an expensive sports car would today. Poor people would probably have an old second-hand outfit; ordinary people would have just one second hand suit and rich people might have two or three outfits. Ridiculously wealthy people would have ten or twenty outfits and would show off by making them extravagantly elaborate.

Remember the story of Sir Walter Raleigh laying his cloak over a puddle for Queen Elizabeth to step over? That was rather like driving a brand-new Ferrari into a tree, in order to impress Madonna!

Lady Grace: 'When my friend Ellie the laundrymaid gets dressed she laces her bodice over her smock, puts on a petticoat and her kirtle, slips her cap, shoes and wooden pattens on, and there she is.

Well, getting me ready for a feast takes an awful lot longer than that. Mrs Champernowne brushed my hair, and her own tiring woman brought my new partlet, all covered with embroidered flowers. The linen is transparently fine; I was scared I'd tear it when I put my neck through the neck hole. And I hate the feeling of having the tabs tied under my armpits. It tickles! The Queen has given me a new pair of white silk stockings with rose-wool garters and new rose-embroidered dancing slippers. The staymaker had brought my new stays. They're cut French-style and they're so tight around the waist I can hardly breathe. Even my bumroll is new, though my petticoat and farthingale are altered ones of my mother's. The top petticoat is of white damask, embroidered with roses.

My gown is just amazing! It is very heavy, because it's mostly made of rose velvet and all in a piece – so I had to sort of dive in and slide. I popped out with my hair everywhere and my arms waving. It took ages for Mrs Champernowne and Fran to do all the lacing and tying together. The silver aiglets on the ends of the laces were decorated with roses so I knew they were my mother's. Suddenly my chest felt full of sadness that she wasn't there to help me dress for my first proper grown-up feast.

'Oh, sweetheart, said Mrs Champernowne. She gave my shoulders a squeeze, then dabbed my eyes and nose for me. 'If you make your nose all red, we will have to paint it with white, look you.'

Glossary:

Kirtle – the skirt section of an Elizabethan dress

Pattens – wooden clogs worn to keep fine shoes out of the mud

Tiring women – a woman who helped a lady to dress

Partlet – a very fine embroidered false top, which covered just the shoulders and upper chest

Stays - the boned, laced bodice worn around the body under the clothes. Victorians called it a corset

Bumroll – a sausage-shaped piece of padding worn round the hips to make them look bigger (think of it as the Tudor version of a Wonderbra!)

Farthingale – a bell or barrel-shaped petticoat held out with hoops of whalebone

Aiglets – the metal tip of a lace which you thread through a hole

Other items...

Bras – not invented until 1914!

Knickers – didn't exist as we knew them! In fact, if a lady wanted to go to the loo, she would do so under cover of her skirt!

For men, pantaloons worn as underwear came "in" about mid 1860s.

Make-up

You: Well, you may not wear it yourself, but lip gloss, eyeliner, glitter, body tattoos and eye shimmer are just a few of the things you could use! And what about nail varnish, hair spray, gel, wax and all the rest?

In Tudor times, ladies were wearing make-up, but it was a lot more grisly than the options we have today - and sometimes deadly!

Lady Grace: '... Masou came and sat on the bed. He had a little tiny pot made of alabaster. 'See, this is kohl,' he said, opening it. 'If you put a little, just a very little, around your eyes, they will look beautiful and sparkling.'

'I don't like wearing face paint,' I said and pushed the pot away.

He laughed at me. 'Not white lead and cinnabar, no, but this will be as if your eyes had grown that way.'

Glossary:

Kohl – black eye make-up

White lead – lead carbonate, used for white paint and make-up

Cinnabar – a red compound of mercury and sulphur, used for red colouring for lips, cheeks, painting, etc.

The ideal image of Elizabethan beauty was bright eyes, snow-white skin, red cheeks and blonde or red-gold fair hair – possibly not a coincidence that Queen Elizabeth possessed almost all of these traits!

Kohl was made of powdered antimony, another metal which could be fatal when consumed in large quantities and belladonna – taken from deadly

nightshade (there's a clue in the name!) and a deadly nerve toxin - would also be dripped into the eyes to make them brighter, often causing blindness

Mercury poisoning can cause brain damage, and it is especially toxic in the unborn foetus of pregnant women – it would have been especially toxic and/or easy to ingest (eat) when painted directly onto the lips as cinnabar was!

Pale skin was a required quality for a courtly beauty. From as long ago as Roman times, wealthy women had used white lead to lighten their complexions - a suntan would have meant you did manual work, whereas only the wealthy could stay inside and avoid a suntan. A mixture of white lead and vinegar was favoured, also known as *ceruse*. The white lead made hair fall out; the use of ceruse may also explain the fashion for high foreheads, as hairlines receded. Ceruse was very toxic and although it was known that its use withered the skin, caused sores and damaged internal organs it was still used extensively – other (safer?!) options included a paste of alum and tin ash, chalk, talc and boiled eggs!