

Vivat Regina

She woke early on that November morning. It was a day that she would remember for the rest of her life. A shaft of sunlight lay across the pillow as her waking fingers found the fine Flemish lace that ran along its edges. Pulling back the thick curtains that surrounded her bed, she reached for her robe and set off through the silent house. She tiptoed along the corridors, down the wide staircase and across the hall towards the back entrance.

As she stepped outside she caught her breath at the chill in the air and crossed quickly to the stable block, where two grooms were already at work. They stood back as she entered, pulling off their hats and bowing their heads. "Good morning Henry, good morning Thomas", she said, "how is my beautiful Snowdrop this morning?"

"Good morning, your Grace" they answered almost in unison. "She is a fine beast, my lady" said Henry, "Thomas was just brushing her down."

She walked over to one of the stalls, where a white horse stood, pawing the ground. The horse tried to look for a treat from her hand, but she just stroked the soft muzzle and looked into the large brown eyes.

"I may need her later, Henry. Make sure she is ready. I will send word."

"Yes, my lady" said the boy.

She crept back upstairs and, not wanting to wake her maid, pulled on an old gown and some boots, fastening them as best she could without Anna's help.

Taking her warmest cloak from the closet as she left the room, she set off for the park. She loved the wide open space around the great house with its ancient trees. Walking through it, whatever the weather, gave her the illusion of freedom, at least for a while. One of the gardeners had turned a fallen tree trunk into a seat, so she sat for a while, lost in her thoughts. She knew that her sister was ill and not likely to live for long. Master Cecil had given her this news and they had talked about what it would mean for her, once the inevitable happened. He was a source of great comfort and wisdom and she planned to keep him at her side as her chief minister.

After a while, she became aware of a group of horsemen coming towards her, harnesses jingling, hooves thudding across the grass.

Stopping a little way off, they dismounted and she recognised Sir Nicholas Throckmorton who handed her a ring and kneeling before her said "Your Majesty". At this, the others knelt too. She gestured to them to rise and they all threw their hats into the air, crying as one "Vivat Regina! Long live Queen Elizabeth"

She smiled and simply said, "Gentlemen, there is much work to be done."

Author's note: Dr. David Starkey says in his book "Elizabeth" that one possibility is that Elizabeth, fearful of being tricked by rumours of Queen Mary's death, had sent Sir Nicholas to London. As soon as the Queen had died he was to return to Hatfield House with the betrothal ring that King Philip of Spain had given to her. Dr Starkey also points out however, that this is speculation and the timing of known events makes it somewhat unlikely.