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Semper Eadem: Always the Same

The greatest monarch of English history was no man, nor was she a king, but she had the heart and the stomach of one and ruled as such she did. Queen Elizabeth I ruled fair and strong; even before her coronation Queen Elizabeth I exhibited attributes of a strong leader. She was resilient, wise politically and socially, and above all, she was brave, all attributes that her predecessors lacked some if not all of. Ethelred the Unready was easily bullied by the Vikings into paying ransoms to protect himself from relentless raids. Edward II was forced into submission by his wife and her lover. Even Mary I, Elizabeth I's half-sister, ruled with relentless violence and religious tyranny, giving her the nickname "Bloody Mary" Elizabeth I took over the throne and ruled the kingdom afterward, thus beginning (as most historians call it) England's golden age.

Queen Elizabeth I's nature as queen can be accredited to the nature of her upbringing. She learned resilience at a young age; the consistent questioning of her legitimacy caused her to be juggled around the line of succession; the loss of her mother, having been raised by a handful of motherly figures, then having to endure accusations of treason and being vindicated by her sister for her religious beliefs. Queen Elizabeth I continuously had to fight and endure for some type of normalcy in her life even before she wore the crown; before she even drew breath, her trials and tribulations had begun. Just being the child of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn, there were speculations about her legitimacy and questions about her claim as heir and right to the throne.

On top of that, there was added pressure from her father to be born a male, as his main priority was to produce a male heir to succeed him on the throne. Thus, being born a girl and, in the eyes of the Roman Catholics, being born a bastard did nothing to help ease Elizabeth's life. Susan Doran writes about the peculiar situation of Elizabeth's birth and legitimacy in her book *Queen Elizabeth I*: "The timing of the child's birth as well as its sex, was unfortunate since it laid Elizabeth open to charges of illegitimacy...As far as Roman Catholics were concerned, Elizabeth was unquestionably a bastard... In their eyes, Henry's second marriage to Anne was a complete sham because the king was then still married to his first wife, Katherine of Aragon."¹ The King's only defense was the biblical scriptures found in Leviticus 18:16² and 20:21³, eventually having his marriage annulled in England instead of Rome, taking the first steps towards breaking England away from papal supremacy. For the first three years of Elizabeth's life, her legitimacy was questioned, even after her father had confirmed her position as an heiress in 1534, putting her claim to the throne over that of her first daughter Mary who he had with his first wife Katherine of Aragon.

Elizabeth's first claim to the throne was short-lived when in 1556, her mother, Anne Boleyn, was found guilty of adultery, and by the orders of her father, King Henry VIII, she was beheaded in the Tower of London. Subsequently, the union between Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn was annulled, rendering Elizabeth's claim to the throne invalid. In just one day, Elizabeth lost her mother, her title, and her legitimacy; she was then discarded and forced outside her father's court. Doran continues in her book to explain the extent of Elizabeth's predicament saying, "...she lost the title of princess and precedence...for a brief period, she was even without

¹ *Queen Elizabeth I* Susan Doran pg 8

² The nakedness of thy brother's wife shalt thou not uncover: it is thy brother's nakedness.

³ If a man takes his brother's wife, it is severe defilement and he has disgraced his brothers; they shall be childless.

well-fitting clothes to wear as the king and council no longer paid close attention...⁴ Elizabeth was ostracized and sent to live with her governess Lady Margaret Bryan who was entrusted to take care of Elizabeth, becoming the first mother figure she had in her life. Lady Bryan would soon be replaced after the birth of Elizabeth's half-brother Edward VI. It is said that Lady Bryan begged for supplies to care for Elizabeth sufficiently. Estelle Paranque, the author of *Blood, Fire & Gold: The Story of Elizabeth I & Catherine De Medici*, writes on Lady Bryan's letter, "Clueless about what to do, Lady Bryan wrote to Thomas Cromwell. 'As my Lady Elizabeth is put from the degree she was in, and what degree she is at now, I know not but by hearsay, I know not how to order her or myself, or her women or grooms.' She begged him 'to be good lord to her and hers, and that she may have raiment⁵...'"⁶ Lady Bryan continues her letter to Cromwell asking for specific supplies to care for Elizabeth effectively.

Then, in 1537 Elizabeth's half-brother, son of Henry VIII, and his third wife Jane Seymour, Prince Edward VI, was born. Thus, Prince Edward VI was declared heir to the throne. After the marriage between her father, and Jane Seymour, she found comfort in her as a motherly figure. So, when Jane Seymour died after the birth of Edward VI due to puerperal sepsis⁷ Elizabeth felt the grief of her loss. Not long after Elizabeth's half-brother's birth, Lady Bryan was sent to care for the new prince. Elizabeth was then put under the care of Katherine Champernowne, who spent years with her. Yet, it would not be until King Henry VIII married his sixth and final wife, Katherine Parr, that Elizabeth would finally find comfort in another motherly figure. Paranque wrote of Elizabeth's fondness of Katherine; Katherine loved all of her stepchildren but especially grew fond of Elizabeth as well; their connection became apparent in a

⁴ *Queen Elizabeth I* Susan Doran pg 13

⁵ Raiment: Clothing or garments

⁶ *Blood, Fire & Gold: The Story of Elizabeth I & Catherine De Medici*, Estelle Paranque pg 24

⁷ the infection of the genital tract occurring at labor or within 42 days of the postpartum period.

letter Elizabeth wrote to Katherine when being quarantined away from her due to the black plague, which was rampant in England during this time, “Elizabeth missed her, [she] wrote to Katherine a month later, after she had been forced to stay at St. James’s Palace because of fears of the plague...”⁸ To enforce such a separation weighed heavily on Elizabeth after some time she was able to return to court. Elizabeth and her sister’s right to the succession was reinstated in Katherine Parr's reign as queen. Elizabeth observed her stepmother's rule closely as Paraque writes, “...admired the calm and measured manner in which Katherine used her new authority.”⁹ There was no question about the close relationship that Katherine and Elizabeth had, so when the king, Henry VIII, died in 1547, it was not surprising that Katherine took Elizabeth into her household. Though this would seem like some peace for Elizabeth, under Katherine’s household, she only found more obstacles.

After the death of her husband, Katherine Parr married Thomas Seymour, the younger uncle to Edward VI, who had assumed the throne after his father’s death in 1547. Elizabeth and Seymour became closely acquainted, living in the same household and sparking rumors throughout the court. Katherine and Thomas Seymour had their first child a year later, in 1548. Unfortunately, Katherine met a similar fate as Jane Seymour before her, dying of puerperal fever¹⁰ a few days later. Thomas took advantage of Katherine’s death to make further advances at Elizabeth in hopes of furthering political ambitions and assuming control over the throne. He was caught, arrested, and executed by the Lord Protector; following this scandal, the court looked to Elizabeth, placing her under close examination and interrogating as part of the treason attempt. Elizabeth showed great maturity and was eventually exonerated; because of the scandal,

⁸ *Blood, Fire & Gold: The Story of Elizabeth I & Catherine De Medici*, Estelle Paraque pg 27

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¹⁰ Puerperal fever refers to postpartum pyrexia which is any temperature rise above 38 °C maintained over 24 h or recurring between the end of the first to the end of the 10th day after childbirth

Elizabeth learned the importance of defending her sexual reputation, which remained apparent throughout her time as queen. This would not be the first time she would be accused of treason.

In 1553, Edward VI died of consumption¹¹, and Elizabeth was removed from the line of succession with her sister Mary again. Edward VI had named Lady Jane Grey (a cousin in the Tudor family), removing his sisters from the line of succession. However, following Lady Grey's coronation as queen, Mary quickly challenged her cousin's ascension to the throne. Lady Grey had been queen for only nine days when Mary replaced her on the throne through popular support. Mary was crowned Queen Mary I that same year; following her coronation, she began to reverse the protestant settlements that her brother and father had placed before her, reinforcing Catholicism in England. Under Mary's reign, Elizabeth found herself under constant pressure from her sister and her court to convert to Catholicism, urging her to go to ceremonies and masses. Elizabeth continued to decline in most cases with the excuse of poor health. On top of that, she was continuously berated for not accepting marriage proposals and swarmed with potential suitors from all over Europe.

Furthermore, despite her best efforts to remove herself from her sister's court, already anticipating the clash they would have in religious stances, she kept being called to court to either convert to catholicism or fight accusations of treason. The first instance she was called to court for accusations of treason was for the Thomas Wyatt Rebellion of 1554; the rebellion included four primary leaders who were supposed to drum up enough support to march against London. However, the only group that showed was Thomas Wyatt, with a group of three thousand men. Easily being thwarted by Queen Mary, Thomas Wyatt was captured and imprisoned. There were suspicions that Elizabeth was part of the plot, so Mary decided to call her back to court to be interrogated and eventually sent to the Tower. When Mary could not find

¹¹ Tuberculosis

strong evidence to pin against Elizabeth to find her guilty of any involvement in the rebellion. Mary sent Elizabeth to be placed under house arrest in Woodstock, where she spent a year. Despite her predicament, during her travel to Woodstock, she was showered with gifts and praise in the surrounding towns there. She realized the popularity she held with the people of England. Elizabeth's popularity would remain strong among the people and later help her maintain the throne after her coronation. After spending almost a year under house arrest, she would only be called back to court by King Phillip, the husband to Queen Mary I. During this time, it had become evident to King Phillip that Queen Mary's health was rapidly declining, and out of fear of succession, Phillip had called Elizabeth back to court. Even then, Mary tried to get her sister to submit and confess; Doran writes about the interaction between the sisters mentioning, "The year in prison had not broken her spirit, and she refused to admit to any offense, despite Mary's chilly reception and demand that she submit."¹² Mary would live only a few more years after that as her health continued to plummet. Within those years, Elizabeth continued to show immense displays of resilience, enduring another conspiracy (Dudley conspiracy of 1556) in which she was also accused of taking part and the continuous pressure from Phillip to find a Catholic suitor to continue England's relations with Spain. In addition to all this, Mary continuously insisted on Elizabeth's illegitimacy in an attempt to keep her from the line of succession. Despite all these obstacles, and all these attempts to keep Elizabeth from the throne she was still made Queen. In November 1558, following her sister's death, Elizabeth was crowned Queen Elizabeth I.

At the time of Queen Elizabeth, I's coronation, England was at a peculiar point in history. They had just endured the reigns of Henry VIII, which saw the separation of England from papal supremacy. The reign of Mary I, though shorter than her father's, was tyrannical and violent, trying to reverse all the protestant implementations of her father. So, having Queen Elizabeth on

¹² Queen Elizabeth I Susan Doran pg 46

the throne was a breath of relief for the English kingdom; this can be accredited to the political intellect in which she ruled and the overall wisdom she displayed. Unlike her predecessors, such as King John, who reigned from 1199–1216. In his time, King John had made various foolish decisions that placed him in many predicaments during his reign. Whether it was his choice in marriage, losing territory to rival countries, or sparking rebellions within his own barons, or even the forced signing of the Magna Carta. Simon Jenkins wrote on King John in his book *The Short History of England*, stating, “John, by his incompetence, cohered baronial power as a force in the land and bequeathed England the blessing of Magna Carta.”¹³ Simon later wrote on King John’s death, describing it as “...exhausted, sick and friendless...” King John’s reign was so unpopular that Simon mentioned the likelihood of his death being a consequence of being poisoned by his subjects, comparing his reign to that of Richard III. However, Queen Elizabeth I was the opposite of such kings. During her reign, she displayed much more intellectual superiority than that of her predecessors like King John; in a political sense and overall social circles, she could conduct herself in such a way that she could balance both.

When Queen Elizabeth I was crowned queen, she wasted no time assembling her council; she chose each member for their expertise and experience. Sir William Cecil, Sir Francis Walsingham, and Sir Robert Cecil. Queen Elizabeth chose William Cecil immediately, wisely choosing him for his extensive political experience. Being from a family of high class, Cecil was able to attend college, thus, being able to marry into politics. Susan Doran writes in another book called *Elizabeth I & Her Circle* about each one of the members of her council. Doran wrote of Cecil, saying, “Cecil was appointed as first the factotum¹⁴ and then the private secretary of Lord Protector Somerset...”¹⁵ She later discusses his resourcefulness in surviving his time in the tower

¹³ *The Short History of England* Simon Jenkins pg 68

¹⁴ an employee who does all kinds of work

¹⁵ *Elizabeth I & Her Circle* Susan Doran pg 219

when he was under suspicion of being part of the Wyatt Rebellion accrediting his “exceptional political acumen and administrative abilities” Cecil later served under John Dudley, was made a counselor and junior secretary later being knighted. During his time, Cecil had effectively served under both Edward VI and Mary I. He became acquainted with Elizabeth, who would keep him in mind for when she became queen, placing him first on her council. Doran references Cecil as “Elizabeth’s key man on the privy council,” mentioning his occupational title earlier in the chapter as Elizabeth’s “Principal Secretary.”

Unlike Cecil, Sir Francis Walsingham was not chosen for an extensive resume or for any political experience he had. Though historians have found overwhelming evidence of Sir Walsingham’s extreme unpopularity among the English people, they can understand why Queen Elizabeth chose him to be a member of her council. Sir Walsingham is sometimes called a “Protestant Mary” because he was an aggressive prosecutor of the Catholics. Though his methods of protestant reformation were mostly questionable, Queen Elizabeth needed a strong hand to reform the English kingdom back to Protestantism. In other words, she had to reverse everything that her sister, Queen Mary I, implemented while maintaining a fair and just reputation to not fall under the same path as her sister. With Sir Walsingham in her council Queen Elizabeth was able to implement force in the reversal of her sister’s Catholic implementation without getting her own hands dirty at risk of losing the people’s support and tarnishing her reputation, thus putting her power at risk. Walsingham was just the man for the position; he was strongly motivated and completely dedicated to Protestantism. Doran describes Walsingham in her book, stating, “Walsingham was indubitably a persecutor of Catholics...He can also justifiably be identified as one of the godly protestants...Under Elizabeth, he was regarded as ‘a patron of godliness and a maintainer of true religion...’¹⁶ Despite his (as some

¹⁶ *Elizabeth I & Her Circle* Susan Doran pg 247

historians regard it) “protestant extremism”, Elizabeth was wise to put him on her council because, without his help, she would not have been able to maintain the balance between Catholic and Protestant influence within her subjects. \

The last member of Queen Elizabeth’s council was placed later in her reign. Sir Robert Cecil was physically impaired and younger than Queen Elizabeth’s first two council members. He would often be judged or even made fun of for his appearance. Doran describes Sir Robert Cecil as “... sickly from birth and very short of stature, with a curved spine that was almost certainly the result of hereditary scoliosis. His unprepossessing appearance made him the butt of jokes...”¹⁷ Unlike the previous two council members Queen Elizabeth did not choose Sir Robert for his experience or religious devotion but for his rationale and intelligence. Doran describes him later in the chapter as having a “strong intellect and serious frame of mind,” which would later lead him to political opportunities gaining political power over time, eventually leading him to have a place on Queen Elizabeth’s court. From the moment he became acquainted with Queen Elizabeth, she could be perceptive and take note of his intellectual abilities. Eventually, making the wise decision to have him added to her council. Each of her councilmen contributed in their ways and in their own aspects to overall contribute to a better reign for Queen Elizabeth.

Queen Elizabeth could maneuver through her social circles with a sense of decorum and self-control. Attributes that were not present in her male predecessors, such as her father, King Henry VIII, who famously had six wives. She was able to acknowledge the importance of her sexual reputation, so she chose to stay a virgin. Though she had multiple suitors, personal interests, and even her own parliament urging and pushing her to choose a husband, she realized the risk involved if she were to get married. So, instead of giving power to a husband, putting her

¹⁷ *Elizabeth I & Her Circle* Susan Doran pg 276

life at risk to produce an heir, or identifying a successor at risk of starting a rebellion (if the kingdom was unhappy with her decision as successor); she prioritized the interests of her kingdom above her own. In the countless suitors and potential matches continuously imposed on her, the most famous of her love interests was Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester. Dudley was a perfect example of Queen Elizabeth prioritizing the kingdom over her personal interests. It was common knowledge to her subjects of the relationship and favor that she carried with Robert Dudley, and though her reputation had become scrutinized and placed under a microscope by those of her court and neighboring kingdoms, she never faltered and never gave privy to the exact nature of her relationship with Dudley or any of her personal relationships. Her ability to separate the different aspects of her life, maintaining organization and order, helped her rule efficiently and effectively.

Along with her resilience and wisdom, Queen Elizabeth I ruled with courage and bravery. Unlike her predecessors, such as King Ethelred the Unready, who ruled from 978 to 1013, a king who was bullied into paying Vikings (The Danes) a ransom called “danegeld,” which was a payment for the cessation of constant raidings. In retaliation to having to pay the ransoms, King Ethelred made the poor decision of massacring the Danes within his kingdom and then fleeing when the Danish king invaded England in response. Another example is King Edward II, who ruled from 1307-1327, a weak and feeble king too infatuated with members of his council (such as Piers Gaveston). A king who was effortlessly defeated in battle (even with odds in his favor) by the Scots but also by his wife Isabella of France, who usurped the throne from him with her lover Mortimier. Queen Elizabeth’s courage and bravery were indeed far superior to that of such kings. To sit upon the throne and rule as a woman took courage in itself. In a society that deemed women inferior to men, she was faced with anxiety and unease from her subjects and faced

different obstacles than that of her male predecessors. She had to find a balance between her societal expectations as a woman and her position of power; a tip to either side of this balance could cost her respect and popularity or power within her rule. In her book, *The Heart and Stomach of a King: Elizabeth I and the Politics of Sex and Power*, Carole Levin explains, "...the way a society views a woman in a position of power not only impinges on her use of that power but may reflect wider societal expectations about women's roles. Elizabeth I was very skillful in how she represented herself... She was able to capitalize on the expectations of her behavior as a woman and use them to her advantage..."¹⁸ Levin goes on to explain that Elizabeth's success came from the ability to stay fluid and place herself "beyond traditional gender expectations" though her title was Queen Elizabeth I, she ruled as a king should.

Her bravery was not limited to breaking through society's gender barriers but also her relentlessness and unwavering personality when it came to her enemies or opposers. For example, with her cousin, Mary Queen of Scots, who continuously made plans to usurp Queen Elizabeth. In 1586, it was discovered that Mary was the center of a major plot to overthrow Elizabeth. Though Mary was considered close to Elizabeth, she was forced to make a decision; with the undeniable evidence, Elizabeth was shaken but unwavering when she had her cousin tried and put to death for crimes of treason. Mary was executed in 1587. Her most famous instance of bravery, however, was the stand at Tilbury of 1588, where Queen Elizabeth stood against the Spanish Armada, which was sent to sail against England for the execution of Mary Queen of Scots. Mary and Phillip II (king of Spain) were allies; so when the news of Mary's execution reached Phillip he retaliated. When the armada was sighted off the coast, Elizabeth had summoned her navy and her men to fight against the Spanish. Here is where Queen Elizabeth I gave her famous speech to her men, saying, "And therefore I am come amongst you at this time,

¹⁸ *The Heart and Stomach of a King: Elizabeth I and the Politics of Sex and Power* Carole Levin pg 1

not as for my recreation or sport, but being resolved, in the midst and heat of the battle, to live or die amongst you all; to lay down, for my God, and for my kingdom, and for my people, my honor and my blood, even the dust. I know I have but the body of a weak and feeble woman; but I have the heart of a king, and of a king of England, too.” The closing sentence would echo throughout history, defining the entirety of Queen Elizabeth I’s reign. She was victorious against the invading Spanish through the maneuvering of her navy and the advantage of bad weather. Her reign continued until 1603, when she died, Jenkins describes the end of her reign, stating, “She had established the supremacy of the crown in her father’s image and bonded the English nation under it. She had brought her nation glory and peace. Elizabeth was surely the greatest of English rulers.”¹⁹

“Semper Eadem, Always the same” was Queen Elizabeth’s famous motto. A phrase that was a perfect representation of the stability and strength of her reign. Her predecessors had been temperamental, unreliable, and unpredictable. Queen Elizabeth I brought tranquility and stability; Semper Eadem reminded her that her reign would be different. Even though her reign was filled with trials, tribulations, scandals, accusations, treason, and wars, she conquered them with her resilience, wisdom, and overall bravery. These attributes were evident throughout her reign. The way she ruled showed the quality of her kingdom. She was dedicated to her subjects, and her subjects were loyal to her for that reason. It is obvious why she died beloved, her name being remembered and honored throughout English history.

¹⁹*The Short History of England* Simon Jenkins pg 164

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