



Opening Extract from

**Elizabeth I:
The People's Queen**

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My name is Lady Margaret Bryan. It may be familiar to you? I am the widow of Sir Thomas Bryan, and I held the important position of Lady Mistress to the late King Henry's three children. That is to say that I had the great responsibility of looking after Lady Mary, Lady Elizabeth and, finally, Prince Edward from their births until they were old enough to have tutors or governesses.

I am writing this in the Year of Our Lord 1547. Two or three years ago I was asked to set down my memories of the royal children, as they could be useful for historians one day. I have devoted a lot of time to this, with several rough drafts, but I have finally finished a fair copy in my best hand-writing.--

I decided to write a separate memoir for each child: each memoir would be complete in itself, although it would entail some necessary repetition. I naturally started with Prince Edward as the only boy. Of course, he has recently become King Edward at the tender age of nine! I pray for God's blessing upon him for a long and peaceful reign, as he follows in great King Henry's footsteps. May he have many fine sons of his own in God's good time.

My second memoir concerned Lady Mary, daughter of Queen Catherine – that is the *Spanish* Queen Catherine. She is now thirty-one years old, so my memory had to reach back a long way to her nursery days.

And, finally, I'm embarking on the story of Lady Elizabeth, now thirteen and the least important in the line of succession. As this is my third memoir, I think I can say that (in spite of my sex) I have become a competent historian.

Firstly, I must tell you a little about myself and –

particularly important in Elizabeth's case – the background. I came to Court as Margaret Bouchier at the age of twenty in 1490, when I married Sir Thomas. The Bryan family were long-standing courtiers. I am proud to say that Sir Thomas was a Knight of the Body to both King Henry VIII and his father, Henry VII. Courtiers have many privileges, but they must know the rules. We saw others rise and fall but (with one exception) we held our places there, through troubling times too, I may tell you. Sir Thomas and I were blessed with three surviving children, and they all became prominent at Court. My son, Francis, was appointed a gentleman-in-attendance to King Henry VIII, and kept His Majesty's favour throughout his service. My two daughters made excellent marriages: one to Lord Henry Guildford, the Comptroller of the Queen's Household; and the other to Sir Nicholas Carew, the King's Master of Horse, who both became Knights of the Garter – a rare honour. Sadly, my daughter, Lady Margaret Guildford, died young in childbirth.

I first became Lady Mistress to the baby Princess Mary when she was born in 1516. My husband, Sir Thomas, had recently died. His last position at Court was Vice-Chamberlain to Queen Catherine, and Her Majesty in her kind way appointed me as Lady Mistress to comfort me in my bereavement. I remember Queen Catherine questioning me, and setting out her wishes for the proper care and upbringing of the royal children. Poor Queen Catherine! She had six babies – including several boys. Some of them were stillborn, some lived a few weeks, but only Princess Mary survived. Such hopes (such important hopes) and such disappointments! So many children have to meet death young. It's always been so, hasn't it? God and his Blessed Mother have a special place for them in Heaven. Queen Catherine told me that, and she was very religious.

Well, the Succession was the problem. There were no

suitable male heirs then, you see. King Henry had no living brothers, and his only nephew was the King of Scotland, which was not friendly towards England. As time went on, we were all worried, not just the King. The Tudors were fairly new to the throne, and my mother and her generation well remembered the terrible civil wars before that. They are known as the Wars of the Roses because of the emblems of the rival armies: my own father died in one of the battles when I was only a baby. Civil wars are the ruin of prosperity. And, of course, successful Courtiers need continuity not change. Since King Henry's father, by the grace of God, became King, peace and security had brought prosperity back to England. But if the King had no heir, the future looked dangerously uncertain again. By 1528 the King was thirty-seven and Queen Catherine was forty-two, well into middle age. It was then that, as I see it now, God Himself began to ordain changes. Heaven knows we went through nine years of turbulence and tension! But in the end God granted our prayers.

What happened first was that Anne Boleyn, Sir Thomas Boleyn's daughter, won the King's heart. She was a witty, bold and outspoken lady. At that time, God was revealing to the King that his marriage to Queen Catherine had been forbidden by The Bible because she had first been the wife of his late brother, Arthur. So after long debate, and even separation from the Church of Rome, the King overcame all hindrances, divorced his wife and married Anne Boleyn in 1533. Queen Catherine was banished to Amptill Castle in Bedfordshire, and my dear Princess Mary was declared illegitimate. I wanted to write and comfort her, but the King would not have approved. In fact I know many people were sorry for good Queen Catherine. But by the divorce she was forty-six, and the King forty-one. He was a strong man then. There was still time for a prince to grow up, but only just.

So, in spite of deep sympathy for the old Queen, many of

us at Court felt relieved that a new, younger Queen had arrived. In any case, it must have been God's will.

It's fourteen years ago now, I suppose, but I clearly remember being led into Queen Anne's apartments in Richmond Palace on a summer's day in 1533. She had been crowned in Westminster Abbey a few weeks before, and was expecting her first child in September. She was laughing at cards with two ladies and her brother, Lord Rochford, when I was announced. I remember her then, sitting straight-backed with her dark hair over her shoulders, and her green satin dress gleaming in the sun.

"Who?" she asked loudly to the top of my head as I curtsayed low.

"Lady Bryan, Your Majesty," prompted my lady-in-waiting. "You wanted to see her about the nursery."

"Oh yes," said the Queen. "I did. I do. But not this minute. Have her wait in the antechamber until I'm ready."

I backed out of the door and waited with several others for the Queen to give me a little of her time. I had often met King Henry, of course, when I was Lady Mistress to Princess Mary, and I knew he approved of me. But Queen Anne had a mind of her own and wanted to assess me for herself. And, in those crucial few months, she had great influence: if she had taken against me then, the King would not have overruled her.

After some time I was called back into the Queen's presence, and she then gave me her full attention. I always felt at ease with Queen Catherine, but, with Queen Anne I was unusually nervous, under her direct gaze and quick tongue. (In fact, I came from a higher lineage than her. The Boleyns had not been nobility for long, although I grant that Lady Boleyn was a daughter of the Duke of Norfolk.)

That afternoon I answered Queen Anne's many questions about me and my experience, and it must have satisfied her, for she finally said, "It is an enormous honour for you, Lady

Bryan, to be entrusted with the care of the heir to the throne.”

“I will spare no effort, Your Majesty,” I replied.

She was silent a moment, and then burst out laughing. “He’s kicking me now! The kicks are so strong. It can only be a Prince, can’t it? All the doctors say so. What do you say, Lady Bryan, with your experience?”

“In my experience, the mother usually knows best, Madam.”

“Yes,” she said, laughing again. “I’m usually right – I’m usually right.”

I was busy after that, hiring nursemaids, finding a wet-nurse, and seeing to the cleaning of the nursery at Greenwich Palace. The nursery rooms hadn’t been used for a long time and needed some new furniture and hangings. And I remember asking for three cats to get rid of the mice! And then there were the baby clothes and caps to be assembled. Lady Boleyn, the Queen’s mother, helped me supervise all these preparations. She was very close to her daughter and, before the King and Queen had married, Lady Boleyn had her own rooms near her daughter in Whitehall Palace. She wanted to ensure that everything possible was done for the baby’s health – and for the Queen’s. My own daughter often came to call as well. She was quite amused to find me taking charge again of a nursery in my sixties!

I’ve mentioned the Succession anxieties, so you can imagine the nervous anticipation surrounding this royal birth. Prayers were said in the churches; the summer weeks passed; and on 7th September 1533 Queen Anne gave birth.

But of course the baby turned out to be a princess, not the longed-for prince. The news flew round the country: “Another girl!” said some. “She’ll have to do better than that!” said others. What a terrible disappointment that day was! It must have been a body blow to King Henry. All the divisive upheavals of church and state he had braved to give

England an heir! It was bitter news indeed to have another daughter. I don't know who dared break the news to him but I do know it wasn't the doctors or astrologers: they had all foretold a son.

I kept to the nursery rooms and chivied the nursemaids about their duties, which had suddenly begun. I know the Queen and her family were deeply downcast after their hopes and prayers for a son hadn't been answered. The Boleyns had risen fast, and were resented by some. My daughter came up to see me and whispered that there was a sombre atmosphere in the Palace and people just didn't know what to say to the King.

He was silent – shocked they said – and brooding. Tournaments and bonfires had been planned for the expected Prince of Wales, but they were now cancelled.

So that was Elizabeth's reception into this world! The Princess was at least given a grand christening when she was three days old, and Archbishop Cranmer was her godfather.

The Queen had had a long and arduous labour, but she got up from her bed after only two weeks. I think she wanted to show herself fit and powerful again. She was always brave: she must have resolved quickly not to give her detractors time to run her down. She knew a queen needed sons. She must face childbirth again to give our noble King a boy.

However, this unwanted Princess was a strong baby with a loud voice, and she sucked well from the wet-nurse, Marjorie Johnson. So, thanks be to God, she grew well, and the nursery at least became a happy place.

Now, when I first met Queen Anne, she hadn't struck me as a motherly lady. Nor did she need to be, because it wasn't a queen's job. But to my surprise she adored her daughter. When she visited the nursery, she would hold her close and sing lullabies. She was thrilled when the baby began to smile, and called everyone over to see. "Look!" she cried with delight.

“She knows her mother. Don’t you, my sweet? Such a happy Princess!”

We were also honoured by three visits from the King himself those first three months. The Lord-in-Waiting would tell us that the King intended to come to the nursery, and we should dress the Princess in her finest robes. Then we would wait (sometimes for hours) for His Majesty to be announced. He was proud of his healthy baby, in spite of her sex, and would lift her from the cradle and search her face for a likeness.

“Yes, you’re a fine Tudor,” he would say. “My colouring! And my mother’s eyes. Well, Lady Bryan, this augurs well for the future. You’re off to Hatfield soon and we must see that you’re kept busy for several years. There won’t be much time for that tapestry of yours now!”

I curtsied low and said, “May God be with you, Your Majesty.”

“God and the Queen, Lady Bryan,” he replied. “God and the Queen!”

His grin had the courtiers laughing, and we all relaxed. We knew what a setback the Princess had been for him. But by then he had learned to display it as a passing delay, soon to be remedied.

He was right about one thing: my entire royal nursery establishment was going to Hatfield House. We left Greenwich in early December when the Princess was about three months and judged strong enough to make the journey. Perhaps you don’t know that royal children don’t live at the big palaces in London? They may visit Whitehall or Greenwich or Hampton Court at Christmas and other special occasions, but for most of the time they live in smaller royal manors two or three days from London. The air is healthier in the country, and there’s far less risk of the plague or the wasting sickness.

What’s more, the royal nursery moves between the manors every few months so that the rooms can be thoroughly aired

and cleaned and food supplies re-stocked. So we lived in a sequence of houses such as Hatfield, Hunsdon, Ashridge, Eltham and Hertford. Some were more to my liking than others: Hunsdon was particularly old and dark, and Hertford Castle had no chimneys and was very smokey. I sometimes longed for my own hall in Chelsea by the Thames.

I was very well looked after in the royal manors, but they weren't my home. And so many moves – although I had very little say in any of them.

Princess Elizabeth's household was put in charge of the Queen's aunt and her husband, Sir John and Lady Shelton. I, of course, was in direct charge of the baby herself and the nursery servants. But the Sheltons supervised the whole household and its expenses. There was always a company of guardsmen to protect us, as well as many indoor and outdoor servants, just as any other important house would have.

The Sheltons were courtiers and the only members of the household with the same status as me, so I sat with them at the high table in the hall at dinner. I tried to make it my business to get on with them, and anyway our respective provinces were usually clear cut and in accord. I can only remember one occasion when I quarrelled outright with Sir John but I'll come to that later.

So, as I was saying, the infant Princess Elizabeth and her household, which numbered about forty people, set off that December from Greenwich to Hatfield. Queen Anne saw us off, and shed tears at the parting. She had instructed me to write to her every week about the Princess's progress. She arranged for the Princess to travel right through the City of London for her first public appearance. The Queen's uncle, the Duke of Norfolk, led the procession, and escorted us all the way to Hatfield in two days.

When we arrived, the Duke announced to me and the Sheltons that the King had instructed him to bring Lady Mary

to join her new half-sister's household. He set off the next morning for Essex with some guardsmen and returned three days later with a reluctant and miserable Mary. Of course I had looked after her for many years when she was little, always, always hoping that brothers would follow. Now she was seventeen and long out of my care. The King's Grace had recently declared her to be illegitimate, and had refused to allow her and her mother to meet. I went out of my way at Hatfield to show her kindness and affection but she felt bitter and refused to call the baby 'Princess'. She unwisely claimed that she was the only true Princess of the Realm and angered the Duke of Norfolk terribly by telling him she had no message of submission to relay to the King. She also showed displeasure at being in the care of the Sheltons because Lady Shelton was Queen Anne's aunt.

I know that time was a hard trial for Mary. But at seventeen she was a grown woman and should have behaved more prudently. The first rule is to obey the ruler. She wept and prayed a lot in those first weeks at Hatfield. But I should tell you that like her mother (and me too) she was very good at sewing and she eventually began to come to my chamber or the nursery to sit with me while we worked on new bedspreads. This kept her busy and gave her some enjoyment and she gradually became calmer. We chatted about the happy days of her childhood, and I even made her smile sometimes, but naturally I could not be drawn into any criticism of His Majesty or Queen Anne. She gradually realised that my lips were sealed on that matter and she soon stopped pouring out her grievances.

By now you will have realised that I did not have an easy task trying to run Princess Elizabeth's household. It wasn't only Lady Mary's sudden and unwilling arrival that taxed my fortitude. It was also about having all the new nursery servants to train. At Greenwich Palace I'd had some help from Lady

Boleyn and my daughter, and the new servants were excited to be at Court with the King and Queen and other great people in fine clothes. Hearing all the below-stairs gossip too, no doubt, and making friends with the other servants at Court.

But when we were moved to Hatfield House, there were some long faces. Usually behind my back, mind you. "So quiet!" "Nothing happening." "Missing my friends." Then they would get used to country life, and begin to make friends among the local servants. Soon afterwards we'd decamp to Ashridge or Hunsdon, so it was a disruptive period in their lives. But if I heard any grumbles, I would remind them to count their blessings. After all, they were well housed and fed, and, God willing, were likely to have work in the nursery for years to come. They were also gaining useful experience in the best nursery with its trained nursemaids, laundresses and grooms of the chamber, who would never want for work. I had the power of dismissal, of course, but very rarely had to use it. We became a happy company that banded together for about ten years, as it turned out. I'd like to think they have fond memories of me, as I do of them.

As for me, I couldn't have undertaken the position if I had still been married. What husband would follow his wife in and out of the royal manors? But I was a free agent and well suited for my important role. Widows (the wealthy ones, at least) enjoy a freedom and authority unique among women.

Even though we were living in the country, we did receive visitors sometimes. The King himself came for a day in January while on a hunting trip. I remember being surprised that the Queen wasn't with him, as she was an excellent horsewoman.

"I hope Her Majesty is well, sir?" I said.

"Couldn't be better, Lady Bryan," he replied with a smile, "But she shouldn't be out on these rough roads in winter."

He admired Elizabeth and exclaimed how much she had grown. But he wouldn't see her sister, which deeply

disappointed poor Mary as she was hoping for a sign of reconciliation.

The Queen regularly sent beautiful new clothes and caps for her daughter. And I sent my weekly bulletin about the baby's health and suckling. Then at the end of March we left Hatfield and moved to Eltham Palace. The King had spent much of his own childhood there, and it was conveniently close to Greenwich. So for the next few months we had plenty of company.

The Queen was thrilled to see her daughter again, now seven months old and very responsive to any attention. She cuddled her a lot, and sometimes brought musicians along to play for the baby. I remember she said, "We must see to it that she is musical like her father. In a few years I'll find a lute teacher for her and the King will be delighted!"

The Queen's parents were frequent visitors too, as was her brother, Lord Rochford. The Queen's sister, Mary, and her two children, Catherine and Henry Carey, aged ten and eight also came. Catherine Carey was a delightful, warm-hearted little girl, and Henry was energetic and lively. Throughout my time with Elizabeth her Carey cousins were regular visitors, and Elizabeth was always thrilled to see them. She grew to admire Catherine greatly and look up to her, as younger children tend to do. They were very affectionate with each other, and Elizabeth tried to copy all that Catherine did. Elizabeth, being of such high rank, hardly ever had other children to play with so she particularly enjoyed it when she did meet children. Personally, I think it is good even for royal children, especially young princesses, to learn to take turns and share their toys. After all, princesses have to obey their husbands when they get married, which is not easy for them if they've always had their own way. But forgive me; I'm getting ahead of myself. We must get back to Eltham Palace in the happy Spring of 1534 when Elizabeth was just a baby.

The news then was the best news of all: the Queen was pregnant again! What a relief for us all, and, of course, hope of a boy! Our hopes were dashed later that Summer when I heard from my Court connections that the baby was born too early and stillborn. By then we had removed to Hertford Castle, so our household was fortunately distanced from this second great disappointment. Many people thought it was a sign of God's displeasure at the King's second marriage. The King himself was certainly displeased. My daughter told me that his love for Queen Anne had already cooled and that he was not spending much time with her. From then on there was tension in the atmosphere at Court and the Queen became increasingly anxious as her influence began to ebb away. As she began to lose the King's love, she also lost the attention paid to her by all the courtiers and ambassadors. It's their job to know which way the wind is blowing. They take their cue from the King.

Meanwhile, as the months passed, Princess Elizabeth's household moved on from manor to manor. At its centre the baby grew, crawled, walked and talked. She was a very advanced child, especially when it came to talking. When she was two I sent a formal request to Mr. Secretary Cromwell for the King's permission to wean her. The King assented so it was time for our wet-nurse, dear Marjorie Johnson, a warm-hearted woman, to leave the household. She was the person Elizabeth had often turned to for comfort when she was upset and of course Marjorie was very fond of the child. But she had her own family to get back to now. Elizabeth missed Marjorie a lot and kept looking and calling for her: "Nurse, Nurse! Where are you?"

I tried to calm her down, "Now then, Madam Princess, you're a big girl now. You don't need a nurse anymore, dear. Marjorie has gone back to her own home."

"I want to go to her own home," she sobbed.

“That’s not possible, sweetheart. You’re a royal princess. You’ve got much better homes than Nursesey.”

“But I want Nursesey.”

There was no satisfying her, of course. It’s often a wrench for a child when the wet-nurse leaves. I told the nurse-maids, “Least said, soonest mended.” We tried not to mention Marjorie again and I was proved right: the child soon forgot her.

In preparation for Christmas 1535 at Court, I ordered portraits of the King and Queen to hang low on the wall in the nursery. I pointed them out to their daughter every morning, and we made a practice of curtsying to the images and saying “God save you, Your Majesty” to each before breakfast. The other nursery staff joined in and it soon became a ritual for us all.

That Christmas at Greenwich the King and Queen made much of Elizabeth and were delighted at her prattle. Once, she was even dressed in cloth of gold and paraded in front of the whole Court. By now the Queen was thin and looked tense and apprehensive. I heard that she had miscarried again that summer. But her daughter’s company delighted her and she spent a lot of time in the nursery. It was during that stay at Court that we heard that the Princess Dowager Catherine (who had been Queen) had died. I was truly sorry for the sad end of her life but knew her soul would be well received in Heaven – as I told Lady Mary later when we returned from Court to Hunsdon. The King and Queen rejoiced at the news. They gave a party where the King, in good humour, carried Elizabeth around while the Queen led the clapping. She hardly knew her father and I was fearful she might cry and reach out for me, but she was a brave child and my training bore fruit in the spirited way that she smiled and waved round the hall. The King was well pleased, and he singled me out and graciously nodded as I curtsyed.

Soon afterwards we moved back to Hunsdon. I remember Elizabeth repeatedly asking to see the Queen. I'm sure she had known she was loved. I kept up my weekly reports to the Queen and she kept sending clothes and little presents. Now that she was old enough to remember, I tried to keep the Princess in mind of her parents. I wished later that I hadn't made such a point of it, but I kept reminding her of the Court and what great people her parents were. I told her that all her clothes and presents came from the Queen and, of course, we still curtsayed to their Majesties' portraits every day.

We went back to Greenwich for Easter. It was early that year being at the end of March. It was not a happy visit. My daughter told me that the Queen had had a miscarriage in January. We all knew (herself above all) about the cloud that was darkening over her. In the past people used to cluster around her, laughing at her jokes, trying to curry favour. Now they didn't bother. And she made no jokes. She still came to the nursery with her ladies (queens are always accompanied). The ladies praised and petted the bright little girl but Queen Anne's nursery was too empty. Where was our prince? The King was now forty-five and the Succession was not secured.

I've never enjoyed Court less than that time. There was a lot of gossip relayed to me by the nursemaids about Queen Anne having let down the King and the country and in so doing had lost his love. And there were rumours about Lady Jane Seymour receiving the King's attention quite openly. There was even speculation about another divorce and the Queen being banished from Court like her predecessor! I told the nursemaids in no uncertain terms that for their own good they should mind their own business and not deal in rumours. I know that the King never visited the nursery that time.

I saw the King only once that Easter. It was one morning when I was with the Queen and two ladies. We were taking Elizabeth for a walk through the main courtyard, when the

Queen suddenly scooped up her daughter and held her towards an upper window. I followed her gaze and saw His Majesty there, looking (I have to say) full of resentment. I sank into a curtsy, but when I dared raise my eyes again, he had gone. The Queen turned away hugging Elizabeth close to her. No-one said a word.

In the nursery we hardly had any visitors except the Queen's family. Archbishop Cranmer did come once but her other godfather, the Duke of Norfolk, never came, even though he was the Queen's uncle. I noticed that Lady Boleyn was always worried. I remember she asked me a strange question one day, and it has stuck in my mind.

"Lady Bryan," she said. "This is between you and me. Has anyone been asking you questions about the Queen and her friends?"

"Who do you have in mind, my lady?"

"I don't know. Anyone at all. Maybe a courtier, maybe one of your own household. Just think a moment."

"No, my lady. I don't suppose anyone would ask me. They'd ask the Queen herself, wouldn't they? People speak to me about the Princess all the time of course, but that's because I'm the best person to ask."

The other thing that stuck in my mind happened near the end of our visit, when the ladies-in-waiting were diverted by Elizabeth's prattle. Queen Anne leaned over to me and said in a low voice: "I'm thankful that Elizabeth is in such good hands as yours, Lady Bryan. Remember, please, that I hope you'll stay with her for many years."

The Queen, of course, never said 'please' to me, and I think that's why I've remembered her words so clearly. Also Matthew Parker, Queen Anne's chaplain, visited us. When I expressed surprise, he told me that Queen Anne had recently begged him to look after Elizabeth's welfare in future. He said no more and neither did I, but I think we understood each other.

You'll understand my relief at leaving the ominous atmosphere of Court and returning to Hunsdon. But the peace of that place could not shut out the turmoil that soon followed. Looking back now, the first shot across our bows was near the end of April. A rider arrived from London with an urgent letter for Lady Shelton. She was summoned to London by Mr. Secretary Cromwell 'to undertake a special commission for the King'. We were dining in the hall when the message came. Lady Shelton was taken aback and went quite pale. She and Sir John tried to find out more, but the messenger apparently knew no details. I helped her that evening with her packing.

"What can it be, Lady Bryan? What can be the matter?" she kept repeating.

She had to set forth the next morning escorted by some of our guardsmen.

A few days later the shocking news reached us that the Queen had been arrested and was a prisoner in the Tower! Lady Shelton in fact had been summoned with two other ladies in preparation to be in attendance on the Queen. The next news, only a week later, was that the Queen had been tried and found guilty of plotting to kill the King's Grace and of adultery with no less than four men, including her own brother! She was sentenced to death. Two days later she was beheaded on Tower Green. It all happened so fast – only seventeen days between arrest and death. I found my heart beating too quickly. I wished I could talk with my son and daughter to find out what was happening at Court. In fact I was very frightened for the safety of my son and son-in-law, because, like them, two of the executed men (Sir Henry Norris and William Brereton) were Gentlemen of the King's privy chamber. The servants kept whispering in corners as we waited for any news. I tried to concentrate on keeping the days normal for Elizabeth, and to stop mentioning her parents.

No. I didn't tell the child. How could I? She was only two

years and eight months old. I couldn't face all the questions that she would have asked. I was in a state of shock myself, and, try as I would, my mind kept being drawn back to Queen Anne in the Tower. It was not for me to judge her crimes but I did know she had loved Elizabeth very much, and she always responded immediately to my letters and requests.

Lady Mary was with us, of course. She was still mourning her own mother, and spent more time than ever in prayer. She was not openly triumphant at Queen Anne's death, but it seemed to confirm her deep faith in the old religion. She would quote the Bible: 'Vengeance is mine,' saith the Lord, 'I will repay.' We heard that King Henry had issued a proclamation that Elizabeth was now illegitimate and no longer royal: in fact she was to have the same status as her sister. Mary, by then nineteen, who had never been unkind to her small sister, now became almost motherly towards her. She visited the nursery much more often, and sometimes even invited Elizabeth to her own chamber. It was a comfort to me at that dreadful time to see my two motherless charges becoming closer.

The very day after Queen Anne was executed, King Henry announced his betrothal to Lady Jane Seymour. And the following week they were married. As I say, "It all happened so fast."

Back at Hunsdon, Lady Shelton returned very silent. After a few days she asked me to come to her chamber. As I entered, she sent her maid out. She told me she wanted to unburden herself of the terrible scenes she had witnessed.

"I know you will listen kindly, Lady Bryan," she said. "Sir John says these are ladies' matters, and he doesn't want my confidences."

She then told me how she had been escorted to see Master Cromwell, with two other ladies, Lady James Boleyn (her sister-in-law) and Mrs Cosyn.

"He informed us that the Queen was about to be arrested

for adultery and conspiring to kill His Grace, the King," she continued. "She was to be imprisoned in the Tower to await trial. We three had been chosen to attend her there, 'For no longer than two or three weeks', Cromwell had added meaningfully. You can hardly imagine the shock we felt. After a moment, Master Cromwell went on with an intent gaze. 'I must impress on you that it is your duty to the King to listen carefully to everything Queen Anne says, and report back to the Constable of the Tower, Sir William Kingston, anything that supports the terrible charges against this shameless lady. Rewards will be given for useful evidence'."

"He then rang the bell on his table and his steward and two guards came and escorted us to a chamber (with a barred door!) where we spent a wakeful night. The next morning, Lady Bryan, we were rowed to the Tower. There we were met by Lady Kingston, Sir William's wife, who was to join us in attending the Queen. I remember she was calmer than the rest of us. She at least was familiar with the Tower and its functions. Then we waited in suspense."

"At about two o'clock the Queen arrived with Sir William and a body of Yeomen. She, poor soul, was looking around her in fear and disbelief. 'But will I have justice?' she cried to Sir William. 'Even the poorest subject of the King has justice,' he replied. The Queen then began laughing distractedly. We four ladies curtsied to her, and she then noticed us with dismay: 'I want my own ladies with me, those I'm fondest of,' she cried. Sir William said, 'These are good and honest ladies.' She knew us all but we were of an older generation and had not been close to her. She then said, 'It is unkind of the King not to send my own ladies.'"

"I can't tell you everything, Lady Bryan. We had a dreadful seventeen days. The Queen often wept when thinking about her mother, my sister-in-law Elizabeth. 'Oh my poor mother!' she would sob. 'You will die of grief!'