

Queen of Sorrows by Eleanor White

August 1537

I stare into the mirror. A pale faced girl stares back at me. Although her eyes are the deepest blue and her hair golden, she is not pretty. Underneath the thick white make up that covers her face, you can see a large nose and podgy cheeks. So why me? Why not my pretty sister? Why me?

A long, richly embroidered, red-gold gown falls from my shoulders to the ground. However exceptional I might think myself at sewing, this is far higher standards. I am dressed like the queen I am, third wife of King Henry VIII, who, people say is the golden prince of England. It sounds grand, but considering what he did to his latest wife Ann Boleyn, I'm not so sure. Despite my worries, Henry has yet to be angry with me. But we have been married for barely a year.

A solitary servant appears, head bowed.

"Yes?" I say, trying to act superior. I lift my chin up and stare down distastefully at the maid, though all I want to do is run away and hide.

"You're Grace," she whispers. "It's time."

Briskly, I follow her to a darkened room where I must stay for six weeks. Soon my baby will be born. I hope to God that it is a boy. It is the only thing that his previous wives have failed my husband.

Inside the chamber sits a huge four-poster bed. The windows are draped with thick tapestries to shut out the light, which are colourful and bright to give me hope. But truth is that I am afraid. Childbirth is traumatic time for any woman, let alone a Queen with the burden of carrying a son safely into the world. If I cannot do this, I only have one more chance. Oh God – what if it is a boy and it dies? What if I die? If the baby is male and it lives, they will not bother to try and save me. Please – I am afraid.

I lie down on the soft pillows and mattress. I cannot tell what time it is, as the sun is hidden from me. In a sudden moment, I am hungry for light, for freedom. I remember the days I was a young girl and I ran barefoot in the field when my mother was away and could not scold me. I remember the time I was not so timid and wary, and I would play with my brothers. I have grown into an obedient slave, and only my status and clothing suggest otherwise.

One of my maids comes to tell me it is sundown. She moves to undress me but I squeak and shoo her away. I am going to take extra precautions about this. Slowly, I rise from the bed and cross to pull on my shift. It takes me a while for I am so careful. As soon as I am dressed, I sink back into the four- poster. My eyes flutter close. I am asleep

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When I awaken, someone is standing over me. They're telling me that I must have a bath, that I must be clean. Rapidly, I shake my head. I cannot disturb the baby. What if I find that I have killed it just by having a bath? I cannot risk it; I would never forgive myself. Nor would Henry, for that matter

I let them dress me, for they do it better than I. They wrap me in beautiful, heavy gown that trails along the floor. I ask them to be careful and, mostly, they are gentle. However, if they handle me too hard, I scold them and quiver in fright. Is it alright? Is he alright, for it has to be a boy. It has to be.

One of the maids comes to speak quietly to me as I read my bible, relaxing onto the pillows. I should be praying, but I will not leave this bed. Not until I have safely delivered this baby.

“Your Grace.” Her voice quivers as she speaks. There is fear in her eyes which dart nervously towards the exit where the other ladies in waiting are ushering her forward. “Your Grace, I must tell you that...” She bites her lip. “I must recommend leaving your bed. Your health...”

“What does it matter about my health?” I am rising from the bed before I can restrain myself. “I am trying to deliver this child securely to the King. I do not care about my health.” This is not true. I would rather live my own life than sacrifice it for a child that I would never know. I am a coward. I do not care.

It does not seem that last year Anne Boleyn was Queen, and I was pushed in front of her to take the throne by my family. I didn’t want to be a monarch, nor did I love the King, but I was afraid to argue. My character has no strong will; it is a meek, shy rabbit that inhabits the wood and runs at the sight of hunters. Who am I? Of that I have no idea.

I remember the visit the King made to our house when he was beginning to lose his patience with Anne Boleyn. He was enchanted with me, and my parents didn’t seem to care that I was afraid of him. Soon after, Anne was sent to the scaffold and we were married no less than twenty four hours later. No matter how much I tell myself that it was not my fault, I still feel guilty. What must her younger sister, Mary Boleyn, think of me? An avenging monster? I hate to think of that. It is not who I wanted to be.

Eight months ago I became pregnant with his child. When he is born, he will be taken to live with a nurse maid at another palace and I will not see him often. He will not remember me when I visit him and one day-

NO! I cannot be so hopeful; it may be a girl. But then again, they will still not let me care for her, whatever gender. The room is suddenly dark-night has come.

October 1537

Pain. Sharp pain. A cry tears from my lips. The midwives rush to my side.

“Don’t worry, I am fine,” I gasp. I know that the next stab will not come for a while. After five weeks, the baby is coming. I am ready. I hope.

A while after, the next stab comes. This time I am braced, and I only grit my teeth when it washes over me. The stabs get closer together. Half an hour. Twenty minutes. Ten . Five.

I scream as a tearing sweep burns through my body. From what I can tell, I have been in labour for at least twelve hours.

“When will this end” I shriek. The midwives examine me and shake their heads at each other. The baby is too high, they tell me. I barely hear; I am in so much pain.

“Dear God, save me from this torture. I will do anything, anything...” I mutter through my pain, fists clenched. A day passes, filled with agony. The midwives tell me that it is almost done, almost finished, but I don’t believe them. Later, through my blackened vision, I hear one of the nurse maids, Mary, the younger sister of the court gossip, Elizabeth, saying loudly that physicians don’t think I will survive the birth. Just before I scream out again, in both pain and fear, I see Elizabeth and Catherine, the gentle girl who cares tenderly for me, hushing her hurriedly and glancing over at me to see if I have heard. I don’t think they can tell, because I am surrounded by midwives and my face is scrunched up with pain that I cannot conceal.

The waves keep coming. It is consistent now and my uterus muscle is strained. I hate this baby, I hate my husband, I hate everything! When Catherine comes to place a cool cloth on my forehead, I hit and bat her away. She will have bruises now, but I don’t care. She doesn’t know how I feel, but she still looks at me with pity. This makes me angrier, for I don’t want pity. For a moment, as I enter dimly into sanity, I think that I am throwing a tantrum like I did when I was a girl and for a moment I hope that I am becoming who I once was. Then I sink back into the madness that the birth brings.

The next day passes in a similar manner, and the pain continues all the way through the long night. I am drained of sleep and I am thirsty, but I cannot drink. What have I done to offend God so that he brings this upon me? Then, suddenly, the pain is gone, something like a barrier breaks, and, in a rush, the baby is kicking and wailing on the bed. The midwives lift it up and carry it away. Catherine comes to bring me the news that has been nagging on my mind ever since the beginning of the birth.

“It is a boy!” she cries, and I hug her and kiss her until we are both exhausted.

“I have done it!” I cry. A niggling thought enters my mind, one that destroys my joy. What if I die now?

“How long was it?” I ask her, dreading the answer.

“Two days and three nights,” she whispers. Then, “Did you hear?”

Weakly, I nod my head. Sinking back onto the pillows, the last thing I see before I fall asleep is her face, eyes full of tears that run down her pale, tired features.

A few days later

I travel, although weak, to the christening in the cathedral. It is a torture for me; I cannot focus at all. My mind wanders uncontrollably across many fragments of memories.

“Come, my love,” Henry says, taking hold of my arm. He leads me into the cathedral, where the London citizens stand and bow to me. I smile weakly at them, as I sit down and turn my face to the

priest. As he drones on, I stare at the empty faces of the lords and the ladies seated in the pew next to us. Fools! Money, power seeking fools! Oh, what I would give to be one of the middle class citizens who are free from the prison of dignity and status! Henry tugs my arm, urging me to come with him. Cautiously, he hands my son to me, as if he is afraid of breaking him.

Tenderly, I take hold of him – he is the only thing in the world that I still care for. He has done me no wrong yet, so he deserves to be loved. As the archbishop sprinkled water on his little head, he lets out a mewling wail, making even me murmur a faint laugh. We walk back to our pews, Henry steering my wobbly legs. Thank God – it is over and I can go back to my warm bed and sleep.

But wait! The priest is still talking. Despairingly, I sink into the softness of our pew and close my eyes. Henry, seeing my weariness, makes a small sign to him, who nods his head, signalling for the congregation to leave. My husband guides me back to the litter lovingly, but I still do not care for him. I could just as easily have been sent to the scaffold and executed if I had not delivered boy. I had the good fortune to have God's good will.

Two weeks later

I am still shivering from, my excursion to my baby's christening. I still cannot believe that one day he will be the king of England. I have done it, I have succeeded in what no one else could, and yet it gives me no joy.

My whole body is weary. My stomach aches and I am painful all over. I know that I will die now – I overheard the physicians talking. Henry refuses to be told but I think he knows it too. He must, or he wouldn't be looking at me with that mournful looking his eyes like a dog gives to its master when it is disobedient.

Suddenly I feel God's presence. No longer am I afraid of death, for I know he will take me into his keeping forever. Maybe I will meet Anne Boleyn and Catherin of Aragon in Heaven. Now I know why she was not afraid of anything – Death would take her in its cold embrace lovingly, no matter what. But what if that was only because she was brave? I am not who she was.

My time has come. Goodbye my child, I love you...

THE END

The Funeral of Raedwald by Mia Lennard

In the year of 624AD there was a strong, bitter cold wind as the hoar grey sky faded to an evil, dark black. I held my coal stained rags tightly and grabbed my father's ice cold hand. As we slowly walked towards a field of wet grass, the sound of squelching grew louder as more heart broken folks arrived.

It was a miserable day; it was the burial of a great King by the name of Raedwald. He had accomplished what no ordinary Anglo-Saxon could have ever accomplished; such as uniting the Norfolk and Suffolk together in 'Angle-Land'. He was an incredible politician and a fact was spread that he was the first king of 'Angle-Land'. Five minutes had passed, and then suddenly there was silence. Slowly- on horses- arrived the Widow Queen and Raedwald's son Eorpwald. They were dressed in dark grey clothes and wore grey leather boots. The Queen tried to hide her emotions but I noticed a tear roll down her face, like a small waterfall.

When they had reached two oak wood chairs – in front of the crowd of people – I could hear a loud rolling sound like an earthquake. Suddenly a great wooden, 6 meter long ship was rolling up a hill on many oak tree logs. It was pushed by a thousand men, the strongest men in 'Angle Land' to be precise, as the ship weighed 12 tones. It was one of Raedwald's ships that had been brought from the River Deben. It had over a hundred oars and a towering red and white sail.

Finally when the ship reached the top of the hill, they placed it so that it faced the East (facing sunrise.) Raedwald's dead body was wearing a golden brooch and wore brown rags; it was carried into the longboat carefully. At this point many people became weak and began to cry. Once the body was laid down in the ship, over 236 of Raedwald's precious possessions were also carefully placed inside the grand ship. They surrounded the corpse beautifully, laid out on the floor in rows of brooches, swords, gold, and much more. How they glistened in the light was almost magical. I overheard someone mentioning his horse was slaughtered. Then placed inside the ship for Raedwald's afterlife, although I still don't know whether it was true, therefore it remains a mystery to me.

When the ceremony was close to ending, the Widow Queen stood up from her chair. She told everybody that Raedwald was brave and majestic, and how she would miss him very much. She couldn't help herself and another tear rolled down her face. Soon almost every woman (and some men) had tears in their eyes. It was really a miserable day; however it was also a celebration for Raedwald's after life.

One by one we walked towards the long ship – with our heads down – and loyally knelt before the dead King to show our respect.