

After Elizabeth: The Rise of James of Scotland and the Struggle for the Throne of England

Leanda De Lisle

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Many volumes have been written about the long reign of Elizabeth I. Now, for the first time, comes a brilliant new work that focuses on the critical year her reign ended, a time in which England lost its childless queen and a Machiavellian struggle ensued to find her successor.

December 1602. After forty-four years on the throne, Queen Elizabeth is in decline. The formidable ruler whose motto is Semper eadem (I never change) has become a dithering old woman, missing teeth and wearing makeup half an inch thick. The kingdom has been weakened by the cost of war with Spain and the simmering discontent of both the rich and the poor. The stage has been set, at long last, for succession. But the Queen who famously never married has no heir.

Elizabeth's senior relative is James VI of Scotland, Protestant son of Elizabeth's cousin Mary Queen of Scots. But as a foreigner and a Stuart, he is excluded from the throne under English law. The road to and beyond his coronation will be filled with conspiracy and duplicity, personal betrayals and political upheavals.

Bringing history to thrilling life, Leanda de Lisle captures the time, place, and players as never before. As the Queen nears the end, we witness the scheming of her courtiers for the candidates of their choice; bloodsoaked infighting among the Catholic clergy as they struggle to survive in the face of persecution; the widespread fear that civil war, invasion, or revolution will follow the monarch's death; and the signs, portents, and ghosts that seem to mark her end.

Here, too, are the surprising and, to some, dismaying results of James's ascension: his continuation of Elizabeth's persecution of Catholics, his desire to unite his two kingdoms into a new country called Britain, and the painful contrast between the pomp and finery of Elizabeth's court and the begrimed quality of his own.

Around the old queen and the new king, swirl a cast of unforgettable characters, including Arbella Stuart, James's ambitious and lonely first cousin; his childish, spoiled rival for power, Sir Walter Raleigh, who plotted to overthrow the king; and Sir John Harrington, Elizabeth's wily godson, who switched his loyalties to James long before the queen's death.

Courtesy of Leanda de Lisle's keenly modern view of this tumultuous time, we are given intimate insights into of political power plays and psychological portraits relevant to our own era. After Elizabeth is a unique look at a pivotal year—and a dazzling debut for an exciting new historian.

From the Hardcover edition.

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