I Cannot Live Without Love

by Keira_63

Summary

“I can live without a crown,” she says, “but I cannot live without love ... without you.”

Episode 3: Brocket Hall Fix-It.

Notes

Disclaimer: I do not own any of the historical characters in Victoria nor do I own the TV
series which was written by Daisy Goodwin. Any lines from the show are also not mine and are just borrowed from Daisy Goodwin and ITV Victoria.

For information, Victoria is granted her father’s title and will be Duchess of Kent for the period of time while she is not Queen, while her mother will be the Dowager Duchess. This title has been granted to Victoria in her own right to be passed on to her children but Lord M will only remain as Viscount Melbourne and not Duke of Kent. Victoria also has the title of Princess.

There is a wedding in chapter two of this story and a wedding night too but I fade to black for that part (I'm a bit useless at sex scenes).

See the end of the work for more notes.
Part I - Proposal

“I believe when you give your heart it will be without hesitation. But you cannot give it to me.”

“I think you have it already.”

“No, you must keep it intact for someone else.”

Her eyes narrow at his words. Lord M always tells her the truth but in these words, this sweet and gentle rejection, there is something not totally honest.

She decides to push further.

“Just answer me this, Lord M, do you love me?”

It is a direct question, asked far more bluntly than all the different ways she has thought about using to discover his feelings. But she senses in this case that directness is needed.

And he knows it too. He can talk around her desire for him to be her companion in life, can say she should not give her heart to him, can imply that he still loves his wife. But with this question he must give an unambiguous answer and he knows instinctively that he will not lie in his answer.

“Lord M,” she repeats, with only the slightest stutter, “do you love me?”

He looks at her, his gaze seeming to stare deep into her soul with more emotion than she has ever seen. She knows what his answer will be before he speaks it.

“Of course I do, Ma’am, how could I not?”

He still has her hands wrapped in his own but she separates them so she can reach up to cup his face, to look at the man she so adores, the man who loves her in return.

There is a moment of quiet, of absolute stillness, and then she kisses him.

He is clearly startled by her initiation of an intimacy between them that will cause extensive scandal if it is witnessed by anyone other than the rooks, but he soon kisses her back with an enthusiasm that brings her joy and stokes a fire inside her she never knew existed.

When they break apart she is breathless and flushed with the excitement of her first kiss.

He looks dazed and moved, yet she can see he is also worried and she cannot help but frown at his concerned expression.

“We cannot do this, Ma’am,” he says after a moment, “whatever our feelings a marriage between us would never be accepted. The Privy Council would be in uproar.”

“I will make them accept it,” she insists, all fierceness and determination, “I will not let my heart be a matter of state.”
“But your marriage is, Ma’am,” he cries out with a mix of frustration and sadness, “and I do not wish you to lose everything over me – you deserve better.”

She looks at him, measured and calm despite her bubbling anger as she thinks of how the Privy Council might dismiss her desires as childish folly.

“I can live without a crown,” she says, “but I cannot live without love … without you.”

And that is the simple truth of the matter.

She pauses for a few seconds, but when she speaks she has never been so certain about anything, “Lord M … William … will you do me the honour … will you marry me?”

His answer is so quiet it is almost lost in the wind.

She hears it though, and her heart rejoices as she gives him her widest, most delighted smile.

“I will.”

For a long time she never wanted to be Queen. She remembers when she was young, how she had wished so much for Queen Adelaide to have a child … how despite her mother’s constant talk she never quite looked forward to being Queen.

She does not know quite why she was so opposed to the idea. Maybe it was that her observations of her family showed a group of people at war with each other, never happy despite their titles and money and power. Perhaps she was just afraid, unsure that she would be able to do her poor dear papa proud.

Now she knows her duty, but she also knows she cannot do it with a broken heart. Being Queen has given her the freedom she has craved for so long, yet in many ways it has also become a new cage, trapping her in an endless cycle of propriety and tradition and expectations.

She will not be controlled, not even by her country and her government, when it comes to her marriage.

As Queen of England she has so much, far more than most people ever will.

But the role takes and takes from her – she will never lack for money or jewels or property or people willing to bow to her … yet she struggles to find those who are willing to be genuine and real with her, who love the young woman Victoria rather than just the Queen.

For so long it was only Dash and Lehzen. Now she has Lord M, though, who loves and protects and supports her, who makes her smile and laugh and feel like she can bear any burden that the crown might place on her.

What Lord M has given her is worth far more than all the material wealth and power that being Queen has placed at her disposal.
So when Victoria tells Lord M that she can live without a crown she is being quite serious.

It will be an adjustment, she knows, for she has got used to her orders being followed, to the power she wields, to the luxury in which she lives.

Yet what she would possibly have to give up does not at all equal what she will gain with Lord M. True, real love and support and happiness … the sort of thing she has wanted her whole life.

Still, though she might not be too sorry if she has to give up her crown, she will always be grateful for her time wearing it – after all it brought her Lord M.

After a little persuasion (for she would like nothing more than to stay where she is, in Lord M’s arms, for hours to come) Victoria agrees to return to Buckingham Palace and prepare for the ball she is holding in honour of her uncle Leopold’s visit.

“You will come?” she asks him, eyes wide, for even after all that has happened and been admitted in the past few minutes she still panics that he will continue to try (out of concern for her) to dissuade her from her desire to speak with the Privy Council and make their engagement a formal thing.

It seems, however, that Lord M (William, as he is to her now) has finally let himself be honest. She knows he has not forgotten his concerns, but he does not bring them up now.

“I will be delighted to attend, Ma’am.”

She laughs, “but you must call me Victoria now, and I will call you William.”

“Well then,” he says with a roguish twinkle in his eyes that she loves, “I do hope you will save me a dance … Victoria.”

Sadly, they only get once dance together at the ball.

Victoria would have liked to have danced with only him the whole evening, but even in her state of bliss she knows that such a thing would cause far too many problems, especially considering the news she will soon be delivering to her Privy Council.

She tries to persuade William into a second dance, especially when she realises he has chosen his Leicester costume to match her Queen Elizabeth one (and that the preparation that has clearly gone into the outfit means he chose it before she arrived at Brocket Hall to confess her love) but he will not allow it, insisting that they must be discreet until she has spoken to the Privy Council.

Still, she does not remember any ball ever being more delightful.

Even with the presence of her infuriating uncle Leopold, irritating cousin George and menacing uncle Cumberland she remains in a state of euphoria thanks to the memories of her kiss with William, of the engagement she hopes soon to make public and the wedding she is determined to ensure will
Victoria wants to shout her news to the world, to proclaim her happiness to the whole country … no, the whole world.

This is what a contented and requited love feels like and she never wants to lose this feeling.

The Privy Council meeting, three days after the ball, is a bloodbath.

Not literally, of course, though William has no doubt that a number of his colleagues would cheerfully run him through with a sword in payment for the trouble he is causing them.

Victoria storms out in a fury after ten minutes of intense arguing descends into total chaos. William is not far behind her – his presence is inflammatory and not helping in the least, and besides he wants to check on Victoria, who in her anger is liable to do or say something she might come to regret.

“Heavens, men,” she rants to him as she paces up and down the length of the room he has found her in, “to say you are not suitable to be the husband of a Queen. Who are they to tell me who I can marry?”

He sighs and reaches out to her, clasping her hands in his own in an effort to keep her still and calm, “they have the right of it, darling girl,” he tells her, “I am far from the ideal consort for the Queen of England.”

“You are the perfect consort for me,” she says with such intense sincerity that it nearly brings tears to his eyes.

He sighs, “the Privy Council must approve your marriage,” he reminds her, “and I do not believe that they will approve of me.”

For a moment he is quiet, and then he speaks again, tentatively, “there is still time to change your mind. If you tell the Privy Council that you will not marry me then I am sure no more will be said about –”

“No!” she shouts it out loudly enough that he winces at the sound, “I will not let them bully me into giving you up, William. And I will not make us both unhappy because they cannot see how wonderful you are.”

“You know you could lose your crown, Victoria,” he reminds her, serious and concerned, “I do not ever want you to regret what you might have to give up – if … if you ever grew to resent me for it then I do not think I could bear it.”

“None of that matters to me,” Victoria insists, “not as long as I have you.”

“You must be sure, darling girl. Please, for your sake, be absolutely sure that this is what you want.”

It frustrates her that he keeps asking her if she is sure, for she is absolutely sure. But it is one of the
reasons she loves him, because he always wants her to be happy and secure with her choices, even if it causes him unhappiness.

She leans up to press her lips against his, thankful that her Privy Council are sure to be too busy arguing over her news to interrupt them.

“I am sure William, believe me I am sure.”

“Drina, how can you consider something so foolish?”

“Victoria, you should listen to wiser heads.”

“Majesty … surely you are not going to marry a man of such a reputation?”

So many voices jumble in her head, a mix of well-meaning and condescending and self-interested parties with only one thing in common.

Their dislike of her choice of husband.

Two days have passed since the Privy Council meeting where Victoria announced her desire to marry her Lord M and his intention to resign as Prime Minister with immediate effect.

They have not been the most pleasant of days.

She has not seen William once. He has been absolutely run ragged by the work involved in sorting out his resignation without letting on to the general populace the reasons behind his retirement from politics. The Privy Council still believe that they can persuade her to change her mind and have insisted the engagement not be made public. Victoria does not see why she must indulge their wish but William, before he departed following the Privy Council meeting, told her it would be wise if they could accommodate her ministers in this even if in nothing else.

Currently she is hiding in one of the little used rooms in the palace, wanting to avoid both lectures from her mama and uncle Leopold, and the scandalised remarks of Lehzen, who does not think William at all an appropriate husband for Victoria.

She will have to show herself eventually, of course, but for the moment she just wants a little bit of peace and quiet.

So she sits with Dash at her feet and a sketchbook in her lap, trying to draw the scene she can see from the window but inevitably ending up with countless little sketches of William instead.

Her mind is full of him and she misses him enough for it to preoccupy her mind, especially as she knows he is almost certainly having an unpleasant time trying to deal with the details of his resignation.
She looks up in surprise when she hears the sound of movement near the door. Thankfully it is only Skerrett, and Victoria knows her dresser will not give her away.

“Apologies, Ma’am,” Skerrett says as she curtsies, “I did not realise you were here.”

“Quite alright, Skerrett. I was just … enjoying some silence.”

“I’ll leave you to it then, Ma’am.”

“Thank you, Skerrett. And … if you see Lehzen, or anyone else, could you please tell them …”

Skerrett gives her a conspiratorial smile, “I’ll try and make sure no one finds you for another hour or two, Ma’am.”

Victoria gives the dresser a grateful look as Skerrett leaves the room.

She looks out of the window once more and considers the scene. But when she puts her pencil to paper once more it is the figure of Lord M that emerges on the paper.

King Leopold writes countless letters to his nephews Albert and Ernest.

At first he tells them to delay their arrival because the Queen has a mild case of the flu and does not wish to receive them while she is ill.

A lie of course. Victoria has never sanctioned her cousins’ visit and she is perfectly healthy, but Leopold does not want to spook Albert (who is already concerned that he and Victoria will not suit) with the news that the Queen has proposed marriage to her Prime Minister.

Of course Lord Melbourne has now resigned, but he was her Prime Minister when she proposed (and besides all that he is so much older, so much lower in station, stained by scandal) – Leopold cannot believe how foolish his niece is being.

So for a while he stalls his nephews as he and his sister try to talk some sense into Victoria. She is stubborn, though, with an attachment and loyalty to her Lord Melbourne that might be admirable if it were not so wrong and frustrating, if it were not the ruination of nearly two decades of Leopold’s planning.

He cannot conceal the truth forever, however, and when he finally admits defeat and sees that Victoria will give up her crown before she gives up Melbourne, Leopold writes to his nephews to tell them that there is no point in continuing towards England - there is nothing here for them anymore.

Ernest is unaffected, apart from his sorrow at the effect of this turn of events on his beloved brother.

Albert … well Albert does not seem to know how to feel.

On one hand he writes that Victoria’s actions show they would not have been well matched. But he
is also angry, for he has spent nearly his whole life preparing for the role of consort of the most eligible royal woman in the world – he is understandably bitter to learn that his future is no longer a dazzling picture, only murky waters to be waded through carefully in the hope of finding a wife who is even a fraction as splendid a match as the Queen of England would have been.

As soon as parliament and the Privy Council are absolutely decided on their next steps, Leopold leaves England.

He has no desire to watch his niece marry so far beneath her, nor to see the last hope of his plans coming to fruition go up in smoke.

They send delegation after delegation to Victoria in an attempt to change her mind.

Some of the men they send are angry and others serious, a few are sympathetic and many are hostile.

None of them change her mind.

Whether they consider it a virtue or a vice, everyone agrees that their Queen has a stubborn will of iron.

Eventually they give her an ultimatum.

It is one that has been unspoken ever since she announced her intention to marry Lord Melbourne, but now they make it quite clear.

If she persists in her plans to marry her former Prime Minister then she will be forced to abdicate in favour of her uncle Cumberland.

William looks nearly distraught when they discuss the Privy Council’s decision, but she rushes to reassure him.

“I have told you, dearest William, that I can live without a crown. In fact, I would give up a thousand crowns if it meant I could have you as my husband.”

There are tears in his eyes as he kisses her, a look of love and awe and delight that pleases her greatly.

“I will make you happy, darling Victoria,” he vows, “for as long as you will have me.”

And she believes him. Because he is William, her Lord M, and he has been her light in the darkness since the moment they first met.
“Skerrett, a moment please,” Victoria says as her dressers move towards the door the evening after she receives the Privy Council’s decision.

Mrs Jenkins look curious for a few seconds, but drops into a curtsey and exits, leaving Victoria alone with the younger dresser.

“You have probably noticed, Skerrett, that there has been a great deal of … fuss recently.”

Skerrett nods. Fuss is putting it lightly – the past week has been full of whispered conversations, long talks between the Queen and Lord Melbourne (who resigned suddenly as Prime Minister five days previously) behind closed doors, raised voices, shouting matches between the Queen and the Duchess of Kent, and a parade of increasingly harassed-looking Ministers.

“The crux of the matter,” the Queen says, “is that I have proposed to Lord Melbourne.”

Skerrett cannot help but smile at the news – the Queen has always seemed happiest around Lord Melbourne, “congratulations, Ma’am.”

“Thank you, Skerrett, but it is not all good news, you see. The Privy Council – vexing as they are – refuse to countenance this match. They have told me,” her voice wavers with anger now, “that if I marry Lord Melbourne I will have to forfeit my crown.”

Skerrett gasps, “but Ma’am … can they do that?” she asks, curiosity outweighing her usual deference.

“Lord M tells me they can,” the Queen replies with a deep frown on her face, “the Privy Council must approve my marriage and it appears that they do not.”

“What will you do, Ma’am?”

Victoria sighs, “I will not give him up. I am sorry for what must happen, as I have always wished to serve my country to the best of my abilities and make my dear papa proud, but I cannot live my life – with all its blessings and burdens – without support … without love.”

“You are making a brave decision, Ma’am,” Skerrett tells her with conviction, “it is a hard choice.”

“Do you think?” Victoria muses, “almost everyone tells me I am being selfish, but there are some things, I think, that one cannot do without.”

“It may be bold of me to say, Ma’am, but I think you and Lord Melbourne will be happy, whether or not you are Queen.”

“Thank you, Skerrett,” Victoria smiles, “you have always understood, I think. That is why I asked to speak with you.”

“Ma’am?”

“My … my uncle Cumberland will be returning soon, and he will be crowned as King as England once Lord Melbourne and I have travelled to Brocket Hall to be married. The Privy Council have
agreed to bestow my father’s title on me so I shall be simply the Duchess of Kent, but I think we shall live at Brocket Hall rather than any of the properties attached to that title. It will not be anything like the palace, but there will still be entertainments and such. My uncle’s wife will bring a dresser of her own to work with Mrs Jenkins and so I wondered if you would consider accompanying me to Brocket Hall – it will not be very glamorous, but we would be at Dover House sometimes so you would not be completely cut off from London, and of course your wages will not be reduced.”

Victoria looks younger and more nervous than usual, even to Skerrett, who often sees a softer side to the Queen that is usually hidden in public.

The dresser thinks about the unexpected offer. The Queen is kind to her, and she does not anticipate that removal to Brocket Hall will change that. And the security of a job is so important, especially with her cousin (and the baby) to support.

The only thought that gives Skerrett pause is of the palace chef who intrigues her as much as he makes her nervous … But she has always sworn that she would not make the mistake of allowing a man to ruin her plans for a secure and independent life.

“Your Majesty,” Skerrett says, with some sadness at the knowledge that she will soon be unable to refer to the woman in front of her as such, “I am so grateful for your offer, and would be pleased to accept.”

Victoria sighs in relief and Skerrett locks away the small piece of her heart that has been intrigued by Francatelli.

Victoria’s uncle Cumberland will be arriving at Buckingham Palace in the next few hours and so she is in a hurry to leave it.

She has made her choice and she is happy with it, but there is still a rawness to her feelings about giving up her throne, and after so many days of battles with her ministers she is too tired to face her uncle so soon.

She plasters a smile on her face when she sees William, though, because he feels guilty enough as it is without overanalysing her expressions and starting to believe she is regretting her choice.

She will never regret him.

She no longer holds out her hand for him to kiss but he takes it anyway, pressing his lips to her skin in that reverent way that makes her feel like the most adored woman in the world.

“Victoria,” he almost whispers as he stands up straight and wraps an arm around her, “are you feeling quite alright.”

Of course he senses her fraying emotions – he has always been so very good at reading her.

“A little odd,” she admits, because honesty is important to her, especially with William, “but excited too William … excited for the future.”
His eyes, a little clouded by worry, brighten at her words.

“The future,” he murmurs, “once upon a time, not so long ago, I wondered if mine had any point to it.”

“William!” she cries out in shock, “please do not say such things.”

“I no longer feel that way,” he reassures her, his words now echoing what he said to her years ago, that day at the piano when he told her about his son, “not when I have you, not when I have this.”

He leans down to kiss her gently and she smiles against his lips.

“Forever,” she promises as they break apart, “you will have me forever, William.”

As Victoria finalises her arrangements before they leave Buckingham Palace for Brocket Hall, William finds himself standing next to the Duke of Wellington.

He tenses, unable to help the nerves he feels in the Duke’s presence. He and Wellington usually have a fairly amicable working relationship despite their differing politics, but now that William has been the reason for throwing the entire Privy Council and parliament into chaos with his acceptance of Victoria’s proposal … well now he is not quite sure what reception he will receive from the popular Duke.

Wellington stays quiet, though, which does not help William feel any more at ease. Deciding that the man might look more favourably on him if he gathers some courage and speaks up first, William ventures to offer the Duke a wry comment.

“I suppose you have come, Wellington, to tell me that I am a fool. Do go on, I’ve heard it enough times recently that I think I’m rather immune by now.”

The Duke smiles, “no, Melbourne, I am not here for that. Anyone of sense knows you certainly tried to talk the Queen … sorry, Duchess … out of all this, but she has got a stubborn will and the bravery to follow through with her promises. She said she would not give you up and those fools thought she would back down if they threatened to force an abdication – it’s as if they do not know her at all.”

William runs a hand through his hair, “I did warn her, but she was most insistent. I know I could have refused her, but she was so …”

He trails off, quite unable to find the words to properly describe Victoria’s character.

“You love her,” the Duke states, “and she loves you back. I imagine that made refusing her very difficult, especially as I am sure she talked circles around you until you agreed.”

William cannot help but laugh, “you have the right of it, Duke, I admit that.”

“Well I hope you will enjoy your retirement, and I am sure that you will have much leisure time now. But perhaps, Melbourne, you may consider putting aside an hour each day to teach your soon-to-be wife a little more about the history and politics that was so deficient in her education. Who knows … soon enough we may have need of Queen Victoria once more.”
William only gapes at the implication. The Duke winks.
Part II - Abdication

Chapter Summary

This chapter contains many snippets of married life along with little bits of political plot (not that there is a huge political story-line in this story).

Chapter Notes

There is a wedding in this chapter of the story and a wedding night too but I fade to black for that part (I’m a bit useless at sex scenes).

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The drive away from the palace leaves Victoria melancholy.

She knows she is making the right decision, but it saddens her as she thinks about how she will only ever return to Buckingham Palace, and the other properties that belong to the Crown, as a visitor.

She tries to cheer up, though, when she sees William looking so concerned and guilty. He still feels as if it is his fault that she is no longer Queen, despite the fact that she has told him a dozen times and more that she made her own decision and she does not regret it in the slightest.

After all, she thinks she can face any hardship with him by her side.

All thoughts of Buckingham Palace leave her head, however, when they arrive at Brocket Hall and Victoria gets her first proper look at the place that is to be her home now.

Of course she has seen it before, on that important visit where they finally spoke of their feelings out loud and started on the path that has led them here, but she had obviously been very distracted on that day and quite unable to take anything in.

It is a handsome house, not nearly as grand as Buckingham Palace of course, but charming and far more pleasant-looking than Kensington (full of drafts and dust and horrid Sir John) had been.

William murmurs that he hopes she likes it, though he know it is nothing at all to her former homes, and he looks pleased when she expresses her happiness, especially when she notes many places in the grounds where they can walk and ride together, and later when he shows her the grand piano that (with some tuning) will sound almost as good as the instrument she had at Buckingham Palace.

There are so many reasons why Victoria loves William, but the one in the forefront of her mind at the moment is the little ways he seeks to put her at ease in her new home.

Her favourite novels tucked onto the bookshelves next to his philosophy and political treatises.
Flowers in every colour brightening the rooms. An elegant desk for her next to his own, stocked with a pile of sketchbooks. An array of treats for Dash that have her spaniel barking in delight.

“Well, it is wonderful,” she tells him, darting from room to room much as she had when he had accompanied her on her first visit to Buckingham Palace, “oh I will love it here, William.”

He squeezes her hand and the light in his eyes tells her that after years of hardship he is finally starting to accept that he deserves happiness.

Victoria chooses the colour white for her wedding dress and she designs the entire thing herself, taking advice from stylish Harriet but ultimately enjoying the opportunity to choose every aspect herself.

All materials come from within the United Kingdom and every aspect of the work has been done by that country’s subjects – it is not as important now as it might have been when she was Queen, but Victoria thinks it is still right to support local industry.

She no longer has the right to wear a crown, but she chooses to forgo any tiara or jewelled headdress in favour of a wreath of flowers created by Skerrett from the blooms in the Brocket Hall greenhouse.

She wears no jewellery either, save a brooch that William has had commissioned, depicting two rooks nestled together.

It is a rather simple gown for a member of the royal family and she has no doubt that many of her relatives would sneer – she does not care at all, though, and as they are not invited to the ceremony they will not get the chance to give their unwanted opinion.

Their wedding ceremony is nothing like the sort of royal spectacle Victoria has grown up expecting, but she thinks that perhaps it is better that way.

At the Chapel Royal she would have been surrounded by many guests she either did not know or disliked, while here she has only friends to wish her well.

The Duke of Wellington is the sole Tory to be found at the church, but he is really the only one she can tolerate right now. He, at least, voted to allow their marriage without a required abdication.

Also present are Victoria’s two favourite ladies – Emma Portman and Harriet Sutherland – together with their husbands, all thankfully bearing no grudge that the change of monarch and government means they no longer have a place at court.

Baroness Lehzen looks disapproving when Victoria is not watching, for she quite believes that no one will ever be good enough for her old charge, but she never considers not attending, for she loves Victoria fiercely (if also jealously).

Victoria’s family is not represented. Her surviving aunts and uncles are strongly against the marriage (aside from uncle Cumberland, who has gained the throne thanks to her choice, but she does not want him on this happy day) and her mama … well Victoria is unsure if their estrangement will ever end, especially as Sir John is probably whispering poison in the Duchess’ ear back at Kensington.
William’s family comes out in force, though. Victoria has met his delightful sister Emily (who shares her brother’s charm) and Emily’s second husband Lord Palmerston before, which makes the meeting with the rest of the family easier. William’s brother Frederick is present too, and the age gap between him and his young wife Alexandrina makes it clear to Victoria why they have taken the decades between Victoria and William with so little fuss. A crowd of William’s nieces and nephews also attend, happy to smile and laugh and make a fuss over Dash (who looks very smart with a silk ribbon and his fur brushed until glossy), ensuring the whole event is a very merry party indeed.

Victoria is gladdened to note there is a small crowd that has gathered to watch them walk out of the church, and she is buoyed by this small section of the public, one or two of whom are even heard to cry ‘God save the Queen’ – a delightful occurrence despite the danger in saying such things now her uncle is the King.

It is a silly thing to yearn for the good opinion of the public at the moment when it no longer matters, but she does so anyway and cannot help but feel a little smug that most people would never cheer in such a way for her uncle.

They return after the service to Brocket Hall for food and a wedding cake that is not as grand as Francatelli might have made but is nevertheless delicious.

They find that there is enough room to have a little dancing, and Victoria delights in being able to twirl around the room with William without having to worry about what rumours might spring up and what mama might say and what ministers might be looking for anything they can use against her for their own agendas.

William’s family, all of a lively and cheerful temperament, are very much to Victoria’s taste and she enjoys the chance to get to know them a little better. The Lamb family’s closeness is also a stark contrast to Victoria’s own family, who are always arguing and pitting themselves against each other.

It is a bit of a shock to the system, this frank and open family. She knows they have had their troubles but they are always eager to support each other and she would be a little jealous if not for the fact that they have so warmly welcomed her into their circle.

“I am so happy for you,” Emily says as they watch their husbands – both clever, quick men – talk together, “poor William has been very unlucky in his personal life and I am extremely glad he has found you.”

Victoria smiles. She is relieved to find approval from Emily, who is William’s favourite sibling, and is glad that she does not hold against Victoria all the trouble William has suffered on her behalf.

“You must come and visit us often,” Victoria entreats, “I am sure you have many interesting stories about William when he was young.”

Emily gives her a roughish grin, “I would be delighted to tell you all the stories.”

The two of them burst out laughing, drawing worried looks from their husbands, who clearly believe they are plotting some joke together. Exchanging glances, William and Palmerston walk over and Victoria grins when her new husband raises his eyebrow quizzically at her.
“Emily and I are only talking,” she says with an innocent look on her face, “she is going to tell me all about your childhood mischief.”

“Oh is she?” asks William, giving his sister a fondly exasperated look.

“Just a few tales,” Emily bumps his shoulder good-naturedly, “nothing embarrassing.”

“That,” William rolls his eyes playfully, “would be reassuring if I actually believed you.”

“And that,” says Palmerston, “is my cue to whisk my wife away before a sibling scuffle begins.”

“Are you well?” asks William once Palmerston has swept Emily away to dance and Victoria has clasped her husband’s hand.

“Incandescently happy,” she replies, feeling the great contentment in his presence that she has never experienced with anyone else.

He looks down at her and the expression on his face is so beautiful that she wants to kiss him now with no regard to the crowd of people surrounding him.

“I never thought I would be so lucky,” he says softly.

“No, William,” she tells him, thinking of how this is the man who loves her, who offered her friendship without strings attached and freed her and gave her the strength to face all the obstacles in her path, “I am the lucky one.”

It occurs to Victoria, as their friends and family depart in a flurry of good wishes, that until now she has not considered in detail what will occur on her wedding night.

She knows little of what goes on in the marital bed, having been sheltered by both Lehzen and her mama at Kensington and Buckingham Palace. She rarely had the chance to hear the gossip of the servants and so most of what she knows is titbits gleaned from her ladies back when she was Queen – and as they would usually fall silent as soon as they saw her approach, she has not learnt much at all.

She knows attraction and love, what it is to be kissed and embraced, all thanks to William … but she has yet to understand the intricacies of intercourse, or the way to turn the tingling warmth she feels when she sees William into the pleasure she has heard can be received in the marriage bed if a couple is compatible.

She and William are compatible, of course … so surely their marriage will be successful in this area?

She cannot help but feel nervous and unsure, though. William has so much experience, while she has none at all. Maybe he will be disappointed with her?
She tries to drive out such thoughts. William has always been kind to her, from their very first meeting when they were strangers. She cannot imagine that he will be anything but considerate now.

Still, she notices that she looks dreadfully pale as Skerrett helps her out of her dress and into her nightgown, and as her dresser takes all the pins out of her hair she bites her lip, nerves getting the best of her.

Skerrett looks concerned and asks if anything is wrong, but although her dresser is sometimes more like a friend than a servant, Victoria feels that this topic is one she must keep private.

“Nothing, Skerrett,” she murmurs in response, “nothing at all.”

Her worried-looking reflection says otherwise but Skerrett wisely keeps quiet about her lie.

Victoria finds herself shaking slightly once Skerrett has left her.

Perhaps she is a fool – this is William, after all, who would never dream of hurting her.

But she feels like an ignorant child, and it is a feeling she despises, one that reminds her of the rigid control and misery of Kensington.

She is so focused on twisting her hands together in an attempt to calm herself that she does not even hear William enter, and only realises he is there when she feels his presence behind her and his arms come around her to rest his hands on top of her own.

His touch soothes her and she leans back against his broad chest, sighing happily when he presses an affectionate kiss on to the top of her head.

“Please do not worry, darling girl,” he murmurs, “we need do nothing at all but sleep if you wish it.”

Dear William, always so concerned for her and always so in tune with her feelings. Nevertheless, she knows she wants to do more than sleep. She does not have much idea what exactly it is that couples do together in their bedrooms, but she believes it will be the culmination of all the feelings she has for William that have confused and delighted and excited her.

So she spins round in the cradle of William’s arms and leans up to kiss him, the kind of passionate and fierce kiss she has only been able to enjoy with him in the few moments they have had privacy since their first wonderful kiss.

His lips quirk into a smile against hers, amused and pleased by her unabashed enthusiasm.

They break apart and she is breathless and flushed, full of energy and excited. The warmth in her belly is even more prevalent than it usually is around William and she wants, she wants, she wants.

If only she knew exactly what it was she wanted.

She presses her hands against William’s chest and then trails them down lower to slip under the loose white shirt he is wearing.

Her fingers dart over the planes of his body, her fingertips tingling at every touch of his skin.
It is pleasurable but also an exploration as she feels softness in some places and taut muscle in others, as well as what she thinks is a dusting of hair lower down.

When she looks at William she notes his eyes are half-closed and there is a look on his face that confuses her – she cannot quite tell if it is pleasure or pain.

“Is this alright?” she asks.

He only nods, taking a deep breath as his own hands rest on her hips, the warmth seeming to sear through her nightgown to the flesh underneath it.

“I … I do not really know what to do,” she admits to him.

“This is certainly a beginning,” he tells her, making a quiet sound that is almost a groan when she lets her fingers drop down further to the waistband of his trousers.

She knows something of what lies beneath. Not much, and not even what it is really supposed to look like, but enough to realise that it will need to fit inside her. She thinks it will hurt and she must look a bit scared because William’s hands leave her waist so that he can cup her cheeks gently and tenderly kiss her.

He offers her his hand then, and leads her over to the bed, “please do not be afraid, Victoria, I have never wanted that. I am sorry that … that the full act of intercourse will hurt a little the first time, but we do not have to do that if you are not ready.”

“I am ready,” she insists with all the bravado she can muster.

She wants this, if only she can figure out what she needs to do.

“I’ll teach you,” he promises.

She leans up to kiss him, to let him know that she trusts him.

With him, she is sure everything will be alright.

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Victoria wakes the morning after the wedding with momentary confusion, unsure about exactly where she is.

She feels a pleasant ache as she shifts, the warmth of someone lying next to her and one arm splayed across her stomach.

William.

The memories of last night – her wedding night – flash through her mind, and despite the fact that she is a married woman now in every sense of the word she still finds her cheeks heating up with what she instinctively knows is a magnificent blush.

There had been some discomfort, as William had warned, but it had been fleeting compared to the
other sensations she had felt.

And oh what feelings.

She thinks she is going to enjoy this aspect of marriage exceedingly.

There is even more to experience, she knows, and with characteristic impatience she wants to feel and explore it all right now.

But she looks at William’s face, relaxed in sleep and so exceptionally handsome, and knows she cannot bear to wake him up just yet.

So instead she moves closer, buries her face into the warmth of his chest, and muffles her giggles when he makes a sleepy protest as she presses her cold feet against his warmer legs.

And then she drifts back to sleep feeling like the most cherished woman in the world.

Emma Portman comes to visit them a month after their wedding and she is astonished by the change in William.

“You look positively twenty years younger,” she tells him with a smile on her face that shows him how delighted she is at this fact, “retirement clearly agrees with you.”

“Are you saying, Emma,” he raises an eyebrow, “that I looked old before.”

Victoria looks playfully scandalised at the idea that her husband – decades her senior but still extremely good-looking, in her view and the view of many others – could ever have been considered to look old.

Emma only laughs, “as you were the one who always said politics tired you beyond reason, William, I do not know why my words should offend.”

William concedes the truth of her words with a slight tilt of his head as Victoria laughs at him.

“You do seem truly happy,” Emma notes to William later, as the two of them watch Victoria play with Dash in the garden.

“I am,” he tells her, far more serious and sincere than usual, “sometimes I cannot quite believe it’s all real.”

He watches his wife, Emma notes, with a mix of love, admiration and delight that makes her feel almost jealous – she and Portman are very fond of each other, but they do not have the sort of deep love and respect she knows is between her friend and the former Queen.

“Yes,” he continues after a moment, “I do believe I am one of the lucky ones … who would ever have believed it?”
For their first Christmas together, a little over a month after they marry, Victoria and William make countless plans for the holiday season.

He hasn’t really been one to celebrate, especially since Augustus’ death, but Victoria is so full of excitement when December comes around and he finds her enthusiasm is rather contagious.

Most of the month passes just as they plan. There are visits to friends and William’s family, trips to town for Christmas shopping, and the enjoyable task of decorating Brocket Hall (using a mix of English and German traditions) so that it looks festive in a way it hasn’t since William’s mother was alive.

For the whole month the delicious smell of baking permeates the whole place, while Victoria puts aside Schubert and Mozart in favour of jolly Christmas tunes.

Their preparations for a large Christmas gathering at Brocket Hall go awry, however, when the heaviest snowfall Victoria can remember begins two days before Christmas and makes them realise soon enough that the roads are not going to be fit for safe travel until the New Year arrives.

It is not quite the Christmas they imagined, but it is wonderful all the same, perhaps even better than it might have been – they both love company but there is something to be said for spending this first Christmas with just the two of them.

It is more relaxed than any Christmas she has previously experienced. When she was still Queen there was always protocols to be followed and state events to attend. At Kensington the fun was always discouraged – no running in case she fell, not too much food in case she became ill, few visitors because mama did not trust them.

But now she can run down corridors with Dash, dance with William whenever she wishes, sample all of the cook’s treats and laugh as loudly as she wants.

Their gifts to each other are not anything particularly special, for there is nothing either of them particularly wants or needs, but the presents are chosen with great thought and given with love so they find each one special.

They walk through the snow-covered grounds, have snowball fights like they are children and watch Dash nudge at the snow with a mix of curiosity and suspicion.

Victoria makes snow angels all over the garden, revelling in the chance to do something that had always been forbidden to her when snow had fallen at Kensington.

And they make a snowman too, that turns out looking so much like the Duke of Wellington (Victoria suspects William’s influence there) that Victoria brings out her sketchbook and sends her completed pencil drawing to the Duke as a small joke.

(he writes back and tells her it is one of the best Christmas presents he has ever received and she decides that though he may be a Tory, the Duke is also a friend).
For the first three months after their wedding William spends a little time most days teaching Victoria more about the history of the country she once ruled and of the government he so admires.

For three months he does so with no word to her of his purpose.

He does not make it obvious. As he had done when he was her Prime Minister, he tells her funny and fascinating stories to help make the often-dull information he is imparting more memorable.

After three months, though, the guilt gets the better of him. While his little lessons are only improving her mind, and though he knows that she would ask him to stop if she did not enjoy his tales, it feels wrong to be teaching her what she considers only interesting little facts with a hidden agenda.

Victoria is probably the most honest person he knows, her face usually an open book and quite content to speak her mind freely. He does not like the deception of carrying out the Duke of Wellington’s suggestion without informing her.

So he tells her.

“The Duke of Wellington requested this of you?”

William nods nervously, “I am not entirely sure of all his reasons but it did not seem to do any harm to teach you what you never learnt at Kensington, what I never had time to tell you before.”

“Why did you not just explain this to me?” she asks him, confused at this little deception.

She looks hurt and it cuts him deep inside because he has never wanted to cause her any sorrow.

“I … I did not want to make it something official, to give hope when there was so much to be unsure about. But I know how straightforward and honest you are and … and I could not continue on without telling you. I am so sorry, Victoria.”

“You were trying to protect me?” she asks quietly.

He nods, “the Duke has … well he has the odd idea that the crown might eventually make its way back to you, and he thought if such a thing came to pass you should be better prepared than you were the first time.”

“You could have just told me,” Victoria sighs.

“I know,” he looks at her apologetically, “I never wanted there to be secrets between us, yet I did not want you to bear this burden, especially when it could well be that none of what the Duke has suggested comes to pass.”

“Always trying to protect me,” Victoria’s expression is fond now rather than hurt and William feels relief course through his body.

“I am still sorry,” he tells her, taking her hand and squeezing it gently, “I know I should have told you.”
“Yes you should have,” she agrees, “but I forgive you, William.”

She leans forward to brush her lips against his own, “now William, I believe you were telling me a rather amusing tale about my grandfather, a French diplomat and a very large tureen of soup. I would rather like to hear the ending.”

He cannot help but smile, “well, the French diplomat was, it turned out, rather allergic to shellfish, a main ingredient in the soup, and when he realised what was in front of him he was a little hasty in his attempt to move away, the servants with the rest of the soup were behind him and … well let’s just say that for the sake of international relations it was a good thing the man’s allergies weren’t triggered by wearing rather than eating the soup.”

Their laughter echoes throughout Brocket Hall.

When Victoria moved to Brocket Hall as a new bride she brought only two people with her to join the household already serving William.

She has Skerrett to assist with her dresses and hair, and maybe it would have been better to have hired a local girl but she likes Skerrett (trusts her) and the dresser is a familiar face used to assisting Victoria. Besides, William hires enough local help, and Victoria tries to be as gracious as possible when she visits the surrounding villages, so she is sure that no one is particularly offended that she has brought one dresser with her.

Second, of course, is Lehzen. She can take no official position, of course, as Victoria needs a governess no longer and the housekeeping roles are already well taken care of by the existing staff. Instead Lehzen comes as a companion of sorts to Victoria, for the former Queen knows that without a position with her, Lehzen will likely be forced to return to Hanover.

The only problem is that as the months go by the situation between Victoria, William and Lehzen unfortunately becomes incredibly awkward.

William has always been a supporter of Lehzen’s, but her former governess has never particularly warmed to dear William and maintains her view that Victoria’s new husband is disreputable in the extreme and not at all good enough for her.

And in close quarters such things are only exacerbated.

Lehzen is not usually direct in her criticism, but she scoffs when Victoria talks about William, looks sullen in his presence and constantly speaks of how Victoria’s new life is far below what she deserves.

William’s patience is clearly pushed to the limit by Lehzen’s constant presence and mutterings, and even Victoria, who adores her, feels as if Lehzen is too often interfering in matters that should only be between her and William.

Brocket Hall is by no means small, but Victoria thinks things might have been easier in Buckingham
Palace, where a better sense of space could have been maintained.

It is a hard task, balancing her love for both of them, especially as Lehzen (who has been a constant friend and companion for years), becomes more and more unreasonable.

In the end she does not have much of a choice.

William never insists she dismiss Lehzen, only asks that she consider her decision carefully and leaves it all up to her … because he trusts her in a way Lehzen (who so often considers her still a child) never will.

She loves Lehzen, will always love her as the one true ally of her childhood. Yet Lehzen will not (cannot) adapt to the new situation and though it distresses her Victoria knows that in the end she has made the best decision she can.

It pains her so, but Lehzen cannot accept that Victoria is a woman grown, a wife who loves her husband.

And so Lehzen returns to Hanover, to live with her sister, five months after Victoria’s wedding.

It hurts to send her away, and Victoria spends days afterwards sobbing into the comforting warmth of William’s chest or shoulder until her husband’s suggestion that she consider ensuring Lehzen’s comfort in Hanover to ease her mind gives her something positive to think about.

Victoria cannot grant her the pension she could have if she were still Queen, but she has a generous allowance from parliament and as they do not live particularly extravagantly at Brocket Hall she is more than able to offer Lehzen a private pension of sorts, for she does not forget what her old governess has done for her.

Victoria promises to write and she does so faithfully, finding that the resentment at Lehzen’s interference in her marriage disappears with her old governess’ departure. Lehzen wisely chooses to mostly steer clear of any negative reference to William and so she and Victoria return to their old warmth and affection, tempered only by having to express their emotions in letters.

It is a little sad to think that their strained relationship has been improved by distance, but Victoria is thankful that there is peace between them once more.

After all, as William tells her, it is the way of the world that things must change, even if she does not want them to.

In June, seven months after their wedding, Victoria and William receive their first invitation to Buckingham Palace for the new King’s birthday.

Victoria dreads it.
She misses the palace that was her home but she has no desire to enter it as a guest. Having gone over half a year without any invitations from her uncle she had started to believe she would never return to Buckingham Palace, and her feelings, though mixed at first, are now firmly contented with the idea of keeping away.

They visit town regularly, for neither of them can abide a constant country life, but they have stayed away from any events at which they might meet the King and Queen – Victoria does retain her royal rank but most of her family are aghast at who she has chosen to marry and do not seem much inclined to speak to her, however friendly they were when she was still Queen.

“I know why he wishes us to attend,” Victoria scowls down at the invitation, “he wants to remind me that I must bow to him now – he is an absolutely odious man. And he knows that we will not be able to walk in to dinner together! I would not be at all surprised if he sat us at completely opposite ends of the table just to vex me.”

“My darling,” William reaches out for her hand, his presence soothing her sparking temper, “it is an important event to be sure, but you know we do not have to attend if you do not wish it.”

“You are kind to say so,” she gives him a small smile before her expression turns miserable once more, “but I know we have no real choice in the matter. If we refuse then my uncle will never forgive me and it will cause such a fuss.”

“We will cope if that happens,” William says, “but you do not have to go if it will be painful.”

Victoria loves William so much in this moment. He has endured a great deal for her sake and is still willing to stand by her in insulting the King because he does not wish her to be upset.

She does not want to make things worse, though. And a part of her wants to go and show her uncle that she will not be cowed or embarrassed, that she still has the regal bearing and dignity of a Queen even if she no longer possesses the title.

He reads her expression, as he has always read even her micro-expressions well, “so I suppose I am to bring out my best outfit for the occasion?”

“Oh no,” she smiles, “uncle Cumberland, King or not, is worth second best at most.”

He laughs and she feels her mood lighten.

She will not let uncle Cumberland’s attempts at humiliation hurt her.

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The King’s birthday dinner goes … as well as can be expected.

As Victoria had feared, she and William are indeed separated at the table, but at least her husband seems to have congenial neighbours to speak with. She, on the other hand, is surrounded by family
members who all seem desperate to give her their opinions on her marriage (none of those opinions are particularly positive, though uncle Sussex seems to give some hint of approval, in his own odd way).

They all begin by telling her that it pains them to speak this way to her, but that they must be honest. Victoria just wonders how such a royal group can be so entirely ill-bred in their actions. She does not say so, though she desperately wants to, and only smiles stiffly while telling them how completely happy she is in her new life.

The King himself is thankfully too busy enjoying his precedence over everyone to make too many barbed remarks towards his niece, but by the end of the meal Victoria feels exhausted from keeping up an expression of calm neutrality rather than letting her emotions have free reign.

She and William leave early, glad to escape back to Dover House for a blissful hour or two of curling up together on the sofa as William tells her one of his fascinating tales and Dash lies on her lap, a comforting warmth as she absentmindedly strokes his silky fur.

It is only when they return to Brocket Hall from London that Victoria realises she has missed two of her monthly bleedings.

As regular as clockwork usually, she thinks she must have overlooked the fact that she has not bled in just over two months because of the stress caused by the invitation to her uncle’s birthday.

She panics. Then she cries. Then she panics some more.

She is not prepared for this.

She tells William, because she cannot keep this kind of secret, and he is thrilled.

At first Victoria does not know how to feel. She knew that children would likely come eventually, but she thinks it would have been nice to have a bit more time with just her and William.

She has had seven months, but she finds she wants a bit more.

Is that selfish?

Still, the idea of a baby with William’s looks and beautiful eyes makes the whole situation more palatable, especially when she sees how genuinely excited her husband is.

He begins making plans almost immediately, talking of having the nursery cleaned with a faraway look in his eyes that tells her he is thinking of poor Augustus.

He does not neglect her, though. While he is more protective than she would like, he also ensures he doesn’t lose himself entirely to mania for the baby – if they had been at Buckingham Palace (if she had still been Queen) then she knows that most of the court and parliament would have seen her only
as a vessel for the heir to the throne, while William still sees her for herself, even if he is looking
forward to the baby’s arrival.

A baby. The heir to a Duchy and a Viscountancy rather than the throne.

She thinks that maybe that will be better for them, that her child will have a more normal life, free
from the constraints Victoria has dealt with for so long.

A baby. She’s not entirely sure how to feel.

The Duke of Wellington writes regularly to William with news of parliament’s latest bills and the
debates going on in the House.

It is kind of him, really, to keep William in the loop following his retirement. He knows, though, that
Wellington does it mostly so that William can in turn keep Victoria abreast of important political
news.

He isn’t sure exactly what kind of plan Wellington has going on his head (because there is a plan,
he’s sure of it) but for the moment it is relatively harmless.

There is nothing too unusual about one politician passing on information to another, even if William
is technically retired.

Of course, if people knew that he handed those letters directly to his wife then they might be a little
more concerned.

Victoria is not the Queen anymore and the short-sighted might consider her a minor player at best.
But William knows better, he knows that things can change quickly, especially in this climate of
revolution and with an unpopular king.

He keeps his peace, though, because nothing has yet been said … perhaps nothing ever will.

He will, however, continue to ensure that Victoria has up-to-date information.

Just in case.

The early part of her pregnancy is hard on Victoria.

She is sick constantly, always rushing away from her reading or sketching to find some privacy to
retch, or ducking behind some trees when she is out in the grounds. It makes her thankful she no
longer has a Queen’s duties, for she does not know how she would deal with them in her current
state and she can only imagine the comments her ministers and mama would make if she did not give
up all work (which she absolutely would not have).

William is so supportive. He does not just leave her to Skerrett’s care, but keeps her hair back from
her face and rubs her back and holds her hand.

He is wonderful.

The sickness has mostly abated by the time two months have passed since the doctor’s confirmation of her pregnancy, to Victoria’s intense relief, but it is followed by months of quite horrendous mood swings.

She has always had a temper but now she finds she cannot at all control the mix of anger and sadness and frustration she seems to feel so often.

She doesn’t want it to be like this. She knows that no matter how patient and kind William is, it must be hurting him when she will not let him comfort her, when she screams at him or bursts into tears at the slightest provocation.

Then there is her jealousy. Her pregnancy naturally brings thoughts of Augustus into the forefront of William’s mind, and so Victoria begins to imagine he is also thinking of Caro. In her rational moments she knows she is being ridiculous, knows that William loves her, but the baby makes her head all muddled and she finds herself convinced that William is yearning for his dead wife, that he is comparing her with Caro and finding her wanting.

It is not a good time for them.

Victoria curses the way her body and her mind betray her, hates how irrationally she is behaving.

Sometimes she thinks she hates the baby inside her for doing this to her, and then, when sense returns, she feels terrible about the horrible thoughts she’s had.

William has experience of irrationality, too much experience. She has never wanted to bring him more trouble, but he takes it all in his stride, soothes her temper and holds her close when she cannot stop crying.

At times she feels like pregnancy is Hell and William is the only light around her.

However, this all passes with time, and, while her emotions are still heightened and at times she feels a little off-kilter, she regains her equilibrium and begins to feel more like herself once more.

She dreads to think what the ministers might have said if she was still Queen. There had been whispers that she had inherited her grandfather’s madness before, and she thinks that this pregnancy may well have led to a resurgence of such gossip and talk of a Regency.

At least here at Brocket Hall she can cope with her pregnancy without the prying eyes of the court and parliament.

And here she has William, without any duties distracting them.
They mark the milestone of one year of their marriage without much fuss.

There are small but thoughtful gifts (sketches Victoria has done of their life together at Brocket Hall and magnificent orchids in wonderful colours that William has grown) and a day spent curled up in the library (reading together, Victoria playing Mozart on the recently tuned piano, spoiling Dash with cuddles and treats).

They dance together – Victoria’s pregnancy prevents any of the more vigorous dances but her state is not advanced enough to bar her from a slow sway with the husband who looks at her with so much love that she feels like the adored woman in the world.

She’s getting used to the idea of a baby now, looking forward to it (and not just so she no longer has to deal with the horrible symptoms of pregnancy).

She likes children and thinks it will be nice to have one at Brocket Hall, especially since she knows her child will have the opportunity to play with their cousins in a way Victoria was so often denied.

Will she be a good mother?

She doesn’t know, not really. She has absolute faith in William as a father but she sometimes worries that she will not be as good a parent as he surely will.

She turns to Emily and Harriet for help, asking tentative questions in an attempt to hide how concerned she is. They both offer a lot of advice that she hopes she will remember and promise to bring their own children over more often so that she can have some practice.

She knows the correct way to hold a baby now, at least, and feels a little more reassured by that small triumph.

But still, the excitement she is beginning to feel is always mingled with a fear that she will be inadequate, a fear only William seems able to chase away.

He tells her that she is strong, that she is not alone, that everything will be alright.

And she cannot help but believe him.

When the time comes for Victoria to give birth, William stays with her for the whole of the ten hour ordeal.

It is not the done thing but she is so glad that he is there (even during the hour she spends screaming terrible things at him) because, while she tries to hide it, the truth is that the idea of childbirth terrifies her.

She knows what happened to her poor cousin Charlotte, and what still happens to countless women every day.
Not even royalty are immune to the perils of pregnancy and childbirth.

William, at times, seems just as worried as she is. His expression is unusually grave and every one of her screams seems to stab at his heart in a way that makes her wish so badly that she could force herself to be silent.

She endures, though, and the result of her efforts is a healthy baby boy.

Victoria thinks momentarily that this boy might have one day been King, had things gone differently.

William thinks of the Duke of Wellington’s words and wonders if his son may eventually sit on the throne, regardless of how matters currently stand.

These thoughts are only fleeting, however, and are replaced soon enough by interest in, and love for, their baby.

William connects immediately with their son, and holds him skilfully, for he has had practice with Augustus and his many nieces and nephews.

Victoria is more aloof, not quite sure how she feels about the wrinkled, red creature with a patch of dark hair that they put into her arms.

On one hand she is a little in awe of the child she and William have made together, one who she fondly thinks already looks just like his father (once he has been washed and his face is a little less scrunched-up). On the other he is quite a squalling thing and she does not feel connected to him in the way she thinks she should.

They take him away soon enough, to the wet-nurse who has been engaged by the housekeeper – she cannot abide by the idea of feeding her son herself, for she is not a cow and the idea is quite disturbing to her.

Victoria does not have the nursery staff she would have had at her disposal had she still been Queen, but she does not think she will need it. She has the wet-nurse and one other nurse, the staff of Brocket Hall (many of whom have worked for William’s family for decades) have indicated they are all more than happy to step in when required, and when the baby is in Victoria’s rooms Skerrett has promised to assist (she says she has often helped her cousin with her baby).

William stays with her as she dozes on and off for a while, exhausted by the rigours of childbirth and aching all over.

He seems to sense her mixed feelings, for he does not ask her about the baby, only holds her hand and reads to her with his soothing voice.

But when one of the nursery staff returns with her son, wrapped up in blankets and well-fed, with his eyes sleepily half-open, she feels a tug on her heart when they place him into her arms.

Perhaps she doesn’t like the baby yet, but somehow she knows she loves him fiercely.
“What shall we name him?” asks her husband, once she has passed their new son to him and William is cradling him with an expertise borne of much experience.

“Why William, of course,” she answers as if no other option is possible.

He is pleased, but unsure if such a name is wise. The Duke of Wellington’s vague comments and continued correspondence have led him to believe that there is a possibility his son will one day be King of England, and he thinks it would not help for his name to be a reminder of the fact that Victoria is married to a viscount and not a prince.

“I am flattered, my darling,” he smiles at his wife, “but I think it might be prudent to give him William as a second name. Perhaps Edward, after your father, would suit as his first name?”

“Edward,” she muses, “we could call him Eddy.”

“You do like your nicknames,” he grins as he remembers the days of ‘Lord M’ and winks at her.

She blushes, “yes, Edward is a fine name – he can be Edward William Augustus, for his grandfather, father and brother.”

William’s eyes fill with tears and, still holding his son gently, he leans down to press his lips to Victoria’s, “oh my darling, I do love you so.”

Tucked between them, Eddy burbles happily.

“I think he looks just like you, William,” Emily says as she admires her week-old nephew.

Victoria beams. She fully believes her husband is the handsomest man in the world and considers it the highest compliment to her new-born son to have him likened to his father, despite the fact that she herself cannot see much beauty in babies when they are very little.

“I hope he will grow up to look exactly like you, William,” she tells her husband.

“Well I am flattered, darling girl, but I think he might have your hair colour, and we will have to see whether his eyes change.”

Victoria looks at the small tufts on Eddy’s head and then examines her own hair carefully, satisfied that it is an acceptable shade, “as long as he has your nose and mouth and ears and cheekbones I believe he will be quite handsome.”

William and Emily laugh in unison and Victoria marvels at the rich and joyful sound the two of them make together.
“You must come and visit often, Emily,” Victoria tells her sister-in-law, “and bring your children too. Your daughter has some little ones, does she not?”

Emily nods, “she will be delighted to visit, and her children will enjoy another friend.”

“Harriet Sutherland may be coming to stay for a few days with some of her children next month. Perhaps you would all come then so the children can play together?”

“I am sure we can manage that,” Emily smiles, “it will be nice to have this house full of children once more.”

She and William share a look and Victoria knows that they are thinking of their childhood, of a time that they both seem to remember as idyllic in a way Victoria’s own childhood never was.

Brocket Hall can never be quite as it was when William was a child. Victoria knows that too much – his first wife’s decline, his son’s death – has happened here for that.

But hopefully, eventually, William’s happy memories can outweigh the haunted ones.

“Letters of congratulations,” William tells her as he passes a pile of papers to her one morning.

“More!” Victoria exclaims, passing him the pile she had received, “I did not expect half so many as this. I even received one today from the King of France.”

William looks up sharply from his perusal of the letters, “the King of France?”

Victoria nods, “yes, I’ve no idea why he should send anything to me, though I suppose his daughter is married to my uncle Leopold.”

“Mmm,” William mumbles as he considers the letter in question. Victoria is still a princess and it is true that there is a relationship through marriage, but that is the case for most European royalty and such personal letters of congratulations would normally be expected only by the reigning monarch or their heirs.

“Is something wrong?” Victoria asks, worried by the frown on William’s face.

“Nothing too concerning, darling girl,” he answers, “only perhaps we should not mention this letter to anyone except the Duke of Wellington. You know your uncle can be …”

Jealous, thinks Victoria, or dangerous or touchy.

“Yes,” she nods, “I understand. And … and I suppose it should be the same for the letters from the Tsar and the King of Sweden.”

She holds up two more letters, both bearing royal seals.

He nods tiredly as she passes them over, “yes, I think so. I am sorry for the secrecy but I do not want a fuss over what could be nothing. If you agree I may go and visit the Duke of Wellington to discuss these, nothing official, just to ask his advice.”
“Yes of course,” Victoria agrees, sure that the Duke will have good advice to give them.

As William leaves to write to the Duke, Victoria contemplates the pile of letters with far too many letters from important personages than there should be on the birth of an heir to a mere viscount and an abdicated Queen.

Is it just courtesy towards a former Queen, or the hint of support?

She’s not sure she’s ready for her peaceful life to be disturbed by the answer to such a question.

They have Eddy christened at the small local church two and a half months after his birth.

The godparents they choose are William’s sister Emily and her husband Lord Palmerston, as well as William’s brother Frederick and Emma Portman, who has been such a good friend to them both.

William worries that perhaps she would like some of the godparents to be from her own family, but she has no intention of asking one of the people who have been so unsupportive and, in many cases, rude to be a chosen guardian for her son. Besides, William’s family are her family now, and they are a delightful group.

The church is filled with their friends and outside the locals (along with a number who have travelled from all over the country) cheer and sing.

It fills Victoria’s heart with joy to hear their good wishes for her son and though William worries a little that the people might be too rowdy, she insists on walking among them for a few minutes with Eddy in her arms, and is rewarded by even louder cheering.

Out of the corner of her eye she sees William speaking quietly with the Duke of Wellington, who has come on her particular invitation.

Something is certainly beginning.

William is brilliant with Eddy. In fact for a little while Victoria finds herself somewhat jealous of her husband, for it seems that their son will only fall asleep to the soothing sounds of his father’s beautiful voice.

Victoria supposes she cannot blame him, because she herself has always loved William’s voice, but she still feels a little hurt.

She has felt jealous about many people, especially in her earlier, insecure days when every woman who spoke to William seemed closer to him than she liked. She has never expected to be jealous of William himself, though.
It is an odd feeling and one she does not particularly enjoy.

William takes it all in his stride, cheerfully noting that she clearly need not worry any more if she loves her son enough, since she is so jealous of his preference for his father.

His words do make her smile but she still feels sad that she is unable to comfort her son the way William can.

But then one night, when Eddy will not stop crying and Victoria refuses to interrupt William in his greenhouse (he is dealing with a very fiddly stage with one of his projects), she tries, after almost being driven to despair, to soothe her son with some piano playing.

As it turns out, Eddy is as fond of Mozart as his father is.

Sir Robert Peel is not having a good day.

He is, in fact, not having a good year.

First had been that damned Bedchamber Crisis, where the role of Prime Minister had been within his grasp, only for it to be wrenched forcefully away by the manoeuvres of a Queen he now admits he underestimated.

Then that same Queen had announced her intention to marry Lord Melbourne, the whole situation made only slightly less farcical by the fact that Melbourne had at least had the decency to resign before the announcement was made to the Privy Council. Peel admits that he was one of the Privy Council members who had agreed that the Queen should be made to abdicate if she insisted on going through with such a marriage, and he had been surprised when he found himself on the opposite side to the Duke of Wellington, who had stated his belief that the couple ought to be allowed to marry (with provisions of course) with the Queen retaining her title.

Now, Peel thinks, he is starting to see Wellington’s point of view.

The former Queen has her flaws, of course, but while she had ruled she had usually been willing to accept the restrictions of her role – they are a constitutional monarchy after all – and that had been, he knows, in large part thanks to Lord Melbourne’s tutelage. He is aware that there were often arguments, and of course there was the Bedchamber Crisis (though Peel can guess now that that particular incident had been more about her sorrow at losing Melbourne and her ladies than any Whig partisanship on her side).

The new King, however, is a fierce supporter of absolute monarchy, and since the day of his ascension he has been hounding parliament in an attempt to claw back some of the powers that now sit in the hands of politicians rather than monarchs.
Their former Queen could be a little petty sometimes (though Melbourne was often able to talk her round) but their new King takes it to a whole new level.

That is something Peel cannot condone, a reversal of power that could well anger the people enough for them to consider revolution.

And revolution is absolutely something he wishes to avoid.

Peel cannot do his job properly at the moment.

How can he draft laws and prepare speeches when he is constantly fielding complaints from his colleagues about the King’s interference? How can he get things done when the King takes three times longer than he should to sign documents because he does not want to give his assent to anything that might restrict his power or which has been proposed by someone he does not like? How can he get popular support when more protests spring up every day, when he hears stories of people cheering the former Queen’s baby son at his christening and booing the King when leaves the palace?

Something has to be done. They cannot continue on like this.

The day brings weather warm enough for a walk outside with Eddy, who is bundled up in layers of blankets so only his tiny face (very like his father’s, to Victoria’s continuing delight) can be seen.

They walk through the grounds to find the rooks and William holds his son and points them out, solemnly telling him numerous facts about the birds even though Eddy cannot at all comprehend the information at the moment and seems far more interested (much to his father’s amusement) with the task of fitting the whole of his tiny fist into his mouth.

Victoria enjoys the fresh air and the quiet time with her family, uninterrupted by the servants, or the letters that seem to come so frequently for William now.

Sometimes she misses the bustle of the city, the balls and the opera visits, the glamour of life as Queen.

But she can still visit the opera on their trips to town, she can dance with William whenever she wants, and the peace of the country is nicer than she once believed (though she does enjoy when they go to London or one of the other big cities for a few days).

Besides, she knows now that home is not really a place (though she adores Brocket Hall) but it is wherever her family is – her, William and Eddy, together with their extended family and friends (the ones who actually support them, at least).

She is so very happy.
The people are uneasy.

Public opinion has not always been on Victoria’s side, especially when it came to the scandals of Lady Flora and the Bedchamber Crisis. But now, when they are ruled by the man once known as Duke of Cumberland, his niece seems a far more attractive prospect.

She has the flaws of youth but she is known to be kind, to give to charities and take an interest in her servants. Besides, people enjoy a good love story, and no one can fail to see, when they are observed together, that Victoria, Duchess of Kent, loves her husband Lord Melbourne to distraction.

The politicians realise now how much they enjoyed having a monarch who worked hard. She often needed things explaining, and she was known to argue with issues she did not agree on, but their former Queen was far more diligent than her uncles before her, and more so than the uncle who has now succeeded her and prefers to pester the government about his powers rather than sign the endless papers placed in front of him.

Who would the people rather have rule them?

A young woman who is not beautiful but is charming; who laughs and smiles and waves; who works hard; who has a son and can give the country further princes and princesses to secure the monarchy in a way their new King, with one blind son (currently unmarried), cannot.

Or an old King, another in a line of disreputable Hanoverian brothers; surrounded by rumours of murder, alleged to have got a child on his sister, and intent on grasping for every scrap of power he can get.

The new King feels secure and pleased as he sits on his throne.

He does not realise that it may not last.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading. Hope you enjoyed it.
Part III - Restoration

Chapter Summary

I'm not entirely sure about this chapter but I decided to post it because I didn't want to just keep playing around with it.

You will have to suspend disbelief because I'm sure in a real life situation things wouldn't have happened nearly as simply as they do in this story, but complex political plots are not my forte.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“The Queen may have her difficulties, but what would rally the public to her support would be the prospect of being ruled by you.”

“Should we really do this?” asks a haggard-looking Robert Peel, “will it not it seem ridiculous that we, the ones who handed him the crown, are now trying to take it away from him?”

“Don’t be dense, Peel,” one of his MPs answers impatiently, “no one ever wanted Cumberland as King. The idea was supposed to scare the Queen into giving up Melbourne.”

“And that plan worked out well, didn’t it?” says a third voice, “at least the Queen could be persuaded to listen to reason most of the time, whereas now we spend all our time fighting to stop the King trying to grab power – he seems to think this is the 16th century rather than the 19th.”

“I did warn you,” comes the final voice, wryly amused, if also a little tired.

“But be smug, Duke,” Peel sighs, “we all admit you were right. But to reverse everything … it will be such a mess – the Whigs will surely use this as an excuse to try and force us out.”

“We’ll have to do it properly then. Give them no room to argue with our terms.”

Trust the military man, the others all think, to state it plainly and without any regard for the complexities such a plan might involve.

“Will you go to Brocket Hall then?” asks Peel, “I imagine that out of the four of us you’ll be received best.”

“I will go,” he agrees, “Melbourne is a reasonable enough man, and an honourable one – and I think his wife will listen.”

“So we are in agreement?” asks Peel, a touch of nerves in his voice.
A moment’s silence stretches out tensely, but when they all speak in unison it is with the conviction they will need to follow through on their plan, “agreed.”

The Duke of Wellington visits Brocket Hall one year and eight months after the Duke of Cumberland is crowned King of England.

When he arrives both Victoria and William know that everything is going to change.

It is not that they aren’t pleased to see him, but his arrival, they think, is more likely to herald significant news than it is to be a social visit. It is a sign that all the hints he has been dropping have finally led to something.

When they hear what he actually has to say, though, it is shocking despite the fact that they have guessed enough to realise that such plots might be in the works.

“Can it even be done?” asks Victoria, when the Duke outlines the plan forming to return Victoria to the throne over her uncle Cumberland, “surely my uncle will not allow you to just give the crown back to me?”

“He has not yet managed to wrest enough of parliament’s power to stop us if we truly wish to,” the Duke replies grimly, “and it is best we act soon before he manages to do irreversible damage to our democracy and constitution.”

“You’re talking about treason,” William murmurs.

Of course they have been talking around it for months now but this is the first time they’ve said it out loud properly.

Victoria winces. Treason has always been a touchy word for those with royal blood.

“Perhaps technically,” the Duke concedes, “but it could also be taken as righting a wrong, or reversing a mistake.”

“I highly doubt my uncle will see it that way,” Victoria notes tartly.

“The people are not happy,” the Duke tells them, “the new King is not as extravagant as your other uncles but he is also not at all a genial figure to them. He is reluctant to donate to any charities; treats the servants more like slaves, I’ve heard; has threatened violence upon some of the politicians when they have told him unwelcome news; and is trying all he can to undermine our power in order to boost his own.”

William looks angry. Victoria remembers what he once told her, about how much he really believed in England’s constitution despite his flippant attitude to many other things.

“It is dangerous,” William tells her, “to let such things go on without attempts to stop it will only encourage your uncle to go further. The days of the Tudors had their charms in some ways, I’m sure, but we do not want to push our development backwards.”
“How do we know that the people will not just wish to … to remove the monarchy absolutely?” she asks, trying to keep her voice steady, “we need only look to France to remind us.”

“I know,” she says to William as he opens his mouth, probably to try and reassure her, “that you told me the English were not revolutionary people … but we can see how angry they are now, and surely angry people are dangerous?”

His wife is right, William knows, but he does not want to alarm her, nor let her see his worry for her.

“I still believe,” he says carefully, “that the English as a whole are not a people to incite a bloody revolution as they did in France, and I do not think they will wish to overthrow the monarchy entirely. Nevertheless, we should possibly be prepared for rioting and some violence – there are those low sorts of people who will use any excuse to commit violence.”

“I too believe that our goals can be accomplished without unnecessary violence,” the Duke agrees, “we will continue with talks with the Whigs and hopefully we will soon have something to bring before the House.”

William thanks the Duke and walks him out, while Victoria sits and thinks for a few minutes.

Will this work? Should it work?

She wants what is best for her country, but she also does not want to cause irreversible damage.

What is it they say … the road to hell is paved with good intentions.

Well their intentions are certainly good. Where this road is leading them, though, is not yet clear.

She only hopes they are doing the right thing.

When her mama arrives (uninvited of course) at Brocket Hall a week after Wellington’s visit, Victoria is immediately suspicious.

William is polite despite the intrusion on their happy, peaceful existence. Still, he insists that Victoria herself does not have to speak with her mother unless she wants to.

Victoria very much does not want to, but one of the many things William has taught her is that sometimes small sacrifices have to be made to prevent bigger problems springing up later – it is a lesson she has struggled to learn but one she puts into practice now.

She is scrupulously well-mannered towards mama when she greets her (though she cannot hide her coldness towards the woman who has never seemed to accept her choices), knowing that this is likely to have more effect that her true desire, which involves a lot of shouting and quite possibly some tears and a stomped foot (there is something about mama that brings out the very petulant teenager in her).

Mama asks Victoria questions about her wedding, how she likes her new home, what William’s
family are like and other such simple topics.

It is a stilted sort of conversation but they manage to get through it without too many awkward questions, though Victoria refuses to give too many details – after all mama cannot expect to turn up out of the blue and have things be immediately fixed.

The woman in front of her is mama, will always be mama … but she is not family the way William and Eddy are, or even the way Emily and the rest of William’s family are starting to become.

There will always be a gulf, always the memory of all the things her mama said, all the ways she never protected her.

The atmosphere does improve a little when Victoria brings out Eddy for her mama to see. She is wary of it, considering the way mama has behaved towards her since her marriage, but she is thankful that the Dowager Duchess seems to take to her grandson, showing a tender motherly side that Victoria has rarely seen these past few years.

It reminds her of those brief moments in her own childhood when Sir John was not around and mama was not so in his power.

Still, she refuses to allow mama to talk herself into receiving an invitation to dinner or to stay the night and, when the Dowager Duchess leaves to return to Kensington, Victoria breathes a sigh of relief.

“She is sorry, I believe,” William says to her as they wave mama’s carriage away, “though I think she still disapproves of me,” he adds with a good humoured chuckle and a wry smile that tells her he is not particularly offended by her mama’s animosity.

“She admired Eddy very much,” Victoria admits, “but that does not excuse all she has said and done before. I do not think she would have come to visit if she had not believed things might change.”

“Sometimes it takes an upheaval to change a person’s mind,” William says.

“Perhaps,” Victoria concedes, “but I imagine Sir John is still lurking at Kensington and until he is gone I believe he will always be first in her thoughts.”

“Will you receive her if she comes again or shall I inform the staff that they are to turn her away?”

She sighs, “I will try not to be rude if she visits again, and I will see her, but I will not have her in my confidence, especially not at a time such as this.”

William nods. He agrees that any mention of their conference with the Duke of Wellington should not be passed on to the Dowager Duchess. In fact, he thinks it may be wise to write to Wellington and suggest that they are even more circumspect – the visit from Victoria’s mother so soon after the Duke’s own trip to see them seems too coincidental to be an accident, and he thinks some word of their plans might have leaked out.

But a letter to Wellington can wait.
For now Victoria needs a little cheering up and it is the perfect day for a picnic on the grounds with Eddy.

He wants a little uninterrupted time with his family.

A month goes by with countless visits.

Sir Robert Peel and the Duke of Wellington (from the Tories), and Lord Palmerston and Lord John Russell (of the Whig Party), are the most common visitors. The latter two, being friends and former colleagues of William (and in Palmerston’s case, married to his sister Emily), are easy to explain, but Victoria is not quite sure what reason is given for the regular presence of Tories at Brocket Hall.

William will, she is sure, think of something innocuous enough to explain it away to most people, but she feels that her uncle might consider such meetings a threat, even if they are meant to be entirely social.

They talk and plan while Victoria becomes steadily more uneasy about the future.

Then one day, out of the blue, William asks her if she is really content with the direction they are moving in.

And suddenly she is so relieved. Because this is the first time anyone has actually asked her if this is what she wants.

Because there is some part of her that never wants to sit on a throne again.

She is happy in her life now, without the intense scrutiny she suffered as Queen, without the burdens and trials her title brought her.

So when William asks she spends some time contemplating the question.

It is not an easy decision.

For so many years she lived with the expectation of becoming Queen and there never seemed to be any alternative path for her to take.

Then she became Queen and though she had her Lord M and some separation from her mother and the riches of her position and power … it was still a cage of sorts.

But now she is living a different life, one that she loves very much, one of more freedom than she has ever experienced, and she doesn’t know how it will feel to go back to the mixed blessings and burdens of a life as Queen.

She knows she is being selfish, thinking of how it will be for her rather than of the good she could do for her country.

Still, she finds the part of her that wants to serve her country fights fiercely with the part that never
wants to set foot in Buckingham Palace again.

Choices. Or really just one … one of the most important of her life.

“I … I do not believe my uncle makes a very good King,” she finally says.

“Certainly not a constitutional one,” William agrees.

“It will be hard to go back to the palace. I have so much freedom now, and no need to deal with all the people who rejoiced at my failures.”

“If you do not want to be Queen, Victoria, then I assure you that I will support you in your decision.”

She squeezes his hand in thanks, “you are so good, William … but I … I have always wanted to make my dear papa proud and do my best. It will be hard, and I shall probably get very frustrated, but I believe it is best that we continue on as Sir Robert and the Duke of Wellington have been planning.”

“Are you sure?” he asks softly, with no hint of judgement in his voice.

She wavers momentarily, wondering whether she should take the way out he is offering her.

“Yes, William, I am sure.”

“William!” Victoria exclaims, “Stop making him move – I cannot get his nose right.”

“My apologies, darling girl,” William says, pressing a kiss to her head as Eddy finally stops wriggling around in amusement at the funny faces William has been making.

“I just want to get this sketch perfect. He’s growing so fast right now and I want to capture every moment.”

“Well it looks wonderful so far,” William tells her.

She rolls her eyes slightly, “I am quite sure you would say that even if it were a complete mess.”

“Well I am sure nothing you could ever draw, especially of our son, would be a mess … and so it is a moot point, my darling.”

“You flatter me, William.”

“Ah but I speak only the truth,” William insists, “and the sketch will be lovely. We shall have to get it framed when you have coloured it.”

Victoria nods happily, “that would be nice. And perhaps when he’s a little older I can paint something of him and Dash together.”

“Well I wish you well in getting both of them to sit still long enough,” William laughs.
Victoria pouts, knowing the difficulty that she will have.

Oh well, she thinks to herself, she will just persuade William to assist her when the time comes.

Sir Robert Peel makes a speech in the House praising the English constitution as a symbol of the country’s democracy and strongly censoring anyone who might seek to turn the clock backwards on such democracy for their own ends. His words are greeted with thunderous applause from both the Tories and the Whigs alike.

The King, on hearing about the speech, is heard loudly swearing and screaming at the poor soul who delivered the news of the speech. He is overheard by a dozen servants, one of whom visits the office of one of the most popular newspapers in the country. The headlines over the next few days are not at all kind.

A mob gathers at the gates of Buckingham Palace demanding freedom from the tyrant known as King. They come back the next day with numbers swelled … and the day after … and the day after that.

A statute of the King is unveiled. Two days later it is torn down in the night. No attempts are made to restore it.

“Are we doing the right thing?” Victoria asks quietly.

“I believe it is your uncle’s doings that are the catalyst for this,” William says.

“But are we fanning the flames. Uncle Cumberland is not quite the demon they make him out to be.”

“One does not have to be a demon to be unsuited to the throne,” William reminds her, “and though your uncle may well have the temperament of a King, it is not one of a King suited for this particular throne. The monarch is no longer the ultimate power and your uncle ill-suits the role of a constitutional monarch.”

“I just do not want anyone to be hurt,” Victoria sighs, “with so many crowds and protests I am sure people will be harmed. I … I keep thinking of the Chartists.”

“The Chartists were different,” William insists, disliking the reminder of the group he had worried excessively over for fear that they would harm Victoria.

“Yes but this is big, William. It could change the face of the country, could break us all.”
“It will not, my darling,” William insists, “I promise that we will endure this, whatever the outcome.”

Victoria leans into his arms, and allows herself feel safe.

“She can rest easy,” she says after a few minutes of blissful comfort, “I want to be the Queen this country deserves.”

“You are so stressed at the moment, darling girl,” William murmurs, “I do not want to add to your burdens.”

“It will distract my mind and keep me busy,” she insists, “please William. I just want to be a good Queen.”

“You will be,” William tells her, “I am sure of it.”

And his belief, his honest and open belief, is what helps her think she can really do this.

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The King’s advisers suggest that he desist with his attempts to increase his own power. He dismisses them as weak-willed cowards pandering to the politicians.

One of the main topics of conversation among the army regiments centres on whether the King will attempt to use their forces for his own purposes. Some take casual bets and consider it a joke. The wiser among them realise the seriousness of the situation.

The King asks a close friend highly placed in the army about using the army against the rioters. When informed that it would turn public support even more against him he shows some sense and does not enquire further. His sensible frame of mind lasts until stories of how Victoria is cheered whenever she leaves Brocket Hall reach him and then he has to be talked out of sending a detachment of guards to ‘discourage’ such behaviour and keep watch over his niece ‘for her own protection’.

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“How does it go?” Victoria asks the Duke of Wellington when he visits one day.

His visits are less common now than they were a few weeks ago. The House is busy now and he can rarely spare a day to come and see them.

“There is agreement on the course of action to be taken,” he explains, “but rather a lot of dissension over exactly how to accomplish it.”

“Well I suppose it’s too much to ask for the House to share the same views on everything,” William
says with a tired smile, very glad to be away from the exhaustion of politics and the tiresome task of trying to rally unity within his party.

“The Whigs are quite insistent that the Tories give the government over to them without even an election, which of course is quite out of the question,” the Duke says with an apologetic nod in William’s direction.

William himself shrugs. He knows the Whigs do not have the support to form a majority, and that they are using the circumstances to push for more than they should.

Victoria stays quiet. She has always had Whig sympathies and when she became Queen that only intensified, though she can admit now that this was mostly due to loyalty towards William.

However, she is still bitter about being forced from the throne in order to marry William, a decision that had certainly been made by a largely Tory group. She remembers, though, the support of the Duke of Wellington, and how the Tories have come to see the error of their ways (even if it may perhaps turn out to be too little, too late).

“I think,” William says after a few moments, “that perhaps the government should stay as it currently is, for stability’s sake. Another election can be held in a while, when everything has settled down.”

The Duke nods, “that was the suggestion put forward by Sir Robert Peel. The more reasonable Whigs are accepting but there is still not enough support for the idea to let everything go relatively smoothly.”

“I will write some letters,” William tells him, “I cannot guarantee it will do any good but it may convince a few of them that we must not destabilise the government at this critical moment.”

“I believe you have more influence than you give yourself credit for,” the Duke tells him with a wry smile.

“I suppose we shall see,” William sighs, “I will just be glad when all this is over.”

“I think we all will,” the Duke agrees.

Victoria nods, but her mind is distracted with thoughts of having to say goodbye to Brocket Hall and return to Buckingham Palace.

She too will be glad when their plans have been seen through, but she will miss this new life of hers very much.

They teeter on the edge of a precipice.

Few people realise until much later how close they came to absolute chaos, to possible anarchy.
William knows. So does Wellington. And Victoria … Victoria feels in her bones how it could have all turned out so wrong, that the relatively peaceful transition could have been as bloody as The Terror that occurred decades before in France.

It isn’t, though.

No one knows precisely why the whole situation manages to work as well as it does.

Perhaps it is a wave of admiration for charming Victoria and her love-match marriage and adorable son.

Maybe it is relief to be rid of Cumberland, to see him safely packed off across the sea to Hanover.

Or it might just be a craving for peace.

Whatever it is, the politicians of the country breathe a sigh of relief at a disaster averted.

When the Privy Council come to him with their demands, her uncle Cumberland does not go quietly.

“But what else,” as William says to her, “does anyone expect of such a man?”

Retention of the throne of Hanover is poor consolation to her fuming uncle, but as the little support he had before his English reign began has mostly disappeared after over a year of his rule, he does not have much choice but to obey the will of the country.

And the country would, it seems, very much like to trade their old, infamous and dictatorial King for their young, charming ex-Queen and her small son (whose cheerful disposition and ready smile wins many hearts).

And so her uncle Cumberland goes to Hanover, where Victoria fervently hopes he will stay for the foreseeable future.

To Victoria it all seems almost too easy.

William tells her this is decidedly not the case, and that there have been many fierce debates and concessions offered by all parties involved in order to reach the agreement they now have in place. Victoria is just thankful that they considered her involvement would bring too much bias and thus did not bother her with such things – she has always liked to be informed but the petty squabbles of parliament have never been at all interesting to her.

There is a period of unease after her uncle returns to Hanover.

The people are glad to see him go, but the upheaval of the changes means everyone is a little out of sorts.
There is much to sort out. William’s title thankfully causes little issue – he is granted the Dukedom of Edinburgh but nothing else, which he proclaims himself more than happy about (he is reluctant to even let them bestow this on him, notoriously unwilling as he is to accept honours, but parliament want the Queen’s husband to have more standing than a mere viscount). The rest however – rules and regulations in relation to how much (or in this case how little) William can interfere in matters of state, orders of precedence, titles for Eddy and so on – is a much longer and more frustrating process for all involved.

It also takes a while for the rioting to die down – news of what has happened travels to some more remote corners of the country quite slowly, and some people, she knows, are sorry to lose the excuse for the more uninhibited and occasionally violent behaviour that has erupted over recent months.

Victoria tries very hard to be especially dignified in these first months, wanting to project a sense of calm she hopes will spread across the country.

She gives speech after speech all over the country (so many that William tells her she is reciting them in her sleep), talking of unity and a strong England and the great empire they will build.

She smiles and waves even when she just wants to rest, and she slips back into her old role even though it now feels like a dress that is just a bit too tight.

Maybe a part of her wishes she had stayed at Brocket Hall but she has made her choice, she has William by her side and she will show the world that she is worthy of her throne.

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_Eight months later_

William finds Victoria after her second coronation in much the same way as he had following her first.

One long braid unpinned and unbothered by the soap splashing on her magnificent dress as she gives her dog a warm bath.

There are differences of course. The slight changes in her face that show she is a few years older, a new dog (she still mourns Dash but loves Islay nevertheless), a dark haired toddler playing with a wooden horse by her side and … and the barely noticeable curving of her stomach.

“You were magnificent, darling girl,” he says as he bends over to scoop up his son, who babbles excitedly as he flies his horse through the air.

“I am so glad the people cheered,” she says as he tickles Eddy gently under the chin and watches in delight as the boy laughs and squirms, “I was worried they might have changed their minds, or that they would feel a second coronation was too extravagant, though I know it was not nearly as grand as my first.”
"It was just what the people needed after your uncle," William tells her firmly, "and the cost can easily be managed. As for the idea of the people changing their mind … well I do not see how they could not prefer you to your uncle – he has very little of your wonderful dignity and grace."

"You always know what to say, William," Victoria smiles as she turns and tilts her head up to receive a kiss from him.

She leans over to cuddle her son before William puts him back on the floor to charge his horse at the battalion of wooden soldiers lined up in front of one of the chairs.

William steps forward and puts his hand against her slightly swollen stomach, "are you feeling alright, my darling girl? It was such a long day and you barely had a chance to eat."

"You worry too much, William. I assure you I am quite well. This child clearly knows who they are, for they behave excellently for state occasions."

William laughs loudly, slightly startling Eddy for a moment before he begins to laugh too, mimicking the father he so adores.

Victoria shakes her head in amusement, "I have been considering names."

"Oh yes," William says with an interested look, "and what are your thoughts?"

"What do you think about Arthur for a boy?" asks Victoria, "the Duke of Wellington has always been so supportive and I admire him very much. I am sure the business with my uncle would not have gone off half so well, if at all, without his hard work, and I would like to thank him."

"Capital idea," William smiles, "but if the baby is a girl?"

"Alice," Victoria says confidently, remembering a conversation a few years ago when William expressed a preference for the name.

"Beautiful," her husband agrees with the glimmer of tears in his eyes.

Victoria gazes at him and sees the love in his eyes that he never tries to hide. She looks down at her precious son and her hand rests lightly on her stomach.

This is her family, the one she has fought so hard for, the one she will grow old with.

For years she knew she would eventually make her own way out of the shadows of Kensington, but never did she dream of this.

And she will treasure the exquisite happiness she has found for as long as she lives.

Chapter End Notes

My headcanon for this story is that Victoria and Lord M went on to have three children in total – Edward William Augustus, Arthur Frederick George and Alice Victoria.
Elizabeth.

Thanks for reading. Hope you enjoyed it.

End Notes

Thanks for reading.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!