

The Queen of England in Disguise

*Imagine you are in Kensington Palace,
London, England.*

The monarch of the realm, Queen Victoria, sighs as she stares through the frosted glass of the palace window. Closing her eyes, she touches the window to feel the fury of the winter weather. A shiver runs down her spine. Snowflakes dance outside, following the wild movement of the wind. She dreams of dancing too, dancing outside in the snow, to the rhythm of the icy air.

‘Kensington Palace has been my home for fifty years,’ she says, looking at Alice, her lady-in-waiting, standing across the bedroom. Alice was young and beautiful, reminding the Queen of her earlier years, of days long gone by.

‘I have ruled my country, I have married and buried my husband, and I have neglected my own dreams for so long. Though I have eaten the finest foods,’ Victoria continues, ‘dined with the best people, and worn the richest clothes, life has become too predictable for me.’ Wind whistles through the crevices of the palace. Victoria opens the window, welcoming the frozen breeze.

‘Your Majesty!’ exclaims Alice, running to the latch. ‘It’s a blizzard out there! You’ll freeze to death!’ She tightly closes the window and locks it. ‘This is one of the coldest mornings in London; we wouldn’t want you to get sick right before your appointment with the Prime Minister.’

Victoria walks away from the window, savouring the small amount of cold air that came in. She sits in a chair facing the red embers in the fireplace.

‘Every morning is the same,’ she says. ‘I wake up, get dressed, and perform the routine duties of my royal position.’

Her lady-in-waiting adds another log to the fire.

‘Yes, your Majesty,’ she replies.

‘When do queens have fun?’ the monarch asks herself curiously as she watches sparks escape up the chimney. An idea formulates in her mind. ‘Today will be different,’ she whispers. More sparks fly into the air. ‘Today will be dangerous,’ she says. A smile appears on her face. ‘Today will be an adventure!’ Jumping to her feet, Queen Victoria exclaims, ‘We don’t have much time! We must be on our way! I have a surprise planned for us today.’

‘But your Majesty, what about your schedule?’ replies Alice, ‘and the Prime Minister?’

‘Cancel my schedule!’ commands the Queen. ‘Cancel all my appointments for the day! There is someone else we must see.’

‘Someone else, Your Majesty? Who? Who could be so important?’

Ignoring her, Queen Victoria marches over to the window and reopens it. Fresh air invades the cosy room.

‘I am the Queen,’ she exclaims. ‘And today will be different!’ Wind swirls through the curtains. Shocked, Alice nods and lowers her head.

‘Gather up the fireplace ashes!’ demands the Queen.

‘What? Why do you want to —.’

‘Do it!’ she exclaims, pointing to the fire.

‘As you wish,’ squeals the lady-in-waiting, running to the fireplace. Victoria stands in front of the mirror. Important documents fly from the desk onto the floor.

‘I can’t believe I am about to do this,’ she mumbles under her breath. ‘I’ve never done anything like this before. Queens don’t do this kind of thing. What would people say if they knew I was going to —’

‘Your ashes, your Majesty!’ says Alice, trying to catch her breath. She places a bucket of ashes before the Queen, and curtsies.

A strange look appears on Victoria’s face. It is a look that longs for freedom – a look that longs to escape this luxurious life. She knows she’ll have to pay a price for her actions, but she figures it’s worth it.

‘You are not to speak to anyone about this!’ she exclaims, as she grinds a handful of ashes between her palms and applies them to her eyebrows and cheekbones.

Amazingly enough, just a little black ash soon makes her face unrecognizable.

‘Excellent!’ exclaims the Queen, as she examines herself in the mirror.

‘Has she gone mad? Has she lost her mind completely?’ Alice ponders. ‘What if people find out about this?’

‘Fetch me an old cloak from the servants’ quarters!’ demands the Queen, pointing to the door.

‘As you wish, your Majesty,’ replies Alice, scurrying out of the room.

Victoria’s eyes dart wildly across the room.

‘Freedom will soon be mine,’ she whispers.

‘Here it is,’ announces the lady-in-waiting, entering the bedroom with a grey, musty cloak in her hand. Victoria goes to her mahogany writing desk and opens a drawer. She finds a sharp knife, a gold one she often uses to open her letters, and removes it from the drawer.

‘This will do,’ murmurs the Queen, a smirk on her face, as she walks towards Alice suspiciously.

Alice’s eyes open wide as the Queen slashes the old cloak with the letter opener.

‘I can’t go outside looking like a queen,’ Victoria tells her. ‘It would be far too dangerous!’ She puts on the torn cloak and walks to the window. A blanket of white snow covers the landscape.

‘Follow me!’ says the Queen, hurrying to the door. Her lady-in-waiting watches her. Dressed in the

clothes of the poorest commoner, the Queen opens the bedroom door. Alice follows.

‘What has come over the Queen?’ she thinks, as she walks through the door frame. ‘Why would she dress in the clothes of a peasant? Who is she going to see today? Who could be this important?’ A gust of wind closes the door behind her, and the two women sneak out of the palace without being seen.

Who would have thought that the monarch and her lady-in-waiting were going to church ... to hear a preacher ... the Prince of Preachers himself? The lady-in-waiting didn't realise that, but the Queen was looking forward to it ... looking forward to it very much indeed.