

The Great Historical Fiction Writing Contest 2026

OVERALL WINNER

(From a student in 7Q)

The Nine Day Queen



Jane

Anxiously, I knocked on the door of the Syon House. My fingers trembled and my legs began to shake with anxiety. Why was I here? What did he want? My doubts and worries swirled around in my clouded and tired mind. I barely slept last night. The nightmares kept me up. Suddenly, the door creaked open and I was greeted by two gentlemen, dressed in suits and ties. Solemnly, they invited me inside and proceeded to lead me into a dimly lit room. I felt uneasy. Why did I come here? Why were they here too? As I entered through the high doorway, I immediately picked up on the strange atmosphere of the room. My stomach twisted, my palms began to sweat and

my eyes darted around the room, as if expecting something to happen. It didn't. Slowly, my gaze landed upon a chair in the middle of the room. It was facing away from me, but I already knew who was there. Slowly, the duke of Northumberland - my father-in-law - turned to face me. I stared at him, expecting him to say something - to answer my burning questions. He didn't. He just sat there, as if expecting *me* to say something. I didn't. We sat there for a bit, the silence stifling us like a blanket. Eventually, the duke spoke. His voice was low and serious - just like it always was, however, today, I sensed something... different. I don't know what it was. I don't know why I even cared. But there was something different... something weird.

"Edward is dead."

The world began to spin; the shock hit me hard as I fell to my knees, weeping. Why? WHY? Memories of him and I surfaced in my mind. It felt like yesterday when we were playing in the courtyards together. It felt like yesterday when we were learning together, laughing together. Now he's gone. And I'll never see him again.

After what felt like hours, I began to wipe my tears away. I sat up. The duke was staring at me, with his glassy and vacant eyes, seemingly unaffected by my grief. His calmness and stone face scared me. He was never like this. What was he hiding? Abruptly, he started to talk. His rough voice pierced the quilt of silence like a knife.

"You are the next queen."

My head felt like it was going to explode. My heart began to beat loudly in my chest. All I could hear was my blood pumping and my breathing becoming raspy and short. No. I am *not*... And I will *never* be. I was reminded of that from the moment I was born.

"No.. No, I can't do this..I *won't* do this." I stuttered, fear filling every inch of my body. He laughed, the sound like fingernails down a chalkboard. My whole body tensed as he put his hand on my shoulder and whispered into my ear.

"Yes you *will*."

Mary

I pity Jane. A mere pawn in this game of chess - of life. Poor, poor girl. I always rooted for her y'know. Deep down. I watched as her parents abused her again and again. Oh, her parents! Her father was the worst. Constantly controlling her every

move; scrutinizing her every mistake. Her mother was bad too; always trying to make her perfect. And when she wasn't... Well, that's another story. Jane was so desperate for respect from them. Desperate for praise. Desperate to matter. I guess I was like that too, once... But times have changed. I found people who respected me. People who praised me. Who made me feel like I mattered.

In chess, the queen rarely ever bothers with pawns. They are so small and unimportant. Usually. Take your eyes off them for too long and the next thing you know... They become the most powerful piece on the board. The best. The queen. Like you. And suddenly, the mere pawn of whom you pitied, becomes your biggest competitor. Your biggest enemy. And, before you know it, you've lost. Lost at the game. Lost at life.

But... *I'm* not going to let that happen. No. *I'm* going to take back what's rightfully mine. Whatever it takes.

But first...

I need a plan.

Jane

I jolted awake, my breaths in short, shallow gasps. I had that nightmare again. Sweat poured down my face as I tried to control my breathing. My heart was racing, my head was pounding with a sudden headache while blood pumped in my ears, so loudly that I wished that it would just stop. Just go away.

I lay there for a long time, all tangled up in my bedsheets, fear slowly seizing control over me. Why that nightmare? Why again? Why *me*...?

Eventually, I rose from my bed. Dots and lines flashed in my vision, like they always did when I got up too fast. My head hurts, my eyes hurt, everything hurts. Dragging my feet across the wooden planks of the floor, I dressed. I wore my favourite dress - the green velvet one. It looked... nice. But it felt bigger than usual, as if I was just a small child put into a massive sea of responsibility, with no way to swim out.

I stared in the mirror for a while, my brain slowly taking everything in. I am going to the Tower of London today... To claim what isn't rightfully mine to take. I hate that my life has come to this. I hate that all I am and all I will ever be is a mere pawn. Just a sacrifice. Something that no one really cares about. Something that is just

manipulated for personal gain. Something that just doesn't matter. That's what I hate. But there is no way around it. I *am* nothing. And I will never matter. To anyone.

I travelled by boat to reach the Tower of London, like any new monarch has to do. The waves lapped at the sides; the sky was a hazy blue while I stared at the murky water, catching sight of my reflection. I don't even look like myself anymore... I look *too* young to be queen.

I hate this life. I hate to admit that this is all my fault. That I should have resisted more - fought back more. I should have insisted that I didn't deserve the crown. That it wasn't mine to take. Why did I do this to myself? Why?

This is going to end badly.

I can already feel it.

I could hear the faint sounds of the trumpets being blown. I am officially proclaimed queen of England.

But...

Where is the actual heir to the throne?

Where is Mary?

And when will she take back what is rightfully hers?

OVERALL RUNNER UP

(From a student in 10Q)

The Axing of the Heir



It was early morning when the rapping at the door came. I slumped out of bed and wandered towards the door. Standing in my doorway, was a member of the Privy Council. I recognised him immediately; his pompous look gave him away. I paused

before opening the door, noting that he stood close, undoubtedly trying to escape the icy rain that was hammering down. Part of me wanted to let him get soaked in the rain that bit longer, but I let him in. Pushing past me, he thumped a note onto my table. I peered over his shoulder to get a good look. I was still half asleep, so my tired brain took a little longer than usual to process the words.

'we doe charge you and every of you, that you, and every of you, with all convenient speede, repaire to our Castell of Fotheringhay where the said Queene of Scottes is in custodie, and there cause by your commaundement execution to be donne uppon her person'

"You've got five days to get yourself ready before you execute the Queen of Scotland," the council member said stoically, laughing dryly as he pulled open the wooden door and strode out into the wet London morning.



Four nights have passed since that fateful summons and I still find myself dwelling over the words that were placed on my table amidst that rain that pelted down outside. The execution is now only a few hours away and the chills that I felt down my spine when I first read those words have only worsened over time. The feeling now is akin to what I imagine it would feel like if hundreds of spiders were crawling under my skin. Fretfully, my weary steps lead me towards Fotheringhay Castle, where *she* is waiting for me. When you think about it, the block is the stage, the executioner and executed are the actors and the execution is not dissimilar to that of a

performance. The audience is the same as one at least. Death is not a show, it is a punishment. But, not for the first time, I wonder how many others understand that. As I walk up the wooden stairs, each step becomes harder. You would think I was climbing a mountain as my head goes fuzzy. The rain hits down and it hits down heavily, making an already difficult day infinitely more troubling.

The crowd, hundreds deep, begins to build up as masses upon masses of people huddle in front of me awaiting Her speech. She doesn't look scared, if anything she looks calm - perhaps even a little too calm? Oh how I wish to be as calm as her. The three cups of ale I consumed this morning have done little to settle nerves, and I can feel myself shaking, the closer I get. I step towards her and ask for forgiveness, as usual. However, this time the words mean more than any other time I've uttered them. It had always been a formality. But this morning, I seek forgiveness from the woman in front of me. I wonder if she can sense my inner turmoil? Can she feel the beating heart of a fellow Catholic standing here? Unlike the stoic woman at my feet, my beliefs have been locked away - a secret I have not shared with anyone since moving to London. I feel for her and wish I could do anything to help. But I know that there is *nothing* I can do.

I watch and listen as she utters her final prayer. I strain to make out the words she mutters under her breath and realise that calm exterior hides a quivering soul. She's wearing something red underneath probably to hide the blood which will soon coat her. She slowly places her head on the chopping block and I ready my axe.

Closing my eyes, I swing...

Damn it.

I missed.

The axe crashes down into the back of her head and I have to swing a couple more times for it to be over. Dropping my axe, I grasp her hair readying myself to raise her head for the crowds' braying approval. But in a moment that stuns the onlookers, her head falls from my grasp revealing the wig she had been wearing. The sight of her grey hair is too much.

Moving myself away from the body, I try to get as far away as I can.



Later that night, as I nurse another ale in an attempt to calm my nerves, I catch the conversation of two young men in the corner of the alehouse.

'She tried to stop the messenger,' one says.

'Who?' mutters the other, clearly confused.

I have to strain to hear his answer as he whispers it to his drinking companion, 'The Queen. She is claiming she didn't want her executed.'

Those whispered words sink like stones in my stomach. 'Bit too late for that' I mutter to myself. Looking down at my bloodstained hands, the colour drains from my face.

What have I done?