

Queen Elizabeth 1

Every Thursday from May to September, Maslow's friend Alma serves afternoon tea at 4 pm sharp. From October through March, she serves cask-strength single malt at 5 pm sharp. Homemade oatmeal cookies with the tea. Fine cheeses and crackers with the single malt.

She takes April off. It's planting season and she's just too busy.

Alma has been doing this for about three decades. On her screened-in porch in warm weather. In her formal dining room when it's cold. Usually about a half-dozen people show up. Sometimes no one does, in which case she contentedly reads a book with her cat Ramona on her lap.

"I'd like to catch a wild swarm sometime," she says as Maslow comes in and pours some tea. She doesn't look up. She knows it's him. Or maybe it doesn't matter.

Alma's latest passion is beekeeping. In the sixty years she's lived on this land, she's been passionate about many things: esoteric astrology, heirloom apples, companion planting, herbal medicine, several guys, and one son but, except for him and her grandchildren—she's left all those pursuits behind.

What began as a legendary commune in the 1960s has slowly returned to its original state—A 1780's farmhouse on 85 acres of land. The cabins, lean-to's, yurts, geodesic domes, and tents have all

disappeared or fallen into terminal disrepair, although Alma will always materialize a bed or couch for anyone who stops by. Particularly her fellow travelers.

“Why is catching a wild one so important?” Maslow asks, sliding into the middle of the conversation she’s been having with herself.

As Alma’s face has become increasingly worn, her eyes have grown only brighter. And her laugh more lovingly maniacal.

“Cause I like wild queens, you idiot!”

Over the next hour, Alma tells Maslow more than he ever expected to know about honeybees. By the time he leaves, his mind is swarming with queens.

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One of the recreational hazards of living in Vermont during the Spring is the annual return of Morris dancers.

Morris dancers are a harbinger of warmer days; they make people smile; they hop around as if the sidewalk were covered with hot coals; they got rhythm (kind of); they drink lots of beer. Everyone loves them.

Except Maslow. He finds them vaguely annoying. He can’t explain why. He just does.

So when one approaches him the following Saturday, he walks faster; looks down, and acts like he’s thinking of something important:

Like how to feed the homeless, solve global warming, or end the war—any war. Those are very popular subjects in Vermont. It's obvious he shouldn't be disturbed.

“*Semper Eadem!*” an excessively cheerful guy chirps, shoving a flyer under his nose. Maslow takes it with a wan smile and puts his head back down to avoid further conversation.

He rounds the corner, crumples the flyer, and drops it into the nearest trash bin. But the phrase stays with him. He knows *Semper* means “always”—like the *Semper Fi* he sees on Marine bumper stickers. But *eadem*? Maybe he said *déadem*? Which, to Maslow, sounds like a precious jewel. Or slang for a mob killing. Dead-em

After looking up and down the sidewalk to make sure he won't be interrupted by any other refugee from ye olde England, Maslow leans against a wall and pulls out his cell phone to look up *eadem* or *déadem*. It's *eadem*. The literal translation is “always the same.” And it was the motto of Elizabeth I.

Maslow hears voices. Not the kind you hear in your head. The kind that are spoken clearly by people who aren't there. Audio hallucinations. A surprising number of people have them; many of whom are considered delusional. Maslow isn't delusional—at least in the traditional sense. It's more like having strangers who stop by for a visit rather than shady specters who are up to no good. Usually they are

historical characters. Sometimes they give him a sign that they are on their way.

Maslow begins to wait on the queen.

After a week, he begins to get impatient. So he reads a biography about Elizabeth, watches movies; listens to podcasts. He wonders why she waited so long to execute her Catholic cousin Mary Queen of Scots who was endlessly conspiring against her. He speculates, as historians have for centuries, on her virginity. He ponders the traumas of her early life—a beheaded mother, imprisonment in the tower of London by her sister, constant threats of assassination from inside and outside her land—and how they would have affected her personality and politics.

From time to time, he repeats *semper eadem semper eadem* to himself like a mantra or the incantation of a wizard.

But no Elizabeth.

Another week goes by. Novels. Films. Kids' books. He pins a timeline of her life on a wall. A map of Elizabethan England next to it. A half dozen pictures of her at different ages. He tries to memorize her most famous quotes.

Her final word on the conflict between Catholics and Protestants: “There is only one Christ Jesus and one faith: the rest is a dispute about trifles.”

Her masterpiece of false modesty when exhorting her troops before they met the Spanish armada: “I know I have but the body of a weak and

feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and of a king of England too.”

And, perhaps the true key to her personality: “I observe and remain silent.”

But no Elizabeth.

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Maslow has a writing cabin behind his house. He does write there occasionally. But he also reads, throws darts, rides his stationery bike, does a little yoga or Pilates, drinks a lot of coffee, takes frequent naps, and sits on the screened porch and stares.

That’s what he’s doing today. Up in the treetops, all is as it should be. The oaks along the ridge are showing barely a bud, but the maples are well on their way to leafing. The poplars are just a few days behind. The narrow spread and subtle cross-hatching of their top branches gives them a human touch, like the faces that appear in clouds. On the left, he sees a scowling teenager. To the right, a droopy old man. In the center, however, is the woman he’s been waiting for, high above the others.

Her face is long and oval, with a firm, but jawless chin. Fine branches drift down like tears past forlorn eyes and a turned-down mouth that’s of a piece with those eyes. But the most distinctive feature of this particular figment is the hair—fine curls of what must be the

tinest twigs strewn across the forehead with one forming a kind of lock of hair in the center. A light breeze raises her eyebrows.

“*Semper Eadem. Be Always ONE.*”

Each word distinct. The last one loudest. But it’s not the literal translation, Maslow thinks.

“ONE.” She repeats.

Maslow holds his breath..

“You may breathe,” she says, a light-hearted parody of a royal command.

Maslow doesn’t dare speak.

“You may speak,” she chuckles.

Maslow feels the urge to get down on one knee and pledge his undying allegiance.

“You may rise,” she chuckles yet again, reading his intention.

He’d often imagined how Elizabeth would speak. Authoritative, he assumed. Condescending, perhaps. Maybe a little amused from time to time. He did not expect her to chuckle.

“Now, record this, Our dear Scribe.”

The royal we. That he *had* expected. But scribe?

Maslow doesn’t want to take his eyes off her, but he needs a pencil and pad. He gets up from his chair as quietly as possible, goes inside, and tiptoes back out. He doesn’t want to break the spell.

“Still here!” She says brightly, adding a gust of wind for emphasis. The poplars wave wildly, like subjects obeying her every command.

“We begin.” She waits for him to put pen to paper. “*Semper Eadem*. Our guiding principle through multiple lifetimes. One mind. One heart. One spirit.”

This makes no sense, Maslow thinks. Elizabeth may have been powerful but she was anything but single-minded.

“You dare to question your Queen?”

While Maslow is often in awe of the voices, he has learned not to unconditionally surrender to their power or their perspectives. They may have history on *their* side but he has the here and now on his.

“Elizabeth,” he says quietly but firmly, as if trying to disabuse a good friend of some strange notion: “Your courtships went on for decades; your death sentences were delayed time and time again; your relationships with foreign countries were all over the place...”

“Ah, but our poor dear insolent Scribe...I was not indecisive. I simply knew how to wait. Especially when even the slightest movement would fan the flames of discord that swirled relentlessly around our kingdom.

“The King of Spain wanted me dead—especially after I refused to marry him. The Queen of Scotland, my own dear cousin, prayed for my death, and schemed endlessly to bring it about. The Pope himself wanted me killed and even absolved in advance anyone who performed that

blessed sacrament! All of them did so in the name of the dear loving Jesus whom they allegedly worshiped, but whose acquaintance they clearly never made.”

Now Maslow scribbles quickly. She no longer seems to be toying with him. She’s speaking her truth.

“When conflict arises,” she continues, “we look it straight in the eye. Otherwise, it festers like a cancer. Whether between countries, the people, the Court, lovers, or within oneself. To stay in the presence of conflict without flinching, without reaching for the weapon, without signing the order of execution, without agreeing to the proposal of marriage, takes real courage...and the sweet art of negotiation, of which I was a highly skilled practitioner. Because I could see into the hearts of men and women.

“So, when action was called for, I simply leaned. One way or the other. A little forward or back. Never losing my balance or, I must say, my head.

“Remember my words: ‘Men fight wars. Women win the peace.’”

Maslow does remember the words. A good turn of phrase he’d thought, but certainly, it’s not that simple.

“Men try to overcome. Women know how to undermine,” she adds, by way of explanation.

Also too simplistic, Maslow thinks. His mind races to find examples. “What about your Boudicca?” he asks. “Joan of Arc!”

“They lost,” Elizabeth says simply. “Their achievements are legendary. They won battles. That was their role. But they were defeated in war.”

Maslow is having trouble following. He’s not sure of her point. What did she do that was so special?

“Our dear Scribe.” Until now, Elizabeth has been proclaiming. Now she is scolding. “You’ll never enter our Kingdom through your mind. Listen to me now. Wrestle with my words later.”

“When it’s time for bold action,” she explains, “the queen knows it must be swift and unexpected—undermining rather than overcoming the other’s attack. Then we return immediately to the center of the hive.”

Maslow remembers Alma’s queens. Directing the hive through subtle shifts of energy. Her every need met by her attendants. Even when leading her loyal followers to a new home, she remains in the midst of the swarm.

“That’s right!” Elizabeth says it with light upward lilt of her voice, as if Maslow had figured out the first clue on a treasure hunt. “Then what?”

He remembers Alma saying that each hive has a different harmonic. Like two notes vibrating that let you hear a third. Even in a hive filled with thousands of whirring notes, there’s but one harmonic.

“Exactly,” Elizabeth says. “Our Scribe is finding his way. Now, attend to this, although you will likely barely glimpse its truth this

lifetime. There's no peace without war. No action without reaction. No power without weakness. No opposites, no harmonics. No harmonics, no evolution!" Her joy is contagious. The trees sway. Maslow starts to rock a little forward and back in time with her words, as if in prayer.

"On earth, Great Nature is the harmonic. In the hive and the kingdom, the Queen, herself, is the harmonic. In humans, *Shin* is the harmonic."

Shin? Maslow wonders. The Tao?

"Words. Words. Words. Listen to the harmonics, our dear Scribe. There lie all the answers you seek. Follow the path of the harmonics. There goes the Way of the Universe. When heart and mind are ONE, there is creation."

Maslow surrenders logic. Her words are dense. But he feels their meaning.

"Yes. Yes! Remember, we will not overcome or undermine you. We will only lean. We don't want to lose you. That's enough for now, our serious Scribe. Except..."

Then there is quiet. He looks up and stares at her tree, softening his eyes, hoping she'll reappear. But she seems to have finished speaking.

Except what? He wonders.

Her voice returns: bawdy, raucous, a wench tossing propriety to the wind.

“Except for the burning question of our virginity that torments our poor befuddled Scribe and legions of historians before him. Only blessed Mother Mary’s has been debated with as much passion! And we assure you that is not a coincidence.” She follows with her signature chuckle. “We shall return. In due time...”

“Wait!!” Maslow shouts it out loud. Quickly tilting forward, he pushes himself to standing, clasping his hands behind his back, shifting his weight from foot-to-foot and looking straight ahead—as if she were the sun, daring him to look directly at her. Throwing shame and disbelief to the wind, Maslow feigns anger although he finds himself unable to feel it. “OK, OK, enough already! I’ve been lectured by rulers, composers, explorers, scientists, and philosophers. One time I was virtually seduced by a movie star! All of you deconstructing this, reconstructing that, as if you’re all on some mission from God to set humanity straight.”

“Yes,” she says it simply, acknowledging his summation but giving it no particular import.

“Well, who the hell is ‘You’ ‘We?’ Some royal you or a whole kingdom of ‘you’s’? And what do you mean ‘the others’? How many of you are there? Why are you here? What are you all going to do? Lead billions of spirits on some new Crusade?”

“Who, the hell ... is ... we?” her tone a mild grandmotherly reproach for his language and grammar. “Ah, the Scribe tries to find his bearings. And still, he loses his balance.”

Maslow stands very still and tries not to blink.

“Well,” she says with a royal harrumph. “Truer than you think. Individuals only reincarnate to complete their individual aspects. We reincarnate to complete us all.”

“Aspects? What are aspects? You are the reincarnation of just Elizabeth...”

“Just? Just? Oh, you people. Always trying to fix us in time and space. So you can use us as exemplars and excuses for your petty opinions and ignorant ways. We are far more than Elizabeth. We were always far more than we appeared. And now we are far more than even that. As are all the others.”

Her strange thoughts and twisted logic make Maslow squint in frustration. And her fast-and-loose use of personal pronouns isn't helping. Meanwhile, his whole body has started moving forward and back again, in time with some insistent rhythm.

She offers Maslow a meager lifeline, but keeps it taut: “Do you really think that when we die, we're fixed for all time?”

“Well, not exactly.”

“What *do* you think?”

Maslow takes a moment to close his eyes and regroup. It really is like he's having an audience with a queen...and his future depends on giving the right answer.

“I think that when we die...” he speaks out loud, clearly, struggling to give his words the deep philosophical import they deserve... “the person we were lives on in memory and then, I guess, either the spirit reincarnates in a new body, or dissipates and blends with some primordial ooze which keeps sending us out in different forms.”

A good answer, he thinks. A very good answer. He braves a small smile and opens his eyes.

He's talking to a tree.