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Julia Baird

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#74365 in Books Julia Baird 2016-11-22 2016-11-22 Format: Deckle Edge Original language: English PDF # 1 9.58 x 1.64 x 6.571, 1.25 #File Name: 1400069882752 pages Victoria The Queen An Intimate Biography of the Woman Who Ruled an Empire | File size: 65.Mb

Julia Baird : Victoria: The Queen: An Intimate Biography of the Woman Who Ruled an Empire before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Victoria: The Queen: An Intimate Biography of the Woman Who Ruled an Empire:

65 of 65 people found the following review helpful. Skip the Masterpiece Theater version, and read this insteadBy

ReadergirlI knew very little about Queen Victoria, being more of a Tudor history buff. But in advance of the Masterpiece Theater version that was to be aired in the states early this year, I decided to purchase this highly-rated biography and read ahead. The book was so well written and compelling that I only watched the first episode before just giving up and concentrating on the book. Baird does an exemplary job weaving in the historical context and the complicated and entangled monarchical history that put Victoria on the throne. This is a very readable and accessible biography of Victoria and Albert. I highly recommend it.93 of 96 people found the following review helpful. Excellent biography of Victoria 4.5 starsBy Avid readerAt 496 pages, not including nearly 120 pages of end notes and a 25 page bibliography which includes several unpublished primary and contemporary sources, Julia Baird's "Victoria: The Queen" is an interesting and entertaining read. Baird, an Australian journalist, author, and historian, presents a well researched look at England's second longest reigning monarch. Taking the reader from Victoria's birth as the heir presumptive to the British throne, to her death at age 81, Baird paints a portrait of a stubborn, imperious woman who was not perfect, but managed to lead an empire for over 50 years. Baird addresses Victoria's marriage to her cousin Albert, the births of her nine children (all of whom survived to adulthood), the death of Albert and three of her children, as well as her relationships with John Brown and Abdul Karim. Albert's increased involvement in ruling the British Empire, Victoria's relationships with her numerous Prime Ministers, and her political and personal goals are all covered in this tome. Baird presents Victoria in an engaging light, as a woman who enjoyed her husband, her children, and grandchildren; the letters and diary entries that contradict her image as a dour, prudish person are an intriguing look into the 'real' Victoria. As Baird states, the purging of Victoria's private correspondence by her children and ministers, with the removal of anything that would paint Victoria as other than a pillar of moral rectitude created a false image of the long reigning monarch. Baird's writing ability and the way she presents her subject makes the nearly 500 pages read quickly. Victoria was more than what her descendants allowed the world to see - she was a woman who enjoyed life, admitted to some of her flaws, and was considerably more involved in ruling her empire than has been portrayed in past biographies.95 of 103 people found the following review helpful. Does an excellent job of introducing us not just to Queen Victoria, but to Victoria herselfBy BookreporterFor as much as we think we understand a historical figure like Queen Victoria, theres always that little morsel to be found that opens our eyes and makes us wonder once more. Author Julia Baird does an excellent job of introducing us not just to Queen Victoria, but to Victoria herself, with all her faults and feats. My knowledge of Victoria was always basic --- longest reigning monarch (until the current Queen of England changed that), petite, married to a man she adored, had nine children --- but I knew very little of her politics. Its amazing to think of her at the age of 18 accepting so much responsibility, willingly, when having the poise and grace to do that at any age is difficult. Granted, we are talking about a woman who was raised to be queen. She was a spoiled child who was known to have an incredible temper later in life, but could somehow find the control to wield amazing power when needed. While she clearly had a healthy respect for her position, and the power with which she was entrusted, Victoria had very little understanding of her subjects at large. For a woman who never interacted with the outside world, this wasnt surprising. Victoria was intelligent and understanding, if clouded by her royal trappings. At times she could be very uncaring regarding certain sections of the population because she saw everything through the lens of being queen. What was good for her country was not always good for her subjects, and she sometimes missed that connection. Still, she always did what she thought was best for her country and never lost sight of that end goal. For a woman so sheltered, Victoria never had a warm or comfortable family life, constantly at odds with those around her who were doing their best to control her future. It was not until she married Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha that she finally understood what family could mean. She was a passionate woman who clearly was not afraid to express her love for her husband at a time when sex was not discussed, and found stability and maturity in marriage. While she clearly loved her children, she notoriously complained about the toll pregnancy took on her body and her life. Family transformed Victoria in other ways as well. She went from a confident 19-year-old to a 35-year-old who was the leader of an empire in her own right, but who questioned her own intelligence simply because of her gender. She relied heavily on Albert, who ended up belittling her choices in order to increase his own power, and its sad to see a woman who fought so hard for her independence cave that easily. Victorias inability to grasp the basic human needs of her subjects was a fault of hers. For instance, she believed that reducing the work day to 10 hours would harm the economy and throw the country into an economic slump as opposed to being concerned about the health, safety and welfare of her subjects. Victoria was a strange mixture of beliefs, and this was a prime example. While extolling the virtues of being a wife and mother, neglecting the fact that she was a working woman, she would also look down on females in the working class who were fighting for their rights. Fighting to keep and strengthen her own power was something Victoria did with fervor. Well into her 70s, she was still battling with her ministers. If she ever recognized this contradiction, it wasnt noted, but it does make her all that much more interesting. Victoria reigned during a time of amazing innovation --- railroads, indoor plumbing, the typewriter --- and seemed to marvel at it all. She was a curious and smart person who engaged with scientists, doctors and statesmen, and could intimidate like no other. She was admired but could be infuriating and forever will be remembered as a woman who helped to usher in great change, even if she didnt agree with it. Victoria ruled an empire, sometimes by sheer will, and was an agent of change in ways she didnt live to see. Reviewed by Amy

The true story for fans of the PBS Masterpiece series *Victoria*, this page-turning biography reveals the real woman behind the myth: a bold, glamorous, unbreakable queen Victoria for our times. Drawing on previously unpublished papers, this stunning new portrait is a story of love and heartbreak, of devotion and grief, of strength and resilience. NAMED ONE OF THE BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR BY JANET MASLIN, THE NEW YORK TIMES ESQUIRE THE CHICAGO PUBLIC LIBRARY *Victoria the Queen*, Julia Baird's exquisitely wrought and meticulously researched biography, brushes the dusty myth off this extraordinary monarch. The New York Times Book Review (Editors Choice) When Victoria was born, in 1819, the world was a very different place. Revolution would threaten many of Europe's monarchies in the coming decades. In Britain, a generation of royals had indulged their whims at the public's expense, and republican sentiment was growing. The Industrial Revolution was transforming the landscape, and the British Empire was commanding ever larger tracts of the globe. In a world where women were often powerless, during a century roiling with change, Victoria went on to rule the most powerful country on earth with a decisive hand. Fifth in line to the throne at the time of her birth, Victoria was an ordinary woman thrust into an extraordinary role. As a girl, she defied her mother's meddling and an adviser's bullying, forging an iron will of her own. As a teenage queen, she eagerly grasped the crown and relished the freedom it brought her. At twenty, she fell passionately in love with Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, eventually giving birth to nine children. She loved sex and delighted in power. She was outspoken with her ministers, overstepping conventional boundaries and asserting her opinions. After the death of her adored Albert, she began a controversial, intimate relationship with her servant John Brown. She survived eight assassination attempts over the course of her lifetime. And as science, technology, and democracy were dramatically reshaping the world, Victoria was a symbol of steadfastness and security, queen of a quarter of the world's population at the height of the British Empire's reach. Drawing on sources that include fresh revelations about Victoria's relationship with John Brown, Julia Baird brings vividly to life the fascinating story of a woman who struggled with so many of the things we do today: balancing work and family, raising children, navigating marital strife, losing parents, combating anxiety and self-doubt, finding an identity, searching for meaning. Praise for *Victoria: The Queen* Fascinating. Vogue In Baird's deft portrayal, Victoria lives, breathes, and struts before us in all her complexity. . . . On a geopolitical level, Baird's sweeping historical portrait also illuminates just how interconnected the European royal families were during this time. . . . Historical astuteness aside, the pages gallop along enhanced by titillating morsels of info. Esquire A vivid portrait of one of England's longest-reigning monarchs. Entertainment Weekly [A] success from start to finish . . . [Baird's] *Victoria* is a vivid, visceral creature. The Christian Science Monitor Like the best biographers, Baird writes like a novelist, and her book is crammed with irresistible detail and description. The Seattle Times

Victoria the Queen, Julia Baird's exquisitely wrought and meticulously researched biography, brushes the dusty myth off this extraordinary monarch. Right out of the gate, the book thrums with authority as Baird builds her portrayal of Victoria. Overturning stereotypes, she rips this queen down to the studs and creates her anew. . . . Baird's *Victoria* isn't the woman we expect to meet. Her queen is a pure iconoclast: emotional, demonstrative, sexual and driven. . . . Baird writes in the round. She constructs a dynamic historical figure, then spins out a spherical world of elegant reference, anchoring the narrative in specific detail and pinning down complex swaths of history that, in less capable hands, would simply blow away. The New York Times Book Review (Editors Choice) In this in-depth look at a feminist before her time, you'll balk at, cheer on, and mourn the obstacles in the life of the teen queen who grew into her throne. Marie Claire Exhilarating . . . [A] frisky, adventurous new biography . . . This book shows how Victoria's girlish naughtiness turned into a regal, willful, complex nature that other biographers have tended to simplify. . . . [Julia] Baird brings a strong feminist awareness to the ways in which Victoria's letters, edited by two men, have been censored to excise the full range of her personality, and also to the subordinate role any wife was expected to assume when Victoria was a young bride. Janet Maslin, The New York Times Fascinating. Vogue In Baird's deft portrayal, Victoria lives, breathes, and struts before us in all her complexity. . . . On a geopolitical level, Baird's sweeping historical portrait also illuminates just how interconnected the European royal families were during this time. . . . Historical astuteness aside, the pages gallop along enhanced by titillating morsels of info. Esquire A vivid portrait of one of England's longest-reigning monarchs. Entertainment Weekly [A] success from start to finish . . . [Baird's] *Victoria* is a vivid, visceral creature. . . . Baird also does a lively, excellent job of detailing Victoria's later years. . . . [She] paints a touching picture of those final decades, during which Victoria strove to feel alive despite the fact that the great love of her life was dead. The Christian Science Monitor Like the best biographers, Baird writes like a novelist, and her book is crammed with irresistible detail and description. The Seattle Times Baird thoroughly and engagingly strives to restore a truer perspective of both woman and sovereign in her fine work, *Victoria: The Queen*. . . . Baird's biography successfully presents the queen in all of her roles, some of which were contradictory, to show how Victoria did indeed have a mind of her own despite her husband and prime ministers and lived and ruled the way she thought best. Chicago Tribune Julia Baird's research uncovered a wealth of new material that gives a fuller, three-dimensional profile of the English queen

who reigned over a quarter of the known world. She writes in a fluent, conversational style that helps readers understand the role of royalty in nineteenth-century England. Fredericksburg Free-Lance Star Baird emphasizes Victorias private side and guides us through her personal life with a sympathetic touch. She makes excellent use of Victorias voluminous personal writings and humanizes this forbidding figure. . . . Baird brings a compassionate humanity to the story of Victoria, and leaves us with a fresh understanding of her influential rule and, just as importantly, her interior life. This Victoria has a strong, beating heart. *Newsday* Spellbinding . . . Julia Bairds biography of Queen Victoria reads like a novel. *Ottawa Citizen* Victoria: The Queen is that rare bird of serious historical biography, a page-turner. Writing with grace and authority, Baird reaches well beyond the conventional image of a reclusive and compliant queen to reveal a robust and interventionist ruler, iron-willed, uncompromising and sexually charged a most unvictorian woman. . . . As a writer and historian, Baird has a wonderful gift for compressing complicated personalities and historical events. *Dallas Morning News* Baird writes with such spirit and well-founded authority that readers will feel as though the story of the famous British queen is being told for the first time. . . . Baird does not turn a blind eye on Victorias darker sides, including her willfulness, selfishness, and self pity. But that simply adds dimensions to a significant character. *Booklist* (starred review) Baird convincingly reframes the public perception of Victoria as a mother, along with providing unprecedented insight into her relationships following Prince Alberts death. . . . Baird crafts a comprehensive study of the monarch and others with whom she was involved in an engaging, smoothly rendered narrative. Highly recommended for those interested in British history and the integral figures who shaped it, as well as readers looking for an excellent biography. *Library Journal* (starred review) Baird draws on previously unpublished sources to fashion a lively, perceptive portrait of the long-reigning queen. . . . Baird shrewdly assesses the quality of the queens family life and creates sharply drawn portraits of the major players in her circle. . . . A well-researched biography sensitive to Queen Victoria as a woman. *Kirkus* sVictoria was young enough when she assumed the throne to consult with her prime minister about her eyebrows (were they too thin?), confident enough when she married to elect to preserve the word obey in her vows. Julia Baird vividly captures her in every light, at once bold and sentimental, stubborn and deferential. Victoria: The Queen is a crisp, sparkling account of the extraordinary woman whose reign was as long as her legacy is vast. *Stacy Schiff* A stunning achievement . . . Neither sanitized nor mythologizing, Victoria: The Queen is a remarkably lucid, endlessly engaging account of Queen Victorias life and rule. *Amanda Foreman* With elegance and keen insight, Julia Baird has painted a memorable, moving, and surprising portrait of one of the most important women in history. This is a remarkable book; in Bairds hands, Victorias story resonates in our own time, shedding new light on why we live the way we do now. *Jon Meacham* What was it like to reign over the worlds greatest empire as queen but in an age when women were supposed to be submissive, supportive, subservient? Baird does not shy away from reality or complexity. She has given us a moving, lusty, passionate, thoroughly human story of one of the most fascinating women of her, or any, time. *Evan Thomas* About the Author Julia Baird is a journalist, broadcaster, and author based in Sydney, Australia. She is a columnist for the *International New York Times* and host of *The Drum* on ABC TV (Australia). Her writing has appeared in *Newsweek*, *The New York Times*, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, *The Guardian*, *The Washington Post*, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Monthly*, and *Harpers Bazaar*. She has a Ph.D. in history from the University of Sydney. In 2005, Baird was a fellow at the Joan Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy at Harvard University. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.

CHAPTER 1 The Birth of Pocket Hercules My brothers are not so strong as I am. . . . I shall outlive them all; the crown will come to me and my children. EDWARD, DUKE OF KENT, FATHER OF QUEEN VICTORIA Queen Victoria was born, roaring, at 4:15 a.m., in the hour before dawn on May 24, 1819. In those first few seconds, she was like any newborn: naked, vulnerable, and wondering, wriggling in her mothers arms. Her spell of innocence would be brief. In moments, the most important men in the land—clergymen, chancellors, warriors, and politicians—would crowd into the room, pressing ruddy faces close to the baby girl who did not yet have a name. Within two decades, all of the men present at her birth who were still alive would be bowing to her as queen—something few could have guessed when she was born, as she was merely fifth in line to the throne. But this was an important child—one who would go on to command armies, select archbishops, and appoint prime ministers. From this moment, she would never be alone; an adult shadowed every step she took, tasted every mouthful of food, and overheard every conversation. As the sky lightened, her mother, the Duchess of Kent, lay back on the pillows of her four-poster bed and closed her eyes, exhausted, breathing in the lilacs and mayflowers in the gardens below. On this cloudy spring morning, a light rain was falling, bringing relief after three weeks of intense heat. The room in Kensington Palace in which the baby was born was entirely white and smelled of lush new carpet. Outside the windows, sheep grazed and jays sang among the beech trees. As was the custom in royal households, the men of the Privy Council had been summoned from dinner parties, the theater, and bed the night before. As the duchess lay writhing and breathing through contractions, His Majestys ministers waited in an adjoining room. The duke had forewarned them that he would not entertain them, as he planned to stay next to his wife, urging her on. As tradition dictated, these high-ranking men listened to the cries of the duchess during the six-hour labor, then crowded the room once the baby arrived, to attest that it was in fact the mothers child. (In 1688, when Mary of Modena, the Catholic wife of James II, gave birth to a thriving boy, a majority of the public—fueled by Protestants unhappy at the thought of a healthy male

heirbelieved that she had in fact miscarried and that she had had another, live baby smuggled into her room in a warming pan. This was untrue, but it was one of the factors leading to the revolution that knocked James II off the throne.) The duchess endured the presence of the men, who signed the birth certificate and a report of the babys perfectly healthful appearance. They murmured congratulations, then shuffled wearily back out into a city that was slowly waking; grooms in stables were fetching water, the scent of beeswax wafted from the nearby candle manufactory. Breakfast sellers were setting up stalls along the Great Western Road, an old Roman highway that ran alongside Hyde Park and was the main route into London from the southwest. Workers hurried to factories through the mist among rattling mail coaches and market carts, and past thousands of weary cattle being herded to their slaughter. Back in Kensington Palace, the Duke of Kent was restless with pride and excitement. In letters to friends, he raved about his wifes patience and sweetness during labor, and he praised the midwife, Frau Siebold, for her activity, zeal and knowledge. In a curious coincidence that shows how tight-knit the worlds of the British and German royals were at the time, just three months later, Frau Siebold was to preside at the birth of Victorias future husband, Albert of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha. The baby Albert, his mother cooed, was superbedune beaut extraordinaire. From infancy, Albert was praised for his beauty, just as Victoria was praised for her strength. At birth Victoria was only fifth in line to the throne. But in the years before, her father, Edward, Duke of Kent the fourth son of King George III had dramatically revised his life when he realized his siblings were not producing heirs and that the throne could someday pass to him and his offspring. He already had a partner, a gentle Frenchwoman named Julie de Saint-Laurent. Edward had ostensibly hired her to sing at a party with his band in 1790, during his first stint as governor in Gibraltar, but she was really brought into his house to share his bed. Despite these unromantic beginnings, and the fact that even if they had married, the king would never have recognized their union, they formed a remarkably successful partnership, which lasted through postings in Canada and Gibraltar as well as a scandalous mutiny by Edwards troops. But despite the three decades he had spent with the devoted Julie de Saint-Laurent, Edward had come to decide he needed a legitimate wife, one who would enable him to pay off his substantial debts, as princes were given additional allowances when they wed. When his niece Charlotte, the presumptive heir to the throne, died in childbirth, it also became clear that if he found a younger wife, she might be able to bear a child who could reign over England. When the Duke of Kent urged his carriage westward from Germany weeks before Victorias birth, he was trying to outrun the most unpredictable of rivals: biology. He wanted to get his heavily pregnant German wife to Britain in time to give birth to a baby he hoped might one day sit on the throne. The duke was certain any future monarch would be more loved if he or she bawled their first cry on Englands soil. He looked down at his wifes pale face, lit by the gentle spring sun, and beamed. He was fifty-one and penniless: it was something of a miracle that he had found such a young, pretty, amiable wife. The thirty-two-year-old Princess Victoire of Saxe-Coburg-Saalfeld, a tiny principality much diminished by Napoleons land grab in south Germany, was cheerful, short, and plump, with brown ringlets and apple-red cheeks. Recently widowed, Victoire had two children of her own, and had taken some persuading before agreeing to marry the Duke of Kent. But they had quickly settled into a fond companionship, and Victoire soon became pregnant. When he began the long journey from Amorbach to England, the duke was not just racing to Great Britain; he hoped he was racing to the throne. Just a year before, the thought that the Duke of Kent might have been able to produce an heir to the throne would have been laughable. He was then only a distant fifth in line, after his older brother George, the Prince Regent. Next in line after George was Georges only and much-loved child Charlotte. Then, also ahead of the Duke of Kent were his other older brothers, Frederick and William. King George III, who was going mad, had fifteen children with his wife, Queen Charlotte, though only twelve were still alive. The seven remaining sons had precedence over their six sisters and if any of the sons had children, the crown would pass down to their heirs, not to their siblings. (The British throne was until 2011 governed by male preference primogeniture, whereby the crown passed to the sons, in order of birth, before then being passed to the daughters, in order of birth.) Charlotte, the only daughter of King George IIIs eldest son the Prince Regent who would become George IV, would ascend the throne after her father. Charlotte was a high-spirited, fetching young woman, who fell deeply in love with and married the dashing Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg-Saalfeld. England cheered when she quickly became pregnant. But Charlotte hated feeling enormous and constantly being told how big she was and grew depressed. Her doctors put her on a strict diet in her final months, and drained blood from her. Many patients died from this dubious practice, the favored remedy for patients believed to have bad humors, especially those who were already malnourished and ailing. After a fifty-hour labor, Charlottes son emerged stillborn. She was exhausted and bled heavily. Doctors plied her with wine and brandy, and piled hot water bottles around her, but they were unable to save her; she died on November 6, 1817. (Her accoucheur, or male midwife, Richard Croft, was so distraught that three months later, while attending another prolonged labor, he picked up a gun and shot himself in the head). Grief for Charlotte, the hopeful future queen of England, hung like a pall over the streets of London for weeks. Soon there was a national shortage of black fabric. Suddenly, and unexpectedly, the succession had been opened up; the crown would now pass down through the aging brothers or their children, not to Charlotte, a young and beloved woman barely out of her teens. Who, they asked, would be the next heir to the throne? King George III and Queen Charlotte led quiet and respectable lives, much like the British middle class. Their debauched sons, though, were unpopular, fat and lazy. Oddly, the one son who was

disciplined, upright, and truthful was the one his parents seemed to like the least: Victorias father, Edward, the Duke of Kent. By 1818, King George was deaf, blind, and deranged, suffering from what is thought by some to be a rare metabolic disorder called porphyria, although it was also quite possibly dementia or bipolar disorder. Residents of his castle could hear unpleasant laughing from the wings he wandered in, and he was often found strumming a harpsichord, wearing purple robes. He was haunted by apocalyptic visions of drowning in a large flood, spoke constantly to invisible friends, and embraced trees he mistook for foreign dignitaries. In 1811, at the age of seventy-three, he was declared officially mad. The Prince Regent, later George IV, was friendly and mildly intelligent. By the time he reached his mid-fifties, he was a miserable man. He suffered from gout and took large doses of opium to numb the pain in his legs. His relationship with his wife, Princess Caroline, was toxic and brutal. The Prince Regent banned her from his coronation in 1821 (a door was slammed in her face when she arrived at Westminster Abbey clad in her finery). Three weeks afterwards, Queen Caroline died. The cause is unknown; it was rumored that the king had poisoned her. By the time the Prince Regents daughter died, in 1817, the seven sons of George III were all middle-aged; the youngest was forty-three. So who would produce an heir? Ernest, the Duke of Cumberland, was the only one both officially married and not estranged from his wife. When they were very young, King George III had decreed that none of the royal offspring could enter into marriages without the kings consent and the approval of Parliament. The resulting Royal Marriages Act of 1772 gave the princes a convenient excuse to wriggle out of any commitments to their lovers. They acted, Lord Melbourne later told Queen Victoria, like wild beasts. The result was a large pile of illegitimate grandchildren fifty-six in total, none of whom could ever occupy the throne. Charlotte had been the only grandchild produced from an officially recognized marriage. What was at stake, then, was not just this generation but control of the next. (Too far down the succession to count were King George IIIs five daughters, who were all over forty and childless.) Could such an enormous family have become extinct? It may seem ludicrous now to think that the Hanoverian dynasty, which began with King George I in 1714, could have ended with King George IIIs sons. It was entirely possible, though, given the behavior of his progeny. When Charlotte died, a hubbub surrounded the future of the throne, and parliament insisted the four unwed brothers marry. The brothers immediately powdered their hair and cast their eyes upon the royal courts of Europe. France was out of favor because of the decades-long battle with Napoleon. Germany was preferred, partly because it was thought that a Lutheran upbringing made for chaste and obedient wives. Three of the four complied immediately, marrying by mid-1818. The youngest of the royal princes, Adolphus, the Duke of Cambridge, sent a marriage proposal to Augusta, the German princess of Hesse-Cassel, to which she agreed. Victorias father, Edward the Duke of Kent was now fourth in line, and the only son who had adopted his parents Spartan, disciplined lifestyle. He was more than six feet tall, proud and muscular, and called himself the strongest of the strong. Though he privately conceded it was presumptuous, he boasted that he would live longer than his brothers: I have led a regular life, he often said; I shall outlive them all; the crown will come to me and my children. He was a composite of opposites that his daughter would later reflect: gentle and tough, empathetic and needy, severe when crossed and tender when loved. Unlike his brothers, Edward was clever, eloquent, and a conscientious letter writer. He was a progressive who was in favor of popular education, Catholic emancipation, and the abolition of slavery. Despite his tyrannical military reputation, he had a kind heart. He was also extravagant: whims he indulged included a library of five thousand books dragged across the seas, fountains installed inside closets, bed ladders covered in velvet, and bright lights of every hue placed along driveways. He kept a hairdresser on staff for himself and his servants. When the duke first asked for his young wife Victoires hand, it was not guaranteed she would say yes. Her two children would become the half brother and half sister of Victoria; when Edward and Victoire married, Charles was thirteen, Feodora just ten, and the independent life of a widow was in many ways preferable to that of a wife. But days after Charlotte died, Leopold, her widower, who was Victoires brother, sent a letter urging Victoire to reconsider the Duke of Kents proposal. Suddenly Edward had greater prospects: he was now much closer to the throne. Finally Victoire agreed. In response, Edward was tender and romantic, vowing to make his young bride happy. Edward and Victoire were lucky: They were quietly thrilled with each other and settled into a domestic routine. On December 31, 1818, Edward wrote his new wife a loving note: God bless you. Love me as I love you. As the new year rang in, three new brides were pregnant. They lay curled up next to their husbands, with rounded bellies and sweet hopes, thinking of the year ahead. In 1819, the race began in earnest. On March 26, Augusta, the wife of the Duke of Kents younger brother Adolphus gave birth to a healthy son. On March 27, Adelaide, the wife of Edwards older brother William, produced a premature baby girl who lived only a few hours. And on March 28, Edward, the Duke of Kent, began his journey from Amorbach, Germany, to London. Victoire, at eight months pregnant, endured a 427-mile journey over rough roads and wild seas. The duke had worried that the trip might bring on an early labor. But Victoire was full of joyful anticipation at the life in store for her in England. As she rattled along next to her husband, her hands kept creeping to her stomach, her fingers tracing the skin where tiny feet kicked and limbs tickled inside her.