Elizabeth I - Ravaged by Smallpox

In the fall of 1562, Elizabeth I (played by Glenda Jackson in this clip from *Elizabeth R*) became desperately ill with smallpox—a contagious, potentially disfiguring and often deadly disease which still has no cure and no treatment.

At first, she refused to believe that she—"Her Majesty"—could contract such an illness. Then she became so sick she could not even speak.

Since she was childless, her ministers were extremely concerned about succession—should the Queen die. For about a week, while she battled a very high fever, it seemed Elizabeth would not survive.

At the time, her likely heir was Mary, Queen of Scots. But Mary was a Catholic and many British Protestants were extremely worried about what would happen if a Catholic were on the throne.

Under the Last Will and Testament of Henry VIII, Elizabeth's second-cousin, Katherine Grey (sister of Lady Jane Grey, who lost her life after she became queen for nine days following the death of Henry's son Edward), had a legal claim to the throne. (Her mother, Frances, was Henry VIII's niece.) Not everyone agreed, however, that Katherine was a good choice.

In the end, the question of succession was saved for another day because ... Elizabeth recovered.

People who cared for the Queen, during her illness, were exposed to smallpox. One of the ladies-in-waiting (who became ill herself) was Mary Dudley (the sister of Robert Dudley, Elizabeth's close friend and the person she references in this clip).

Mary Dudley also survived her bout of smallpox, although the disease left her face badly scarred.

Credits:

Clip from *Elizabeth R*, starring Glenda Jackson as Elizabeth I, online courtesy BBC.

Original broadcast, 1971. DVD released, October 16, 2001.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:
http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Elizabeth-I-Ravaged-by-Smallpox

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http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/Elizabeth-I-Ravaged-by-Smallpox