Linda Porter

Crown of Thistles

The Fatal Inheritance of Mary Queen of Scots

PAN BOOKS

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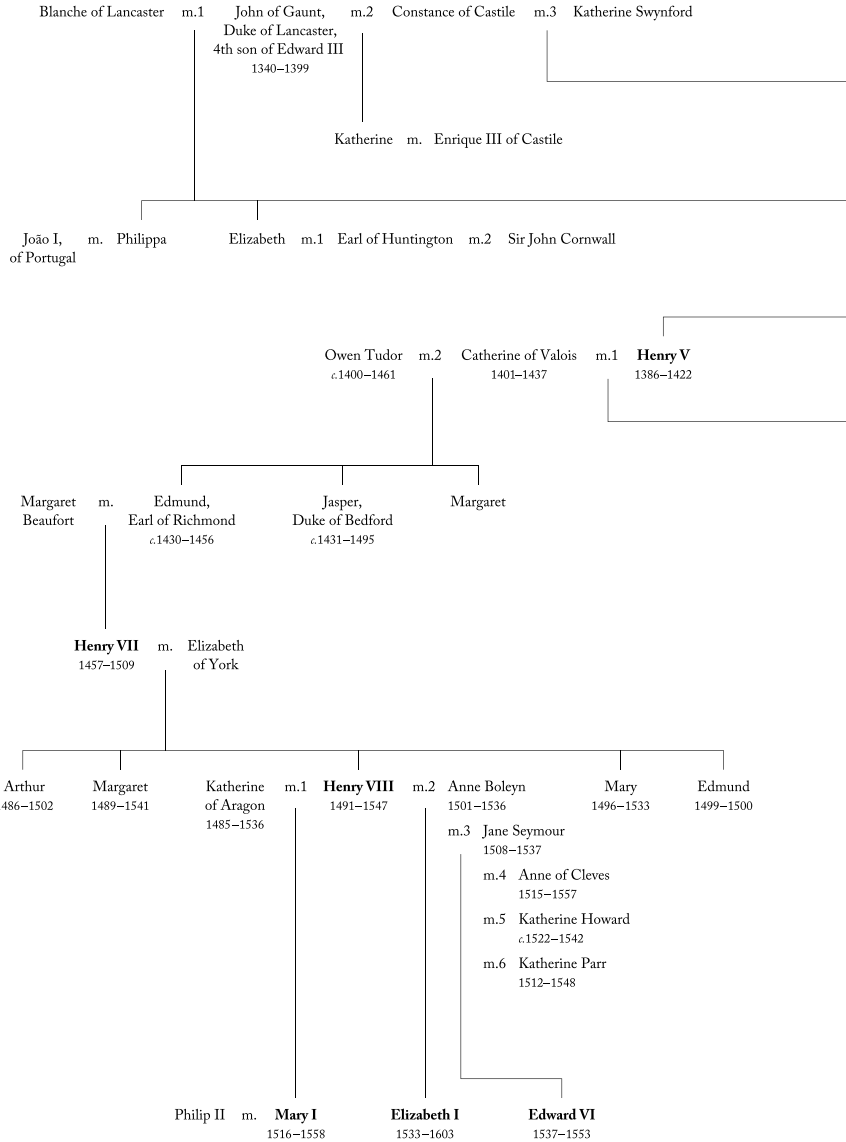
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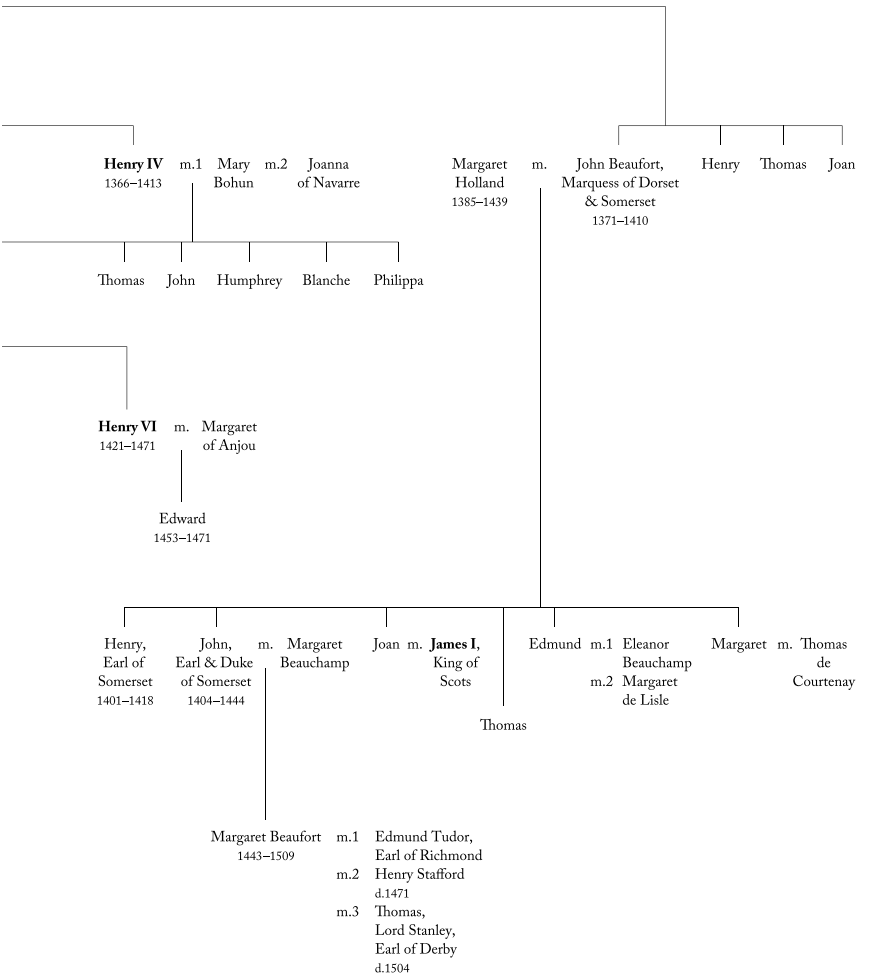
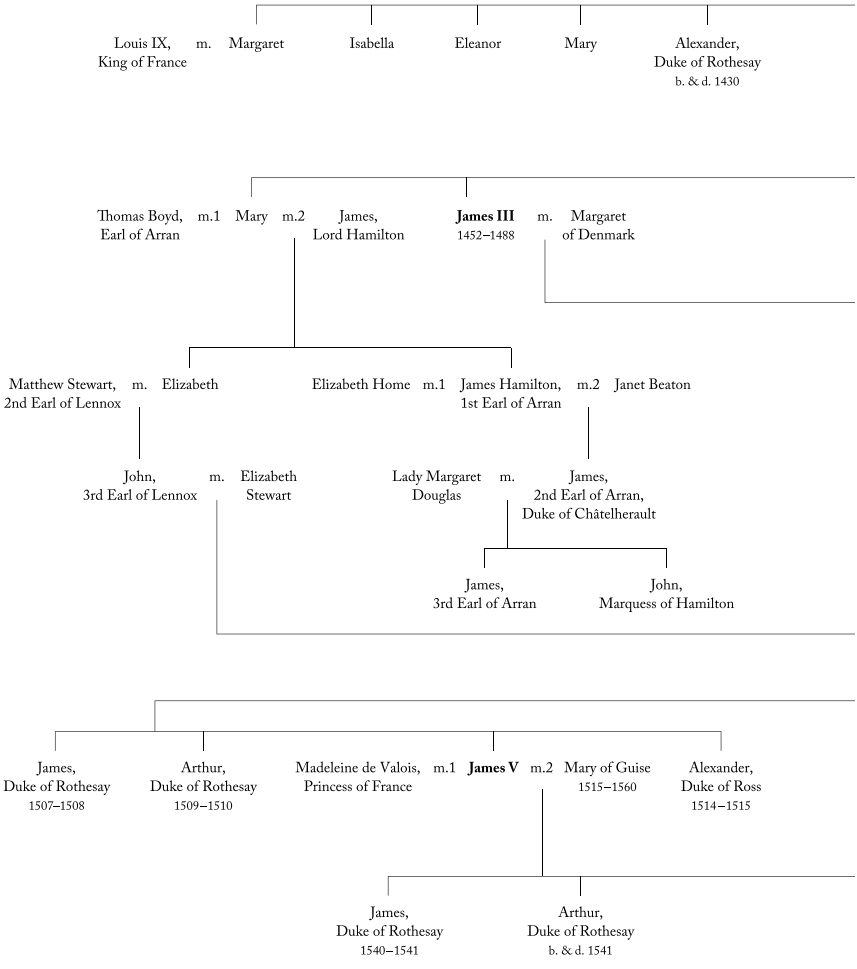
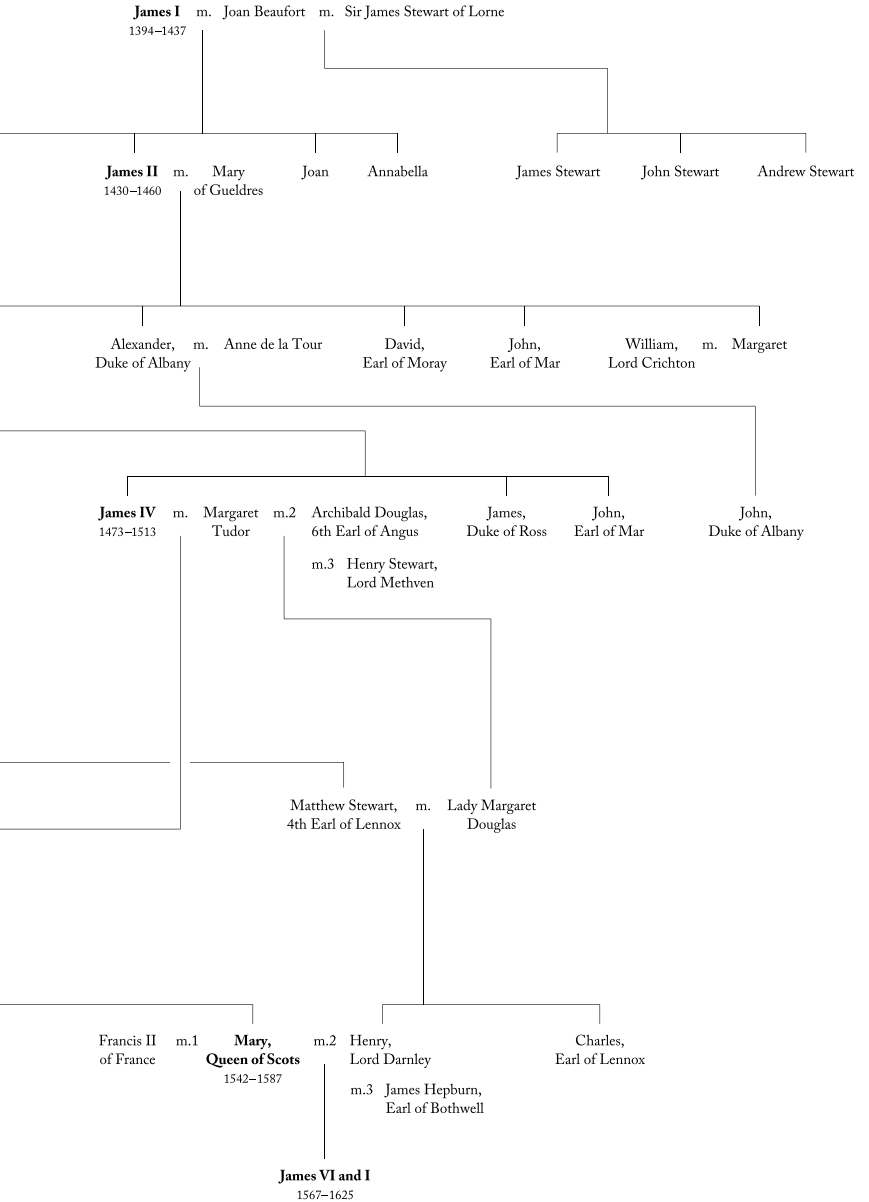
The Tudors and Lancastrians



The Stewarts




James I m. Joan Beaufort m. Sir James Stewart of Lorne
1394–1437
James II m. Mary of Gueldres
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Joan
Annabella
James Stewart
John Stewart
Andrew Stewart
Alexander, Duke of Albany m. Anne de la Tour
David, Earl of Moray
John, Earl of Mar
William, Lord Crichton m. Margaret
James IV m. Margaret Tudor m.2 Archibald Douglas, 6th Earl of Angus
m.3 Henry Stewart, Lord Methven
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John, Earl of Mar
John, Duke of Albany
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Prologue

Leith Harbour, Scotland, 19 August 1561

The chilly summer morning brought only a muffled and impenetrable dawn. A sea mist, or *haar*, as it was known locally, enveloped the coastline, completely obscuring two galleys that had sailed unannounced into Edinburgh's port on the Firth of Forth. 'In the memory of man, that day of the year, was never seen a more dolorous face of the heaven . . . Besides the wet and corruption of the air, the mist was so thick and so dark that scarce might any man espy another the length of two pair of boots. The sun was not seen to shine two days before, nor two days after. That forewarning God gave unto us; but alas, the most part were blind.'[1]

If such gloomy premonitions were still far from the thoughts of most of the passengers on the two vessels, one, at least, made no secret of the fact that she had undertaken the voyage with mixed emotions. On board, and very much the centre of attention, as she had been all her life, was Mary Stewart. An unusually tall young woman of eighteen, regal in bearing and acknowledged for her charm and warmth, she had been a queen since she was six days old. Accustomed to being fêted and adored, she was gentle by nature and had given orders that the lash was not to be used on the rowers during the crossing. But she remained convinced that monarchs were divinely appointed and was always supremely conscious of her royal status. In matters of faith she

was conservative, though not obsessively so. Raised in the Catholic religion of her ancestors (and the majority of the population in France, her adopted country), Mary had never known her beliefs rejected or her right to command the devoted loyalty of those around her questioned. Neither education nor experience had in any way prepared this undoubtedly intelligent girl for the challenges that lay ahead.

Scotland, the country she had left behind at the age of five, whose language she still spoke but without the fluency of the French that had long since become natural to her, was engulfed by religious change and struggles for power between its unreliable nobility. Small and poor, harassed by England, its southern neighbour, Scotland may have been on the fringes of Europe, but its strategic importance in the never-ending machinations of European diplomacy was enhanced by Mary's father and grandfather, both of whom were dominating figures. After Mary left Scotland in 1548, the position of the monarchy had changed. Lacking the strong personality of a resident ruler, the realm became unstable. A centuries-old battle for influence in Scotland, exacerbated by the religious upheaval of the Reformation, was still being fought between the English and the French. Behind it lay the larger question of who would control the entire British Isles. This problem had not been solved by any of the young queen's immediate predecessors, in Scotland or England, and a deep-rooted tension remained between the occupants of the two thrones. The reality facing Mary Stewart on that dreary Scottish morning was one that would have given pause to even the wiliest and most experienced of monarchs. For Mary was very much alone. Her beloved mother and her young husband had died within six months of each other the previous year. She never knew her grandfather, the energetic, charismatic James IV, or her own father, his astute son, James V. Nor had she met any of her Tudor relatives. Henry VIII, her great-uncle, died the year prior to her departure for France and though as a baby she was the intended bride for his son, Edward VI, she had never seen him or either of his sisters. When the elder of these, Queen

Mary, died in 1558, the throne had passed to the Protestant Elizabeth. Now the rivalry between the English and the Scots rested in the persons of two women who could not ignore one another but were total strangers.

Mary knew no one well in her kingdom except for Lord James Stewart, a much older half-brother of dubious loyalty, on whose goodwill and support she was crucially dependent. She was exchanging a country where she was a widowed queen consort for a realm where she had long been an absent queen regnant. To her subjects she was unknown, a serious disadvantage in a land where the personal accessibility of the king had been a major element of Stewart success, and the land of her birth was equally unfamiliar to its own queen. But Mary had been frozen out of France, the country she loved, by her mother-in-law, Catherine de Medici, and by the realization that as a childless queen dowager she could play no further role there. The death of her husband, Francis II, in December 1560, left Mary with no choice but to return to Scotland. Whether she was genuinely welcome there was another matter.

Yet Mary possessed an optimistic nature and was accustomed to getting her way. She was well aware of the effect she had on others. So, as she waited for the fog to clear, the queen of Scots put the sorrow of parting from the France she loved behind her. She accepted, with deep regret, that her life had changed. She did not, however, leave everything from her past behind. She was accompanied by three of the four Marys, the daughters of leading Scottish families, who had sailed with her from Scotland thirteen years earlier, and by a retinue of loyal French servants. As much as she could, she had taken her French life back with her across the North Sea. A vast array of personal belongings – horses, furniture, beds, rugs, tapestries, jewels, plate and a wardrobe more magnificent than that of her cousin, Queen Elizabeth of England – would soon follow, carried on a dozen ships. Mary was not returning to Scotland without her creature comforts. Ever conscious of her image, she was the daughter of kings and determined to live like them in splendour. Her youth and

singular power to captivate were important weapons and she meant to use them to the full. She was also ambitious and dynastically aware, conscious of her legitimate descent from the Scottish House of Stewart and from the Tudor king Henry VII of England. Mary's distant cousin and 'sister queen', Elizabeth, had only been on the throne in England three years and was of questionable legitimacy. She was also a heretic, unmarried and childless, though efforts were being pursued vigorously to find the English queen a husband. For contemporaries, both Mary and Elizabeth appeared equally vulnerable as unsupported female monarchs in a male-dominated world. Mary, though, was constant in the belief that she was Elizabeth's rightful heir and, quite possibly, if Elizabeth's position on England's throne should become untenable, her replacement. The Scottish queen's goal was nothing less than to unite the two kingdoms of England and Scotland under one crown. It was just a matter of waiting, and perhaps not even for too long.

By late morning, the sea fog lifted and Mary was able to go ashore. Her arrival, after a voyage of just five days, took her brother and the Scottish government by surprise. There was to be no rapturous welcome but, as the weather improved, the people came out to greet her. It was a much more muted reception than she habitually received, but welcome nonetheless. Mary Queen of Scots was home at last.

Part One

Ill-Gotten Thrones

1485–1488

CHAPTER ONE

'This pretty lad'

'*We will unite the red rose and the white . . . England hath long been mad and scarred herself.*'

Henry VII in William Shakespeare's *Richard III*

On another day in August, seventy-six years earlier, Mary Stewart's great-grandfather was standing in a field in the heart of England. This may sound idyllic but the reality was not that of a pleasant pastoral scene. The noise of battle and the fear of death were all around him. He had good reason to wonder how much longer he might breathe the air of a country he had never yet been able to call home. The life he knew best was that of a wandering exile, often in flight, always penurious, harbouring schemes and consorting with unreliable malcontents. But there was one clear aim that underpinned his determination after all the uncertain years of living in foreign courts, surviving on the transitory goodwill of European rulers who reckoned his presence might give them a political edge in the realization of their own ambitions. He wanted the throne of England. His hopes were based on a distant and dubious claim, but the prolonged upheavals of the fifteenth century had presented others with unforeseen opportunities and he had gambled that such good fortune might also be his, in the right circumstances. Most people in England would probably never even have heard his name, such a rank outsider was he. Living so long across the water, the Breton and

French tongues came more easily to him than English. But that scarcely mattered on 22 August 1485. As the fighting raged, his own safety seemed the first priority. There are signs that he was not entirely confident of success on the battlefield and with good reason. Supporters were fickle and uncommitted, his forces were outnumbered two to one and he had chosen survival over heroism by staying behind the vanguard of his troops and preparing an escape route if the day went against him. He could always try again.

But his enemy had seen a chance to put a decisive end to the fighting that rolled across the countryside of Leicestershire that summer's day. It was a battle in which the rebels were achieving a surprising degree of success, but although the larger force led by the king had been outmanoeuvred, it was by no means beaten. It was noted that the pretender was separated from his main force, with just his immediate bodyguard and a small number of horsemen and infantry to protect him. His vulnerability was obvious. In late medieval warfare, the death of a leader almost inevitably led to the capitulation of his forces. A direct onslaught, perhaps even hand-to-hand combat between the rivals, might settle things once and for all. As a tactic, it was not without risk, but the rewards – the removal of a continuing threat and the promise of stability in a strife-torn country – would be worth the gamble. Urged on by his advisers and doubtless following his own well-honed battle instincts, the king did not hesitate for long. A cavalry charge, led by the monarch himself, bore down on the small force of men gathered around the pretender's standard, a red dragon which proclaimed his Welsh ancestry. As the riders approached, the man in the field knew that his life hung in the balance. Henry Tudor, unlikely heir to the House of Lancaster, was about to come within a spear's length of Richard III, the Yorkist king he had pledged to overthrow. A matter of minutes would decide his fate.

'He was a comely personage, a little above just stature, well and straight-limbed, but slender. His countenance was revered, and a little like a churchman, and as it was not strange or dark so neither was it winning or pleasing, but as the face of one well disposed. But it was to the disadvantage of the painter, for it was best when he spoke.'[1] This description, although written more than a century after the death of Henry Tudor, captures what we know of him perfectly. A considered person, not given to great public displays of emotion, somewhat ascetic in appearance, not exactly handsome, but with an interesting and by no means unattractive face, the whole man only at his most appealing when he was animated. His portraits show that he did, indeed, have something of the churchman about him: a calm and also an inscrutability, a sense that you would never entirely know what he was thinking. It gave him an air of authority which must have been invaluable for a man who had never been part of any establishment, never so much as managed an estate or led men, in war or peace, and who had existed on the periphery of the English ruling class. He was of it but not part of it. His background and the dislocation of long years of civil strife had set him apart from those whom he might view as his peers. This distinctiveness marked him and would characterize his approach to the dangerous business of winning the throne. For Henry Tudor, nothing had been simple. His background was unusually complicated and the circumstances of his birth compellingly strange.

He was the grandson of Shakespeare's 'Fair Kate', Catherine de Valois, the wife of Henry V. This gave him royal French blood. On his father's side, however, the antecedents were much less illustrious, for Catherine, left a widow after her husband's early death in 1421, had, by the start of the next decade, married again. Her second marriage, to Owen Tudor, a Welshman in her household, was kept secret until she died in 1437. By that time, she had borne Owen four children and inadvertently complicated the politics of England during the long minority of Henry VI. The regency government for the young king was

uneasy about the existence of half-brothers, especially ones linked to the French royal family at a time when England was in the process of losing its extensive empire in France. The two eldest sons of the unlikely alliance of a French queen and a Welsh squire, Edmund and Jasper Tudor, were removed from their father and brought up together at Barking Abbey in Essex. They did, though, find favour with King Henry VI, who seems to have been fond of his half-brothers, and as he began to make his own decisions, their fortunes rose. In 1452, shortly before England's descent into the beginnings of the Wars of the Roses, Edmund was made earl of Richmond and Jasper earl of Pembroke. The lands and prestige that went with these titles meant that the Tudors became persons of significance. Just one year later their position was further enhanced when they were granted joint wardship of the heiress of another great landed family with a doubtful past – Margaret Beaufort, the ten-year-old daughter of the late John, duke of Somerset, who had died in disgrace after a costly and disastrous expedition to France. But it was her surname, rather than her father's failure, that made Margaret important. Aside from her wealth, her desirability lay in the fact that she was the great-granddaughter of John of Gaunt and had a potential claim to the throne of England herself. Not that this claim was without impediment, since the Beauforts were the offspring of John of Gaunt's initially adulterous liaison with Katherine Swynford. Though eventually regularized, the relationship cast a long shadow over fifteenth-century England, since this 'bastard' branch of John of Gaunt's line was not considered to have a rightful claim to the throne and Henry IV had expressly excluded his half-kindred from the succession.

Henry VI, a king not otherwise noted for his decisiveness, took a keen interest in the fortunes of his little cousin. Just a year after her birth he gave her wardship and marriage to his chief minister, the duke of Suffolk. This was probably intended to bolster Suffolk's wealth and status but as the duke's political fortunes took a dramatic turn for the worse in 1450, he saw an opportunity to salvage the prospects of his heir, seven-year-old

John de la Pole, by marrying the boy to Margaret Beaufort, who was then six. Such marriages seem to us now to be both ludicrous and shocking, but they were common at the time and viewed as sensible business arrangements that could be, and indeed often were, revoked at a later date. This is exactly what happened to the first marriage of Lady Margaret. Summoned to court with her mother on Valentine's Day 1453, Margaret now faced the considerable ordeal of making public her decision, since the law required she must do so in front of witnesses, including a bishop. There was no lovers' romance for her.

The initiative for this public dissolution of her marriage contract with Suffolk's son was not, however, Margaret's. At nine years old, she was directed by others. The king was bringing pressure on her to choose his half-brother, Edmund Tudor, over John de la Pole. She later remembered that Henry 'did make means for Edmund, his brother, then the earl of Richmond'. Uncertain what to do, but no doubt mindful of the king's own preferences, Margaret agonized over her decision. It was then suggested that she pray overnight to St Nicholas, who would guide her choice. By the morning her mind was made up. She would put aside the boy she scarcely knew for a much older man who was also a stranger. Thus she had made her own choice (or so she thought) and also pleased the king. But there were much greater political and dynastic considerations involved, for Henry, though married for some years, had no children and was faced with growing discontent among his fractious nobility. It is possible that, without an heir himself, Henry intended to nominate his brother Edmund in Margaret Beaufort's right.

He did not, however, do so and in fact his wife, Margaret of Anjou, was already pregnant, though at too early a stage for it to have been known at the time Margaret Beaufort and her mother came to court. The visit made a great impression on the child, who was enchanted by the magnificence of the spectacle, the opulent jewels and dresses of the queen and her ladies, and the warmth of the welcome from the king, whom she seems to have genuinely revered and liked. He also brought home to her the

importance of her position and instilled in her a sense of who she was. There was no resentment of the role he had played in severing her from her child-husband. Perhaps she remembered him afterwards with fondness because of his attention to her and the contrast with the dark times that followed for England. Only a few months later, Henry suffered a severe mental collapse and the country slid towards civil war.

Despite her proximity to the throne and the attractions of her wealth, Margaret grew up in a happy environment, among the children of her mother's first marriage, the St John family, to whom she would remain close. But her childhood ended prematurely when Edmund Tudor married her as soon as she was twelve years old, in May 1455. This was the legal age of marriage for females and Edmund clearly saw no reason for delay, though another year was to elapse before Margaret conceived. This may have had more to do with the point at which his very young bride reached puberty than any early abstention on Edmund's part from marital relations. He was clearly keen to make his wife pregnant as soon as possible, so that he could secure a permanent interest in her estates through their offspring. It was not uncommon for girls of noble birth to be married at a very young age and to go to live with their frequently much older husbands (Edmund, then in his mid-twenties, was actually a younger spouse than was often the case in such marriages) but it was very unusual for such wives to bear children before their mid-teens.

Margaret had moved with Edmund Tudor to south Wales a few months after their wedding, where he was essentially acting as the king's lieutenant. It was a traditionally restless area, resistant to rule from London even before the outbreak of more widespread strife in Henry VI's realm in the 1450s. Local grievances and the fact that the Tudor brothers had briefly flirted with the Yorkists before reverting to full support of their half-brother made Edmund a target for the disaffected. Margaret was not with him at Carmarthen Castle in the summer of 1456 when

he was attacked by two thousand troops under the leadership of the duke of York's men, Sir William Herbert and Sir Walter Devereux, and captured. Briefly imprisoned in the castle, Edmund was released but fell ill, probably with the plague, and never recovered. By the beginning of November he was dead, leaving Margaret, who was six months pregnant, a widow at the age of thirteen. His insensitivity and callousness in impregnating her at such a tender age have often been criticized but we know nothing of their relationship. It is unlikely that affection played much part in it and Edmund clearly felt that the risks to his wife's health, and that of any child she might bear, made it worthwhile ignoring convention. He obviously had not calculated on dying himself.

This may seem like a sort of rough justice but it left Margaret in danger. With winter setting in and the political situation in Wales so uncertain, she could not return to her mother in England. Her own safety and that of her unborn child were at stake. She needed to be somewhere secure and as free as possible from the threat of disease. It was now that Jasper Tudor, her brother-in-law, a man who would play a vital role in her future, came to the rescue. Margaret took refuge with him in Pembroke Castle and it was there, on 28 January 1457, that her child was born. He was named Henry, presumably as a sign of his Lancastrian birthright. His mother was still four months short of her fourteenth birthday.

It had been an extremely difficult birth which imperilled the lives of both mother and child. Margaret was small for her age and should never have conceived so early. The price she paid was that she was subsequently unable to have children. Yet the bond with the son born when she was scarcely more than a child herself was strong and unshakeable. She was committed to supporting him from the moment of his birth. Margaret Beaufort would grow into a clever and ambitious woman, able to manipulate, to adapt and, above all, to bide her time. Henry VI had made her conscious of who she was. It was an awareness that she

was determined to inculcate in her son, no matter what vicissitudes might befall them both.

IF SHE HAD been unlucky in her husband, Margaret Beaufort was fortunate in his brother. Jasper Tudor, by now completely committed to the Lancastrian cause, took an active interest in the well-being of Edmund's widow and her child. Later, he would share exile, hardship and uncertainty with his nephew, acting as mentor at a crucial stage in Henry Tudor's life. The ties that bound them were strong. But his immediate concern, once it was clear that Margaret had survived her ordeal, was to help her find a new husband. Single himself, he could offer her neither the domestic peace nor personal security that could be hoped for in a new marriage. And they both knew that Pembroke Castle, despite Jasper's attempts to increase its comforts, was still more of a fortress than a home. It was not an appropriate place for Margaret and her baby to remain permanently. By March 1457, Margaret was with Jasper in eastern Wales, at a manor belonging to the duke of Buckingham, one of the few nobles in the realm who could rival the duke of York in power. There, apparently with her full support, a marriage was arranged with Buckingham's second son, Henry Stafford. The precise timing of this, the third marriage in Margaret's young life, is not known, but it was probably at the beginning of 1458.

Relieved that she was now able to influence her affairs with some dignity, Margaret approached her life with Henry Stafford with renewed confidence. Theirs appears to have been a happy relationship, made easier by a financial settlement from Stafford's father when he died in 1460 and by Margaret's sizeable income from her own estates. The couple were wealthy enough to live in considerable style, though there is little information on their whereabouts in the years immediately after their marriage, or whether the infant Henry Tudor always stayed with them. Given the concern of both his mother and new stepfather to protect his interests, it is probable that Margaret did not want him too far

distant, though his day-to-day routine would have been the responsibility of his nursery staff. The stability of Henry's early childhood was not, however, to last long. By the time he was four years old, he had been removed from his mother's care.

The year 1461 saw the fortunes and allegiances of Henry's uncle and stepfather diverge, in ways that had a direct impact on the child himself. Both Jasper Tudor and Henry Stafford had maintained their support for Henry VI but they had picked the losing side. In February 1461, Jasper and his father, Owen Tudor, widower of Catherine of Valois, confronted a Yorkist force at Mortimer's Cross in Herefordshire. They were vanquished and Owen summarily executed. Jasper, his hatred of the Yorkists even stronger now, escaped back into south Wales, where he vowed to avenge his father 'with the might of Our Lord and the assistance of . . . our kinsmen and friends, within short time'.[2] The threat, though heartfelt, could not be realized. Yorkist power was firmly established within months. Jasper, skilled in the arts of disguise and evading capture, fled into exile, first in Scotland and then in France. So began his long life as a fugitive in the courts of France (where he was well received as a blood relative by Louis XI) and Brittany, constantly striving for the restoration of the House of Lancaster, for the recovery of his own lands in Wales and, as time went by, the rights of his nephew, Henry Tudor. Jasper's misfortune, his life as a 'diplomatic beggar', as it has been called, would not, ultimately, be in vain.[3] He could not have foreseen, in 1461, that all the Lancastrian hopes might one day rest on Margaret Beaufort's son.

Less than two months after his grandfather's death, young Henry's stepfather fought for the cause of King Henry VI at the battle of Towton, in Yorkshire. But unlike many who were massacred as they fled one of the bloodiest battles ever fought on English soil, Stafford survived. The victory at Towton was decisive for the Yorkists, bringing Edward IV to the throne and precipitating the flight of the Lancastrian royal family to Scotland. This might well have been enough in itself to cause the Staffords to rethink their allegiances, but events much closer to

home gave them no alternative. In September 1461, Pembroke Castle fell to a Yorkist force led by Sir William Herbert, an old adversary of the Tudors and a diehard supporter of the new king. It is often said that Margaret, her son and second husband were in the castle when it capitulated but there does not seem to be any firm proof of their whereabouts. Whether personally humiliated or not, they were bound to acknowledge that Herbert was now the representative of royal authority in south Wales. Keen to protect their estates, the Staffords accepted that they could not oppose the new regime. A year later, Herbert, newly ennobled, acquired the wardship and marriage of Margaret's son. It cost him £1,000, the equivalent of half a million pounds today, an indication of Herbert's wealth and also of Henry Tudor's perceived worth. Henry was removed from his mother and taken to live at Raglan Castle. He saw her occasionally during the years that followed, though it would be more than two decades before they spent much time in each other's company again. He was a child with prospects but in 1461, with his uncle in exile and his mother treading cautiously in her reappraisal of the family fortunes, the most she and her husband felt they could do for him was to become loyal subjects of Edward IV and watch and wait.

AT RAGLAN, Henry was brought up in what was probably the greatest fortress-palace of its day. Defended by a moat and its formidable 'Yellow Tower', the stronghold also boasted a luxurious palace, built in the latest French style with superb masonry work and a double courtyard. Even a child parted from his mother at such a tender age must have come to appreciate its grandeur. Henry seems also to have been grateful for the care and attention shown him by Herbert's wife, Anne Devereux, the daughter of another prominent Welsh family. There were two other boys, both slightly older than him, in the family circle: Herbert's heir (also called William) and Henry Percy, who became earl of Northumberland in 1470. Percy was, like Henry

Tudor, Herbert's ward. In addition, there were the daughters of the Herbert family, one of whom, Maud, was intended by Herbert as Henry's bride. So it was not an isolated childhood and though Henry's lands had been reassigned by Edward IV, he was still styled, even by his guardian, as the earl of Richmond. Little is known of his education except what was written years later by Bernard André, the Frenchman appointed by Henry as his official historian. There were two priests who acted as tutors: Edward Haseley and Andrew Scot. Haseley became dean of Warwick and was later given an annuity by Henry for his services; Scot was an Oxford man. Henry appears to have been an apt pupil and his attainments must have pleased his mother when she learned about them on her rare visits or, more frequently, by messages that passed between her household and that of the Herberts.

The education of fifteenth-century aristocrats encompassed more than scholarly learning (overemphasis on the schoolroom was viewed with disapproval) and Henry also learned the vital physical skills of a gentleman of his class: archery, swordsmanship, riding and hunting. By the time he was twelve, such attributes were well enough developed for Lord Herbert to introduce his ward to the reality of political strife in England. It was to be an unforgettable baptism. Henry Tudor had spent eight years in a Yorkist household and, whatever the allegiances of his kindred, was being raised as a loyal subject of Edward IV. But by the end of the 1460s, Edward was losing his grip on England. His marriage to Elizabeth Woodville had insulted the French king, whose sister-in-law, Bona of Savoy, was spurned as a bride when the marriage negotiations were well-advanced. The Woodville match also divided Edward's supporters at home. Meanwhile, the Lancastrians were recovering their strength and Jasper Tudor, their main hope if they could gain back Wales, was raiding in the north of that country. His success was only temporary but the connection between uncle and nephew was not lost on Henry Tudor's guardian. In 1469, Herbert took the boy with him on campaign, perhaps thinking to ensure his

loyalty to Edward IV as well as continue his practical training for warfare. If so, it was a disastrous miscalculation. At the battle of Edgecote, near Banbury, troops loyal to the turncoat earl of Warwick defeated Lord Herbert, who had quarrelled with his fellow commander, the earl of Devon, the night before and as a result had been deprived of his archers. As the day turned against Herbert and Welsh losses began to mount, Henry Tudor was led from the field by Sir Richard Corbet. He never saw his guardian again. Herbert was executed on the orders of Warwick and Henry was taken to Herbert's brother-in-law, Lord Ferrers, at Weobley in Herefordshire. He was joined by Herbert's widow, who assumed responsibility for his safety during the uncertain summer months of 1469. He remained with her for a year but his time in the Herberts' care was effectively over.

The balance of power in England was shifting and Margaret Beaufort, though anxious about her son's safety, saw an opportunity to recover his wardship. Hard bargaining ensued between the lawyers of the Staffords and the Herberts, but Margaret had set her sights on a more ambitious agenda and this required her to take a political gamble that would have a far-reaching impact on both her son and herself. She was determined to secure a title and lands for Henry, to ensure that he was no longer a pawn in the hands of others. Believing that the Richmond title was rightfully Henry's, she appealed directly to Edward IV's traitorous brother, the duke of Clarence, then owner of the 'honour of Richmond', as the power to grant its title and lands was known. She was not entirely successful, as Clarence, never a man to give up wealth easily, only agreed to return the title and estates on his death. It looked like Henry Tudor would have a long wait.

But who could be sure where the twists and turns of the struggle for domination of England might lead? Confusing as the events of 1469–71 seem to us now, for contemporaries it was impossible to predict the outcome of so much upheaval. Margaret and her husband had worked hard to be seen as loyal supporters of Edward IV, distancing themselves from her unpredictable Beaufort relatives and developing their contacts with the

family of Elizabeth Woodville, Edward's wife, when Stafford's nephew, the young duke of Buckingham, married the queen's sister. But Margaret's appeal to Clarence on her son's behalf compromised all this. It looked like plotting with the king's enemies, even if Clarence and his brother were eventually reconciled. Despite Henry Stafford's attempts to demonstrate his loyalty, Margaret's actions could not be undone. In the early autumn of 1470, however, she had every reason to believe that her re-emergence on the political scene was thoroughly justified.

Faced with rebellion and treachery within his own family and deserted by the powerful earl of Warwick, who had styled himself the 'Kingmaker', Edward IV could not hold on to his kingdom. In September 1470 he fled to Holland. Within a month, Henry VI was brought out of confinement at the Tower of London and restored to the throne. Jasper Tudor returned to Wales and was reunited at Hereford with the nephew he had not seen for almost ten years. Henry Tudor was now able to spend time with both his uncle and mother, whose unwavering support for him seemed fully justified. One of his abiding memories of this period, however, was a brief meeting with the gentle and pious king. On 27 October he was rowed down the Thames in his stepfather's barge for a royal audience.

Henry VI had always been well disposed towards Margaret Beaufort and he seems to have greeted her son warmly. What passed between them is unknown but the story was later given out that he had prophesied that Henry Tudor would one day become king. There is every reason to assume that he had been gentle and welcoming to the boy, but the gloss put upon young Tudor's reception is probably Tudor propaganda that was picked up by Shakespeare: 'This pretty lad will prove our country's bliss' is likely to be sheer dramatic invention.

For young Henry Tudor, the promise of such bliss was soon to be a distant vision. Henry VI had been a weak and unpredictable king before; he was now simply unfit to rule at all. In reinstating him, the Lancastrians lost an opportunity for a painless abdication and the assumption of power by his seventeen-

year-old son, Edward of Westminster, who remained in France while attempts were made to cobble together an administration that would help the mentally unstable monarch function. Henry VI never seems to have been enthusiastic about his restoration, preferring the quiet certainties of honourable captivity to the cut and thrust of power in a country where the struggle for dominance seemed never-ending. Taking advantage of the fluid situation and hoping to build on his solid support in London, Edward IV landed without opposition in Yorkshire in March 1471. He defeated and killed Warwick at the battle of Barnet in April and then moved west to meet the forces of Margaret of Anjou, who had landed with her son in Dorset. On 4 May, still waiting for the soldiers that Jasper Tudor and his nephew were bringing from Wales, the queen's commander, Edmund Beaufort, duke of Somerset, cousin of Margaret Beaufort, met Edward IV's army at Tewkesbury in Gloucestershire. The vicious fighting and subsequent bloodletting effectively destroyed the Lancastrian cause. Edward of Westminster was killed fleeing the field, while Somerset was inveigled out of Tewkesbury Abbey, where he had taken sanctuary, on a false promise of safety by Edward IV and executed two days later. To ensure an unequivocal Yorkist success, Henry VI was murdered in the Tower of London, almost certainly on Edward's orders, on the night of 21 May.

Jasper and Henry Tudor retreated to Pembroke Castle but it was doubtful that they could hold out there for long. Fearful for her son's safety and understandably mistrusting any offer of pardon from the king, Margaret Beaufort counselled her son to flee the country. He was now firmly connected in Edward IV's mind with the Lancastrian cause and his mother valued his life more than his company. She would entrust him to the brother-in-law who had been an unshakeable ally and pray to God that she would, one day, see him again. Jasper, that inveterate evader of the Yorkists, was able to spirit his nephew out of Pembroke Castle to the small port of Tenby, where his local contacts allowed them to make good their escape by sea. Even then,

nothing was easy. They intended to make for the French coast, but storms blew them off course and they finally landed in Brittany at the end of September 1471. So began, at fourteen years old, Henry Tudor's long period of exile. He would be twice that age before he saw his mother or England again.

Brittany gave Henry Tudor sanctuary but also something more – a hard schooling in the reality of power politics in Europe. This would add a dimension to his understanding that Edward IV lacked. It also taught him that trust must be awarded with extreme care, that security was a luxury scarcely to be expected, but that being an outsider provided a perspective that could be enlightening. We know little about most of his time in Brittany, since few records survive. Though honourably treated at the expense of Duke Francis II of Brittany, Henry and his uncle were essentially under house arrest. In addition, they would very soon have realized that they were caught up in a wider political struggle. Duke Francis was determined to maintain his independence from France and the Yorkists needed his support as their own relations with the French king Louis XI ebbed and flowed. The Tudors were separated in 1474 when a plot to assassinate them was feared. It came to nothing but two years later Henry's position was thrown into doubt when Duke Francis, apparently believing Edward IV's promises of finding an appropriate Yorkist bride and grants of land for his 'guest', agreed to the young man's return. But no matter how much his mother, now remarried after Stafford's death to the Yorkist Lord Thomas Stanley, might have wanted such an outcome, Henry himself was not convinced of the English monarch's good faith. As he was about to embark at St Malo, Henry pretended to be ill. His departure was delayed and, even as Duke Francis reconsidered his agreement with Edward, Henry took sanctuary in the cathedral. He was permitted to stay, and later brought together again with his uncle for a time.

But the danger and uncertainty over his future remained.

Despite it all, the glimpses of his lifestyle from remaining records show that he did not sit fretting inside the succession of Breton castles that became his temporary homes. He grew into an active young man, sometimes in the company of Duke Francis's own soldiers. His education was not overlooked and he was well prepared in the skills of warfare. Gradually, as his prowess developed, his expenses, particularly for horses, began to outstrip those of his uncle.[4] Duke Francis, despite frequent bouts of illness, was a generous host. Yet Henry was not free and his prospects, seen even in the most positive light, were indeterminate. He had been twelve years in exile when, in 1483, his situation changed dramatically. He was about to be transformed from being no more than a member of the diffused Lancastrian opposition to a claimant to the throne.

The catalyst was the unexpected death of Edward IV on 9 April. The handsome hedonist had turned into an overweight, self-indulgent man (a path closely paralleled by his grandson, Henry VIII) but no one was prepared for the stroke that ended his life after more than twenty years on the throne. He had a large family but the girls, renowned for their beauty, had come before the boys. His heir, now Edward V, was only twelve years old, too young to rule for himself. It soon became apparent that faction, rather than harmony, would characterize the transition towards a new government. Few, however, could have predicted the dramatic outcome of what at first seemed no more than a family squabble for control of the new monarch. Ranged against each other were the queen's family, the Woodvilles, and the supporters of the late king's youngest brother, Richard, duke of Gloucester.

The Woodvilles were certainly numerous. Edward IV had married into a fertile family and the extensive granting of favours to his wife's relatives, though only to be expected, did not sit well with some of the English aristocracy. Nor did the fact that the Woodvilles had, until Elizabeth's good fortune, been Lancastrian supporters. When Edward met her she was the widow of Sir John Grey, who had been killed at the second battle of St

Albans in 1461, and the mother of two young sons. This dubious past was now well behind her and she appeared to be on reasonable terms with the duke of Gloucester at the time that her husband died. As he was based in the north of England, distance may have made their relationship easier. When circumstances brought them closer together, things did not go well at all.

It speedily became obvious that the duke would not stay meekly on the sidelines while the reins of government were taken by others. The role of queens during the minority of their sons had never been formalized in England but there were precedents for the appointment of uncles as Protectors. Allied with the duke of Buckingham and Sir William Hastings, one of Edward IV's most loyal ministers, the duke ensured, within three weeks of his brother's death, that he would not be passed over. He knew that control of the person of the king was the key to the exercise of real power. In truth, the Woodvilles lost the initiative when they took too long to bring Edward V from his residence in Ludlow to London. On the last day of April 1483 the queen's brother and younger son by her first marriage, totally unsuspecting after an apparently pleasant dinner the night before with Gloucester, were arrested at Stony Stratford in Northamptonshire. The king himself, though dismayed by this sudden turn of events, was compelled to continue his journey towards his coronation under the control of his other uncle. On hearing the news, Elizabeth Woodville, with her younger son and daughters, fled into sanctuary in Westminster Abbey.

This was, however, only the first phase of Richard's coup d'état. It has been suggested that his subsequent actions were at least in part driven by a fear that he would lose his lands and power base in the north of England rather than the burning desire to become king. Perhaps he did not know himself when he took on the Woodvilles in April. Yet by 24 June he had destroyed Lord Hastings (summarily executed after a council meeting in which the Protector claimed there were plots against him), imprisoned Margaret Beaufort's husband Lord Stanley, the

bishop of Ely and the archbishop of York, persuaded the queen to give up her younger son, and published a detailed statement that demonstrated the illegitimacy of the king and his brother because of an alleged pre-contract of marriage that Edward IV had undertaken before he wed Elizabeth Woodville. This left Richard as the sole legitimate heir of his brother but in case people were not persuaded of the legalities, he also brought his army down from Yorkshire in an unsubtle move intended to cow any opposition. On 6 July he was crowned King Richard III in Westminster Abbey. In less than three months he had moved from magnate in the north to monarch of all England. It may well be that, with hindsight, his actions look more carefully planned than they actually were. What cannot be denied, however, is that he ruthlessly removed his brother's heirs from their inheritance (a document of the time refers to 'Edward bastard late said king of England') and that they never emerged from their confinement in the Tower of London.

Richard III, who had come by the throne with the speed and organization of a professional soldier, remains the most controversial of English monarchs. Tudor propaganda and Shakespeare's colourful, if wildly inaccurate, portrait of one of the most consummate villains ever to walk the stage served to blacken his image for centuries. No contemporary portrait of him survives, but the nearest, and therefore probably the most accurate, dates from about 1510. If this is a reasonable likeness, it reveals a man who appears wary and tired. He does not look at ease with himself. Even today, when a more balanced view of his actions has been suggested by historians, the popular perception is still that of the hunchbacked monster who left a trail of murder on his way to the throne. Attempts to clear him of all the charges that could be brought against him have merely polarized opinion still further. Yet there is no doubt that the manner of his rise to power shocked contemporaries in an age that was inured to violence and double-dealing. It is not surprising that Richard seems to have known from the outset of his reign that he might have difficulties keeping his crown. But when he looked around,

he would not have seen many serious contenders able to try their own hand at usurpation. He was also bolstered by a strong religious faith in the justifications of his actions. It seems unlikely that he was overly troubled, in the summer of 1483, at the thought of Henry Tudor as a serious opponent. By the autumn, he knew differently.

It was not long before the new king discovered the challenges awaiting him. There were conspiracies everywhere, especially in the south of England, and it was soon brought home to Richard that commanding loyalty in the north was an insufficient guarantee of stability. He had also made implacable enemies in his struggle with the Woodvilles. The significance of this was not lost on one observer. Margaret Beaufort had hoped, before Edward IV's death, that her patient adherence to the Yorkist cause, coupled with Lord Stanley's rising power and political influence, might finally bring about her son's return and the restoration of his lands. Richard III's seizure of the throne, and the likelihood that the Princes in the Tower were dead, prompted her to rethink her strategy. A greater possibility than mere restitution now beckoned. So Margaret, who had carried the train of Richard's queen at the coronation on 6 July, was within two months entering into dangerous secret negotiations with Elizabeth Woodville. Her sights were now set much higher: on the arrangement of a marriage between Princess Elizabeth of York and Henry Tudor. Her son would claim the throne and make Elizabeth his queen. Using her personal physician, Margaret established contact with the queen dowager and proceeded to raise loans in the City of London to give financial underpinning to her quest. She sent a trusted servant to Brittany to apprise her son of what was afoot, urging that he prepare an invasion. By late September, she had a further important ally from amongst the English nobility. The duke of Buckingham, the man who had helped Richard III to the crown, regretted his actions sufficiently to rebel himself.