Introduction

For God's sake, let us sit upon the ground
And tell sad stories of the death of kings;
How some have been deposed; some slain in war,
Some haunted by the ghosts they have deposed.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE,
RICHARD II ACT 3, SCENE 2

In fifteenth-century France it was believed that the English bore the mark of Cain for their habit of killing their kings.[1] Before the slaughter of Richard III in 1485, when the Tudor crown was won on the battlefield of Bosworth, a series of English kings had been deposed and then died or disappeared in mysterious circumstances that century. The overthrow of the first of these, Richard II, in 1399, had brought a long-standing element of instability to the monarchy.

At that time, the paternal ancestors of the Tudors were modest landowners in north Wales – and even this status was lost the following year. In 1400 they joined a Welsh rebellion against Richard II's heir, the usurper Henry IV, first king of the House of Lancaster. The family was ruined after the rebellion was crushed, but eventually a child of the youngest son left Wales with his son to seek a better life in England. It was this man, Owen Tudor, who was to give the Tudor dynasty its name.

Looking back, Owen's life is that of a modern-day hero: a common man who lived against convention, often thumbed his nose at authority, and died, bravely, with a joke on his lips. Owen, however, is lost to the family story in histories of the Tudors that so often begin at Bosworth in 1485. So is the remarkable life of Owen's daughter-in-law, Lady Margaret Beaufort, whose descent from the House of Lancaster provided the basis for her son Henry Tudor's royal claim. Indeed his reign, as Henry VII, rarely merits more than a chapter or two before these Tudor histories propel us towards Henry VIII and the 'divorce' from Katherine of Aragon. Written by the children of the Reformation, the Reformation has become where the story of the 'real' Tudors begins; but the Tudors were the children of an earlier period, and their preoccupations and myths were rooted in that past.

The famous mystery of the disappearance of the princes in the Tower in 1483, which turned Henry Tudor from a helpless exile into Richard III's rival overnight, becomes less mysterious when it is considered in the light of the culture and beliefs of the fifteenth century; the life of Margaret Beaufort also emerges in a more sympathetic light once we have recalibrated our perspective, and the actions of Henry VIII and his children can likewise be much better understood. England was not predominantly Protestant until very late in the Tudor period, and habits of thought were still shaped by England's long, and recent, Catholic past. Similarly, while the Tudors are often recalled in terms of a historical enmity with Spain, this too is history written with hindsight: the Armada did not take place until a generation after Elizabeth became queen. It was memories of the Hundred Years War with France that remained strong, and although the war that began with Edward III laying claim to the French throne had ended in 1453, over thirty years before Bosworth, it was to have a lasting impact on England's political character.

The English had not needed French land, as the country was underpopulated after the Black Death. Successive English kings had been obliged to persuade their subjects to come into partnership with them

to help achieve their ambitions for the French throne. The result was that in England military service was offered, not assumed, and royal revenue was a matter of negotiation, not of taxation imposed on the realm. English kings were, in practical terms, dependent on obedience freely given, and that had to be earned. They had certain duties, such as ensuring peace, prosperity, harmony and justice (if a crown was taken from an expected heir or an incumbent monarch, the perceived ability to restore harmony within the kingdom was particularly important) and kings were also supposed to maintain, or even increase, their landed inheritance. England's empire in France had reached its zenith under Henry IV's son, Henry V, and his son Henry VI was crowned as a boy King of France as well as England. But then he lost the empire he had inherited. The humiliation of the final defeat at French hands in 1453 was not something England had recovered from even a century later, which is why the Tudors were devastated by the loss of Calais. It was the last remnant of a once great empire.

In England the loss of France in 1453 was followed by eighteen years of sporadic but violent struggle as the rival royal House of York fought for supremacy over Henry VI and the House of Lancaster. This was the period into which the first Tudor king, Henry VII, was born. It was still remembered in the reign of his grandson with horror as a time when 'the nobles as well as the common people were into two parts divided, to the destruction of many a man, and to the great ruin and decay of this region'.[2] It was the promise of peace, and the healing of old wounds, that was the *raison d'être* of the Tudor dynasty. The Pope himself praised Henry's marriage to Elizabeth of York in 1486 as marking the conciliation of the royal houses. This was symbolised in the union rose of red (for Henry VII and Lancaster) and white (for York). Although Henry VII denied he owed any of his royal right to his marriage and faced further opposition from within the House of York, the union rose became an immensely popular image with artists and poets in the sixteenth century.

The key importance of the royal lines of Lancaster and York that

stretched back long before Henry VII, and which had nothing to do with his non-royal Tudor ancestors, has inspired the recent assertion that the Tudor kings and queens did not see themselves as Tudors at all, but as individual monarchs sprung from the ancient royal house, and that the use of terms such as 'the Tudor age' only creates a false separation from a hypothetical Middle Ages.[3] This is an important reminder that the Tudors did not exist in a time bubble, yet it is not the full story. It was well understood in 1603 that the Stuarts were a break from the family which had preceded them, and if Henry VII and his descendants did not see themselves exactly as a dynasty – a term not then used to describe an English royal line – they had a palpable sense of family.[4] It is there in Henry VII's tomb in the Lady Chapel at Westminster Abbey, where he lies with his mother, his wife and three crowned Tudor grandchildren; it is also there in the Holbein mural commissioned by Henry VIII of the king with his parents and his son's late mother. The Tudors believed they were building on the past to create something different – and better – even if they differed on how.

The struggle of Henry VII and his heirs to secure the line of succession, and the hopes, loves and losses of the claimants – which dominated and shaped the history of the Tudor family and their times – are the focus of this book. The universal appeal of the Tudors also lies in the family stories: of a mother's love for her son, of the husband who kills his wives, of siblings who betray one another, of reckless love affairs, of rival cousins, of an old spinster whose heirs hope to hurry her to her end. 'I am Richard II,' as the last of the Tudors joked bitterly, 'know ye not that?'[5]

Part One

THE COMING OF THE TUDORS: A MOTHER'S LOVE

Henry Tudor, son of Edmund Tudor, son of Owen Tudor, who of his ambitious and insatiable covertise encroaches and usurps upon him the name and title of royal estate of this Realm of England whereunto he has no manner, interest, right, title or colour, as every man well knows.

RICHARD III PROCLAMATION, 23 JUNE 1485

1

AN ORDINARY MAN

On 8 February 1437 a royal funeral procession wound through the streets of London. At its heart was a hearse pulled by horses and bearing a queen's coffin. It was draped with red cloth of gold stitched with golden flowers. On top lay her effigy carved in wood and dressed in a mantle of purple satin.[1] The head, resting on a velvet cushion, bore a crown of silver gilt, while the face was painted to look as the lovely Catherine of Valois had in life, the eyes blue and the lips red. Real light-brown hair was dressed above delicately carved ears, and the arms, crossing the body, embraced a sceptre, the insignia of her royal rank.

At Westminster the coffin was carried into the abbey under a canopy of black velvet hung with bells that tinkled as it moved.[2] Following a requiem Mass, Catherine was buried in the Lady Chapel, so called because it was dedicated to the Virgin Mary. Her tomb had been built close to that of her first husband, Henry V, the great victor of Agincourt. His successes would be remembered in song and tales of chivalric romance for generations. In 1420, as conqueror of France, he had been recognised as heir to Catherine's father, the French king Charles VI, with their marriage sealing the treaty and the union of the crowns. But though it proved happy, their marriage was as short-lived as the peace. Catherine of Valois had been Queen of England for only eighteen months when Henry V died on campaign in France,

leaving her a widow aged twenty, with their son, Henry VI, a mere eight months old.

As Catherine's coffin was lowered into the ground, Henry V's tomb effigy, with its silver head and armoured with silver plates, glinted in the candlelight.[3] There was nothing in this scene, however, to suggest Catherine had left behind a grieving widower, and if her second husband witnessed her funeral it was only as a face in the crowd.

It is not certain when, or how, the queen had met the modest Welsh squire Owen Tudor. What information we have suggests he had found a position in Catherine's household as a chamber servant in about 1427.[4] The widowed queen was then twenty-six, and her son, aged six, was considered old enough to be raised by men in the masculine business of rule. Since she was no longer required full time at court a new household was being set up for her.

Owen's grandfather had been ruined after taking part in a Welsh rebellion against Henry V's father, Henry IV, in 1400, and he was seeking a new life in England. Owen's Welsh name, Owain ap Maredudd ap Tudur, meant 'Owen son of Meredith son of Tudor', but that was too much of a mouthful for the English so he had become simply Owen Tudor. If the attempts to anglicise it had gone differently we might have had a dynasty of Merediths – not that it had seemed very likely that Owen would spawn a dynasty at all. He was, however, about to marry very well indeed.

Catherine was lonely, and resentful that the council Henry V had appointed to rule during his son's minority had forbidden her from remarrying. She was expected to wait at least until Henry VI had reached his majority and could approve a match. This was backed with an Act of Parliament that threatened to confiscate the lands of any great man who ignored the injunction.[5] It never occurred to anyone that Catherine might instead marry a mere chamber servant. Later some wondered if Catherine chose to marry Owen specifically because he was 'a poor man' who posed no threat to the king or his

nobles, and so the council 'might not reasonably take vengeance on his life'.[6] But Owen also appealed to Catherine in a more straightforward way. Although the early Tudor historian Polydore Vergil claimed Owen was 'adorned with wonderful gifts of body and mind', we hear little about his mind from anyone else.[7] Other reports point exclusively to his physical attractions. One account describes how the queen fell in love with Owen after coming upon him swimming naked[8]. But the most repeated story, and the one most likely to have some basis in fact, describes how Owen came to her attention in dramatic fashion during a party in her household[9]. There was music playing, and her servants were dancing. While Catherine watched, Owen performed a leap which span out of control, and he fell straight into her lap. As an Elizabethan poet asked, 'Who would not judge it fortune's greatest grace, Since he must fall, to fall in such a place?'[10] It was not long before Catherine and her handsome chamber servant were married and, according to a rather disapproving sixteenth-century account, when they made love she would scream in ecstasy.

Catherine and Owen had their first child, a boy called Edmund, in about 1430.[11] A second son, named Jasper, soon followed and within seven years the couple are reputed to have had four children. This could not easily have been hidden from the council. As a seventeenth-century historian observed, 'it is not to be supposed the court could be hoodwinked in four great bellies'.[12] Indeed, since no doubt was ever expressed that the children were legitimate, it is likely they knew of the marriage before Edmund was born. But the council had decided the marriage should remain outside the public domain until Henry VI was old enough to decide what to do about it. Meanwhile, if the marriage was accepted as fact, it was not welcomed.

Female virtue was closely associated with the ability to control powerful sexual urges (women being more prone to lust than men).[13] That a Queen of England had 'proved unable to control her carnal passions', and with 'no man of birth neither of livelihood', was deeply

shocking.[14] Catherine tried to defend herself by insisting that although Owen's Welsh family did not speak any language she knew, they were 'the goodliest dumb creatures that ever she saw'.[15] Appearance as well as behaviour mattered during the fifteenth century, and she was convinced Owen's handsome family must be of noble origin.[16] But as Sir John Wynn of Gwydir observed acidly, 'Queen Catherine being a French woman' failed to understand that there were considered to be racial differences between the English and the Welsh, and that Owen's 'kindred and country were objected to . . . as most vile and barbarous'.[17]

The couple had lived quietly near London, away from the disapproving eyes of the court, until 1436. Catherine, 'long vexed', as she complained, with a 'grievous malady', had then retired to Bermondsey Abbey, Southwark, where she died on 3 January 1437.[18] Henry VI, a precocious but prim adolescent of fifteen, now had to be told in short order that his mother was dead, that she had married a commoner, and that he had four half-siblings bearing the strange name of 'Tudor'. Owen was understandably nervous about how he might react. For a commoner to have married a Queen of England was unprecedented. It was possibly also punishable by imprisonment or worse, and fleeing back to north Wales seemed his best option. The children, Owen could be sure, would be well looked after. Whatever the shame of their Tudor name, they were the king's half-brothers and sisters.

Owen packed all his best goods: gilt cups, chalices, enamelled salts, silver ewers, candlesticks and flagons, many of them gifts from the queen, and some of them breaking in his frantic hurry to leave for his homeland.[19] But as Owen rode west the king's messenger was already in pursuit. With Owen's baggage slowing his horses, the messenger caught up with him at Daventry in Northamptonshire, where Owen was handed a summons to the royal palace in Westminster. Owen demanded he be first given a written promise of

free passage, guaranteeing he could leave London afterwards. Only when he received it did he turn his horses around.

The borough of Westminster was the heart of political and legal business in England, and had for centuries been distinct from the rest of London, with its focus on trade. Dominated by the royal palace and its neighbouring abbey, it had a resident population of around 3,000 and lay under the jurisdiction of the abbot, rather than London's mayor. The neighbouring areas were, however, beginning to grow together both socially and economically. It was not untypical to live in London and be rowed daily to Westminster for work. One clerk recalled later how he used to spend his days hunched over parchment in Westminster and his nights taking out girls, drinking and kissing, before being rowed home alone (and deeply frustrated) to the Strand.[20] Owen had good friends here, and one warned him the council had been stoking the young king's anger. Again Owen's instinct was to make a bolt for it, this time for the sanctuary of Westminster Abbey.

Anyone could claim sanctuary from the authorities in a church, and at Westminster sanctuary also covered a large area behind the abbey's precinct wall. Here Owen could hide out amongst a hive of criminals, men fleeing their creditors, and the packed stalls of shopkeepers selling unregulated goods. After several days he was still 'eschewing to come out thereof', despite the fact that 'divers persons stirred him of friendship and fellowship to have come out'.[21] Owen could even have been amongst the crowd that watched Catherine's funeral in February and afterwards seen her effigy, displayed standing in a niche like those of female saints, five feet four inches tall, dressed in royal robes over a red painted shift[22]. Eventually, however, Owen was persuaded that he was only making matters worse for himself and so he left for the palace, pushing his way through the throngs of poor awaiting alms from the monks at the abbey gates, and down the muddy street.

Inside the neighbouring Palace of Westminster Owen found himself in the enormous space of the Great Hall with the splendid hammer-beam roof commissioned by Richard II. It had been completed only after Richard had resigned the throne in 1399, accused by his cousin and heir, Henry Bolingbroke, of leaving the realm 'in point to be undone for default of governance and undoing of the good laws'.[23] He had never got to see it, while Bolingbroke had celebrated his coronation feast here as Henry IV: the king who had destroyed Owen's family after the great Welsh rebellion of the following year. It was strange that it was to Henry IV's grandson, Henry VI, that Owen was, awkwardly, stepfather.

Henry VI's councillors were awaiting Owen in a chamber situated along the east wall of the hall. Now that the king had reached his majority they acted as his principal advisers. As Owen stood before them he argued 'that he had nothing done that should give the king occasion or matter of offence or displeasure against him'.[24] From their perspective, however, he had broken a strict social code in marrying so far above his rank. It was only because Owen had his promise of safe conduct that he was permitted to return to Wales. There he was soon arrested on a trumped-up charge of failing to keep to the rules under which the promise had been issued: a neat riposte to his gall in having asked for it.

From having been the husband of a queen, Owen found himself a common prisoner at Newgate in London. The 300-year-old gates that formed the prison had recently been restored and rebuilt. Owen could drink fresh water from newly laid pipes and eat in an airy central hall.[25] There were terrible dungeons where prisoners were kept chained to the walls, but Owen was allowed a servant, access to his own chaplain, and he was locked in some of the better rooms. These all had privies and chimneys, while those in the turrets also had access to the roof and fresh air. Nevertheless Owen resented his loss of freedom, and the prison food at Newgate was not only

disgusting, but like all prisoners he was obliged to buy it at the inflated prices set by the prison staff.[26]

By early February 1438 Owen had had enough and planned to break out of Newgate, along with his chaplain and his servant. They attacked the guard who fought hard to prevent the escape, knowing he would be fined for losing Owen. But the escapees fought harder, and after they had fled it took weeks for the council to track Owen down and capture him. He was imprisoned once again, this time in Windsor, and accused of 'hurting foul his keeper' at Newgate. Had Owen angered a different king that might have been the end of him, but Henry VI proved merciful and the following year Owen was pardoned. His charm and loyalty stood him in good stead thereafter, and by 1444 Henry VI was even referring to him as 'our well beloved squire'.

Owen's and Catherine's children, meanwhile, had been taken into the king's protection and were being educated at Barking Abbey. The sixteenth-century chronicler Edward Hall claims that the youngest two, Owen and Catherine, would subsequently join the church with Owen becoming a monk at Westminster Abbey and Katherine Tudor a nun, possibly at Barking.[27] The elder two sons, Edmund and Jasper, had, however, been groomed for life at court, where they had arrived as early as 1442 when Edmund was about twelve. They found their half-brother the king, aged twenty, a tall, slender, baby-faced neurotic.[28] He had inherited the crowns of France and England before he was even a year old and had never known a superior or equal. Unsurprisingly he was profoundly conscious of his regal dignity, and as such he was determined there would be no further unsanctioned marriages within his family. He personally protected Edmund and Jasper from sexual temptation, keeping 'careful watch through hidden windows of his chamber, lest any foolish impertinence of woman coming into the house should grow to a head'.[29] By 1453, when they were in their early twenties, Henry VI had even come to regard them as potentially useful

allies. That winter, he created Edmund Earl of Richmond, and Jasper Earl of Pembroke, giving them precedence over all other magnates, excepting dukes.[30] He also had a bride of royal blood in mind for Edmund: his cousin, Margaret Beaufort.[31] It was to be a marriage with consequences their father Owen could never have imagined.

2

A CHILD BRIDE

Henry VI's cousin, Margaret Beaufort, was nine years old when her mother received a royal summons to bring her to London, and wait on the king's command. Her father, John Beaufort, Duke of Somerset, had died when she was an infant.[1] She had been his only child but she nevertheless enjoyed the warmth of a large family of half-brothers and sisters as well as step-siblings. She would always remain devoted to her extended family, and it was a much-loved girl that was about to take her first steps on the national stage.[2]

Courtiers who came to London regularly all had their usual haunts. Some stayed at taverns in Westminster, while many of the great lords had their own 'inns': sprawling buildings built around courts in which they could also house their followers. Margaret's mother had a tower house called Le Ryall on the site of what is now the College of Arms in the City of London. It was here that mother and daughter awaited the royal summons.[3]

Margaret was aware she had been invited to court because the king 'did make means for Edmund [Tudor], his [half] brother' to marry her. It would be some years, however, before she could understand the full background to his decision. Margaret Beaufort was, like the king, descended from John of Gaunt, the father of Henry IV and founder of the House of Lancaster.[4] The significant difference was that the Beaufort line was of illegitimate descent, having sprung from

Gaunt's relationship with his mistress, Katherine Swynford, and so they had no right to the throne.[5] Nevertheless a marriage to Margaret Beaufort meant Edmund Tudor would gain the power that came with wealth. Margaret was a great heiress, with a Beaufort inheritance estimated at £1,000 a year.[6] Still more significantly, the Franco-Welsh Edmund could have children of English royal blood and this would bolster the House of Lancaster, which was badly needed.

Henry VI as yet had no children while his cousin and heir, the wiry, dark-haired Richard Plantagenet, Duke of York, was already the father of several sons. The House of York thus represented the future and that posed a possible threat to the king. As the last Tudor, Queen Elizabeth I, would observe: 'more men worship the rising than the setting sun'.

There was just one small difficulty for the king's plans. Margaret had been promised, aged six, to the son of a leading councillor.[7] Happily, such youthful betrothals only became binding when a girl was twelve, and Margaret had been invited to court to repudiate hers in a public ceremony.

Margaret's summons arrived during the period of feasting enjoyed in the run-up to Ash Wednesday and she was at court by 14 February.[8] The royal household was divided into two main areas: below stairs, concerned with practical daily necessities such as food and drink, under the Lord Steward, and, secondly, the king's apartment or chamber, under the Lord Chamberlain, whose department staged public ceremonies and provided the king's private service. There was meaning as well as practical consequences in who could, and who could not, approach the monarch. 'What is the belly or where is the womb of this great public body of England but that and there where the king is himself, his court and his council?' declared one bishop of the period.[9] For some there was the enormous importance of being able to counsel the sacred representative of God. But for Margaret even seeing the king would feel like a blessing, and Henry VI made a significant impression on the young girl.

Now aged thirty-one, Henry VI was pious and scholarly, with an elegance and otherworldliness that only added to his regal presence. Henry would greet visiting envoys standing by his throne, dressed in wonderful rich robes that fell to the ground. Beauty and bounty reflected the divine, with the king having 'a prerogative in his array above all others, whereby his dignity is worshipped'.[10] Henry's queen, the twenty-two-year-old Margaret of Anjou, 'a most handsome woman, though somewhat dark', set the high standards for the ladies of the court with her jewellery and fine clothes.[11] Margaret Beaufort would be provided with a hundred marks for silks and velvets in order that she too might meet them.[12]

Looking back in her old age Margaret remembered a different scenario to that with which, in reality, she was presented as a powerless girl of nine. She convinced herself she had been offered a choice between her two possible grooms. 'Doubtful in her mind what she were best to do', she recalled turning for advice to an 'old gentlewoman whom she much loved and trusted'. The woman suggested she pray to St Nicholas, the patron saint of unmarried girls.[13] Margaret duly prayed to him that night, and while she was half asleep St Nicholas had appeared to her, 'arrayed like a bishop'. He named Edmund Tudor as the better choice and that, she later believed, was why she chose him the next day.[14] It helped reassure her, as well as others, that the marriage and everything that followed was God's plan – and that it was one in which she had a dynamic role.[15]

In March the king granted the Tudor brothers Margaret's wardship, clearing the way for Edmund to marry her when she reached the age of twelve. The following month, with Margaret still at court for the Garter ceremony, the remarkable news was announced that, after eight years of disappointment, the queen was pregnant. A son and heir for the king was a cause for national rejoicing. But it was quickly overshadowed by events in France, with repercussions that would directly affect the newly betrothed Margaret and Edmund and change the course of their future.

What became known as the Hundred Years War had begun when Henry VI's great-great-grandfather, Edward III, had laid claim to the French throne. The rules of inheritance concerning the English and French crowns were not straightforward. Ideally they followed the rules of male primogeniture, but if there was no legitimate son it was uncertain whether a king's daughter could transmit her rights to a son, or whether the crown had to pass entirely through the male line. Edward III had decided to claim the French crown through his mother, the daughter of the last king of the Capetian dynasty.[16] The French nobility asserted against this that under ancient 'Salic' law no right to the throne could pass through a woman, and had instead backed the House of Valois.

Henry V's victories against the Valois led to the Treaty of Troyes in 1420, under the terms of which Henry VI had inherited the French crown of his maternal grandfather, Charles VI. Many French accepted his rule, either because they acknowledged the historic claims of the English kings to France, or because it brought them a greater measure of political stability. But others, most of whom lived south of the river Loire, saw the treaty as a betrayal of the rights of Charles VI's son the dauphin. These two French nations had since been pitted against each other in a series of military confrontations, which ended in July 1453 in a final defeat for Henry VI at Castillon, on the Dordogne river. An English-ruled French nation, which had once extended across the whole of northern France, as well as Gascony, was reduced to a small area around Calais known as the Pale. The humiliation was terrible and Henry VI fell into a state of mental collapse.

The king at first suffered a sudden 'frenzy', after which he could neither move, nor speak. His 'wit and reason withdrawn', he had to be spoon-fed to keep him alive. These symptoms indicate a severe form of depression, but it has also been suggested that he was suffering from catatonic schizophrenia, or even porphyria. It is possible he had inherited a disposition to mental illness through his mother.[17] Her

father, Charles VI, had suffered periods of madness for the last thirty years of his life, and believed for a time that he was made of glass. When Henry VI's son was born in October, Henry was incapable even of acknowledging him.[18] In this desperate situation his cousin, Richard Plantagenet, Duke of York, was made Protector, a role that encompassed the protection of the physical person of the monarch, as well as of the realm. It proved to be a role he was reluctant to give up as the king's faculties returned.

The Duke of York had long claimed to stand for good government in opposition to the king's preferred councillors – and he did not want to see them back. On 22 May 1455, nine days before Margaret Beaufort's crucial twelfth birthday, thousands of York's retainers attacked the king and his accompanying force in the streets of St Albans, twenty-two miles north of London. The local abbot saw one man fall 'with his brains dashed out, there another with a broken arm, a third with a throat cut and a fourth with a pierced chest'.[19] The killing ended with the king grazed by an arrow, and surrounded by the bodies of his noble servants and knights. The period which the nineteenth-century novelist Sir Walter Scott romantically but inaccurately termed the 'Wars of the Roses' had begun.[20]

The simple five-petal design of the heraldic rose was inspired by the wild dog rose that grows in English hedgerows. As a symbol it had a long association with the Virgin Mary, who is sometimes called the 'Mystical Rose of Heaven'. But although the king's grandfather, Henry IV, had once used red roses to decorate his pavilion at a joust, their use as a Lancastrian royal badge was not widespread before the advent of the Tudors.[21] Equally, the white rose had yet to be associated strongly with the House of York.[22] Lancastrian supporters sometimes even boasted white-rose badges.[23] Whatever the origin of the term Wars of the Roses, however, the coming succession of battles between royal cousins would prove to be bloody and real enough.

When Margaret turned twelve it was decided she should marry Edmund Tudor without delay, before the Duke of York could

intervene. While it was usual for young brides to stay with their parents or guardians until they were physically mature – in their mid-teens, at least – Margaret would not be returned home after her wedding. Instead she discovered she was also to leave England with Edmund. He was under orders to consolidate royal power in the unsettled regions of north and south Wales and he had to consummate their marriage for it to be irrevocably valid. If she became pregnant it would also guarantee he received the income from her estates.

The belief that children were more 'mature' then than they are today is misplaced. In physical terms they were far less so. This placed Margaret in great danger at childbirth. Nevertheless, by late August of the following year she was three months pregnant. Little good it did Edmund Tudor, captured that same month by a supporter of the Duke of York. Although released from Carmarthen Castle only a few weeks later, his health had suffered and he proved insufficiently strong to fight off the plague that was sweeping the town. The Welsh poet Llywelyn Fychan, lamenting the death of his four daughters killed by plague a century earlier, noted pustules like 'brittle coal fragments' scattered over their bodies.[24] There had been regular epidemics over the previous decade, but Margaret was still appalled by her husband's death on 1 November.[25] For the rest of her life she would keep books describing the best means of protection from the disease.

Having given Edmund a hurried burial in front of the high altar at the Greyfriars in Carmarthen, Margaret now had to consider what to do next.[26] Thirteen years old, pregnant and alone in a remote region of Wales, she would surely have liked to return home. But icy rains could turn the roads to mud in hours and with her baby due in less than two months, she was in no state to travel to her mother in the Midlands. Instead, as soon as she was able, Margaret began making her way to Pembroke Castle, held by her brother-in-law and guardian, Jasper Tudor. Margaret was terrified that the plague which had killed Edmund would follow her.[27] Happily it did not. She found safety

within the castle's massive walls, where Jasper joined her as soon as he had permission to leave the king's side.

In January, when Margaret's pregnancy entered its last weeks, she withdrew into a tower room overlooking the river. This was the traditional period of confinement, in which the expectant mother rested before her labour. When it came the pain was terrifying. As her later friend and confessor John Fisher, the Bishop of Rochester, recalled, Margaret was never 'a woman of great stature' and 'she was so much smaller at that stage'. The birth of her son on 28 January 1457 left her immature body so damaged that she would never be able to bear another child. He was given a Lancastrian rather than a Tudor name, the same name as her cousin the king: Henry.[28]

Just over a month after Margaret had delivered her baby Jasper travelled with her to meet Humphrey Stafford, Duke of Buckingham, in Gwent. It was less than two years since the Battle of St Albans and already a second marriage was to be arranged for her. Buckingham had a reputation for having an ungovernable temper. Famously he had tried to stab the French rebel leader Joan of Arc during an interrogation in 1431. But he was the only man in England whose power matched that of the Duke of York, and his second son, Henry Stafford, was free to marry. An agreement between Jasper and Buckingham was soon thrashed out. Although the Staffords were not descendants of the Lancastrian house, they were of royal blood, as descendants of John of Gaunt's youngest brother Thomas of Woodstock.[29] Margaret's marriage to Stafford, sealed when her son was a year old in January 1458, thus had a political dimension, yet it was also to prove happy.

Sir Henry Stafford became devoted to his young wife. A friend later recalled that Margaret was 'of singular easiness to be spoken unto'. She was the kind of woman who never forgot a kindness, or a service done for her. She was intellectually curious, read extensively, and worked hard at managing her estates, which she did with great efficiency. She found she had an excellent 'holding memory' for those things, 'of

weight and substance wherein she might profit', as well as great determination. Her friend later observed that she would not let a positive opportunity pass her by, 'for any pain or labour'.[30]

Margaret's wealth ensured that the family were able to live on the grandest scale, and as the fifteenth-century *Noble Babees Noble Book* reminded children, magnificence was a matter of noble duty. Fine clothes and great feasts were not a matter of personal indulgence but intended to advertise the degree to which a noble was willing to help their 'dependers', the families that looked to them for protection and advancement. Indeed nobles were expected to recall Christ's example of self-sacrifice. Margaret loved to entertain lavishly, but however many dishes she served at her table she always ate and drank moderately. She also liked 'to be joyous' and 'to hear those tales that were honest to make her merry', but after joking for a while, she would have a reading from the life of Christ, and then move the conversation on to more serious and spiritual matters.[31] As Margaret got older and more pious, she would even occasionally wear haircloth beneath her rich clothes, as a reminder of Christ's suffering for men and of her duties.

For Margaret, as for many other members of the nobility, Christ was often physically present in her house. It was usual to hear Mass daily, as she did in her private chapels, and in Catholic belief, at the moment of consecration the bread and wine is transformed into the actual body and blood of Christ – the miracle known as transubstantiation. If Christ's presence felt immediate, the Devil unfortunately also seemed close at hand. It was said the Devil had once been a high-ranking angel, but when God revealed that His son, Christ, was to be born a man, the Devil in his pride could not tolerate having a mere human raised above him. He had rebelled against God and now sought to destroy all peace and harmony.[32] People had a visceral fear of the violence the Devil sought by exploiting mens' weaknesses. Yet such conflict was coming to England soon enough.

After the bloodshed at St Albans in 1455 Henry VI had worked hard to reconcile his quarrelling subjects. It was the desire for vengeance that meant in the end he failed. As one chronicler recorded, 'there was evermore a grouch and wrath had by the heirs of them that were slain'.[33] It sapped the will of the supporters of the king's chosen councillors, and of their Yorkist enemies, to keep the peace. This in turn affected all those 'dependers' who were expected to offer service in battle for their masters if called on to do so. The century of war with France meant all boys were trained from childhood to fight 'up and down the streets clashing on their shields with blunted swords or stout staves', and even the girls were expert archers.[34] An army could be raised quickly.

The blue-eyed three-year-old Henry Tudor lost his step-grandfather, the Duke of Buckingham, at the Battle of Northampton in July 1460; over the following months the killing would continue to sweep around him like a tornado, spiralling with all the peculiar viciousness of a family vendetta.