

MARY TUDOR

Princess, Bastard, Queen

Anna Whitelock



R A N D O M H O U S E




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Mary Tudor

PRINCESS, BASTARD, QUEEN

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SHE WAS A KING'S DAUGHTER,

SHE WAS A KING'S SISTER,

SHE WAS A KING'S WIFE.

SHE WAS A QUEEN,

AND BY THE SAME TITLE A KING ALSO.

*—John White, bishop of Winchester,
in his sermon at Mary's funeral*

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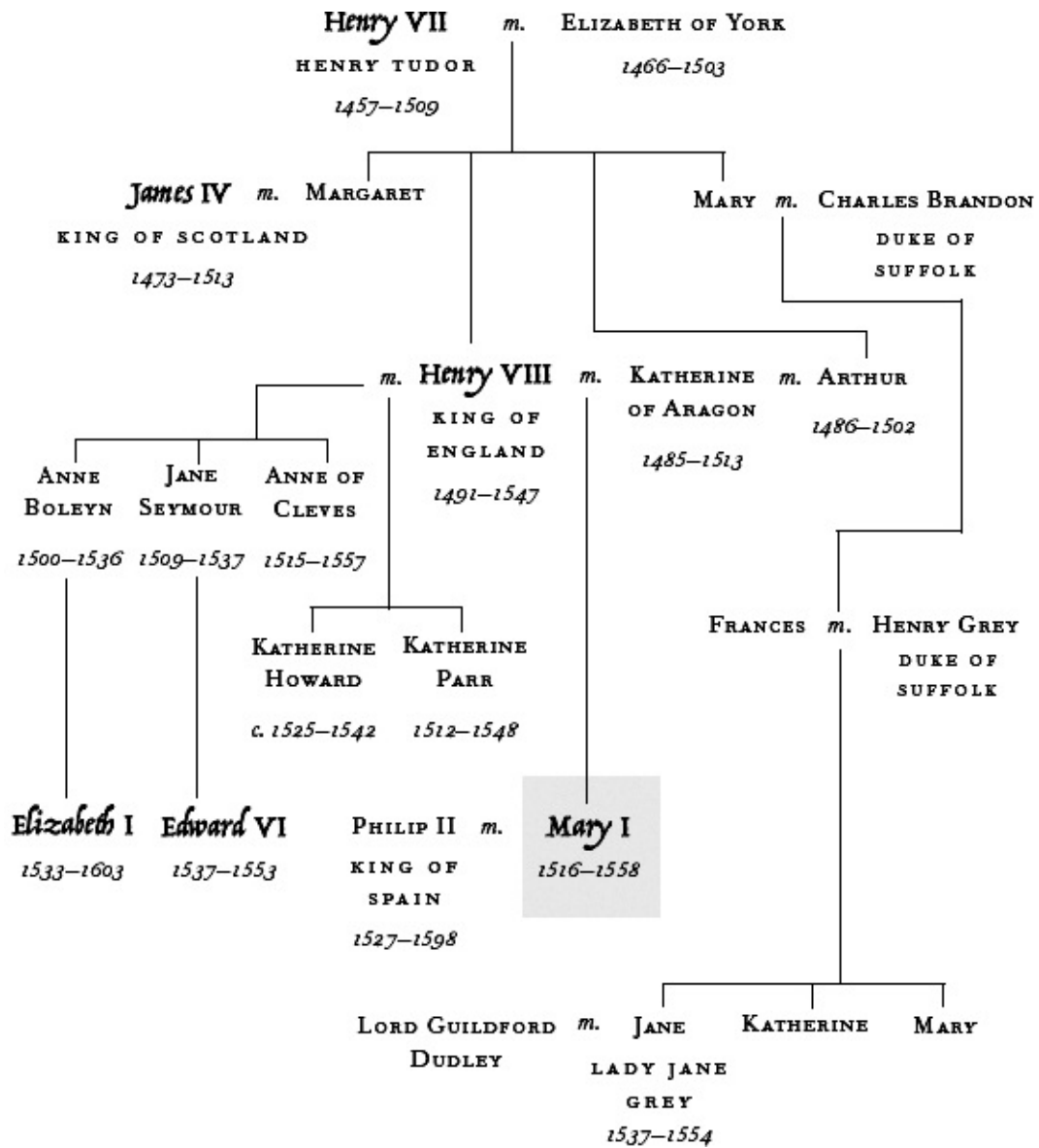
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MARY TUDOR'S FAMILY TREE



MARY'S REIGN HAS LONG BEEN CONSIDERED A TERRIBLE FOOTNOTE in English history, her reputation dominated by the great Elizabethan work of propaganda, John Foxe's *Actes and Monuments*, which so graphically depicted "the horrible and bloody time of Queene Mary." It is striking that nearly 450 years later Foxe's work continues to have a tenacious hold on the popular imagination. Recently this view found dramatic expression in Shekhar Kapur's 1998 film *Elizabeth*, which portrays the dark, brutal, and barren world of Mary in contrast to the light, liberating accession of Elizabeth. Mary is maligned as a cruel, obstinant Catholic bigot who burned heretics and married an unpopular Spanish prince. As one early biographer concluded, she had "a fatal lack of that subtle appeal that awakens popular sympathies."¹

This book seeks to challenge such popular prejudice and acceptance of Mary as one of the most reviled women in English history; to "rebrand" her less as the "grotesque caricature" that is "Bloody Mary" and more as the groundbreaking first crowned queen of England. In the last ten years or so the gap between academic writing and popular understanding has grown ever wider, and this has spurred my desire to write. Recent scholarship has questioned twentieth-century verdicts of Mary's reign as one of "sterility" and lack of achievements and of Mary as a "profoundly conventional woman."² A number of important revisions can now be made to the pervasive popular view.

Mary's relationship with her mother is key, and Katherine must be understood not as a weak, rejected wife but as a strong, highly accomplished, and defiant woman who withstood the attempts of her husband, Henry VIII, to browbeat her into submission and was determined to defend the legitimacy of her marriage and of her daughter's birth. As one of the most prolific Tudor historians of the twentieth century argued, Mary "had ever been her mother's daughter rather than her father's, devoid of political skill, unable to compromise, so only on the wholesale reversal of a generation's history."³ Yet Katherine of Aragon can be understood as a figure of immense courage from whom Mary could learn much. Katherine oversaw Mary's early education and highly formative upbringing, which was not a prelude to inevitable failure but an apprenticeship for rule. Mary's Spanish heritage informed her queenship but in a far more positive way than is popularly acknowledged.

Mary's very accession was against the odds and is a too commonly overlooked achievement on the scale of which is rarely acknowledged. It was, as one contemporary chronicler described, an act of "Herculean daring" that rarely finds its way into the popular annals. Upon becoming queen, Mary entered a man's world and had to change the nature of politics—her decisions as to how she would rule would become precedents for the future. She gained the throne, maintained her rule, preserved the line of Tudor succession, and set many important precedents for her sister, Elizabeth. Less a victim of the men around her but politically accomplished and at the center of politics, Mary was a woman who in many ways was able to overcome the handicap of her sex. For good or ill, Mary proved to be very much her own woman and a not entirely unsuccessful one at that.

So the Mary of this book is an unfamiliar queen, and hers is an incredibly thrilling and inspirational story. She broke tradition, she challenged precedent; she was a political pioneer who redefined the English monarchy.

RESURRECTION



IN WESTMINSTER ABBEY, AMID THE CHAOTIC GRANDEUR OF ROYAL tombs, lies the marble effigy of a resplendent Tudor queen. It is a striking, iconic image of Elizabeth I, her successes inscribed for “eternal memory” in panegyric Latin verses. Each week hundreds of people file through the north aisle of the Chapel of Henry VII, past this monument dedicated to the great “Gloriana.” Many perhaps fail to notice the Latin inscription on the base of this towering edifice:

Regno consortes et urna, hic obdormimus Elizabetha et Maria sorores, in spe resurrectionis. [Partners both in throne and grave, here rest we two sisters, Elizabeth and Mary, in the hope of one resurrection.]

Elizabeth does not lie alone; she inhabits her elder sister’s tomb.

Queen Mary I was buried there on December 14, 1558, with only stones from demolished altars marking the spot where she was laid to rest. When Elizabeth died in 1603, her body was placed in the central vault of the chapel alongside the remains of her grandparents Henry VII and Elizabeth of York. But in 1606, James I ordered that the dead queen be moved. Forty-eight years after Mary’s death, the stones were cleared from her grave, the vault was reopened, and Elizabeth’s coffin was placed within. Seeking to legitimize a new dynasty and preserve his status in posterity, James wanted Elizabeth’s place in Henry VII’s vault for himself.¹ Having moved her body, he then commissioned a monument, celebrating the life of England’s Virgin Queen, to lie upon the tomb of the two dead queens. In doing so James shaped how those queens would be remembered: Elizabeth magnificent, Mary, her body, and her memory, buried beneath. This book seeks to resurrect the remarkable story of Mary, the first queen of England.



MARY’S ACCESSION WAS against the odds. It was, in many ways, emblematic of a life of both fortune and adversity, of both royal favor and profound neglect. Mary was a truly European princess. The heir of the Tudor dynasty in England and a daughter of Spain, she grew up adored at home and feted by courts across Europe. Yet this was a prelude to great personal tragedy. When her parents, Henry VIII and Katherine of Aragon, divorced, Mary, then just seventeen years old, was reduced from a royal princess to a royal bastard. She became the “Lady Mary,” spurned by her father and superseded in his affections by the infant Elizabeth. For the next three years she defended her mother’s honor, refusing to acknowledge her stepmother, Anne Boleyn, as queen or the illegitimacy of her own birth. Mother and daughter were prevented from seeing each other even when Katherine was dying. Mary was threatened with death as a traitor and forced to submit to her father’s authority as supreme head of the English Church. Her submission defined her. From then on she lived according to the dictates of her Catholic conscience, ready to defend her faith at all costs.

Her defiance cast her in opposition to the brother she loved when he became king. Edward VI was determined to enforce a new religious service and outlaw the Mass that Mary held dear. In repeated confrontations, Edward challenged Mary to submit to his authority, but she proved defiant, even considering flight to the imperial court in Brussels to retain her independence. As Mary refused to capitulate and accept the new Protestant settlement, Edward overturned his father's will to prevent his sister from inheriting the throne. When Edward died, the Protestant Lady Jane Grey was proclaimed queen—though she would never be crowned and anointed—and orders were issued for Mary's arrest. Yet Mary fled and eluded capture. Ready to fight for her throne, she mobilized support across East Anglia. In a dramatic coup in the summer of 1553, she mustered her forces at Framlingham Castle in Suffolk and won her rightful throne.

England had never before had a crowned queen regnant. The accession of Matilda, the daughter of Henry I, in the twelfth century had been challenged by her cousin Stephen and failed. Matilda was never crowned queen of England and granted only the title "Lady of the English."² It was not until Edward VI's death four hundred years later, in 1553, that England once again faced the prospect of female succession. Though there was no Salic law barring a woman from the throne, in practice the idea of female sovereignty was anathema to contemporary notions of royal majesty. The monarch was understood to be God's representative on Earth and a figure of defense and justice. Women were considered to be too weak to rule and overly led by their emotions.

Yet Mary reigned with the full measure of royal majesty; she preserved her throne against rebellion and reestablished England as a Catholic nation.



MARY'S LIFETIME SPANNED years of great European crisis, fueled by a rivalry between Spain and France. Spain had been unified in 1479 as a result of the marriage of Mary's grandparents Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile. France had grown in strength since defeating England in the Hundred Years' War (1377–1453) and expelling the English from all its territories except Calais. In 1494, Charles VIII, the king of France, invaded Italy looking to make good his right to the Kingdom of Naples. The rival claims of France and Spain to territories in Italy ignited a conflict that would continue throughout the first half of the sixteenth century. England was now dwarfed as a European power but sought as an ally by each to prevent the ascendancy of the other. The accession of Charles of Habsburg, duke of Burgundy, as king of Spain in 1516 and as Holy Roman Emperor three years later increased the enmity with France. Mary's cousin Charles became ruler of much of central and western Europe; France was virtually encircled by Habsburg lands and challenged the emperor's claims to the disputed territories in Italy and to lands along the Pyrenees. From the eve of Mary's birth to shortly after her death, the Habsburg and Valois kings would be engaged in a bitter conflict. For much of her life Mary would represent the prize of an English alliance.

Mary was born on the eve of another great struggle that divided Europe, the Reformation. In October 1517, Martin Luther ignited a battle of faith that shattered the unity of Christendom. His attack on the abuses of the Church, expressed initially in his Ninety-Five Theses, became an onslaught against many of its most fundamental teachings. Luther

maintained that a sinner was justified by faith alone and salvation might not be secured by the purchase of indulgences or by other “good works.” He denied the authority of the pope in Rome and called on the German princes to take over and reform the Church. With the development of printing, Luther’s ideas spread, as people looked to throw off the yoke of Roman Catholicism and embrace the new teaching.

The vast empire of Charles V, Mary’s cousin, became riven by rebellion and dissent. As the emperor sought to stanch the flow of Protestantism, he faced the great threat of the Ottoman Turks in the East. Under the leadership of Suleiman the Magnificent, the Turks threatened Spain’s trade in the Mediterranean and Habsburg family lands in Austria. Following the fall of Constantinople in 1453, the Turkish advance had been unrelenting; Belgrade was captured and the Kingdom of Hungary conquered. From North African bases the Barbary pirates preyed on shipping and raided the coasts of Spain and Italy. During the sixteenth century “the threat of Islam” cast a long shadow over Christian Europe, rousing successive popes to make calls for a European crusade and commanding much of the emperor’s attention and resources. Throughout her life, Mary would petition Charles to come to her aid and protect her claim to the throne and later her right to practice her religion; but always she would be secondary to his own strategic interests.

England too became the theater of European conflict. Henry VIII’s repudiation of Katherine of Aragon and search for a divorce challenged the power of the papacy and of Katherine’s nephew Emperor Charles V. Charles was determined to protect the position of his aunt, and for a time Henry’s rejection of Katherine and their daughter, Mary, brought the threat of war with Spain and the papacy. Mary would always look to her Habsburg cousin for protection. Her kinship with him gave the struggles of her life a European dimension. Remaining loyal to her Spanish ancestry and looking to preserve England’s position in Europe, she chose to marry Philip, the son of the emperor and the future king of Spain. It was a match that revived the Anglo-Spanish alliance founded with her parents’ marriage forty-five years before. While protecting her sovereignty as queen and limiting his power, Mary would submit to Philip as a dutiful wife and mourn his long absences abroad.

It is the contrast between Mary as queen and the personal tragedy of Mary as a woman that is the key to understanding her life and reign. Her private traumas of phantom pregnancies, debilitating illnesses, and rejection—first by her father and then by her husband—were played out in the public glare of the fickle Tudor court. The woman who emerges is a complex figure of immense courage and resolve, her dramatic life unfolding in the shadow of the great sixteenth-century struggle for power in Europe.

A King's Daughter

PRINCESS OF ENGLAND



MARY, THE DAUGHTER OF KING HENRY VIII AND KATHERINE OF Aragon, was born at four in the morning on Monday, February 18, 1516, at Placentia, the royal palace at Greenwich, on the banks of the Thames River in London. Three days later, the nobility of England gathered at the royal apartments to form a guard of honor as the baby emerged from the queen's chamber in the arms of Katherine's devoted friend and lady-in-waiting, Elizabeth Howard, countess of Surrey. Beneath a gold canopy held aloft by four knights of the realm, the infant was carried to the nearby Church of the Observant Friars.¹ It was the day of Mary's baptism, her first rite of passage as a royal princess.

The procession of gentlemen, ladies, earls, and bishops paused at the door of the church where, in a small arras-covered wooden archway, Mary was greeted by her godparents, blessed, and named after her aunt, Henry's favorite sister. The parade then filed two by two into the church, which had been specially adorned for the occasion. Jewel-encrusted needlework hung from the walls; a font, brought from the priory of Christchurch Canterbury and used only for royal christenings, had been set on a raised and carpeted octagonal stage with the accoutrements for the christening—basin, tapers, salt, and chrism—laid out on the high altar.² After prayers were said and promises made, Mary was plunged three times into the font water, anointed with the holy oil, dried, and swaddled in her baptismal robe. As Te Deums were sung, she was taken up to the high altar and confirmed under the sponsorship of Margaret Pole, countess of Salisbury.³ Finally, with the rites concluded, her title was proclaimed to the sound of the heralds' trumpets:

God send and give long life and long unto the right high, right noble and excellent Princess Mary, Princess of England and daughter of our most dread sovereign lord the King's Highness.⁴

Despite the magnificent ceremony, the celebrations were muted. This was not the longed-for male heir, but a girl.



SIX YEARS EARLIER, in the Church of the Observant Friars, Henry had married his Spanish bride Katherine of Aragon. Within weeks of the wedding, Katherine was pregnant and Henry wrote joyfully to his father-in-law, Ferdinand of Aragon, proclaiming the news: "Your daughter, her Serene Highness the Queen, our dearest consort, has conceived in her womb a living child and is right heavy therewith."⁵ Three months later, as England awaited the birth of its heir, Katherine miscarried. Yet the news was not made public, and with her belly still swollen, most likely with an infection, she was persuaded by her physician that she "remained pregnant of another child."⁶ A warrant was issued for the refurbishment of the royal nursery and in March 1511 she withdrew to her apartments in advance of the birth.⁷

For weeks the court waited for news of the delivery, but labor did not come. As Katherine's confessor, Fray Diego, reported, "it has pleased our Lord to be her physician in such a way that the swelling decreased."⁸ There was no baby. Luiz Caroz, the new Spanish ambassador, angrily condemned those who had maintained "that a menstruating woman was pregnant" and had made her "withdraw publicly for her delivery."⁹ Many councillors now feared that the queen was "incapable of conceiving."¹⁰ Fearing her father's displeasure, Katherine wrote to Ferdinand in late May, four months after the event, claiming that only "some days before" she had miscarried a daughter and failing to mention the subsequent false pregnancy. Do "not be angry," she begged him, "for it has been the will of God."¹¹

Hope soon revived, and while writing letters of deceit to her father, Katherine discovered she was pregnant once more.¹² Seven months later, on the morning of New Year's Day, bells rang out the news of the safe delivery of a royal baby. It was a living child and a son. England had its male heir. Celebrations engulfed the court and country, and five days later the child was christened and proclaimed "Prince Henry, first son of our sovereign lord, King Henry VIII." The king rode to the Shrine of Our Lady at Walsingham in Norfolk to give thanks and hold a splendid joust in his son's honor. But the celebrations were short-lived. Three weeks later Prince Henry died. It did not augur well. Over the next seven years, failed pregnancy followed failed pregnancy, each ending in miscarriage, stillbirth, or infant death.

So when in the spring of 1515 the thirty-one-year-old queen fell pregnant for the seventh time, there was a somewhat subdued response. This pregnancy, however, followed its natural course, and in the early weeks of the New Year the royal couple moved to the royal palace at Greenwich, where Henry had been born twenty-four years before and where preparations were now under way for the queen's confinement.

The Royal Book, the fifteenth-century book of court etiquette for all such royal events drawn up by Margaret Beaufort, Henry VIII's grandmother, outlined the necessary arrangements. The queen's chamber was to be turned into a tapestried cocoon, the floor covered with thickly laid carpet; the walls, ceiling, and windows hung with rich arras and one window left loosely covered to allow in air and light. The wall tapestries, the queen's canopied bed, and the bed hangings were to be of simple design, with figurative images avoided for fear of provoking dreams that might disturb mother and child. There was to be a cupboard stacked with gold and silver plate to signify the queen's status, and crucifixes, candlesticks, images, and relics placed on an altar before which she could pray. At the foot of her canopied bed was placed a daybed, covered with a quilt of crimson satin and embroidered with the king and queen's arms, where the birth would take place.¹³

In late January, with all made ready, Katherine began the ceremony of "taking her chamber." First she went to the Chapel Royal to hear Mass; then, returning to the Presence Chamber, she sat beneath her cloth of estate—the mark of her rank—and took wines and spices with members of the court. Lord Mountjoy, her chamberlain, called on everyone to pray that "God would give her the good hour"—safe delivery—and the queen was accompanied to the door of her bedchamber in solemn procession. There the men departed and Katherine entered the exclusively female world of childbirth. As *The Royal Book* stipulated, "All the ladies and gentlewomen to go in with her, and no man after to come in to the chamber save women, and women to be inside."¹⁴ She would not be in male company.

again until her “churching,” the purification after labor, thirty days after the birth. Officers, butlers, and other servants would bring all manner of things to the chamber door, but the women would receive them.

After days of seclusion and hushed expectancy, the February dawn was broken with bells ringing in the news: the queen had delivered a healthy baby, but a girl. Writing two days later, Sebastian Giustiniani, the Venetian ambassador, assured the doge and Senate that he would offer their congratulations but added that, had the baby been a son, “[he] should have already done so, as in that case, it would not have been fit to delay the compliment.” Eventually, the ambassador sought an audience with King Henry and congratulated him “on the birth of his daughter, and on the wellbeing of her most serene mother Queen.” The state would have been “yet more pleased,” he added, “had the child been a son.” Henry remained optimistic. “We are both young,” he insisted; “if it was a daughter this time, by the grace of God, sons will follow.”¹⁶

A TRUE FRIENDSHIP AND ALLIANCE



*We have this moment received news of the death of the most serene Ferdinand, King of Aragon; and it is supposed this was known some days ago to his Majesty, but kept secret, because of the most serene Queen's being on the eve of her delivery.*¹

—GIUSTINIANI TO THE DOGE AND SENATE, FEBRUARY 20, 1516

MARY CAME INTO THE WORLD DURING A SEASON OF MOURNING. Just days before her birth, news reached the English court of the death of Katherine's father. Solemn requiems were sung at St. Paul's, but the queen was not informed of her loss until after she had safely given birth.² Ferdinand's death marked the passing of the last of Mary's grandparents, and though she never knew any of them, with her steely determination, Catholic devotion, and strong sense of her right to rule, she would prove to be every inch their heir. She was, unmistakably, both a Spaniard and a Tudor.

Her mother, Katherine, was the daughter of Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile, and her father the son of Henry Tudor (Henry VII) and Elizabeth of York. Both sets of grandparents had brought unity to their war-torn kingdoms after years of disputed successions. Henry Tudor's defeat of Richard III at the Battle of Bosworth in 1485 had ended thirty-three years of incipient civil war between the Houses of York and Lancaster, two rival branches of the Plantagenet family that had ruled England since the twelfth century. Henry, a Lancastrian, claimed the throne through his mother, Margaret Beaufort, and her descent from John of Gaunt, duke of Lancaster, the son of Edward III. Following the accession of the Yorkist king, Edward IV, in 1471, Henry had fled to Brittany for fear that Edward would act against him as the remaining Lancastrian claimant. Twelve years later, after Edward had died, his brother Richard, duke of Gloucester, usurped the throne. He imprisoned, and most likely murdered, his nephew Edward V, and was crowned King Richard III on July 6, 1483. Realizing Richard's unpopularity, Henry saw an opportunity to win the throne. He set sail from Brittany with French men and ships and landed at Milford Haven in August 1485. On the twenty-second he overwhelmed the king's forces at Bosworth, near Leicester, and killed Richard III in the midst of the battle. Five months after his accession, Henry married Elizabeth of York, the eldest daughter and surviving heir of the Yorkist king, Edward IV, thereby uniting the warring Plantagenet family. The establishment of the Tudor dynasty was made secure by the birth of their first son and heir, Arthur, on September 19, 1486, a daughter Margaret, and a second son, Prince Henry, five years later, to be followed by another daughter, Mary.

Mary's grandmother Isabella of Castile had also fought to win her throne, after her father disinherited her. Alongside her husband Ferdinand, king of Aragon, she campaigned for five years in a bitter civil war before emerging triumphant and claiming the crown of Castile. The only queen regnant in fifteenth-century Europe, she doggedly reasserted her position in the

face of her husband's attempts to share her power. It would be a marriage of equals, with both sovereigns ruling in their own right. Ferdinand and Isabella became the foremost monarchs in Europe, with a crusading zeal that characterized the Spanish monarchy. Their shared aim became the Reconquista of Granada, the last Muslim kingdom in Spain. The Reconquista was to be the climax of the Crusade, the medieval Christian enterprise against the Muslims that had begun in the twelfth century. Isabella, determined, single-minded, and fervently Catholic, saw the campaign as her divine purpose and rode with her knights rallying her troops. The war lasted for ten years before finally, on January 2, 1492, the last Muslim leader, Muhammad II, surrendered complete control of Granada. It was the culmination of several centuries of reconquest and a great Christian triumph. In the years that followed, the Spanish Inquisition, established first in Castile and then in Aragon, secured the expulsion of all remaining Jews and Muslims. "The Catholic Kings," as they were entitled by Pope Alexander IV, had created a unified Spain and an entirely Catholic kingdom.

Katherine, the youngest of Ferdinand and Isabella's five children, was born on December 16, 1485, in the midst of the Reconquista at the archbishop of Toledo's palace northeast of Madrid. She was named after her mother's English grandmother, a daughter of John of Gaunt, duke of Lancaster, who had married Enrique III of Castile. Following the defeat of the Moors at the Alhambra—the former residence of the Muslim kings—became Katherine's home, and from there she witnessed the expulsion of the Jews and the activities of the Inquisition.

Isabella was determined that her four daughters be educated properly and have what she had been denied. She had received only a meager schooling as a child and had later taught herself to read Latin while campaigning. Along with learning the "female arts" of dancing, music, needlework, and embroidery, Katherine learned the works of the Latin Fathers of the Church—Ambrose, Augustine, Gregory, and Jerome—and those of the Latin Christian poets. But whereas her brother, Juan, was educated to rule, Katherine and her sisters were expected to cement foreign policy alliances as the wives of European princes. First Isabella, Katherine's eldest sister, was married to Prince Alfonso of Portugal, then Juana to the Archduke Philip of Burgundy, and later Maria to Prince Manoel of Portugal. When it was Katherine's turn, her parents looked to England.

Ferdinand and Isabella wanted an Anglo-Spanish alliance as a counterpoise to French aggression in Italy. For Henry VII a union with Spain was a great diplomatic coup, a means to bolster the fledgling Tudor dynasty and England's place in Europe. Founded on their common interest of restraining the growing power of France, the Treaty of Medina del Campo on March 28, 1489, provided for mutual cooperation. It would form the basis of an Anglo-Spanish bond that would endure for the first half of the sixteenth century.

A true friendship and alliance shall be observed henceforth between Ferdinand and Isabella, their heirs and subjects, on the one part, and Henry, his heirs and subjects, on the other part. They promise to assist one another in defending their present and future dominions against any enemy whatsoever.... As often as and whenever Ferdinand and Isabella make war with France, Henry shall do the same, and conversely.... In order to strengthen this alliance the Princess Katherine is to marry Prince Arthur. The marriage is to be contracted *per verba de futuro* as soon as Katherine and Arthur attain the necessary age.³

Isabella "made very particular honour [of the English ambassadors], for she prized her

Lancastrian kinship with Henry, and saw a connection with England, as with Burgundy important to pre-eminence in Europe.”⁴ And so, from the age of three, Katherine knew her future would be as an English queen. Her mother was reluctant for her to go: she was the youngest of her children and the last to marry; but finally, aged sixteen, Katherine set sail for England to marry Henry VII’s son Arthur.⁵ Upon the Spanish princess’s arrival at Plymouth, the licentiate Alcares wrote to tell Isabella that “she could not have been received with greater rejoicings if she had been the Saviour of the World.”⁶

Katherine and Arthur were married on November 14, 1501, at St. Paul’s Cathedral. It was a magnificent ceremony and one that heralded the Anglo-Spanish alliance—the defining moment of the Tudor dynasty.⁷ After a week of splendid banquets and tournaments, the royal couple journeyed to Ludlow in Shropshire to govern the Principality of Wales, as was the ancient custom for the heir to the throne. But though long in the making, the marriage was in fact over last less than six months. On April 2, Arthur, then sixteen, died suddenly; most accounts suggest it was tuberculosis, or “consumption.” The foundations on which the Anglo-Spanish entente had been constructed had crumbled.

Yet it was an alliance too important for either party to lose. As soon as news reached Spain of Arthur’s death, Ferdinand and Isabella mooted the possibility of Katherine marrying the new heir to the throne, ten-year-old Prince Henry. Because of their consanguinity, a dispensation had to be sought from Pope Julius II, although Katherine insisted that her marriage to Arthur had never been consummated. On June 23, 1503, a new treaty was signed and an agreement reached for Prince Henry and Katherine to be married in five years’ time. But when Queen Isabella died in November 1504, the personal union of Castile and Aragon founded on her marriage with Ferdinand, was shattered. Isabella had bequeathed Castile to her daughter Juana, who was married to Philip of Burgundy. He claimed the throne in her name, while Ferdinand of Aragon took power as regent. Katherine’s worth as a bride fell dramatically. She was no longer princess of the Iberian Peninsula, and an alliance with Aragon alone was of limited value. Henry VII now abandoned marriage negotiations with Ferdinand.

Katherine, meanwhile, was stranded. She remained in England, mourning the loss of her mother, with little money and no clear status. She petitioned her father to come to her aid, describing how she was in debt and how greatly she needed money “not for extravagant things” but “only for food”; she was “in the greatest trouble and anguish in the world.”⁸



ON APRIL 21, 1509, amid scenes of great celebration, seventeen-year-old Prince Henry was proclaimed king of England. “Heaven and earth rejoices,” wrote Lord Mountjoy to the Dutch humanist Desiderius Erasmus; “everything is full of milk and honey and nectar. Avarice has fled the country. Our King is not after gold, or gems, or precious metals, but virtue, glory, and immortality.”⁹ Soon after his accession, Henry sought to establish his European status by reasserting England’s claim to the French Crown. He needed allies and looked to renew the alliance with Ferdinand of Aragon and marry his brother’s widow, Katherine. On June 1, 1509, they exchanged vows at the Franciscan church at Greenwich.

“Most illustrious Prince,” Henry was asked, “is it your will to fulfil the treaty of marriage

concluded by your father, the late King of England and the parents of the Princess of Wales, the King and Queen of Spain; and, as the Pope has dispensed with this marriage, to take the Princess who is here present for your lawful wife?" Both parties answered, "I will."¹⁰

Two weeks later, Henry and Katherine were crowned together at Westminster Abbey. Henry was eighteen, handsome, and athletic; she was twenty-three and described as "the most beautiful creature in the world." Well educated and accomplished, she loved music, dancing, and hawking almost as much as Henry did. She was, in many ways, the ideal royal bride. Both were equally learned and pious and were keen readers of theological works. Katherine spent hours at her devotions, rising at midnight to say Matins and at dawn to hear Mass, and very much her mother's daughter, she proved to be politically able and determined. As Henry prepared for war with France in 1512, Katherine was closely involved. "The King is for war, the Council against and the Queen for it," one Venetian diplomat reported.¹¹

While Henry embarked on his campaign, capturing the towns of Thérouanne and Tournai in northern France, Katherine remained in England as "Regent and Governess of England, Wales, and Ireland," with authority to raise troops and supervise preparations for war against the Scots. Ten years earlier, when James IV of Scotland had married Henry's elder sister Margaret, he had sworn "perpetual peace" with England. He had now been persuaded by the French to renew their "auld alliance" against England. War was declared in August, and James launched an invasion across the border. As Peter Martyr, the contemporary Italian historian, reported:

Queen Katherine, in imitation of her mother Isabella ... made splendid oration to the English captains, told them to be ready to defend their territory ... and they should remember that English courage excelled that of all other nations. Fired by these words, the nobles marched against the Scots ... and defeated them.¹²

The Scottish king was killed at Flodden Field. It was one of England's most resounding victories over the Scots and Katherine's finest hour. She wrote triumphantly to Henry, "In this your grace shall see how I can keep my promise, sending you for your banners a King's coat. I thought to send himself unto you, but our Englishmen's hearts would not suffer it." Following in the footsteps of her mother, Isabella, she had proved to be a great warrior queen, mustering troops and delivering rousing orations. Ironically, it would be the woman's "duties" of pregnancy and childbirth—her inability to provide a male heir—that would be her undoing.

ARE YOU THE DAUPHIN OF FRANCE?



ONCE MARY HAD BEEN CHRISTENED, KATHERINE ENTRUSTED HER care to the staff of the royal nursery. Katherine carefully selected each of them: a lady mistress, Lady Margaret Bryan, formerly one of Katherine's ladies-in-waiting, headed the small establishment; a wet nurse, Katherine Pollock, suckled the young princess; three "rockers" took it in turn to soothe her; and a laundress performed the endless task of washing the infant's clothes. In the inner room of her nursery suite, Mary slept in an "everyday" cradle. In the outer chamber, she received visitors in a specially constructed "cradle of estate," draped in a quilt of ermine and framed by a canopy embossed with the royal arms.¹ Courted by princes from around the world, she was at once a dependent infant and esteemed European princess.

Her father doted on her. According to Sebastian Giustiniani, one day the king showed his affection for the Princess Mary, then two years old, in her nurse's arms. "He drew near, knelt and kissed her hand, for that alone is kissed by any duke or noble of the land." Henry then said proudly to the envoy, "*Domine Orator, per Deum immortalem, ista puella nunquam plorat*"—this child never cries—to which Giustiniani replied, "Sacred Majesty, the reason is that her destiny does not move her to tears; she will even become Queen of France." These words pleased the king greatly.²

The twenty-five-year-old King Henry looked to hold his own against Francis I, the young new king of France, and Charles, duke of Burgundy, just sixteen, who had become king of Spain weeks before. Mary would increasingly become a pawn in their European rivalry.

Francis had triumphed in the latest conflict over Milan in Italy, and the warring kings had come to terms in the Treaty of Noyon. With neither side looking to England for an offensive alliance against the other, Thomas Wolsey, Henry's chief minister, sought to preserve England's status by becoming champion of peace. The Treaty of London, brokered by Wolsey in early October 1518, bound all the great powers to perpetual concord, to maintain peace and act together against any aggressor.³ Sponsored by Pope Leo X, its declared aim was a European crusade against the Ottoman Turks, but for Henry and Wolsey it was a means of countering the growing threat of France. The treaty was underpinned by an Anglo-French rapprochement that hinged on a future marriage between Mary and the French dauphin François, then just a few months old.⁴ Although Mary was not to be delivered to France until she was sixteen and the dauphin fourteen, the betrothal sealed a new era of Anglo-French relations, which was to be celebrated the following year at a meeting of the two kings.



AT EIGHT O'CLOCK on the morning of Tuesday, October 5, 1518, Mary, just two and a half years old, was taken to her mother's chamber at Greenwich Palace in preparation for her betrothal. There her parents, the papal legates, Cardinal Wolsey and Cardinal Lorenzo Campeggio, the

queen dowager of France, and numerous French dignitaries headed by the lord admiral Guillaume Bonnavet, gathered to receive her. As Giustiniani described it, “all the court were in such rich array that I never saw the like either here or elsewhere.”⁵ Dressed “in cloth of gold, with a cap of black velvet on her head, adorned with many jewels,” Mary was a vision of royal extravagance.⁶ When Cuthbert Tunstall, the bishop of Durham, delivered his sermon in praise of marriage, she grew restless and was picked up and “taken in arms” by her lady-in-mistress, Margaret Bryan.⁷ Her betrothed, the six-month-old François, was spared the monotony of the ceremony, the lord admiral acting in his place.

After the vows were exchanged, Wolsey “placed on her finger a small ring in which a large diamond was set,” leaving to Bonnavet, the proxy groom, the symbolic task of slipping the ring down over the second joint.⁸ In spite of her young age, Mary did, it seems, know something of the meaning of the occasion. “Are you the Dauphin of France?” she was reported to have said to Bonnavet. “If you are, I wish to kiss you.”⁹ With the ceremony finally concluded, the party moved to the chapel for a celebratory Mass followed by a sumptuous banquet. The dancing continued long into the night, many hours after the young bride-to-be had been put to bed.

As a condition of the marriage alliance, the French had insisted that Mary be recognized as her father’s heir. It was the first acknowledgment of her right to the throne.¹⁰ At the time it seemed a relatively insignificant concession. Katherine was pregnant, and Henry held out great hope for the imminent birth of a son. But once again, to the “vexation of everyone,” disappointment followed. On November 9, a month after the betrothal ceremonies, Katherine gave birth to a stillborn daughter. “Never had the kingdom desired anything so passionately as it had a prince,” Giustiniani wrote. “Perhaps had the event taken place before the conclusion of the betrothal, that event might not have come to pass; the sole fear of the kingdom, that it may pass through this marriage into the power of the French.”¹² By the beginning of 1519, Princess Mary, betrothed to the French dauphin, was the sole heir to the throne of England.

A VERY FINE YOUNG COUSIN INDEED



IN 1519, THE HABSBURG-VALOIS STRUGGLE FOR EUROPEAN DOMINANCE imploded. Mary's cousin, nineteen-year-old Charles of Spain and Burgundy, became Holy Roman Emperor following the death of his grandfather. He was now the most powerful ruler in Christendom, heir to the vast territories of Spain, Burgundy, and the Netherlands and huge swaths of Germany. England held the balance of power. Francis needed English friendship to prevent French encirclement; Charles wanted English money and ships to suppress the Comuneros revolt, which had broken out in Castile against his rule. Seeking to maximize his advantage, Henry negotiated with both sides. While rumors circulated of a proposed marriage between Mary and her cousin the Emperor Charles, Henry sought to reassure Francis of his commitment to the Anglo-French match.

On Saturday, May 26, 1520, shortly before Henry's long-awaited meeting with the French king, Charles arrived in England on his way from Spain to the Low Countries. He landed at Dover and was conducted by Henry and Wolsey to Canterbury, where for the first time he met his aunt. Katherine "embraced him tenderly, not without tears." Their reunion had been "her greatest desire in the world."¹ For three days, amid lavish entertainment, Charles sought to undermine the marriage alliance between his cousin Mary and the Valois prince. On the twenty-ninth, Henry and Katherine set sail for France accompanied by a retinue of six thousand Englishmen and -women.

For just over three weeks, a temporary town, the Camp du Drap d'Or, or Field of the Cloth of Gold, stood on a no-man's-land between the English-held town of Guisnes and French-held Ardres.² Gold fountains flowed with claret; there were huge and elaborate pavilions and tents and a great temporary palace of classical design erected at the town's entrance. Together the two kings jostled, feasted, and celebrated the entente reached two years before. It was a spectacular meeting of two young and physically powerful monarchs, whose rivalry was once political and intensely personal. It was the greatest and most conspicuous display of wealth and culture that Europe had ever seen.

While her parents feasted in France, Mary became the focus of royal attention, holding court at Richmond Palace. Her nursery had been expanded to become a more "princely household, reflecting her status—albeit reluctantly acknowledged—as the king's sole heir. Head officers were appointed, and male servants, gentlemen, grooms, and valets were added to her original female staff. Lady Bryan was replaced as lady mistress by one of the most powerful and influential women in England: Mary's godmother, Margaret Pole, the countess of Salisbury—one of Katherine's most trusted and long-serving confidantes and a direct descendant of Edward IV's brother, George, duke of Clarence. It proved to be an inspired choice. Mary became devoted to her new governess and came to think of her as a "second mother."³

During this time privy councillors visited the young princess frequently and sent reports

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