

'A Fair Young Lady'

Margaret Tudor was the eldest daughter of Henry VII, the first Tudor King of England, and his Queen, Elizabeth, heiress of the royal House of York. She had been born in November 1489 and was just thirteen when, in 1503, in the interest of forging good relations with Scotland, England's traditional enemy, she had been married to James IV, King of Scots, who was sixteen years her senior and renowned for his lechery. Four of their six children died in infancy, but in 1512 Margaret Tudor bore a son, also called James, who thrived.

However, the following year James IV invaded England, seeking to take advantage of Henry VIII's absence on a campaign in France. The English were not unprepared, however, and a large force under the command of Thomas Howard, Earl of Surrey, marched north to confront James. The two armies met on 9 September 1513 at Flodden in Northumberland, and by the end of the day King James and the flower of the Scottish nobility lay slaughtered in the field. It was one of the most cataclysmic events in Scottish history, immortalised in ballads such as 'The Flowers of the Forest', in which it is claimed that twelve thousand were slain. Nearly every notable family lost at least one of its sons, and the impact of this disastrous defeat would be felt for generations.

Scotland was now under the nominal rule of an infant, James V, and subject to yet another long minority; such had been its fate for more than a century, as king after king had succeeded in childhood. It was a kingdom dominated by huge interrelated families, notably the Stewarts, the Douglasses and the Hamiltons, and this age-old clannish system of kinship groupings had nurtured a fierce sense of

family. Allowed virtual autonomy during a succession of regencies, the factious Scottish nobility had come to enjoy great power and pursue deadly rivalries. Alliances and loyalties constantly shifted, and blood feuds could persist for centuries.

The great lords were all hungry for power, and it was rare for a widowed queen to be granted custody of her children; nevertheless Queen Margaret was named regent of Scotland during the minority of her son and given the guardianship of the young King and his infant brother. She had been newly pregnant when her husband was killed, and in April 1514, at Stirling Castle, she had borne another son, Alexander, Duke of Ross.

On 6 August 1514, less than a year after her husband's death, Margaret Tudor secretly married again without consulting the Scottish lords or her brother, Henry VIII. Her bridegroom was Archibald Douglas, Earl of Angus – 'Ard', as he styled himself¹ – a member of her Council and the head of the faction that supported her rule. Handsome, charming, courteous and accomplished in chivalric exploits, he was the son of George Douglas, Master of Angus, and a widower, having lost his first wife, Margaret Hepburn, the year before. Angus, who at twenty-six was the same age as his bride, was 'very lusty in the Queen's sight'.² He was a man of mild temper, dry humour and undoubted courage, and although his enemies saw him as treacherous, he was good at building and maintaining friendships. He was ambitious, wholly committed to the aggrandisement of his family, and hungry for power. Although this was a love match on Margaret Tudor's part, it was probably prompted more by self-interest on Angus's.

The Douglas family was an ancient one and could trace its origins back to the Dark Ages. A William Douglas had fought for the Emperor Charlemagne, and Sir James Douglas had carried King Robert the Bruce's heart to the Holy Land; since then the arms of his descendants have borne a crowned heart. Their crest, which Margaret Douglas would also use, was the salamander. They were an ambitious tribe, into which Margaret's strong character fitted well, and 'family envies were strong',³ leading in 1380 to the clan splitting into two feuding branches, the senior being the Black Douglasses and the junior the Red Douglasses, to which line the earls of Angus belonged.

The 5th Earl, Archibald 'Bell-the-Cat' Douglas, the most powerful noble in the kingdom, had played traitor against King James IV in 1482, allying himself with Henry VII of England, but he was back in favour a decade later, having established the Douglasses as the

foremost family in Scotland. He had won his nickname – ‘belling the cat’ means performing a challenging task – by getting rid of a royal favourite. But his son, George Douglas, Master of Angus, Margaret Douglas’s grandfather, had perished at Flodden.

The history of the Douglas clan was a violent one; few of its prominent members had died in their beds, and it looked very much as if Angus, who succeeded ‘Bell-the-Cat’ as earl in 1514, might be of their number, for it soon became apparent that he was determined to rule Scotland. His marriage to the Queen, and her subsequent advancement of the Douglases to high offices, excited the jealousy of the Scottish nobility and provoked the pro-French party at court, which was headed by James Hamilton, Earl of Arran, a man renowned for his heroic triumphs in the tournament field; it reignited a centuries-old feud between the Douglases and the Hamiltons, and gave rise to a civil war in Scotland. Scotland had long been allied to France, and both countries had a long history of enmity with England; but Margaret Tudor was determined to continue as regent with the pro-English Angus at her side. Her opponents asserted that, under Scottish law, by remarrying she had forfeited the office of guardian (‘tutrix’) to her under-age children. The Arran-led Council resolved to replace her with John Stewart, Duke of Albany, a grandson of James II and the next royal heir after her sons. Albany was an honourable man and a capable administrator, but he regarded himself primarily as a Frenchman – he had been brought up in France, where he owned vast estates – and was reluctant to take up office in Scotland.

At once the Queen withdrew with her children to the safety of her mighty dower fortress of Stirling, set high on its volcanic crag at the gateway to the Scottish Highlands, against the spectacular backdrop of the Trossachs and the Ochil Hills; whereupon the Scottish lords rose in arms against her. Angus was ousted from power, and Albany, who was still in France, was offered the regency.

Queen Margaret appealed repeatedly to her brother, Henry VIII, for aid, impressing on him that ‘all the welfare of me and my children lies in your hands’.⁴ Henry threatened Scotland with war, while privately urging his sister to escape with her children to England, but she dared not attempt it because her enemies were keeping her under constant watch.

Margaret Tudor was six months pregnant with her first child by her new husband when, on 12 July 1515, the anti-English Albany was formally installed as regent. He treated her with courtesy at first,

but when he learned that Angus, fearing for the safety of the young King and his brother, was plotting to send them to England, he laid siege to Stirling, seized the little boys from the Queen, and made himself their custodian. Margaret Tudor had no choice but to consent; her supporters had either fled or been taken, and she herself was now a captive. In grief at losing her sons, she drew up a long 'remembrance' of her complaints, which she sent to Thomas Magnus, the English ambassador to Scotland, who was then staying in Northumberland.⁵

Thereafter relations between Queen Margaret and Albany grew ever more tense. He made her write to her brother that she was content, and other letters 'contrary to her own mind', and he kept her 'strict prisoner' and under surveillance in Edinburgh, so that she was unable to see her sons, whom Albany had 'in ward'.⁶ He had also deprived her of her revenues, leaving her in extreme poverty.⁷ She entreated Henry VIII to send someone to mediate between her and the Regent; 'she was in much woe and pain, and besought remedy for God's sake'.⁸ But Albany was hostile to England, and for years would make every effort to raise an army and attack it. Effectively forcing Margaret Tudor into a position where she felt the need to flee from Scotland was an insult to Henry VIII, who naturally took her part and responded by offering her refuge.⁹

It was to the Queen's advantage that the birth of her child was approaching, for she was planning to flee to England before it was born. No one would suspect a woman going into seclusion of plotting an escape, for once she had taken to her chamber, she would remain there until she was fit enough for her churching, the ceremony of thanksgiving and purification that marked the end of a woman's confinement and her return to normal life.

On 1 August Margaret Tudor wrote from Edinburgh to Henry VIII: 'Brother, I purpose, by the grace of God, to take my chamber and lie in my palace of Linlithgow within this twelve days, for I have not past eight weeks to my time, at the which I pray Jesu to send me good speed and happy deliverance.'¹⁰

Knowing that she could count on the aid of her brother, she sent her trusty servant, Robert Carr, to Thomas Magnus and Lord Dacre to ask them to inform the King of her secret plans, and ask for his assistance, which he had already commanded Dacre to extend to her.¹¹

Lord Dacre was then forty-eight, fierce, indefatigable and politically astute.¹² In 1485 he had fought for the last Plantagenet King, Richard III, against the future Henry VII at the Battle of Bosworth,

but had quickly made his peace with the Tudor victor, who had made him a Knight of the Bath. Dacre had been serving on the Scottish Marches since 1485, and had been made Warden General in 1509 by Henry VIII. He had fought against the Scots at Flodden, but he had been willing to help Margaret Tudor smuggle her sons into England earlier in 1515. At that time she had expressed fears that Scotland was so infested by robbers as to render travelling dangerous, but that seemed the lesser evil now. Dacre and Magnus assured their master that, 'notwithstanding her Grace is within six weeks of her lying down, yet she hath ascertained us she hath good health, and is strong enough to take upon her this journey'.¹³

On 1 September 1515 Lord Dacre wrote to Queen Margaret, urging her to make haste to steal away to Blackadder Tower. Its owner, Andrew Blackadder, had fought and fallen under the Douglas standard at Flodden, and his widow and daughters were loyal. Dacre assured Margaret Tudor that, considering she was near her time, this was the best course of action. She would want for neither household goods nor money, and if all went to plan, her children would be safely restored to her and she herself would be restored as regent. Dacre himself would rendezvous with the Queen and escort her through the marsh where Blackadder Tower stood, 'so that you can resort [there] without any danger'.¹⁴

But on 3 September Margaret Tudor informed Dacre that she had a strategy of her own.¹⁵ Feigning sickness, she obtained Albany's permission to remove with her husband to Linlithgow Palace for the birth of their child.¹⁶ She and Angus travelled there on 11 September, closely followed by a letter from Lord Dacre informing the Queen that Henry VIII had been advised of her plight, and had confirmed his offer of asylum in England. Everything was now in place for her escape.

After the birth of her daughter Margaret Tudor 'fell into such extreme sickness that her life was despaired of by all'.¹⁷ Given the drama of her flight and the stress she had suffered, that was hardly surprising.

Dacre evidently thought the birth of a daughter of little importance, and it was not until 18 October that he informed Henry VIII that on 'the eighth day after that the Queen of Scots, your sister, came and entered into this your realm, her Grace was delivered and brought in bed of a fair young lady'. He added that 'the sudden time, by God's provision so chanced', took them all unawares. His excuse for not writing sooner was that he had been too busy, and

he had not thought it worth sending a letter for the sole purpose of informing the King that he had a new niece.¹⁸

The Queen's child was christened the day after her birth,¹⁹ on 8 October, the ceremony probably being held in the castle chapel; at the font she was given the name Margaret, after her mother.²⁰ Cardinal Thomas Wolsey, the minister who was all-powerful at the English court, had been chosen by Queen Margaret as a godparent, *in absentia*.²¹ Dacre was to explain to the King that the baptism had taken place 'with such convenient provisions as could or might be had in this barren and wild country', although everything had been 'done accordingly as appertained to the honour of the same', considering the suddenness of the birth.²²

Because she was born in Northumberland, the 'fair young lady' started life as an English subject. Her uncle, Henry VIII, had as yet no surviving child to succeed him; his nearest heirs were his sister, Margaret Tudor, and her children, James V and now Margaret Douglas. Although Henry VII, in his will, had not excluded Margaret Tudor's issue from the succession, James V was not an Englishman; since the fourteenth century there had been a common-law rule against alien inheritance,²³ and a majority opinion in England held that that applied to the royal succession. Hence Margaret Douglas was second in line to the English throne after her mother until such time as Henry's Queen, Katherine of Aragon, bore a living child – and Dacre was wrong to regard her as a person of little political importance.

On 10 October, three days after the birth, Queen Margaret was sufficiently recovered to write reprovingly to Albany: 'Cousin, I heartily commend me unto you, and where I have been enforced for fear and danger of my life to depart forth of the realm of Scotland, so it is that, by the grace of Almighty God, I am now delivered and have a Christian soul, being a young lady.' She demanded to be reinstated in the regency, desiring him 'in God's name, as tutrix of the young King and Prince, my tender childer, to have the whole rule and governance' of them and of Scotland.²⁴

Albany refused, informing her that 'the governance of the realm expired with the death of her husband, and devolved to the estates' and 'that she had forfeited the tutelage of her children by her second marriage'; if she would not listen to reason, he would be compelled to resort to sterner measures to prevent the disunion between the two kingdoms.²⁵

Angus, meanwhile, had entered into a solemn covenant with several powerful, sympathetic nobles to liberate James V and his brother

and unite in opposition to Albany. That was sufficiently alarming for Albany to offer the Queen apologies, terms and the return of her jewellery; he said he would even take Angus into favour if she would return to Scotland; but she refused.²⁶

When, on 18 October, Dacre informed Henry VIII of Margaret's birth, he asked what was to be done with his royal guest. Her lying-in was proving 'uneaseful and costly' because all necessities had to be carried some distance to Harbottle, so he was 'minded to move her Grace to remove to Morpeth' as soon as she had been churched. Dacre evidently feared that Margaret Tudor would make difficulties about the move, as he suggested to the King that 'it may like your Highness to signify your mind and pleasure unto her, that we may move her accordingly'.

As soon as he had been informed of his sister's imminent arrival in England, Henry VIII had sent one of his gentlemen ushers, Sir Christopher Garnish, north with suitably royal clothing, plate and other necessities for her and her child. Garnish deposited these at Morpeth, then travelled to Harbottle with a letter from Henry that was 'greatly to the Queen's comfort'. Because she was still lying in, and was expected to keep to her chamber for at least three weeks, Dacre advised Garnish to return to Morpeth and remain until she was fit to travel there and receive her brother's gifts.²⁷

After Queen Margaret's churching in late October, Henry VIII wanted her to journey south and join the lavish Christmas festivities at his court, but she was too ill to travel, or even to be moved.²⁸ For weeks she lay bedridden at Harbottle with a 'great and intolerable ache that is in her right leg, nigh to her body', which may have been due to sciatica, a trapped nerve or a fracture. It was not until 26 November that she was well enough to travel. Dacre settled her and her infant in a litter and set off for Morpeth Castle, nearly thirty miles south-east of Harbottle, but 'her Grace was so feeble that all of this way she could not suffer no horses to go in the litter', so it had to be borne by 'honest personages of the country'.²⁹ On the way they had to rest for four days at fourteenth-century Cartington Castle, a strong fortress of stone. Their next stop, on Sunday 2 December, was five miles away at Brinkburn Priory, and the following morning they came to Morpeth, where Dacre had summoned local dignitaries to greet the Queen.

The castle at Morpeth had been built in the thirteenth century on a steep bank south of Ha' Hill, replacing an earlier eleventh-century structure. Its keep, the Great Tower, stood within a bailey

surrounded by a curtain wall.³⁰ Dacre had spared no expense to welcome the sister of his sovereign. John Younge, Somerset Herald, wrote: 'Never saw I a baron's house better trimmed in all my life: the hall and chambers with the newest device of tapestry, his cupboard all of gilt plate with a great cup of fine gold, the board's end served all with silver vessels, lacking no manner of victual and wildfowl to be put on them.'³¹

When Henry VIII learned that Queen Margaret had borne her child, he commanded all the important gentlemen of Northumberland 'to do them pleasure'.³² He lifted the ban on any Scot attending upon her, which meant that Angus was now free to join her at Morpeth and meet his new daughter. Lord Home was of his party. When Garnish visited Queen Margaret in December,³³ bringing a letter from the King assuring the Queen and Angus a warm welcome at the English court, she received him lying in bed, and was much cheered by her brother's kindness.

In fact Henry was loudly proclaiming to all how badly his sister had been mistreated by Albany, and accusing the Regent of tearing her from her children, insulting and abusing her, stealing her jewels, forging her handwriting, and forcing her, in late pregnancy, to flee for her life. It was reported in France that 'if the Duke of Albany did not abstain from and make reparation for his injuries to Margaret and her children, Henry would make him do so', and was already planning to invade Scotland.³⁴ Albany tried to defend himself, protesting that he had had no idea that the Queen had intended to escape, and went on begging her to return to Scotland. The French ambassador added fuel to the flames by claiming that she had been in no danger and had run off in a temper, but no one wanted to listen.

Queen Margaret was still weak on 8 December, when she was carried out of her bedchamber in a chair to inspect the rich gifts the King had sent her. Among them were twenty-two gowns of gold and cloth of tissue, silk and velvet, trimmed with fur.³⁵ Garnish informed Henry VIII that she was 'one of the lowest-brought ladies, with her great pain of sickness, that I have seen and [es]cape[d death]', and was suffering such agony in her leg that, when she had to be moved or turned in bed, 'it would pity any man's heart to hear the shrieks and cries that her Grace giveth; and yet, for all that, her Grace hath a marvellous mind upon her apparel for her body'.³⁶ She seems to have been more preoccupied with her new wardrobe than with her baby. Showing off the gowns to Lord Home, she cried,

'Here ye may see that the King my brother hath not forgotten me, and that he would not that I should die for lack of clothes!'³⁷

On 17 December Sebastian Giustinian, the Venetian envoy in London, reported that when Queen Margaret was better, she would 'by his Majesty's orders come to the court in London'.³⁸ But at Christmas, although 'great house' was kept at Morpeth,³⁹ the intolerable pain in the Queen's leg worsened. The local physician and surgeon having failed to cure her, Dacre wrote to Henry VIII asking that a royal doctor be sent north.⁴⁰ Apparently – possibly for want of any word on her progress – it was assumed at the English court that the infant Margaret Douglas had died, for on 2 January Cardinal Wolsey informed Giustinian that Queen Margaret 'is yet most grievously ill, having been prematurely delivered of a daughter, who had subsequently died'.⁴¹ In fact the baby was thriving.

It was not until the end of January 1516 that Queen Margaret began to recover. On 15 March Dacre reported to Henry VIII: 'She amendeth continually and is greatly desirous to be coming towards your Highness.' But, fearing for her health, Dacre was keeping back some tragic news. On 28 December a Scottish delegation had brought word from Stirling Castle that the Queen's favourite son, twenty-month-old Alexander, had died. The cause is not recorded, but in an age long before antibiotics, many children died in infancy, as had four of Alexander's older siblings. Garnish observed, 'If it comes to her knowledge, it will be fatal to her,'⁴² and when, in March, Dacre felt that she was sufficiently strong to bear the news, she collapsed in grief. Dacre did not 'suspect any danger or peril of life', but he again asked the King to send a physician from London all the same.

Encouraged by an indignant Henry VIII, Margaret Tudor blamed Albany for Alexander's death, and in her formal complaint against him would state that 'it is much to be suspected he will destroy the young King, now that her son, the young Duke, is dead, most probably through his means'.⁴³

Two weeks later she suffered another blow when Angus told her that he would not be accompanying her to the English court. 'More simple than malicious' (as the French ambassador to Scotland described him at this time),⁴⁴ he wanted to make peace with Albany and secure the restoration of lands confiscated by the Regent. Without even taking leave of his wife, he left her and their daughter and returned to Scotland with Lord Home.⁴⁵ Dacre, who saw this as no less than abandonment, chased the escaping lords as far as Coldstream,

but none of his reproaches or pleas could persuade them to return. True to Angus's expectations, Albany pardoned him, received him and Home into favour, and promised to return his lands, and thereafter Angus remained a close associate of the Regent.

Angus's sudden departure 'made [the Queen] much to muse'.⁴⁶ She took it 'right heavily, making great moan and lamentation', and looked to her brother for succour, crying that without it, 'the King her son and she are likely to be destroyed'.⁴⁷ This is the first evidence of a rift between the Queen and Angus, the first sign of the marital strife and power struggles that were heavily to overshadow Margaret Douglas's childhood.

Meanwhile a temporary peace between England and Scotland had been agreed, and Scottish envoys were on their way to London to discuss terms for Queen Margaret's return to Scotland. The Queen was to follow in their wake. She was sufficiently recovered to leave Morpeth on 7 April 1516, but the litter and horses sent by Henry VIII did not arrive until four o'clock, so she and Margaret, now six months old, set off the next day. They were escorted by Lord Dacre and others as far as Newcastle.⁴⁸ Here they were greeted by the city dignitaries and Sir Thomas Parr (father of the future Queen Katherine), before proceeding south the next day to Durham, where there was another civic welcome. From here Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland, accompanied the Queen's party to York, where Angus, sent by Albany, unexpectedly caught up with them and asked the Queen if he might join a Scottish embassy that was preparing to enter England. Still disgruntled with him, she refused, whereupon he returned to Scotland.

On 27 April Queen Margaret was at Stony Stratford in Northamptonshire, and on 3 May she reached Enfield, Middlesex, where she stayed at Elsyng Palace,⁴⁹ the home of Sir Thomas Lovell, treasurer of Henry VIII's household. The next day she rode on to the village of Tottenham, north of London, and it was here, in Bruce Castle, the newly built manor house of a favoured courtier, Sir William Compton,⁵⁰ that Henry VIII was waiting to greet her and his infant niece. Brother and sister had not seen each other for thirteen years. When Margaret Tudor had gone to Scotland, Henry, two years her junior, had been a boy of twelve. Now he was a handsome, athletic, talented and egotistical man of twenty-five, and had been ruling England for seven years. Queen Margaret saw before her a tall, broad-shouldered Adonis with flame-red hair and a beardless

chin; Henry would not metamorphose into the bearded, overweight colossus of later years for another two decades.

After a short conversation, the King escorted his sister, his niece and their retinue the rest of the way to the City of London, and at six o'clock that evening Queen Margaret, royally attired and riding a white palfrey, passed in procession along Cheapside, preceded by Sir Thomas Parr and followed by many lords and ladies. Thus she came to Baynard's Castle by the River Thames, a royal residence that she would have remembered well from her childhood. Here lodgings had been made ready for her and her daughter.⁵¹ After resting there until 7 May, mother and child joined the court at Greenwich Palace.

Henry VIII and his Queen, Katherine of Aragon, received her there joyfully, and with them was the youngest Tudor sibling, Mary, the widow of Louis XII of France. A year before, Mary, the beauty of the family, had caused a scandal by secretly making a second marriage, for love, with Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk. Henry had been furious, and had imposed a crippling fine on the couple before receiving them back into favour. Now there were feasts, revels, jousts and a banquet in the Queen's chamber.

In February 1516 Katherine – whose first four children had died in infancy – had at last presented the King with a healthy daughter, Mary, who now took precedence over Margaret Tudor and Margaret Douglas in the English succession. The two cousins were much of an age, but of course they were far too young at this time to form any friendship. It is likely that Margaret only stayed in the royal nursery at Greenwich while her mother was there, and that after their visit she went to stay with her at 'Scotland', where Queen Margaret was allocated lodgings during her sojourn in England.

'Scotland' was a palatial complex that lay south of Charing Cross. It had acquired its name from being used as a residence for visiting Scottish monarchs, and was convenient for Westminster and Parliament, which they attended in their capacity as English barons. First built by the Saxon King Edgar in AD 959 so that Kenneth III of Scots would have suitable accommodation when he came annually to London to pay homage, the buildings in the complex were called Little Scotland Yard, Middle Scotland Yard and Great Scotland Yard. They were built around a courtyard, enclosed with a brick wall, and had 'large pleasure-grounds extending to the river'. According to the Elizabethan historian John Stow, the palace was 'a very great building', but little else is known about it, and no clear image of it

survives. Here Queen Margaret lived quietly, with 'little or no semblance of state'.⁵²

In November 1519 an annuity of £10 was granted to Queen Margaret's former nurse, Alice Davy, who had cared for her in her infancy from 1489 to 1491.⁵³ This was 'for services to the Queen Consort and Margaret, Queen of Scotland'.⁵⁴ It was not unusual for royal servants to be rewarded after a lapse of years, but the annuities that Henry VIII had granted to those who had served his mother, Elizabeth of York, who died in 1503, had been assigned by 1515. The fact that Mrs Davy had rendered services to Katherine of Aragon and Margaret Tudor suggests that she had been employed more recently in their nurseries, and that Queen Margaret had called upon her old nurse to look after her baby.

Margaret and her mother remained in England for a year. Angus, despite having been given leave by Albany, had refused to join them. He had also appropriated his wife's rents, so the Queen had little money of her own, and although Henry VIII made occasional payments to her, at Christmas 1516 she was forced to beg Cardinal Wolsey for financial help.⁵⁵

In the summer of 1517 Albany returned to France to tend to his sick wife, leaving James Hamilton, Earl of Arran, as president of the Scottish Council, with Angus and other lords serving alongside him. It was to be a volatile partnership, as Angus was unable to work amicably with Arran, but was bent on pursuing his bloody feud with the Hamiltons.

In the wake of the truce between Scotland and England, Queen Margaret's hopes of regaining the regency flourished anew. On 18 May 1517, furnished with a safe conduct from the young King James and assurances of the restoration of her revenues,⁵⁶ she departed from London, taking the eighteen-month-old Margaret with her. Escorted by George Talbot, Earl of Shrewsbury, they set out on the long ride north, the King having summoned various lords and gentlemen to receive them with due ceremony along the route.⁵⁷ The Queen fell ill at Doncaster, but pressed on to York, where the Earl of Northumberland waited upon her, and thence to Durham, and Berwick, where she hesitated, reluctant to return to the kingdom where she had suffered so many troubles. 'Her Grace,' Thomas Magnus reported, 'considereth now the honour of England, and the poverty and wretchedness of Scotland, which she did not afore, but in her opinion esteemed Scotland equal to England.' But she had to go

back, and on 15 June young Margaret crossed the border into Scotland for the first time.⁵⁸

At Lamberton Kirk, three miles from Berwick, Angus, accompanied by his kinsman, James Douglas, Earl of Morton, and other lords, was waiting to greet his wife and child. He had not come voluntarily but had been sent by the Scottish Council. According to Margaret, he 'behaved right courteously to her',⁵⁹ and a reconciliation of sorts took place. Attended by an escort of three thousand men-at-arms, they rode together towards Edinburgh, where, on the evening of 17 June, the Queen was received with some state and lodged in Holyrood Palace, recently vacated by Albany.

But she was still to be denied a share in the government and access to her son, James V. During the succeeding years she made abortive attempts to regain power, but there was no hope of that after Henry VIII made a new truce with the Scots without insisting on redress for the wrongs she had suffered, and she was in financial straits because of difficulties in obtaining payment of her dower revenues. This was the backdrop to Margaret's childhood.

‘Disdained with Dishonour’

U ntil she reached the ages of ten or twelve Margaret remained in the charge of her mother. We do not know how much she saw of her, since royal children were normally looked after by nurses and servants; it was a queen’s duty to ensure that her offspring were well cared for and educated, sometimes in a household of their own, not to participate in their daily care. But Margaret Tudor, for all that she was preoccupied with political affairs and wrangling for what she believed to be her due entitlements, must have been one of the primary influences on her daughter. Her devotion to the interests of her son, James V, may have had some bearing on the younger Margaret’s ambitions for her own sons, and her willingness – in an age not noted for indulging children – to spoil them. We can see in the adult Margaret much of her mother’s passionate persistence in fighting for her rights.

Margaret was brought up as a princess, probably spending most of her early years in the nurseries of the various royal palaces in which her mother resided. It is likely that she learned some English from the Queen, but Scots would have been her first language, and even though she would in time learn to speak and write fluent English, her letters in later life – written phonetically, as letters then were – betray a strong Scottish accent. She wrote, for example, ‘curt’ (court), ‘dede’ (did), ‘erl’ (earl), ‘borden’ (burden) and ‘warsse’ (worse).¹

Strictly contemporary sources are for the most part silent on Margaret’s childhood, yet shortly after her death a *Commemoration*, in verse form, was published by John Phillips, who had served her and evidently knew her well.² It is, predictably, laudatory and reverent, and yet Phillips, a student of divinity, was a Puritan preacher with

no reason to approve of Margaret, who had for years been known – even notorious – for her strong Catholic faith. The fact that he chose to hallow her memory with praise says much for the enduring impression she made on him, and shows that his account was not mere flattery. The personal details in it strongly suggest that it was based on her own reminiscences and perhaps those of the people who served her, so Phillips can be forgiven for getting a little muddled in places, since he is treating of events that had occurred decades before. His *Commemoration* was written as if Margaret herself was looking back over her life, and therefore it has a deeply personal aspect. From it we know something of the tenor of her early upbringing and education. Like most high-born girls, she was ‘trained to virtue and grace, in faith and God’s fear’, in ‘obedience and truth. No lightness in me could any discern. My heart and my hand to do good was bent, and wisdom to learn I was well content.’

Early in 1518 Queen Margaret discovered that Angus had been having an affair with the beautiful Lady Janet Stewart of Traquair. He had been betrothed to her before his marriage to Margaret Tudor, and had apparently become close to her during his wife’s long sojourn in England; worse still, he was using his wife’s revenues to enrich himself and his mistress. Margaret had forgiven him for allying with Albany and refusing to join her in England; now she became consumed with jealousy and a violent, enduring hatred, and decided to separate from him at once. Margaret, at only three, now found herself the only child of a broken marriage, for whom the term ‘warring parents’ would become only too apt.

It was to be a long and complicated affair, drawn out over nine years, and engendering much bitterness. There were vicious quarrels, in which the Douglasses – and even Henry VIII, who thought it immoral for Margaret to leave her husband – sided with Angus, and Angus’s enemy, Arran, with the Queen. In October 1518 she wrote to Henry VIII, ‘I am sore troubled with my lord of Angus, and every day more and more, so that we have not been together this half year.’ He had done her ‘much evil’ and she was minded ‘to part with him, for I wit well he loves me not, as he shows me daily’.³ It would not have been surprising if, under her mother’s influence, Margaret had grown up to have a jaundiced opinion of her father. That would have been understandable, for Angus seized the Queen’s property and appropriated more of her revenues, obliging her to live ‘as a poor suitor’ in Edinburgh. She, in turn, refused to allow him any

share in the regency she hoped to secure, and made secret overtures to Albany for help in obtaining the divorce she desperately wanted. At one point she even alleged – blatantly falsely – that her second marriage was bigamous because her first husband, James IV, had still been alive three years after he had supposedly been slain at Flodden.⁴

But Margaret Tudor needed the support of her brother, Henry VIII, and so in the autumn of 1519 she consented to what proved to be a brief reconciliation with Angus, who agreed to it because he was again engaged in a power struggle with Arran and wanted Henry's backing. Around that time, alarmed at an outbreak of plague in Edinburgh, Queen Margaret took her four-year-old daughter to Stirling Castle. In December the Queen was laid low with a vicious attack of smallpox, and there were fears that she might die. For days she lay prone, unable to move or speak.⁵ But she recovered to resume her battles with her estranged husband.

It was the fate of nobly born girls to be the subject of marriage alliances that were advantageous to their parents, and it was not unusual for them to be betrothed in childhood. By reason of her royal blood and her claim to the English succession, and as James V's half-sister and Henry VIII's niece, Margaret was a highly desirable bride – a great prize in the European marriage market. In 1520, when she was not yet five, her mother entered into negotiations with Angus's enemy, Arran, with a view to her becoming affianced to his eldest son, another James Hamilton, then aged about four. Thanks to the ongoing feud between Angus and Arran, affairs in Scotland had deteriorated to the extent that the Duke of Albany was anticipating having to return from France to resume his role as regent. Albany was perturbed by reports of the proposed betrothal, fearing that the Queen and Arran would unite against him. Moreover, in the event of the young King's death, Arran was Albany's rival for the Scottish succession. There was no more talk of the marriage, but later that year Albany formally invited Queen Margaret to assume the regency pending his return. On 15 October she set out from Linlithgow for Edinburgh, having made the pragmatic decision to be reconciled once more with her husband – a decision that cost her the support of some of her party.

Angus and his faction had retained control of the capital, resisting the attempts of Arran to dislodge him from power. He rode forth at the head of four hundred mounted men to receive his wife, offered a cordial welcome and escorted her into Edinburgh Castle. Thereafter

the couple resumed living together, but not for long. Angus continued to trespass upon the Queen's property, whereupon she lost patience with him and decided to ally herself with his enemy, Arran. One night in December she left a dinner hosted by the Archbishop of St Andrews and stole away to Linlithgow with her daughter and only six attendants. Leaving Margaret behind, she rode to Stirling, where she was welcomed by Arran. Angus protested against her desertion, and Henry VIII castigated her for doing 'much dishonour' to herself and the King her son, warning that she could not look for any favour at his hand.⁶

Albany had approached Pope Leo X on Queen Margaret's behalf about a divorce, but efforts were now made to turn him against her. When he returned to Scotland late in 1521 and resumed the regency, the Queen allied with him against Angus, and there were rumours – probably unfounded – that she was closer to Albany than she should have been. Albany summoned Angus to answer charges of high treason, but he failed to appear, whereupon he was sentenced to death and his estates were once more confiscated. In March 1522, after Queen Margaret had interceded for his life to be spared, he was exiled to France, whence, in June 1524, he escaped to England at Henry VIII's invitation. It has been claimed that Angus took young Margaret with him into exile, and that she did not see her mother for the next three years, but this misunderstanding rests on the incorrect dating to 1523 of a letter that Margaret wrote complaining that Angus had removed Margaret from her care within the past three years.⁷ The letter was actually written in November 1528 (see below), and in any case Angus would hardly have welcomed the risks and practicalities of fleeing into exile with a six-year-old child.

Much to his estranged wife's annoyance, Angus was received warmly at the English court. He was given a pension, and measures were taken to bring about his return to Scotland and the mending of his marriage.⁸ Queen Margaret remonstrated with her brother to obstruct his return, but Henry wanted a pro-English party north of the border, and Angus was ready to uphold the King's interests. By the autumn of 1524 Albany had been overthrown and Scotland was 'so divided, it is hard to say whom to trust. There is no justice, but continual murders, theft and robbery.'⁹ Henry VIII had no time for the Queen's 'wilfulness towards her husband'.¹⁰

On 28 October, with the backing of an English alliance, Angus finally returned to Scotland to find his wife in power and refusing to have anything to do with him, an attitude that was believed to

have been encouraged by 'one Harry Stewart, a young man about her Grace, which ordereth all causes'.¹¹ Henry Stewart was eleven years Margaret Tudor's junior, and it was not long before Henry VIII was informed that the two of them had begun an adulterous relationship, one that would cause scandal for several years. Queen Margaret was said to be 'so blinded with folly as to have her ungodly appetite followed; she doth not care what she doth'.¹²

Angus hated his wife's lover, and he was outraged that young Margaret was being exposed to such an undesirable and immoral influence. On 23 November he stormed into Edinburgh, only to have Margaret Tudor's forces open fire on him. Forced to retreat to his stronghold of Tantallon, he proceeded to rally a large contingent of lords to his side.

There is, alas, no evidence of how Margaret, at just nine, was affected by the enmity between her parents. She must have suffered to some extent from conflicting loyalties, and it may be that her mother and Henry Stewart did their best to poison her mind against her father. Nor do we know what she made of the affair between the Queen and Stewart. Fortunately royal children spent more time with those appointed to care for them than with their parents, so she was probably shielded to a degree from the tumult of her mother's life.

Early in 1525, when Margaret was nine, the Earl of Moray asked for her hand. A bastard son of James IV, he was about twenty-six, and an ally of Queen Margaret. The Queen pushed for the match, fearing that her husband might try to marry Margaret to one of her enemies, the Douglasses,¹³ but Angus was having none of it. In February 1525 he staged a coup, occupying the capital and summoning Parliament, which restored him to power, jointly with David Beaton, the future cardinal and archbishop of St Andrews, and granted him custody of the resentful young King, whom he kept strictly under his control.

Queen Margaret was forced to establish a fragile accord with Angus. Thomas Magnus informed Wolsey that she 'entertaineth the Earl with good countenance and familiar communication, but continually her Grace procureth [him], by all the ways and means she can, to a divorce'.¹⁴ Angus's friends wanted him freed from their marriage, so that he could take another wife and father sons, which would spare him the necessity of having to leave his title and estates to his daughter. The Queen was anxious to ensure that a divorce would not impugn Margaret's legitimacy. She now petitioned Pope

Clement VII on the grounds that before their marriage Angus had entered into a precontract – a formal exchange of promises to marry made before witnesses that was as binding as wedlock – with Lady Janet Stewart; she urged his Holiness to consider that ‘by the ignorance of the mother [the daughter] should not suffer any loss, damage or disadvantage’.¹⁵ Normally an annulment rendered the children of an irregular union bastards, but if a marriage had been made in good faith, its issue could be deemed legitimate.

For the next three years Angus enjoyed great power in Scotland, acting as regent for James V; in August 1527 he was made high chancellor. He put Queen Margaret and her supporters to flight, curbed the ambitions of the Hamiltons, and restored order in the kingdom. The young King he kept a virtual prisoner, diverting him with women and dice from learning his kingly duties. The Douglasses were now supreme, and it was said that ‘none that time durst strive against a Douglas nor a Douglas’s man’.¹⁶

Angus had permitted Margaret’s betrothal to Moray to go ahead, and her mother had arranged it, but according to an instrument from the Moray charter chest, dated 10 January 1527, the Queen, when required by Moray to proceed to the marriage, had refused because she had found a more promising bridegroom, ten-year-old Matthew Stewart, Earl of Lennox, whom Margaret would eventually marry nearly sixteen years later.¹⁷ But her plans came to nothing, and we hear no more of either betrothal at this time.

Now came a period of far-reaching change for eleven-year-old Margaret. On 11 March 1527 the Pope granted her mother’s petition for an annulment.¹⁸ In accordance with the Queen’s wishes, he added a special clause declaring Margaret legitimate.¹⁹ This was endorsed by David Beaton, who declared ‘that, the mother being innocent of bad faith in the marriage, the daughter ought not to be disinherited’.²⁰ Thirty years later it would be asserted by a hostile witness that Margaret ‘was openly taken and reputed a bastard in Scotland’ after her parents’ divorce,²¹ and this was no exaggeration, because James V, who hated the Douglasses, always referred to her as his ‘base sister’.²² But he had no grounds for doing so.

By 2 April 1528 the Queen had married Henry Stewart, provoking the ire of Henry VIII, who was then seeking the dissolution of his own marriage. He was shocked and indignant on his niece Margaret’s behalf, and wrote a letter reminding his sister of ‘the divine ordinance of inseparable matrimony first instituted in Paradise’, expressing the

hope that she would 'perceive how she was seduced by flatterers to an unlawful divorce from the right noble Earl of Angus upon untrue and insufficient allegations'. Furthermore, the dispensation sent from Rome plainly showed 'how unlawfully it was handled', for judgment had been 'given against a party neither present in person, nor by proxy'.

Thinking of the innocent victim of this 'shameless sentence', and revealing that he had received reports on her daughter's progress, Henry urged the Queen

for the weal of your soul, and to avoid the inevitable damnation threatened against adulterers, to reconcile yourself with Angus as your true husband. Yet the love, the tender pity and motherly kindness towards the fruit of your body, your most dear child and natural daughter, cannot but provoke your Grace unto reconciliation, whose excellent beauty and present behaviour, nothing less godly than goodly, furnished with virtues and womanly demeanours, after such a sort that it would relent and mollify a heart of steel, much more a motherly mind, which, in your Grace, Nature enforcing the same, ought largely to be showed. Moreover, what charge of conscience, what grudge and fretting, yea, what danger of damnation should it be to your soul, with perpetual infamy of your renown, slanderously to distain with dishonour so goodly a creature, so virtuous a lady, and namely your natural child, procreate in lawful matrimony, as to be reputed baseborn, which cannot otherwise be avoided, unless your Grace will (as in conscience ye are bound under peril of God's everlasting indignation) relinquish the adulterer's company with him that is not, nor may be of right, your husband.

This, Wolsey assured the Queen in an enclosing note, was 'the faithful exhortation of my most dread lord and sovereign, your entirely loving brother, with a motherly respect towards your natural child, your own flesh and blood'.²³

Katherine of Aragon wrote too, sorrowfully reminding Margaret Tudor of the great sin of disparaging 'the fair daughter she had by my Lord Angus'. Margaret replied that she had married him in good faith, so her daughter's legitimacy would not be in question.²⁴

Sometime between 1525 and April 1528 Angus removed Margaret from her mother's care. It has been described as a kidnapping,²⁵ but as a father and a peer of the realm he had every right to the custody of his child. Margaret was approaching marriageable age, which for