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Written by Conn Iggulden

Published by Michael Joseph

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Wars of the Roses

Ravenspur: Rise of the Tudors

THE WARS OF THE ROSES SERIES

Stormbird
Trinity
Bloodline

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Wars of the Roses

Ravenspur: Rise of the Tudors

CONN IGGULDEN

MICHAEL JOSEPH
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Acknowledgements

After the death of my father, I hoped my mother would recover and grow strong once again. Instead, she was gone within the year. I would like to acknowledge her here, in the first of my books she will not read.

Her love of words and particularly poetry was a huge influence on me. She told me that history was a collection of stories about real people, with dates. I miss her advice every day, because she used to give me advice every day.

> A ship spreads white sails into the morning breeze. I stand and watch until she hangs as a speck between sea and sky – and someone says: 'There. She is gone.'
>
> And at that moment, as someone at my side says, 'She is gone,' there are other eyes watching for her arrival – and glad voices are raised to shout: 'Here she comes. There she is!'
>
> Henry Van Dyke

List of Characters

– *Queen Margaret/Margaret of Anjou*: Wife of Henry VI, daughter of René of Anjou
– *Lady Margaret Beaufort*: Great-granddaughter of John of Gaunt, mother of Henry Tudor
– *Thomas Bourchier*: Archbishop of Canterbury
– *Derry Brewer*: Spymaster of Henry VI and Queen Margaret
– *Henry Stafford, Duke of Buckingham*: Supporter of Richard, Duke of Gloucester, later leader of a rebellion against him
– *Charles le Téméraire (the Bold), Duke of Burgundy*: Enemy of King Louis XI, and backer of Edward IV's return to England
– *Sir John Cheyney*: Defender of Henry Tudor at the Battle of Bosworth
– *George, Duke of Clarence*: Brother of Edward IV and Richard, Duke of Gloucester
– *Sir Gilbert Debenham*: Scout for Edward IV
– *John Courtenay, Earl of Devon*: Supporter of Queen Margaret and the Prince of Wales at battle of Tewkesbury
– *Edward IV*: King of England, son of Richard Plantagenet, Duke of York
– *Edward V*: Elder son of Edward IV, one of the princes in the Tower
– *Henry Holland, Duke of Exeter*: Supporter of Henry VI and Queen Margaret

– *Richard of Gloucester*: Brother of Edward IV and George, Duke of Clarence, later King Richard III
– *Lord Baron William Hastings*: Lord Chamberlain to Edward IV
– *Henry VI*: King of England, son of Henry V
– *Edward of Lancaster*: Son of Henry VI and Queen Margaret, briefly Prince of Wales
– *King Louis XI*: King of France, cousin of Queen Margaret
– *Jacquetta of Luxembourg*: Mother of Elizabeth Woodville and Lord Rivers
– *John Neville, Baron Montagu*: Brother of Earl of Warwick
– *Tom Morton*: Bishop of Ely
– *Anne Neville*: Daughter of Earl of Warwick, wife of Edward of Lancaster, then of Richard of Gloucester
– *George Neville*: Archbishop of York, brother of Earl of Warwick
– *Isabel Neville*: Daughter of Earl of Warwick, wife of George, Duke of Clarence
– *John de Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk*: Supporter of Edward IV and Richard III, formerly supporter of Henry VI
– *Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland*: Head of Percy family, reluctant supporter of Richard III, formerly a supporter of Henry VI
– *John de Vere, Earl of Oxford*: Supporter of King Henry VI and Queen Margaret, and later of Henry Tudor
– *William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke*: Guardian of Henry Tudor in Pembroke Castle
– *Anthony Woodville, Earl Rivers*: Brother-in-law to Edward IV
– *Edmund, Earl of Rutland*: Son of Richard, Duke of York; killed at battle of Sandal Castle

– *Richard Neville, Earl of Salisbury*: Grandson of John of Gaunt, father of Earl of Warwick; killed at battle of Sandal Castle
– *Edmund Beaufort, Duke of Somerset*: Supporter of Queen Margaret and the Prince of Wales
– *Lord Thomas Stanley*: Royal treasurer and stepfather to Henry Tudor
– *Sir William Stanley*: Brother of Lord Stanley and captain to Lord Hastings; fought with Edward IV, and later Henry Tudor
– *Richard Stillington*: Bishop of Bath and Wells
– *Rhys ap Thomas*: Welsh captain, supporter of Henry Tudor at battle of Bosworth
– *Edmund Tudor*: Husband of Margaret of Beaufort and father of Henry Tudor; died of the plague in 1456
– *Jasper Tudor*: Brother of Edmund Tudor, uncle of Henry Tudor
– *Owen Tudor*: Second Father of Edmund and Jasper Tudor; killed after battle of Mortimer's Cross
– *Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick*: Head of the Neville family after the death of the Earl of Salisbury, later known as the Kingmaker; formerly supporter of Edward IV, restored Henry VI to the throne
– *Baron Wenlock*: Supporter of Margaret and the Prince of Wales
– *Elizabeth Woodville*: Wife of Edward IV
– *Earl of Worcester*: Supporter of Edward IV and Constable of England
– *Bridget of York*: Daughter of Edward IV and Elizabeth Woodville
– *Catherine of York*: Daughter of Edward IV and Elizabeth Woodville

– *Cecily of York*: Daughter of Edward IV and Elizabeth Woodville
– *Elizabeth of York*: Daughter of Edward IV and Elizabeth Woodville
– *Mary of York*: Daughter of Edward IV and Elizabeth Woodville
– *Richard Plantagenet, Duke of York*: Great-grandson of Edward III, father of Edward IV, George, Duke of Clarence, and Richard of Gloucester; killed at battle of Sandal Castle
– *Richard of Shrewsbury, Duke of York*: Younger son of Edward IV, one of the princes in the Tower

The Road to This Place

In the fifteenth century, two great houses of England were bound by blood. The older line, Lancaster, held the throne for three generations – until King Henry VI fell ill. The lesser line, York, snatched up the reins then – and war followed.

There could not be two kings. Edward of York joined with Earl Warwick to settle the issue on the battlefield in 1461. The house of Lancaster was defeated. Queen Margaret fled to France with her son, leaving her husband, Henry, to be held in the Tower of London.

King Edward IV married Elizabeth Woodville, who turned him against Earl Warwick. After endless provocations, Warwick snapped and captured Edward, holding him a prisoner. Warwick also allowed the king's brother, George, Duke of Clarence, to marry his daughter.

Though Warwick freed Edward in the end, their friendship never recovered. Edward acted on accusations of treason against Warwick, sending men to arrest him.

At the end of the events in *Bloodline*, Warwick ran. He left England with his heavily pregnant daughter and his son-in-law, George of Clarence. Denied safe harbour, the child was born and died at sea. Warwick and Clarence were made exiles in France, rejected by friends and family.

The French king, Louis XI, saw a rare chance. He gave Warwick and Clarence an army of mercenaries – and the ships to land them. They returned to the coast of England in

September 1470. Leaves of gold and red and white had been swept up in a great gale, so that no one knew how they would land. The season of vengeance had begun.



PART ONE

1470

Trust not him that hath once broken faith.

William Shakespeare, *Henry VI, Part Three*

I

The river bent a tail around Pembroke Castle. Winter sun shone red against the walls and the keep rose above the rest, tall as a cathedral, and about as proud.

On the path by the gatehouse, the stranger rested his hands on his saddle pommel, rubbing a thumb along a line of broken stitching. His horse was tired, the animal's head drooping as it found nothing to eat on the stones. Compared to the guards staring down, Jasper Tudor was as dark as a shepherd. His hair was thick with road-dust, like matted cloth. It hung to his shoulders, keeping his face in shadow as the sun set and the day began to die around him. Though he was weary, his eyes were never still, watching every movement on the wall. Each time a guard turned his head to the inner yard, or glanced at an officer below, Jasper saw and listened and judged. He knew when the news of his presence had summoned the master of the castle. He knew how many steps that man had to climb to reach the outer gate, barred in iron and just the first of a dozen defences against an attack.

Jasper counted under his breath, distracting himself from the anger he felt just at being in that place. He imagined each turn of the stone steps within and his mouth quirked when he saw William Herbert arrive on the crenellations. The young earl looked down at him, strong emotion making him mottled. The new master of Pembroke was just seventeen years old, a red-faced brawler, still reeling from the death of his father. It seemed Earl Herbert did not much like the sight of the dark and wiry man looking up at him. That much was clear from

his expression and the way he gripped the stone with his thick hands.

Jasper Tudor had been the Earl of Pembroke once, a dozen years before. He had called that castle home and he knew and loved those stones as well as anywhere in the world. It was hard not to bristle when a man half his age looked down upon him in arrogance from his own walls.

Earl William Herbert merely stared for a time, his eyes pinched small as if he lacked the long sight or had swallowed something that irked him. The younger man had a wide head, not fat but broad, topped by sleek hair cut straight across. Under that gaze, Jasper Tudor inclined his head in greeting. It would have been hard enough to deal with the father, had the man lived.

The older Herbert had not died well, giving no new honours to his family line. He had not lost his life in some valiant action but had been cut down without thought when Warwick had captured King Edward. That small loss, ignored at the time, had been eclipsed by the greater sin of Warwick laying hands on the king. In Pembroke, it had meant an entire town in mourning.

In the gathering gloom, Jasper Tudor swallowed nervously. Glints of light appeared and vanished in stone along the walls, as men in armour shifted their weight. He knew he had gained no advantage by spotting them. No one could outride a bolt.

Clouds drove across the sky, lit from beneath by the last of the sun. Above, the new earl lost patience at last with the silence. For all it cost him a slight advantage, for all his grief and dominance, there were not many seventeen-year-olds who could have matched the stone-like calm of a man at forty.

'*Well?* What do you want here, Master Tudor?' The young earl seemed to find some small pleasure in the lack of a noble title. Jasper Tudor was King Henry's half-brother. He had been raised

high by the house of Lancaster, and in return he had fought for them. He had taken the field against the eighteen-year-old Edward of York, the giant still weeping in rage for the death of his father. Jasper repressed a shudder at the memory of that monster in red armour, carmine as the sun on Pembroke walls.

'I give you God's good day and recommend me to you. I have sailed from France to this coast, running ahead of all news. Have you heard yet from London?'

'Does it so stick in that Welsh throat to call me lord?' William Herbert demanded. 'I am the Earl of Pembroke, Master Tudor. If you're at my gate to beg for food or coin, you will be disappointed. Keep your news. Your Lancaster mobs and your ragged *prisoner* king have no claim on me. And my father gave his life in defence of the *rightful* king of England, Edward of York.' The young man's mouth turned up on one side, twisting his face. 'While you, Tudor, I believe you were *attainted*, losing all honour, titles, property. I should have you struck down at this moment! Pembroke is mine. All that was my father's is *mine*.'

Jasper nodded as if he had perhaps heard a point worth considering. He saw bluster in the young man, covering weakness. Once more, he wished he could have dealt with the old earl, who had been a man of honour. Yet that was the way of it, when wars began. Good men died and left their sons to follow them, for better or worse. Jasper shook his head, swinging the clotted locks of his hair. He was one of those sons himself, perhaps a lesser man than his father, Owen. Worse, in the years of his exile, Jasper had found no wife nor made sons of his own. If the French king hadn't granted him a stipend as his cousin, Jasper thought, there was a chance he would have starved to death, alone and penniless. Yet he had remained loyal, to King Henry, and to Queen Margaret of Anjou, in all her despair and her fall.

Jasper looked down for a moment, his hopes fading under the earl's scorn. Yet he stood before Pembroke, and that old place had been his. It still rang with an aching familiarity and gave him some strange comfort just from being there, tempting him to reach out and touch the stone. He could not allow himself to be shamed in sight of those walls. He raised his head once more.

There was still one whom he loved within the fortress, as well as any father loved a son, both the reason for and purpose of his visit. Jasper Tudor had not come to Pembroke to make accusations or for vengeance. The tide of men's affairs had called him home from France and he had asked permission of Warwick to take the time for a private errand. As the great fleet braved the open sea, his ship alone had set off into the west.

Jasper looked along the length of the battlements and saw no sign yet of his brother's son, kept for fourteen years as a ward, or a prisoner.

'I used to think Pembroke was a different world from all the busyness in London, all the doings and the trade,' Jasper said, raising his voice to carry. 'Two hard weeks on the road, with a string of horses. It can be done, but it is no easy task. And in the winter, the roads are such a quagmire, it is better to sail round the Cornish coast, though it takes at least as long and is more perilous. For myself, I fear those winter storms that can tear a ship's hull open and drown all those who risk their lives on deep waters, God bless their souls.'

The words flowed from him, making the eyes of the earl grow glassy until the young man shook his head in confusion.

'You will not enter here, Master Tudor,' Earl Herbert snapped, losing the last threads of his patience. 'Play no more of your Welsh games; I will not open my gate to you. Say what you have come to say and then go back to your damp woods

and your camps and your poaching of hares. Live like the grubby, starving brigand you are, while I enjoy Pembroke and roast lamb and all the comforts of King Edward's trust.'

Jasper rubbed his jaw with the back of his thumb to keep a flash of anger from showing. He loved Pembroke still, every stone and arch and hall and musty storeroom, filled with wine and grain and preserved haunches of sheep and goats. He had hunted the land all around and Pembroke was home to him in a way that had a greater claim than anywhere else in the world. It had been a dream as a child that he might one day own a fine lord's castle. When it had actually come true, Jasper Tudor had been satisfied. There was no greater dream, not for the son of a soldier.

'Whether you have heard or not, *my lord*, the tide is turned. Earl Warwick has come home with a fleet and an army.' Jasper hesitated, searching for the right words. The young earl watching him had leaned right out on hearing that name, gripping the stones so hard it looked as if he wanted to break a piece off and hurl it at him. Jasper went on slowly, making the words fall far from the gatehouse.

'They will restore Lancaster, my lord. They will lay a hot iron over the wounds, ending York. I speak not to threaten, but to give you the good word so that you may choose a side, perhaps before anyone asks again with iron in their hands. Now, I have come for my nephew, my lord. For Henry Tudor, son of my brother Edmund and Margaret Beaufort. Is he well? Is he safe within?'

As the Earl of Pembroke opened his mouth to reply, Jasper saw movement along the wall at last, a white face, surrounded by thick black hair. The boy, surely, not yet with a man's growth. Jasper gave no sign he had seen.

'*You* have no claim on him,' William Herbert snapped, showing his teeth. 'My father paid a thousand pounds to gain

a ward. I can see the ragged edge of your cloak, Tudor. I can see the grease and dust on you from here. Can you return that thousand pounds to me?' The young man's sneering grin vanished as Jasper Tudor reached behind him to a parcel of canvas and leather strapped to the small of his back. He pulled it out and shook it to jingle the gold coins within.

'I can,' he said, though there was no triumph in his voice. He could see the scorn in the earl and he knew it would not matter.

'Oh yes? Do you also have . . .' William Herbert's mouth worked as if some thick clot of rage had closed his throat '. . . *the years* spent on his training in that bag of yours? Do you have my father's time? His trust?' The words spilled out faster, his confidence returning. 'It looks too small for all of that, Tudor.'

The young earl's will would prevail, no matter what was said, or who had the better of the exchange. One man could not force the door of Pembroke. Ten thousand could not.

With a sigh, Jasper shoved the pack out of sight once more. At least the French king would not own him once he had returned the loan. He rubbed his forehead as if in tiredness, hiding his eyes from the man thirty feet above him so he could flick a glance at his nephew. Jasper did not want the boy seen and sent away. If he addressed him directly, he sensed enough spite in William Herbert to make his nephew's life a misery, or even put it in peril. When Jasper spoke again, it was as much for the ears of Henry Tudor as it was to the new earl in Pembroke.

'This is a chance to earn a little good will, my lord,' he called up. 'The past is the past, all our fathers gone to tombs. You stand now where once I stood as earl – and Pembroke is yours. The years turn, *my lord*, and we cannot take back a day, or return one *hour* to make a better choice when we had the

chance.' He took heart from the earl's silence, feeling that the young man was at least not yelling curses and threats.

'Edward of York is away in the north, my lord, far from his armies and palaces. And now it is too late for him!' Jasper went on proudly, making his voice ring out for all ears. 'Warwick is returned to England! With a vast host raised in Kent and Sussex, aye, and France. Men such as he have even kings bend close to listen when they speak. They are a different breed from you and me, my lord. Look you, Earl Warwick will bring Henry of Lancaster from the Tower to rule again. *There* is your rightful king – and he is my half-brother! Now, I would like to take my nephew to London, my lord. I ask you to pass him into my care, in good faith and in trust of your mercy. I will repay your father's investment in him, though it be all I have.'

While they had spoken, torches and shuttered lamps had appeared along the walls, seeming to snatch away the last of the day's light. Lit by a flickering gold, William Herbert waited only an instant when the entreaty came to an end.

'No,' he called down. 'There's my answer. No, Tudor. You'll have nothing from my hand.' The earl was enjoying his power over the ragged man at his gate. 'Though I might have my men take your coins from you, if that was not one of your lies. Are you not a brigand on my road? How many have you robbed and murdered to gather so much coin, Tudor? You Welsh hedge-lords are all thieves, it's well known.'

'Are you so much a *fool*, boy?' Jasper Tudor roared up at the younger man, making him splutter in outrage. 'I have told you the tide has turned! I came to you with an open hand, with a fair offer. Yet you bleat at me and threaten me still, from behind the safety of your walls? Is that your courage then, in the stone under your hands? If you will not give up my nephew, then open your ears, boy! I will put you under the cold ground if you harm him in any way. Do you understand

me? Deep under the earth.' Though he spoke in apparent rage, Jasper Tudor shot a glance to the fourteen-year-old nephew watching him from the battlements further down the wall. He held his nephew's gaze until he sensed William Herbert craning round to see what had caught his attention. The face vanished. Jasper could only hope his message had been understood.

'Serjeant Thomas!' the young Earl of Pembroke called in imperious tones. 'Take half a dozen men and ride down this brigand on my road. He has not shown sufficient respect to a king's earl. Be thou *ungentle* with this Welsh bastard. Spring a little blood from him, then fetch him back to me for punishment.'

Jasper cursed under his breath as great thumps and cracks sounded within the castle gatehouse, along with the rattle of enormous chains. Soldiers raced up to the walls on all sides to check the environs for any force in hiding. Some of them carried crossbows and Jasper Tudor could feel their cold gazes crawling over him. It did not matter that one or two might have been his own men, from years before. They had a new master. He shook his head in anger, wheeling his horse and digging in his heels so that the animal bunched and lunged down the open road. No bolts sprang after him into the darkness. They wanted him alive.

Leaning out as far as he dared between the stones, Henry Tudor had stared at the rider, thin and defiant before the gatehouse of Pembroke, sitting like a beggar on a dark horse and yet daring to challenge the new earl. The black-haired boy had no memory of his uncle and would not have been able to pick him from a crowd if William Herbert hadn't called him Tudor. All he knew was that Uncle Jasper had fought for King Henry, for Lancaster, in towns so distant they were just names.

Henry had drunk in the sight of his blood relative, risking a fall to hear every word, gripping the rough stones he knew so well. He had been born in Pembroke, both he and his mother coming close to death, so they said. He'd heard it was surely a miracle that a woman so tiny had survived at all. Not twenty feet from the gatehouse wall where William Herbert stood, Henry had come into the world, his mother just thirteen years old and half-mad with fear and pain. He had been given to a wet nurse and little Margaret Beaufort had been spirited away to marry again, her only child and first dead husband to be forgotten and left behind. When the Yorkists took Pembroke and his uncle Jasper had been hunted as a Lancastrian traitor, Henry Tudor had been left utterly alone.

He was convinced it had made him strong, that isolation. No other lad had grown up without a mother, without friends or family, but instead with enemies on all sides to hurt and scorn him. As a result, in his own mind, he had been made about as hard as Pembroke. He had suffered a thousand cruelties from the Herberts, father and son, but he had endured – and he had watched, all the years of his life, for one single moment of weakness or inattention.

There had been shameful times, when he had almost forgotten the hatred and had to nurse and blow upon it to keep it alight. Before the old earl had been killed, there had even been days when Henry had felt more like the man's second son than the mere coin he truly was, to be hoarded and spent at the right time. He'd found himself wanting to earn some word of praise from William, though the older boy never missed a chance to cause him pain. Henry had hated himself for his weaknesses then, and clutched anger to his breast as he slept, curling in on it.

On the road below, he heard his uncle grow stern. The man's stream of words caught at Henry like a barbed line

snatching across his throat. '. . . under the cold *ground* if you harm him.' It was the first concern for his well-being that Henry could remember and it shook him. At that instant, as he understood in wonder that a man cared enough to threaten an earl, his uncle Jasper looked directly at him. Henry Tudor froze.

He had not known his uncle had spotted him creeping closer. He was pierced by the gaze and his thoughts shook suddenly, skipping a beat ahead. *Under* the earth. *Deep* under it. Hope soared in Henry's chest and he ducked back inside, away from his uncle's eyes – away too from a Herbert earl who had long taken out his hatred of Lancaster on the weakest end of a distant line. Henry Tudor had taken no sides in the wars, at least beyond the colour of his blood, as red as any Lancaster rose.

The boy ran, clattering along the walkways that rested on beams beneath the battlements. In the flickering torchlight, one of the guards put out a hand to stop him, but Henry knocked it away, making the man swear under his breath. Old Jones, stone-deaf in his right ear. The Tudor boy knew every man and woman in the castle, from those who lived within the walls and tended to the Herbert family, to the hundred or so who came up from town each morning, bringing supplies and carts and their labour.

He leaped down steps, throwing himself against the outer post with all the carelessness of youth so that he thumped hard into the rails but lost no speed. He had raced across the castle grounds a thousand times, building his wind and his agility. It showed then, coupled with a purpose that had him casting off all caution and running like a scalded cat through Pembroke grounds.

In near darkness, he scrambled through a workshop erected on the main yard, raising himself on his arms as he jumped

across piles of crates, thick with the briny green smell of the sea. On another day he might have stayed to see the silvery fish or oysters unpacked, but he had a path to follow and a burning need to know that he had not been mistaken. Across the open ground, he could see the setting sun had dropped beyond the walls, casting an odd light as he reached the stone halls around the keep, the massive tower that stretched five storeys above the rest of the castle and could be sealed against an army. Pembroke had been built for defence, though it had one weakness to those who knew it, one secret, kept well hidden.

Henry skidded as he reached the lower feast hall. He saw the Earl's constable there, a florid man in earnest conversation with one of the castle factors, both poring over a scroll as if it held the meaning of life and not just some record of slates broken or hundredweights of oak and beech. He slowed to a stiff-legged walk as he crossed the end of the hall farthest from them. Henry could sense the men looking up, or perhaps he imagined it, as they did not call out. Without even a glance at them, he reached the door and opened it on the heat and steam of the kitchens beyond.

Pembroke had two dining halls, with the kitchens running beneath the grander of the two. Staff and unimportant guests ate in the first. Henry had spent many evenings chewing bread and meat in near darkness there, begrudged even the cost of a tallow candle. He'd sat alone, while reflected light and laughter spilled from the windows above, from the greater hall where the earl entertained his favoured guests. Henry would have risked a beating to even enter that place, but that night he was concerned with the kitchens themselves – and what they concealed.

The maids and serving staff barely looked up as he entered, assuming the skinny boy was bringing back a bowl, though he usually ate off a trencher and took the slab of hard bread away

with him to gnaw or to feed to the jackdaws on the towers. Even so, Henry was familiar to them and he could not see the cook, Mary Corrigan, who would have shooed him away with her big red hands and a flapping apron. In the heat and steam from bubbling pots, the air was thick and there was bustle on all sides as the staff dug into piled ingredients and measured them out. The sight made him lick his lips and he realized he had not eaten. Should he wheedle a little food from the cooks? His gaze flickered over a pile of peeled apples, already turning a honey brown. Slabs of cheese bobbed next to them, in a pot of watery whey. How long would it be before he ate again?

As he stood there, with the clatter and smells and sheer hard work of the kitchen going on all around him, he could sense the door on the far side. Set into the stone wall, it was narrower than a man's chest, so that a soldier would have to turn to pass through. An oak plank blocked the doorway, resting on thick iron braces in the mortar. Henry could feel it there as he looked anywhere else but directly at it. He knew every stone of Pembroke, in winter and summer. There was not a storeroom or an attic or a path he had not walked, though none of them had gripped his attention as had that single door. He knew what lay beyond it. He could feel the dampness and the cold already, though his skin was sheened in sweat.

He walked across the kitchen and the staff parted before him like dancers, carrying pots and trays, clattering and calling to one another. They would feed six hundred men and some eighty women that evening, from the high table in the great hall and those closest to the young earl right down to the falconers and the priests and in a later sitting, the guards and the boys who mucked out the stables. Food was a vital part of the compact between a lord and his people, a duty and a burden, half symbol, half payment.

Henry reached the door and lifted the bar with a heave, staggering under its weight as it came free. He spent precious moments steadying the plank against the wall. Breathing hard, he took the key from where it hung, and as he inserted it, he felt a hand on his shoulder. He turned to see Mary Corrigan peering at him. She was no taller than he was himself, but seemed three times his weight in meat and bone.

'And what are you after?' she said, wiping her hands on a thick cloth. Henry could feel himself flushing, though he did not stop working the key until the ancient lock clicked open.

'I'm going down to the river, Mary. To catch an eel, perhaps.'

Her eyes narrowed slightly, but in disdain rather than suspicion.

'If Master Holt or the constable saw you using this old door, they'd skin you, you know that, don't you? Honestly, *boys*! Too lazy for the long way round. Go on with you, then. I'll lock it behind. Be sure you put the keys back on their pegs. And come back to the gatehouse. I won't hear you knocking here, not with all this noise.' To Henry's surprise, the big cook reached out and ruffled his hair with fingers strong enough to bend an iron ladle.

He felt his eyes threaten tears, though he could not remember the last time he had wept, not in all his life. There was a chance he would never set foot in Pembroke again, he realized. What passed for his family were all within the walls of that castle. It was true Mary Corrigan had beaten him three times for stealing, but she had once kissed his cheek and slipped an apple into his hand. It was the only act of kindness he could remember.

He hesitated, but recalled the dark figure of the rider. His uncle had come for him. Henry's resolve hardened and he nodded to her. The door opened with a draught of cold air and he closed it on Mary's bright perspiring cheeks, hearing

the lock click and the woman grunt as she lifted the bar and put it back. Henry steadied himself, feeling the cold seep into him after the thicker air of the kitchen.

The stairs turned immediately, so that no one who came up them would ever have room to brace himself and swing an axe. They dropped away into the cliff under Pembroke, twisting sharply. The first few steps were lit through cracks in the door, but that dim gleam lasted only to the second turn. After that, he was in blackness, thick as damp linen pressed against his face.

No one knew if the cave had been discovered after the castle was built or whether it was the reason the first wooden fort had been raised in that spot, centuries before. Henry had seen chipped flint arrowheads recovered from the cavern floor, formed by hunters from a past too distant to know. Roman coins too had been found, with the faces of dead emperors set into blackened silver. It was an old place and it had delighted Henry when he'd found it first, during a winter of solid rain when every day had been a misery of tutors, bruises and damp.

Some change in the echoes of his steps warned him before he struck the door below. It too was locked, but he felt for the key there and found it on a leather cord. It took all his strength to force the door open after he'd unlocked it, thumping his shoulder against the swollen doorjamb over and over until he fell into a much colder darkness. Panting from exertion and not a little fear, Henry shoved the door closed behind him and held the cold key in his hand, wondering just what to do with it. It didn't seem right to take such a vital thing. He could sense the huge cavern overhead – a different world, though he stood directly under Pembroke. The silence was broken by flutters of pigeons on the high stones, reacting to his presence in their mindless way. He listened harder and heard the river's gentle breath.

The darkness was complete as he stepped out, immediately knocking his shin on the keel of a rowing boat, no doubt dragged into the cave to be repaired. The existence of the cave was not the secret of Pembroke. The secret was the hidden door back in the gloom, that led to the heart of the castle above. Henry cursed and rubbed his leg, feeling the key once again. He hung it on the prow of the boat where it would be found and edged his way past on a floor that was as smooth as a riverbed.

The last barrier to the river was of iron, a gate set into stone walls built over the natural mouth of the cave. Henry collected another key and worked it in the lock until he heard a click. He stepped through and stood outside in the darkness with his back to the river, relocking the gate and tossing the key back beyond reach. He did not do that for William Herbert, with all his scorn and cruelty. He did that for Pembroke – and perhaps for Mary Corrigan. He would not leave Pembroke's secrets to be discovered by others.

He could not go back. Henry heard himself breathing hard before he summoned his will and slowed his heart, forcing calm like cream poured into bubbling soup, so that all became still. The heat was still there, but hidden, or drowned.

He turned to the river then and understood that he had been hearing the muffled sounds of a boat, somewhere close. Though there was no moon and the river was almost as black as the cave, he thought he could still make out some deeper blot, barely twenty feet long. He whistled in its direction, hoping he was not wrong.

Oars plunked and creaked, sounding loud in the night. The boat came gliding across the current and Henry Tudor stared in fear. Smugglers, fishermen, poachers and slavers – there were a number of men with reason to go out on the waters in the dark. Not many of those would take kindly to being hailed by a boy.

'Well done, lad,' came a voice from the darkness. 'And didn't your tutors say you were clever?'

'Uncle?' Henry whispered. He heard the man chuckle and began to scramble down, half falling into the boat until a dark figure grabbed him by both arms and proceeded to crush the air out of him with surprising strength. Henry felt the man's stubble rasp against his cheek and he could smell sweat and green herbs, and the odour of horses driven deep into his uncle's clothes. There were no lamps lit, not with Pembroke's walls looming above. Yet after the blackness of the cave, stars and the moon were enough for Henry to see surprisingly well as he was guided to a thwart to sit.

'Well met, lad,' Jasper Tudor said. 'And I only wish my brother could have lived to see this. Half the guards seeking me in the town, the rest following one of my men with a burning brand, while I am here – and you remembered the cave under Pembroke. Your father would be so proud of you.'

'He would not know me, Uncle,' Henry said, frowning. 'He died before I was born.' He felt himself retreating from the warmth of the man, his tone and his embrace, pulling back in all senses, finding an old comfort in coldness. He inched a fraction clear along the plank, feeling the boat rock. 'Delay no further for me, Uncle. There must be another boat, a larger one. I heard your words to William Herbert. Are we to London?'

Henry did not see the way his uncle Jasper stared, obscurely deflated. They were utter strangers, both becoming aware of it in the same moment. Henry had never known a mother or a father. Waiting in strained silence, he supposed it was not so strange that his uncle might retain some family feeling for his brother's only son. He felt no answering need in himself, only a black chill as deep as the river under them. Yet it felt like strength.

Jasper cleared his throat, shaking off the stillness that had held him.

'To London, yes. Yes, boy! My ship is moored at Tenby and this little bark is far too frail for the open sea. I have horses though, waiting a mile up the river. Can you ride, son?'

'Of course,' Henry said curtly. He'd had the training of a knight, or at least as a squire to William Herbert. It was true he'd had more in the way of cuffs and scorn than proper instruction, but he could stay in a saddle. He could handle a sword.

'Good. Once we are out of sight of the castle, we'll mount up and ride to the coast. Then London, boy! To see your namesake, King Henry. To see Lancaster restored. By God, I'm still taking it in. We are out! To roam like free men, while they search the woods for us.'

The boat moved on the current, the oars employed with little noise. For a long time, the only sounds were from the water and the harsh breath of working men. Jasper shook his head at the continuing silence of the boy. He had expected a chattering jackdaw. Instead, he had rescued a little owl, watchful and still.