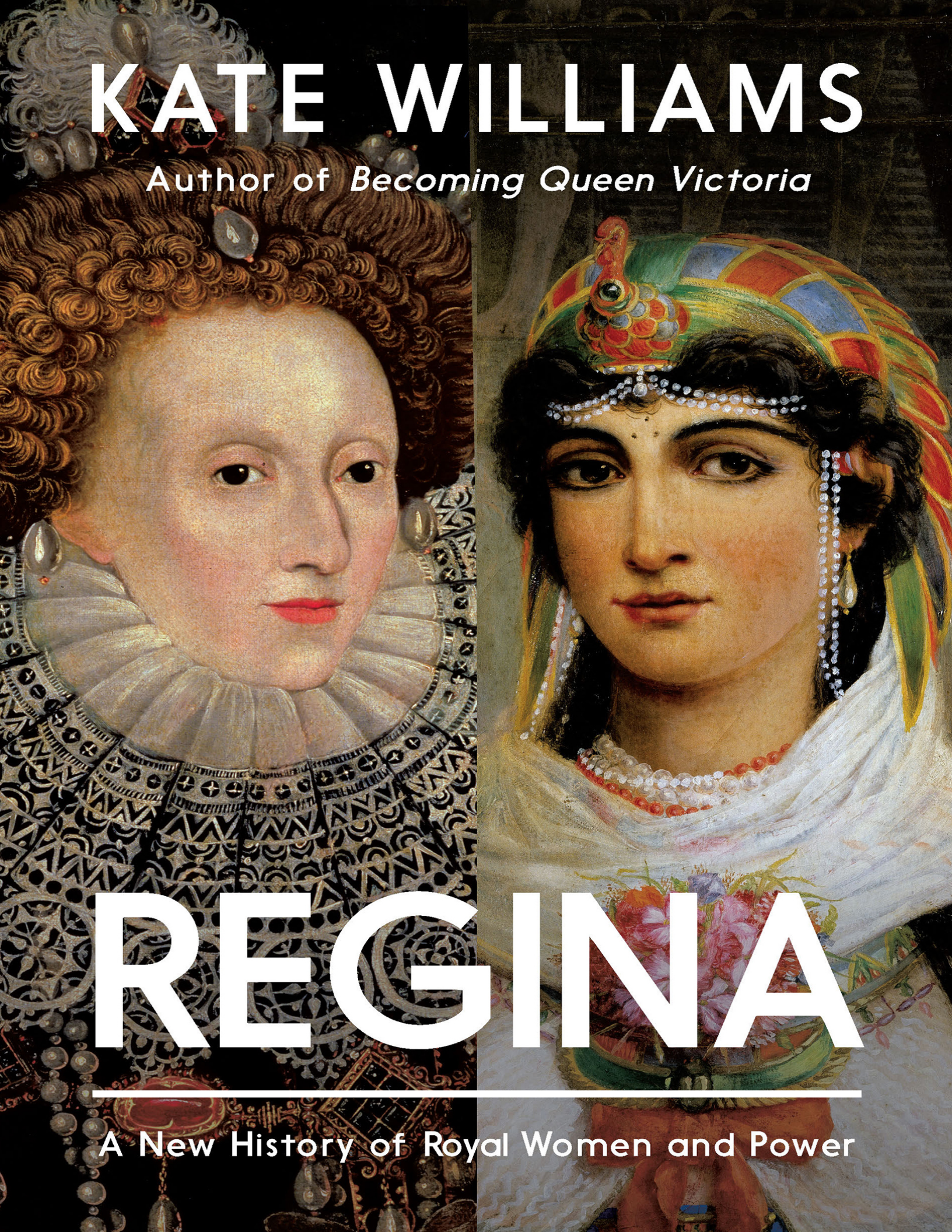

KATE WILLIAMS

Author of *Becoming Queen Victoria*

REGINA

A New History of Royal Women and Power

REGINA

A New History of Royal Women and Power

KATE WILLIAMS

PEGASUS BOOKS
NEW YORK LONDON

‘She’s my prisoner, you know,’ the Red Knight said at last.
‘I don’t know,’ Alice said doubtfully. ‘I don’t want to be anyone’s prisoner. I want to be a queen.’

—Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There*

Introduction: In the Beginning

The woman is at the back of the temple, a beautiful carving in stone. She is making offerings to the gods, behind a taller man. Slight and youthful, dressed to the ankles, she is huge, over six foot tall, but then all the figures are huge. She wears a simple gown, holds the sistrum, a sacred musical instrument, in her hand, with the young man in front of her depicted as more important. To the passing eye, she might be a temple priestess. Visitors hurry past, preferring the exquisite carvings and the sensational zodiac clock inside the bustling main temple. Yet she is Cleopatra VII, queen of Upper and Lower Egypt, the terror of Rome, speaker of over seven languages, war leader, economist, a survivor who fought and won against her siblings for power, held Egypt's independence against all the odds. In front of her is Caesarion, her child with Julius Caesar; he wears the crown of the ruler of Upper and Lower Egypt, while she wears the smaller crown of Hathor, goddess of fertility, love and motherhood. Here at Dendera Temple near Luxor one of the greatest female rulers in history is displayed as she wished to be remembered: as a holy mother-queen, founder of a new dynasty and a queen who ruled thinking of her son.

Cleopatra is called a sex goddess, a tragic failure, a cautionary tale about what can happen if you give women power: showy theatrics, death. This was how she was written about by her enemies, not how she had herself depicted, here at her favourite temple and across Egypt. In the respectable guidebook I bought at the Egyptian Museum, the author declared it 'odd' to see Cleopatra at Dendera thus, in this 'anonymous form' rather than 'flesh and blood', the 'centre-spread fold out who bedded the two most powerful Romans of her day'.[1] Centre-spread! This reduces Cleopatra to a seductive nude model, a sex queen, the object of men's desires who is punished for

provoking them, with the associations of 'spread' and 'flesh and blood'. The 'real' Cleopatra is not a ruler portraying herself to her people as a queen making offerings to the god, mother of a king, but rather a woman who poses undressed for male magazine readers. The divine mother representation of her wasn't 'odd' but probably in many temples across Egypt. But the 'spread' is only a slightly more extreme version of the Cleopatra that the world likes to think of: glamorous, led by her desires, the woman who ruined Egypt due to her passion for men. Not the queen of incredible courage who did more to stave off occupation than any other ruler, the first of her line to speak Egyptian, the bureaucrat who saved her country from famine and inflation. We are served up sexy, sex-mad Cleopatra, reclining, whether in Shakespeare's barge or a centrefold magazine. Our images of women and women leaders are constructed, mostly by men, even when the queens might try to present themselves. If Cleopatra, the most famous queen in history, is cast as being led by vanity, sexual desire and emotion (anger, an emotion associated with men, is never seen as a problem), it plays into a deep-rooted fear of giving women power, for they waste it, lose their country.

Across society, throughout history, there is an impulse to reduce queens to a single image: tragic sex goddess, warrior queen, doomed queen. Queens are criticised, portrayed as failures or seductresses to save the reputations of husbands or other male rulers. Cleopatra is castigated to make the Roman men look better, just one example of an intelligent, successful, adept ruler, reduced to a 'centrefold', a cartoon, a caricature.

This book investigates 3,000 years of female rulers – queens regnant, consorts, princesses and queens-in-waiting – and shows how female power is often erased, compromised and twisted by words and images. Sometimes, women are literally scraped off their monuments. Or if, like Cleopatra, they hang too heavily over history to be excluded, they are instead reduced to lurid examples of sex and destruction. Why do we see queens and royal women in the way we do? They are either feted beyond measure as warrior queens, saints or fairy princesses or castigated as monsters, sexual obsessives, feminine failures.

Queens are mythological beings. They are so woven round with myths and stories, legends that dress them more vitally than their crowns. Cleopatra becomes a seductress, Catherine the Great loved a horse, any male

counsellor is assumed to be a lover. Their contribution tends to be minimised. Marie Antoinette's shoe-shopping threw a whole nation into debt; she was so reviled that she had to be executed along with her husband in a much less fair trial, while her husband's brothers, the male heirs to the throne, were left alive (and later took the throne). Cutting off the queen consort's head was to symbolise the end of the monarchy. Ranavalona of Madagascar was a monster, Mary I is not known as the first queen regnant of England but 'Bloody Mary' because she burned over 280 at the stake – while her father, Henry VIII, had executed tens of thousands and her cousin's child, James I, would burn around 2,500 Scottish women because he decided they were witches (spoiler: they weren't). Joanna of Spain was declared mad by her husband and father and even her son so they could seize her country. Queen Lili'uokalani of Hawaii was imprisoned in her own palace after being presented as despotically hanging on to royal privilege, not allowed to write in prison but permitted a needle and thread, she sewed her story of resistance into a quilt. Even the 'good' queens, whom history has presented as protecting and improving their country, get swamped by their image, whether warrior like Boudica or Zenobia, or virgin queen like Elizabeth I. And most royal woman are, particularly Elizabeth, seemingly, punished for 'vanity', a catch-all that encompasses wearing royal jewels or being portrayed as the mythological figure the public wanted, Venus or Gloriana, or at the top of the social tree at Versailles. Even suffering from an eating disorder is cast as 'vanity'.

The portrayal of queens and royal women matters. They are often the most visible women in history, and in some periods of history they are the only women we really know about. What is said about them impacts the perception of all women. If a queen, meant to be above all women, can't hold power or manage money or stay faithful, why should any female be given any self-determination, independent income or freedom in real life? Early monastic chroniclers wrote about shocking queens as cautionary moral tales, later we have satirists or newspaper reporters who create caricatures for public consumption, and then, in the modern day, repeatedly come accusations that women are self-indulgent, vain, lacking intellect, seducing, ruling men, blamed for their own sexual assault. Even though royal women live in gilded cages of money and privilege, exercising power over the lives of thousands, still their representations matter. They rebound on all women.

We live on a planet on which women in many regions are denied a voice; even in the most powerful country in the world it looks pretty unlikely that a woman will be voted president – and what we say about female rulers in the past impacts on how we see the likelihood of being led by women again. By placing all these royal women in one book we see how narratives are repeated, across countries, across centuries.

Nearly 1,500 years before Cleopatra, a pinnacle was commissioned by the woman who may have been the first Egyptian female monarch, Hatshepsut, to top her stupendous obelisk at the Temple of Karnak, near modern-day Luxor. The obelisk was inscribed with her figure giving offerings to the great god Amun. After Hatshepsut died, her stepson (and nephew) Thutmose became sole ruler and sent out stonemasons and builders across the country to literally erase her image and name. They did a hack job, rushed and incompetent. On the obelisk they replaced her figure with some hastily etched flowers. And so the obelisk made no sense: as if a random bunch of flowers were making offerings to Amun. Thutmose wanted her forgotten – and she was, until nineteenth-century archaeologists questioned the inscriptions, which seemed to vary between 'she' and 'he'. The slapdash stonemasons had inadvertently left some 'she's behind. If they'd made more effort, perhaps we would never have known about Hatshepsut at all.

We can write a history of the world through queens because there are more than we think, even though so many have been forgotten. Their countries remember them, but the world does not recall the queen of the Maldives, the queen of Hawaii, the early empresses of Japan. When a male monarch loses his country or throne, history discusses the economy, the army, the political conditions. We find reasons. With a woman it is all about her personality, her passions, her flaws. In the end, there is an elision of country and monarch. And to make a country female, even if only for a little while, excavates thoughts about women and their role in society which encase mistrust, fear and a belief that in the end, women are there to submit, and so having a female ruler means you will have to submit.

More rarely, queens are seen as extraordinary warriors, incredible governors, brilliant minds – and therefore not 'really' women. Too often, female power is tolerated by declaring it exceptional. So that ordinary

women don't get ideas above their station. If we look behind the image of supposedly 'failed' queens, from Cleopatra to Lili'uokalani to Mary I, we see that they were in fact more successful than has been admitted. As for the ones we see as great, we should consider how they fit into a tradition, building on women who have come before, often on the work of their mother and grandmother, rather than as magical, strange women who only come along once in a blue moon. Queens consort, thus, often create formidable queens regnant, and indeed many queens regnant created and secured their power, like Hatshepsut, while they were wife to the king. But the queen consort tends to get it the worst: if the public turns against the king and what he stands for, they will revile her with more force (he might just be sacred after all). We often undervalue the queen consort and overvalue the contribution of the queen regnant (everything that went wrong was due to her); consorts are, in this book, so often power brokers.

Monarchs are images, sold to us through carvings, oral stories, paintings and more recently photography and film. And we might say women are elided with their image more than men, for a woman's appearance matters – it is taken to explain her personality and motivations. One of the biggest burdens on a queen is that she must be symbolic – of motherhood, purity, power, even sexuality. The threads of symbolism, expectation and misogyny, the belief that a woman can only survive if she is seen as useful (usually meaning young and beautiful), are wrapped tightly round royal women. Some queens harness this symbolism effectively to create their power, and then it is turned against them. As we will see, queens can perform their role with excellence but if society decides it no longer needs them they will fall. The image imposed on a queen tells us what society wants to say about female rule, and women in general.

And what do we do with a ruler in a woman's body? The woman's body is cast as inferior, the heterosexual act so often cast as submission. Queens are often either sexualised or cast as male in their qualities, from Hatshepsut and Khadijah wearing male dress to Elizabeth, as the Virgin Queen, reported as saying she had the heart and stomach of a king. Thus the queen, all queens, have a problem with the female body; deny it exists and be called unfeminine (and such behaviour is generally only allowed in war), or admit it, like Cleopatra, marry and procreate and be called weak and sensual. Monarchs need to have heirs and they need to marry in order to create

international alliances. But marriage is often a disaster for queens, husbands try to seize power or the queen is presented as dominated. Queens are supposed to have children (sons), but when the consort of a ruler has a son, as in ancient Rome, the chroniclers cast her as power-hungry for him; she can't win. It is only, perhaps, when rule turns constitutional that female monarchs can be admired: Queen Victoria becomes the exemplary image of motherhood and Elizabeth II is valued for her judicious silence.

Queens live in a world of impossible riches and privilege (unless they are thrown in prison), they eat well when many in their countries have nothing, they can direct the death of their subjects. Yet to be a queen is to take a poisoned chalice: their position makes them dangerous, so they are likely to be seized, assaulted, killed – and if they are defrauded, like Marie Antoinette, or sexually assaulted, like Mary, Queen of Scots, or even chronically ill, they will be blamed for it. Because surely a queen should be able to resist. There are three key historical periods in which female power was particularly strong apart from the ancient world: from around 400 to 900 CE; the sixteenth century; and the nineteenth. Sometimes queens gain the most power in times of chaos – perhaps people think, nothing else has worked, why not try a woman? Overall, these periods see the emergence of different realities: from warrior society into settled culture; from agrarian civilisation into a civil service bureaucracy; and from separate states to empires. And yet, from the matriarchal monarchies in Cambodia to the early female empresses of Japan to Henry VII and the Tudors claiming a male lineage, the often militarised regimes that come next cross them out. Many of the last monarchs of countries before they were taken over by imperial powers were queens, from Ranavalona III of Madagascar to the queen of Tahiti. Liliʻuokalani wished to be a true queen regnant of her country, but the colonising powers she lobbied wanted her to appear at their parties, for her to be content to play a symbol of a bygone age. Queens seem like a glittering thing, female images of power. But they are often there to be cast into a hole, lined up and have things thrown at them. This book is about queens who resisted. They are extremely unlikely rebels, royal revolutionaries. Yet this is what they are. The queen is supposed to uphold rule, and that means society geared towards men. But her very act of being there lets in a chink; the suggestion that male rule doesn't always work.

I have combed through letters and archives, searching for the voices of these ruling women, trying to reconstruct their lives and stories, been to their palaces and ruins, archaeological sites. Some women we see through fragments, the words of hostile male chroniclers; some we find through their own letters and diaries; some of them are swamped in the images that survive. About so many, we still know so little; we have no contemporary portrait of Anne Boleyn, no tomb for Cleopatra. Commentators in different forms had their turn, from Roman commentators to religious writers, portraitists, and then much later, paparazzi photographers. If Princess Diana's 'smile' held up whole businesses in Fleet Street, it reminds us that this is a story about power but also about money. Commentators make profit from the royal woman's body and they also want their riches. It was Cleopatra's money that Rome really wanted, but they couldn't say that; it had to be a war of 'honour'. We have to dig hard through the sheer weight of representations, searching for the real woman in the gaps in the archive, in the cracks and fissures in what men say.

We often hear that history is the story of kings and queens, but in reality we usually only discuss the men, with only the odd exceptional woman such as Elizabeth I allowed to join the club. Queens, otherwise, are often cast as failures, or seen as irrelevant. This history of the world through queens indicates that if society can avoid giving women power, it will. But when women rule they are often successful, although we often have to excavate past sexist representations to find evidence of their achievements. The world was fashioned by women in so many ways, by ordinary women creating economies and families, and by queens creating mythologies and fighting for their nations. This book will look at numerous female rulers and power brokers and show how they reformed the societies over which they reigned and how much what we think of them still shapes how we see the world today.

CHAPTER ONE
Broken Statues: Hatshepsut

In a temple a mile or so from the Nile, there is a carving of a little king. Over three thousand years old, he is much deteriorated, but we can make out on the walls the story of his conception. The infant is part divine, shaped on the potter's wheel by the creator God, complete with male genitalia. The all-powerful god Amun visited the queen in the Palace and he was conceived, the child who would rule Egypt. And yet this story is not that of a king – it is a she-king. She is Hatshepsut, one of the earliest female rulers in known history, who reigned for some twenty-one years from around 1479 BCE and became one of the greatest monarchs in history.

She was admired, all powerful.

And then she was forgotten.

Thousands of years later, nineteenth-century Egyptologists were examining a major temple on the west bank of the Nile, the place of the dead, as the sun set. The temple was surrounded by broken monuments and statues, covered in symbols, which the Europeans thought to be ornamental. When French scholar Jean-François Champollion published his breakthrough attempt at cracking the code of the Rosetta Stone, revealing that hieroglyphs were a language, scholars returned to look anew at the broken statues. Champollion himself went to the temple. The more he translated, the more he was baffled. For the carvings praised a pharaoh, and yet the pharaoh was referred to as female, 'she'. It didn't seem possible. But, as he and the other scholars realised, there had been a female king; or a *roi-reine*. The spectacular temple

was that of Hatshepsut, her Mansion of Millions of Years, the broken statues were tributes to her, and she had, they saw, been scrubbed out of history.

Temple recycling was a common phenomenon between Egyptian monarchies and dynasties, but this was something more. After her death, Thutmose III, her stepson, nephew and successor (and a few other monarchs) had ordered her statues broken and the images of her removed from her temples, or turned into references to kings. We are fortunate that destroying the mighty Mansion of Millions of Years itself was, for him, a step too far. Even more happily for us, workmen at the mortuary temple and on the other monuments cut corners: her body is scrubbed off but not entirely lost. The baby on the potter's wheel has been damaged, but not removed. In the section where she is paid tribute at her coronation, she is merely a scrape on the wall – but you can tell someone was there. She is a shadow everywhere in her Mansion of Millions of Years, and also at the wondrous, world-famous temple at Karnak, where she was once a priestess. She is even replaced by a random bunch of flowers on her own magnificent obelisk. And destroying a statue had far-reaching effects. Statues and other images had to be ritually activated, usually identified by a written name. And they could also be deactivated, negating an aspect of the dead person's 'use' of that image as a conduit. Breaking her statues would mean blocking Hatshepsut from getting to the afterlife.

Perhaps the workers were afraid to remove her name and likeness entirely. They left shadows of the queen where she had been removed, in case she truly was the daughter of the god. Or perhaps they had no idea which representation of her was which, and only took out the most obvious ones. Or they simply knocked off early for lunch. Either way, it was a lackadaisical effort (and the whole thing was accelerated by general decay and the later advent of Akhenaten, who decided Aten was the supreme God, not Amun, and sent out workers to scrub out mentions of Amun). We are fortunate. Had a better job been done, we might never have known about her.

The broken statuary, and Thutmose III's attack on her legacy, were interpreted by scholars as evidence she was a power-mad monster whom her stepson had rightfully punished by destroying her legacy. One distinguished 1950s curator who had worked on her temple dubbed her 'the vilest type of usurper', a 'vain, ambitious and unscrupulous woman' (vanity is often a slur

thrown at queens who attempt to memorialise their achievements).[1] She had not stepped up to the job in a time of crisis – she had stolen it out of pure ambition. Plenty declared that Hatshepsut's key advisor, Senenmut, had been her lover and had pushed her forward – another common theme about women rulers, thousands of miles and thousands of years apart, is that they must be sleeping with any male advisor or supporter. For why else would a man assist or support a woman? It is a version of the old suspicion that any woman in power must have slept her way to the top. We don't ask why men in certain positions exploit their status to get sex, instead we accuse women. And so even female monarchs are accused of retaining men's loyalty through having sex with them. Why on earth would any men work for a woman otherwise? It is emasculating, thus, for a man to be advising a female monarch, without being able to redress the status quo in the old way, through being in a relationship with her. So Hatshepsut must have seduced her main advisor. And, as a vile usurper, she was the wicked stepmother of Thutmose III. Thank heavens he took revenge and restored the tradition of male rule! Even now it is said that the destruction was not too bad, that much can be explained by the usual temple-recycling that occurred between pharaohs.[2]

Hatshepsut's temple, facing the city of Luxor, is now one of the greatest ancient sites in the world, the route to it flanked with stalls selling flashing pyramids and ice cream, when once it was an avenue of sphinxes. It was the Mansion of Millions of Years, called 'Holy of Holies', built to unite her perpetually with Amun. And it was once a riot of colour, trees and greenery, a beautiful oasis. Standing in the Temple of Hatshepsut, facing all the magnificent carvings and reliefs and pillars, you are as close as you can be to her. This was the monument she created that all Thebes, the city on the site of our modern-day Luxor, could see and it would have been entered only by her inner circle and the gods themselves. It contained the images of herself she wished to be memorialised. You pass up into the most important two terraces, the middle levels, one on the left and one on the right. To the north-west it is the trade mission that she sent to the dazzling land of Punt. To the south-west it is her birth story, telling how she was born to rule. Elsewhere we see her as a sphinx crushing Egypt's enemies. Interestingly, more sphinxes seem to have been created in Hatshepsut's reign than that of

any ruler before her, perhaps because they were often associated with royal women, or because their hybrid nature appealed to those memorialising a king-queen.[3]

There is a section of the temple suggesting a mighty battle against Nubia, which she vanquished as her father had done. But for me the most important is her birth story, her book describing herself. She told how she was a female pharaoh, a queen-god, a daughter of a god and a queen, created through divine conception when Amun entered the palace, always destined to rule. In fact, she was an excluded female who had to fight for the throne, using networks of loyalty and political acumen to win it and myth-making and financial skill to keep it. The wondrous story leaves out her life as chief queen and queen consort, which gave her the temporal influence to secure her power while she built her network of supporters, as well as her role as high priestess, through which she was allied with the priestly class – and already chosen by the god. Hatshepsut, it has been said, was doing something unique and original with her story here, but also she was adopting the male tradition of telling a semi-divine birth story, one which would go on and on through history. However, I would say she emphasises the position of her mother, the queen, more than other kings had done. The queen and Amun are communing, happily conversing side by side. Hatshepsut was a brilliant narrative weaver, a storyteller.

Amun, the all-seeing god, often refers in the carved temple sequence to Hatshepsut as female, declaring: 'I will join for her the two lands in peace', and also, 'I will make her appearance above the gods, because of her dignity of king of Upper and Lower Egypt'[4]. And yet she has a male shape. Thousands of years before the modern era, she was founding a new mythology as a female king. And yet getting to that position was only possible because she used all the available routes of female power: the role of queen consort and king's sister, the position of Regent and most of all the sensational authority given to her because she was appointed Amun's high priestess.

Hatshepsut was a successful ruler, but the greatness she achieved was enabled by a culture that was familiar with female influence and authority, bolstered by a unique situation in which the wife and the daughter of the male ruler were the formidable priestesses. As we will see, often more female

rulers come up from the position of being the wife of the king, as opposed to the daughter of the king, taking over from husband not father – she was both wife and daughter, but in her battle for the throne, wife was more important. Egypt had no word for a 'queen', you were King's Daughter or King's Wife or King's Sister. But being the chief sister or daughter or wife could bring influence. The decades before Hatshepsut saw an extraordinary elevation of royal women at court, and particularly through adopting the role of high priestess of the god Amun. To say, as earlier scholars did, that she seized the throne out of cruel ambition is an impossible sexist fantasy: if a woman takes the reins it is because the significant elites around her agree with her doing so. Hatshepsut was effective at creating loyalty. She was also in the right place at the right time, alive in a period that allowed females particular influence at court. Hatshepsut spun a narrative around herself as a scion of the gods, a man-woman, female king, gradually adopting male insignia, and her court was delighted to consume the story.

Under Hatshepsut, wealth rolled into the country. She made monuments to herself across her realm, created a magnificent temple carved with the story of her birth, sent out trade missions. She was a king-queen-goddess, perhaps the greatest queen of the ancient world and one of the most powerful monarchs in history. And, yet, she is not always valued in the history books, not always seen as one of the most powerful queens. More attention is given to the women perceived as dramatic failures, presented as crashing their way through the treasuries of their country, unable to control themselves with spending (this 'feminine' inability to control spending is the reason given as to why credit cards were not allowed for women without male oversight until 1974 in the UK). The fact is that those female rulers who can be accused of a tragedy in history – like Cleopatra, who is blamed for the loss of Egypt to Rome – are the ones that history can't forget, as everybody must make it very clear it was not the male rulers' fault. And these female rulers, cast as sexy, tragic failures, can intersect with our fear of giving women power. Those like Hatshepsut who, as one scholar puts it, 'did everything right', filled the coffers, expanded the realm, created prosperity, fought back against enemies or worked with diplomacy to keep them on side, are more easily wiped out, as the next rulers want to take their achievements for their own.[5]

Egypt is old. We are closer to Cleopatra than she was to the building of the Great Pyramids. Cleopatra would not have known of Hatshepsut, who lived 1400 years before her, but although her own line was a long one of powerful women, she would probably have known there were female monarchs before the Ptolemies. For ancient Egypt accorded more authority to the wife of a king than almost everywhere else in the ancient world. In the Great Pyramid Ages of the fourth to sixth dynasties (2613–2181 BCE), queens consort were given their own pyramids, as well as in the twelfth dynasty (1991–1802 BCE), and many have elaborate graves, notably buried separately from their husbands. Pharaohs often married their half-sisters, and royal daughters were only allowed to marry their brothers – which meant a rather confined life for those who did not marry, but significant influence for those who did. At his coronation, each pharaoh was given four new names as well as his birth name, including one referring to two goddesses of Egypt – even the male leaders carried a female reference. Perhaps it was Hatshepsut herself who introduced the use of the term 'Great House' or '*per aa*', and thus pharaoh to refer to the monarch. The use of Great House (meaning palace) certainly came in during her dynasty, the eighteenth, and denoted neither woman nor man; it referred to the house, and thus the royal blood that she possessed in abundance. Although, notably, it was never the official title of the monarch (using it as a name for all Egyptian kings comes from the Hebrew Bible).[6]

Egypt was always the breadbasket of the world (so said the Roman Empire), and its religion was always predicated on fertility, its rich agricultural land and the flooding of the Nile: when the river burst its banks in summer it left the land in prime condition for crops. Its religion was full of goddesses who played a key part, from when Isis (dating back to the Old Kingdom, long before Hatshepsut), after her brother-husband was killed, reconstructed him with her magic and gave birth to his son. Women had life-giving qualities, like the Nile, and they were magical. By the time of the New Kingdom and Hatshepsut, religion had given a significant role to the high priestess, always a royal woman, to interact with the god Amun himself – significantly, the role of High Priest and God's Wife of Amun only came in not long before Hatshepsut appeared on the scene. Egypt was ruled by a series of families, and within these dynasties, security was derived from

extraordinary investment in the importance of blood. The monarchy of Egypt demonstrates a point that will weave through this book: that monarchies which give roles to women as consorts, queen mothers, sisters or religious ministers usher in female agency. Give more influence and authority to a consort, and her daughter may one day be queen. And yet so many women, inheritors of this long line of female significance, tend to be remembered merely as failures or placeholders for men. They are erased.

One of the earliest queens in history was long held to be Queen Kubaba of Mesopotamia but she is now believed mythical, partly because she was said to have ruled for 100 years. Mesopotamia did accord many of its royal women great influence. Elite women took on a crucial role for the monarch, conducting rituals as priestesses, caring for the gods and goddesses. They also worked as mobile diplomats, travelling to cities and towns across their kingdoms to conduct rituals and attend banquets, keeping up good relations with gods across the kingdom. Queen Baranamtarra of Lagash, from around 2400 BCE, in modern day south-east Iraq, left records of her administration of the extensive queen's estate, employing over 700 people in agriculture and fishing. Her role as queen was also to create diplomatic relations with nearby city states such as next-door Adab. She and the queen consort of Adab kept up a flow of gifts and letters back and forth, from copper to donkeys.

In the royal burial cemetery at Ur, archaeologists in the 1920s found over 2,000 tombs. One had been untouched over the centuries and it was found to be that of Queen Puabi, who reigned around 2550 BCE. It was crammed with astonishing grave goods, including a chariot and jewellery of gold and lapis lazuli. She had been buried with dozens of attendants in death pits around her tomb. But there was no mention of her husband, so it may be that she ruled in her own right.

The first queens we truly know are Egyptian. Queen Merneith ruled from around 2950 BCE, initially for her young son, who was later her successor, but it is possible that she ruled in her own right. Much of our knowledge of her comes from Abydos, a sacred city where early rulers were buried. Merneith's tomb there is as big as those of the other pharaohs, her husband and son, suggesting she had similar status. She is interred with over forty courtiers and servants, along with a wealth of other grave goods. A seal

found in her son's tomb at Saqqara, an hour or so from Cairo, lists her as a ruler, noting her as 'King's Mother', probably because she was regent. There may be others; as men went to war, royal women took the role of regent, a custom of a temporary assumption of power that meant that they would always be surrounded by circles of influence, men waiting for that moment when they might become the stand-in monarch.[7]

Over 1,500 years after Merneith came Sobekneferu, who reigned for about four years, probably around 1780 BCE, until her death. On the passing of the king before her, Amenemhat IV, most likely her brother or husband or her brother-husband, she claimed the throne – and, like Hatshepsut later, would trace her line of legitimacy to her father, not her husband. When the king was thought of as a god on earth, it was only a small jump to see his daughter as a goddess too – and who would want to unseat a goddess? Sobekneferu, whose name means 'the beauties of Sobek', adopted the style of a king and presented herself as full ruler. And she wielded the iconography of Sobek, the crocodile god, after the sacred Nile crocodile.

Sobek was associated with fertility and military success and was invoked to protect against danger. Amenemhat III, her father, engaged in building works to praise Sobek, and the centre of his worship was the city of Fayoum, sixty miles south-west of Cairo, dubbed 'Crocodilopolis' by the Greeks. By associating with the crocodile god, Sobekneferu at once portrayed herself as the true inheritor of her father and as a crocodile god, a queen who brought riches and fertility. She used a male god, one who was also explicitly linked with male qualities such as military power. This stunning act of self-presentation, staking herself as equal to her father, succeeded – for four years at least. A statue of her face and bust was lost in the Second World War after being on show in the Egyptian Museum in Berlin, but the lower section was found in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, and the throne shows the inscription 'uniting the two lands' – an inscription for a king. Another statue of her, headless and now in the Louvre, shows her wearing at once male and female dress – a woman's shift dress, with a male kilt over the top and a king's headdress over her shoulders.

Sobekneferu's skill at narrative building suggests she may not have been the first to be a queen-ruler-god, but she laid down the rules for the success

of a female monarch: become the male god and adopt male insignia. Egyptian society was one of buildings, temples, tributes and statues, rather than war efforts, and imagery was key. Sobekneferu stuck to one idea: the crocodile god. As she knew, the image of the ruler had to be instantly recognisable.

Hatshepsut also knew this – and the god she took on was Amun, the all-powerful god himself. And she began early. As block 287 on her wondrous Red Chapel at Karnak portrays, during a mighty festival watched by all the elites celebrating Amun, the child Hatshepsut was selected, pretty much out of nowhere, as the future ruler by the god himself. And then it was destiny. Or so she said.

Hatshepsut was born around 1500 BCE to the king, Thutmose I and the Great Royal Wife, Ahmose. She was raised at the palace under the doting eye of her mother; Ahmose had no other children and all her hopes were invested in Hatshepsut. Thutmose had sons by other wives, but these women were very much less favoured than Ahmose. She was the Great Royal Wife and she wanted to cement her power through her daughter. Thutmose himself had been given the throne in the absence of any children of King Amenhotep, possibly even, as Kara Cooney suggests, manoeuvred in by queen Ahmose-Nefetari, the mother of Amenhotep.[8] Probably a general and a minor royal, Thutmose was swiftly married to Ahmose, probably a relation to Ahmose-Nefetari. She positioned young Ahmose to retain influence – likely the girl was royal, as she was named for the pharaoh Ahmose I. Thutmose owed his throne to being judged capable by the military and political elites – and to female power. And he and Ahmose were keen to use Hatshepsut as an asset.

At roughly seven or eight, little Hatshepsut was watching a festival, in front of the Temple of Karnak. Priests carried the statue of the god Amun out of his sanctuary so that he could perform his act of revelation, a miraculous moment when he communicated with the crowd. Amun was the supreme god of the sun, who brought life to the world. He was shown to the crowd. Usually he was carried on a barque on the shoulders of the priests, and he naturally swayed from one side to another – so the side he favoured would be seen as the answer. And yet on this occasion the god did not move.

The watchers were struck with anxiety. And then the god's statue started to move towards the river, and then to the nearby royal palace, and Hatshepsut herself came forth and threw herself to the ground. The god was talking to her. She called out that the plans of his majesty were great, and he was her father, the being that created all. She asked him, 'What is it you desire to happen? I will do according to all that you have ordered.' The god then sent her to the Great Chapel and there she was told her destiny, that she would rule. The people had never seen anything like it. Hatshepsut had been chosen.

Hatshepsut told the story in the Red Chapel, the most sacred and central part of Karnak during her reign and her funerary temple. As she later had inscribed on one of her huge obelisks dedicated to Amun at Karnak, 'I acted under his command, it was he who led me. I did not plan a work without his doing. It was he who gave me the directions.' It was shockingly courageous and bold. In a world where power was passed between men and there were men ready to take it, she was claiming it for herself on the basis that she had been chosen by Amun.

She did have a head start. When the ceremony that picked out Hatshepsut took place, the princess had already been working towards becoming the high priestess, called God's Wife of Amun – a job always given to the wife or daughter of the king. The role of priestess or god's wife had been elevated under the great ruler Ahmose I and his wife and sister, Ahmose-Nefetari, who reigned only a few decades before Hatshepsut was born. Ahmose-Nefetari had been the first God's Wife of Amun. She was worshipped as a full-blown goddess and patron of workers in the Valley of the Kings. She performed rituals for the God, and she had unique access to the temple and the religious ruling class. God's Wife was the equivalent of the high priest, who had ruled access to the gods and interpreted their desires for hundreds of years, who created the rituals that would summon the gods to their statues, and Hatshepsut began training for the role as a toddler. It may have been that the role of God's Wife was created because the king no longer had the time for all the rituals, and wanted to keep the priest class happy by giving them a good stand-in. Whatever the reason, it was a benefit to the woman.

It's impossible to overstate the importance of the God's Wife. From her earliest years, Hatshepsut was communing daily with Amun – and he, the

sun god, was everything. The ancient Egyptians invented the twenty-four-hour clock, not to designate the days or times to work but to ascertain when precisely the god should receive his offerings and prayers, to keep the sun god on his journey through the day. When life was ruled by agriculture and the longed-for yearly flooding of the Nile, the god needed persuading to bring riches to Egypt. And so the young priestess who encouraged him into action had prodigious influence. Every day Hatshepsut was at work in the small temple room at Karnak, worshipping the god and praising him, asking him to send his blessings to Egypt. She had a set of complex rituals to learn: singing, chanting, using the sistrum, a metal rattle used in worship, in what would have been rites of religious ecstasy. If she failed, the crops would fail. Her role was to love Amun, spiritually, emotionally and even physically, giving him the divine revelation of her beauty; if she loved the god, she would bring plenty and peace to her land. The sexual nature of the process of regeneration gave the woman a unique power; no priest could do what she did, love the god mentally and physically. Eventually, she became a full priestess, moving through the rituals with the statue of the god, her beauty and semi-deity part of the colossal cycle of regeneration. And she could become a vessel for his wishes, the one who understood his wants.

God's Wife of Amun, visiting Amun regularly in the inner temple of Karnak, was given her own palace, hundreds of staff and lands which generated immense profit, storerooms of goods in the treasury. And most of all, she was on close terms with the priest class; the men who held all the power. She learned that to succeed you needed not a few men but a group behind you. Her role was sacred and truly divine, but also rooted in the Egyptian structures of power and money.

Karnak became little Hatshepsut's home from home. Now one of the most visited sites in the world, its huge carved pillars in a million photographs, few remember it as once Hatshepsut's place. She first entered the sacred walls as trainee Wife. It was where she learned to be a ruler. Thebes, now Luxor, had been built up by her father and Hatshepsut's dynasty installed it as the capital of their vision of a unified Egypt, a flourishing site for business and the civil service. Religion was at the heart of everything, and the Temple of Karnak was all-commanding. She appears to have had a palace there, keeping an eye on the building works.

Hatshepsut knew the god better than anyone, so it was little wonder that he had selected her as a successor. Her half-brother, whom she was destined to marry, was not strong. Hatshepsut was a dynamite combination: a myth-weaver and an efficient networker and bureaucrat. Modern-day politicians who fail to win leadership within their party are judged as failing to have won over enough fellow party members, chatting in the tea rooms or on WhatsApp groups. It was no different in ancient Egypt. You needed a band of supporters, who would then expect a reward. Most of the grand Temple of Karnak was inaccessible to the nobles and politicians; even on festivals they could essentially only stand in the front garden. Hatshepsut went all the way in, right to the very heart, even alone. And court and priests both would speak to her as a confidante, ask her for information. She used this relationship as she moved towards power, leveraging her strong connections with the priesthood. The story of Amun picking out the little girl in his festival wasn't magic: the priest class had chosen Hatshepsut as a successor they could trust.

When she was around fourteen, Thutmose I, Hatshepsut's father, died and her half-brother by a secondary wife was anointed successor as Thutmose II. The boy was young and had weak health and her own mother, Ahmose, became his regent – and soon Hatshepsut was married to him. She was a king's daughter, a king's sister, a king's wife and great high priestess, and her mother was regent. Ahmose, as king mother, directed the army and politics; she was allowed to do so because the elites around her saw her as the secure ruler compared to the frail little boy. And what Ahmose could not achieve as regent she achieved through her daughter as high priestess. Intelligent, divinely adored by Amun, watchful and alert to the impact of spectacle and show, Hatshepsut negotiated the labyrinthine world of the court – with her mother as guide. And plenty of course would have believed that Amun really had selected her out. No doubt she believed the same.

The young Hatshepsut's next step towards power would be to bear a son and thus become regent for her child when her husband-king died. Instead, she had a daughter, Neferure. And then her husband died after only three years on the throne. Hatshepsut was sixteen or seventeen, mother of a daughter who could not reign. It seemed as if it was time for her to sink into the background. And yet, fortunately, the next ruler was decreed by the god to be a two-year-old son of her husband by a minor wife. The priest class

would have chosen him – and the benefit of a tiny child and such a minor wife was that a Regent must be put in place, and who better than the Great Wife? Hatshepsut declared she had been designated as regent in the moment when the god Amun had turned to her at Karnak and said that Neferure would marry the boy when she was older. The elites were behind her – her mother had proved that the Great Wife was the best person to reign for a minor king. And she knew the political circle of advisors as they had served her brother and indeed, some of them, her father.[9] She began to appoint her own advisors. And, still only a teenager, she initiated huge building projects, as her father had – temples, chapels, statues and other buildings – which made those around her rich and brought glory to the god Amun. We have little evidence that Queen Ahmose commissioned monuments, but Hatshepsut was acting like her father. The architect and courtier Ineni, who had supervised building projects for Thutmose I and then for his daughter, had inscribed on his tomb in the Valley of the Nobles at Luxor: 'Her majesty praised me and she loved me. She knew my excellence in the palace. She provided me with things and she made me great.' This was her strategy, to say to supporters, follow me and you will become rich. Wise.

The new regent commissioned images of herself as God's Wife of Amun in temples across Egypt as well as tributes to her husband. She also continued to work as God's Wife of Amun, consolidating her power. At the same time, she began her mighty partnership with the architect Senenmut, whom she advanced into high position. Totally loyal, he was tutor to her daughter, and as her architect she sent him to Aswan to commission from the red granite quarries majestic obelisks paying tribute to Amun. These giant needles soaring to the sky would be erected at the Temple of Karnak. Senenmut then let everyone know what he was doing by carving into one of the rocks on the river, for all those sailing past, an image of him offering his work to Hatshepsut as God's Wife of Amun and an inscription declaring her as the one to whom the god had given majesty; captions that only the elites could read. She was 'King's Daughter, King's Sister, God's Wife, Great King's Wife'. This inscription contains the first ever Egyptian wording of *hemet es*, literally 'Her Majesty'. This idea of a female monarch, a female majesty was new and challenging. But she, as a temple in Nubia put it, was the daughter of the gods, 'the daughter who has come forth from you'.[10] The act of

construction, especially commissioning obelisks, so hard to excavate and transport, is that of a king. Hatshepsut put allies in roles of influence at court, controlling religion, building and the treasury. She had garnered power as a princess, as a priestess and as a consort. She had put images of herself on buildings. She gained influence – and then made her move.

When Hatshepsut was about twenty-five, at around year seven of the little boy's reign, she declared herself sole ruler. It was a stunning moment. The boy king was thrust out just as he should have been moving into his role as full king.

Hatshepsut, astonishingly, said she was monarch even though the male heir was very much alive, albeit a child. She repeatedly justified her new position with the claim that she was commanded by Amun, doing his bidding, as well as emphasising her lineage from her father. And most of all, she made a pact with the priesthood. They knew she would build temples to their glory and pay tribute to Amun.

When Hatshepsut took the role of king, she passed the position of priestess and God's Wife of Amun to Neferure. Her stepson was not in the role of consort. Hatshepsut was the pharaoh and her daughter was cast as the queen. She erected the obelisks from Aswan at Karnak, explaining that Amun had told her to do so, decorating them with a vision of herself performing rituals directly with the god. The two obelisks, the tallest structures that her people would ever have seen, were specifically positioned. Their coating of silver and gold would catch the sun in the morning and late afternoon, sending the rays of the sun into the heart of the temple and creating a brilliant sheet of light through which Amun could be present. Hatshepsut's image was carved into the pillars, which reminded the world of her connection to the temple where she had first been greeted by Amun. Every power move proclaimed her legitimacy and was portrayed as religious devotion. It is the top of one of these obelisks that is now in central position in the first gallery of the Grand Egyptian Museum – with her form scratched out and replaced by poorly etched flowers.

As sole ruler Hatshepsut needed a new iconography, more formidable than the one she had used as regent and Great Wife. She was now a manifestation of a god and occupying the role of a man. But how to be a female king? As she began her reign, Hatshepsut commissioned images of herself with a female body and gown and a male crown on her head. On a

carving on a block at Karnak, which may have been made before she had officially assumed power, Hatshepsut is offering wine to Amun, a job that only kings would do. She wears a queen's gown, a typically long, feminine one fitting close to the body and ending at the ankles, in a female pose with feet close together. But she bears a short wig, that of a man, then the great atef crown, ram's horns and ostrich feathers, the crown that would declare her king of Upper and Lower Egypt and indeed the text dubs her exactly this, king of both realms. She wears the king's crown and gives herself a new name, Maatkare (The Soul of Re is Truth). This was standard practice for kings – but astonishing for a queen.[11] Most likely she wore that very king's crown in real life. Hatshepsut breaks apart what Egypt thought about divine rule: she is a king, making offerings, wearing the crown, called a king, but she has not even been crowned.

To become king, Hatshepsut spent nights in the temple sanctuary, communing with Amun. When she emerged, she was crowned. Then, as declared on her Red Chapel, 'the majesty of the Lord of All fixed the titulary of her majesty as beneficent king in the midst of Egypt'. She then spoke to her people and declared 'I am a beneficent king… the wild horned bull coming from heaven… the falcon who glides over the lands, landing and dividing his borders… I am excellent of heart, one who glorifies her father, attentive of deeds to render justice to him'.[12]

After she gained the throne, she began to change her self-representations. In a carving from a temple in Nubia she is depicted with feet apart, in the male pose, yet still wearing the female's ankle-length gown. And then, eventually, over time, in keeping with her general approach of testing out strategies before she adopted them wholesale, she decided to adopt full male dress. As the male dress was a kilt, with the chest exposed, it would be indecent for a woman to be seen wearing it. So she styled herself as a man, with a male torso, her stance widened and her shoulders broadened. All along, she was referred to in the writings with both female and male pronouns. As time went on her face became less feminine. She adopted a beard, part of the iconography of male-coded kingship.

All through history, queens who styled themselves as men have been the most praised. Societies needed a monarch to present themselves as having male qualities; it is not until we reach constitutional monarchy that

stereotypically 'feminine' qualities become celebrated. The most successful female monarchs need to be able to create spectacle and self-mythologise. All monarchs must create a show and a narrative to survive, but female monarchs have to do so most of all. From the earliest times to the modern day, even between authoritarian and constitutional monarchy, the same expectations are placed on women: to rule they must claim to be doing so for a son or husband, they must always declare they are sacrificing themselves to serve their people, that God has chosen them to do the job and they would never have expected it, but God must be obeyed. They cannot say they want to do it because they want power or think (rightly) that they are the best person to wield it.

Hatshepsut's use of male imagery may have been a response to her stepson's growing age: as he became close to being old enough to be seen as king and his circle demanded she step back for him, she showed herself as a god and a man. Thus people did not need to think of replacing her with her stepson; they already had a man. Certainly we can argue, due to how she adopted it gradually, that she tested the waters, found her people appreciative, and continued. We might be able to draw a comparison with notions in other cultures that a woman post-menopause could turn into a form of a man, freed from (what society saw as) troublesome female emotions. Of course, twenty-five was still young, but by thirty-five or so, many Egyptian women were grandmothers and no longer expecting to bear children. Whatever her motivations, it was a supremely successful strategy. There was no model for a female ruler, so she made her own and as perhaps the most prolific builder in ancient Egypt, she put the representations across her country. Amun put the crown on her head and said she was ruler. Did Hatshepsut believe that she had been transformed into a man on the throne or see herself as what we might define as gender fluid? Maybe so. It seems just as likely that she saw herself as moving past the set notions of gender, at least of femininity. As scholars have noted, when a woman died, she assimilated with the god Osiris to facilitate her own rebirth, becoming temporarily male and female.[13] It was possible to be both, particularly in death, and Hatshepsut's Mansion of Millions of Years was of course her mortuary temple. In tombs, the masculine gender is used. In her tomb in the Valley of the Queens, Queen Nefetari is called 'true of voice' with the

masculine gender, and moreover in her tomb, her skin has the reddish hue of male deities. Sobekneferu had styled herself after a god, and adopted both male and female dress.

Thutmose III, around nine, was firmly pushed away. Ostensibly he was co-monarch; really, he was a footnote. She even downgraded his name, adding *ka* or spirit to it, rendering him the 'manifestation of the soul of Re', not the manifestation of Re – a significant demotion. Where he is allowed to appear in reliefs, he plays second-best, merely burning incense while she wields the sceptre. She even adopted his reign as her own, so his year seven became hers – essentially saying she had been king alongside him as soon as her husband died. As she put it on one of her obelisks, those who heard the story of her birth would not say 'It is a lie' but 'How like her it is, she is devoted to her father. The god knew it in me.'[14] In her earliest days, she staked the importance of her role as wife to her brother. By this latter part of her reign, in her late twenties and beyond, she understood that her audience was more interested in the passage of power from father to daughter. It seems as if she began creating representations of herself as a regent to Thutmose III during the early years of her regency – then ordered them removed. She built up and expanded Thebes, promoting herself as the true inheritor of her father. At Karnak, later in her reign, she added a special Red Chapel to house the barque or gilded boat used to carry the god in festivals. The chapel was covered with reliefs of her greatness, her divine birth story and her relation with the god. Hatshepsut shows herself engaging in rituals, assiduously caring for the god, anointing him, changing his clothing, offering him food and drink and then leaving the chapel. As Kara Cooney has said, she herself is sweeping away her footprints as she leaves.[15] Even after she had defined herself as sole ruler, she was still communing with the god, in rituals that were kingly but also perhaps not too distant from the duties of the priestess. She was both the wife and the son of Amun. And it is here, in the Red Chapel, on block 287, where she tells the story of how she was picked out by the god.

If Hatshepsut had not engaged in such wholesale building, we would not have known about her. Perhaps there were many other female pharaohs, who did not do much building, and thus are forgotten.

Somewhere between her seventh and twelfth year of governing, Hatshepsut embarked on her supreme monument – her mortuary temple, her very own Mansion of Millions of Years, one of the greatest architectural wonders of the ancient world. If you stand in the small temple to Amun that Hatshepsut built and decorated in Karnak, you can see all the way through to her temple on the other side of the river. She had stood in Karnak so often, facing the West Bank. Now she built on that very land. The East Bank was home to the bustling city of Thebes and the huge Temple of Karnak, the West Bank was the land of the dead, the land where the sun set, poetically called 'the deathbed of the world' by Florence Nightingale, where kings were buried and modern-day visitors marvel at the Valley of the Kings. The cliffs that Hatshepsut had looked at from Karnak were now the site of her superb temple, dedicated to the goddess Hathor. As she had written, 'He who will praise her, he will live. He who will speak an evil thing, ignoring her majesty, he will die.'[16] There, at the temple, her elites could be reminded of her greatness.

A mortuary temple was a sign to the living. It is perhaps an oversimplification, but we might see it as an advertising billboard, colours and lights, proclaiming the excellence of Hatshepsut, in a temple that all of Thebes and its people could see. Every time an ordinary person looked across to the other side of the Nile they saw this tribute to her, and inside it was decorated with the most colourful images of her majesty, testament to her brilliance, preserving her legacy for the future. Her giant temple was, as she put it, 'a garden to my father Amun', and the climax of it was the shrine that she had built to Amun, the walls decorated with images of offerings to the god from Hatshepsut, Thutmose I, Ahmose and Neferure. The walls of her temple do not feature her stepson, Thutmose III, or her brother-husband, Thutmose II. This is the story of her as the inheritor of her father and mother – and her inheritance from Amun. And her birth story was so important. As we have said, Amun came into the palace and visited Queen Ahmose. He 'gave her his heart to her and showed himself in his godlike splendour' and his 'love passed into her limbs'. Hatshepsut shows the god presenting her mother with the symbol of life, and the two sitting on a couch together. And then, wonderfully, Hatshepsut herself is made out of pottery

by the potter god Khnum and is later born to Ahmose, with gods in attendance – the very image that began this chapter.

According to her inscriptions, her father said: 'This daughter of mine, Khnumetamun Hatshepsut – may she live! – I have appointed as my successor upon my throne… she shall direct the people in every sphere of the palace; it is she indeed who shall lead you. Obey her words, unite yourselves at her command.' Amun told her: 'Thou art the Pharoah, taking possession of the Two Lands.'[17] The name Khnumetamun means 'united with Amun' and was even adopted before she declared herself full pharaoh. She would always be joined to Amun and Egypt and had no need of an earthly spouse (the idea that a queen was married to her people only was one that female monarchs would deploy many times after her).

At her mortuary temple, Hatshepsut was depicted as a life-sized male pharaoh, giving offerings to the gods, a role that was normally assumed by men. And, as she extensively depicted on the walls of her temple, she sent her armies not on invasions but on trade expeditions. One beautiful series of pictures shows a mission to Punt, a country rich in gold, ebony, myrrh, frankincense, ivory and exotic animals, which has been estimated to be in the vicinity of modern-day Somalia, Eritrea and South Sudan. Middlemen had been controlling the Egyptian business with Punt and taking their cuts, so Hatshepsut planned her own expedition. Shiploads of sailors set out and returned loaded with treasures. Hatshepsut's representation rather overegged the heroism, claiming they had demanded tribute, for in actual fact the visitors were enthusiastically received by the king and queen of Punt. The point was proving to the people that direct trade was worthwhile, that Egypt could be a seafaring nation, and the reliefs show one of the earliest depictions of a sea expedition in history. After this success Hatshepsut launched further missions to Byblos and Sinai. Her temple declared that she slaughtered her enemies in Nubia. It has been suggested that she 'borrowed' these battles from her father when she did not have such wars – in fact there were skirmishes in the area during their reign, as a piece of graffiti by a man called Ti, who served the queen, recorded when he was fighting in the south.[18]

Under Hatshepsut, the coffers were full, the buildings and temples a tribute. The gods were smiling upon her. We cannot know if a woman on the

throne generated more opportunities for women in real life – apart from in the case of her daughter, who gained great significance. It seems as if Neferure was God's Wife early, at about six, when her mother had been Regent for five or so years, and it may have been that both shared the position for a while.[I] She was given queenly titles. And then Neferure was married to Hatshepsut's stepson. She hoped that Neferure would have a son, and then the line would go to him. It appears as if Hatshepsut was considering raising her daughter as an heir. She had ruled, why could not her daughter? There is a large female figure on the reliefs on Hatshepsut's Mansion of Millions of Years standing before a goddess, which might very well be Neferure and she was elsewhere described as Mistress of Upper and Lower Egypt, titles that Hatshepsut had used, with a date of 'year 11 of the majesty of the God's Wife Neferure'.[19] However, it appears as if this was going too far and the references to Neferure were altered to Ahmes or Thutmose I, and this happened during Hatshepsut's reign.[20] It is possible that Neferure died, putting an end to Hatshepsut's hopes, or perhaps the elites around her refused the idea: one female king in a generation was quite enough! Hatshepsut attempted to alter the mode of the succession to favour women, but could not. And the other references to Neferure were removed after Hatshepsut's death. Neferure may have gained significant influence during her mother's life, but it did not continue and her children by Thutmose, if she had them, do not appear in the record. The rule of women flamed with Hatshepsut, and then the usual tradition of men resumed.

How much were the images of divinity Hatshepsut created believed? In a cave near the Mansion of Millions of Years, used by workers, there is crude graffiti of a woman's figure, and she is wearing Hatshepsut's crown. Most workers on long and tedious projects complain about the boss. Were these men also doing so by saying, 'everybody knows she's a woman, despite all of this'? Still, they etched her wearing the crown; that was unassailable. Her kingly body held onto power. As Thutmose III himself grew into a man, she made herself look increasingly male, with naked torso and muscled legs. By the end of her reign, as Hatshepsut moved into her forties, she began to show herself as a joint monarch with Thutmose III, performing rituals together. He is usually walking behind her, and often they look very similar, same height, same stance, same crowns. So her reign saw her move from

female dress, to a hybrid style, to full male dress, back to joint monarch. She knew, by the end, she was handing over her power.

Hatshepsut died around 1458 BCE at the age of forty or so. She had enjoyed a long and prosperous reign. She was buried in the tomb she had created in the newly consecrated Valley of the Kings. She had, like her father, commissioned one commemorative tomb, then another secret tomb for her actual body, perhaps to deter grave-robbers or to create more mystery around the death of the king. In another stunning act, she ordered the coffin of her father to be put into her own grave (or she may have even added a burial chamber onto his tomb) emphasising her direct lineage with the former king. Tombs were the advertisements of the time. But Thutmose III removed his grandfather from the tomb with Hatshepsut and created a new burial place for him, telling Egypt that he himself was the true heir of Thutmose I. It's even possible that he moved Hatshepsut too, to lie by her old nurse in an adjoining tomb – a shocking act to remove a queen from her grave goods.

Hatshepsut had secured the throne for Thutmose III and left him a successful country. He used the treasury she had filled to wage military campaigns and try to gain a reputation for being a great pharaoh. When he came to the throne in his mid-twenties, he initially identified himself with her, finished her unbuilt monuments and added his own name to her structures. Her supporters and courtiers were swiftly pushed from power, but Thutmose kept up the idea of his debt to her, publicly at least. But then, after twenty-five years, when he was near to the end of his life, he sent out builders to destroy her legacy. It was not uncommon for pharaohs to delete the name of their predecessors; repurposing a predecessor's monument to glorify yourself saved a lot of money. But Thutmose III's campaign went further than the occasional reutilised temple. He wanted every image of his stepmother destroyed, from public areas and the inner shrines of temples, every mention of her gone; hundreds, maybe thousands of reliefs, statues and monuments wrecked and replaced with images of his father and his grandfather; or he replaced Hatshepsut with pictures of something else, like flowers, which was rather insulting.

Hatshepsut's name was removed and replaced with that of his male ancestors, although the workmen had a job changing the female pronouns into male and 'daughter' to 'son', changing *sat* to *sa*. Hatshepsut's momentous

obelisks at Karnak remained, presumably because knocking them down would damage the surrounding temple – perhaps they had false walls put round them. Interestingly, Thutmose happily lived with images of her as the wife of Amun, priestess, daughter. He didn't mind showing her as a queen; the images of her as a king were removed. Sometimes the workmen simply forgot – so on one gateway to her mortuary temple Hatshepsut's name was chiselled off and replaced with that of Thutmose III, but they forgot to alter 'her' to 'his', and so the gateway declares that 'Amun is satisfied by her monuments', confusingly rendering Thutmose female. It is the conundrum of female rule that those who fail will be remembered, recorded as examples of why a woman should not gain power. Those who succeed, like Hatshepsut, have their efforts seized by the men who follow. She was the queen who did everything right, secured the country, left the coffers rich, attracted the happy attention of Amun, and yet she was entirely forgotten.[II]

Why did Thutmose III wait until he was nearing the last phase of his life to destroy his stepmother's name? Approaching the end of his reign, he had become anxious about the position of his son, Amenhotep, then a teenager. He wanted to show he came from a line of male rulers, with no women involved. And Thutmose III and Amenhotep reduced the responsibilities and significance of the role of God's Wife of Amun so it became much weakened and it was given to minor royal women only. It was eventually abolished. Hatshepsut had shown it could give a woman too much power. She had been not just a king, but a priestess-king, at once the son-daughter and wife of Amun. When Hatshepsut is written about, it is often on the basis that she became a pure king, with no other roles. And yet she used her position as the high priestess to get there and still showed herself conducting some of the priestess rituals during her reign.

Hatshepsut's tomb, in the Valley of the Kings, is generally closed, only rarely opened because it is not safe due to rockfall. It was excavated by Howard Carter in the early twentieth century, who said he heard grave-robbers when he arrived. The queen's body is exhibited in the Hall of Mummies in the Museum of Civilisation in Cairo, but many scholars believe it is not her. Tutankhamun's tomb, hidden for all the years by mounds of earth and debris, was preserved, full of his spectacular grave goods. Hatshepsut probably had similar wonderful tomb items, which would have

told us so much about her life, but they are gone. The walls were not painted as they are in most tombs, for they were covered in soft shale, and instead they were probably lined with limestone panels, bearing texts describing her life and her devotion to the gods; these are gone too. We have nothing of her but her buildings. Hatshepsut intended to be remembered and, despite the efforts of those who came after her, she was.

I. Hatshepsut's daughter could not be more powerful. In one depiction, God's Wife and a priest burn the names of the enemies of Egypt, in a ritual meant to end them. In another, she takes male priests to the temple pool for purification and then follows Hatshepsut to the shrine for rituals in front of Amun.

II. There's an interesting case of the high priest of Amun 500 years after Hatshepsut's death naming his daughter, the (now enforcedly celibate) God's Wife of Amun, after her. So perhaps she was remembered in networks of women, as priestess at least.

CHAPTER TWO
Sex-Mad Tragic Queen: Cleopatra

Cleopatra made herself sole queen, sole monarch, one of the first in history. She called herself 'Female King' on her coinage. She was admired, a respected leader who staved off Rome longer than pretty much any other monarch threatened by them. And yet the story told of her is one of sex and death (and, frankly, a sexy death: women are even objectified while expiring), a cautionary tale of what happens if you give women power. At the Temple of Dendera, Cleopatra told us how to see her. On the back of the temple she is over six foot tall; in a giant advertisement to the gods, she is making offerings, showing her piety. She is in customary dress, paying tribute, communing directly with the divines as only she could as queen – an image of what she had done at this very temple many times during her twenty-one-year reign. She wears the typical crown of Hathor, a sun-shaped disc flanked with cow horns, the queen of love, fertility and motherhood. She stands behind her son, Caesarion, who might have ruled Rome and Egypt had he lived. He was, in reality, treated as a co-ruler only occasionally for spectacle. And yet in this carving she shows him leading the offerings; his crown is the Pshent Crown, that symbolising rule of both Upper and Lower Egypt, more recognisably that of the Pharoah. He is king and pharaoh, she stands behind as goddess and queen.

Cleopatra's wish as to how she wanted to be perceived was clear. She probably commissioned this carving when Caesarion was an infant, not long after Julius Caesar was killed, and she showed herself to the gods and to the Romans as a queen behind her Roman son, protected by his lineage. She was

the divine goddess of motherhood – and she had founded a new Egypto-Roman dynasty. It was this image that she hoped would secure her power, as the guardian of Caesar's only legitimate male child, and win the respect of the Romans. She was presenting herself as the supportive mother-queen.[I] Carvings and statues like this would have been present across Egypt; it is how her people would have been used to seeing her.

Dendera was Cleopatra's most cherished temple to the goddess Hathor, where we believe she laid the foundation stone with her father. She used it throughout her reign as a place for performing rituals and she would have taken guests there, most likely including Julius Caesar after giving birth to his child. She showed herself there as a goddess, the weaver of Isis myths, one who gave life itself. Although Cleopatra commissioned the reliefs, they were not completed when she died. The Romans left Dendera standing and even added images of their emperors making offerings to the gods and so the aesthetics may have been influenced by Roman desires. But in the Temple of Dendera, looking at the giant relief of Cleopatra standing behind her son, you cannot be closer to what she wished us to see her as. And it is a brilliantly multifaceted image. She is seemingly modest, deferring to her son, standing behind him; her crown smaller, it seems the perfect way not to seem a threat. And yet this carving is the one most guaranteed to terrify Rome, for this son could rule them and Egypt in one. Cleopatra is at once a divine mother and a leader of the resistance.

It is truly curious how little the Temple of Dendera is referenced in our modern thinking about Cleopatra: the presence of her son, heir of Rome, her focus on religious ritual and piety, the seemingly unadorned appearance. Yes, she makes offerings to the gods directly, a significant act, but she is supporting her son. She was always acutely aware of symbolism. At the beginning of her reign, seventeen and newly crowned, she rowed a bull in a boat at the front of a procession on the Nile, presenting herself as Isis, the first monarch in living memory to do so, with the crowds shouting in delight. Shakespeare's depiction of her seated in a golden barge 'like a burnished throne' wasn't necessarily how her people would think of her; they'd just as likely remember her rowing the boat containing the sacred bull. The older Cleopatra in the carvings showed herself as, once more,

offering homage to the gods, standing behind the boy who would one day take her throne, rather than putting herself at the forefront.

Ask people across the world to name the most famous queen from history and they will often say Cleopatra. How she is understood informs Western perceptions of Egyptian women, African women – and perhaps all queens who followed her. We talk little about the Egyptian and other ancient kings who lost their empires to Rome and do not criticise them. The male rulers of Egypt before Cleopatra made Roman occupation inevitable by mortgaging the country to Rome, and yet she is blamed. Cleopatra's relationships with Julius Caesar and Mark Antony were not 'bedding', as declared by the book that called her a 'centre-spread', but strategic attempts at saving her country. If Caesar had stayed in power, so would have she. Her dynasty, the Ptolemies, were all skilful at self-presentation, showing themselves off covered in bling, staging elaborate shows, but the excess is only associated with her.

Cleopatra is one of the most famous women in history, the most celebrated queen of the ancient world. Reams have been written about her, but not her economic policies or efficiency at governing Egypt's grain stores, her struggle for the throne, or her diplomacy as the speaker of multiple languages, the first of her line to speak Egyptian. Instead, it is about her 'mystique', a cautionary tale of a sexualised goddess reclining in a golden barge who lost the throne by following her desires, a disastrous example of female leadership. There is a 'Cleopatra's nose' theory of history – if she had a big nose, been unattractive, then history would have been different. As if her attractiveness according to patriarchal beauty standards was all that mattered. Caesar allied with her for her power and wealth, not her looks. Depictions of her for children are as a siren, little girls shown from their earliest age that this greatest of queens is a shimmying dance of glamour and seduction. Why is it that possibly the most famous queen in history is the one who is always cast as tragic or doomed? Why do we want to read about women who (it is said) lost everything? The most celebrated kings in the popular imaginations are the ones who fought and expanded their realms, from Alexander to Henry V.

Every age talks about Cleopatra. And yet we know little about her. Her palace and belongings were looted, her art and treasures taken and melted down, her statues and reliefs broken. Now her once majestic palace is

submerged under the sea, its pillars at the bottom of the ocean. Her tomb may never be found. Not one of the many influential accounts of her that survive are written by her, or anyone from Egypt, or anyone who even sympathised with its cultural norms. They are all the accounts of Roman commentators, their words riven by anger at the war between Egypt and Rome, the cataclysmic breakdown between the male rulers of Rome that caused mass death and destruction. Roman ruling men were always falling out with each other over who got all the goodies – and this time it became Cleopatra's fault. We have images of her by Romans, including a decoration from a house in Pompeii that might show her suicide; the death of the mighty queen became wallpaper.

Cleopatra is not remembered as a strategist, popular with her people, or even one who fought for her throne. She did not 'lose' Egypt; that was done by her ancestors, including her father, but particularly her grandfather and great-uncle, who had struck devil's deals with Rome. Every other part of the Alexandrian Empire, such as Cyprus, Asia Minor, Macedonia and Syria, all the kingdoms around her, had fallen to Rome before she came to the throne. Egypt was the last piece of the puzzle. She fought off the Romans with genius, staved off occupation for nearly twenty years against incredible odds, but the enduring image of her is not this one of tragic sexuality.

Most of the women in this book have created and distributed representations of their words, from Hatshepsut's temples to Liliʻuokalani's memoirs, in legal records and newspaper interviews, portraits or even fighting their corner in court. All of these were remembered. But Cleopatra's remaining carvings, documents and coins are cancelled and replaced by the words of men. It is an interesting coincidence that the favourite queen of world history is the one whose few images have been ignored and her reality – more than any other queen – has been communicated by men. And one major reason why Cleopatra is so depicted, with fictitious images of her constantly appearing around the world, is because she intersects with something society wants to see happening to women in power: sex and death.

As Lord Byron put it, 'man's love is of man's life a thing apart, 'tis woman's whole existence'. Even when Cleopatra is afforded intelligence and strategic vision it is rooted in manipulating men, wrapping them round her finger or 'using her looks', when in the end the men around her were older, powerful,

made their own choices and took the final decision – whether she lived or died. Egypt had many great queens and many other royal women called Cleopatra – she was number VII after all. And yet our image of Egyptian female monarchy is an invented castigation of Cleopatra VII as a seductress who lost her country. The most celebrated story about her, the secret meeting with Caesar at Alexandria, was not a blind date; it was a summit of two superpowers.

The main written sources that have directed our perceptions of Cleopatra are not even about her. There are Plutarch's biographies of Mark Antony and Julius Caesar, written nearly 150 years after her death; and Cassius Dio's *Roman History*, a story of Rome that features Cleopatra from time to time, written 200 years after her death. These are historians not aiming to be objective but writing stories for the glory of Rome, trying to produce moral exemplars. Cassius Dio accuses Antony and Cleopatra of causing 'many evils to the Egyptians and many to the Romans' and she is a woman of 'insatiable passion and insatiable avarice', becoming queen of the Egyptians through her charms and trying to use her allure to then conquer and rule the Romans. She was, in such depictions, every Roman's worst nightmare: a female horror who wanted to lord it over Roman men. When people want to demonise queens, they say they want to rule the countries they are attempting to resist – Cleopatra never wanted to be queen of the Romans. She simply wanted to retain her country's independence.[1]

Virgil's *Aeneid* dubs her only Antony's 'Egyptian mate' in its description of the Battle of Actium; Propertius compares her to the evil sorceress Medea; Appian, around 150 years after Cleopatra's death, himself an Alexandrian, declares that Mark Antony's passion for Cleopatra brought 'ruin upon them and all Egypt besides' – how on earth did Cleopatra ruin Egypt when Rome was circling to invade anyway? Lucan, writing between 61 and 65 CE, just can't stop, declaring that 'a wanton daughter of the Ptolemies' came to 'pollute' a Roman bed, saying her 'sistrum even rattled the Capitol', and had her wanting to lead a 'captive Caesar in an Egyptian triumph', complaining about her 'baleful beauty' and characterising her, like her country, as all lascivious luxury and 'idle love of display'.

On and on it goes. An anonymous fourth-century work declares her a courtesan, and 'men paid for a single night with their lives'.[2] Then we have Shakespeare, who describes Cleopatra in her barge with even the waves in love with her, and, as she dies, recalls how Antony calls her 'my serpent of old Nile' and 'I feed myself with most delicious poison.'[3] And in the twentieth century Elizabeth Taylor rolls out of a carpet at Richard Burton's feet, all beauty to a magical shimmer of music. Shakespeare's play is more of a comment on the complex legacy of Queen Elizabeth I; Taylor's role, based on a 1957 biography light on references, reflects demands for high-octane glamour but sexually submissive postures. Yet, curiously, if one returns to Plutarch, who set the Cleopatra ball rolling, so to speak, his work is less highly coloured than one might think; certainly there is little sexual description. But the outlines of what later writers follow are clear: Caesar was involved in a 'dangerous and dishonourable war' due to his 'passion' for Cleopatra; she is bundled up into a carpet and carried to him on her servant's back. Cleopatra visits Antony lying on a golden barge, styled as Venus, surrounded by her maids dressed as 'sea nymphs', and she trusts in her 'magic and charms' to win him; the ceremony of the tributes is all shameful and his passion for Cleopatra is 'mischief'.

The word 'ruin' comes up over and over. Horace writes only a few years after Cleopatra's death, but he is in line with Roman anger at the battles between men caused by her. '*regina dementis ruinas*', writes Horace in one of his most famous poems, '*funus et imperio parabat*'; the queen plotted mad ruin for the empire and the Capitol with her '*contaminato*' followers. She looks on the ruins of her empire and, when she kills herself with a snake, no 'woman to be humbly led in triumph', he says she did not flinch at the source 'like a woman'. He finally congratulates her, but for not being a 'woman', too afraid to kill herself.[4] Queens plot destruction, then they leave their empire in chaos. All these stories are so colourful, written by men seen as authorities, that they have taken hold of the perception of Cleopatra, riding roughshod over the archaeology – such as Dendera itself. And they push aside sources that did not demonise her: medieval Arabic writings that present her as an impressive scholar, Egypt as a realm of science and investigation (rather than lavish sexuality), and portray her as one keen to learn who studied science and mathematics and medicine and spoke to

scholars. As Al-Masudi put it, 'She was a sage, a philosopher, who elevated the ranks of scholars and enjoyed their company' as well as writing books on medicines, charms and cosmetics.[5] Another Arabic history credited the construction of the lighthouse at Alexandria to Cleopatra. As we will see in the following chapter, Zenobia of Palmyra repeatedly claimed ancestry from Cleopatra when declaring herself fit to rule and when standing up to the Romans. To Zenobia, the Egyptian queen's name meant bravery and strength, not failure.

Cleopatra was written about by her enemies. And what they were saying was that it is wrong to resist the Romans: your people are better if you submit immediately.

Cleopatra VII was born in 69 BCE. Her father, Ptolemy XII, was on the throne at the time, and was known as 'Auletes' or the flautist because he was skilled on the flute. He was probably a younger son by a minor wife of the pharaoh nicknamed Chickpea, and in 79 BCE he married Cleopatra Tryphaena, likely his sister. He had a daughter with her, Berenice, and then a second daughter, our Cleopatra VII. Tryphaena disappears from the records in August of 69 BCE; perhaps she died while giving birth to our Cleopatra. It is also possible that Cleopatra was born to a minor wife of Auletes, perhaps an Egyptian herself, which might account for her facility with the Egyptian language. But the most significant evidence that Cleopatra was born to Tryphaena, senior wife and co-ruler, was that the Romans, who called her a monster and a seductress and attacked her for everything, never claimed she was insufficiently 'royal' or not deserving of the throne. Children by minor wives were legitimate in the Egyptian system, but the Romans saw other wives as concubines, so it seems more likely she was born to the chief, royal wife. Pretty much everyone in Cleopatra's story is called Ptolemy and Cleopatra, with the odd Arsinoe. Cleopatra had three younger half-siblings: one girl, Arsinoe, and two boys, both called Ptolemy. One half-brother would try to kill her; Arsinoe and the other Ptolemy would plot against her – and they would all die.

In 332 BCE, Cleopatra's ancestor Alexander the Great, aged twenty-three, crossed the Nile and saw the pyramids of Giza. His sister and stepmother were both called Cleopatra. Accompanied by Ptolemy, a friend and perhaps

half-brother, he was received in Egypt as a liberator from the Persian rulers, and swiftly named Pharoah of Upper and Lower Egypt. He founded a city on a piece of land by the coast, called it Alexandria. He later departed. Alexandria would become a centre of Greek culture and the library a repository of scholarship from across the Hellenistic world.

After Alexander died, Ptolemy declared himself King Ptolemy I of Egypt and founded a dynasty of Ptolemies and Cleopatras that would rule Egypt for three hundred years. Cleopatra would not likely have known of Hatshepsut or Sobekneferu – or any of the other women who may have ruled Egypt before her. But she grew up against a backdrop of female power – and within her own dynasty, a whole series of queens, king mothers and princesses battled with their brother-husbands for rule. The name Cleopatra means 'glory to her father' or 'celebrated in her ancestry'.

Cleopatra VII's family had expanded Egypt and secured effective trading relationships with Arabia, India and Asia, but also engaged in murderous infighting. Sibling marriage was common among the pharaohs of the past (and indeed the gods like Isis and Osiris) and the royals of neighbouring countries, and was intended to keep loyalty and riches within the family. For the Ptolemies, it sparked brutal power grabs between husband and wife, brother and sister, mother and son. Thus, Cleopatra III deposed her eldest son, Ptolemy IX, or Chickpea, in 115 BCE, then ruled with her youngest son, Ptolemy X, Cleopatra's great-uncle. She was killed, probably by Ptolemy X, who was then driven off the throne, and Chickpea came back to be pharaoh. However, Ptolemy X had made a terrible error: he borrowed money from Rome to fight and put up his country as security; if he died without an heir, they could have it. He hated his mother and brother so much that he'd rather mortgage his country to Rome than allow them to rule it. From then onwards, the destiny of Egypt was entwined with Rome and it was a deal that could never be unravelled. The minute Rome was promised Egypt meant that one day the Republic would have it.

After Chickpea's death, his daughter, Berenice, ruled. Rome decided she needed a male co-ruler, her half-brother. He killed her and then the Alexandrians promptly killed him. After that bloody disaster, Cleopatra's father, Auletes, took the throne. When Cleopatra was born, there seemed to be an uneasy peace, and the little girl grew up in luxury and security. Cleopatra's palace, which extended across the promontory of Alexandria,

was built of the best imported marble from Turkey, Greece and Italy and decorated with mosaics, interior fountains and pools. In the royal dining pavilion, gold eagles perched on its scarlet ceiling. There were gold and silver tables and golden couches. The walls of the palace were decorated with coloured glass and studded with precious stones, and there were ornate murals of gardens and cities. The floors were set with elaborate mosaics of gods and goddesses and domestic scenes and inlaid with semi-precious slabs of stone – lapis lazuli from Afghanistan, turquoise from Sinai, and onyx, as well as elaborate mosaics. Cleopatra walked past statues of gods and goddesses and her ancestors, in stone form, surrounded her. She knew her dynasty was one of wealth and power.

Alexandria was one of the most sophisticated cities in the world. Going back and forth to the palace and festivals, little Cleopatra would have seen an organised layout of apartment blocks, banks, customs terminals and passenger hubs, hot food restaurants, shops, libraries, temples and parks. Fresh water was supplied by an underground network of pipes and cisterns, and the grid system had been conceived to fan the sea breeze down the streets. A mighty statue of Isis stood to welcome those arriving by sea. The factories of Alexandria processed commodities from all over the world and re-exported them. Money rained in like a shower of gold.

Cleopatra grew up in a world of learning. She was taught in her youth by Philostratus, who instructed her in philosophy and oratory, and she visited the Library of Alexandria and met with scholars to further her learning. She read literature, medicine and law and wrote books about medicine, charms and cosmetics and did her own research into toxicology and poisons. She studied philosophy, rhetoric and oratory, and attended the lectures of scholars. She had access to books and classical texts. The library was filled with writings from across the ancient world and thousands of scrolls of poetry, history, philosophy, medicine and law. Works were dedicated to her and some sources dub her 'scribe of the Gods'. She grew up a student and a scholar.

And as a child who spent most of her time with adults (mostly men) she became a keen watcher of the ways of the powerful. And I like to imagine young Cleopatra reading Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. The Library had been involved in editing the texts, indeed the earliest librarian had been the first to work on them. What a vision of queenship she would have received. The

Iliad and the *Odyssey* are about two queens, Helen, who had been Queen of Sparta, and her cousin, Penelope, who was Queen of Ithaca. Helen is blamed for leaving with Paris, but then such behaviour is healed by Penelope who wards off her suitors by unravelling her weaving until her husband Odysseus finally gets back from the war. One queen starts it all by not resisting, one ends it by resisting. The whole premise of the *Odyssey* is based on the idea that a man who marries Penelope gets power – it hasn't automatically gone to the son, Telemachus. Queens get status in Greek culture. They would not in Rome. But, in the *Odyssey*, Helen's behaviour is used to justify a landgrab. The same would be done to Cleopatra; she would be used as an excuse to settle a power battle between men.

By the reign of Cleopatra's father, Auletes, Rome was intent on taking Egypt and was putting pressure on him. Auletes began bribing its rulers to leave him alone with money and offers of support. He borrowed from Roman bankers to pay off its rulers; the payments came to constitute nearly all of Egypt's annual income. In 58 BCE, when Cleopatra was eleven, Rome took Cyprus, ruled by Auletes' brother, Ptolemy, accusing him (falsely) of helping pirates. Ptolemy of Cyprus committed suicide rather than give in to the Romans. It was not uncommon for male rulers to commit suicide when invasion occurred, but when Cleopatra does the same, it is shocking and selfish. The Alexandrians were angered by Auletes' failure to help his brother, and fearful that the Romans would invade – so they deposed him and replaced him with his eldest child, Berenice, then around twenty, with another Cleopatra as a joint ruler, possibly our Cleopatra's own mother.

The princess had a stark choice, the first of several momentous decisions: stay with her father or ally with her sister and the woman who might have been her mother. It seems she chose her father, even though he was wildly unpopular and had little chance of getting back his throne.[II] She and Auletes fled the palace at Alexandria and sailed first to Rhodes, and then to Rome. Pompey gave them one of his grand villas south of the city and there Auletes lobbied and bribed senators to get his throne back. He entertained Julius Caesar and it is likely that Mark Antony attended the house. During this stay, Cleopatra became familiar with the ways of Rome and Romans, and she was not intimidated by Roman rulers, generals and senators.

Auletes, weary of Romans making promises but giving him little, set off to Ephesus with Cleopatra. There, they heard that the Cleopatra who had been ruling had died. Berenice was extremely vulnerable. Auletes paid a Roman general, Gabinius, to invade for him. Gabinius and his soldiers arrived at Ephesus in 55 BCE to meet the pharaoh and his daughter, then fourteen. Gabinius's cavalries were headed by 27-year-old Mark Antony. The story goes that he saw Cleopatra and fell in love. In reality, he had most likely already met her at the villa near Rome and now saw her as a possible future monarch and treated her thus.

With the troops, Cleopatra and Auletes marched to Alexandria, and Mark Antony put the pharaoh back on the throne. Auletes swiftly executed Berenice, his own daughter, and declared triumph. Antony returned to Rome, leaving around 2,000 soldiers behind to ensure Auletes remained in power; also, to remind him he was at Rome's mercy. Auletes and Cleopatra were back, but Rome would demand their price.

Auletes offered thanks by ordering new temples to be constructed; an important lesson for Cleopatra that building was an effective way of gaining support from the people. He started a huge new temple for Hathor-Isis at Dendera. Cleopatra, we believe, accompanied him to lay the foundation stone to the temple on which she would one day leave her portrait. As Auletes had no official wife, Cleopatra accompanied him to festivals and ceremonies, treated as a co-ruler.

From early on Cleopatra saw herself as her father's heir, and she saw above all that she needed to be familiar with the classical texts of Greek and Rome and the languages of her neighbours. Plutarch suggests 'she could pass from one language to another' and speak to most of the 'barbarian nations' without an interpreter; 'to most of them she spoke herself, as to the Ethiopians, Troglodytes, Hebrews, Arabians, Syrians, Medes, Parthians, and many others' (plus Greek and Egyptian), which was, as he put it, 'surprising', since most of her predecessors hadn't bothered to learn Egyptian and some didn't even have correct Macedonian![6] Cleopatra, who could thus speak at least nine languages, not only would avoid other wily monarchs pulling the wool over her eyes, but in her effort to expand Egypt, she knew language could function as a way of exerting power. Not to undermine her great intelligence, but surely nine languages was simply too many to have facility

with – one wonders if she polished her knowledge by 'cramming' with tutors just before meeting a foreign dignitary. Either way, it's curious that a woman who was clearly more intelligent than her predecessors, who were too lazy or perhaps unwilling to learn Egyptian, is the one who is seen as not clever, ruled by her desires, not her brain.

After visiting Rome, where well-born women were usually covered up and expected to stay at home, she recognised the unique nature of Egypt, in terms of a society that fostered female activity. Egyptian women's freedom had increased as the trading and business economy expanded over the years up to Cleopatra's birth. Although the significant roles in Egyptian government, finance and management were taken by men, the army was male and society was ruled by men, women could own property and businesses, and towns and villages were full of women selling goods, owning shops and trades. Women from scribal families could become scribes themselves, and they worked in roles from weaver to baker to restaurant owner to mourner and sandal maker – and earning their own money gave them status.[7] Women would keep their property when widowed, and they were able to divorce – and after a divorce, the children would usually stay with the mother and she could keep the house, if it had not been owned by the husband's family. If he initiated the divorce, he would have to pay her an allowance. Women could enter contracts in their own name, serve on juries and witness legal documents, and bequeath and inherit property, a level of rights still not shared in the twenty-first century by many women across the world.

Female rule, whether as queen mothers or king sisters, was prevalent in Egypt, even though so many other countries preferred men to lead. One argument as to why lies in its geography. It is difficult to invade by land and so less threatened by warlords trying to seize territory than nearly any other country in the ancient world, and so a war leader and a male-led warrior culture was less necessary (Rome kept trying to trap Egyptian leaders into 'deals' because it was too difficult for the Roman army to invade). By Cleopatra's time, especially in booming Alexandria, life was about shops and trade rather than war – and working its fabled agricultural land. Many of the industries were family businesses and the idea of a family running the country was thus palatable. With money to go around, a wealthy elite who

wanted to retain their position, and being a country full of small businesses, Egypt wanted consistent government and a rulership that promoted plenitude. So Hatshepsut advertised her brilliant voyage to Punt on her temple and Cleopatra showed off her wealth through Nile cruises. In a blood monarchy, the role of king's wife is elevated. And the prevalence of sibling marriage made women at court important. Princesses were not sent away, and thus retained power. The king's wife had influence, and, as this book will suggest, a great queen regnant often has a great queen consort behind her. The long history of Ptolemaic queens wielding dominion as King's Wife, Sister, Mother or Regent accustomed the people to women in positions of command. Cleopatra went further and attempted to be sole queen.

Do countries with more female freedom tend to have female leaders, or does a female leader on the throne generate more interest and support for women's independence? The prevalence of powerful female gods in Egypt is, similarly, something of a chicken and egg question. Was the Egyptian religious iconography that featured mighty female goddesses an enabler of queenly power? Or was it a reflection of how women had already gained a foothold and wished to see themselves reflected in the religious system? It is most likely a combination of both – Cleopatra used the goddess Isis in her rituals and self-presentation, and we see the population's interest in Isis fade after Cleopatra. Isis had come very much more to the fore over the Ptolemaic period, surely because there were so many women in positions of influence, sisters who saw themselves as saving their brothers, as Isis had done. And if the most important gods are associated with fertility and generating new life, these qualities, often associated with women, give women a greater status.

A unique geography, an economy predicated on buying and selling rather than war, a royal court that gave women influence and a religion replete with goddesses fuelled a world in which female power was possible. All this made Egypt seem even more alien to Rome, where the whole system was predicated on men instructing, women obeying. Auletes knew Rome only respected men and thus, when he approached death, he created a strategy for his daughter's rule: a crowning.

In 52 BCE, when Cleopatra was sixteen, she was crowned joint queen with her father, in a splendid ceremony in front of crowds in Alexandria. She was named as 'Father-Loving Goddess'. Auletes' will, stored at Alexandria with a copy sent to Rome, stated that his daughter Cleopatra should be ruler after his death, co-ruling with her younger brother Ptolemy. But rather than wait, her father elevated her to the position she had informally occupied ever since they had returned from exile. By first making her monarch alongside him, he sent a message. The new queen and her father put on a show. Auletes was near the end of his life and he knew it. In the following year, at around fifty-five, he died.

Cleopatra was queen at not yet eighteen, alongside her ten-year-old brother. She knew that her brother's advisors would immediately try to push her out, particularly Pothinus, the boy's governor, who took the role of Regent to the child. She ordered her circle to tell no one of her father's death and continued to send out documents in the name of her father and herself, with no mention of her younger brother. She did not inform Rome that her father had died – for she knew they might arrive to 'help'. A relation was given the title of Prophet, and it seems there was a coronation ceremony in Memphis, with him overseeing the recognition of her as king of Upper and Lower Egypt.

Cleopatra was the queen of spectacles, and they can be crystallised into several great moments. All the Ptolemies had used ceremony to secure their power. She did what they had done, but with more brilliance, a mistress of drama, reinvention and costume. Cleopatra's shows have been portrayed as the indulgence of a shopaholic woman, trying to seduce Romans. And yet, Roman triumphs or modern-day jubilees are not generally presented as self-indulgent but as giving the people what they want. Cleopatra was doing the same.

Cleopatra started to deploy the power of the royal image immediately. In late March, not long after her father's death, she planned and performed an astonishing ceremony with the sacred bull. The new bull, the realisation of the sun god on earth, sacred to the gods, had been born just a few days into her reign (the animal was selected due to it having markings deemed auspicious on its coat), and Cleopatra took advantage of the lucky

coincidence. For over 1,000 years people had celebrated the installation of the new bull in the temple at Thebes, but royals did not attend. Cleopatra became the first monarch to be present. She also decreed she would lead the rites herself. She was keen to show herself as united with the gods. She then rowed the sacred bull along the Nile in a boat in a surprising physical feat, as if she was rowing the sun, showing herself to the crowds. Local women sometimes rowed the sacred bull to attempt to conceive; the 'Lady of the Two Lands' was showing that she was about to conceive her new nation. And she was proving she was a goddess – so no one should push her off the throne.

All the Ptolemies associated themselves with the gods of the Egyptians, but none did so as effectively as Cleopatra turning herself into Isis. Isis, the descendant of the creator god Atum or Ra, was the goddess of life and of passing souls to the afterlife and of magic. She was also the mother of Horus with her brother, Osiris, whom she had brought back to life. Horus was likened to the pharaoh;[III] so Isis was the creator of kingship. By the time of Cleopatra, Isis was the goddess of rain, fertility and the very kingdom itself – some temples even recorded her as the creator of the world. In a mythic system where Isis was the most powerful of all gods and the act of creating life and giving birth was a magical, spiritual gift, the Isis story of divine motherhood was highly useful to Cleopatra. We can see aspects of Isis in Aphrodite, Venus and other love and fertility goddesses, but unlike these figures Isis truly created life from death. Cleopatra would display herself as the very human embodiment of the goddess, a queen of life-giving powers. She often appeared dressed as Isis, in white linen and with a black mantle draped over her shoulder. She recognised the importance of imagery to connect with her subjects, many of whom could not read.

Cleopatra had portraits of herself painted in Egyptian style, unlike many of her predecessors, who had tried to separate themselves from the country's customs, and she prided herself on adopting Egyptian traditions, as well as being the first of her dynasty to truly speak the language. A papyrus from 35 BCE called her *Philopatris*, 'she who loves her country'[8]. In her coinage, she had herself immortalised to look like her father with the same conspicuous nose; she shows her direct relation to the previous ruler in order to cement her authority. It is such a problem that the queen who created her image in

these all-political ways is the one most often condemned for vanity. We will never know exactly how Cleopatra looked. In public at least, Cleopatra exceeded the expectations of a jewelled, magnificent queen. Her hair would have been grown as long as possible, enhanced with hairpieces to create elaborate styles, held up with gold and silver pins. She would have used kohl and eyeshadow on her eyelids (kohl, thought to be first used under Hatshepsut, helped to ward off eye infections in the hot climate). She would have been draped in jewels, long necklaces wrapped twice around her neck and, famously, the biggest pearls in history as earrings, as well as other precious stones including Egyptian emeralds and turquoises. When she is referred to as beautiful, it is usually no compliment but rather a way of reducing her, taking away from her brilliance as queen and turning her into a mannequin. She has been fetishised as the epitome of Eastern glamour and dismissed for the same reason, her 'beauty' endlessly discussed. The looks of Caesar or Mark Antony by comparison have seemed hardly worth mentioning. And frankly most people who saw her would have had no idea whether her face was beautiful or not. Unless you were in her inner circle, she would have been so bedecked with jewellery that her face would be hard to distinguish. Moreover, to her people she was a goddess, above beauty. If beauty is a way of classifying the women in society, then rulers, who must claim themselves above society, and for their own people, at least are removed from it: it's hard to ask if a current monarch is beautiful; it would be the same for Cleopatra.

Cleopatra's coinage was created to show her authority to a world of men as her father's inheritor, but has been read by scholars as an astonishing revelation that she was rather plain (and did not have the beautiful nose of the Cleopatra's Nose theory after all).

Much has also been made of Cleopatra bathing in asses' milk as evidence of her indulgent vanity. But even Caesar would not have thought anything of this; most well-off women in Rome bathed in asses' milk and used it in facial preparations – it was their equivalent of bubble bath. Roman women were supposed to keep all their beauty preparations secret and maintain a 'natural' look. Cleopatra made no concession to this convention, presenting herself with expensive jewels and a hairstyle and make-up as elaborate as possible. All of this demonstrated her power.

By late spring, Cleopatra's brother and his advisors had come to understand that the king was dead. Cleopatra continued issuing documents in her name only and did not include her brother. She appeared on coins and in statues and she was respected as queen, travelling to take part in rites and festivals, showing herself as divine. But Auletes had left debts outstanding, and the spring had brought bad weather, poor crop yields and a low level in the Nile thanks to drought. These were all inauspicious signs, for it was the monarch's role to create fecundity. By the end of the year, Ptolemy's advisors were trying to force their way back into power and requesting the support of the Romans to do so. Pothinus joined with Ptolemy's tutor and an Egyptian general to launch an offensive against Cleopatra, eighteen months after she had taken the throne. By autumn in 50 BCE, Pothinus had achieved control of the grain stocks and issued an order that all wheat and beans had to be sent to Alexandria – on the order of Ptolemy XIII and Cleopatra. This order, in joint names, was a demotion of Cleopatra. It was only the beginning. Within two and a half years of her taking the throne, Cleopatra was finally deposed by Pothinus and Ptolemy was installed as ruler. It seemed as if female rule was over.

Cleopatra moved to Thebes, where she had supporters, and then appears to have made a base at Ashkelon, near Gaza, where she planned her campaign to win back the throne, and then moved towards Pelusium. At the same time Julius Caesar battled Gnaeus Pompey Magnus, his former son-in-law, for power, and, on 9 August 48 BCE, won a significant victory. Pompey, his wife and son and 2,000 soldiers arrived in Egypt, looking for money, closely followed by Caesar. Pothinus and his circle decided that the way to show loyalty to Caesar was to kill Pompey. Pompey arrived – and a soldier in the greeting party stabbed him in the back. Ptolemy returned to Alexandria carrying Pompey's head, convinced Caesar would be pleased. It was a terrible misstep.

Julius Caesar's plan had been to tell the siblings to reconcile – which would mean Cleopatra having to submit to her brother – then he would extract money out of them and head back to Rome. The beheading of Pompey changed everything. Caesar was outraged by the assassination, and he knew that Rome would be scandalised. Caesar took up residence in the palace to attempt to decide his next steps. After a spell pretending to be an ordinary Roman tourist sightseeing around the library and the temples

(Roman tourism to Egypt was a thing), he commanded brother and sister to appear before him and told Pothinus that he wanted the money owed to him by Egypt.

Caesar, the most powerful man in the world, was in a quandary. He had to secure Egypt, but Rome would expect him to avenge Pompey's murder. And he was surrounded by Alexandrians and their forces. In a reversal of the fairy story, Cleopatra was to prove his rescuer, his knight in shining armour. For he simply could not make an alliance with Pompey's killer. This meeting between Julius Caeser and Cleopatra is always presented as if it was seduction. Instead, it was politics, and Caesar needed Cleopatra as much as she needed him.

Cleopatra, at twenty-one, was in crisis. She had to get to Caesar, but her brother had made it impossible as he had left his troops confronting hers. Her entire camp at Pelusium was surrounded, spies were everywhere and Alexandria was over two hundred miles away. She planned a daring escape. The queen, who was normally always with an entourage, heavy with jewels, had to go undercover with one courtier, Apollodorus, an act of remarkable bravery when anyone could have seized her. She took a ship, sailed around the coast and reached Alexandria late at night, sailing right up to the royal harbour. There, according to translations of Plutarch, Cleopatra struck on the idea of wrapping herself up – according to some translations in bedding and to others a carpet (or, as Joann Fletcher has pointed out, the words could be translated as cloths or cloak).[9] Then, says the story, Apollodorus slung her over his back and trundled off to Caesar's apartments.

A servant not employed at the palace carting a bundle of carpet around would have looked suspicious, even if he'd made a good stab at looking like an ancient Egyptian removal man. And surely no Roman Emperor living in hostile territory would have let an unfamiliar servant carrying a carpet into his private rooms – and he would have been surrounded by guards. A courtier escorting a cloaked woman would be much less strange, for she would likely have been thought to be entertainment or another servant. Moreover, Cleopatra would have been carrying gold to bribe guards if she was stopped, and some of them would have been her former attendants and so would have waved her through. Indeed, not all the sources have declared

she was swathed in cloths. Cassius Dio declared that she gained permission to enter in advance and visited Caesar in an attractive outfit, 'beautified herself to appear in her most majestic and pity-inspiring guise'. Let's face it, the guards and the Romans knew she was coming and turned a blind eye. It's not as colourful as the carpet story, but it is more likely to be the truth. The carpet story was there to sexualise her, roll her in a carpet at Caesar's feet, make her seem submissive. Even Plutarch says that Caesar sent for Cleopatra to attend him. The most critical, like Lucan, said she entered in secret, but that was because he was invested in the vision of Cleopatra as the shocking seducer, 'the shame of Egypt, to the harm of Rome', as opposed to being Caesar's equal and indeed saviour.[10] Cleopatra arrived at the threshold of the palace and then sent a request to Caesar. He couldn't openly be seen to agree to a private meeting but, she might think, if she were to surprise him, what could he do? She had grown up in the palace and knew its corridors and passageways. Caesar was no doubt occupying the monarch's apartments – he was, essentially, in her bedroom – so she knew where to go. She did what everyone else in her family had failed to do: achieve a private meeting with Caesar himself.

Cleopatra's was an impossibly risky mission. Caesar had seen her when she was a girl in Rome, and he knew her. It is most likely that they conversed in Greek. Twenty-one to his fifty-two, she was semi-divine; he had been allowed an impossible privilege to see her at such close quarters. It is curious that Cleopatra is seen as the prodigious seductress when, as far as the evidence suggests, she had not had any lovers up until this point. Caesar, however, had seduced many, had affairs with the wives of men in his circle (they doubtless had little choice), to demonstrate his importance and even to use them as informants on their husbands. He was married, to Calpurnia, his third if not fourth wife, daughter of a Roman power broker. He and Calpurnia had not had children and Julia, his only child with a previous wife, had died in childbirth in 54 BCE and her baby had died soon afterwards (while Caesar was in Britain). Julia would have been six years older than Cleopatra, had she lived. In a time when men's masculinity was judged by their panoply of sons, Caesar was lacking – which he felt.

Cleopatra had smuggled herself through enemy lines, but she still would have worn her jewels. They were a sign of majesty. Cleopatra, walking into

the presence of Caesar, wore colours and silks and, even though she had recently been on campaign (and been wrapped in a cloak or cloth), still had heavy necklaces around her neck and bracelets on her arms. She was immediately showing herself as queen, and rejecting subservience to Caesar. Roman wives were not allowed such trappings of riches but were encouraged to wear plain gowns and only permitted to wear half an ounce of gold jewellery. Cleopatra was presenting herself as the human embodiment of power and wealth – and wealth was what Caesar needed. She had already achieved the impossible in even contacting him, as her brother's forces had him surrounded. For them to meet at all was her act of genius. But then, Cleopatra may not have appeared in all glory. Cassius Dio declared she looked both majestic and 'pity-inspiring'; Lucan, who hated her, declared she was 'decked in the trappings of mourning', with her hair unkempt, in 'sorrow, not in tears', and then burst forth into articulate speech about her right to rule[11]. It makes sense. Cleopatra, the famed queen, showing herself as vulnerable, deprived, would have created pity in a man old enough to be her father. Lucan might have been an extreme critic, but this account seems most likely to be correct. At twenty-one, she was the same age as his only daughter had been when she had died. Surely this added to his sympathy and inspired promises to take a fatherly approach to Egypt. And so perhaps the whole relationship presented as her seduction really began as a type of father–daughter interaction; Cleopatra, after her life with her own father, was used to the mix of deference and independence best suited to managing a difficult but all-powerful parent.

Above all, in this private meeting she convinced Caesar, who, like all Roman men, had been a total believer in male rule, that she was the rightful occupant of the throne. Cleopatra gave him her father's will stipulating that brother and sister should rule together, having carried it with her all the way – and explained that her father had asked Rome to be executor of the will. She promised her allegiance. He agreed to decree that Pothinus and Ptolemy should agree to joint rule (and Cleopatra, of course, would have fully expected to be the lead monarch). Caesar did believe in the importance of a father's will – and most of all, the people of Rome would see him as punishing the beheading while keeping Egypt's funds. What is forgotten in the whole 'seductive Cleopatra' story is how much Julius Caesar needed

Cleopatra's support, not just in showing a way of avenging the murderers of Pompey, but also her grain stores for his people (when the Nile did its thing no Mediterranean country could produce more grain than Egypt). It was an excellent deal for him. And it was the mighty Cleopatra VII's masterstroke to save her throne and her country, to push forward her desire to be an independent monarch of Egypt, and to save her own life.

Cleopatra gained independence for herself and, she hoped, for her country. Her brilliance in beating her brother, her intellectual prowess and courage, was a show witnessed only by Caesar – but it had a cataclysmic impact.

Next morning, Ptolemy arrived and saw Cleopatra with Caesar in the apartments. He stormed from the palace and threw his diadem onto the floor. He wanted the Alexandrians to rise in support of him and oust Cleopatra, perhaps kill her. Instead, Caesar stepped out and read the will to the crowds. Cleopatra's brother had to submit. A ceremony of installation was swiftly held, celebrating Ptolemy and Cleopatra as joint rulers.

In the nights that followed, Caesar stayed in the palace. He and Cleopatra stayed up talking until the early hours of the morning, as he asked questions about Egypt and its economy. They debated, shared information. Maybe he even told her about Britain, where he had tried to invade looking for minerals, perhaps he gave her a British pearl. Outside, Pothinus' hired killers were lurking, waiting for the best time to slay Cleopatra and Caesar in one attack. Caesar's barber, passing, heard them plotting and rushed to tell Caesar, who had Pothinus beheaded. Ptolemy's general, Achillas, believing he might be next, escaped the palace and reunited with his troops. Caesar expected that Achillas would try to block the arrival of more troops by sea, so set fire to all the ships in the dock, including his own Roman ships. The fire spread fast, engulfing the dock warehouses, which contained books that had not yet been transferred to the Library of Alexandria.

Cleopatra's younger sister, Arsinoe, probably around seventeen, joined Ptolemy's side. Arsinoe's forces tried to root out Cleopatra and Caesar by pumping seawater into the palace water pipes so they would die of thirst. Caesar and Cleopatra ordered the digging of new wells. It was a stand-off. To Caesar, Cleopatra was his only ally. And then Cleopatra realised she was

pregnant. The child would be heir to both Egypt and Rome. And Caesar, with no sons, his only legitimate child dead, greatly valued the pregnancy. She could easily imagine her own monarchy secure, backed up by Caesar. Certainly at this point Arsinoe and Ptolemy were stronger and it would have been easier for Caesar to hand over Cleopatra to them, the all-important male ruler and his sister. But (quite apart from the fact that Ptolemy's man had wanted to kill him) Cleopatra was the queen and she was carrying his future.

Ptolemy and Caesar met in battle by the Nile and Ptolemy drowned. Caesar returned and Cleopatra planned a procession of statues of gods and goddesses carried by priests to meet him. Caesar declared Cleopatra would now rule Egypt with another younger brother, then twelve, also Ptolemy, who would be Ptolemy XIV. And yet, although nominally her brother was her husband, she married Caesar (even though he was also already married). Cleopatra, with Caesar, was in charge. As Cassius Dio rather grudgingly put it, her sharing the rule with her brother was 'mere pretence'. She was the wife of Caesar and she ruled alone.

Cleopatra and Caesar left the palace on Cleopatra's giant yacht. It has been presented as a romantic cruise, but really it was a triumphal month-long procession along the Nile for Cleopatra. Cleopatra's ship was 300 feet long, with its own gardens, the upper storey made up of dining and public areas decorated in marble, gold and ivory and precious stones, ceilings painted in gold and drapes and statues. The mast was 100 feet high, visible far past the Nile. Accompanied by Caesar and his giant army, she was displaying herself to her people, now with the power and the support of Rome. After the panoply of Ptolemaic rulers who had disadvantaged themselves to a stunning degree when trying to make deals with Rome, it seemed as if Cleopatra was actually managing to ally with Rome as an equal.

Cleopatra was also proving to Caesar the wealth of Egypt, as well as performing a vital religious rite. Isis was sailing along the river, and she would bring the floods and the rains that they needed. Cleopatra disembarked to conduct rituals and visit temples and, at Memphis, to give thanks to Isis at her beloved temple of Dendera. There she also carried out a crowning ceremony, with the priest who had crowned her father. The

ceremony was even more significant for her being pregnant. She and her child were being invested with all the greatness and magic of the Egyptian gods. Her child could rule both Egypt and Rome.

Cleopatra had secured the support of Rome and was displaying her power to her country. But word of their leader parading on a painted boat sparked criticism in Rome and he was condemned for not returning immediately. Finally, when late spring came, Caesar planned his departure, arranging to leave three legions in Alexandria to ensure no one tried to unseat the queen again. He took Arsinoe to Rome as a prisoner and displayed her in chains at his victory triumph (and later he packed her off to exile to Ephesus). It was perhaps a mistake not to kill her.

On 23 June 47 BCE, Cleopatra gave birth to her son at the palace and named him Ptolemy Caesar, or Caesarion. Only a month later, the Nile finally flooded – the most auspicious symbol of fertility. Cleopatra was the Great Mother Isis, mother of Horus. Cleopatra commissioned a new coin, with one side depicting her as mother with her son, the other as Cleopatra 'the Female King', and featuring the cornucopia horn of plenty. She was both man and woman, father and mother, king and queen, just as Hatshepsut had been. In Cyprus, she commissioned coins showing her as Aphrodite, alongside her son. She was a goddess for any occasion: Venus in Rome, Isis in Egypt, Aphrodite in Cyprus.

Caesar received the news of his son and was greatly gratified. He consulted advisors on passing a law that would allow him to legitimise his marriage to Cleopatra and his heir, and issued coins depicting Venus-Aphrodite – Cleopatra – with her sceptre. Caesarion could rule the Roman Empire and Egypt, a second Alexander the Great. He was a passport to power for Cleopatra, but also for Caesar. Caesar even dedicated a temple to Cleopatra in the heart of Rome: the Forum, a Temple to Venus Genetrix, Venus as generator of his dynasty, containing a gilded state of Cleopatra. Well, the Venus temple wasn't officially dedicated to her but everyone knew it was. A house in Pompeii, the house of Marcus Fabius Rufus, appears to have painted on its inner wall an image of a golden-jewelled Cleopatra to evoke the gilded statue with Caesarion as a very small Cupid clinging to her face and neck[12]. She is Venus. If so, it suggests that there was optimism

about this new dynasty of Caesarion, that Cleopatra could be both queen and goddess for the Romans as well as the Egyptians.

In Rome, the new father celebrated his victory over Ptolemy XIII, Cleopatra's brother, with an extravagant triumphal progress, giant floats carrying huge pyramids and the Nile shown as a potent male god. He staged games and forty days of thanksgiving and then a massive free outdoor banquet. The whole of central Rome was draped in silks, cottons and linens, and there were enough couches in the streets for nearly 200,000 people. The city ran the equivalent of modern park and ride and congestion charges; the streets were devoted to celebrations.[IV] Caesar needed Cleopatra and their son to complete his triumph, even though his role of emperor was not supposed to be hereditary. He invited her to come to Rome on a state visit. Cleopatra planned to come with Ptolemy XIV, her youngest brother and co-ruler, to keep the fiction of a joint monarchy – and also to ensure he didn't try to seize power while she was away. In early summer 46 BCE she, Ptolemy, her son and a small army of servants and attendants set sail for Rome. Cleopatra was housed in one of Caesar's extensive villas in the Trastevere area, with landscaped grounds reaching down to the river, dubbed by the elites 'friend and ally of the Romans'. It was like being with her father again, an Egyptian in Rome.

Cleopatra knew she was playing a dangerous diplomatic game. The presence of a great, powerful, independent queen was met with fascination but also distrust from the population, especially as she broke so many norms, from the sanctity of marriage to the wearing of veils. And in Rome, public opinion mattered. She hoped to return to Egypt with as much protection and as many promises as possible, but the Romans around Caesar were growing increasingly angry about her influence. As they saw it, realms should be conquered and subservient, not parading themselves as equal. Women should be obedient. But Cleopatra had too much power: a wealthy country and a child that could rule the whole empire. And Caesar had made a will providing a guardian for a son to be subsequently born, suggesting either that Cleopatra was pregnant again or that they planned for a second son. Caesar was treating Rome like Egypt, a country that wanted big ceremonies and declarations of ruling. The Romans wanted the pretence of

democracy, that men got to decide what happened. And women were supposed to be in the background. Cleopatra also managed to offend Cicero in a disagreement over a book, for he wanted a volume from the library at Alexandria, and she didn't put it at the top of her to-do list. He complained about her parties and her clothes – an influential woman accused of vanity again. It is an easy insult.

That there was a statue of Cleopatra in a temple of Rome was a demonstration of her power. Caesar had also witnessed the effectiveness of Cleopatra's use of coinage with images of her as goddesses to foster loyalty, and he did the same, becoming the first living Roman to depict himself on coins. He described himself as 'Father of the Fatherland'. At a festival, Mark Antony offered him a royal diadem. Caesar refused it, to the cheers of the crowds. But there was suspicion that the whole thing had been a stunt to make Caesar look good, so he could claim he was not sole ruler, no tyrant, and Mark Antony had been a stooge. 'Where did this diadem come from? You didn't find it in the street,' declared Cicero.

Had the two men whom the queen chose as allies been better at creating their own support bases in Rome, perhaps they would have survived.

On 15 March, Caesar went to the Senate as was habitual. A group of senators approached and then were upon him, stabbing him over and over, twenty-three times in total. They claimed to be defending Rome and the principle of the republic. The senators fled. Brutus, one of the assassins, walked out shouting that Rome was free, but people had locked themselves away. Caesar's body was finally taken away and then Mark Antony, as deputy, took control, and ordered a great funeral, and declared he would govern along Caesar's lines – but did not immediately punish the assassins, for fear of more bloodshed. Mark Antony had surely hoped to take control, but Caesar had named his grandnephew, Octavian, as heir.

Cleopatra had used everything she had to create an alliance with Caesar. The fate of Egypt would have been very different had Caesar lived but now he was dead, Cleopatra was exposed and vulnerable. She knew she was blamed for his overreaching in Rome and that people might want to poison her son. Caesarion was an infant, too young to rule. Octavian hurried back from studying in Macedonia to take his throne. Within a month of Caesar's

death, Cleopatra had left for Egypt (if she had been pregnant, it had ended prematurely), taking Caesarion with her. After she arrived, one document was issued in the name of Cleopatra and her little brother Ptolemy, who was then fifteen and old enough to be taken seriously. But by the summer of 44 BCE, he was dead, said to have been poisoned by Cleopatra herself. By September, Cleopatra was once more issuing documents in her name alone.

Cleopatra pronounced her son, Caesarion, her co-ruler, and attempted to foster relations with the new order in Rome: the 'triumvirate' of Octavian, Mark Antony and Marcus Aemilius Lepidus, a Roman general and ally of Caesar and the weak link. It was difficult for anyone to know how long they'd stay in power. By 42 BCE, the triumvirate had recognised Caesarion as king of Egypt. Order seemingly restored, Cleopatra resumed her building programme and commissioned new temples, and toured the country to show off her new co-ruler. The queen was an effective administrator. When the Nile failed to rise as needed in 43 BCE and the country was under threat of famine, she released the grain reserves in the royal warehouses and instigated anti-famine measures, and made tax exemptions, which she forced the tax collectors to respect. It was at this point, we believe, that she began to commission the carvings on the exterior wall at Dendera, featuring Caesarion with the Crowns of Upper and Lower Egypt, standing in front of her making offerings to Isis and Horus and to Hathor and her son. Cleopatra was both Isis and Hathor. And her son (depicted as rather full-grown for a toddler!) was at the front, the male leader, she the female support. Dendera, her greatest monument, presented the image of her that she hoped would preserve her in a world of Roman ruthlessness.

Cleopatra would probably have been stable and successful as queen of Egypt if Rome had managed to agree on a ruler. Instead, the backstabbing and infighting continued, and it was on the brink of civil war again as the leading assassins of Caesar, Cassius and Brutus, were gathering to fight against Mark Antony and Octavian. Antony pondered how to ally with Cleopatra, for her money and foodstuffs would be needed to go to war. The triumvirate issued plans to tax 1,400 of Rome's wealthiest women, many of them widows. One, Hortensia, led a march to the Forum and spoke eloquently about how unfair it was to tax women when they had no say in government. No taxation without representation, indeed. Hortensia and the other women would normally have been booed, and dragged from the

Forum for displaying themselves so openly but public opinion was sympathetic about taxation for expensive wars. The triumvirate reduced the number of women eligible for taxation to 400 and decided on an alternative. If they couldn't get the money from Roman women, they'd get it from the Egyptian queen.

Cassius asked Cleopatra to give him ships to fight against the triumvirate. His request was quite some cheek, considering he had killed her husband. She played for time, telling him that Egypt was suffering from famine and had no ships to give, a bold move. In 42 BCE, Antony and Octavian set out for Egypt and Cleopatra, as war leader, sailed out to meet them with all the ships she did not offer Cassius, although rough seas destroyed many of them. At the end of the year, Antony won a devastating victory against Brutus.

Cleopatra had chosen her father against her siblings, Caesar against her brother, and now she had chosen the triumvirate – another excellent decision. Antony, Octavian and Lepidus divided up the empire between them and Antony took the greatest share, demanding most of Gaul and the entire East, taking Macedonia, Asia Minor, Bithynia-Pontus, Cilicia and Syria. Cleopatra and Egypt would have felt immense relief to have security once more. And then, almost as soon as the war with Cassius and Brutus was over, Antony and Octavian began fighting each other. It was the celebrated 39-year-old general Mark Antony against the bureaucrat Octavian, the eighteen-year-old who had Caesar's family blood in his veins.

Mark Antony summoned Cleopatra to meet him in Cilicia, now southern Turkey, to pledge her allegiance to Rome. He told her there were rumours that she had helped Cassius, which were totally untrue, but he was trying to put her on the back foot, make her subordinate. Mark Antony's envoy patronisingly advised her 'to go to Cilicia in her best attire'[13] – as if the queen of Egypt would turn up in the equivalent of a jogging suit. Antony wanted a show of obeisance. And, as a woman, she was being told that what mattered was her appearance. She no doubt wanted to stay neutral in the fight, not ally with anyone in this latest round of backstabbing between men. But she had to go. She had first met Antony when she was a young girl with her father in Rome, and he had more than likely paid her visits when she

was there with Caesar and dandled the infant Caesarion. She knew him, but he was not a friend now. Once more, Cleopatra had to win over a powerful man to ensure her country survived.

Cleopatra mustered all her genius at pageantry to ensure Egypt's independence. Glittering in jewels, draped in pearls, her hair pinned in gold, the illustrious queen set sail in a barge with purple sails and silver oars to visit Mark Antony in a giant procession. The crowds waiting for Antony in the marketplace dashed to the shores to see her, a real-life goddess. As a goddess, she would make Antony recognise she was a queen, an equal, and most of all that her land had not been conquered. She sent word that he should come to her barge. Antony invited her to dinner, but she countered with an invitation to him. He acceded: he knew he could only push her so far.

For his arrival, Cleopatra adorned the boat and its rigging with lights, entertained Antony and his officers in a stateroom hung with tapestries, eating from a golden dinner service. She invited him and his officers to dine on the next two evenings – and then, finally, agreed to leave her boat and dine with him. At each of these dinners, it was business. Antony had expected it to be all about his demands. Instead, Cleopatra persuaded him of her loyalty and convinced him to act for her. She encouraged him to distrust her sister, Arsinoe, who was fomenting plots against her in Ephesus. Antony assured her he would order Arsinoe's execution, as well as that of a young man claiming to be Ptolemy who had come back from drowning in the Nile. Just as Caesar had given Cleopatra Cyprus, Antony gave her Cilicia, the country in which they met. By the close of their meeting, she had secured her own throne and Egypt as an independent country under Antony's protection, gained more territory and pledged allegiance to Rome. She had played the game brilliantly once more.

Cleopatra *was* Egypt to Mark Antony – and all the Roman historians who have ever written about her. With Caesar, she had performed obeisance, wealth and youth. Now she presented herself as a mighty and powerful queen, a woman of astonishing riches. She returned to Alexandria. Antony followed her and intended to use Egypt as a base for governing the rest of the East. And he fell in love with Cleopatra. She staged grand banquets full

of interesting guests and entertainments, and they played at dice and board games together. He challenged her to hold the most expensive banquet possible, and she declared she could eat 10 million sesterces, worth in one go, an impossible feat. But then she took one of her pearl earrings, dropped it into her goblet and drank the lot. It was a pre-planned trick; she was probably drinking sour wine or 'vinum acer', which would have dissolved the pearl. Maybe it was one of the pearls Caesar could have given her from Britain.

Once more, Cleopatra entertained the most powerful man in the world in her apartments, and once more she became pregnant. Did Cleopatra love Antony? Or did she see it as the only way to win over protection for her country – and indeed her son? Can queens on the brink of capture even freely feel 'love'? The only way to find some protection for her throne and her country was to do the same as she had with Caesar. But she'd seen the endless battles over power in Rome and she knew allying with Antony was a risk. If he failed, she could lose everything. She had no choice but to set up a relationship with him to save her country and had to marshal all her powers to encourage him to put Egypt first. Antony left before the child's birth to fight the Parthian Empire, a long-established foe, and Cleopatra gave him 200 ships.

Cleopatra gave birth to twins, a boy and a girl named Cleopatra and Alexander – Selene and Helios, moon and sun. In an age of deadly pregnancies, frequent deaths in childbirth, and stillbirths, in which even the wealthiest women died in labour and their children died too, that Cleopatra had given birth to twins and all three had survived was a miracle, grist to her image as the divine and wondrous mother, fertile and powerful, Isis on earth.

Away from Egypt, Antony's wife, Fulvia, died and he agreed to marry Octavian's sister, Octavia. The news of the wedding and then Octavia's pregnancy may not have pleased Cleopatra on a personal level, but she knew that Antony attempting to create a peaceable alliance with Octavian was her only hope for keeping her country safe. She wanted the Romans to rule together. This moment, when Cleopatra is often portrayed as consumed with jealousy – certainly by Shakespeare – is actually one of her most successful. She had secured Roman support, Antony had cemented his position in Rome, and now the men might stop fighting and allow Egypt to go on its

own path. Cleopatra didn't need a husband; she wanted the Romans to leave Egypt alone.

Cleopatra made a play for independence by strengthening trade routes with countries in the East, notably Arabia and India, and claiming a percentage for state coffers. Money rolled in, inflation fell, the average Egyptian housewife found her goods cheaper, business flourished and people bought themselves ornaments for their houses and took temple tribute holidays to other parts of Egypt. Roman tourists came sightseeing. Cleopatra had restored the finances of the country. But like all client states, or countries under the 'protection' of Rome, and any country near Rome, Egypt was wholly at their mercy. Much of the unforgiving presentation of Cleopatra reflects a lack of understanding of how difficult it was to be a client king or queen, always negotiating with Rome, always told off by your people for any concession. No matter what you did, the whims of the men at the heart of empire ruled your future. She was in an impossible position from the start.

In 37 BCE, Mark Antony decided again to attack the Parthians and made plans for Roman control of the East. He asked once more for Cleopatra's money and support, although he had not seen her for four years (and had fathered two children with Octavia in that time). He sent his messenger to summon her to meet him at Antioch. She set out with her son and the twins.

Antony, forty-eight, and Cleopatra, thirty-one, met at the royal palace. There she promised him support and supplies, and he was astounded by her wealth and kingly reach once more. Antony and Cleopatra were soon married. It was partly love but it was mostly power. Mark Antony had guessed that Octavian had won over the Senate. He had a plan: he would take the East, with Cleopatra.

Cleopatra then made her gravest diplomatic error and allowed Mark Antony to give her too much land, including nearly all of Phoenicia, which restored to her almost all of what had been the Ptolemaic kingdom, a great new empire. This would please her people, but not Rome. Cleopatra became pregnant once more and left for Alexandria in a triumphant parade across her new territories – and narrowly avoided being assassinated on the way by Herod, king of Judaea. She entered Alexandria to huge acclaim. Octavian

had agreed to the giving of lands to win Cleopatra's support and also because he recognised that Rome was too stretched and it was easier to hand over the responsibility of supervising some lands to Cleopatra. But then, in Rome, Octavian pretended he had not agreed and declared that Mark Antony was enriching the Egyptian queen with Roman lands that weren't his to give. It was a clever trick, and Antony was fast losing reputation.

Back in Alexandria, Cleopatra gave birth to their second son, Ptolemy Philadelphius, in 36 BCE. Caesarion at eleven was old enough to be a mature co-ruler. She had three sons to rule with her, to inherit Rome and the empire. This made her magnificent – but it also made her a threat. Having a son makes a woman seem powerful, but also someone who might need to be contained. When a consort has a son, this can save her life, but when a queen regnant has a son, she can be in trouble. From Cleopatra to Mary, Queen of Scots, a queen who has a son when the rival countries do not, one who has a claim over the throne of the other country, has a powerful weapon that is simply too dangerous to allow her to live. Then Antony's campaign in Parthia, an area roughly corresponding to modern-day north-eastern Iran, was a disaster; he lost huge numbers of men including 20,000 to dysentery. He summoned Cleopatra to meet him with ships and money and, in the middle of winter, she set out.

Antony should have returned to Rome, despite the poor weather conditions, but, unable to face his failure in Parthia, he headed to Egypt with Cleopatra. The catastrophic expedition to Parthia, the languishing in Alexandria, was all exquisite grist to Octavian's efforts to show Antony as undeserving of the position of joint ruler. Instead of admitting that the only way to control the East was via Cleopatra, Octavian and his allies declared that Antony was fighting the Egyptian queen's battles for her. And what could be worse than being under the thumb of a woman? Especially one who had sons who might rule Rome.

Cleopatra had to stake everything on the hope that Antony would turn his fortunes around, and the two of them would be king and queen of Rome and the East. It might have worked: a new style for the overexpanded, overtaxed empire, the East under client kings and Cleopatra. But what works in politics is not always what is rationally right, rather what appeals to the emotions. Antony and Cleopatra had omitted to consider one element vital

to success: the support of the people in Rome, who even though they knew the empire was stretched, did not want to cede any part of it.

The next ceremony Cleopatra staged was all brilliance, a commemoration of the new lands in a giant show in the city's stadium. If the Romans wanted gladiators killing foreign animals and each other, and free banquets in the streets, the Egyptians wished to see their monarchs as gods. That's what they were going to get. The city stadium was incredibly decorated and all of Alexandria seemed to cram into the seats. Cleopatra, dressed as Isis-Aphrodite, and Mark Antony as Dionysus-Osiris, sat on thrones, with the children on smaller seats below them. Cleopatra was presented as Queen of Kings and her sons as Kings of Kings. Antony stood up, declared that the 'greatness of the Roman Empire consists more in giving than in taking' and bestowed various lands on each of his children.[V] Cleopatra was made regent for them all. Then, finally, came Caesarion, and Antony announced him as 'Ptolemy Caesar, King of Kings' and said he was heir to Caesar. Caesarion was announced by Antony as a god, not just king of Egypt with his mother, which was dangerous enough, but extremely perilously the true son and heir of Julius Caesar.[14] Cleopatra would have expected Cleopatra Selene to one day marry her half-brother, Caesarion; and thus, both her children would rule Rome. It was a grand view of dynasty and splendour. Egypt, the richest nation in the ancient world and the last to remain independent of Rome, was announcing it would never be conquered. On the coins issued to celebrate the event, Cleopatra was 'Cleopatra Queen of Kings and her sons who are kings'.

It was magic and magnificent. The Egyptians, who expected such theatrics as part of their contract with monarchy, were delighted by Cleopatra as she showered them with the gold dust of theatre. Antony was far removed from the realities of his home country and the need to pretend humility. For presenting himself as a god on a golden throne, marrying a goddess, was too shocking for Rome. The ceremony might have been brushed off as irrelevant foreign theatrics had it been for Cleopatra alone and if Caesarion, now a young man at thirteen years old, had not been presented as heir. The declaration of Caesarion as true son to Julius Caesar was extremely threatening to Octavian. And Antony sitting on a throne was

a disaster. Only the ruler of the empire should receive tributes, and no man should pretend to be a god or a king. It was now urgent that Antony returned to Rome to speak to the people. But instead, he thought the victories he planned as he secured the East would speak for him.

Cleopatra and Antony's show played into Octavian's hands; he declared Antony an enemy of Rome and he played a clever double game. He said to the elite it should be hushed up (the whole thing was too shocking) but the gossip spread around the ruling class.

Antony clearly thought that, with his skill and Cleopatra's money, he could win the upcoming war. But he didn't have the disciplined, toughened army that he had been used to in Rome. Octavian stepped up his words against Antony, declaring he had been seduced by the witchcraft of Cleopatra and the East, and told the Senate that he was a slave to his Egyptian queen.[15] He even seized Antony's will where it was held with the Vestal Virgins in Rome, an outrageous invasion. He lied that Antony wished to be buried next to Cleopatra, declared Caesarion was heir and confirmed the land gifts to Cleopatra. The Romans then began to believe that Alexandria would be made the capital of the Roman republic, a rumour put about by Octavian no doubt. This suggestion was a sly move – plenty of ordinary Romans just wanted to get on with business and didn't care either way which man was in charge, but would panic at the thought of losing capital status and all the cash that came with it. The whole 'will' was a forgery, but Antony was not there to deny it, and so the tide of public opinion turned against him. The people were told Cleopatra had 'enslaved him so absolutely'.[16] Octavian declared that Cleopatra was a terrible threat to Rome and would invade the city. It was said that Rome feared two people: Hannibal and Cleopatra. The people were told she was a terror, that she wanted to 'demolish the Capitol, and demolish the empire'. As the poet Propertius put it, she 'demanded the walls of Rome and the Senate bound to her rule'.[17]

So it happens. Queens who want to rule their own lands are often demonised with claims that they also want everybody else's. And the men beside them are cast as 'weak'. Antony was even accused of wearing an 'oriental dagger' rather than a proper weapon; thus appearing entirely emasculated. It is curious, though, that Antony's mistake – participating in

Cleopatra's vast shows – was also the one Julius Caesar made; but history has not criticised him in the same way.

In the autumn of 32 BCE, Octavian declared war upon Cleopatra and Egypt – she was simply not to be allowed to be called 'queen'. He was really declaring war on Antony, but he couldn't say so explicitly because it was not acceptable to fight another Roman. Cleopatra was a cardboard cut-out enemy figure, used to justify war. The people of Rome were told that he was fighting a rebellious queen who longed to take over the empire and that she must be stopped for the safety of the whole empire.

On 2 September 31, the two sides met at the Battle of Actium. Antony took up his position on the flagship as admiral and led the ships forth out of the bay against the enemy. Cleopatra's ships were at the rear. He had around 140 ships to Octavian's 250. Bloody and bitter fighting ensued, with losses on both sides. Cleopatra retreated to regroup and Antony followed her. Much of the rest of his fleet eventually surrendered. It was an act that was seized on by Rome as cowardice, temptress Cleopatra pulling Antony from his duty. And yet there had been no conclusive victory. Antony and Cleopatra intended to fight on. Cleopatra was still hopeful of success, until, as they sailed towards Alexandria, they heard that the governor of Cyrene had moved his loyalties to Octavian. Antony sank into despair and talked of suicide.

Over the winter, Cleopatra made plans. She considered leaving her son in charge and taking cover in India, a trading partner to Egypt where the empire's tentacles had not reached. She knew that Octavian still needed her money and that she could strike a deal with him. She sent him golden gifts and made the offer that she would abdicate if her children were allowed to rule Egypt (but no other territory, which was a huge concession), and asked for Antony to be allowed to remain in Egypt. Octavian took the money and told her to renounce her sovereignty. He then told her in secret that she could expect favour if she killed Antony or expelled him from Egypt.

Cleopatra might have saved herself if she had given up Antony and submitted to Rome as a subservient queen. But she was loyal to Antony and,

quite reasonably, she didn't trust Octavian and would have suspected that Rome would invade and take over anyway, even if she offered obeisance to him. Antony was her only protector. She celebrated his fifty-second birthday with a magnificent banquet. Her hope was that, if she sent him regular bribes, Octavian would be distracted by other parts of the empire and leave Egypt alone. In 30 BCE, Caesarion was sixteen and Cleopatra held a marvellous festival at the city's stadium. The people of Alexandria proceeded to enjoy days of celebration to celebrate their heir. It was another ceremony bound to annoy Rome. Caesarion's presence was both Cleopatra's strength and her greatest danger – for as long as he existed, he was a threat to Octavian. He is never talked about in the typical Cleopatra as sexy-failure story, it is forgotten that he was the one who Rome truly feared, but it was the case.

Octavian and his forces advanced on Egypt. And so, not long after the birthday celebrations, Cleopatra gave Caesarion much of her stores of the treasury and sent him and his tutor towards India. She sent the three younger children to Thebes, always the most loyal part of the country, near her beloved Dendera, with the plan of sending them further southwards.

Cleopatra took up her position in the palace. Octavian's armies moved swiftly into Egypt and were soon at the gates of the city. Antony and his troops came out and pushed them back, in a stunning victory, and told Octavian he wished to meet him in hand-to-hand combat. Octavian wasn't much of a fighter and would never agree. Cleopatra was surrounded. With Alexandria about to be invaded, the two rulers had time for one final celebration of their love, their dreams of ruling empire together. Antony and Cleopatra gathered with their old friends and courtiers for one last banquet, like the ones they had held in the early days of their relationship. And then Antony rode out again to fight Octavian.

Cleopatra believed Antony had been killed in battle with Octavian's forces and all was lost. She gave word to her attendants to tell everyone that she had killed herself. She sequestered herself in her tomb, where she had already stowed the rest of her treasury, with her attendants Charmion and Eiras, and waited. When he was told she had killed herself, Antony was heartbroken. 'Fate has snatched away the only thing for which I still wanted

to live,' he said. 'But it distresses me that so great a general should be found less courageous than a woman.' He drove his sword into his stomach, but unfortunately, he failed to die, and tried to find someone to stab him again, although the palace was in chaos, servants rushing all around. The ones he managed to waylay wisely refused to kill such an illustrious Roman general. One courtier sent urgent word to Cleopatra that he was still alive, and so she called him to her and he staggered to the tomb. The door could not be opened, but the upper part was unfinished and she let down ropes, presumably left behind by the builders, to pull him up. With the help of her women, and with enormous strength, she manoeuvred him into the tomb and laid him down. He told her to trust Gaius Proculeius, one of Octavian's men, and to remember how happy they had been. He died in her arms.

Cleopatra locked herself in the tomb while the Romans invaded her palace. Octavian feared she would destroy her treasures and kill herself, so he sent his men to try to remove her from the tomb. They could not get past the sealed stone door. Gaius Proculeius came and she agreed to negotiate, saying she would leave the tomb if Caesarion was allowed to rule Egypt. As Proculeius distracted her, men climbed up to enter through the upper windows. When she realised they were coming in, Cleopatra tried to stab herself, but Proculeius stopped her and shook her dress to see if she was harbouring poisons. She had been betrayed.

Cleopatra, the great queen, was put under house arrest in the palace, and every means by which she could kill herself taken from her. Octavian told the troops not to sack the city. He called a public meeting in the stadium where Cleopatra had recently celebrated her son's birthday and told the citizens that they would not be punished. He got word from the child's tutor that Antyllus, Antony's fourteen-year-old son, was hiding in the Caesarum, the temple built by Julius Caesar, and sent troops, who would execute the boy and kill the tutor as well. Soldiers were sent to retrieve Caesarion and his half-brothers and sister, Cleopatra, Alexander and Ptolemy.

Octavian watched Cleopatra obsessively, ensuring she ate, because he wanted to show her 'so she might add brilliance to his triumph'. It was her worst fear. She would be jeered at, imprisoned, displayed like an exotic animal; soldiers would manhandle her, men would try to catch at her, people would throw things as she was paraded in heavy chains, walking through the dusty streets of Rome. She told him she would not be 'shown in any

Triumph'; he made plans to hurry it up. Octavian demanded that every item in the treasury was given to him so that she could barely have a single jewel for herself. She was still living in her apartments, still a ruler for now. Then she received the most dreadful news. She was told by an informer that Octavian was about to leave for Syria and she would be taken to Rome in three days. At that point, Cleopatra commenced her final strategy. On 10 August, when the Alexandrian heat was high, the sea breezes through the palace windows the only relief, the sounds of the city outside, the city that she had done so much for continuing without her, she asked to be taken to Antony's mausoleum one last time.

Cleopatra prayed and made offerings to his soul. Back at the palace, she put on her most royal gown and ornamented her hair with the few jewels she was allowed. The mighty queen who had stunned her people with ceremonies on a gold throne, who had rowed a bull along the Nile, who had won over Caesar and Antony with her wit and her magnificence, was preparing for her last performance. She then sent away all her staff except for Eiras and Charmion, who the Romans had underestimated and dismissed as mere feminine attendants because they were 'just' her hairdresser and mistress of the wardrobe. She lay down on the golden bed, arranged herself to advantage with the help of her ladies, and took in her hands the emblems of royalty. Then she took her own life. The woman who had, since her earliest years, researched herbs and medicines, could easily kill herself with poison. She had secreted it in one of her many vases or boxes, perhaps smearing it on a pin that she used to dress her still-voluminous hair, or in a make-up box. The Romans dismissed make-up as trivial and irrelevant, and had been so obsessed by seizing her jewels that they had forgotten about her other belongings.

The idea of her killing herself with an asp, a snake crawling over her beautiful skin, is potent but entirely unlikely, and was invented. As Propertius put it, Cleopatra had handled 'stinging serpents to absorb their black venom into her body'. A real snake has been the image, so dramatic, so sexual. One Greek historian, Strabo, in Alexandria not long after Cleopatra, said she used an ointment. Death from a snake bite could be slow and drawn out – enough time for the Romans to discover her and attempt to save her. And sometimes snake bites failed to work; a snake might give only a dry bite with no or little venom. Cleopatra was a planner and an asp was leaving

death to chance. Moreover, the more venomous Egyptian cobra, which could also be denoted by the word aspis, could be up to two metres long, impossible to hide! It would be improbable for her to have had a real snake in her rooms. This was all exoticising propaganda, to suggest that Egypt was wild and unsophisticated, and it gained credence as time wore on because it evoked comparisons with Eve. Even Plutarch hedges about whether it was a snake or a pin. The queen who came from a family who blithely murdered siblings and rivals, would have known exactly how to kill herself with a concentrated venom. Still, venom can be slow, and she would have had to insert a pin right in a major blood vessel to ensure a quick death, so perhaps it is more likely she just swallowed an effective poison. On the walls of the House of Giuseppe II in Pompeii, now in the National Archaeological Museum of Naples, there is a painting of a woman dating from the first quarter of the first century taking poison in a cup who is thought by scholars to represent Cleopatra. The queen wears a Romanesque small diadem, is dressed in a colourful, revealing gown and a nearby servant carries a crocodile head, perhaps as a form of tray. She is surrounded by attendants, and a Roman man is also present. There is no sign of a snake. She is about to take her poison from a large silver cup. These wealthy Romans then, thought Cleopatra drank from a cup and her servants and at least one Roman watched while she did so. Essentially, the Romans knew that the snake idea was ludicrous, but it was too juicy to abandon.

According to Plutarch, after they had arranged their mistress to their satisfaction, Eiras and Charmion killed themselves. Cleopatra had outwitted her enemy, dead at thirty-nine. The Romans arrived and found Cleopatra dead, Eiras dying at her feet and Charmion, near death, fixing her mistress's crown. 'Was this well done of your lady?' demanded one soldier. 'Extremely well done,' retorted Charmion. The most powerful man in the world had lost this battle. Octavian, according to Cassius Dio, had experts try to revive her, dosing her with drugs and snake antidote. He had been determined to show the terrifying queen of Egypt, his most powerful enemy, the fear of Rome, in chains as his captive. He was also afraid that the Alexandrians would rise against him and accuse him of having murdered her. So he ordered that Cleopatra be buried as she had asked for, with Antony in her tomb, and that her two ladies be given an honourable burial.

It is strange that the big story of Cleopatra's death is not how she was double-crossed by the Romans, how her children were imprisoned and one murdered, how she had tried to bargain and been refused, but how she destroyed herself with a snake. As we have seen, killing yourself when you lose is very much a Roman custom, like Cassius and Brutus, and also the king of Cyprus. And much is made of her killing herself on her bed, yet more sexualised. But surely, if you want to poison yourself, you are most likely to do it in the most comfortable place. But when it comes to Cleopatra, everything is portrayed as one overblown sexual romance.

However, what if there was a different story? What if the Romans didn't want Cleopatra in Rome? She was powerful, troublesome – and showing people the real queen might have made them realise that she wasn't a monster after all. Horace declared she didn't want to be 'a humble woman in a proud triumph'. Plutarch, Cassius Dio and another writer, Florus, all have Cleopatra as declaring that she will not be displayed, as does Livy – and Shakespeare makes his Cleopatra tell dying Antony she will never be in the 'imperious show'.[18] But perhaps Octavian didn't want her; perhaps he wanted her dead, arranged her murder or at least allowed it to happen.[19] The very fact that every commentator says she killed herself is suggestive; they spoke the words that the empire wanted. As we have seen, the whole snake story was pretty much medically impossible. What if she was actually poisoned? What if Cleopatra didn't kill herself, but was murdered – and it was dressed up as suicide? It was much better for them that she was dead, her threats out of the way. If we ask, *cui bono* from Cleopatra's suicide – well, it wasn't her. It was the Romans, who, because no one would ever see the real queen, could monster her as wild and excessive, a sexualised woman who they could all hate. Cleopatra's personality was, it seemed to me, marked by eternal determination and a refusal ever to give in. Of course, she had lost everything at this point and knew that with Antony's death Rome would invade and she would be blamed, so she cannot have been feeling optimistic. But her son was still alive, and he was a man and could be respected by Rome. She was still a queen and could guess that Rome didn't want to govern Egypt – just possess it, so perhaps once the initial flush of the triumph had faded, she might be allowed her freedom and perhaps even consulted on Egypt.

The portrait in Pompeii suggests the Romans knew that the snake story was fiction, and we might go one further and say she was murdered. Octavian would be reviled for despatching a woman, a captive, not in battle and Egypt could have risen up. Much easier all round politically for Octavian to kill her and pretend it was suicide. The rolling out of a carpet story wasn't true, what if the suicide story wasn't either?

'Thus was Egypt enslaved,' wrote Cassius Dio, and those who had resisted were 'finally subdued'. Caesarion ruled for three weeks or so – Cleopatra was not quite the last ruler of Egypt. Octavian then had him executed, which was what he had planned all along; as Caesar's son he was simply too much of a threat. That Octavian executed Caesarion lends weight to the argument that he might have also had Cleopatra killed. He wanted them both out of the way. The Romans' excuse was that Cleopatra had enlisted him to fight and therefore he was an enemy. Only a large payment from Archibius, a friend of Cleopatra, stopped Octavian from ordering the destruction of all her statues. After all, he had got what he really wanted – Cleopatra's cash.

In Octavian's triumph, a float bore an image of Cleopatra, dying on her golden bed. It might have been a painting or, more likely, a wax model. Either way, she was served up to reduce her, other her, sexualise her. It was better for him that she was a model, not a real woman. 'I saw your arms bitten by sacred serpents,'[20] declared Propertius, the poet who might have seen the triumph. Cleopatra might have refused to be paraded, but men still got their way by sexualising her. She saw herself as royal mother, dignified woman, they wanted a sexy doomed woman lying on her bed. Every story needs an antagonist. Such was her role. There are two portraits of Cleopatra in Pompeii, giving us an insight into how ordinary citizens saw her, as opposed to Plutarch and the rest trying to hype up the drama. One is the suicide created as a sedate affair. Then in happier times, as we have seen, someone had painted on their wall a young Cleopatra as Venus with Caesarion as Cupid, the beloved of Caesar, the future ruler. That was walled up and concealed, sometime in Cleopatra's century. It was clearly too incendiary, after Caesar's death, to have Cleopatra painted in your sitting room. But once upon a time, this painting suggests, the Romans were hopeful for her as a part of Rome – and perhaps hundreds, thousands of citizens had Cleopatra as Venus on their wall.

The Romans couldn't believe the wealth of Egypt. Octavian sent every bit of treasure he could find back to Rome, including all of Cleopatra's beloved jewels. The injection of money was so immense that the Roman economy soared and the rate of interest fell by two-thirds. Octavian finally returned to Rome and staged a fabulous triumph, thanks to Cleopatra's wealth, showing off his conquering of Egypt – in which it was no sophisticated, modern country with a booming economy but a strange and mystic land of magic, gods and doomed passion.

Her twin children, eleven-year-old Cleopatra Selene and Alexander, dressed as the moon and the sun, along with their brother Ptolemy, were forced to walk in chains behind her image. The chains were so heavy that the children were barely able to move, and there were reports that the onlookers felt sympathy towards them, particularly as they were the children of a great Roman. Octavian realised that he would have to show mercy; he couldn't treat the children of Mark Antony thus. The children were later given to Octavia, abandoned wife of Antony, to bring up, along with their half-siblings, her children by Antony. Both boys quickly disappeared from the record, perhaps killed by those who feared they might be figureheads for rebellion (that would mean three of Cleopatra's sons slain). Not long after, Marcus Vipsanius, Caesar's right-hand man and general at Actium, started building the Pantheon, the temple to all the gods, in Rome. The pillars were made of granite from the mighty quarries of Aswan, and it was later said that one of Cleopatra's pearls had been cut in half to give the statue of Venus a pair of earrings. The Pantheon burned down and was later rebuilt, but still, that great temple, beloved of so many visitors to Rome, is to me the temple of Cleopatra, the triumph of Rome built with Egyptian money.

One presumes Cleopatra was mummified. But perhaps if she lay by Mark Antony, she was not. If she was mummified, then it is most likely that asphalt was used as part of the process; used as a sealant. Giant blocks of it could be found floating on the Dead Sea, it was thrust into boats, melted and used as a sealant on the mummy wrappings. That one day we might possibly discover a tomb in which a woman is mummified and a man is not, which might be the queen and Mark Antony, is an astonishing idea, but one imagines that Octavian buried her far away in a concealed tomb, so her body could never be found and the queen treated as a martyr.

The younger Cleopatra, Cleopatra Selene, survived and was brought up in the heart of the Roman republic – she had inherited her mother's diplomatic skills. At around fourteen she was married to Juba of Numidia, a prince who had been brought up in the household of Julius Caesar and then Octavian. In the same year, she and Juba were given the kingdom of Mauretania by Rome. In her new home as queen, Cleopatra Selene commissioned a great statue of her mother in the palace, and called her son Ptolemy, an act of hope for a new dynasty. She brought in scholars and artists from Alexandria to create a court rivalling her mother's for intellect and culture, as well as fostering trade routes, making it into a formidable trade capital. All the hope of Cleopatra and Caesar and Mark Antony had been invested in the boys, but Selene was the mighty queen who, despite Rome, managed to rule with her husband. She inherited her mother's intellect and understanding of what a country wanted from its queen. She bore the position of co-ruler, featuring on the coinage along with her husband, and even minted her own coins, in the name Queen Cleopatra. Her son Ptolemy took the throne after her husband's death, but the Emperor Caligula executed him and the territory was taken. Cleopatra's daughter was interred in the Royal Mausoleum, which still stands in modern-day Algeria although her body is gone.[VI] She was the last Cleopatra.

Cleopatra, female-king of Egypt, had been dangerous to the Romans, with her power and her wealth.[VII] And having a son, Caesarion, made her a terrible threat. Through him, the Romans said, she could rule Rome – and there would be nothing worse than that! So the relief on the back of Dendera Temple, so often ignored or overlooked, was Cleopatra's own representation of herself and her showing herself in the guise that Romans most feared. And they left it, too afraid of her gods to remove it. This vision of her is the clearest indication we have of how she saw herself, and how she saw her role as female king and mother of the future king, the politics, the danger. This is what we should remember, not the asp-bitten figure paraded in Roman triumph, reclining in death on a waxen bed.

There would not be an independent Egypt again until the twentieth century. Cleopatra survived when all others were conquered. As queen she was underestimated by the Romans and she won over the two most powerful

people in the world, Julius Caesar and Mark Antony. She did everything to attempt to secure her country's independence; she acted the goddess, mistress of performance and propaganda, who introduced herself as Isis and then bore child-gods for the empire. Historical representations of her have been reduced to propaganda depicting her as lascivious rather than politically astute. Shakespeare's famous words power a perception of her as vain and self-obsessed, an intelligent woman brought low by love and interest in her own beauty. Yes, he was very dependent on Plutarch – and one has to admit that the theatre-going public wouldn't have had much interest in watching a play about a political mother or a bureaucrat when they could have been gazing at a queen dragged down by tragic love. But Shakespeare's queens can be figures of mockery. Titania in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is laughed at because she falls in love with a donkey. Did it please a populace who were frustrated with Elizabeth I, who, by 1595 or 1596, knew that she would not have a child? And *Antony and Cleopatra* appeared after the advent of James I, when Elizabeth was out of fashion, everyone was praising the Stuarts, and kingship was the thing. Elizabeth I and Cleopatra are both cast as vain by their critics. Perhaps, if written at the height of Elizabeth I's popularity, a play about Cleopatra would have given a few more gestures to what she achieved: a diplomat leading a booming, efficient economy more sophisticated than Rome's, who managed the complexities of political power better than most of the men around her. In a world crafted by Roman historians and Shakespeare, we are wont to see her alliance with Antony as wrong; foolishly driven by love. Yet if Antony had secured Rome, allied with Octavian, she would have won too. The last of the Library at Alexandria was demolished in 391 CE by the Archbishop Theophilius, who sent teams to obliterate all remaining pagan temples in Alexandria – as well as the Serapeum, which was a gathering spot for scholars.

With the destruction went all the records of Cleopatra's reign.

Rome feared her in her lifetime, and after her death they wrote about her with misogyny and hatred. A woman rolling out of a wrapped-up carpet seduces a powerful man, persuades men to ignore their duty and then kills herself with a snake, forgetting her people at every turn. Male rulers are judged on whether they can hold onto power, if they have the expected interest in detail and administration, whether they win battles or not. Their

love affairs are dismissed as irrelevant (unless they are with other men, and then they are often criticised for having male favourites). Octavian, the Roman emperor who finally captured Cleopatra, expected the women of Rome to fall into his bed, and Julius Caesar, as we've seen, had plenty of lovers, but both men are preserved by history as emperors ruled by their heads, whereas Cleopatra is seen as all passion.

Cleopatra's was the ultimate story of a fight for survival – not only for herself but for her country against Rome. And yet, although Cleopatra was queen of Egypt, she was also Greek by descent, from Alexander the Great himself, and bore a Greek name. And thus, even though her story was depicted by Roman writers as a battle between exotic Egypt versus controlled and structured Rome, it was also part of the age-old struggle between Greek culture and the Roman world. The Roman Republic conquered all before it, laying waste, taking everything it wanted or destroying it. But the problem for all client states of Rome, and particularly for Egypt, was that the rulers of Rome were no secure monolith of authority, but men who were constantly falling out for power. Roman propaganda depicted an upstanding and disciplined civilisation, but in fact it was riven by the vicissitudes of personality and rivalry, and these fights between men in Rome were like stones thrown into the water that caused huge waves across the Mediterranean, and meant, in the end, that Cleopatra died. As the Roman Empire conquered the known world, so its attitudes towards women spread (and the later advance of Christianity would also push out the traditional female role of priestess). The cult of Isis reached its greatest heights under Cleopatra; goddess and woman intertwined, they both burned with the brightest flame.

Hundreds of years later, on a spring day in 415 CE, the scholar Hypatia was driving through the city of Alexandria in her chariot. She was venerated as a mathematician and philosopher, a peerless scholar of geometry and astronomy, and an advisor of statesmen. But the Roman Empire wanted obedience to the new Christian religion and Hypatia represented paganism – and had more influence than should be possessed by a woman. A group of men tore her down from her chariot and dragged her to a church, where they beat her to death with roof tiles. The Archbishop Cyril of Alexander

had detested her, and perhaps decreed her death. Cyril was later deemed a saint. The horrific death of Hypatia in a city once famous for learning marked the final act of Alexandria as a city of women.

With no words about Cleopatra surviving in Egyptian sources, she has become a figure defined by the Romans. They made her the symbol of what they wished Egypt to be: rich, fecund, sex-driven, ill-disciplined, superstitious, weak. They did not display her in chains, so they put her in a cage of words. No other monarch would come so close to the impossible task of outwitting Rome. Politically and diplomatically brilliant, Cleopatra was one of the world's greatest queens. She inherited a country in debt and left it so rich that her coffers ended Egyptian inflation. Cleopatra's wealth literally saved indebted, overstretched Rome. She held an empire in her hand.

In the end, she was buried in Egypt, as she had always desired. Somehow, she would have turned the triumph to her advantage, made the watching Romans feel ashamed of putting the majestic queen in such a scenario. The queen who had always specialised in shaping her image, carving herself across Dendera, staging giant shows during the great events of her life, would have made the triumph her own and earned respect from the people. And even though history has turned her into a tragic queen, both contemporary monarchs and those who followed her used her as an example of strong rule – including her own daughter. Cleopatra deserves to be the world's most famous queen. Not because of tragic glamour. But because no one fought harder for her country's independence than she.

I. I said in the introduction that she might look to a passing modern eye like any other temple priestess, but of course she cannot be – only queens or goddesses would be shown at such a scale on temple walls.

II. Our evidence for this is a source that notes he was accompanied by a daughter and, as one had betrayed him and another was an infant, we presume this was Cleopatra.

III. The Isis cult can first be seen in sources from the Fifth Dynasty, beginning in 2494 BCE.

IV. Between sunrise and dusk, no vehicles were allowed into the city centre, neither carts, wagons nor chariots.

V. Alexander Helios gained Armenia, Media and Parthia – the furthest reach of the empire so far (even though Parthia was not yet conquered and had proved extraordinarily resistant). Two-year-old Ptolemy gained Phoenicia, Syria and Cilicia. Cleopatra Selene was given Cyrene and Crete.

VI. This was probably due to grave-robbers, although it may be the case that the mausoleum was only meant to be a tribute, not a grave.

VII. The needles, now standing in New York's Central Park and on the Thames, were once said to be from Cleopatra's palace, but were probably instead once at the Caesareum.

CHAPTER THREE

Killer Queens: Women Trying to Get Their Hands on Rome

Boudica held up her hands, appealing to the gods. She was rousing the men of her tribe to fight back against the Romans. It was better to be killed, she declared, than go about 'possessing empty titles of freedom' and having to ransom themselves every year, to pay taxes to the greedy empire. As she said, their sufferings under the Romans were manifold, captured beasts fared better and there was no option but to push them out. She then called on the goddess Andraste and staged a magical rite in which a hare jumped from the folds of her dress and ran to the 'lucky' side of the crowd, which was taken as a sign. Boudica the queen raised her hand to the skies and called out, 'I thank you, Andraste, and call upon you as woman to woman… as the queen of such men and such women, I beg thee for victory.'

This magnificent scene, reported by a Roman, the speech, is the image we have, for good or bad, of Boudica, the warrior queen. As one Roman historian declared, 'in stature she was very tall, in appearance most terrifying, in the glance of her eye most fierce, and her voice was harsh; a great mass of the tawniest hair fell to her hips; around her neck was a large golden necklace; and she wore a tunic of divers colours over which a thick mantle was fastened with a brooch.' As she spoke to her people, she 'grasped a spear to aid her in terrifying all beholders'[1]. She is a fierce, half-savage, noble warrior. In Egypt, we have some sources for our queens: buildings, temples, documents, accounts by others. Now, as we depart Egypt, our queens grow harder to find outside of the empire itself. We must look for

torcs in the soil, or the odd scrap of document. Boudica is only given to us through a few accounts by Romans, and we cannot know what is true. We find her chiefly in two sources: Cassius Dio, writing in around 220 CE, one hundred and fifty years later, and Tacitus, writing in 110 CE, who, although fond of embellishment, was closer to reality than most accounts of lost queens because his father-in-law had been a senior officer in the Roman army in Britain during the period, so may have even seen the queen, certainly heard reports, and he writes only fifty or so years after her death. These accounts, like those of Cleopatra, were written for domestic consumption, and the story they wanted to tell was of a rebel queen rightfully squashed. Unlike Cleopatra, Boudica was in a country that Rome didn't have to court for power – Britain was miles away and she had been roundly beaten – so she wasn't demonised and sexualised. Britain wasn't seen as sexual and lascivious by the Romans, but as chaotic, rather savage and primitive, with a dose of old magic, and this was how their queen was characterised. Cleopatra was sexy and selfish, Boudica was waving her spear and using magic tricks.

What we see after Cleopatra is a growing interest in the warrior queen who leads troops into battle, ideally hopelessly.

But if women should be meek and obedient and one has to be courageous and ruthless in war, how can a woman be a warrior? Throughout history, men who kill are often coded in terms of honour, courage or necessity. But female killers are often portrayed as strange freaks, especially if they kill their husbands, upsetting the natural order of male rule. The codes have always punished a woman who kills a husband with more force than a man who kills a wife. In England in the seventeenth century, killing your husband was 'petty treason', a worse crime than murder, punishable by burning. One Mary Perkins, convicted in Worcestershire in 1609 of poisoning her husband, was forced to buy the materials to make her own fire. Men would only be executed although more mitigating circumstances were found for them. Domestic abuse was very rarely prosecuted unless it ended in murder (and rape in marriage was legal in the UK until the late twentieth century). So if female killers were generally demonised, when men who killed could be coded in terms of honour or necessity, where did this leave queens – who command death and execute their enemies? As we will see, while men like Julius Casear are allowed to go out and conquer, we prefer queens to be

engaging in defensive operations; a woman's fighting instincts must be presented as protecting the motherland. Cleopatra was trying to do this, but she was demonised by a constant narrative that she was trying to take over and rule Rome.

To make Cleopatra a bad queen in Roman eyes she had to be shown as trying to invade. Zenobia, as we will see, was not necessarily defending the motherland as she has been portrayed but fighting back against Rome by expanding her territory. The same Roman men who wrote about Cleopatra, Boudica, Zenobia and other client queens also wrote about Roman Imperial women, many of whom came off even worse, accused of seducing and murdering everyone in sight and being obsessed with gaining influence. Despite the Roman Empire being an almost perfect structure of all-male power, the men who ruled it were constantly afraid of women destabilising it. As we see with Boudica, her rebellion is presented much more sympathetically than Cleopatra's. Of course, Britain was not much of a threat compared to Egypt. Most Romans probably had no clue where it was and believed there was certainly no chance of any Roman being seduced by those scruffy barbarians in their rain-sodden lands. Boudica had no son who might expect to rule Rome and there was no need to use her as an excuse to cover up the fact that soldiers had died to settle an argument between men. But we also might argue that Plutarch was writing about Cleopatra in a time of Roman success, under the respected military leader Emperor Trajan (more of him later) and Cassius Dio may have been writing at the same time as the deeply unpopular Elagabalus; he's telling the Romans they need to step up their efforts. What we have as sources about royal women of the past are often not always about them at all.

Boudica's life in early Britain, as a young woman in the Iceni, an elite daughter or minor royal, would have been one of privilege, but tinged with fear of invasion from neighbouring tribes. She was probably born around 25 CE, fifty or so years after the death of Cleopatra. The Iceni territory was huge, spread across parts of modern-day Cambridgeshire, Suffolk and Norfolk. The Iceni were also wealthy and highly developed, with a strong agricultural industry as well as pottery and land that was rich in minerals. They had their

own coinage and traded with their neighbours and built temples; they had the money that the Romans wanted.

Boudica would have experienced life at its most sophisticated. But it was nothing like Rome – Caratacus, one captured British chieftain taken to Rome, was confused about why its rulers had tried so hard to seize his 'poor huts' when they had such grandeur.[2] But the Iceni were proud of their land. As Boudica said, 'we inhabit so large an island, or rather a continent, one might say, that is encircled by the sea' and 'are so separated by the ocean from all the rest of mankind that we have been believed to dwell on a different earth and under a different sky'.

The name Boudica comes from the Brythonic word '*boudi*', meaning victory; adding the suffix '*ka*' changes the meaning to 'victorious woman'. So, it may in fact be a description and we still may not know her real name. She was married to Prasutagus, most likely the king's son, and possibly some relation of hers, sometime in the late 30s CE.

The first Roman invasion had happened long before Boudica was born, and made little impact; indeed, she may never have known about it. Julius Caesar, after he'd entertained Ptolemy Auletes and his daughter, little Cleopatra, in Rome in 55 BCE, sent an investigator to report on the quality of the land. The investigator decided not to disembark for fear of the 'barbarians'. Caesar decided to visit himself. He and 10,000 troops arrived in Kent and were met by a large local army, painted in terrifying blue woad. The Roman army did very little and set off back to Rome after a fortnight, yet it was celebrated as a giant propaganda victory, an invasion of unexplored land. In the following year, Caesar returned with a much bigger army and put a king who had been deposed by a fellow tribe back on the throne, gathered hostages and left, bearing a large stock of pearls. Once the 'help' of Rome was accepted, the die was cast.

Caesar complained that there wasn't any silver in Britain, and the British slaves he was capturing (according to Cicero) were very rough – even though he allowed there was a lot of beef and tin and the houses didn't look so bad, the whole place looked quite like France, he thought.[3] Britain, with its lack of silver, and shabby unkempt people, seemed much more trouble than it was worth and he turned his attention to Africa and Egypt. One imagines him telling Cleopatra about the strange land he had found when

he first met her in the palace; perhaps some British pearls ended up in her stunning collection. Maybe even the one she 'ate' in front of Mark Antony.

After Caesar, the British sent tributes to Rome, traders travelled to Britain and matters seemed peaceful. However, the Romans, always desperate for cash, saw that controlling Britain would bring copper, tin, silver (Caesar had simply missed it), gold and human capital in the form of slaves (even if they weren't deemed up to much). And until Britain was conquered, it would be a potential pocket of resistance in Europe. In 43 CE, when (we think) King Antedios was ruler of the Iceni, the Romans came back for a full-scale takeover. Antedios occupied a neutral position and allowed the Romans to pass through his lands, and probably paid tribute to them. He struck a bargain with the dark side. This decision shaped Boudica's life.

Boudica knew her country while it was nominally independent. She lived as a child and as a young adult in a country awkwardly coexisting with Rome, traders and travellers moving back and forth. She most likely married Prasutagus before the invasion. She had her two daughters. Then everything exploded. The Emperor Claudius, paranoid that every person in Rome wanted his throne, desired to prove himself with a giant victory, as a second Julius Caesar. The ostensible excuse was reinstating the king of the Atrebates, who had been unseated by the kingdom of the Catuvellauni. Twenty thousand Roman soldiers arrived on the south coast and swiftly defeated the armies who came against them. Claudius himself, along with a troop of elephants – intended to stun the people – travelled to Camulodunum, modern-day Colchester, the seat of the Catuvellauni, where he took the city and accepted obeisance from eleven tribal kings. Camulodunum was installed as the new Roman capital of Britain and the building of a temple honouring Caesar was begun. Claudius was a smash-and-grab sort of emperor; he arrived in August, peak Roman fighting season, and left after sixteen days. His soldiers remained and began moving throughout the country. The Iceni had already allied with Rome and an Iceni king, probably Antedios, was most likely at the ceremony of tribute in Colchester. Perhaps Prasutagus, as a powerful man, accompanied him, with Boudica. If she was there, she watched an immense spectacle of power, something she would have never seen before.

The Romans took the country swiftly. By 47 CE, most of Britain to the south and east of a line from the Severn to the Humber was under Roman

control. They established Londinium as a settlement. The Roman habit was to choose existing local settlements in strategic positions and take them over, but London appears to have been at most rather small before the Romans built it up. The Iceni had allowed the Romans passage through their land and perhaps, in the hope that they'd be left alone, supplied men to fight. They believed that this new deal with Rome would mean they could continue to live peacefully.

The British grew increasingly angry about the invasion. Their lands were taken, high taxes were imposed and buildings funded that were to the glory of Rome, not Britain; people were enslaved, the gods disrespected. Colchester was inhabited by retired soldiers and displaced Roman citizens, all the best spots taken by Romans.[I] The Iceni were allies of Rome, and they put up with the taxes and soldiers tramping through their land, but they were weary. Boudica and her husband would have realised they could never satisfy Rome, that kept asking for more.

At around this point, King Prasutagus took the throne from Antedios, who may have been his father. We do not know if Antedios died, was pushed off by the Romans in favour of Prasutagus, or if the new king decided to take the throne to begin the fight back against the occupiers. The Roman governor sought to introduce the so called '*pax romana*', which entailed the British tribes giving up their weapons. At this, the Iceni rose up in revolt. Boudica would have been part of the discussions; felt it was worth fighting back against the Romans, no matter how powerful they were. They hoped no doubt that other tribes would support them. But the Roman soldiers beat them back – and won.

The Iceni were now subservient to Rome. Prasutagus may have been newly installed after the rebellion, but it seems more likely that he had been the king before, for he appears to have been accepted by the Iceni, and his will suggests that he had rebellious tendencies. The Iceni were given a brutal fate – the Romans demanded that the king, on his death, would bequeath the Iceni lands to the emperor. The Romans would get everything, the Iceni's flourishing trading posts, temples, agricultural lands and pottery and crafts. The Iceni began their new life, dreading that Prasutagus would die. They took out loans to pay the Romans the money they demanded. Boudica and her people were under occupation. As Boudica said in her speech rousing

men to fight, they had suffered every sort of 'shameful or grievous' treatment 'ever since these men made their appearance in Britain'. Nearly all of their possessions had been taken, and those few they had kept they were forced to pay taxes on. They were 'pasturing and tilling for them all our other possessions' and then were forced to yield crops as well. Under occupation, Boudica was acting as a queen consort, conducting civil ceremonies and rites and governing for her husband when he travelled to Roman events to perform obeisance. Little had prepared her for what was about to happen.

Prasutagus died in 60 CE, when Boudica was around thirty-five or so. In direct contravention of Roman demands, the king's will bequeathed the kingdom jointly to the emperor and his two daughters. It was a courageous act, but perhaps it would have been braver to fight back against the Romans himself, rather than kicking the can down the road to his two daughters. He knew the Romans did not respect female rulers. Perhaps writing such a will made him feel better on his deathbed, less submissive, but it exposed Boudica and his daughters to danger. Did he mean for his people to have joint queens, or for his daughters to be co-rulers with the emperor? Leaving it to a male relative along with his daughters might have had a chance of working out. That he gave the kingdom to both princesses rather than simply the eldest suggested he knew it was near hopeless, a pyrrhic attempt. He wanted to seem valiant at the last minute, but he should have fought the battle before his death.

Boudica was going to defend his decision all the same. The alternative, giving in to Rome, would have sparked a mass revolt. Prasutagus had truly left her a poisoned chalice. One of Boudica's daughters, presumably the oldest, was now queen, but we do not know her name; the chroniclers did not record it, or give her much of a role other than being Boudica's daughter, denying her legitimacy. It is striking that she is never called queen, even though she was her father's eldest child and thus, by all usual expectations, now the ruler. The Roman historians didn't give her a name, the story was all about her mother. This focus meant that their readers could forget about the daughter, whitewashing over the shocking fate of the nameless young queen of the Iceni.

The Romans ignored the will. The procurator in charge of Britain, Catus Decianus, declared that the Iceni land was theirs. If the Iceni were not going to give up their land happily, then Rome was going to take it. Roman

soldiers arrived swiftly to take power. They occupied the kingdom and also invaded houses and seized the assets of noble families (they said they hadn't received loans and taxes, the British said they had). The Romans fought brutally. According to Tacitus the royal residence was taken and relatives enslaved. And in a horrific act, the two daughters were raped and Boudica was flogged. Catus must have ordered this. Romans generally captured monarchs and royal relations and took them to show off in Rome in triumphs, as they did with Cleopatra's children and would do with Zenobia. They usually treated royal prisoners of war with a reasonable level of respect, and British leaders had been sent to Rome for showing before, including Caratacus. Catus had clearly told his soldiers to spare the women no mercy. For the Romans, giving a throne to two women rather than wholly to the Emperor was an act that needed severe punishment, before anyone else got any ideas. This was rape as war crime, to humiliate, to reduce and ideally to impregnate them. Raping a queen was a shocking act. Tacitus writes that 'his wife' Boudica was subject to the lash and 'his daughters violated'. They were queens, but they are not called so. They are called 'daughters' of the king rather than the 'queen and her sister', in a Roman effort to minimise the deplorable behaviour of the soldiers – behaviour the Roman people would not see as right[4].

Boudica would not be cowed by the horrors. Instead, she and her people were ready to fight, and fight to the death. As she put it in her rousing speech before the magical trick with the hare: 'How much better to have been slain and to have perished than to go about with a tax on our heads!' She talked of the depredations, how their dead bodies were even stripped for goods. And even when they died, they were not free, because even 'though none of us has any money (how, indeed, could we, or where would we get it?), we are stripped and despoiled like a murderer's victims'. As she said, they should never have let the Romans set foot on the island; they should have been 'expelling them at once as we did their famous Julius Caesar'.[5]

It is up there with the most rousing battle speeches. Tacitus, whose father-in-law fought on the other side, tells us nothing of the speech, and we cannot say if Cassius Dio was reliable, but certainly the queen would have spoken about taxation, independence and the loss of possessions, and all the other painful depredations of sovereignty. She does not appear to have

talked of the horrific act committed on her daughters. She called out that the Iceni should 'go against the Romans, trusting to good fortune. Let us show them they are hares and foxes trying to rule over dogs and wolves.' She then staged her magical rite with her gown and the hare, which she presumably had bundled up and fastened inside the dress with brooches. When she released the animal and it promptly ran to what the crowds thought was the lucky side, they let out a great cheer.

Boudica rallied thousands of Britons by allying herself with the goddess Andraste (perhaps exclusive to the Iceni) against the hordes, evoking an old religion in opposition to the new. As with Cleopatra, a queen's use of the goddess was most powerful at times of crisis. After allying with their neighbours, the Trinovantes, and no doubt disaffected members of other tribes, the Iceni, roused by Boudica, launched an attack against the Romans. They struck when the governor and much of his army were fighting to subdue Wales. Boudica led the warriors into battle, creating alliances, arming her men and planning their route.

Boudica had created an impressive appearance, a brilliant performance of favour from Andraste and she had the gift of rousing her fighters with speech. To rally so many troops, to convince them to follow her against a seemingly invulnerable enemy, to stage a rite in front of thousands and for them to believe she was channelling the magic of Andraste; she was astonishing. The story the Romans told was one of a sole queen leading her men. They wanted to suggest that the Iceni rebellion was isolated; that Boudica, like Cleopatra, was a tragic, doomed queen hanging on by her fingernails, on a suicide mission, as opposed to a leader backed up by other leaders, other tribal groupings and their chiefs allying with her and producing an efficient and sophisticated fighting force. As Boudica herself said, the Romans wore heavy armour and so could not pursue anyone or flee, hid behind barricades and could barely swim the rivers. All those years back, Julius Caesar had complained that the British method of fighting was to move about in all directions and, when they had got between the troops, jump out and engage them on foot. Under Boudica, the British knew they were nimbler than the cumbersome, overloaded Roman army.

Boudica and her forces advanced first to Camulodunum, the heart of Roman Britain, the town taken and turned into a place for the Roman citizens to enjoy – after taxing the British. Boudica's army overcame the

Roman garrison, killed many of the citizens and burned the town, including the Claudius temple. It was a stunning victory. Her army then moved on to attack Londinium. Catus, who had ordered the seizing of Boudica's land and the barbaric treatment of her daughters, fearing he would be punished for the rebel wars, fled to Gaul. The news reached the Emperor Nero, who pondered if Britain was simply too difficult to control and whether maybe it should be left alone after all. Boudica's extreme tactics were having an effect. She not only nearly saved her people, she nearly saved the country.

Londinium was only around the size of modern-day Hyde Park, and it was largely occupied by wealthy Romans and had no standing garrison; it was not built to withstand attack. For the British tribes, the settlement on the Thames was perhaps more hated than Camulodunum, because it had never been one of theirs – it was purely the result of Roman invasion, and Roman trade had made it wealthy for its inhabitants.

Boudica went into Londinium essentially unchallenged – Suetonius Paulinus, the then-governor of Britain (Roman historians suggest it was Catus who made the decisions, not him), was attacking the Druids in Angelsey. He had marched back but retreated when he realised he was outnumbered. The queen's forces burned and entirely conquered the city. Afterwards, she and her forces attacked and sacked the third main Roman settlement of Verulamium (now St Albans). Suetonius gathered his forces. His army now numbered 10,000, but Cassius Dio puts Boudica's at nearly a quarter of a million. Clearly those who were there thought her army was large, but 250,000 was impossible – the entire population of Roman Britain was only a few million. As her victories multiplied, more people joined her, all infuriated by the occupation and subordination that the Romans had imposed, even those who had disliked the Iceni. Boudica knew she couldn't win in the long term as Rome could send endless supplies of soldiers, but she was fighting in the hope that Rome would come to terms and agree to Britain having independence from Roman rule. She and her troops pushed forward with courage and resourcefulness. However, Boudica's strength was also her weakness. She had summoned thousands of men, and she overextended her army by incorporating those who were not experienced fighters. Behind the lines of troops trailed their families. They wished to assist, but their presence made everybody vulnerable.

Suetonius readied himself for battle with Boudica and her forces. He chose his battleground carefully, positioning his much smaller force in a narrow defile, which made it more difficult for Boudica's army to attack with their chariots, and in front of a wood so he couldn't be attacked from behind.

On the eve of the battle, Boudica spoke. As Tacitus reported, she mounted a chariot, her daughters behind her, and spoke individually to each clan – an excellent strategy of speaking personally to all of her fighters.

> It was customary, she knew, with Britons to fight under female captaincy; but now she was avenging, not as a queen of glorious ancestry, her ravished realm and power, but, as a woman of the people, her liberty lost, her body tortured by the lash, the tarnished honour of her daughters. Roman cupidity had progressed so far that not their very persons, not age itself, nor maidenhood, were left unpolluted. Yet Heaven was on the side of their just revenge: one legion, which ventured battle, had perished; the rest were skulking in their camps, or looking around them for a way of escape.[6]

This time she spoke of what her daughters had suffered. She probably called again on Andraste and the gods. As she said, 'on that field they must conquer or fall. Such was the settled purpose of a woman — the men might live and be slaves!' It was a superb speech. One imagines that Boudica had been a practised speaker before, that while she was consort she had spoken for her husband. Now on the eve of battle, she inspired men with her words.

Once battle commenced, the fighting went back and forth, and then the Romans charged. Because the Britons had a phalanx of their wagons behind them, they were unable to escape, and the Romans slaughtered them, soldiers and followers alike, in their thousands. They were ruthless, as Tacitus put it, 'the troops gave no quarter even to the women' and even the 'baggage animals were speared' and killed. He claimed that 80,000 Britons were killed for the loss of only 400 of the Roman army, an unlikely statistic, but still the Empire had won a huge victory. As to Boudica, the historical sources are divided. Tacitus declared she poisoned herself. Cassius Dio

wrote that she died while her remaining soldiers were considering gathering to fight, and this finally convinced them to give in. As he put it, 'The Britons mourned her deeply and gave her a costly burial; but, feeling that now at last they were really defeated, they scattered to their homes.'[7] Either way, Boudica died near the battlefield. One wonders if we might draw some comparisons with Cleopatra here, possibly secretly killed and the whole thing dubbed a suicide so that Rome did not have to deal with her. It would have been easy enough for a secret agent to get behind enemy lines or even a double agent who was already there, and could poison Boudica to get her out of the way. If the Romans did that, it was a successful strategy. With Boudica dead, the Britons gave up the fight. The victorious governor, Suetonius, punished those Britons who survived very cruelly – so cruelly that the new procurator, Gaius Alpinus Classicianus, who had taken the position after Catus had fled the country, warned Nero that the punitive policies were creating further hostility among the tribes.

The rebellious Britons had seen many of their number killed, and because of the uprising had not tended their farmland. The people were on the brink of famine. But still the Roman occupiers demanded crops, not just to feed their population, but also for export. Nero sent an investigator to report back on what had happened and Suetonius was recalled and a new governor put in place, Publius Petronius Turpilianus, who approached the occupied population in a fairer way and without so much military oppression. Unlike so many rebellions, which had the effect of making the occupation even worse, Boudica's did indeed improve the lives of those she had tried to defend. And it warned the Romans off further repressive action. The Romans swiftly regrouped and Camulodunum, Londinium and Verulamium were rebuilt; London expanded and became the new capital of the province. No other rebellion came close to that of Boudica.

So what of her daughters, the queens who were never called queen? Tacitus and Cassius Dio tell us nothing. It may have been that, if they survived, the daughters were married into the Roman elite in Britain (as appears to have happened with Zenobia's children). They weren't reported as being taken to Rome for a triumph, as you might expect – perhaps because finding out about the sexual assaults enacted on them by soldiers would be shocking for the Roman people. Most likely, they were killed or poisoned

after the battle. Boudica's daughter, the queen who never was, was perhaps a great warrior, a mighty speaker like her mother. But as the sources only recorded the words and actions of her mother, she is a queen we will never know.

In the sixth century the British monk Gildas, a pro-Roman writer, refers to Boudica as a 'treacherous lioness'. She is forgotten for centuries, then reappears in the sixteenth century as the Renaissance makes the writings of Tacitus and Dio widely accessible. Edmund Spenser depicted her in a poem as a heroine called 'Bunduca'. As a queen and leader of Britons, she made an ideal mirror and soulmate for Elizabeth I in her wars with Spain.

In the late eighteenth century she was utilised to develop the idea of English nationhood, most effectively by William Cowper in his poem 'Boadicea' in 1782, and in the 1842 poem by Alfred Lord Tennyson of the same name, depicted as a warrior for all Britain. Her bronze statue *Boadicea and her Daughters* by Thomas Thornycroft was produced between 1856 and 1871 and positioned on the Westminster Pier in 1902.[II] The queen has some resemblance to Victoria, and Albert lent horses as models. The daughters have bared breasts (of course they do, this is a Victorian sculptor, and battle is just the place to go topless). Carved on the plinth are lines from Cowper's poem that her 'posterity' will 'sway' regions 'Caesar never knew'. Boudica, a fighter against the Roman Empire, was used as a cheerleader for imperialism. But in the twentieth century, attitudes began to change again. In 1906 her statue became a gathering place for campaigners for votes for women. In 1908 a gold-topped silk banner for the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies featured Boudica as a defining image, and since then she has been closely allied to the cause of female suffrage. Thus, along with Queen Victoria (who was opposed to women voting but was used as an example by campaigners of how a woman could fully comprehend political matters), she has been vital to the presentation of the suffragette cause.

There are two statues of Boudica in Colchester. One is part of the facade of the town hall and the other a sculpture in aluminium made in 1999, over five metres high. At Cardiff City Hall is a sculpture of Boudica and her daughters as a family group. It was unveiled in 1916 by David Lloyd George and is the only representation of women in a group of Welsh figures from

the past. It is titled *Buddug/Boadicea*; the name Buddug is the core of the Welsh word '*buddugol*', meaning victorious. We have nothing of Boudica's, we know nothing concrete of her. Some torcs owned by the Iceni were found by a Norfolk farmer in 1948, buried in a sort of votive offering, a present to the gods; long before she was born, in around 70 BCE, they were very like what she would have worn as queen. This is the closest we can get to Boudica, some golden torcs owned by rulers before her. Maybe she did bury gold as an offering to the gods, maybe it is still there to be discovered.

Boudica is rare because she was a consort protecting the inheritance not of a son but of a daughter.

Boudica's writings and speeches were recorded by her enemies, but the Britain she created lives on. Her powerful and impressive rebellion did ensure better treatment for the British under the Romans. And because her legend has lasted throughout the ages, she has had more influence over the modern world than any of her enemies. She represents the ultimate female David and Goliath story. She didn't win. But she should be remembered for her greatest legacy, a fighter avenging her own horror and a queen who succeeded in making life better for her people and other Britons.

Living at around the same time as Boudica was Cartimandua, queen of the Brigantes, a tribe who occupied much of northern Britain. Cartimandua made a life under Roman occupation. And then in 51 CE, Caractacus, leader of the British resistance and chief of the Catuvellauni tribe, launched an attack on the Romans. He lost and fled to Brigante territory and Cartimandua handed him to the Romans. Tacitus accused her of having captured the king by 'treachery' and of betraying him. She didn't have any choice. She later divorced her husband, and he pushed her off the throne in revenge. Not a good idea to marry.

Romans had exoticised Cleopatra, and made Boudica out to be a magical fierce queen at the top of a chaotic army. But as the emperors came and went, so Rome's empresses began to be seen in the same way as Cleopatra

had been – passion bent on power. Male writers churned out dreams of the glory of Rome, but there was just one problem: women. Apparently, they turned crazed whenever they had a son, and tried to get him into power. The son-mad story was also told about women who weren't even empresses.

In around 20 BCE, ten years after the death of Cleopatra, her vanquisher Octavian gave a young, enslaved woman, Musa, to Phraates IV. He was the king of the Parthians, who had been the enemy of Mark Antony, and Musa may have come from the house of Octavian himself. The king already had four other wives and was probably around forty or so, and used to exercising his male privilege on women in his household. Musa quickly gained a foothold in his household, and he grew fascinated by her. He made her queen and she gave birth to his son in 19 BCE, a year after she arrived. Ten years later she persuaded the king to favour her son and had his four elder sons by his other wives sent to Rome, clearing the way. In 2 BCE the king died, and there were accusations that she had poisoned him. Her son became Phraates V. She appears on the coinage with him, suggesting she was a joint ruler. In around 4 CE, she and her son were thrown off the throne and hurried to Rome and the protection of Augustus (the next king only lasted two years – they were brutal times). Her husband probably died of old age, but the Roman chroniclers liked a poisoning story, it was a way of making her a monster of ambition, grasping at the throne for her son.

It is curious – and should make us look anew at representations of Cleopatra – how often Roman empresses were tarred by the same brush as client queens. According to the chroniclers these wives quickly became hungry for control; every Roman imperial woman was crazed and murderous, bent on elevating her otherwise helpless son. Claudius took the throne in 41 CE along with his empress Messalina. She was accused of being wild for power, pushing her husband to execute female relations and potential heirs, murderous and promiscuous and manipulating her husband. Of course Claudius himself did not want to get rid of potential heirs! She was punished by a guard running her through with a sword when she was aged only thirty, in 48 CE, the year after the invasion of Britain. Tacitus, one of the historians who wrote about her, even admitted that his account might seem invented. Claudius then married Agrippina, and she too was portrayed as wildly ambitious, pushing Claudius to adopt her son, Nero. When Nero became emperor, she apparently fought him for power, and he finally

murdered her after three attempts. And yet when the deposed British leader, Caratacus, was taken to Rome, Tacitus reported that he was presented to Agrippina while the people cheered her. This isn't the story that comes down in the chronicles. A clear-eyed assessor of Roman ways (he was the one who asked why the Romans wanted the poor huts of the British when they had such grandeur at home), he had no reason to lie. She, like all the other demonised women, was more popular than the chroniclers wanted to admit. Similarly, Faustina, wife of Marcus Aurelius when he came to the throne in 161 CE, was accused by Cassius Dio of commanding deaths by poison and having her enemies executed. However, contemporary reports have her accompanying her husband on campaigns, loved by the soldiers and called Mother of the Camp by her husband. The ideal of the Roman Empire was honour, dignity, reason and fairness – and every time this was diverted from, a woman was blamed.

We read the same story over and over. Women near to power apparently killed each other or their husbands, became monsters when their son came to the throne, tried to have sex with everybody. One wonders if readers ever got tired of the avalanche of portraits of awful women as grenades of poisoning and jealousy. The representation of Roman women shows one of the fundamental problems a misogynistic system has with women: their purpose is to have a son, but having a son makes a woman too strong.

The earliest writing by a woman in Britain dates back to Roman occupation in about 100 CE. Claudia Severa, the wife of a commander of a fort in Vindolanda writes to Sulpicia Lepidina, wife of the Vindolanda commander, inviting her to her birthday party. The invitation was written by a scribe, and then adds, 'Give my greetings to your Cerialis. My Aelius and my little son send him their greetings.' She signs off (in a hand that we believe is hers), 'I shall expect you, sister. Farewell, sister, my dearest soul, as I hope to prosper, and hail.' Real-life women across the empire were not trying to poison each other for precedence, but strengthening diplomatic bonds through friendship and community.[8] If Claudia had been an empress, the chroniclers would have said she was trying to shove her son into power.

The anti-woman frenzy fades somewhat when the empire is secure. The Roman Empire was at its largest under the Emperor Trajan, who reigned from 98 to 117 CE – it encompassed the Eastern Empire as well as Europe

and newly conquered Britain and Western Asia. Trajan's wife, Pompeia Plotina, was one of the empresses who got the best press, being celebrated for her chastity, dignity and learning, and apparently her desire to resist getting involved in power battles. A learned woman, she patronised the Epicurean school of philosophy, engaged in charity work, advocated for abandoned children and orphans and hoped to open schools for all children. Although perhaps her good press was because she didn't have a son, which made her less of a threat. And then when Trajan died Plotina got involved in the succession and proclaimed his successor to be Hadrian. She was Hadrian's guardian, and she had signed the letter naming him heir. It would surely be natural to assume that Plotina had done so because the emperor was too weak to write. And yet it was declared a plot, that she had pushed Hadrian forward because she had been his other guardian's lover. Even a beloved empress, with a reputation for modesty and restraint, becomes a misogynist's horror when she dares to sign a letter for her husband.

Rome was about men – but the most sacred symbols of religion were female: the Vestal Virgins, the ritual heart of Rome, who guarded the fire of Rome at the Temple in the Roman Forum. If it went out, it was believed Rome would die. In 220 CE, one of the Vestal Virgins, Julia Aquilia Severa, was performing her rites in Rome for Vesta, sacred goddess of the hearth and fire. Wearing the white gown that resembled Roman bridal dress, she tended the fire, which burned day and night in the Temple at the Roman Forum – you can still see its ruins. Julia, like the other five Vestals, was from a high-born family and had been chosen as a little girl, picked for her intelligence and grace. She lived in the House of the Virgins, an opulent fifty-room palace under total protection, not allowed to mix with society. The Vestal Virgins kept the wills and documents for senators in their temple. Anyone who assaulted a Vestal would be instantly killed, and they had the power to free a person on their way to execution simply by touching them. And if a Vestal was found to have taken a lover, she would be buried alive and he would be publicly beaten to death.

For ten years Julia had learned the rituals, for the next ten she would be performing them, and then in her final ten years of service she would teach the new pupils. At around the age of forty, she would be set free to live as she pleased, able to marry if she wished. She was even able to make her own will and bequeath property – even to a woman, which was forbidden to all other

women. Julia knew she was sacred, touched by the hand of the goddess. And then she was informed that she must marry the sixteen-year-old Emperor Elagabalus, who had been two years on the throne. She was forced from her home, all the stability she had known, and she knew that if the emperor fell from favour, she would too, and could be punished with live burial, suffocating slowly as her air ran out.

The emperor's marriage to Julia was so shocking to Rome that he divorced her the following year and married a noblewoman, Annia Faustina. It was now impossible for Julia to return to the Vestals, so presumably she was put in a villa in Rome. Then the emperor promptly divorced Annia and took Julia back into the palace, and she lived with him until he was assassinated in 222 CE. It was likely that she was stowed in a villa again after his death, although it was also possible that she was killed – hopefully not buried alive.

The capture of a Vestal Virgin marked the beginning of Rome's crisis. In the years following, the empire was rocked by attempted invasions from various enemies, peasant rebellions, the plague, hyperinflation, collapsing trade networks, and, in Rome itself, wildly see-sawing political instability as various generals claimed the throne. They were also fighting Christianity, after a prophet called Jesus started preaching about the poor in Palestine. Women were some of the earliest believers, and Valerian instructed that Roman women who would not renounce their enthusiasm for the new religion should lose all their property and be banished.

In the wondrous city of Petra in Jordan, one of its most memorable sites is the Treasury, the beautiful building at the end of the passageway known as the Siq. This is not a treasury, although it was once believed to be, but the tomb of an illustrious king, Aretas IV, king of the Nabateans. He was married to Queen Shaqilath, who was not a consort but a joint ruler from around 16 to 40 CE, depicted with him on the coinage and named King's sister, to demonstrate her high position – she probably was his sister or half-sister. There was clearly a tradition of joint monarchy, as his first wife Kuldu was also depicted on the coinage with him. Aretas's daughter with Kuldu, Phasaelis, was married off to Herod, but he decided to divorce her and marry his brother's wife and protesting about this got John the Baptist

executed. After Aretas died, he was succeeded jointly by his daughter by Shaqilath, Shaqilath II, and her half-brother. She ruled for her son, Rabbel II Soter, after her husband's death, but once he reached majority, he ruled with his queen. Throughout this period, the kingdom had an uneasy relationship with Rome, as it had conquered so many of their neighbours and had been invaded by the Romans in 62 BCE. They sat in a half-world between client king and independence, generally left alone by the Romans due to their profitable status as a key trading post. But then after the death of Rabbel, the Emperor Trajan took the country, and it became a Roman province. He perhaps had died without children. The Romans took Petra in 106 CE and it was the end of the tradition of queens at Petra.

One of the threats to Rome in this period was Zenobia. She was born around 240 CE and, at the age of twenty-seven, she was made queen of the Palmyrene Empire. She became the most important person in Palmyra and one of the most significant and formidable individuals in the world, a world that Rome claimed to possess. Within just a few years she had become ruler of Egypt, Asia Minor and the Levant, and declared that she controlled an independent empire, and that she was an empress.

Zenobia was no born queen regnant, a monarch's daughter, like Cleopatra, but a consort who became an independent empress (as we see, many reigning queens began as consorts). But when she was presenting herself as a born queen she referred back to Cleopatra and declared herself a descendant, presumably through the latter's daughter Cleopatra Selene. She said she had a collection of the great Egyptian queen's drinking goblets and also claimed that Alexandria was her 'ancestral city' – which made her a legitimate contender to take the Egyptian throne, as the descendant of the last queen and pharaoh. Zenobia's frequent use of Cleopatra as an inspiration, and her wielding her legend, suggests how important Cleopatra was as a model to client queens and kings, and that the Roman version of Cleopatra as a sexualised, tragic failure was not imbibed by her contemporaries. They saw her as powerful.

Zenobia's family and birth have left few traces, and we are sure of very little until she married Odaenathus, ruler of the celebrated city of Palmyra, as his second wife, in 255 CE when she was around fourteen. Her name in

Palmyrene was Bat-Zabbai – meaning daughter of Zabbai, but the Palmyrene Empire used Greek as its diplomatic language and so she referred to herself by her Greek name, Zenobia, which means 'descended from Zeus'. The sources for Zenobia are scant. She is like most women in the ancient world and beyond: we know nothing concrete of them until they interact with famous men. There are references to her in Persian writings and historical accounts, referring to her as a ruler, as well as coinage. But her main source is famously problematic – the *Historia Augusta*, a series of biographies of emperors written by different people that its authors say was written in the fourth century, but which was in fact composed much later (our main evidence for this is that it gives people roles that didn't exist in the fourth century!). It's full of errors and confusions, and is either a wildly inaccurate history or, more likely, a form of fictionalised biography – the main facts may be true, but aspects of motivation and conversations are imagined and dramatised.

The *Historia Augusta*, despite its inventions, was surely right to attribute to Zenobia the typical upbringing of a noble or royal Palmyrene girl.[9] She was an accomplished rider, loved hunting and was fluent in Egyptian and Syrian, her native language; she could also speak Greek and Latin (she later compelled her sons to speak Latin) and had a distinguished philosopher as a tutor.[III] One might venture that Zenobia's astonishing power as queen suggests that it was a society in which women did have a level of freedom, but we cannot know. Certainly, her education was one that suggested girls were valued; she was taught various subjects that would have prepared her for a role in influential circles. Zenobia was surely brought up to make a significant marriage and was perhaps a cousin of Odeanthus himself. Zenobia had a son with Odeanthus, Vaballathus, who was born in 258 or so, probably two further sons and possibly some daughters. One source suggested she had seven children; if she did, we have lost the records of them.

Zenobia's life saw a time of crisis for the Roman Empire: it was totally overextended, threatened on the borders. Territories around the edges of the empire were overlooked, tax collectors forgot to visit, governors were not appointed and local men took on the job of running the area. Such was Odaenathus.

He was born Septimius Odainat in around 220 (Odaenathus is the Latin translation of his name), making him about thirty-five when he married Zenobia. There was no monarchy at the time, and Palmyra had a secular leadership, in which Odaenathus had a meteoric rise. By 258, he was a consularis. Palmyra was a city of around 200,000 people and wealthy; one of the most significant trade hubs in the ancient world, a stop for merchants travelling between the East and Rome, and right on the Silk Road, the trade route from East to West that carried silks from China and spices from India to Europe. Rome had seized it and had been struggling to defend the area for some time against the Persian Empire, who were disrupting trade on the Silk Road. In 260 the Persians, long-time enemies of Rome, were victorious in a momentous battle at Edessa in modern-day Turkey, and also captured the Emperor Valerian himself. King Odaenathus preferred the rule of the Romans to the rule of the Persians, so he went to battle against the Persians, and in his campaign, regained all the territory of the Roman Empire that had been taken by the Persians.

Odaenathus presented himself as acting in Rome's interests and took the role of king. Zenobia, in her mid-twenties, was elevated to queen. Some sources suggest she went on campaign with Odaenathus – which seems likely considering her later military success. In Rome, the Emperor Gallienus's position was severely weakened by Odeanathus winning the borders of the empire. Even though Odaenathus had said he was loyal, the Roman people knew another man had done the job. But Odaenathus was clever; he played the humble game, styled himself as protecting the empire rather than saying he was making his own. He was politic, and only minted coins with the head of Gallienus, but, really, he was the king – and the lion on the obverse of some coins might have been meant to represent him as the king of kings.

In 267–8 or so, Odaenathus secured peace with Persia. Then, shockingly, he was murdered. Various culprits have been suggested – including an agent of Gallienus and rebel Palmyrenes who wanted to take power. It was perhaps most likely a combination of imperial agents and rebellious members of Odaenathus' own circle. Some said Zenobia was part of it, eager to raise her son to power (yet again that old story of a crazed woman pushing forward her son), but he was only eight, so surely it would have been better to wait until he was older. Enemies had accused Odaenathus of being a Persian

stooge. The assassins, whoever they were, had not killed Zenobia or Vaballathus. Perhaps they thought she would be no threat. But they had underestimated her. She saw herself as a queen, wife of a king, not an obedient Roman servant.

Zenobia was swiftly agreed as regent – suggesting that she was with her husband when he was killed – and quickly accepted by his army. She promptly moved in and began taking the same role as her husband. She had her son Vaballathus proclaimed King of Kings, but she was the one in control. She knew that Rome could not protect her borders against the Persians, so she should rule for herself. She initiated a court in Palmyra of philosophers and scholars and invited illustrious men to debate religious questions. Palmyra was a diverse city and Zenobia dealt well with the various power factions – by presenting herself as a queen and by setting herself against Rome. She sent an envoy accusing Gallienus of harbouring a courtier who had killed her husband. Zenobia showed her neighbours that she was not to be treated as a weak monarch and that her husband's death was no excuse to invade. She secured the border against Persia with further fortresses.

Although Zenobia showed submission to Rome, she ended the production of Gallienus's coins. Gallienus himself was assassinated by senior officials in Rome. If killing Zenobia's husband had been his last-minute attempt to hold on to power, he had failed. He was succeeded by Claudius II, known also as Claudius Gothicus. Disciplined, a ruthless warrior and a gifted military commander, he was a far more threatening enemy for Zenobia than Gallienus had been. His ambition was to regain all Roman territories that had been lost. He condemned Zenobia for giving her son titles without Roman consent and refused to see her as a legitimate ruler. Zenobia was in trouble.

Newly crowned on a throne, which was not supposed to be hereditary and was thus not secure, Zenobia struck. She began putting her son's face on coins as an act of defiance. Claudius was occupied fighting in the West and so, after securing her forts on the Euphrates River, in spring 270 she sent an army under her best general, Zabdas, to Bostra, a wealthy city in Arabia Petraea, a Roman-ruled territory bordering Syria. Zabdas's forces killed the governor in battle and then took over the city. That the Romans did not immediately punish her suggests how overextended the empire had become.

A few months later, Claudius died of plague. He left his throne to his brother, but this was contested and, into the vacuum, Zenobia launched a more daring attack: on Egypt, a majestic prize due to its fertile lands and wildly profitable trade routes. She had supporters in Egypt – she claimed she was descended from Cleopatra, and so might expect she would be welcomed as a liberator. Zabdas invaded Egypt with 70,000 men, overpowered the Roman army there, took Alexandria and left a garrison of 5,000. After a second battle Egypt's Roman governor, Tenagino Probus, lost and committed suicide (so we see yet another ruler who committed suicide when defeated, a Roman, and yet Cleopatra's suicide is cast as selfish, strange, rather than, as we might argue, common among rulers and client monarchs).

Zenobia was now queen of Egypt – the first since Cleopatra's terrible death. In December 270, Vaballathus and the Emperor Aurelian were announced as the rulers. Zenobia appointed her own administrators on their behalf, and the people of Egypt supported her. She wisely authorised the continued export of Egyptian grain to Rome. She put out decrees and edicts and issued coinage featuring the emperor and her son. Zenobia was presenting herself as a ruler subservient to Rome, even though her armies had invaded its territory and killed its governors.

Everything that Zenobia did was in the name of her son, but she was the ruler. She held around a third of what had been the Roman Empire in her hands. By 271 she ruled over lands that stretched from upper Mesopotamia to Anatolia to Egypt. She secured trade agreements, negotiated with the Persians. On coinage issued at Antioch, Aurelian, on one side, was described as Augustus and wore a full crown, while her son on the other wore only a laurel crown. It was pretended deference. Likewise, she claimed she was helpfully ruling territory for Rome. The populations of the countries accepted her because they had found Roman rule disadvantageous and pretty absentee. Zenobia promised security.

Zenobia did not claim to be King of Kings or supreme ruler, as her husband had done, but styled herself as a goddess and queen: a Palmyrene queen, an Egyptian queen, a Greek goddess – and, increasingly, a Roman empress. By 271, she was commissioning inscriptions and descriptions of her as '*eusebes*' or 'pious', only used by Roman empresses, and she was elsewhere called '*sebaste*', or Augusta in Greek and Latin. She may have been

attempting to suggest that she was the empress to Aurelian's emperor, and thus her child was their joint heir. She even called her son 'Augusti'. Zenobia's representations are more positive than Cleopatra or Boudica, even though she seized more territory than Cleopatra. She had been meeting the Romans in fair fights, rather than being caught up in battles between men for power. But in the end her son was not a Roman. When Cleopatra had herself carved on the Temple of Dendera, she was providing an image of herself, with her son, that might look harmless, but was terrifying to Rome.

In 272, the mints in Antioch and Alexandria stopped producing coins bearing the faces of Aurelian and Vaballathus and minted them with Vaballathus alone.[10] Zenobia was signalling both open rebellion and strength – and garnering support from soldiers, as well as her people and the wider population in Egypt. She even added 'Juno Regina' to her coins and imagery, Roman goddess, the warlike protector of the state. And in yet another bid for independence, she issued a coin from Antioch and Alexandria of herself as Augusta, no mention of Aurelian. She was an empress, ruling swathes of territory, including Egypt.

Unfortunately for Zenobia, Aurelian was unlike his predecessors, who were too preoccupied by other invaders to give her too much thought, unable to countenance the military operation requisite to take the East back from her. In early 272, Aurelian and his forces set off for Palmyra and Alexandria. He began by destroying cities, and then, when he reached Tyana, offered mercy if the population gave themselves up. Cities surrendered, garrisons gave in. Alexandria was captured in early June and Egypt fell. Zenobia withdrew her troops to defend Palmyra and Syria. But even though she knew she was outnumbered, she continued to call herself Augusta on coins, as well as erecting statues presenting herself as Augusta of Rome, the equal of the emperor.

Aurelian headed towards Antioch and met Zabdas and their troops around twenty-five miles from the city in May or June 272. The Romans won a decisive victory. Zenobia had one final brilliant stroke left up her sleeve to prevent her country from falling. She declared that Aurelian had been captured. Zabdas found a man resembling the emperor and paraded him through Antioch as a distraction. In the chaos, Zenobia and her troops

escaped southwards. Aurelian and his troops then set off in pursuit of Zenobia's army.

Zenobia and Zabdas assembled all their soldiers for battle. The Palmyrene cavalry were formidable and inflicted severe losses on the Romans, but then the Romans pretended to retreat and instead pounced. The battlefield was covered in bodies and blood. Zenobia fled to Palmyra and Aurelian blockaded it. The *Historia Augusta* claimed Zenobia wrote a letter to Aurelian when he demanded she surrender.

> You order my surrender, as though not knowing that Cleopatra chose to perish while queen rather than live with any other stature. We do not lack Persian aid, which we now anticipate. The Saracens support us, the Armenians support us, Syrian robbers have defeated your army, Aurelian.[11]

Zenobia's words were brave. Once more, Cleopatra was held up as an example of resistance. Aurelian demanded Zenobia surrender in person.

The queen would not give in. She escaped from the city on a camel with her son, hoping to reach the Persian Empire and ask for help from its king. Just as she arrived at a boat on the Euphrates, she and Vaballathus were seized by Aurelian's men. She was brought back and put on trial for treachery, along with her son and her advisors. The advisors were executed and she and Vaballathus were sentenced to house arrest in Rome. Then she was transported by the army back to Rome, along with her son. There they were displayed for the crowds in golden chains at the grand triumph; it was said the chains were so heavy that she could hardly walk (although one historian, Zosimus, recorded a story that she had died of starvation on the way, implying it was self-inflicted or, like Cleopatra, murder).[12]

Zenobia might have expected to be poisoned. She was in her thirties or early forties, had ruled an empire, declared herself an Augusta, put out coins depicting herself as a queen. But she was given a villa near the Tiber, on condition that she lived quietly. She was worth more to Aurelius alive than dead; a living reminder that no queen should defy Rome. It appears, moreover, that she married a senator of Rome, and her son may have also married into a political family, and she may have had further children, using her strategic mind to oversee her household and relationships. That a queen

who had openly fought Rome, ruled an empire and won momentous battles, could then be a senator's wife seems one of the most surprising turns in fortune of all. To the Romans, she was a trophy, and marriage was a way of controlling her. But marriage into an elite Roman family was remarkable, and she secured the future of her sons. Perhaps that was one reason why Octavian had wanted Cleopatra dead: married to a senator, she would be a threat.

Zenobia has become romanticised as a warrior queen, a lone woman – she was lauded by Syrian nationalists, causing suffering and war to the people. Her stupendous city of Palmyra has been much assaulted, much of its famous Temple of Bel destroyed.

Who was Zenobia? She was a warrior queen who also expanded her territory, and adeptly used images of Cleopatra to seize Egypt. Like some other women in this book, such as Catherine the Great, Zenobia moved up from the position of consort; she had little claim to be a queen but still declared herself one. She styled herself as an Augusta, as a goddess, and seized a position of regent that didn't even exist. She did try to win independence for her people – and managed it for a while.

No statue of Zenobia remains. We have only the coinage, some inscriptions and a biased Roman history to recall her by. Like Cleopatra, she used her son to underline her legitimacy. She assumed the role of divine mother and wife, continuing her husband's legacy. She was always co-ruler, always claiming she ruled for her son even though he was pushed into the background. Playing goddess and queen, ruler, wife and obedient Roman client monarch, she used the imagery of royal women, goddesses and queens – and finally saw them used against her, chained up as she was in a triumphal parade. If she had been content to act as subservient ruler for the Roman Empire, as her husband had done, retaining the country's position, stamping coins for the emperor, securing the empire's borders, she would have been accepted. But she saw a possibility of independent queenship with the weakened state of Rome and bet her rule on it. Zenobia ruled an empire for a brief two years; short, but more than anyone else had managed. No other woman, perhaps no other ruler, would gain so much power in her area of the East.

The empire had triumphed over Zenobia, but the end was coming. In 476 CE, the Germanic Emperor Odoacer deposed Romulus Augustus and allowed him to live in exile. The Western Roman Empire was at an end. What we know suggests that Romulus was unmarried. The last empress of Rome was the wife of his predecessor, Julius Nepo, and she is not named in any source. We know nothing of her. The Eastern Roman Empire was ruled from Constantinople, called by most the Byzantine Empire. Throughout the fifth and sixth centuries women gained power as empresses, such as Empress Eudoxia, who was given the title of Augusta and depicted on coins. But no one could prepare for the arrival of Theodora.

In around 500 CE, the child was pushed out in front of the crowds in the areas outside the Hippodrome of Constantinople, where people were queuing for the games. Along with her two sisters and their mother, she had to dance, somersault and high kick. The child was a talented tumbler, and she was soon promoted to the show at half time. After her father, a bear keeper at the hippodrome, had died, her mother remarried and put her daughters to work. Procopius, who wrote about her, claimed she was a prostitute. She may have been an actress and nothing else, since the words were often confused. But it was most likely, as another source suggests, she was forced into prostitution as a child – which makes Procopius' descriptions of her 'wanton' performances even more cruel; a little girl forced to perform desire for men and then punished for having to do so. She later went with a Syrian general to North Africa, where she fell pregnant, but he abandoned her and she made her own way back, discovering on the way a devotion to the Christian religion. The new, radical religion was appealing to women, even though the mother goddess was relegated; female preachers travelled across the empire and spoke of female saints, and Jesus' preaching about the importance of the underdog was engaging.

Even Procopius, who disliked Theodora, declared that no statue could live up to her beauty. He said her look was 'intense'; she was a woman of focused concentration. Back in Constantinople, she met Justinian, a farmer's son who had been adopted by his uncle, Justin, the emperor. Justinian, who was maybe twenty years older than Theodora, wanted to marry her, but the law forbade those of senatorial rank marrying actresses. In 524, Justin

changed the law to allow actresses who had reformed to marry men above their rank, and the pair wed in 525. Two years later Justin died, Justinian became the emperor and Theodora, ex-acrobat at the games, became empress of the Eastern Roman Empire.

From the beginning, Justinian presented his reign as a variety of joint rule. He relied on Theodora absolutely; she advised him on strategy, attended councils with him and worked with him on their joint plan to expand Constantinople and regain Rome. In 532, the two factions in Constantinople rebelled against Justinian and his advisors told him to flee. Theodora spoke up at a meeting at the government council, declaring that the 'present occasion is too serious to allow me to follow the convention that a woman should not speak in a man's council'. She said he should consider 'you have once escaped to a place of security, you would not gladly exchange such safety for death'.[13] Justinian stayed, and, after the rebellion, the two of them rebuilt Constantinople. She was never formally decreed co-regent, but almost all of the legislation passed bore her name, and she received foreign envoys and wrote to foreign rulers.

During Theodora's reign as empress, she made radical changes to the lives of women. She gathered young, enslaved sex workers in the city and gave them sanctuary in a safe house, and then she and Justinian demanded closure of the brothels and the arrest of the owners and keepers. Further laws also forbade the killing of a woman who had been found committing adultery and forbade the practice of exposure or leaving babies out in an isolated place (the infants were nearly always female), brought in the death penalty for rape and expanded women's rights by allowing them to divorce for abuse or adultery. Few women rulers dare to do much to improve the lives of women, and if they do they are often punished.

Theodora died in 548, aged around forty-eight, of a form of tumour. After she died, Justinian ruled for another seventeen years but passed very little legislation. She is preserved in the mosaics of Ravenna, even though she never went there, her intense, intelligent gaze looking out at us.

Cleopatra had almost retained Egypt, Zenobia had ruled a third of what had been the empire. Like Cleopatra, Boudica and Zenobia were bureaucratic experts; Boudica gathered an army from previously warring tribes, Zenobia created a court, adjudicated and issued laws and coins. It is

interesting that we call men soldier kings, but women warrior queens. The latter suits their bravery and courage, but they are also soldier queens. Like kings, they use established channels to make themselves legitimate, head the army, invite men to court, put themselves on the coinage, join with other rulers like Boudica, win over the religious leaders like Hatshepsut. The representation of Boudica waving her spear and staging her magic rites washes over her diplomacy and planning skills, and how she brought other tribes together. A warrior queen sounds passionate but perhaps also a little undisciplined, individualistic. It might override some key aspects of why these women became successful: their abilities to network in circles of power, impose bureaucratic systems, build up the state.

Countries accept queens when they are in crisis. Many kings have lost their kingdoms, been deposed, and then committed suicide, it is the queens who lost that we remember. Although emperors have seized Vestal Virgins or murdered their best friends we remember the stories of their terrible wives. The myths written by Roman chroniclers about the scandalous behaviour of powerful women, from Cleopatra to Zenobia to Agrippina to Theodora, continue to weave a heavy spell on our imagination.

I. Roman soldiers also earned a parcel of land after twenty-five years of service, so those serving their last mission in Britain had settled in this new part of the empire.

II. Prince Albert offered horses from the royal stables as models for the sculptor.

III. By 'Syrian', the sources probably mean Palmyrean Arabic, which was the language spoken by most in the city.

CHAPTER FOUR
Brother-Killers and Warriors: Fighting Queens

Almost 150 years ago, in 1878, Swedish archaeologists made a stunning find: the tomb of a tenth-century Viking warrior in Birka, a grave site on an island in a lake not far from Stockholm. He had been dressed in silk and buried with an arsenal of weapons: a sword, an axe, two shields, a spear, twenty-five armour-piercing arrows and a dagger, as well as dice and a gaming board and playing pieces, most likely used to map out military strategies. His outfit suggested he was a cavalry commander, reporting directly to royal command. The grave was written about as that of a great warrior buried with his weapons as a recognition of his courageous acts in battle. Out of over 1,000 tombs found at Birka, it was one of only two containing full weaponry.

In 2017, a team extracted DNA from the bones and found that the skeleton had two different X chromosomes and no Y chromosomes – proving that the body was that of a female (there had already been suspicions that the bones looked more female than male).[1] Even though the thirteenth-century *Saga of the Volsungs* describes shield maidens fighting alongside the men, the Vikings had long been described as a solely warrior-male culture – the assumption was that the Vikings, terrifying as they were, must have all been men. The Birka grave changed everything, our whole perception of this culture.[2]

Aud the Deep-Minded, according to various Icelandic sagas, the daughter of a warrior king, married Olaf the White. When Olaf was killed in battle,

Aud and her son, Thorstein, set off to the Hebrides, as her father Ketil ruled the area. Aud and her family were on the brink of being captured as spoils of war. She then embarked on a clandestine mission. She had a secret boat built in the forest at Caithness and captained it herself, with twenty sailors, to Orkney, where she gave one granddaughter to be married; then she sailed to the Faroes to give away another. She also carried various British prisoners in her ship, taken captive in raids by the Vikings. She sailed on to Iceland and claimed a large swathe of land for her family – and gave her British prisoners their freedom. There are surely Viking warriors and warrior queens that we have yet to find. And what they might show us is that fighting women, female soldiers, are more common than we thought.

From around 600 to 900 CE, we see women gaining power across the world. As world history sees a movement from smaller nations to larger, powerful queens rise up, defending their homelands, allying with each other and governing, leaving their thrones to their female relations. These women survive in fragments, slight sources. And yet we can hear their voices, see their power and how much they shook up the world around them. From the Vikings to what is now Cambodia, as states were forming this created conditions that allowed women to emerge. In later years, when the states were more stable, they tended to introduce rules cementing male succession.

We know there were women of power in this period. But the documents are fragmentary and what we know is always subject to revision. Graves can tell us much; but sometimes they can be deceptive. One ancient Mesopotamian grave was long thought to contain two royal women with their attendants, the latter having been sacrificed. But the more recent discovery that all the bodies were those of girls aged between twelve and eighteen suggests they might have all been sacrifices, buried together; maybe none of them were royal.[3] Sometimes the evidence we have can withhold its secrets from us. We must look at carvings on temples that have long been eaten away by time, piece together grave goods, look for traces of lives.

In China there was a long history of women ruling as consorts and queen mothers, court power brokers, stretching as far back as the eleventh century BCE. Great queens married to the Zhou kings came from the Jiang family. Yi Jiang was queen consort to King Zhou in about 1046 BCE and he trusted her

sufficiently to appoint her as one of his nine government ministers. The long tradition of marrying Jiang consorts created networks of power and considerable trust for the women at court. Queen Wang Jiang, who died at the end of the tenth century, had administered the imperial finances and accompanied her husband on campaign.

In 690 CE Wu Zetian, the only Chinese empress regnant generally accepted by history, came to the throne. She would rule for fifteen years. Wu began as a minor concubine in the imperial palace. Born into a wealthy family, well educated in calligraphy, history, literature and politics, Wu was sent at fourteen to be a minor wife to the royal court. There, she used her education and became private secretary to the Emperor Taizong, a testament to her intelligence and skill in calligraphy. She also had a love affair with the emperor's son and heir Gaozong – an excellent move. It was a brutal life for a concubine: fail to have a son and you would be sent away after the emperor's death. After Taizong died, she was packed off to the monastery, at only twenty-five.

Wu probably resigned herself to a life of seclusion. Then she had a stroke of luck. The Empress Wang, senior wife to the new emperor Gaozong, was battling for dominance with a minor wife, Xiao, who the emperor favoured. Wang had the bright idea of bringing back Wu, thus using his old flame to see off the minor wife. Wu arrived at court and played the game; she acted humbly towards the empress but also developed ties of friendship and support with the other courtiers and ladies-in-waiting, especially those whom the empress had frozen out or offended. Soon the emperor was entirely in love with her and Xiao fell from favour but so did Wang. Wu saw off both wives. Wu gave birth to the emperor's daughter, but she died soon after a visit from Wang. Wu immediately told the emperor that the empress had killed the baby. The following year she persuaded the emperor to depose his empress, and six days later Wu was created Empress Consort. Both Empress Wang and Xiao were imprisoned in isolation. When Wu heard that the emperor was considering freeing them, she promptly ordered them to be flogged and then put to death.

Wu was entirely dominant at court, influencing all decisions and presiding over royal events. At imperial meetings she sat behind a pearl screen (because she was not technically supposed to attend) and passed on her thoughts, and the emperor would always ask ministers if they had

spoken to her. She even wore the yellow robes reserved for the emperor. After nearly thirty years with Wu as consort, the emperor died and their eldest surviving son came to the throne, with Wu as regent – which was not customary; dowagers usually retired from court. She deposed him from the throne for her younger son, Ruizong. It would have been impossible for her to seize power had she not, like Hatshepsut, been backed by ministers, investors and business interests. She kept Ruizong in his chambers; he was not allowed to meet with ministers or officials or to attend imperial functions and events. She was ruler.

Despite her brutal treatment of enemies and her own son she was effective at forming alliances at court. She created a network of spies and secret police to dispatch her enemies. Six years after Ruizong came to power, Wu forced him to give her the throne. She became emperor herself and ruled for nearly fifteen years, until her death.

Wu Zetian, one of the most successful and powerful monarchs in history, managed, like Hatshepsut, to push aside the male heir, in this case her own son. She expanded the empire's borders to the widest they had ever been and fuelled a successful economy. She presided over trade growth and expansion, told people she had achieved such and so the court and crowd wanted to keep her in position. She executed and disappeared various rivals, but she was popular with the ordinary people, partly because of her policies to encourage small-scale farmers and poor relief, And, like Catherine the Great and many other female monarchs in history, she expanded education, supporting men from the common and gentry classes to take imperial examinations and enter the bureaucracy and government service. If it is fair to say that female monarchs need a strong civil service to succeed, it is also the case that most successful female monarchs expand the civil service and recruit into it people who will be loyal to them. Wu never let her guard down – and she didn't marry again, a wise move, for that would have meant giving up her power.

It is striking how women such as Wu rise from the harem. Recent scholars have argued that we shouldn't be using the words 'harem' or 'concubine' at all, they have such overtly sexual connotations that we overlook women's roles at court.[4] Just because these women were expected to perform sexual

roles (or at least appear as if they would be available), we cast them as primarily sexual attendants, imagination fuelled by orientalised and sexualised images of the harem from the nineteenth century, half-dressed women lying around a pool. We might argue that we should call such centres of power within the palace the women's court. The fact was that these women were courtiers, often engaged with the extensive business of the monarch, in terms of ceremony or actual activity. Rising up within this hierarchy took persistence and skill.

Their role was as diplomats, courtiers and, like Wu, as secretaries and administrators. Families sent young daughters to the court's 'minor wife' section to show their allegiance to the king, in the same way that high-born families in Renaissance Europe sent their daughters to be ladies-in-waiting to queens. Kings took minor wives from royal and elite families across the country. The inhabitants of this 'women's court' constituted a significant centre of power in the king's household, and unlike medieval Europe, they had a structure quite apart from the king's chief wife. Joining the palace as an imperial concubine then, was the ancient equivalent, we might argue, of passing the fast-track civil service exam. As with any court, the king could pick out his favourites for accelerated promotion. If we see the 'harem' as a centre of female authority, highly educated women sent to be civil servants, it helps us to understand the rise of women's power in this period and the influence of female rulers such as Wu. Because women's work was already important to the palace, it was possible for an empress to rise.

In Japan the Chrysanthemum Throne, later permitted only to male heirs, saw a series of empresses, usually daughters of the emperor, but sometimes consorts who stepped into the role after the ruler's death. The first was Empress Himiko in around 190 CE. At this time Japan was a collection of small kingdoms, and Himiko came to the throne of one of the larger ones. She was chosen to be empress after a long period of internal warfare, as the kingdoms fought against each other. It was said she never married and lived in her royal castle with 1,000 female attendants. She appears to have used images of women as priestesses to impress the populace, and claimed to be able to cast religious magic to support her reign. Another ruler, Jingu, was said to have ruled in the third century, and even featured on later banknotes.

When the kingdoms further consolidated and unified, in the second to third centuries, a single emperor came to rule over all the kingdoms, but this did not mean the end of female rule. Empress Suiko was the first woman to take the new unified throne, in 593. She was daughter of the previous emperor and had been consort to her half-brother, Emperor Bidatsu. After his death his brother came to the throne, but he died after two years, and, following a power battle between various factions, she was offered the throne. As in Egypt, the blood of the emperor was preferred, even if his direct descendent was a woman. She ruled for over thirty years.

The Empress Genmei ascended the Chrysanthemum Throne in 707. She was daughter of the emperor and half-sister and consort of his successor, the crown prince, and the throne went to their son, Monmu, as the crown prince died before him. Monmu then decided that his son, Obito, was too young to rule, and asked his mother to rule instead. So at the grand age of forty-seven, Genmei became empress and reigned for eight years until she appointed her daughter, Genshō, as crown prince (normally a male term, but applied to women as well) in 714 and then abdicated for her. Empress Genshō ostensibly ruled for Obito, her little brother, even though at fourteen he was now mature enough to rule. She ruled for nearly nine years.

The last known Japanese female ruler was Empress Kōken, known as Empress Shōtoku, daughter of the emperor before her. He declared her the first Crown Princess of Japan before he retired to be a monk. She ruled for eight years, stepped off the throne after a power struggle between relatives, and then resumed the throne and ruled for another five years before her death in 770.

It was an extraordinary period of female rule in Japan, when women were chosen intentionally even when there were possible male candidates. But then from the twelfth century until the nineteenth, the country was ruled by the military shogun, and the imperial monarchs were largely figureheads – and they had to be male. Despite the history of female rulers, the Japanese throne is now strictly men only; the law was confirmed in 1947 and, despite such a tradition of great empresses, has so far been judged unable to be overturned for the current emperor's sole child, a daughter.

In 632 the first queen regnant of Korea, Seondeok came to the throne in Silla after convincing her father, the king, that she could take on the role. She ruled for fifteen years, fostered the arts and developed the nation, laying the ground for unification of the Three Kingdoms. It is thought that she deliberately did not marry to avoid a man starting conflict. She was followed by her cousin, Queen Jindeok. Jindeok also chose not to marry. Her reign saw a strengthening of the civil service, taxation system and foreign relations with neighbours. Queen Jinseong ruled from 887–897; her father declared before he died that she could take the throne since Seondeok and Jindeok had been such successes. Jinseong was the last female monarch of Korea.

The stupendous temples of Angkor Wat and its surrounding area are the jewel of Cambodia, visited by millions and particularly packed on Cambodian New Year. They are one of the most significant religious sites in the world. The complex of Angkor Wat was the capital of the Khmer Empire, which rose in the early ninth century. It was a symbol of the strength of the empire under its powerful kings and was expanded into a marvel in the twelfth century by a king criticised even then for too much temple building.

And the Khmer Empire, which lasted until the mid-fifteenth century, was ruled by men. It was the end of female monarchy in Cambodia. The preceding period, the age of Chenla, was a loose collective of kingdoms encompassing parts of modern-day Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos and Thailand, and areas were ruled by various monarchs including a series of powerful women.

From 514 to 517, after the death of her husband, Queen Kulaprabhavati ruled her kingdom. Queen Jayadevi ruled from around 681 for over thirty years, after succeeding her father to the throne. An inscription remains in which she talks of the misfortunes of the time. This has been used as evidence that she was a weak monarch. It is curious how we claim we like humility in leaders but if one expresses any self-doubt they are seen as weak. She adopted the title of Holy Lord, like the men. Jayadevi's rule was long and successful, and she co-ruled with her husband for a period. At the same time, an entire nearby kingdom was ruled by queens, that of Sambhupura in Chenla. Jayadevi's son married one of their queens, Queen Indrani, then Indrani's daughter took the throne after her.

Most of the women had co-regents or kings consort, but there were also sole queens. Jayendrabha took the throne of Sambhupura in the late eighth century. But the world was changing around her. For it was during her rule that the mighty warrior king of the region, Jayavarman II, came to power. The accepted story was that he conquered small Cambodian kingdoms, overlords and regions to create an all-encompassing Khmer Empire. And yet, as scholars have recently argued, he 'conquered' the kingdoms by marrying their queens or the daughters or sisters of the king – in other words, the women agreed to marry him, perhaps accepting the importance of being part of an empire, banding together against possible enemies. In Chenla culture women symbolised the land, so if he married the woman, he also married the land. He married Jayendrabha, queen regnant of Sambhupura, incorporating her into his dynasty. Although he was described as king consort, the unity of a new Cambodia was based on him being the 'real' king. He created his power through forming alliances with great women. They chose to ally with him, but history has preferred to see them as beaten in battle.

The last queen of Sambhupura was Jyestha, daughter of Jayendrabha and Jayavarman II himself. She took the throne in 803 after the death of her mother. In the previous year, her father had laid down the beginning of the empire. It seems as if she was allowed to rule while he was occupied elsewhere. But if Jyestha had daughters, she was not allowed to leave the throne to them. When her half-brother Jayavarman III came to the throne, he took all the kingdoms, including hers.

Thus, even when the supreme king's daughter came to the throne, her legacy was ignored by her brother and that was the end of female monarchy for many years. The new kings took wives from the families that had once created queens regnant, and women were only allowed power as queens consort and king mothers.

By the twelfth century, 30,000 men were building the temple complex of Angkor Wat. The warriors on the wall are male; women are dancers and servants – although they are plentiful. The Khmer Empire appears to have had no further female rulers until Queen Tey came to the throne in the seventeenth century and ruled for her son for three brief months. As Trude Jacobsen has argued, the 'Khmer origin myth' was one of male dominance and female passivity, and, from the ninth century onwards, goddesses began

to be depicted as no longer autonomous but simply accompanying their male counterparts. Images of them were put up not so much to worship the goddess but to 'honour the god on which her existence depended'.[5] At the same time, the goddess's possession of beauty became ever more important, physical perfection defined by a certain standard (slim body, prominent bosom). Inscriptions celebrated men's conquest of women, including Jayavarman VII, who took 'in battle' the wives of his enemies like 'the elephants of the enemies'.

This wasn't in fact what was going on. Women overall still had elite power, as they had in the old court, and were seen as the actual manifestation of the land in which they were born. Rulers who seized power justified their rights through their royal mothers, such as the eleventh-century Suryavarman, who claimed the right to rule as his mother had been daughter of a king. And yet scholars have insisted on the vision of male dominance; so much so that, as has been pointed out, they have got confused about succession, because they ignored the importance of mothers.[6] Thus Indravarman I, nephew of Jayarvarman II, justified his accession to the empire his uncle had created not because he was the king's nephew, but due to his mother and her sister; and he covered the temple of Preah Ko, twelve miles from Angkor Wat, with inscriptions praising his mother's family, with a tower each for his aunt, mother and grandmother, which suggests that these women had power.

One of the most celebrated temples in the Angkor Wat area, Ta Prohm – grown over by trees and star of a *Tomb Raider* film – is actually a tribute made by the mighty temple builder, Jayavarman VII, to his mother Jayarajacudamani. The Khmer emperor celebrated female power – and had become so strong because queens and royal women had agreed to marry the reigning king. It seems as if the 'Khmer origin myth' of men triumphing over weak fellow monarchs, including weak queens (rather than the reality of marrying them all), was more about the assumptions of scholars hundreds of years later than the actual world of ninth- and tenth-century Angkor Wat.

The early female queens of Cambodia illuminate an issue that we see in so many representations of queenship – they are dismissed by later scholarship and presented as divisive, often to justify the male empires that

followed. The first Western scholars suggested the Cambodian queens were failures. One of the earliest Khmer scholars, George Cœdès, gathered and translated the inscriptions on temples into French and from this built a history. He also declared that the advent of Queen Jayadevi resulted in civil war, for the area of Chenla split into land and water after her reign.[7] As modern scholars have argued, the Chenla area was a loose collection of kingdoms, and the 'split' was probably a historical generalisation created by the Chinese historians of the time. Angkor Wat is a great symbol of the power of the male-ruled Khmer empire, but female power was still important, a hangover from a time of queens. The rulers of the time still noted their debt to their mothers and wives on their temples, as at Preah Ko, and this surely reflected the women's power at court. But the scholars who first translated their words created a myth of female inferiority. Evidence is evidence but interpretations, many years later, can be biased and partial. And thus we find women constituting so little of written history. We have to search for their voices.

In southern Mexico, in a heavily forested area, is what today seems like a hidden city, Palenque. It flourished from the third to the eighth century and had at least two female rulers. Yohl Ik'nal, its first female ruler, succeeded in 583 after her father (or possibly her brother) died. It was during a time of repeated invasion, as depicted on the famous stairway of Palenque (known as House C Hieroglyphic Stairway), showing Palenque's gods destroyed.[8] Perhaps instead of assuming that this period of repeated invasion was due to having a woman on the throne, as historians tend to argue, let's turn this perspective on its head. Instead, as other scholars have suggested, maybe a woman took the role as all the possible male candidates had died in battle.[9] And as some queens in battle take a leadership role away from the front lines, perhaps that's one important reason to have a female monarch in times of strife: those in power assume she won't be killed in battle and will thus provide some consistency. Yohl Ik'nal ruled until her death in 604, after which her son took the throne. The sackings of Palenque did not stop with her death and there was a particularly ferocious attack in 611. Her son was dead within sixteen months and a new ruler took the throne – Muwaan Mat, who the inscriptions suggest was likely also a woman – ruling for her own son. The ruler is compared to female goddesses, and a key carving, the Oval

Palace Tablet, shows a woman handing the royal headdress to her successor and no other man in the picture, suggesting she was regent.[10] The boy given the headdress is Pakal, one of the greatest kings in Mayan history; his grandmother and mother prepared the way well for him.[11]

Elsewhere in modern-day Latin America, Lady K'awiil Ajaw was queen regnant of the Mayan city state of Coba for forty-two years from 640, and archaeological evidence suggests there were at least two other female rulers before her. Her reign saw a significant expansion of the city state's economy and relations with its neighbours.

It is fascinating that there are so many queens in this period of a 'rise of nations'. Once these great states rise, whether it is the Khmer Empire or the Japanese military empire, queens fall back. If an empire is going to have one monarch, it is expected to be a man. Empires are all-powerful, much less prone to invasion, and so there is less space for queens. They tend to codify strict rules of succession, so there are fewer power battles between men for the throne (such battles can advantage wives, daughters and mothers). Alongside these male rulers comes an iconography of male power, whether religious or military, often inscribed on the walls of temples and palaces. Even if female monarchs thrive, the propaganda of the rulers who come after them is taken at face value. As countries move from being warrior cultures to nation states, conglomerations of small regions - kingdoms come into play. Some respect the traditions of female rule, some choose women due to constant invasion, some choose women because the men at court cannot solve their battle for power and the emperor's daughter is a clear blood relative. And, as with Palenque, there can be a benefit in times of war in having a female monarch, especially one with sons. Sometimes neighbouring kings held back on invading when a woman came to the throne, because they intended to marry her or marry her to their son – as Jayavarman II of Cambodia married Jayendrabha and incorporated her kingdoms into his empire.

But by the tenth and eleventh centuries, borders were becoming cemented and ruling became a man's game. In 870 a daughter, Æthelflæd, was born to Alfred, later called Alfred the Great, and his wife Ealhswith. When she was one, her father came to the throne of Wessex. By the time she was eight, most of England had been taken by the Danish Vikings. In the

early years of Æthelflæd's life, Alfred fought back against the Vikings and regained territory across southern England and reoccupied London, which he handed back to its former ruler, Aethelred, Lord of the Mercians. By the age of seventeen, Æthelflæd was married to Aethelred, who was probably much her senior. In 899, Alfred the Great died and her brother, Edward, took over, but Æthelflæd and Aethelred took responsibility for Mercia and continued to seize back territory from the Vikings.

In 911, Æthelflæd's husband died and she was given the title of Lady of the Mercians, and was the sole ruler and only known female ruler of Anglo-Saxon England. She regained Mercian territory lost to the Danes, and in 917 won back Derby and then swiftly moved to take Leicester. She was so successful that the leading men of York begged her to accept their treaty, but she died before she could. Her daughter Ælfwynn succeeded her but Edward of Wessex, her own uncle, promptly deposed her and took Mercia for himself. He had been too fearful to do so to his sister. It was the end of a truly independent Mercia – and of female rule.

In 972 a seventeen-year-old girl, Theophanu, was married to Otto II, emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, which had risen after the Roman Empire fell apart. Charlemagne, king of the Franks, expanded his territory and was crowned emperor by the pope in 800. In 983 his successor, Otto, died and Theophanu became regent for her son, the young Emperor Otto III. She declared herself 'Imperatrix', gained power for her daughters by positioning them in eminent nunneries around the country, received ambassadors and waged wars; in 987 she marched forth herself, before sickening the following year. One chronicler declared that she was of weak female body but had 'protected with male vigilance the royal power for her son'. Unlike the Roman imperial women, she was congratulated for securing the throne for her son.

The turn into the new millennium saw a general decline in female monarchy across the world. After wars end, there tends to be a noticeable surge in the birth of baby boys. Perhaps that makes people think that the gods preferred men. The warrior queens and consorts seizing power became a thing of the past. With the growth of trained fighting forces and the spread of Christianity, which had an all-male priesthood, power became more difficult

for women to achieve. And laws hardened against women owning property; in England, for example, the Norman conquest of 1066 created a significant change in the role of women. Anglo-Saxon society had allowed women to own property; after the Battle of Hastings, women who owned land and property were told they had to marry Normans or lose their land. A legal system of 'coverture' developed, by which husband and wife were considered a single entity, their property absorbed into one. Married women could not own property or their own businesses. Despite the law wives still ran shops and trades, and the most successful tavern keepers were often female; however, the law grew increasingly strict over the years. Although there are examples of married women acting independently, strictly speaking in the Tudor period a woman's property, even her clothes, was her husband's, and when he died it became the property of his heir – unless he made it clear in his will that her clothes or other personal items remained her possession.

The Bayeux Tapestry, most likely commissioned in the 1070s by Bishop Odo, half-brother of William the Conqueror, features only three women in the main narrative (there is also one very small woman in the border, probably being assaulted) and there is no room for Empress Matilda, wife of William.[I] It famously features more penises than women (96 or 97, depending on how you count them). The three women include one fleeing her burning house with her child as the Normans raid her land; King Edward the Confessor's wife, Edith, the queen, who mourns over the dead king; and one mystery woman, whom scholars have endlessly debated.

The mystery woman, gowned in green and red, is with a man who is touching her face. The stitching above says she is Aelfgyva, a popular name of the period, and she is alongside a cleric. It might be an embroideress, receiving her commission to create the tapestry from one of Odo's men. Some claim it is Harold's sister, who may have been betrothed to William the Conqueror, and thus the cleric is punishing her for being betrothed to him, over which she would have had no control.

Or she may be Emma of Normandy (William the Conqueror's great-aunt), one of the most powerful queens of the time: mother of Edward the Confessor, first queen of the English as the wife of Aethelred (the Unready), renamed Ælfgifu on marriage. After Aethelred's death the Danish king Cnut invaded and Emma tried and failed to hold on to London and then had to

marry Cnut, thus becoming queen of the Danes (even though he already had a wife, also called Ælfgifu). There were battles between Emma's sons for the throne; her younger son was killed and Edward the Confessor finally succeeded. If it is Emma, perhaps she is being used to represent the chaos of power struggles before Edward the Confessor came to the throne. We see the same myth as in Cambodia: men come in to sort out the catastrophes caused by queens.

And then came Empress Matilda. In November 1120, Henry I was on the throne of England, the fourth son of William the Conqueror. A ship full of nobles and the king's heir, William, set sail from England for France. The 300 or so passengers had been drinking and they demanded that the captain overtake the king's ship that was nearby. The *White Ship* was new and fast, but the night was dark and the ship struck a rock. William was almost safe, but then he returned to rescue his illegitimate half-sister and drowned. Everyone else died apart from a butcher, found clinging to the rock.

Henry I's daughter, Matilda, was thus heir to the English throne. In a world obsessed by male rule, Henry I could have chosen one of his nephews, including Stephen of Blois, and he hoped to have another son, but when he understood he would not have another child, he decided that Matilda was his future heir. She had two problems: she was female and she was living overseas. Matilda had been sent to marry Henry V of Germany in 1114. After he died in 1125, Matilda was not brought back to England, but her father married her to Count Geoffrey of Anjou, thirteen to her twenty-five, to secure his control of Normandy. Henry saw her as his heir, demanded his barons swear fealty to Matilda as future queen, and Stephen of Blois also did so. Matilda had two sons with Geoffrey, making her an even stronger prospect to take the throne, as she had a male line to hand it to. If Matilda had been married to Stephen, might he have agreed to a joint monarchy? It is possible. We might argue that Henry should have summoned her to England in 1125, found her a husband who would live in England with her. But instead, he had to use his daughter for dynastic purposes, to secure land and territory, even though she was his heir. Although perhaps Geoffrey, no great prince but a count, was chosen because he would be a better consort. The chroniclers couldn't work out how to see her, this woman who would

one day take a man's job; she had 'masculine firmness' and Arnulf of Lisieux, a bishop who wrote extensively about her, said 'she had nothing of the woman in her'.

When Henry I died on 1 December 1135, Matilda was queen. But she was in Anjou, pregnant with her third child, and Stephen took the throne, claiming that Henry had changed his mind on his deathbed. With his small army he reached London and was proclaimed king and crowned. But Matilda's supporters contested his claims and she invaded in 1139, supported by her husband. After a series of battles, Matilda's men captured Stephen in early 1141 and imprisoned him in Bristol Castle. She was now queen. She advanced to London to take her position and be crowned, but London was afraid of accepting her and she fled back to Oxford. By the autumn, she was negotiating with her enemies and had to release Stephen. He was crowned again at the end of the year. The battles continued.

In 1153, Matilda's side signed a peace treaty with Stephen – on condition her son came to the throne. She devoted the rest of her life to overseeing Normandy. One chronicler who met her said she was from the 'stock of tyrants'. Stephen died in 1154; Matilda's eldest son took the throne as Henry II and she lived for another ten years, long enough to see her son's reign. A woman's rule had been so fragile, so impossible, that her cousin had taken the throne instead and, even though supporters had fought for her, until her son took power the country was unsettled. Matilda could not even be installed as regent for her son. In the twelfth century, many believed the prospect of a woman's rule would pitch the country into chaos.

And yet – why do we not acknowledge that Matilda was queen for that period she ruled in 1141? Nearly a year as queen is hardly nothing – many have ruled for shorter periods. It suggests that the whole story is about male legitimacy, passing the line from King Stephen to King Henry. Matilda gets the subservient title of Empress. As we have seen, many queens are scrubbed out, described only as regents for sons; it was the same for her.

Eleanor of Aquitaine, the most majestic heiress of the twelfth century, owning extensive lands in southern France, was married in 1137 at the age of around fifteen to King Louis VII of France, although her father stipulated before he died that her lands could not be taken by the king and must go to her children. For a lot of the male chroniclers, she had too much power. The problem was that women were weak, the gateway to the devil, and could

drag you into sin at any moment. As Bernard of Clairvaux, a scholar and keen promoter of the Cistercian monastic order, wrote, 'to live with a woman without danger is more difficult than raising the dead to life', and he was most mistrustful of Eleanor's influence. Bernard accused her of vanity and described her glamorous dress, 'Fie on a beauty that is put on in the morning,' he declared. 'The ornaments of a queen have no beauty like to the blushes of natural modesty, which colour the cheeks of a virgin.' Eleanor was like 'one of the daughters of Belial, who got up in this way, put on airs', wear so much gold that gold dust shakes off their trains. There could be nothing worse. But Bernard was particularly angry about her meddling in politics. On one occasion, she asked for his help and said in response she would use her influence to settle a dispute he was concerned with. He was incensed at her audacity and scolded her severely, telling her that if she stopped interfering, he would pray to God to grant her children. The Church was a secular power and it did not want women involved.

The queen later annulled the marriage in order to marry Matilda's son, Henry. She told the king that she had realised they were too nearly related. It seems as if it was her decision, but the king also did want to have a male heir and they had only had daughters. She returned to her capital at Poitiers. On the way, two men tried to seize her to marry them so they could take her lands. She had to flee in darkness along the Loire to escape the future Count Theobald V of Blois (who later married her daughter by Louis!) and went a back route to avoid Henry's younger brother, who also wanted to take her. A single heiress was never safe. She told Henry to come to marry her immediately. He did so and Henry thus acquired through marriage over half of what now constitutes modern France. Two years after the marriage, Stephen died and in 1154 Henry became King Henry II. The woman who had been Queen of France was now Queen of England. The fact that her father had insisted her lands remain hers had given her independence. The chroniclers did not like this. Eleanor annulling and then marrying again was seen as a shocking act by so many of the religious and monastic chroniclers. Prior to the annulment, she was barely mentioned in the chronicles, even on crusade. When Eleanor went on crusade with her husband to the Holy Land in 1147, there was little mention of her in the writings of the contemporaries. Later writers declared she and her ladies had been vain and self-indulgent, insisting on huge piles of gowns and distracting the men

from their holy purpose. One chronicler declared she was 'very evil' and had tried to elope with the Turkish emir, but her husband had seized her back (his story had a slight problem as the emir was only around twelve, but who cares about facts!). Gerald of Wales, a bishop, said she had had an affair with Geoffrey of Anjou while married to Louis, and declared there was no chance of the right sort of issue (boys) from that kind of woman – and by the time he was writing, Geoffrey was her father-in-law. Others accused her of an affair with her uncle Raymond on crusade, and she was most damagingly of all accused of killing Henry II's lover, Rosamund de Clifford or Fair Rosamund. To be fair, Gerald didn't think much of Henry either, accusing him of flaunting his mistress and 'since a world copies a king, he offended not only by his behaviour, but even more by his bad example'.

There were courtly love writers praising Eleanor, but the churchmen who condemned her because she had annulled her marriage and because they were so angered by Henry II's acts cast her as promiscuous and power-hungry. She had so much influence that when Henry's and her sons rebelled against him, he put her under arrest. Henry wanted to annul the marriage, but he knew that her lands would revert to her and back in Aquitaine, she could raise rebels against him in support of their sons and might even remarry. He told Eleanor if she'd agree to go to a nunnery as an abbess, she could keep her lands. She said no and he put her under house arrest, in splendour but isolated. It was simply impossible for her to have killed Fair Rosamund as she was in prison at the time. Henry eventually gave her more freedom, and she sometimes travelled with him, but she was still subject to him until he died and her son, Richard I, came to the throne. Richard fully set her free and she acted as regent for him while he was on crusade. When she died at the age of eighty or so, she had made her tomb a little higher than that of Henry II's, a good payback.

The sources for Eleanor's life are fleeting; we view her through the words of men, chroniclers less concerned about history than telling improving tales, so Eleanor is often cast in condemnatory terms as the usual suspects, power-hungry and vain, loaded with gold and jewels. She is criticised for her dress; it is too colourful, too luxurious but no one says the same of the king. Eleanor's reputation, like so many queens, suffers because they are written about by male chroniclers who want to see them as ideal moral examples. They find it much more difficult to attack the king. Sadly, we have very few

female chroniclers who write in the same way. The few women who do write tend to focus on men, like Princess Anna Komene, who at the age of fifty-five in 1148 began writing the history of her father Emperor Alexiso's reign, *The Alexiad*. If only nuns had written chronicles, as well as monks.

Owain Glyndŵr fought for the independence of Wales from English rule. After 1412, the end of his rebellion, he disappeared, never captured or sold off, despite a huge bounty on his head. It may be that he was hiding in plain sight of the English. He had been a successful lawyer, and as a young man, he had married Margaret, the daughter of a prominent judge. Owain was pronounced Prince of Wales, but she is not known to have used the title of Princess. They had four daughters, who all made stunning marriages, including to English nobles who were expected to control the Welsh. One of his daughters, Alys, married Sir John Scudamore, sheriff of Hereford, who was supposed to be governing the area. After the rebellion failed, Margaret, her daughter Catrin, another daughter, and Catrin's daughters were taken to the tower and seem to have died there. In recent years, Catrin and her daughters have been commemorated by a statue on the site of the chuchyard of St Swithin, in London, and it is also a memorial for women's suffering in war. Alys survived – and it seems likely that Owain was hiding with her, perhaps as a tutor or steward, so that nobles would have visited and not known the man walking past their grand room was the Welsh prince himself. Alys too and her children were princesses of Wales, survivors.

In the history of female monarchy, it seems, queens regnant are most likely to emerge at periods of crises and repeated invasions – and these tend to mark the beginning of the end of the kingdom, when the female monarch and country decide or are compelled to submit to a larger power. By the early medieval period, women's rule was not popular in much of Western Europe – and this disparity was then enshrined in law.

In France in 1314 there was a huge scandal. Two daughters-in-law of King Philip IV, Blanche and Margaret, were accused of adulterous affairs, including partying with the royal bodyguards in the Tour de Nesle in Paris. And the result was that women would be banned from the French throne for ever.

It all began when the French royal family came on a visit to London. The king's daughter, Isabella, was in an unhappy marriage to Edward I. Edward had been accused of being in love with his courtier, Piers Gaveston, and had seemingly been willing to give up everything for him. Queen Isabella decided that the purses she had given her sisters-in-law as presents were being carried by knights in the royal entourage, suggesting the women were having affairs with them. The king had the knights tortured and they promptly confessed. The knights were executed and Margaret and Blanche were imprisoned for life. Not long after the executions, King Philip died and his son, Louis, came to the throne. Margaret was officially queen of France. But she died in prison, probably poisoned, conveniently, in the same month as Louis was crowned.

When King Louis died (after a game of tennis) technically his daughter by Margaret, Joan, was his heir. The Salic Law, dating back to the age of Clovis in 500, had excluded daughters from inheriting land. However, it had been amended to allow daughters to inherit if there were no sons and it did not explicitly exclude property. From 987 to the time of the Tour de Nesle, kings exclusively had sons. Then Joan became next in line to inherit. By the letter of the amended Salic Law, she could; but the shocking Tour de Nesle affair meant that no one wanted a woman. Louis's brother took the throne and Joan was married off to Philip of Navarre.

The Tour de Nesle affair was one of the biggest scandals in royal history. It played into the hands of those who didn't want women to rule. Isabella was said to have made the accusations, but angry accusations between family members are hardly anything new. It seems such an astonishing coincidence that, just as Philip was getting old, a giant scandal erupted to push his granddaughter out of the running. One might think it was all invented to ensure women could not rule. The idea of taking the throne being impossible for women in France and other parts of Europe has been historically credited to the Salic Law, but, as we have seen, the Salic Law did offer the possibility that daughters could inherit. Whatever the truth of the purses or the adultery, the whole thing was trumped up to ensure that Princess Joan would never get the throne.

Women in the thirteenth and fourteenth century were losing power in Europe, but not across the world. 'One of the wonders of these islands is that the ruler is a woman named Khadijah,' said a scholar and traveller in the fourteenth century, stunned by the rule of the great queen who presided over the Maldives from 1347 to 1379. Nowadays few visitors to the Maldives hear the story of Queen Khadijah, who seized power from men and is a feminist heroine to many in the country. Sadly, nothing remains of her life or her palace in Malé.

In 1341 Omar I, king of the Maldives, died and his son ascended to power. Six years later Khadijah, Omar's eldest daughter, had her brother deposed and took the throne. It seemed as if it was a group of politicians, including the high minister or vizier Jamal, who agreed to put her on the throne, as she was popular with the people. She married Jamal. It's clear that he thought she would be his puppet; she'd smile at people while he governed the country. Instead, she wanted to rule. The dictates were issued in her name alone, but her husband wanted a part of power and she refused. In 1362, he deposed her to become king himself. She seized back the throne the following year and assassinated him. As one traveller put it, 'the inhabitants of the Maldive islands preferred for sovereign Khadijah'.[12] She took a second husband, Abdullah, who also became her high minister. After ten years on the throne, he deposed her. She had him killed too and reclaimed her throne. She ruled until her death. Queen Khadijah was a successful monarch, popular, powerful, and she oversaw a strengthening of the economy. One might think that a husband would not fight for even more power if he was high minister. Not so. After resisting takeover attempts by three different men, she settled into ruling, wisely taking no further husband and decreeing as heir her sister – who did not depose her. After her sister's death, the throne went to her daughter, Khadijah's niece.

Khadijah began a tradition of female rule in the Maldives and managed to eject three kings from the throne, two of them her own husbands. She is one of the most popular historical figures in the country. Her life suggests a problem shared by nearly every queen in this book: what to do with your husband? Most queens marry to beget heirs, because it is expected. And then, they undergo constant challenges for power from these husbands, who even try to depose them, until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when

monarchs manage to put their husband in the role of consort. Plenty of husbands try to push queens off the throne, from Cleopatra to Cartimandua to Mary, Queen of Scots. Khadijah ruled for nearly thirty years and showed that women could not only take the throne. They could also take it back.

In 1262, Rudrama Devi, queen of the Kakatiya dynasty, ruled over Andhra Pradesh and Telangana in Southern India, after being appointed joint ruler by her father, the king, and then his heir. She fought off challenges from her half-brothers to secure the throne. Marco Polo declared her an excellent queen, 'a lover of justice and peace and was more beloved by those of her kingdom than any lady or lord before', although he seems to have thought that she was her father's widow. And, like Hatshepsut hundreds of years before, she adopted male dress and a male name. It seems this was originated by her father, who saw her as a son and called her by a male name – even after he had sons by minor wives. We have seen queens such as Hatshepsut adopting male dress, particularly in times of crisis, and, as we will see, even marrying princesses. Rudrama was married (it was arranged by her father for diplomatic aims with the son of a nearby lord) but kept her husband far from administration. She secured the civil service, expanding the recruitment of non-aristocrats into the warrior class, and protected the borders, creating strong relations with neighbours. But although she had three daughters with her husband, she nominated the son of the eldest daughter as her successor. Not all queens can give their throne to another woman.

From 600 to the fourteenth century, we are looking for women in fragments of manuscripts, in texts about men, in carvings and tombs. By the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries we have more accounts, more stories, a few more voices. And we have more questions about what it is to be a female monarch.

I. It was long suggested as having been commissioned by Empress Matilda, wife of William the Conqueror, but recent analysis has associated it with Bishop Odo, who most likely used English female embroiders. He inserted himself into many sections.

CHAPTER FIVE
Locked-up Queens: Isabella and Juana

In the 1540s or thereabouts, Orompto, the new female king of the Oyo Empire in modern-day Nigeria, took the throne, and was, reports said, magically turned into a man. She was the first female king, or Alaafin, and took the throne after the death of her brother, Egunojo, when there were no more sons. Her brother had been at war with the neighbouring kingdom, Nupe, who were invading Oyo lands. King/Queen Orompto encouraged the use of horses, fostering a force of elite cavalry, and rode into battle, a man, and beat back the Nupe. Orompto turned magically into a man on taking the throne, but we might see all queens as turning into some sort of man on accession. It is often easier for society to think of queens as a form of magical men; to believe that accessing the throne turns you into someone who is no longer quite female. And by the sixteenth century what we see is queens declaring or implying that the very act of being queen means that they are different from other women. They might wear male dress or are said to claim typically male traits like the 'heart and stomach of a king'. But then they must marry to produce heirs. And in the system of monogamous marriage dominating Europe and much of the rest of the world, the husband rules the wife. So does the queen's husband rule her?

The sixteenth century was an age of unprecedented female power, particularly in Europe; the greatest period for female monarchy since pre-medieval times. There was a lot at stake. And so, when her husband and father and then her son wanted the lands of Queen Joanna, they declared her mad and locked her up. And Joanna La Loca has stuck. Her mother

wanted to be a pious warrior and instead has been seen as a political operator. Joanna wanted to be seen as a good wife and mother; her reward was being thrown into prison.

The European obsession with bloodlines meant that if royal families ended up with only a daughter left standing she would become queen. At the same time the growth of empires meant that some parts had to be governed by women, the importance of money in increasingly capitalist economies had women working and earning, and those who inherited land had power. Nunneries were wealthy and women acted as crucial patrons in the rise of Protestantism. And it was a time of turbulence for Europe, as kings and ordinary people went to war over religion. Queens, it seems, appear as nations are transitioning from one type to another. Nations around 600 to 800 BCE are moving from warrior to settled societies, and in the 1600s are moving from agrarian and aristocratic to increasingly urban societies with a merchant and intellectual class and experiencing religious upheaval.

And the presence of a civil service helps. Isabella of Castile built a new civil service and Elizabeth I relied on her network of ministers and advisors. We see the same with other great queens in history, from Hatshepsut, who came to power after her father had installed a significant civil service, to Wu Zetian, who used the existing bureaucracy of China and added to it. And Elizabeth I, viewed as one of our most successful queens, saw the greatest expansion of the British state in history. In the sixteenth century, organised religion such as Christianity offered networks for pushing messages through churches and sermons, and queens could present themselves as saviours of religion. The printing press revolutionised governance. Laws, edicts and pro-monarchy propaganda no longer needed to be painstakingly handwritten. Instead, they could be printed at then lightning speed and distributed around the country.

The Salic Law, as we saw, made it possible that, if a man had no sons, he could leave his property to a daughter. A woman of a propertied family with no brothers thus possessed the legal status of a man, for the purposes of inheritance at least. And if you are a legal man, what do you do about marriage to a man, when a husband should take a wife's property on marriage? Queens are in an anomalous position: they are expected to marry, but they are not supposed to give up power to their husbands; they are supposed to be queens regnant. This was how Mary, Queen of Scots was

used as a child; Henry VIII demanded her marriage to his son so he could subsume Scotland into England, and yet even when she was married to the future King of France, Scotland was not his. So a queen takes a strange legal position in which by marriage, her husband owns all her possessions, right down to her hair combs, but he does not own her country. And yet he tries.

Queen Mamani kaPhahlo, queen of the AmaMpondomise Kingdom in the Eastern Cape, who died in 1758, had an effective solution. The eldest of the three daughters of the senior wife of the king, she defeated her half-brothers for the throne. She then married a princess from a neighbouring group, Princess Ntsibatha, but the marriage was consummated by her brother, who then became her successor.

Marriage is a problem for a queen regnant but it strengthens the queen consort. If marriage is governed by the church, almost impossible to dissolve, and the king is allowed only one wife, she gains power. And the sixteenth century is the age of the queen consort. A phalanx of tough wives, from Mary of Guise to Catherine of Aragon, pushed forward the idea of the female ruler. As we have seen, in the past, powerful reigning monarchs often have a strong queen mother behind them, who have already proved a woman can be a successful regent and court networker.

With the sixteenth century came a rise in the security of the state, female education and the professionalism of the army, which meant that queens could rule and not fight; so we have a flaming crucible of queenship – conditions that favour female rule. We see a similar paradigm to earlier centuries: female power is tolerated in times of upheaval, invasion and chaos, sometimes even welcomed. But when the state is settled it is less so. Thus, the sixteenth century is an age of contradictions: blood inheritance meant that a daughter might have a chance if she had no brothers, but the family structure on which blood inheritance was based was founded on a model of female inferiority; monogamous marriage meant women were men's property but it could also give immense sway to the woman who was the king's only wife; the printing press could be used to propagate power, but also misogynist diatribes on failing rulers; Christianity decreed women inferior, but within it women were important patrons. And the flipside of female dominion is that queenship, now that it is powerful, is feared.

Queens, both consort and regnant, were put on trial and executed, or locked up and declared mad. Even the most tragically powerless queen of all, Jane Grey, was executed. The sixteenth century is the period of the great rise of queens, but it is also the time of queens executed or thrown into prison. No story shows this contradiction better than the contrasting lives of Queen Isabella and her daughter, Joanna.

This 'queen of Spain, called Isabella, has had no equal on this earth for 500 years', one commentator declared. Isabella of Castile was the first monarch to be referred to as ruler of Spain. Before her, the queen on the chessboard only moved one square. After Isabella's reign as the queen of Castile, the queen became the most powerful piece on the board. She set a precedent for female monarchy; but it did not last. Her throne went to her daughter, who was then imprisoned, rather than allowed to be queen. Isabella managed to solve the husband problem. But for her daughter it flared up in giant form.

Isabella's claim to the throne was not the strongest, and she gained it in a period of chaos for the country. Her daughter, Joanna's, position could not have been stronger; she was handed a country with a sophisticated bureaucracy, and yet men took it from her. We might see this as an example of the story we see again and again: a female monarch may be permitted when a country is in trouble, menaced by invasion or internal collapse, but a secure country is earmarked for a man – Joanna couldn't have it. But most of all, what we see with Isabella and Joanna is the story that is most pertinent for queens and female leadership in the sixteenth century: how you negotiate power if you have a husband, or even more dangerously, a son. Having a son can be nearly as fatal to a queen as having a husband. Cleopatra managed to use her son as her key to power. Had he not been killed, he might have seized the throne from her. In the 1430s, Saw Yin Mi was queen of the kingdom of Sandoway, in modern-day Myanmar. Her husband decreed that after he died she would take the throne and become queen regnant. But one of her sons killed the other in a quest for power. It appears that Saw Yin Mi, fearing all-out civil war, offered to marry a nearby ruler, King Khayi. She became his queen consort, and her country was

absorbed into his. It is rare that a queen regnant becomes queen consort, but sometimes it is the only option to prevent one's son from causing war.

In the royal chapel at Granada there is a silver box, overlaid with gold, decorated with flowers and fauna, with carvings of Christ holding a victory banner. One might think it a reliquary, except for the convenient gold handle on the top that makes it look like a sixteenth-century carry case. And it is portable – because Isabella of Castile took her jewels with her, as she showed herself across the country, overseeing the installation of law and order. Isabella's jewels were so grand that one of her confessors once told her off for 'vanity'; she firmly told him she was showing the grandeur of Castile. This box was her image of herself as a queen.

In 1469, when Isabella was eighteen, she sneaked out of the court of her half-brother, King Henry of Castile. She told him that she was going to visit her family's graves; her father, the king of Castile, had died fourteen years before. She was lying: she had a big plan in mind to outwit her half-brother and secure herself as heir. Henry wanted his daughter, Joanna, to succeed. After the death of their father, Isabella, her mother and her brother, Alfonso, had been kept in a poor castle with little money while Henry took the throne. Nothing could make clearer to her how unprotected she was without a father, how her mother, once an illustrious queen consort, now had nothing.

In 1468, Alfonso died (some said he was poisoned). Isabella was now the heir, and she feared being killed herself. Henry almost immediately tried to marry her off. She had been betrothed as a child to Ferdinand, son of the king of Aragon, but the engagement had been broken off and her brother had considered for her instead the king of Portugal, the brother of the king of France. There was even talk of Edward IV of England and the future Richard III. Once she was sent out of the country, married and pregnant, her chance of gaining the throne would be low. Young Isabella knew she had to have a husband; it was a question of who. She clandestinely approached the king of Aragon and suggested she wed his son, Ferdinand, her childhood fiancé. He agreed. She then travelled to the city of Valladolid and hid out, waiting for Ferdinand. He entered Castile dressed as a servant and crept into Valladolid in the middle of the night. They met and were swiftly betrothed.

Isabella negotiated brilliantly: Ferdinand had to sign a marriage contract that was much to her advantage. He agreed to reside in Castile and that, although documents would be signed jointly, Isabella's consent would be vital and he was forced to agree that all his interests in her lands would end with her death. Isabella was to be a shrewd queen, and this marriage was her first masterstroke.

Berengaria had been queen of Castile over 200 years before, but she gave up her rule for her son, Ferdinand, three months after she came to the throne. She then ruled through him, advising him and negotiating for him; she was queen, but not in name. As a woman ruling for herself, not her son, Isabella had to create a model of sole queenship for herself. She declared herself a protector of the Catholic religion, which caused suffering to those who were not Catholics. She deployed religion as a weapon to bolster her position.

In 1474, when Isabella was twenty-three, Henry, the king, died. She received the news in Segovia the day after his death. He had named her his successor. She made Segovia into her stage; she paraded through the streets for all to see, dressed magnificently. One of her gentlemen walked in front of her, holding the royal sword. Some said they had never seen such a spectacle. At a quickly assembled stage in the town square, she was proclaimed queen.

For most of the century, but especially in Henry's reign, kings had been at the mercy of the aristocrats, who disregarded them, seizing control of the regions and behaving as if whole areas were their personal fiefdoms. Isabella inherited a wealthy realm of more than 4 million inhabitants, one of the largest countries in Europe at the time. But it was riddled with lawlessness, corruption, spiralling inflation, little respect for authority, and bloody battles between political groups. Isabella was determined to win back her kingdom. Ferdinand encouraged Isabella in her vision. She implemented many effective reforms, including installing officials to oversee law and order, introducing a police force to put an end to vigilante groups and fixing a standard for the coinage to correct its debasement and inflation. Her half-brother had sold royal estates to aristocrats at cut-price rates, but now Isabella decreed that they would be bought back at the same price and that those given as a payment for services could be returned without any

compensation. It was a courageous move against the powerful nobles of the kingdom. Isabella might have looked as if she was creating a system of constitutional monarchy, bolstered by a civil service. In fact, it was a highly personal rule; whatever she decreed was law. Ferdinand backed her up, acting as her diplomatic hand. And his title was Prince, not King, so his was the subservient position. Ferdinand was always annoyed that he was not king of Castile even though he was her husband; she told him he was king in all but name. It was words; she was in charge. She was fortunate that her husband was only a prince when she first began, because it ensured that he was already in a lesser position when she became queen.

They had seven children in quick succession, five of whom survived: Isabella, John, Juana, Maria and the youngest, Catherine. Isabella devoted herself to their education, ensuring her daughters were as learned as their brothers, and encouraged them to be scholars.

In early 1479, Juan II of Aragon died and Ferdinand became Ferdinand II of Aragon. Ferdinand and Isabella ruled Spain together, the first monarchs to be called king of Spain and queen of Spain. They effectively kept their realms legally distinct, with separate laws and mechanisms of government, but bolstered each other's power.

Ferdinand and Isabella aimed to unite their joint kingdoms under Catholicism. Thus they began the Inquisition. Jewish and Muslim inhabitants who had converted to Christianity in fear of being attacked for their religion were the focus. If converts were judged to be secretly practising Judaism, they were arrested, tortured and sometimes executed by the Inquisition; thousands were burned. By 1492 Spain's remaining Jews were told they could convert or be expelled. The monarchs set about conquering and imposing a siege on Granada, the last remaining part of the Iberian Peninsula not under their control, ruled instead by the Muslim Nasrid family. Granada surrendered on 2 January 1492, and Ferdinand and Isabella now controlled all of their country. In 1502, Muslims were also told to convert or leave.

On 3 August 1492, funded by money from Ferdinand and Isabella, Christopher Columbus set sail from Castile, planning to seek a western sea passage to the East Indies. He arrived in Guanahani in the Bahamas, then

travelled to Cuba, Hispaniola and Haiti. In 1494, Isabella and the king of Portugal divided the new lands outside Europe between their countries. Columbus had brought brutality and deadly disease to the people of Central and South America. Isabella commanded that all the subjects of the countries he had captured were citizens of Castile and could not be enslaved, and told the new governors 'you are to ensure that the Indians are well-treated and can walk safely throughout the country without anyone assaulting them or robbing them or doing them any harm' and men should not take 'the Indians' wives'; if Spaniards should wish to marry Indian women, the marriages should be 'entered into willingly by both parties and not made by force, and the people should be paid fairly for the work they did.'[1] In her will, she decreed that native peoples should 'be treated well and fairly, and if any have been mistreated that you remedy it'. But the men who arrived in Central America and the islands of the Caribbean were bent on gold, enslavement and money.

Isabella was admired as the queen who had united Spain, even though so many had suffered at the hands of her Inquisition and in her colonies. Her five surviving children included one son, so the throne was secure. Prince John was married to Archduchess Margaret of Austria, daughter of the Holy Roman Emperor, a powerful alliance against the French. The queen showered Margaret with her beloved jewels, including the ruby and pearl necklace that Ferdinand had given her on their marriage.

Six months after his wedding to Margaret, John fell ill and died of a fever. Margaret gave birth to their child, a stillborn girl. Isabella was plunged into grief over the loss of John, and her health was never the same again. And without her only son, the vision of unity between crowns was shaky – Aragon would not accept a female heir. Their hope lay in Isabella, their eldest child, and her future sons. Isabella was now queen of Portugal – which would entail possible unity between that country and Castile. Ferdinand and Isabella declared that she was the heir to Castile and Aragon.

In 1498, poor young Isabella gave birth to a son, Miguel, and then died an hour later. Baby Miguel was now Ferdinand and Isabella's heir, future inheritor of Portugal, Castile and Aragon. But he died before he turned two. Queen Isabella betrothed her fourth child, Maria, to the king of Portugal. Daughters had to be married for political unity, even if it was to their sister's

widower. Now the heir to Ferdinand and Isabella's vast realms and their legacy was their eldest surviving daughter, Joanna. She had been married to Margaret of Austria's brother, Philip, in 1496. Already Philip had shown signs of being power-hungry, of pushing Joanna into subservience to gain control over her. In 1502 Joanna was declared heir to Castile and given the title of Princess of Asturias. She had already produced the all-important heir, Charles, born in Flanders in 1500. Her status as heir to Aragon was not accorded, not only because female succession was a new idea for Aragon, but also because if Ferdinand's wife died and he remarried he could yet have a male heir.

Queen Isabella was deeply distressed that her legacy would be left in the hands of Philip, husband of Joanna. By early 1504 she was ill and withdrew from public affairs. She died at the royal palace on 26 November and was buried in Granada. She asked for her eldest child, Isabella, to be laid at her side, but Ferdinand did not let it happen. Isabella had been a ruling queen but in death her wishes – that she be buried with her eldest daughter, that her husband cede power to her living child (and the people in her colonies should be well-treated, even though she had violently taken their lands) – were ignored. She could never have imagined what came next – that her eldest daughter would not be allowed to rule.

Joanna, aged twenty-six, became the queen of Castile. Ferdinand had been a supporter of female rule and had respected his wife's wishes since his marriage over thirty years before. But as soon as his wife was dead, he moved to strike. In Isabella's will, she had declared that Castile should be left to Joanna and then her son, Charles. By the terms of the marriage treaty, the kingdom was not Ferdinand's, and he no longer had jurisdiction within Castile. Yet as soon as Isabella was dead, he declared himself governor of Castile, saying that he should be regent for Joanna. He had coins minted showing Ferdinand and Joanna, king and queen of Castile. Isabella's will allowed him to govern if Joanna was unwilling, until her heir reached the age of twenty. He declared Joanna was too mentally unfit to rule and so he should take the power. Philip, Joanna's husband, fought back and had his own coins made of him and Joanna. He too said his wife was mentally unfit and he should rule. Joanna was immediately stuffed into confinement in

their home in the Low Countries. The country was told she was too insane to govern, while the two men fought over who got to be her 'king'.

The problem was that Isabella had made queenship too successful. It was now impossible to say that a man should rule instead because a woman couldn't fulfil the role. So Joanna, who was not seen as unfit or in need of confinement when she was a consort, instantly became 'mad' when she was a queen. Philip's father, Maximilian, asked her to accompany him to events during a state visit, and she was let out of her isolation to do so. He clearly disagreed with confining her and indeed no one watching the state visit suggested she was crazed or had lost her faculties.

Philip decided they would sail together to Castile to claim it as their territory; he had to take her with him. But he had a tactic to try to humiliate her: decree a ship of ladies-in-waiting should come too. Joanna refused. She thought Philip would seduce them. Her mother had turned a blind eye to her father's infidelities; queens were supposed to ignore such things, indeed, historians still congratulate consorts for 'wisely 'overlooking affairs. But Ferdinand had been discreet. Joanna believed Philip by contrast was bringing the women to reduce her, to prove she was secondary, and, as queen regnant, she did not wish to accept it. One might think that refusing them passage was reasonable; she was the queen, if she didn't want them there, fair enough. But it was later used to declare her crazed. On the journey there, she met Catherine of Aragon in England. Catherine left no report that she thought Joanna had lost her wits.

Joanna probably thought that being crowned in Castile would bring her power. When they arrived in Castile, the nobles gave fealty to Joanna and clearly saw her as queen. Ferdinand understood the new reality. That day, the men took urgent measures; Ferdinand and Philip signed a clandestine treaty declaring that Joanna was too ill to rule and they decided between them that she should be kept out of government and should lose her freedom.

Joanna became known as Juana La Loca, Joanna the Mad. The evidence for her madness is flimsy to say the least. If she had been truly unwell, would Isabella have left her the kingdom? It is true that Isabella suggested there was an alternative if Joanna was unwilling, but this doesn't suggest Joanna

couldn't do it. It is said that in Joanna's teenage years she once sat down and refused to move. This is typical teenager behaviour. Scholars have said that when Isabella was very ill, her daughter stopped eating and sleeping; hardly strange.

As the third child of Ferdinand and Isabella, she had been taught by tutors in law, history, mathematics, literacy, history and philosophy, been given classical literature to read, and had been particularly quick at learning music. She learned the Iberian languages as well as French and Latin. Her stringent educational schedule and progress in her lessons as a girl hardly suggests a child too unwell to learn, and surely any hint of mental illness would have been picked up and refused by Philip's family, who could have easily demanded another sister be married to Philip. And saying she didn't want a shipload of ladies accompanying her voyage was also cast as madness.

Many queens, from Cleopatra to Mary, Queen of Scots, have been and still are dismissed as beautiful seducers. Joanna, a devoted wife, and mother of many, could not be cast as an immoral woman. And she gave the realm heirs, so they could not use that excuse against her. Joanna was not possessed of her mother's intelligence, ruthlessness and decisive courage, or her sister Catherine of Aragon's perspicacity and skill at public speaking. But she would no doubt have been competent as queen, as she had been as consort. Isabella had been brought up always to look behind her, had expected to be betrayed and double-crossed, whereas her daughter expected to be treated with respect, and this was what condemned her. Later royal women who were considered inconvenient were cast as unstable, their suspicions ignored. Many years later, Princess Diana's worries over her marriage were dismissed and she was told she was imagining things; the story has not changed much.

In September 1506, two years after the death of Joanna's mother, Philip died, probably from fever, although some accused Ferdinand of poisoning him. Joanna was now sole queen – and pregnant with her sixth and final child. She expected she would be able to rule alone, for her eldest son, Charles, was only six. Joanna declared she would not bury her husband where he had died, but wished to bring him to Granada, nearly 700 miles away, to be

buried next to her mother. Joanna's desire to bury her husband beside her mother was a clever manoeuvre to build a dynastic legend, to present Philip as a 'son' to Ferdinand and Isabella and herself as a daughter who deserved the throne, and most of all to legitimise her son's claim to power. Newly widowed and pregnant as she was, she knew that she would immediately receive marriage requests. But Joanna's act of legacy building, taking her husband to the family's dynastic home, was presented by her father and then her son as more evidence of her total madness and unfitness for the throne. The stakes of power were so high that pretty much whatever she did, she was going to be described as crazed.

Ever since Joanna had become queen, her father had been trying to take the throne of Castile from her. Now that her husband was dead, no one was blocking his way. In the month after Philip's death, Ferdinand married Germaine de Foix, niece of the king of France, a long-term enemy of Philip's family. He expected to have a son by Germaine (who was only eighteen to his fifty-four) who would inherit Castile – even though the rules of inheritance excluded his children not with Isabella – and Aragon.

Joanna attempted to govern for herself, but a regency council was set up, against her wishes. Plague and famine hit the country, Joanna was blamed, and Ferdinand was delighted to see his daughter in crisis. He arrived to take power in 1507. Unfortunately for Joanna, the plague was burning itself out, and it looked to the people as if Ferdinand's arrival in Castile had ended the disaster. Ferdinand told his daughter to give him power, but Joanna issued her own statement declaring that she was still queen. Ferdinand had her locked up in the royal palace in Tordesillas, guarded by servants who answered to him. Documents were issued, in her name, but he signed them. Joanna had until now been isolated and confined by her husband, but not actually imprisoned. Now, though, she was locked up, watched, treated like a criminal. Having fought so hard to win power, Ferdinand promptly handed over the day-to-day practicalities to Archbishop Cisneros. In 1510, he departed Castile entirely and essentially left the kingdom to Cisneros, and Joanna was left imprisoned.

Matters got even worse. In 1516, Ferdinand died. Joanna was now officially queen of Aragon as well as Castile (although female rule was mistrusted in Aragon). But Joanna was not told. Her cruel keepers and

Cisneros lied to her that Ferdinand was still alive and continued to demand her imprisonment.

The death of Ferdinand was the signal to Joanna's eldest son, Charles, now sixteen, to step into power. He then visited his mother and gained her agreement to be his co-ruler. But like his grandfather and father, Charles had no interest in sharing power. Once he had his mother's agreement to joint rule, he insisted that she continue to be imprisoned and declared himself sole king of Aragon and Castile. He surrounded himself with Flemish advisors, which angered Castilian nobles who felt as if they were being ruled by a foreign power. In 1519, Charles became Holy Roman Emperor, the most powerful man in Europe, and the Castilians grew restive at the thought of being absorbed into the giant empire. In 1520 he departed for Germany, leaving his advisor, the Dutch cardinal Adrian, as regent. This, for the people of Castile, was too much. The ruler seemed not to care about them and the rightful queen was locked up in a castle.

Riots began across cities. The rebels declared they would go to Joanna and ask her to be their queen. The Bishop of Mallorca sent a group of royal councillors to ask her to condemn the rebels. She declined to do so, asking for more time and a clearer idea of what was being requested. She delayed and questioned sharply – hardly the actions of a woman who had lost her wits. The very suggestion that Joanna's signature could possibly be valid, and enough to overturn her son's power, undermined the whole principle that she was mad and had been locked up for her own good. The rebels then sent her a delegation asking for support. Cardinal Adrian told her that Charles would lose Castile if she upheld their cause, but her confessor and the courtiers were keen to tell her she should send the rebels away, for otherwise she would be responsible for mass death and civil war. Joanna was caught between two demands. She delayed, claiming ill health and that she needed more time to think. Using indecision as power – much as her future step-niece Elizabeth I would do – Joanna made them wait for her answer. The advisors told her endlessly there would be dreadful war and anarchy, and it would all be her fault.

Historians wonder why she simply did not take the plunge, agree to the rebels' demands and return to the throne. She would have been supported by the people of Castile. But Joanna had been imprisoned since her father locked her up sixteen years previously. She had little idea of public opinion.

She wasn't aware to what extent Charles was unpopular, that Adrian was detested and that the populace wanted the daughter of Isabella on the throne. Finally, she told the rebels supporting her to stand down because she feared civil war – as we will see, plenty of female monarchs are threatened with the same. The male monarchs around her would never have stood down.

Joanna's belief in the strength of female rule and her own right to the throne had been killed by years of ill treatment and imprisonment. Her husband and father and their advisors had seized power from her and everybody had allowed it to happen. She played a clever game, delaying her decision. She naturally expected that making such a concession to her son would mean he would respect her as his mother and bring her to court.

Of course, she was wrong.

Charles had no gratitude; he just feared his mother's potential power. Once he had secured Joanna's support, he told Adrian to lock her up again at the Royal Palace of Tordesillas. Afraid that further rebellions would again try to instal her as queen, Adrian kept her under even crueller surveillance. Joanna was totally alone, tormented by her keepers, and, although the nuns caring for her day to day could be kind, they were instructed not to give her any freedom. This final betrayal caused her even greater suffering, as she now understood that she had been kept in such miserable circumstances at the command of her own son. Her life was even worse than it had been at the hands of Ferdinand or Philip.

Charles wanted his mother in total isolation. He said no one should speak to her or meet her. Joanna was terrified that her guards wanted to kill her. She was not always permitted to sleep, or bathe, and was stopped from changing her clothes as much as she wished. Even the most equable of temperaments would be tried by such horrors and tribulations in what was essentially solitary confinement, and Joanna suffered, mentally and physically. She always hoped to be let out, but she died under house arrest aged seventy-five and was buried in Granada, with Isabella, Ferdinand, her tiny nephew Miguel and her husband. She was laid to rest with a father and a husband who had betrayed her – although not as much as her beloved son had done.

Joanna was called Joanna the Mad, stigmatised as too 'mad' to rule. And yet when her signature was required, as in the case of the rebellion, she received delegations, considered their suggestions, was spoken to as an intelligent woman and queen. Attempting to have her husband buried in Granada with her mother was a strategy to empower her son, and to fortify herself as sole ruler, for which other monarchs would have been congratulated. As time went on, Joanna was imprisoned, deprived of society, even supplies and clothing, and it was only then when she seemed to manifest distress. And if she was unwell by the end, it is hardly surprising, mistreated by capricious jailers and betrayed by her son as she was. Plenty of kings have suffered from delusions and kept the throne, including poor old Charles VI of France who thought he was made of glass and might shatter at any moment; others have killed friends on a whim. But she was a woman and her father, husband and son wanted power. If she was truly crazed, she would have been allowed out, to occasionally wander court, to show she was unwell.

Sometimes a queen has less autonomy than an ordinary woman. An ordinary man would be questioned if he locked up his wife and mother of his children and claimed she was too mad to be out. Queens are sometimes all-powerful, and sometimes, as Joanna's story shows, the most vulnerable. In previous ages, women could lose the throne because they couldn't hold it through battle – and so they could be deprived of command if their army lost. But, in the sixteenth century, being a war leader against constant invasion was less relevant. Instead a way to take women's power from them was by saying that they were weak in another way: that they suffered from insanity.

Women can be cast as mad, distrusted when they do things that men do not want. Few women have been so excluded, so gaslit as poor Joanna, denied all freedom. Joanna loved her son and would have no doubt been happy to play the queen consort role behind him, smiling with him at court. But Charles would not let her out of her prison. He was afraid of her – and this was because Isabella had been an unassailable queen. Curiously, the two women's reputations and images are seen as in direct contrast to each other. Isabella is powerful, Joanna is mad. Isabella managed to control her husband, who supported her aims. Joanna lost everything to the men around her. For Isabella, her masterstroke was marrying Ferdinand. For Joanna, the very same man was her doom. The two women are not distinct;

they are joined. In a terrible irony, Isabella's success meant her daughter's misery; because Ferdinand felt he had been too long subservient to Isabella, so ignored her wishes as soon as she was dead, and because Isabella had been so popular that the people of Castile immediately accepted and supported Joanna, so she had to be locked away for ever. The shadow of Isabella, the powerful queen regnant, meant that Ferdinand and Philip were just too afraid of the possible strength of a queen.

The Tudor monarchy was founded on the efforts and determination of women: Catherine of Valois, the young widow of Henry V with a baby son for a king, was not allowed to be regent. Forbidden from making a match with a noble (let alone a royal), she fell in love with the steward of her household, the Welshman Owain ap Maredudd ap Tudur, or Owen Tudor. They had two sons, Edmund, born in 1430 and Jasper born in 1431. Catherine died in 1437 at the age of thirty-five, maybe in childbirth. She was buried in the Lady Chapel of Westminster Abbey and given an eminent alabaster memorial, befitting the mother of the king.

The young king, Henry VI, gave Owen Tudor the rights of an Englishman and invited Edmund and Jasper to court, for he was fond of his brothers. At this time, young heiress Lady Margaret Beaufort was on the marriage market. She was the sole child of a grandchild of John of Gaunt and Katherine Swynford. After his wife died, John had married Katherine and had their children legitimised, but they were declared ineligible for the throne. Yet their claim strengthened as the others died out, and so Margaret was both rich and well connected. The young king rewarded Edmund Tudor for his loyalty with a marriage to Margaret. He was twenty-four to her twelve. In 1455, the king was captured by the York side, and this was the beginning of the Wars of the Roses between the Yorks and the Lancasters, the latter of whom, including the king's half-brothers, supported the king. Owen was captured and executed, before which he declared he would lie on the stock 'like he was wont to lie on Queen Catherine's lap'. Edmund died of plague in Wales, leaving Margaret a thirteen-year-old widow – and pregnant. At Pembroke Castle in January 1457 she gave birth to a son, the future Henry VII. So 'little', she had a difficult birth and never had another child. She was a survivor, though, made a wealthy second marriage and sent

her son to France along with Jasper, fearing that the Yorks would kill him now that the York King Edward IV was on the throne. When her second husband died, she swiftly married Thomas Stanley, Earl of Derby, a wildly rich landowner and widower who had court favour. Thomas was appointed the steward of Edward IV's household, even though his stepson was such a great threat. For Margaret, the marriage brought her into the heart of the enemy. She worked to charm and befriend the Yorks and their supporters. A marriage was even suggested between the eldest princess Elizabeth and her son.

The Wars of the Roses saw the rise of one of the greatest warrior queens, Margaret of Anjou, a French princess married to Henry VI. She fought intensively for the rights of her son, rousing armies, leading men, leading the Lancastrians. But when her son died at the age of seventeen at the Battle of Tewkesbury, she was heartbroken and had no will to go on. She was captured by William Stanley, brother-in-law to Margaret Beaufort.

In 1483, Edward IV died and his brother, Richard III, seized the throne. Edward IV's sons, Edward and Richard, were imprisoned in the Tower of London and by autumn that year they had disappeared, conveniently for Richard III. Margaret Beaufort, astonishingly, was back at court, attending on Richard III's wife, Queen Anne. Richard underestimated her, as they all did.

Margaret pushed forward her son as future king, even though she was embedded deep in the heart of the Yorks. After financing his failed bid for the throne, she was imprisoned but continued to plot by letter. In 1485 Henry invaded again, defeated Richard at the Battle of Bosworth and gained the throne. The thirteen-year-old girl giving birth at Pembroke Castle had become the most successful kingmaker in history. It is curious how often Margaret Beaufort is characterised as bent on taking power for her son, when in fact she gave up her claim for him. Just like the Roman empresses who were attacked by misogynist chroniclers for attempting to ensure their son took the throne, so her efforts to make her son king are not seen as they would be if she had been a father. For a man to push forward his son – no problem. For a woman to do the same is manipulative. Margaret of Anjou had fought pitched battles to win her son the throne. Margaret Beaufort had campaigned in different ways, raising money, marrying, winning favour. Her son, stowed safely in France, was able to take the throne.

Henry VII won his throne on the battlefield of Bosworth. Elizabeth of York's claim to the throne, as the eldest living child of the former king, was stronger than his, but this was not to be a joint monarchy. Instead Henry VII made Elizabeth wait for the marriage. He wished to be crowned alone, as he indeed was in October 1485. Elizabeth of York would have made a powerful queen regnant. Instead, she exercised her talents as consort, deploying her considerable intelligence and skill at diplomacy in work for the poor and the Church.

Catherine of Valois, Margaret of Beaufort and Elizabeth of York had given Henry VII the throne. And yet he spent his reign trying to exclude female power. During his reign the Lady Chapel in Westminster Abbey, in which Catherine of Valois was buried, was destroyed so he could build his new chapel. He left her body within the railings of Henry V's tomb in an old coffin, the wood disintegrated and soon Catherine's body was exposed. He was keen to disavow his debt to a woman. For centuries Catherine, his grandmother, was open to view, and her body became a tourist attraction. And worse. The 36-year-old Samuel Pepys, who liked to press his attentions on living women, also did so on a dead queen; as he wrote in his diary in 1669, he 'had the upper part of the body in my hands, and I did kiss her mouth, reflected upon it, I did kiss a queen; and this my birthday'. Henry wanted the woman cut out of his Tudor myth, a vision of him going straight back to Henry V.

One of the most popular plays under the Stuart king James I was *The Duchess of Malfi* (1613); the duchess is a widow and regent of Malfi for her young son who marries her steward against the wishes of her brothers and is tormented and executed. Giovanna, Duchess of Malfi, was a real woman living in Amalfi, and in 1510 she and her children disappeared, presumed killed by her brothers. But the story of a woman who secretly married her steward would have been recognised by the audience as a comment on the founding dynasty of the Tudors. Catherine of Valois tormented on stage; the Stuarts were the survivors, and owed nothing to a woman.

In 1778, Catherine's coffin was at last buried with dignity under a vault, and in 1878, thanks to another queen, Victoria, she was interred under the altar in a new chantry. The inscription read, 'Under this slab… rest at last, after various vicissitudes, finally deposited here by command of Queen

Victoria, the bones of Catherine de Valois, daughter of Charles VI, King of France, wife of Henry V, mother of Henry VI, grandmother of Henry VII'. Victoria clearly liked queens; she also erected a memorial plaque to Anne Boleyn near where she was buried. But she did nothing for Henry VIII, who had desired an immensely elaborate grave. William IV, Victoria's predecessor, placed a plain stone in St George's Chapel, Windsor: that was all that Henry was going to get.

Henry VII and Henry VIII both owed everything to women: Catherine of Valois and Margaret Beaufort. But they were fixated on their own God-given male right to rule. And what they wanted was to continue a male monarchy.

The battle over the king's divorce was about female power. By the time of Catherine, Henry VIII's consort was impossible to dislodge. Henry wanted to prove that women had no influence, could be excluded and swapped over at the blink of an eye. The 'King's Great Matter' was about diminishing the consort.

CHAPTER SIX
Who Gets the Jewels?: Catherine and Anne

The familiar portrait of Anne Boleyn holds tight on the imagination. Dark hair, an enigmatic Mona Lisa style look, a B around her neck, no signs of queenship. She is seductive, mysterious in a dark dress. She is so different to the vision we have of Catherine of Aragon – or any queen. In fact, she may not have looked anything like this. It is a version of her. Anne Boleyn, first loyalty to her family, exquisite, imbued with the myth of the executed queen, the seductress, the dark flashing eyes, who brought down a king.

We know kings through their statues, monuments, castles. Of queens, we have comparatively little; for what are they but the upholders of the ideology of kingship, in which everything is created by the all-powerful king? When they come out for themselves, separate themselves from the king, such as Eleanor of Aquitaine travelling on crusade, they are criticised. And thus, for Anne Boleyn, one of our most famous queens in history, who is perpetually thought of in terms of seduction, her appeal to Henry VIII, we have no monuments she commissioned, no contemporary portraits. Her palaces must have once been full of her images; the queen in the most fashionable gowns, hung where the portraits of Catherine had once been. But they were destroyed, just as other iconographies of queens have been wrecked, for removing an image of the queen is seen as enough to cancel her out of history. The celebrated portrait of Anne, the B around her neck, was painted much later in the sixteenth century, although we know not when. The

beautiful Hever Castle Anne portrait has recently been dated to 1583, but it probably was a copy of an original.[1]

The only image of Anne from the time that we know of for sure is a disfigured lead medallion from 1534, which was to be released when she had a son. One of the most celebrated portraits of Catherine of Aragon is now thought to be of Henry VIII's sister. The portraits of Anne Boleyn were destroyed after she died; we only see her in H and A carved on palaces, her words on documents, her beautiful rooms and her Book of Hours at Hever. It is hard to know how she really appeared. The Anne portrait we know is beautiful, enigmatic. She may even have had fair or dark brown auburn hair, as in a Hans Holbein sketch, the 'Windsor sketch' of a woman in profile that is very likely an image of her. But in the popular imagination she is always dark-haired; dark-haired women are often characterised as seductive sirens. For Anne Boleyn, more than so many women of the sixteenth century, we have to make our way through hostile sources, or absence, because much was destroyed after her death. We have the reports of ambassadors who disliked her; trying to get a handle on Anne the woman and Anne the queen is constantly out of reach.

In the late fourteenth century, *The Mirror for Ladies*, a conduct book for queens, was written for Joan of Navarre by her confessor. It instructed her to fortify her house (the country) and decorate the interior of the house (her soul), be wise, patient, virtuous, intercede for her people with the king, create peace and unity and foster a court of virtue. A queen who didn't cut it could be severely criticised. The queen was there to perform virtue and virginity, implicitly compensating for the king's louche or bloodthirsty behaviour, and reminding everyone that the job of the queen was to be sexually faithful. The British Library edition of the book, in the royal manuscripts section, bears the coat of arms of Henry VII. Perhaps he gave it to outline expectations to his wife and daughters (after all, what would happen if you failed? Your coffin was opened to all in Westminster Abbey). His son, Henry VIII, had the same ideas about the role of women. He expected a consort to be there to support him entirely. His first wife, Catherine of Aragon, was perfect at the role of consort, ticking all the boxes. Catherine, like her sister Joanna, the imprisoned queen of Castile, had been highly educated, taught law, history, religion, philosophy, mathematics and

literature, and the arts and Latin, the language in which she was expected to converse with her husband. She had been born to leave the court and her family forever. It was an important role. The primary woman in the land, a consort could exercise significant influence. Catherine was told to be loyal to her husband, while also pursuing and encouraging the interests of Spain. A difficult balance, which she achieved, becoming popular and loved at court. But without a son, none of it counted.

The story of Catherine of Aragon and Anne Boleyn is one that is usually told as a battle between women. But it was a battle for the meaning of the consort – of what the king's wife should be and should do. In the sixteenth century, due to the societal obsession with inviolate marriage, the consort had the greatest power in history, and she was the one thing the king was not supposed to change. He could imprison or execute his friends and relations, go to war, send his armies against thousands, even rid himself of children, or other pesky would-be heirs to the throne. But marriage was until death. There had been occasional exceptions in Europe, such as Blanche of Tour de Nesles fame, imprisoned then repudiated when her husband came to the throne but the Pope had to do it, and it was a giant undertaking, for the worst of women. Annulment was a possibility but really a wife was a wife – and thus marriage was the only limit on power-hungry Henry's absolutist desires.

In Catherine and Anne we see a transition of the consort, from foreign princess, a woman trained for marriage and cementing inter-country alliances, to a courtier, surviving on wits and the king's favour, like any male courtier. The long-told story of Catherine and Anne embodies a question: what was the consort for?

Catherine of Aragon was a superbly intelligent woman, the first female ambassador in Britain, representing Spain in the years before she was married, an effective and trusted governor for her husband when he was away. And yet she is remembered for only one thing: divorce. Few even remember that she was the youngest child of Queen Isabella, born into a great tradition of queenship. It is interesting indeed that she is never called, colloquially or not, Catherine of Castile – this would make her look much more powerful.[I] Catherine had English royal blood, as did all of Isabella's descendants.[II] She had John of Gaunt's heritage via two of his daughters and,

unlike Henry VI and Henry VII, it came from his legitimate line, his two first wives, Constance and Blanche, rather than his mistress, then wife, Katherine Swynford. Catherine of Aragon had, we might argue, a stronger blood claim to the throne than Henry VII. When she was sixteen, she travelled over to be wed to fifteen-year-old Arthur, Henry VII's eldest son and heir to the English throne. On 2 October 1501, Catherine arrived in Plymouth. Henry VII promised to 'treat, receive and favour you like our own daughter'. He meant as a possession. Her parents had commanded she not see or speak with father or son until the wedding ceremony. Henry decided the 'pleasure and commandment' of the bride was his and said he would see her, even if he had to storm into her bedchamber. Threatened with such a shocking event, Catherine submitted and came out to give a gracious greeting to the king in her receiving room. Her parents' authority was as if nothing; now she had to survive by pleasing the king.

Henry VII had instructed the Spanish royals to send their princess with a small retinue, but Catherine came with fifty servants and staff, including ladies-in-waiting, a baker, a cook, pages and her trusted Lady of the Bedchamber, Dona Elvira, as well as African attendants, including the trumpeter John Blanke. She arrived as she expected to be treated: a queen as significant as her parents. She carried with her a glittering display of jewels from Isabella's jewel box, even though some had been pawned for her dowry. At the magnificent wedding, Catherine made a significant bid for independence by wearing Spanish dress. Spectators were fascinated by the big sleeves and, even more surprising, the 'held out' skirt, a skirt pushed out on canes, which we would know as a farthingale, not an English fashion at all. A Spanish dress was a bold move.

Not six months after the wedding Arthur died, most likely of the awful sweating sickness, in April 1502. Catherine was a teenaged widow. Henry VII did not want to send her back as then he would have to return her dowry. Ferdinand and Isabella energetically demanded to know from their daughter's retainers whether she was still a virgin. Everyone claimed she was. The existence of Catherine's virginity or otherwise would be passionately debated years later, but at the time everybody, including the English royals, all seemed quite convinced. Ferdinand and Isabella wanted her betrothed to the next son, now heir, and would not send over the rest of the dowry until she was. Annoyed, Henry VII sent the princess to Durham

House in London and refused her permission to come to court. He didn't want to risk her fascinating his son before a decision was made, and he didn't want to send what he had of the dowry back, so he wouldn't let her go to Spain. After the death of Elizabeth of York, Henry VII thought of taking Catherine as his second wife. But Isabella was scandalised by the idea of Catherine marrying her father-in-law and declared it 'a very evil thing – one never before seen and the mere mention of which offends the ears' (strange considering she had married her own daughter to her other daughter's widower; it was no doubt because she didn't want Catherine to be queen for a few years before her husband died, she wanted her to be in the position for decades). Poor Catherine. Henry VII wasn't the best husband in the sixteenth-century dating pool, but she could have had a comfortable life at court as a dowager queen, stepmother to Henry VIII, and it would have been no matter if she did not bear a son. Isabella said her daughter would have to come home, with no mother-in-law to protect her virtue. It was brinkmanship. Isabella got her way. In 1503, Catherine, seventeen, was betrothed to Arthur's eleven-year-old brother, Prince Henry. Isabella had beaten the wily Henry VII. Or so she thought.

The death of Isabella in 1504 made Catherine much less valuable; she was only the daughter of the King of Aragon, a minor territory. Henry gave her very little money and Ferdinand said that she was Henry's responsibility to house and feed, and so she was caught between them in the standoff and barely had funds to pay her servants or maintain her household. She wrote to her father declaring her household were all wearing rags. She writes repeatedly that she does not have the gowns that she should have to maintain her position. This and the stunning wedding dress remind us that the old idea of Catherine as plain and dowdy versus Anne as glamorous is simplistic – she was stylish, at least in the early days, although in the Spanish way. Yet, Henry frequently kept her away from court. She was a true princess trapped in the tower, except the dragon who had imprisoned her was the king. Henry even secretly renounced the treaty and decided to betroth his son to Catherine's seven-year-old niece, Eleanor, Joanna's daughter. Her father decided to rescue her in 1507, not by fixing the dowry drama, but instead appointing her as Ambassador to Henry's Court for Spain. At the age of twenty-two, she was the first female ambassador in Europe. Roger González de la Puebla, who had been in the role for some years, was unwell,

so she was his co-ambassador; it was too much to have her working alone. Henry VII allowed the whole thing because he had a cunning plan: in 1506, when Joanna was widowed after Philip died, he wanted to marry her, the Queen of Castile. Catherine wrote coded letters, with codes sent by her father, conversed with the king – and wrote to her sister that Henry had been upset at seeing how poorly Philip had treated her in England. He was, she wrote, a 'passionate King' and felt 'great affection to her'. Poor Joanna might have liked some affection, even from an Englishman.[2] Considering what happened to Joanna, marrying Henry was a better option. Catherine played the game well; she was careful not to express resentment about her years of ill treatment and not to advocate too strongly for Spain. But Catherine and Joanna were both pawns, Catherine allowed a small amount of power because she could do what men wanted in terms of seeming like a go-between about her sister's fate. When the idea faded, Catherine's influence did too and she was once more excluded and declaring she was 'suffering from the unkindness of the King', who said he wouldn't give her food. She begged her father to allow her to return to Spain and enter a convent. And then in April 1509, Henry VII died.

Henry VIII was now king, at seventeen. Henry surprised the court by declaring he would marry Catherine. He said that the king had requested on his deathbed that he marry her, which seems unlikely. His erstwhile betrothed, Eleanor, was a child and presumably Henry VIII simply wanted to be married, to begin begetting heirs. He wanted the Spanish alliance, the dowry, and he knew Catherine well. Eleanor was later married off to the King of Portugal, who had already been married to two of her sisters.

At her lavish joint coronation with the new Henry VIII, Catherine had finally gained everything she had been raised for, fulfilling her parents' dream. The country was delighted with their new queen. In 1513, Henry travelled to France to fight his old enemy and left Catherine in charge as Regent and 'Governor of the Realm and Captain General'. James IV of Scotland, married to Henry's sister, Margaret, exasperated about English raids into Scotland from the border, sent word to England that he was making a declaration of war. Catherine could be as ruthless as her mother. She instructed that all Scotsmen in England must surrender their property. She ordered an army to be raised, and rode to address them, even though

she was in an advanced stage of pregnancy. The English defeated the Scots at the Battle of Flodden, with as many as ten thousand men killed, including King James himself. Margaret Tudor, Catherine's sister-in-law, was a widow, the regent for the tiny baby James V. She had to try to govern with the few lords she had left, and at the same time create a peace with Henry VIII.

Catherine sent James' bloody coat to Henry VIII; a tribute. She had proved herself at Flodden, a war leader, a Regent. But not long after the battle, the baby she had been carrying was stillborn. Catherine had proved herself in every way, except for providing a son. In 1516, she gave birth to Mary. Henry was pleased. A girl was a disappointment, but a healthy child after seven years of marriage was truly a gift. Mary was cherished by her mother, given an intellectual education, and was a talented musician. Catherine could be forgiven for thinking that a daughter was enough. Her mother had ruled Castile, had been one of the greatest monarchs in Europe. But Henry would not be convinced. He wanted a boy. The horrors of the Wars of the Roses were still in people's minds, when the country was a battlefield due to the lack of a clear male heir. Catherine was now over thirty; Henry was no longer optimistic.

At the Field of the Cloth of Gold in 1520, the grandiloquent diplomatic meeting between England and France, Catherine was feted. Among the attendants in the French party was a young woman in attendance on Queen Claude, Anne Boleyn. Henry did not notice her. But a few years later, in around 1525, Anne was at court, dancing in a pageant. This time, when Henry saw her, he was 'wounded by a dart of love'.

In early 1527, a group of clerics and scholars were secretly invited to Thomas Wolsey's house to examine a question for the king. Could Henry's marriage be declared illegal? In the Old Testament, Leviticus decreed that no man should marry his brother's wife. Now, after nearly twenty years, Henry had understood the painful reality that God was angry with him and would not give him a son. He, as he saw it, must put aside his superannuated wife and take a new, younger queen. The secret court would make their decision, the Pope, faced with the strength of argument, would have to agree, and Catherine would be no longer married, before she knew anything about it.[III] A woman who does not have a son is not useful to society and so everybody would fall in behind his plan.

Not long after the secret meeting at Wolsey's house, Henry went to the queen and told her they had 'been living in mortal sin since the day of their wedding', that they should annul the marriage and all the leading men of the Church thought so. With immense magnanimity, in his view, he suggested she might 'choose the place to which she would retire'. Catherine immediately began weeping. But it appears she had some advance knowledge; she was ready to fight. Henry's plan went against everything she believed about religion and the status of a queen. She could never have imagined that he might put aside his faithful queen, the daughter of Isabella, with royal blood herself, and have their marriage declared sinful. And she knew his act would render their daughter Mary illegitimate, ineligible for an illustrious marriage, let alone the throne.

Catherine contacted her nephew, son of Joanna, the Holy Roman Emperor, and begged his assistance. Henry expected the Pope to give him what he wanted. But the Holy Roman Emperor had sacked Rome and taken the Pope entirely under his power. Catherine said that if the present Pope agreed, it would 'weigh on his honour and conscience and lead ultimately to the discredit of the Apostolic See'. Strong words. The Holy Roman Emperor was keen to support his aunt, even though he had gaily imprisoned his own mother, Joanna. And Catherine thought she would have other women on her side. A wife could not simply be abandoned. As Catherine herself put it, 'No marriages will be secure if this is dissolved.'

Henry wasn't making a bid for the liberalisation of divorce law. Everybody else had to stay married. Indeed, it is often said that Henry 'divorced' Catherine, as a shorthand, but Henry was demanding nothing so merciful as a divorce, telling Catherine she had done her duty and he was setting her aside; instead he told her they had never been married. What he wanted was an annulment. Henry didn't think twice. He was God's envoy and God's representative, a holy king, and he should be allowed to marry whom he chose. What he wanted was in the best interests of the country. Male rulers tend to think this; women tend not to. In this book, we see so many female monarchs told to stand down from rebellion or asserting themselves due to the possibility of civil war from Joanna of Castile to the Queen of Hawaii. Even Princess Charlotte, daughter of George IV, then the Prince Regent, was told in 1814 that if she resisted her father over marriage, there might be civil war. She had refused her father's marriage choice for her,

a man unpopular with the public, and he had decreed she should lose all her servants and be locked up at Windsor. She fled to her mother's house and was told by her uncle and the politician, Henry Brougham, to return, to prevent national unrest. Women step back at the threat of civil war. Henry embraced the possibility of mass unrest, was willing to break the country apart for his desires.

Catherine's resistance to Henry's plans is famous. Conduct books such as the *Mirror for Ladies* made no suggestion for what a queen should do if her husband tried to abandon her. Catherine resisted with all her majestic brilliance. Even though she knew some judged her to have 'failed' in the role of queen, to ensure succession of father to son, she had thought she would be protected by the Church. For her, the queen consort could not be dislodged.

It was 21 June 1529. Catherine was at the hall at Blackfriars. It had been filled with benches for lawyers, gold-draped chairs for Wolsey and Cardinal Campeggio, who had been appointed Cardinal Protector of England in 1523 and been sent to hear the case. There were chairs under cloths of estate for Catherine and Henry, as well as seats for spectators. She was gowned and jewelled in the armour of a queen. Henry made his speech; said he was spiritually tormented by having lived in sinful cohabitation since 1509. And then it was Catherine's turn and she struck. She knelt at Henry's feet, and swore, 'as God is my witness' that she had been a 'true, humble and obedient wife, ever conformable to your will and pleasure'. Then, in a clear, proud voice she said to her husband, the man whom she had fought to marry since she was sixteen and had supported for twenty years, 'I take God to be my judge, I was a true maid without touch of man.' As she continued, 'Whether it be true or no, I put it to your conscience.' This was clever. It reminded the whole court that no one knew what had happened after the wedding with Arthur, twenty years before.

Catherine had been eloquent and totally convincing. Henry had tried to raise her from her knees and she had resisted. Once she had concluded, she swept a curtsey to Henry, flung her head high and refused to sit under her embroidered canopy, walking from the court. Henry wanted her called back and the court officials requested she be seated. Catherine said no, 'on, on, it maketh no matter, for it is no indifferent court to me'. After Catherine departed, the Court descended into grubby discussion of the wedding night.

Charles Brandon, the king's friend, husband to his sister, declared that Arthur had boasted that he had been 'in the midst of Spain' and suggested that too much sex had weakened him and made him fall ill. Everybody understood he was the king's ally. And the fact was nobody did know the truth. Catherine had not become pregnant during the marriage. It was often the case that young married royals were betrothed, even married, but kept separate to avoid the risks, primarily to young men's health from too much sex, but also the danger of bearing children very early – like Margaret Beaufort, a mother at thirteen and then never again. There was some evidence there was concern about Catherine and Arthur living together due to their youth; perhaps they were advised to wait.

By October, Campeggio declared that the case would be referred to Rome.

The king had lost. Or at least for now.

Catherine refused to give in to the powerful forces who put her under heavy psychological pressure. She swore she had only shared a bed with Arthur for seven nights and she came to Henry as 'intact and uncorrupted' as a baby.[IV] Thirty or so great men, Anne Boleyn's uncle at the head, marched into her rooms late one night and tried to terrify her into submission, telling her she would cause 'danger and confusion' across the country by resisting. Queens are constantly told they have no power, and then the minute they engage in a measure of self-assertion, they are told their resistance has the power to pitch the country into civil war. It is, whether they stand up to husband or father, a supreme illustration of why laws are punishing for women, backed up by a double standard that comes down hard on a woman who disobeys; it is feared that one small move for freedom could send women wild. Catherine refused to listen to the threats of terrible riots – and what do you know? There was no mass unrest. Catherine knew the people supported her. Her speeches were brilliant, worthy of her mother, Isabella. She proved her case with aplomb. And yet Henry was king and thus would do what he wanted, with or without the law. Wolsey was in Yorkshire when he was told he was to go to London to be tried for treason. He died on the way. Wolsey had failed, in the eyes of the court, and he was punished. Henry declared he would get what he wanted and two years after Catherine electrified the court

at Blackfriars, on 14 July 1531, he did so. Henry set off from Windsor with Anne on his usual summer progress. He told Catherine to stay behind. A month later, she received a message telling her to go The More, a former home of Wolsey. Mary was to go to Richmond. Catherine would never see Henry again.

Thomas Cromwell, once a protégé of Wolsey, now overseeing the king's legal matters, was brought in to enact the break. In early 1532, Henry was recognised by Parliament as 'the only head, sovereign lord and protector of the church'. The unthinkable had happened. Henry had removed his country from the Catholic Church.

Henry demanded that Catherine send the queen's jewels for Anne to wear. Some had been Isabella's. Catherine declared she would not give them to a person who 'is bringing vituperation and infamy upon the King'. It was no good. She had to send all the jewels to Anne, even those brought from Spain. She kept for herself one plain gold cross on a gold necklace, for it was meant to contain a sliver of the cross on which Christ was crucified. As a queen, in the end, she owned practically nothing.

'What I ask from his holiness is not war,' Catherine wrote. 'I would rather die than be the cause of it.' But that a war was mooted over a queen being dropped for another showed how much importance and momentum her struggle had gained. But, really, the emperor was not going to go to war over her. In the end, the men didn't want to choose a wife over a king. Catherine had fulfilled all the requirements of queenship, fostered a virtuous court, patronised good causes. But without a son, she could be set aside.

Catherine was told she could no longer be addressed as 'Queen'. She would not have it. 'I am your queen,' she said, and that she would rather be 'hewn to pieces' than take any other title. Thomas Cranmer was appointed Archbishop of Canterbury and his court decreed that Henry and Catherine's marriage was void. The country had broken from Rome and Henry had his divorce. Catherine was stripped of her lands and manors and sent to various unappealing properties, finally to a small set of rooms in Kimbolton Castle, not even a royal palace. She refused to speak to anyone addressing her by the title Henry required her to take: Princess Dowager, as the widow of Prince Arthur, the only legitimate marriage according to the king. Rumours circulated that Cromwell's agents were looking for evidence that Catherine

and Mary had been aware of plots against Henry and thus were guilty of treason. Everyone was in danger.

Catherine is often seen as retiring, saintly, passive. Instead she was the most active queen. She was a superb debater, knowledgeable about law, the most courageous consort for standing up to the all-powerful Henry VIII and refused to listen to the old chestnut 'there will be civil war' if she did not obey. But still, Henry did as he pleased. His view had won: a woman was only useful if a man deemed her so. In the end, her fate was not unlike that of her sister, Joanna, forced to live and die in total isolation. She was later buried as Arthur's wife only, no illustrious funeral for an eminent queen. Perhaps, if she had accepted that Henry's will was all-encompassing and agreed to the proposals, she would have been permitted to live quietly in retired freedom in a proper house, with her daughter, maybe visit court – maybe outwait Anne Boleyn. Later, Henry showed gratitude to Anne of Cleves for agreeing immediately to ending the marriage. If Catherine had done the same, it was legally possible that Mary could still have been declared legitimate, for there was a provision in law for the legitimacy of children who had been conceived when the parents in good faith believed themselves in a correct union. Perhaps Catherine could have pushed and bargained for that, plus estates. And yet she did not, for she remained true to her beliefs. She held tight to the image she had first adopted as the good queen, the custodian of virtue and upholding correct behaviour in the eyes of God. She defended the role of consort, the woman tied to the king for life, the queen who could not be removed from position because the king wished. She maintained with her iron strength this image of a faithful wife and was punished with miserable seclusion.

And yet her struggle had an impact on everyone's lives. Henry had broken from Rome. He was already pondering reducing the power of monastic houses and taking more financial privileges from the Church, but the Catherine business accelerated his desires. Catherine, one of the most pious queens in history, was, ultimately a useful excuse for him to seize all the money of the Church in his attempt to become the richest man in Europe. The man with a somewhat dubious blood claim to the throne was king and no one could tell him no. Catherine's fight also made it inevitable that Anne would die – for Henry, when he turned against Anne, didn't want to try to divorce her and again hear endless legal arguments.

The whole battle between Catherine and Henry left the role of the consort much reduced, compared to the all-powerful role it had been previously. The king had set her aside. And yet the sheer effort he and his advisors had had to devote to the matter showed how significant the consort had been and Catherine's refusal to give in showed that male power was not all dominant – even though he was the king, even though she had promised to obey, she fought for her own rights and position, in front of the eyes of the world. And Catherine's courage and her self-belief had a most important effect: it proclaimed her daughter Mary's rights and that a woman could not be easily forced. When Mary came to claim her throne, in the most courageous display of royal determination since Henry VII, her mother's brave blood coursed through her veins.

Catherine of Aragon and Anne Boleyn's story is a human story, but on a larger canvas, it is the battle of the queens. Who would best symbolise queenship? Catherine, from a European power, or an Englishwoman from Court? Arrangement or love? Anne Boleyn shows to us how strange and alien is the image of the 'seductress queen'. As we have seen, Cleopatra was twenty-one and doubtless a virgin when she met Julius Caesar, a repeatedly married man twice her age who had taken other men's wives, yet she was called a seductress. Thus Anne, who was in her twenties, unmarried, possessed of little protection at court as her family was entirely dependent on the monarch's pleasure, is presented as the sexual aggressor and Henry VIII, the all-powerful king, who had been through various mistresses, is seduced. Anne is cast as a magnetic enchantress, the 'Concubine', mysterious, with a B around her neck – for most other queens, their family are forgotten but Anne is always called Anne Boleyn, not Queen Anne. We would have an entirely different image of her if she had had six sons with Henry; Anne the matron, the mother of the future king.

Anne Boleyn's life led up to a political assassination, a murder coup against a queen who was inconvenient, even threatening to the king. It is a watershed moment in the history of the queen consort. Queens had been set aside, like Catherine, guarded under house arrest or imprisoned like Eleanor of Aquitaine, for taking part in a rebellion, locked up like Joanna of Castile. Some had been killed in battle. But Anne Boleyn was murdered by the mechanics of the state. She was symbolic of a woman having too much power. She hoped to be a reformer of religious abuses and political

overreaching in the educated traditions of humanism in which she had been brought up. Instead, because the king didn't want her and the men around him agreed to his desires, she was removed.

Anne's year of birth is unknown for sure, but was most likely 1501, although it is possible it was 1507 (this would have made her very young to join the court of Margaret of Austria when girls were usually twelve or thirteen when they became attendants). If it was 1507, she was very much younger than Henry, but even if it was 1501, she was ten years his junior. Anne has been accused of manipulating Henry's desires to increase his fire, saying no to inflame him, eyes on the prize from the beginning. In fact, Anne didn't want to be Henry's sexual conquest, to lose her precious virginity to a king who would move on within a year, if not months; she wanted to make a good marriage. Anne has to be cast as the seductress so often, because what is the alternative? That a king stalked and harassed one of his wife's ladies-in-waiting and then cut off her head?

Anne was born in Norfolk and spent her childhood at Hever Castle. The Boleyns are often dismissed as money-grabbing courtiers. And yet her father was an effective, educated diplomat, a patron to the eminent scholar Erasmus (Erasmus was also patronised by Catherine, and dedicated his treatise, *On Christian Marriage*, to her in 1526. Perhaps she had an inkling of what was coming when her chamberlain asked him to write it). Thomas met and negotiated with Margaret of Austria, daughter of Maximilian, the Holy Roman Emperor, and she took Anne into her court when she was around twelve (or if we believe her birth date is 1507, very much younger), after she had been impressed by Thomas Boleyn's diplomatic skills. Anne wrote to her father that she intended to work hard on her French and become an 'entirely virtuous woman when I come to the Court'. She noted that he had said that the queen might 'converse with me and it gives me great joy to think of talking with such a wise and virtuous person'.[V] Child Anne was well schooled in the role of a courtier, gracious, learned, flattering.

Anne had nearly a year and a half with Margaret of Austria. Margaret's power was all due to the treatment of Joanna of Castile. As we saw in the previous chapter, when Joanna's husband Philip died, their son, Charles, inherited the rule of the Netherlands at the age of six. But Maximilian, Philip's father, declared Joanna could not be regent. Instead, he gave the role

of Regent over the Netherlands to his daughter, Margaret, then twenty-seven. And Margaret was more successful as a Regent than many monarchs had ever been. Both Catherine of Aragon as ambassador and Margaret as Regent gained some power, but only due to the oppression of another woman; there is only one slice of the pie.

After 1514, Anne was moved to the court of the new Queen of France, Claude, the wife of Francis I.[VI] Young Anne was exposed to a world of powerful women. Claude was a successful queen consort, while Francis's mother, Louise of Savoy, controlled the court. Claude used the iconography of Esther, one of the most celebrated women in the Old Testament, who had married the King of Persia and went on to save the Jewish people and bring kindness and virtue to the court. It might have seemed rather daring to adopt the style of a heroine wife to a king portrayed as prone to wicked advisors (and considering Esther effectively saw off the rest of the harem and Francis had many mistresses), but Francis respected his wife and admired her deployment of images of virtue. And, with seven children in almost as many years, wealthy dower lands and a powerful family behind her, Claude was unassailable. In the French court, as Anne saw, women were political players (and Louise of Savoy and Margaret of Austria would later strike a peace between France and the Holy Roman Empire, after years of war, known as the 'Paix des Dames' or Ladies' Peace). Wives, mothers, sisters had power. Maybe, some thought, too much.

Anne returned to England in 1522 and became lady-in-waiting to Catherine of Aragon, the perfect courtier, able to sing and play, speak French, performing in tableaux for the court. She was glamorous, fashionable, intellectually brilliant and she had charisma in spades. She outshone her mistress. Men did not bring their wives to court, so the only women were the queen and her ladies, there to entertain her, create music with her, surround her, represent her. And they would be the nearest women for any king who wished for an affair, like Anne's own sister, Mary Boleyn, whom Henry spotted while she was a lady-in-waiting to Catherine and then became Henry's mistress (according to a comment from Henry later admitting he had 'known' her). There were negotiations about marrying Anne to a young aristocrat, James Butler, to address a complicated land dispute. By 1524, Anne had fallen in love with Henry Percy, the heir to the

Earl of Northumberland and page to Thomas Wolsey, but they were forbidden to marry on the basis that she was Percy's social inferior, as well as the fact that he was promised to another, and there had moreover been negotiations about her marriage to James. She blamed Wolsey and even Henry for blocking the marriage (even though Percy's father was also unenthusiastic). Had she been able to marry him, it would have been an entirely different life for Anne, that of an aristocratic wife in the countryside, busy with the Tudor equivalent of the school run. Instead, within a year or so of her broken engagement, Henry VIII had spotted her and decided she would make an excellent new mistress. He expected her to agree immediately. She said no.

Anne's refusal has intrigued generations of historians. Many have said she refused in order to inflame the king out of 'ambition' for advancement. This notion that only a woman of ambition would think to say no occupies a sexist space of entitlement to women's bodies. It's a vision that if she truly loved him, she would have given in – which is pure misogyny. It has been said that Anne was already sexually experienced and this gave her the idea to say no – a strange notion that only women who have had sex recognise the perils of a sexual invitation. Such are the visions of patriarchal society; that there is innocence on one hand and experience on the other, when in reality young women talk between themselves, share advice and warnings. And courts are full of men making comments and engaging in 'trying it on' or low-level (to them) sexual harassment. Anne, brought up at court, had seen plenty of it. And if we take Henry's comment about 'knowing' the sister as evidence that Mary Boleyn had been his lover, and rather recently at that, well, most young women would hardly be delighted to receive an offer of sex with the same man. Surely there must have been other ladies who turned Henry down? It's just that he didn't try again with them, so they have not been remembered by history. Anne's no is hardly a surprise at all. She wanted to make a marriage with a distinguished aristocrat. But history has become obsessed with how Anne managed to 'captivate' Henry, even verging into suggestions of new sexual practices learned in France. It has aspects of the coverage of Wallis Simpson, years later, when all kinds of reasons (particularly fetishised, orientalised sexual practices that she was supposed to have 'learned in China') were declared for why Edward VIII fell in love

with her. With misogyny as it is, we can't believe a man would give things up for a woman.

Plenty of contemporaries found the king's new obsession with Anne surprising, for she was deemed vivacious but no great beauty. Anne, raised in the court of Queen Claude of France – whom she attended at the Field of the Cloth of Gold – was quick-witted, elegant, spirited and stylish, always fashionable and fluent in French. Catherine had been emblematic of the Spanish model of queenship and Spanish dominance. Anne was seen as all French. Henry thought she was very fascinating, expecting lots of chats about France while he used her for sex.

The king showered Anne with letters, pleading love, sending her 'a buck killed late last night by my own hand, hoping that when you eat of it you may think of the hunter'. He is 'wounded by the dart of love', he enthuses about her breasts, says his heart gives itself entirely to her. The vision of Anne as manipulating his feelings is even more odd when you consider that we do not have any record of her feelings. Henry's letters have been preserved, secreted in the Vatican Archives (presumably stolen from him and sent by ambassadors to the Pope as part of the portfolio for the divorce). Anne's answers have been lost.[3] She had an impossible line to walk. Offending Henry could mean losing everything. This is the problem with conduct books for women like *The Mirror for Ladies*. Women should be virtuous and respectable – but how is it possible when a man is all-powerful and bombarding you with letters? Consent was understood in terms of power by the Tudors – but power was part of life, so what could be done? Henry chased Anne down, but it is so often figured as her seduction of him. Because this is what Henry said at the end, she had bewitched him, and so we take his part as truth. Just as the Romans said that a young Cleopatra seduced Julius Caesar. History is written by the victors – and not just of battles. On top of this, there was a general belief that women at court were eye candy, sexual resources – what else were they there for?

Anne took refuge at Hever Castle in Kent, her childhood home. At the height of their correspondence in 1527, as recorded in one of the letters in the Vatican Library, she gave Henry a present. It was a model of a ship, containing a jewelled woman being thrown around. Anne was a damsel in distress, shipwrecked on a sea of emotion. Henry wrote to thank her:

> For a present so beautiful that nothing could be more so (considering the whole of it), I thank you most cordially, not only on account of the fine diamond and the ship in which the solitary damsel is tossed about, but chiefly for the fine interpretation and the too humble submission which your goodness hath used towards me in this case.

History has often seen this as manipulative – Anne telling Henry she was overwhelmed by love. But maybe it was her subtle message that she was suffering, in danger, when any choice could condemn her and she could not save herself. Perhaps although it seemed like 'submission', she was saying she was also afraid of drowning, that she might die and was asking him to rescue her by leaving her alone.

'Submission' was all that mattered: a woman submits, a man dominates. Henry thought Anne could easily rescue herself. She simply had to say yes to his offer of love. If she would only give up to him 'body and heart', he would 'remove all others from my affection and serve you only' – offering to abandon all other mistresses, hardly the most generous offer of all time. So, he was clearly flirting with other women, if not full-blown affairs. She had seen her own sister and probably other women she knew seduced and then ignored by the king – and laughed at by all the other men. Her family were pushing her to say yes. In theory at least he could not seize her. But he could push her family out of favour, a fate worse than death, for the fortunes of the Boleyns had been created by their success at court, as courtiers, diplomats and flatterers of the royal ego. Anne offered submission. But not entirely. They could be together, but she would not give him the final sexual act.

As the relationship grew, Henry promised marriage. It was almost unthinkable, impossible. He was going to consider setting Catherine aside and marrying Anne instead. He no doubt told her it could be easily done, on the basis of her previous marriage. Henry and Anne flirted, bantered. And Anne introduced ideas. She was reading about religious reform and books of the New Testament translated into French and she bought a copy of the religious reformer and translator of the Bible in exile, William Tyndale's *Obedience of a Christian Man*, which declared that people should know God through the scriptures, rather than the intercessions and ceremonies of priests, but also that princes should rule their dominions, with no limits from Rome. Anne marked out passages for the attention-challenged Henry

to review. Henry had been firmly in the traditional camp when it came to religion but now he was so infuriated by the Pope's refusal to give him what he desired that he was turning to the new ideas. 'This is a book for me and all kings to read,' he apparently said.[4] He and Anne, late at night, talked about the new religion and it was enticing, intoxicating, like a drug. Henry was already annoyed by the Church and wanted its money. Such discussions encouraged Henry to think about how a new order might not need the Pope and the king could head the Church. Anne was an intellectual and a reformer, who had a radical impact on religion, and yet this is often lost in discussions of the love story. There's another parallel here with Wallis – who begged the king not to abdicate in 1936. Was she a convenient excuse so he could get out of the dull routine of being king and could go back to the glamour of being Prince of Wales? Did Henry see a similarly expedient way by which he could set himself against the Pope or at least gain monastic cash? Perhaps, as soon as the Pope started blocking his divorce, Henry and the men around him could see a way to shucking the Church off altogether – and Anne would be the pretext.

Anne was hated, surrounded by enemies, feared she would never marry the king, and all would be lost. She received a poison-pen letter bearing a drawing of three figures, Henry, Catherine and Anne herself. But the one marked 'A' was missing her head. Her lady-in-waiting suggested that the drawing was a warning against marrying Henry. 'I am resolved to have him whatsoever might become of me,' said Anne. She was increasingly frustrated with Henry's slowness. 'Did I not tell you,' she said, 'that when you disputed with the queen she was sure to have the upper hand? I see that some fine morning, you will succumb to her reasoning and you will cast me off.' As she put it, she had waited for him and so bid 'alas farewell to my time and youth'.[5]

Catherine was sent away from Court in 1531 and Anne took her place, presiding at court and occupying the queen's rooms. She was always by the king's side, bought expensive religious books in French from the Continent, including a beautifully decorated French psalter (book of psalms and other devotional material) – she and her brother would eventually own around forty evangelical books in French. In September, Anne was made Marquis of Pembroke in her own right and took a white falcon as her emblem. This

entitled her to sit in the House of Lords, to give the title to any offspring, even if illegitimate, and to have the status to meet other royals. Anne accompanied Henry to France to meet the King, Francis I. It was on this trip that Anne gave in to Henry, and their relationship was consummated, most likely in the Exchequer Palace at Calais, where there were interconnecting bedchambers. The Pope would not declare Henry free to wed, but Henry was going to behave as if he was. On the return, on 14 November, the pair had a private exchange of vows, probably even without a minister at the ceremony. They would be married. Henry took Anne to the Tower to review the Queen's apartments there and she asked for renovations, including more windows to add light and allow her to enjoy the views and a new gallery in the privy chamber. It was a lot for rooms that she would only occupy for one night before her coronation, but Anne was making changes. A new queen was on the scene.

Early in the morning in January 1533, at York Place, a secret ceremony took place, perhaps in Anne's partly finished bedroom. Henry and Anne were married. She was already pregnant, with the son who would secure her destiny. Anne would be the queen. The country would have to accept it. She had a vision of herself as a new type of queen. No longer the Catherine of Aragon type, sewing and declaring virtue like *The Mirror for Ladies*. She wanted to be a leader, influencing religious policy. For Anne, a queen was a reformer. York Place, once Cardinal Wolsey's home, would be their new palace of Whitehall. The couple immediately began renovating, with plans for it to be their favoured residence.[VII] By the summer, the marriage had been solemnised. Anne, only the second commoner (after Elizabeth Woodville) to marry into the Crown since 1066, was given a beauteous coronation, designed to evoke the assumption of the Virgin Mary. Before her coronation, as was customary, Anne stayed in the royal apartments in the Tower, which had been newly extended and renovated for the new queen, with a new dining room and great chamber. Henry stayed with her. Anne was crowned with St Edward's Crown, the crown that dated back to Edward the Confessor and had been used to crown the kings of England before the Tudors. The use of St Edward's Crown for a woman, a consort, was unprecedented, but Henry VIII decreed it to show Anne was queen and because he believed the child with whom she was pregnant was a boy.[6] They

were crowning the boy in her womb, the future King of England. He wore a new crown, probably commissioned by his father, Henry VII, the Tudor Crown and perhaps thought the other could be demoted – but other queens didn't get it. Anne was being shown as the future mother of the king. The lavish coronation did nothing to allay dislike of Anne. The Mayor of London was sent to speak to the city guilds and tell the men to instruct their wives to stop criticising her. Women were arrested and beaten publicly and nailed up by their ears, for claiming that Catherine was the true Queen of England. One congregation, when exhorted to pray for Anne, walked out of the church.

Anne had retired to her specially appointed birthing chamber in Greenwich Palace in late August 1533. On 7 September, the baby was born, a girl, Elizabeth, named after Henry's mother. It was a disappointment, but Henry was pleased by the speedy conception of a healthy child; a boy would soon follow. Princess Mary, now seventeen, was told she was no longer a princess and instead the 'Lady Mary, the King's daughter'. She refused and was then told she would lose her independent household (over 150 staff) and was informed by the Duke of Norfolk, Henry's loyal thug, that she had to go into the household of her baby half-sister.[VIII] Mary, despite being often ill, was made of steel and although she quickly became fond of little Elizabeth, resisted being put in the subordinate position to her half-sister, whether in the royal barge or the dining room. She also refused to call Anne the queen. The only queen she recognised was Catherine.

Anne headed a grand court and wore beautiful gowns and jewels. She was the queen, with all that Catherine had had. Despite everything, Henry's flea-like attention span was already dissipating, and he was looking at other women at court. Of course she would be shocked. He had switched swiftly from devoted love bomber to bored husband, ogling younger women. The king had thrown the country into the brink of revolution for marriage, he had pressed her and adored her for six years, and now the initial fervour of intimacy was fading, his wife was just another woman. Anne was heartbroken. Henry told her that she should 'shut her eyes and endure as more worthy persons had done'. Henry no longer had any interest in debating religion with Anne. He wanted constant gratitude (no mention of how she too had taken risks, losing her prospects of another marriage). As

he told her, she ought to know that he could 'humble her again in a moment more than he had exalted her'.[7] Threats, threats. Henry's divorce had undermined the whole principle of queenship. As he told Anne, she was just a woman he could set aside at will.

After the birth of Elizabeth, Anne became pregnant but suffered loss after loss and she knew that her enemies were crowing, and saying she was growing too old for conception. Anne had never thought that what Henry expected of Catherine would one day be expected of her – blind obedience and smiling submission. Even if Anne had managed to transform herself into the gentlest lamb, it would not have been enough: she had not given birth to a son. She and her family were growing increasingly unpopular at court as people resented their close ties to the king. Still, even though Henry was tiring of Anne, he kept up all the appearances of marriage. In 1534, he named her regent and 'absolute governess of her children and kingdom', if he died. In the same year, an Act of Parliament was passed that deemed the succession was to his children by 'his most dear and entirely beloved wife Queen Anne' and declared it high treason to deny their 'lawful matrimony' (but it hadn't said anything particular about Mary).

Anne, then, tried to adopt her greatest role as queen as a religious reformer. She owned an illuminated version of William Tyndale's translation of the bible, inscribed *Anna Regina Angliae*, and left it open for her ladies to read. As Henry considered dissolving the monasteries and nunneries of the country, she told him that their supreme wealth should go to charitable and religious causes. Henry and Thomas Cromwell wanted the huge estates and the gold to go to the king's friends and allies. Anne stepped up her attempts to persuade the king to implement her ideals. She even carried out her own inspection, including visiting the nunnery at Syon while in residence at Richmond Palace, and telling them they needed to use English prayer books rather than Latin ones. She also sent her chaplains to investigate a relic of Holy Blood at Hailes Abbey, which was displayed to great effect to visiting pilgrims (and cash donations). Some of Anne's detractors had suggested that she engaged with reformist principles during the courtship as a way of manipulating Henry. It's not true. Anne was devoted to her own political ideas, she was passionate about religious reform and what she believed to be right. She encouraged young reformers, commissioned her own

investigations, demanded answers from Henry's men. She had seen in her early years how women like Margaret of Austria could gain and wield power and she was expanding and reshaping the role of queen. Traditionally, queens were meant to intercede for their people. Was not this effort with the monasteries another part of this? For her, yes. Not for Henry, not for Cromwell. For both, the old role of the queen to intercede should be abolished.

In early 1535, Henry asked Cromwell if it was possible to annul his marriage to Anne. The problem was that if he did so, he would be expected to return to Catherine and he had already spotted wife number three, Jane Seymour, one of Anne's ladies-in-waiting and formerly a lady-in-waiting to Catherine. She would not be persuaded to be Henry's mistress, even though her power-hungry brothers wanted to use her influence. Then, at the end of 1535, Catherine grew ill and died in early 1536. It was said Henry and Anne dressed in yellow, that the king put a white feather in his cap and both danced at court with joy, that Henry told the Imperial Ambassador that now that Catherine was dead, he had no more cause to 'trouble himself' about England. Henry was happy, but was Anne? Yes, Catherine had been a thorn in her side.[8] And yet with the old queen dead, Anne was in danger. Henry could set her aside and pick a new wife.

In early 1536, Henry suffered a fall from his horse while jousting and was reported to be unconscious for two hours. Certainly, his brush with death made him want to grasp time. A few days later, Anne found the king with Jane Seymour on his knee and lost her temper. And then, five days after Henry's fall, on 29 January, the day of Catherine's burial at Peterborough Cathedral, Anne miscarried her fourth pregnancy in her rooms at Greenwich. She was devastated. She told the king he had caused her 'distress of mind'. Henry, spooked by his bad fall and facing his eventual death without male heirs, was becoming convinced that his marriage to Anne had offended God. Anne, as Eustace Chapuys, the ambassador to the Holy Roman Empire put it, had 'miscarried of her saviour'. In early February, Henry left for London. The same ambassador (who had a way with words) declared, he 'has left her in Greenwich, whereas formerly he could not leave her for an hour'.

By the end of March, people at court were saying that the king was considering marrying a French royal – where this left Anne was anybody's guess. Anne doubled down on her hope for religious reform. On 2 April Anne's almoner John Skip who, like Anne, believed that if religious houses were dissolved, the money should go to charitable causes, preached a sermon referring to the dissolution of the monasteries and 'evil counsellors', in which he declared that a king's advisor should take care 'what advice he gave against altering ancient things'. He was openly saying that Cromwell was wrong in planning to give the money to the Crown. Still more recklessly, he compared Anne to Queen Esther, whose husband, the king, had been persuaded by a wicked minister (Cromwell) into killing the Jews (the English religious men and women). Esther dissuaded the king and saved the day. Anne had once, at an impressionable age, seen the French Queen Claude use the iconography of Esther effectively. But Claude was a secure consort, a wealthy mother of sons, a woman who could have been queen regnant herself, if the French throne went to women. Anne, in casting herself as Esther, was wildly optimistic, thoughtless. Anne was in danger, but she didn't realise it; instead of keeping her head down as we might advise with hindsight, she had her almoner criticise Cromwell. She was, estimably, determined to see the right thing done to the monasteries. But to everyone at court, it looked like the gloves had been taken off. It was a battle between Anne and Cromwell now. Only one could win.

Soon Cromwell was gathering evidence against Anne. Henry couldn't just divorce Anne for failing to have a son. There had to be more. Henry could have annulled the marriage, on the grounds that she had an existing engagement (to Henry Percy) before he married her – or even declare she had engaged in witchcraft, although claiming witchcraft was a dangerous option and might fuel the enchantresses and soothsayers across the country, who thought Henry was a cad and liked to make predictions against him. It would have been possible to set her aside on legal grounds – Percy had sworn that there was no precontract, but he could be persuaded by the king to say the opposite. But then Anne, sent to a small house in the country, would be a figure of resistance, she'd keep talking and she was proof of his failures. Henry didn't want to risk another drawn-out PR disaster, after Catherine's campaign – and certainly, Anne had more secrets of his that she might expose. Catherine's efforts to preserve herself, her battles in court,

hadn't saved her but they contributed to his desire to find a swift solution to the problem of Anne. Cromwell knew that Anne was opposed to him, called him an 'evil' advisor. Historians are divided on who prompted the downfall of Anne; was it Henry instructing Cromwell or was it Cromwell persuading Henry? In the end, both had a role, but overall, Henry was in charge: he could be ruthless, he executed thousands and he wanted Anne out of the way. The death of Anne Boleyn was a state assassination. Anne was blocking Henry's and Cromwell's ambitions. Henry wanted to show that queens were interchangeable.

Cromwell had got Anne into position and now he would pull her down. If Henry and Cromwell had tried to claim Catherine was unfaithful, they would have been ridiculed. But for a woman called a 'concubine' by ambassadors, who was talked about as having fascinated Henry beyond reason, it was not too big a jump to decide Anne had fascinated other men too. Paradoxically, and indicative of the misogynist society, then and now, the fact that she had withstood Henry's sexual expectations for so long made it easier to cast her as sexually promiscuous, someone who didn't really 'love' Henry, but had captured him for ambition and then would have affairs with man after man almost as soon as she was married.

Anne, with the persistent hopefulness of a woman who wants to have a child, felt sure she could still produce the magical boy. The renovations she and Henry had planned for Whitehall were not completed – her apartments were still a work in progress. If your bedroom decoration still wasn't finished, how could your husband get rid of you?

Henry kept up appearances with Anne. He wished to stay distant from the taint of the investigation. Cromwell was away from court, claiming sickness. In fact, he was building a case. He knew that Henry was mercurial, might change his mind and fall back in love with Anne, and if he did, Cromwell would be ruined, as Anne would not forgive. The charges had to stick. Anne, who had realised she was out of favour, distracted herself by buying presents: gold and silver buttons for a saddle for the king, two leading reins for her little daughter. Anne was no fool, she knew that queens could be set aside. She would know an annulment was possible, on the basis of her previous relationship with Percy, but would have expected it to be a drawn-out process and that she'd be sent away to live quietly, perhaps even

to Hever. She asked her chaplain to look after Elizabeth, were anything to befall her.

Anne's birthdate, as we have discussed, is generally thought to be 1501, making her thirty-five at her death. But what if it were 1507? Two particular sources, one a lady-in-waiting to Princess Mary, suggest her as only in her twenties when she died. This would mean she had been eighteen when Henry had picked her out, making him thirty-four or so, twice her age. And it makes the whole thing even more false. For, if she was thirty-five, the men at court could have justified the matter to themselves since, at that age, she was deemed unlikely to have more children. But twenty-eight was still young, only a year or so older than Jane Seymour, wife number three.[9] Another oft-reported comment on Anne is that she was friendless at court, acerbic and rude, haughty when she should have been creating allies. Anne was no people-pleaser, not warm or deferential or keen to bake Tudor cupcakes for the office, but she had created a strong network of allies, not just her family but friends such as Sir Henry Norris and her own ladies-in-waiting (other than Jane Seymour of course). The problem was that once Cromwell pressed play on the investigation, everybody fled in panic, for fear of being in trouble. It was said about her that she hadn't created many friends and she flirted with men (how could one be possible but not the other?). When we present her as friendless rather than a woman leading a political faction, we are allowing our thinking to be coloured by the words of her detractors.

On Sunday 30 April, when spies were watching Anne, the queen was talking to Sir Henry Norris, a good friend of the King's, made Groom of the Stool in 1526, and thus with the king when he was in the Tudor loo, a job for a close and trusted person, who had become an ally of Anne's, supporting her view on the monasteries. Anne asked Henry why he was not yet married to her cousin Madge Shelton. He declared he was waiting. Anne laughed that if 'aught came to the King but good', then 'you would look to have me'. Anne's words couldn't have sounded worse; she was both extending an invitation to another man and raising the possibility of the king's death. In the past, Henry would have thought such an exchange a silly joke. The Tudor court ran on conversation after all. And Anne had always prided herself on her

witty jokes and exchanges, light banter, the clever queen always ready with a riposte. Now, Anne knew she was being watched and she became worried that they had been overheard and this conversation would be used against her by advisors telling Henry to set her aside. She didn't realise how bad things were. The only way she could have preserved herself would have been if she'd managed to flee abroad. But who would have protected her?

Cromwell had moved fast and was compiling 'evidence'. Henry authorised the arrest of one of Anne's musicians, Mark Smeaton, after Cromwell heard report of a flirtatious conversation between him and the queen. Smeaton was not an aristocrat and so could be tortured. He was taken to Cromwell's house in Stepney for questioning and then to the Tower, where he was 'grievously racked', according to a servant of Henry Norris – his body stretched out on the rack. Smeaton, under extreme pressure, said he had been the queen's lover, although the dates he gave were totally wrong, claiming they were together when Anne was elsewhere. He probably also implicated other men, most likely Norris – or at least was forced to agree to a list of names that he was given. It was enough. Cromwell told Chapuys the king had 'authorised and prosecuted' him to investigate – or as Chapuys put it, to 'bring to an end the Concubine's trial'. The progress to getting rid of Anne could begin. As discussed, in law in early modern England, a woman who killed her husband was punished more severely than a man who killed his wife: it was petty treason. So female killers, a rare phenomenon, were society obsessions, killing their husbands to have affairs with other men. Anne was going to be shaped into the image of a female killer, the stuff of lurid pamphlets: a sex-seeker and murderer, the focus of bloody misogynist fantasies. Nothing could be further from the ideal of the queen.

On 1 May 1536, Anne accompanied the king to the May Day jousts at Greenwich Palace. May Day was one of the most significant days in the royal calendar and supposed to be all joy and celebration. Henry 'gave himself up to enjoyment', as the queen's brother, George Boleyn, Viscount Rochford, led the jousting challenge with Sir Henry Norris leading the defence. Other men who jousted well included Thomas Wyatt, Sir Francis Weston and Sir William Brereton. They were Henry's friends and associates; they were about to lose everything.

Then, suddenly, Henry, in the middle of the jousts, rose and left. Anne was humiliated in front of everyone. She remained in place, all dignity. She

had no idea of what was going on. The king had received word Mark Smeaton had confessed to sexual congress with the queen. He ordered Henry Norris and others to accompany him to Whitehall. He told Norris to admit he was guilty of sex with Anne. Norris refused, and was taken to the Tower, pleading that he would rather die a thousand deaths than be guilty.

Anne spent a night worrying. She did not know the men had been taken and no one told her anything. But she still thought that the worst that could happen to her was an annulment, exile in the country or possibly abroad. Next morning, Cromwell, the Lord Chancellor, her uncle Norfolk and two more of the king's men came to her. They told her she was accused of adultery and bombarded her with brutal questions. Anne pleaded that she was the king's true wife and she would never be unfaithful. The men refused to listen. As she later said, she was 'cruelly handled'. She was allowed to eat dinner, and then at two o'clock, Cromwell and the rest, plus the King's guard, entered her apartments to take her to the Tower. She was not given time to change, gather belongings, or visit her beloved daughter. As her ladies wept, Anne, in the crimson and gold gown of a queen, walked to the barge. It was an open barge and broad daylight, and the people hurried to the river to see the shocking sight of the queen under arrest, surrounded by guards. Anne was now public enemy number one.

When Anne reached the Tower, she started to panic. She saw the walls where so many had died, and she fell to the ground, begging God to help her.

Anne was lost. She knew she was dead.

Anne was taken to the Queen's Apartments. Only three years previously she had stayed there, all triumph before her coronation, in love with Henry, had them spectacularly renovated for her triumphant moment – and they had been untouched since she left them to be crowned. She had added windows to look at the world she was now forbidden. She asked the Constable of the Tower, 'shall I die without justice?' The Constable avowed 'even the poorest subject of the king hath justice'. To this the queen could only laugh. Not when you were a queen and the king wanted you gone. She was given four ladies to attend on her in the Tower, all of whom were enemies of the Boleyns or disliked Anne. Anne told the Constable of the Tower that she thought this unfair and wanted her own ladies-in-waiting (she didn't know that most of them had fled and pledged everything to

Cromwell and would work for Jane Seymour). The four women, all spies, prompted Anne, asking her about men, searching for evidence. Poor Anne was panicking and began to fret over all the possible encounters that might be suspected. As she rambled, overwhelmed, those around her wrote down everything she said. For, despite everything, Cromwell's case was weak. Few people in court had had any firm accusations. So Cromwell was hopeful that a terrified Anne, under severe psychological stress and hopeful that she would be forgiven, would admit adultery or at least light conversations with men. Anne had always been a talker, someone who gained love and friendship through conversation. Now, she was using conversation to beg for mercy – but it would only condemn her.

Anne's brother, George Boleyn, had been arrested and taken to the Tower and within a few days more were arrested: Francis Weston, William Brereton and the poet Thomas Wyatt, as well as another courtier Richard Page. Others were questioned, including Anne's cousin. Any friend or ally was in danger and those of Anne's court who could swiftly gave allegiance to Cromwell, agreeing to condemn Anne, including her father. The Boleyn family, once all-powerful, collapsed. Everybody dashed to turn their backs on dreadful Anne. The die was cast.

She didn't know it, but Henry had already sent for a French swordsman to ensure a swift execution – it would take one to two weeks to send for the man and for him to journey to London. Once Henry had in his mind to do a thing, he wanted it done.

On 15 May, Anne was put on trial in the Tower, most likely the large hall in the White Tower. Two thousand people were there for the show; new seating was constructed for the eager spectators, all fine nobility and ambassadors. She was an animal in the zoo, there to be watched. Dressed in black velvet over scarlet damask, and a cap containing a black and white feather, Anne entered the court with dignity, 'walked forth in fearful beauty' with the carriage of 'one coming to a great honour'. She did not know, most likely, at this point the full accusations against her: that she would be accused of adultery with various courtiers, incest with her brother. She was also accused of plotting to kill the king, with the aim of marrying one of the men, reported to be Henry Norris, and ruling England with him as regents for Elizabeth. For by the statutes of treason it wasn't enough for a queen to have affairs. She had to plot the king's death. She was also accused of

bumping off Catherine of Aragon and trying to do the same to Princess Mary. Anne was not to be executed for religious heresy or credited as a reformer or a politician. Instead, Henry was going to agree with what had been said about his wife from the beginning – that she was a whore – and now there was a further accusation: murderess.

Of course Anne hadn't plotted to kill the king. She knew her position as queen came from her husband. Adultery was equally improbable – she was watched closely, and an affair would have been found out in a second. Still, the ridiculous parade continued, and she was accused of adultery on seventeen occasions, including on Christmas Day in 1533 and a month after the birth of Elizabeth. In most of them, the man wasn't even in the same place as her. She apparently solicited Henry Norris for sex on 6 October in Westminster, although she was in Greenwich, recovering from the birth, and then had sex on 12 October, again in Westminster, while she was in Greenwich. She had been pregnant or trying to become pregnant by Henry for her entire tenure as queen. It would, paradoxically, have saved her skin if she had had an affair – for the pattern of Henry's wives' conceptions suggested that it was not female infertility that caused the problems, but his own. Anne had had a livelier personal court than Catherine, inviting men to court to pay attention to her ladies, as it was her role to find husbands for them. For Anne, the odd sexual joke was innocent, evidence that she was a youthful queen, spirited and witty, not dreary like Catherine. But Cromwell declared that her conduct was so 'rank and common that the ladies of her privy chamber could no longer conceal it'.[10] In fact all he ever found were reports of banter and the odd overblown tale, such as one report of Mark Smeaton hiding in the marmalade cupboard at night, ready to have sex with Anne when she requested a late-night snack of preserves. So as soon as Anne became queen, she almost immediately started having sex with Henry's friends? Of course not. But Norris, Weston, Brereton and Smeaton had been tried and found guilty, in a trial heard by men who all disliked them or were in Cromwell's circle – one had owed Brereton a large amount of money (as did quite a few others at court), a debt which would disappear if he was found guilty. All but Smeaton staunchly said they were innocent. Smeaton was probably promised mercy if he said he was guilty; the others knew that such promises meant nothing.

So, with those men found guilty, Anne's trial was a foregone conclusion. She was going to die. Henry was not present and had informed Jane Seymour in Surrey that he would send 'her news at three o'clock in the afternoon of the condemnation of the Concubine'. Anne saw that the Duke of Norfolk, her own uncle, was presiding over the trial, and the jury was packed with Henry's friends. Cruelly, among the peers trying her was Henry Percy, who had once loved her. Anne was now read every accusation of adultery, including accounts of her incest with her brother – they had apparently been kissing with their eyes open – and plotting against the king's life. To each charge, Anne put up her hand and said, 'Not guilty'. She made a powerful and logical defence, and some in the stands began to whisper that the whole thing was unfair. Even Chapuys, the Imperial Ambassador who had criticised her in the past, thought her defence very strong. It didn't matter. Anne's trial was for show. Henry had ordered the executioner and he was already on his way. She had no witnesses to interrogate, no documents to contest. It was a political coup. Henry wanted to humiliate her, reduce her, show a queen as no better than a common adulteress.

The lords were called upon for their verdict. All declared Anne guilty. She was told that she must give up her crown. Anne was no longer queen. She said herself that there 'was some other reason for which she was condemned than the cause alleged'. She was right. Did the investigators hope that, in the end, Anne would 'confess', faced with Henry's power? Surely. She showed great bravery in refusing to do so.

The Duke of Norfolk, Anne's own uncle, told her 'thou shalt be burned' or 'have your head smitten off'. Henry would decide which. It would have been a kindness to tell her that she would be executed, since Henry had already decreed it, but they left her hanging, fearful of being burned at the stake. Anne raised her eyes to heaven and said, according to one report, 'I am clear of all the offences which you then laid to my charge. I have ever been a faithful wife to the King, though I do not say I have always shown him that humility which his goodness to me and the honours to which he raised me, merited. I confess I have had jealous fancies and suspicions of him, which I had not discretion enough and wisdom to conceal at all times. But God knows, and is my witness, that I have not sinned against him in any other way.' Anne's speech was passionate, as majestic as Catherine had been. As Chapuys said, 'Her speech made even her bitterest enemies pity her' and

noted there had been 'no valid proof or confession'. All Anne would admit to was jealousy. Her speech reflected texts about queens such as *The Mirror for Ladies*. A queen should be faithful, devoted. She should not be jealous or proud. It didn't matter. It had been made fatally clear to her: a queen had less protection, less chance of justice than an ordinary woman. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, the queen's position couldn't have been more powerful. Now, with Anne, everything seemed taken away; she could be executed on flimsy accusations. As soon as Anne left, Henry Percy fainted and had to be carried out – he would die the following year.

The Lord Mayor said that what he had watched was that 'they were resolved to make an occasion to get rid of her at any price.' Those watching knew it was a state killing, that Henry wanted Anne out of the way. But they assented, because otherwise they might be next and only a few, like Chapuys, had the bravery to admit it had been a set-up; he was protected as the Imperial Ambassador and was not reliant on pleasing the King. As Chapuys put it, the execution of Anne was 'virtually to separate and divorce man and wife. However, if such was their intention it strikes me that it would have been a far more decent and honest excuse to allege that she had been married to another man still alive.' Kings before had had to set inconvenient wives aside, imprison them, and then the women were troublesome thorns in their side. If you could just chop off their heads, well that was a game changer for men. But the fact was that even though the men around Henry had agreed with him, most people thought like Chapuys; fair enough to get rid of Anne, not so much to kill her.

That night, Henry was overwhelmed with 'extravagant joy'. He was 'heard to say that he believed upwards of a hundred men had to do with Anne'.[11] He planned out her execution with meticulous care. On the day after the trial, Archbishop Cranmer was sent to request Anne's consent to annulment of the marriage, which would render Elizabeth illegitimate. She did so and said that evening she hoped to be sent to a nunnery. Perhaps she'd been offered a deal by Cranmer: agree the marriage was always illegal and be spared. But the French swordsman was ready to kill her.

Two days after the trial, on 17 May, Anne's brother George was executed; he was first as he was of the highest rank. Norris, Brereton, Weston, Smeaton followed. They did not 'confess'. Henry Norris said almost nothing. Last to

go was Mark Smeaton and by the time he reached the block, it was drenched with other men's blood. Thomas Wyatt and Richard Page had not been tried, or executed; little evidence, apparently.

Anne heard the crowds shouting at the men's execution, her friends and her brother. That night, workmen by the White Tower erected a new scaffold. At dawn, Thomas Cranmer came to hear her final confession. Anne swore she was innocent: 'she had never offended with her body against the King'. She still refused to give Henry and Cromwell and their circle what they wanted: a confession of guilt. One hopes that she had heard that Norris, her brother and the other men had refused to confess, but she was probably told they had. Then she waited for 9 a.m. and her execution, but nothing happened. She was told that it would be delayed. She was devastated, 'I hear say I shall not die afore noon, and I am very sorry therefore, for I thought then to be dead and past my pain.' She wanted to die. She 'entreated the governor of the Tower for God's sake, to go to the King, and beg of him that, since she was well disposed and prepared for death, she should be despatched immediately'. Henry had not signed the execution warrant. Cromwell also wanted foreigners removed from the Tower – some might report back sympathetically on Anne's death. She had to wait to find out her time of execution, a horrific suspense. The Constable tried to reassure her it would be painless, and she said she'd heard the 'executioner was very good and I have a little neck'. This was Anne's sense of humour, blunt and bold. She was finally informed that she would die the next morning.[12]

At two o'clock in the morning on 19 May, Anne woke and spent the time praying. Then, dressed in grey, with a red petticoat, the colour of the martyr, and accompanied by four women, Anne walked from the Queen's lodgings to the courtyard to meet her escort of guards and officers. Her father and mother were not present in the crowd of around five hundred people or so, with seating erected at the front for the most important to have a good view. Instead, she had the beady eyes of Cromwell, other men of the King's council, all her enemies. Anne walked with grace, but frequently looked behind her, expecting, it seemed, a last-minute message, even a reprieve. Anne mounted the scaffold, which was about four or five feet high, swathed in black cloth and covered in straw. As the executioner was not dressed as

such, she did not know whom to fear. She asked if she might speak to the crowd:

> Good Christian people, I am come hither to die, for according to the law, and by the law I am judged to die, and therefore I will speak nothing against it. I am come hither to accuse no man, nor to speak anything of that whereof I am accused and condemned to die, but I pray God Save the King and send him long to reign over you, for a gentler nor a more merciful prince was there never: and to me he was ever a good, a gentle and sovereign lord. And if any person will meddle of my cause, I require them to judge the best. And thus, I take my leave of the world and of you all.[13]

She drew her speech to a close. 'I heartily desire you all to pray for me. Oh Lord have mercy on me! To God I commend my soul.' Anne refused to beg pardon or confess. Instead, she said she had been judged and so she would submit. Those on the scaffold were expected to beg forgiveness for their sins. She insisted on her innocence. She was making it clear: no fair trial.

Anne then asked which of the men on the block would execute her. She was told that he was coming, and in the meantime she should 'confess the truth' for 'she could not hope for pardon'. Anne said, 'They shall know no more from me.' She had said no to Henry for years when he was importuning her to be his mistress; now she said no again.

Anne knelt and tried to pray, crying, 'O Christ receive my spirit' but she was now terrified, frantically looking about her. The swordsman had removed his shoes so he could creep up behind Anne, and 'without being noticed by the lady' because she 'expected the blow to descend from the other direction', he 'divided her neck at a blow'. He performed his office with skill.

The queen's head fell to the scaffold and her ladies threw a white handkerchief over it. As the spectators ambled away, Anne's ladies steeled themselves to pick up her head and put her body into a chest – they were afraid that she might be 'handled unworthily by inhuman men, they forced themselves to do this duty'. No coffin had been commissioned for her, so they put her in a leftover chest that had contained bow staves, undignified. Her gown was taken for Tower officials, a perk of the job. The cannon at the

Tower Wharf was fired. Anne was dead. She had been queen for not even three years.

There are differing accounts of what Anne said on the block. The lurid, often unreliable *Spanish Chronicle* reported that she said 'everything they have accused me of is false, and the principle reason I am to die is Jane Seymour, as I was the cause of the ill that befell my mistress'. She was then told to stop talking. This is unlikely, as Anne wanted to protect Elizabeth and accusing Jane would be very unwise. Lancelot de Carle, secretary to the French ambassador, was in the crowd and wrote a lengthy poem not long after the execution. As he had her speak:

> To tell you why I am here,
> Would not serve you nor me either:
> Which is why I am silent, but the judge of the world
> In whom justice and truth abound
> Knows all.[14]

This seems more likely. Whatever she said, all the commentators agreed that Anne refused to admit her guilt. She would always be the innocent sent to the block. She had tried to make queenship political, just as Catherine had tried to ally her role with defence of religion. She had lost.

Anne's story never loses the power to shock. It goes to the heart of the role of a royal wife. You might have glory, but if the king wishes it, you will die. No woman is safe if her husband desires to kill her, not even a queen. Anne's was the ultimate witch trial. A woman was seen as no longer useful and so she died. As we have seen, the sixteenth century saw a surge of female power, with queens regnant but also consorts in positions of influence. The trial said to consorts and all wives: you have only what I give you. Anne had done so much in a few short years. She wanted to be the campaigning queen, the religious reformer. We should remember her as such. Her's was a tragic death, but she also reshaped the role of the consort – forever. Catherine and Anne are often set in opposition to each other. Instead, they were two sides of the same coin, two women who dared stand up to the king and died for it. And yet their very battle, proclaiming queenship and that the accusations

were false until the end, undermined male power and let in the possibility that, one day, a woman could win. Not one but two queens had stood up for queenship and the power of a queen. For no matter what Henry did, the unstoppable train of women in power had begun.

On the day after Anne's execution, 20 May, Jane Seymour and Henry were betrothed in secret. It was a revolving door for Henry: one queen out, another queen in.

Then days later, Henry and Jane were married at Whitehall, in the Queen's apartments, those which Anne had decorated for herself and were still unfinished. Jane was courageous: she knew that if she did not have a son, she might be executed. Henry was brutal. When Jane asked for pardon for some religious rebels, he told her not to meddle. The threat was she'd end up like Anne. She bore Henry his longed-for heir in late 1537 but died less than two weeks later from the complications of childbirth. Henry, casting about for a new wife, considered Mary of Guise, a widow from a major French family of royal blood. She declined, declaring that she did not have the right sort of neck. Instead she married James V of Scotland, even though the French thought that the Scottish climate was fatal to French people (James's first wife, Princess Madeleine, had died not long after her arrival at court). She bore James two sons, but both died – and then gave birth to a daughter, Mary. When James died six days later, the baby became queen: Mary, Queen of Scots.

Henry agreed to an arranged marriage with Anne of Cleves, who was from an influential Protestant family in Germany. He'd already spotted her young lady-in-waiting, Catherine Howard, a cousin to Anne Boleyn (surely the family might give their young women a break from shoving them into Henry's path). Still, he made a cunning plan to surprise her after she arrived, turning up in her chamber in disguise. Unfortunately, Anne rather ignored him – he had to reveal himself for her to understand. It was a bad start and Henry never really took to Anne. She was married to Henry in January 1540 and, within a few months of the wedding, he was giving Catherine Howard gifts and land. In June, Anne was informed that the marriage would be annulled. Anne, aware no doubt that she could be executed, wisely agreed. She was given various lands and castles, and Henry said she would be the highest woman in the land after his wife and daughters, and could be known as the King's Sister. She even later received Anne Boleyn's beloved childhood

home, Hever Castle. Anne of Cleves managed to win at the game of marrying Henry VIII. As much as it was possible to succeed.

One month after sending Anne away, and two weeks after annulling the marriage, on 28 July, Henry married Catherine Howard. Henry was fifty, she was a teenager. She was Anne's relation; her uncle was also the Duke of Norfolk, who quickly saw Catherine as a way of gaining the influence the family had lost – and she was hopefully more controllable than Anne. But in her past, Catherine had been groomed by men, exploited. Word got to Thomas Cranmer and he informed Henry, who wanted her arrested for adultery. He could have set her aside, declaring a precontract with one of the men; again he did not. Catherine was questioned and fell into hysterics; even Cranmer said it 'would have pitied any man's heart to look upon her', although he exploited her distress to try to gain an admission of guilt. On the night before her execution, Catherine, in the Tower, practised putting her head on the block. Before she died, she pronounced her punishment 'worthy and just' and asked for forgiveness, words that Queen Anne had refused to pronounce.

Only five women have been executed within the bounds of the Tower of London. Four of these were at the behest of Henry; two were his wives. After Catherine was executed, so was her lady-in-waiting, Jane Rochford, widow of George Boleyn, accused of covering up for Catherine. She had gone mad before she could be put on trial and it was against the law to execute people suffering from insanity. Henry changed the law so that the mentally ill could be executed for treason and Jane was executed after Catherine.

Henry considered executing his sixth wife, Katherine Parr, in 1546, after he was told she harboured Protestant views. Plans for her arrest were drawn up but Katherine managed to dissuade him, telling him she had only been speaking about heretical matters to distract him from the pain in his ulcerated leg. Perhaps, in the final year of his life, he could not face putting a third queen on the block.

It was a period of women with influence at court. Despite all this, the English public were convinced of one thing: no woman should be on the throne. Other countries found women effective rulers. In 1533, the same year that Anne Boleyn gave birth to Princess Elizabeth, Aminatu was born

in the city state of Zazzau to the King of the Hausa States, in modern-day northern Nigeria. Her mother was a queen herself and trained her in the art of fighting, and she became an accomplished horsewoman. When she was sixteen, in 1549, she was named heir apparent and given a present of enslaved people. When her parents died in 1566, her brother became king. When he died ten years later, Aminatu was queen. She almost immediately began a campaign to conquer surrounding lands. She led her army of twenty thousand men across Western Africa. Her policy of expansion was not centralisation, instead she restored or installed subject rulers, who were required to send tributes to the capital. She also created trade alliances with those she did not conquer, trading in goods such as leather and salt, and sent emissaries to create diplomatic relationships as far away as Morocco. She died after thirty-four years on the throne, at the age of seventy-seven. She gained power using existing structures and client rulers.

Queens had to be careful not to do too much for women. Dodi Akaabi came to the throne of Ga Land in 1610. She was a successful war leader, leading her men to battle. But she also wanted to improve the lives of women and pursued severe penalties for rape and abuse of women. This made her unpopular and she was eventually buried alive in 1635. Her story shows us why female power is feared: because they might open the door to all women to escape oppression. The best way for a female ruler to survive is not to help other women; even focusing on a daughter can be seen as insurrection. A queen will be congratulated for getting involved in military strategy, particularly if defensive. But she must be careful of getting involved in religious reform or stopping crimes against women – Theodora might have been the only one who got away with helping women. There are too many powerful institutions lined up rejecting both.

If Anne had had a son, we would be telling the story of queenship reinvented as campaigning and interventionist, religious reform. But in the end, despite all his executions, Henry lost. The problem is that any small moment of female power, letting the queen answer back for herself at trial, allowing her to speak, undermines the impermeability of male rule. Women's voices continued to strengthen. We shouldn't think of the mystic, mysterious queen, but the would-be political reformer. And thanks to her, and Catherine, the queen was not to be moved. Henry, who had most

wanted to erase female power and influence, who broke with the world to have a son, would only six years after his death be succeeded by a woman.

I. Of course she was 'of Aragon' when she married, for her sister was Queen of Castile – and she assumed her father's title. But much of her value on the marriage market had been because she was the Queen of Castile's daughter.

II. Isabella's paternal grandmother, Catherine of Lancaster, was daughter to John of Gaunt and Constance of Castile. And through her mother, Isabella was the great-granddaughter of Philippa of Lancaster, another daughter of John of Gaunt.

III. Not all those consulted were of the belief that Henry's marriage was wrong. After all, Deuteronomy said that a man should marry his brother's wife if his brother died without children. And, as Catherine had sworn she was a maiden, a virgin, it didn't matter whether one thought Leviticus or Deuteronomy should be paramount – she had never been truly married. And some thought that only the Pope could decide.

IV. Wolsey asked servants to provide statements while agents of the Holy Roman Emperor tracked down Catherine's servants, even one who had become a nun, to swear Arthur had been too weak for such activity

V. Some have suggested that her father was talking of placing her with Catherine of Aragon, but it is more likely Anne was referring to Margaret of Austria, who was often referred to as 'The Queen'.

VI. It does not seem as if Anne attended to Mary Tudor, sister of Henry VIII, then about to marry the elderly king of France – although her sister, Mary Boleyn, did.

VII. Henry planned for York Place (soon to be called Whitehall) to be a pleasure palace for entertainments, with an indoor court for real tennis, a cockfighting pit and a tiltyard for jousts. The palace burned in 1698, and was built over by government buildings. The modern-day Cabinet Office is built on the position of the cockfighting pit.

VIII. When Henry heard that Mary was resisting her new role, he took away both of her ladies-in-waiting. Chapuys, fearful that she might really be threatened with execution, advised her to submit outwardly to serving and accept Henry's position as head of the Church.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Tudor Pearls: Lady Jane Grey, Mary and Elizabeth

Lady Jane Grey features in one of the most popular portraits of a queen in history. In 1833, nearly three hundred years after her death, the French romantic painter Paul Delaroche painted her about to be executed. Almost everything is fictional. Jane is struggling to find the block with her hands because she wears a blindfold, and the lieutenant of the Tower is helping her, with fatherly kindness. Jane is not depicted dying outside in the grounds of the Tower in a public execution, as in reality she did, but in a dark interior, as if she was kept and killed in a dingy prison. Delaroche was painting for an audience imbued with a desire to see the French Revolution executions. Jane Grey: rather than wearing a black velvet gown as she did, she is dressed in white like a sacrificed innocent, an executed bride. In this painting, Jane is not the Protestant martyr she had longed to be, but a hopeless innocent. The painting condemns her to die again and again. But Jane was tough, not tragic, articulate, and she learned to be authoritative. She fought back against the men who tried to command her, refused to be their doll. She laid the foundations for female power.

Lady Jane Grey is not even called a queen. Edward, the eldest of the two Princes in the Tower imprisoned by Richard III, never crowned, never treated as a king for even a day, is always Edward V; but there is no Jane I in our annals, even though she reigned. She was the first ever queen of England. Her reign, short as it was, proved that a woman could be an independent monarch. She has been dismissed as a puppet but she laid down the model of queenship that was later retooled by Mary and Elizabeth.

Jane's story was the ultimate proof that, however much a woman had been told to be obedient, expected to defer, the very position of a female king gave her a new authority that she could use.

It was 25 May 1553 and King Edward VI was dying, aged just fifteen, in excruciating pain. Henry VIII's great hope, for which he had sacrificed everything, had come to the throne aged nine, and he would never escape the power of his regents, who ruled for him, particularly John Dudley, Duke of Northumberland, who had managed to shove rivals out of power. On the same day, Dudley's son Guildford was about to marry Lady Jane Grey, great-niece of Henry VIII. Dudley had long been telling the king to leave the throne to Jane, his cousin, not his two elder sisters, daughters of Henry VIII, and the heirs Henry had willed should take the throne after Edward. According to the will, Jane's line should inherit after Elizabeth. She was the granddaughter of Henry's younger sister. Henry VIII had never thought his healthy young son would not marry and have heirs. He only added the Greys to ensure the children of his elder sister, Margaret, the wife of James IV of Scotland, mother of James V, got nowhere near the throne. No one wanted those Scots saying they might take England! Jane was a faraway choice, but Dudley wanted her as queen. The wedding was stuffed with supporters, from home and abroad. They saw the bride as their ideal, a young woman who could be entirely controlled by men. If they supported her, they would get patronage and riches from Dudley. But unfortunately, the hot salad had been out too long and, when the guests got home, they fell violently ill with food poisoning. A bad omen.

Jane might have been an excellent Protestant minister in another time. She was a studious child, and she learned Latin and Greek as well as Hebrew, and corresponded with scholars. Her parents, Frances and Henry Grey, Duke of Suffolk, gave her a good education but tried to make her meek, ruthlessly forcing her into obedience, she later claimed. They had intended her to marry Edward and be queen consort. When she was ten, a month or so after Henry VIII's death, she was sent to the household of Thomas Seymour, brother of the former queen Jane Seymour, who had promised he'd get her married to the king. Then a few months later, Seymour married Katherine Parr, Henry's dowager queen, love-bombing her because he wanted to use the king's widow for her status and money. And by marrying Katherine, he got his hands on Princess Elizabeth, then just thirteen. He

moved into Katherine Parr's house, Chelsea Manor, and treated his new family – Katherine, Jane and Elizabeth – as his private fiefdom.

Seymour had asked Elizabeth to marry him almost immediately after Henry VIII's death and she had refused him. Now he had access to her. He tickled her, slapped her, invaded her room in his nightclothes, visiting her as she lay in bed in the morning. He sexually harassed her in an attempt to gain dominance over her, hoping that he could alternate bullying her and being kind to her as a prelude to coercive control, trying to push her into eventually marrying her (aggressive grooming was his preferred mode of behaviour: he'd tried to use compliments combined with intimidation to get influence over the young King Edward). He wanted to gain dominance over a girl who had lost both her parents, knew not her position, was without a protector, over whom he was stepfather. It was cruel; she and Katherine were nothing more to him than conduits to the career at court he wanted. When the princess's governess protested, he declared, 'I mean no evil and will not leave it!' Elizabeth started getting up and dressed earlier and earlier to try to stop him. He even burst into her room and threatened to cut her nightgown into ribbons. He stepped up his exploitation when Katherine became pregnant. 'Let him not touch me,' Elizabeth wrote in a letter directed to him. For the final months of her pregnancy, Katherine moved to Sudeley Castle and took Jane with her. She gave birth to a little girl and died soon after. Jane, only eleven, was her chief mourner.

Seymour kept Jane in his household after Katherine's death – her parents should have removed her immediately because there was no lady to serve, but they wanted her in his orbit and betrothed to the young king. It is not impossible that he tried to shower Jane with compliments, in case he might use her as a bride; he saw girls and women as his route to money after all. Seymour then invaded Hampton Court, tried to kidnap the child Edward VI at gunpoint (and shot his dog), and was swiftly sent to the Tower. Elizabeth was immediately put under interrogation about his plots and efforts to marry her behind the king's back, such plots that would qualify as treason. She was at risk of being sent to the Tower, to the apartments previously occupied by her mother. Jane was subject to tough questioning. Thomas Seymour was executed. Elizabeth narrowly dodged being judged as involved. John Dudley, forty-nine and bent on power, took over as the king's protector. A period in the Seymour household had been a brutal baptism of

fire for Elizabeth and Jane alike; they had been unprotected in a world of treachery.

By 1553, the young king was dying and Dudley, now he had succeeded in persuading him to exclude Mary and Elizabeth from the succession, tried to seize both sisters and put them under arrest. He invited them to attend the deathbed of their brother. Elizabeth, cleverly, said she was too unwell to travel, and Mary set out on the journey but was advised that it was a trap and fled to East Anglia, where she had large estates. Elizabeth and Mary remained free. The men had underestimated them.

Dudley informed Jane that the king was dying and she would be queen. Jane was overwhelmed with distress and said the news 'very deeply upset me'. She was not obedient as they had hoped. Dudley and his wife were most displeased by her answering back and told her that she would not be allowed to go out. They feared she might gather support. Jane was about to be the most powerful woman in the land, and yet she could not stir from the house, constantly watched by her mother-in-law (rather like a later young Victoria, surveilled by her mother to force her into obedience). Jane, using a strategy perfected by Elizabeth I, said she was ill and was allowed to convalesce at Chelsea Manor.

On the evening of 6 July, Jane was told she had to move to Syon House, further down the Thames, where Catherine Howard had been sent before she was packed off to be executed. Jane arrived and waited in the Long Gallery. They left her alone, unknowing, uninformed, to disorientate her. Dudley, her father-in-law, arrived with four members of the king's council, and informed her that the king had died. Jane was in shock. He told her that the king had cut his 'bad sisters' from the succession and so Jane was now queen. Jane fell to the floor weeping, 'stupefied'. She cried out that the 'crown is not my right'. It was the beginning of a battle for power. Jane was severely chastised by her father Henry Grey, Duke of Suffolk, and the council and then 'submitted to their will' and, weeping, turned to God and begged him for his aid, 'if what was given to me was rightfully and lawfully mine'.[1]

Jane I was now the richest woman in England and one of the richest in Europe, the owner of fifty or so palaces, as well as gold, jewels, plate and incredible furnishings. With no clear precedent for her role as queen, she would have rights to both the jewels of the monarch and those of the queen

consort. She could change the law, the religion, make decrees and have people arrested. But she was still subject to her father-in-law and her parents. On 10 July, Jane was rowed to the Tower in splendour to await her coronation, accompanied by her parents, her husband Guildford (who had left her entirely to the mercies of his father before, probably having no choice), ladies, and barges of aristocrats. The new queen arrived at the Tower steps and the crowd looked at her, stunned. They had expected Mary. The herald shouted, 'Long live the queen' but no one echoed the words. The crier declared that Lady Mary and Lady Elizabeth were illegitimate, and Mary would try to make the kingdom Catholic again. Still, the crowd was mute.

Jane and her husband were conducted to the royal apartments, once occupied by Anne Boleyn, who had decorated them extensively before her coronation. She had a bedchamber, a dining room and a presence chamber, where her council awaited. Jane was terrified, feeling as if she was in the wrong place, pained by the crowd's reaction. In the presence chamber, she sat on a throne under the canopy of state as men knelt to her. Then the crown jewels, crown, orb and sceptre were carried towards her.

The lord high treasurer came forth and offered her the crown, asking if he could crown her. Jane refused. 'Your grace may take it without fear,' he said. Jane eventually agreed and bore the crown on her head. Then the treasurer told her that, as she later wrote in her own account, 'another should also be made, to crown my husband'. Jane said nothing, but she was angered and distressed by the mention of her husband. She decided she would not obey. If God had chosen her to be the queen, then she would be the queen – but she would not give up power to Guildford. The young woman thought of as so meek, so biddable, showed a core of steel. She promptly told her husband that she would not make him king. Even though, legally, she was her husband's possession, she determined to rule – and attempted to solve the age-old problem of being a married queen on the throne by saying her husband would be subject to her, suggesting, radically, that queenship outranked marriage. Jane offered him a dukedom, a poor prize, and told him she might consider making him consort, if requested by parliament. Guildford's mother berated her and told her son to refuse to share a bed with her, which would mean she could not have a child. The duchess told her son to leave the Tower to force Jane to back down. Queen Jane forbade

them both to leave. Dudley had made her queen for his own ends. He had forgotten that queens get to command.

In Norfolk, on her estates, Princess Mary was as courageous as her mother, Catherine of Aragon, had once been. Everyone grabbing power had thought she would be easily pushed out. She sent a messenger to the Tower, telling Dudley, Jane and the council that Jane was 'falsely styled queen' and told him that he knew, 'the whole world knoweth', that her father had left the throne to her. Mary said that she was ready to pardon them to avoid bloodshed. They were bold words from a woman with nothing. Dudley and the council wrote back that she was illegitimate and could not take the throne. They instructed her to stay 'quiet and obedient'. That was what a woman should be: obedient to men.

Mary had no army, and little in the way of resources. Dudley had control of the armoury and the treasury. A young man who shouted in Cheapside that Mary was the rightful queen was arrested and his ears were cut off. Mary sounded out the ambassadors for the Holy Roman Emperor, who told her not to proclaim herself queen. 'My Lady has no hope,' they said baldly and the emperor refused to give her any assistance. It seemed as if she had no chance. She knew Dudley would try to seize her and imprison her. Mary took up position at her stronghold, Framlingham Castle, in Suffolk. On her arrival on 12 July the local gentry and justices, along with a crowd of ordinary people, informed her that they were ready to support her.

Dudley decided that Jane's father, Suffolk, would lead an army to capture Mary. He would likely then try to execute her or at the very least keep her in perpetual imprisonment. Suffolk, who had been so keen that his daughter become queen, now got cold feet, and said he was too ill with fainting fits. The council said Dudley should do it. On 14 July, he set off to Norfolk with a huge company. He left Jane unprotected.

Jane asked that she be brought the royal jewel collection. She was creating the vision of a queen, but her popular support was lower than ever. She sent out a document declaring that Lady Mary was putting out slanderous claims that she was queen, exhorting people to 'remain fast in your obeisance and duty' to the crown, and promising to defend her people. She signed herself 'Jane the queen'. She now believed herself anointed by God.[2] But she was

totally exposed. Without Dudley, the ultimate bully, in charge, her circle began to slip away. The men of the council were in 'fear of the people, all of whom are flocking to Mary'. One by one, they fled from the Tower, rats from the sinking ship. As night fell on 18 July, Jane had only her husband, parents, mother-in-law and her ladies. The councillors gathered next morning and agreed to pledge allegiance to Mary and proclaim her as queen, and wrote to the Holy Roman Emperor declaring they had been forced to agree to Jane's reign. Everything had happened at a terrible speed.

Mary was announced as queen and people lit so many bonfires that the imperial ambassadors thought London from above must have 'looked like Mount Etna', declaring 'not a soul imagined the possibility'. Well, they didn't, but plenty of loyal subjects had hoped for Mary on the throne. The emperor sent word to tell Mary that it might look as if he did nothing for her, but he had in fact actually been assembling a fleet to help her – ha ha, not. Now that Mary was winning, everybody wanted to be on her side. William Cecil corrected documents that had been signed by Jane as 'Jane the queen' by writing 'Jane not the queen – *Jana non Regina*'.

Jane was dining with her husband, sitting under her canopy of state. Her father, miraculously recovered from his fainting fits, entered, and rushed straight to the canopy, seized it and ripped it in two. He told her that 'this place did no longer belong to her' and she should take off her royal robes and 'be content with a private life'. It was so cruel. Cravenly desperate to save his own skin, he made a giant show of declaring it was all his daughter's fault. Oh, it wasn't me! It was *her*.

Jane was courageous, unlike her father. She argued her case, told him that she had been forced to be queen. 'Out of obedience to you and my mother, I have grievously sinned and offered violence to myself.' Her father, she was saying, was not getting away with it so easily. Jane sat under the torn canopy of state, the image of dignity. She had been queen for thirteen days, but four had been in secret. She looked at her father and asked, 'May I go home?' He turned and walked away. Jane understood the truth. She was a prisoner.

Jane sat in her chamber, watching her parents rush away before they could be imprisoned as traitors. That evening, guards arrived to take Jane and Guildford prisoner. Mary would need to occupy the royal apartments for her coronation. The nine-days queen and her consort were taken, and

the royal apartments were hastily cleaned, as servants scrubbed to remove all trace of Jane.

On 24 July, Mary set out to London. Cheering crowds marked her way. She was a warrior queen who had regained her throne without having to spill a drop of blood. Mary would be a queen regnant, like her grandmother, Isabella of Castile. Catherine's desperate, brilliant fight, which had ended with her stranded in Kimbolton, far from her daughter, had not been hopeless. It had left the people entirely convinced of the legitimacy of her marriage – and of Mary. Mary arrived to take up her rooms at the Tower, which Jane had so recently left, with the cloth of state restored and newly dusted, as if Jane had never been there.

As Mary arrived, she freed prisoners imprisoned in the reigns of Henry VIII and Edward VI. The prisoners left the Tower, jubilant, but Jane remained, alongside her husband and father-in-law. She planned a speech, and begged to see Mary personally, but she was denied. Perhaps if her father or mother had said that Jane should be forgiven, she might have had a chance. But the Greys and the whole council threw Jane under the Tudor bus to save their skins. Jane wrote Mary a letter; it is now lost, but it is likely that it resembled a later declaration in which Jane begged that she was wrong to have listened to those who with 'shameful boldness' gave 'others that which was not theirs'. She said, 'I am charged and esteemed more guilty than I have deserved.'

Mary was, as is often forgotten under a welter of sexist propaganda, the queen who fought for the throne against impossible odds, like her grandfather, Henry VII. And, as is also forgotten, the woman castigated as cruel and called Bloody Mary was, as she began her reign, the most merciful of Tudors. She was minded to spare Jane: 'My conscience,' she said, 'will not permit me to have her put to death.' She understood how Jane had been manipulated by Dudley. The emperor's ambassadors reported Mary thought that Jane was innocent and that she never did 'give her consent to the duke's intrigues'. When it came to men who had actively betrayed her and declared another queen, she allowed them to keep their heads.

Jane claimed that her father-in-law Dudley had tried to poison her, first at his house and then at the Tower. She was panicking, throwing out wild allegations. She was told that Dudley was sentenced to death, but the queen planned to let her live. She expected that she might be sent to dwell quietly

in the countryside and a visitor saw her sitting at dinner, enthusiastically declaring that the 'queen's majesty is a merciful princess'. But still, she talked of Protestantism, speechifying on about how those who converted to Catholicism would not see heaven. What was she thinking? Yes, she was a teenager, believing in her own probity, but everyone around her should have told her to stop talking. And many of Mary's advisors were pressing her to carry out an execution. The emperor, too, worried that Jane was a threat and advised the queen to make Mary, Queen of Scots her heir, at least after Elizabeth. Finally, Mary decided that Jane, her husband and his remaining brothers must be put on trial for treason.

On 13 November, Jane was taken to her trial. She was not to be allowed a private trial but had to pass through the street. Guildford was dressed in rather a smart outfit of black velvet with slashes of white satin, but Jane was wearing a plain velvet dress and was carrying a prayer book, open, with another hanging at her waist. The message was clear: she was dying for her religion. At the Guildhall, packed with nearly 1,000 spectators, she stood at the bar, alongside the other accused. Anne Boleyn had been allowed to sit, as a measure of respect to her rank as queen consort, but Jane was being treated as an ordinary woman, a commoner; she was also referred to as Jane Dudley. She and the others were accused of high treason, aiming to take Mary's throne and even 'destroy the queen with finality'. Jane pleaded guilty. She had not sought the crown, but she had accepted it, she had signed documents, she had sent for the crown jewels. She was told she would be sent back to the Tower and, when the queen ordered it, taken to Tower Hill, and either executed or burned. Despite her sentence, most people expected her to be freed from the Tower after a fit period had passed. The imperial ambassador reported that, even though Mary was 'truly irritated' by Jane's father, 'it is believed Jane will not die'. Mary's suspicions about a challenger were focused on her sister. 'There is no persuading her that Elizabeth will not bring about some great evil unless she is dealt with.'[3]

Jane only had to stay quiet. Her father, though, was about to ruin everything. One would think that he would be spectacularly grateful to have dodged the executioner's axe and be content to live a quiet life, glad that his daughter had been put on trial and not him. No such luck. Resentful that

Mary had given him no role in government, he fell in to support the plot of Thomas Wyatt (son of the poet of the same name who had narrowly avoided being executed for adultery with Anne Boleyn), who wanted Mary off the throne and Elizabeth in her place. Wyatt prepared to march on London. Jane's father raised troops in the Midlands. The queen beat back the rebellion and Henry fled, but was found hiding in a tree and arrested. Jane, whom Mary had almost forgotten while she attended to her religious changes and her marriage, was now a marked woman.

Jane was told that she was to be executed, probably on the evening of 7 February, five days after the capture of her father. She would be spared a public execution on Tower Hill and instead be executed inside the grounds of the Tower (as Anne Boleyn had been). Jane told Queen Mary's chaplain, who was visiting her, that 'she had taken leave of all earthly matters so that she did not even think of the fear of death'. He tried everything he could to convert her, and Jane refused. Now no queen, she hoped to be remembered as a Protestant martyr and that her words might be published and circulated after her death. Guildford begged to be allowed to visit her and embrace her to say goodbye, but Jane refused, saying it would not be a 'consolation to their souls' but 'their meeting would only tend to increase their misery' and they would meet in heaven. She wrote her own prayer, begging that God should be to her 'a strong tower of defence' as she faced her terrible fate. Guildford was to be executed first. On the next morning, 12 February 1554, Jane, looking from her window, saw her husband's bloodied body being taken by cart to the Tower Chapel, St Peter ad Vincula. She cried out, 'Oh Guildford, Guildford!'

Jane prepared her speech and dressed herself in the sober black dress that she had worn for her trial. She and her ladies walked to the scaffold, only a short way; she read from her prayer book all the way. She was not captured by 'feare of her own death', her 'countenance nothing abashed, neither her eyes anything moysted with tears'. On the scaffold, she repeated that she had been unlawful against the queen's highness, but that she was innocent of desiring it or procuring it. She had not wanted it. 'I do wash my hands thereof in innocency before God and the face of you, good Christian people.' Just seventeen, she spoke with dignity and grace. 'I die a true Christian

woman and that I look to be saved by no other mean, but only by the mercy of God.' She asked for prayers. She wanted to be a Protestant martyr.[4]

Jane had spoken with fortitude. She had not begged for forgiveness. She loosened her hair and was given a handkerchief as a blindfold. Then, she saw the block. Turning to the executioner, she begged him, 'I pray you dispatch me quickly.' She knelt and bound her eyes with her handkerchief. But then, blindfolded, she could not find the block. She cried out, 'What shall I do? Where is it?' and she caught desperately at the air. One of the men on the scaffold helped her by taking her hands and placing them on the block and Jane placed her head on it and lay flat on the scaffold, ready to receive the blow. She cried out, 'Lord Jesus, into thy hands I commend my spirit.'

The speeches as reported by those watching of Anne Boleyn and Jane have much in common. As Anne said:

> Good Christian people, I am come hither to die, for according to the law, and by the law I am judged to die, and therefore I will speak nothing against it. I am come hither to accuse no man, nor to speak anything of that, whereof I am accused and condemned to die, but I pray God save the king and send him long to reign over you, for a gentler nor a more merciful prince was there never: and to me he was ever a good, a gentle and sovereign lord. And if any person will meddle of my cause, I require them to judge the best. And thus I take my leave of the world and of you all, and I heartily desire you all to pray for me. O Lord have mercy on me, to God I commend my soul.

And as Jane said:

> Good people, I am come hether to die, and by a lawe I am condemned to the same. The facte, in dede, against the quenes highnesse was unlawfull, and the consenting thereunto by me: but touching the procurement and desire therof by me or on my halfe, I doo wash my hands thereof in innocencie, before God, and the face of you, good Christian people, this day.

Certainly the 'Good people, I am come here to die' is very similar between the speeches.[5] One wonders if there were more parallels drawn between the

two at the time than we might think. Overall, though, there was little comment on her death. Most reports called her 'Jane of Suffolk', after her father, even though she was married. One chronicle noted 'was beheddyd wythin the tower lady Jane that wolde a bene qwene'.[6] Or she was 'ye pretendyd queene'.[7]

She is not remembered as the Protestant martyr she hoped to be. That was reserved for the men burned for their religion by Mary. She was simply blurred out of history, Jane the 'pretended queen'.

The image we have of Jane is that of the tragic innocent in white, as in the painting by Delaroche, not the powerful queen in black, the Protestant martyr. The men around her in the painting are fatherly, when in fact the men in her orbit, father, father-in-law, advisors had tried to exploit her. Would a 'John Grey' have been stronger, more likely to attract popular support than Mary? Most likely. But, despite Henry VIII's wild quest for a son, the battle was between female descendants, and the role was that of the first queen. Another Jane on the throne, one day in the future, should be Jane II. A man can plan to make a queen regnant his doll, but the role has a power that cannot be denied. Jane's brave reign was brief but, by refusing to submit to her husband and family and give them royal command, she commenced the queenship that Mary and Elizabeth embodied.

Queens are often given adjectives or nicknames. But one queen has an adjective almost permanently attached to her. Bloody Mary. She is the mad queen, the bloodthirsty queen, the murderous queen. She burned over 280 people at the stake for their religion. And yet, as we have seen, early modern England burned women at the stake for killing abusive husbands, and no one cried for them. Henry VIII arrived on the throne and promptly executed two of his father's civil servants, and tens of thousands of those he saw as enemies, as well as Anne Boleyn and Catherine Howard. Around 5,500 people died when their attempts to rebel against a prayer book imposed by Edward VI were brutally put down. Even Elizabeth executed around 300 people, many for practising Catholicism. Mary forgave those who had tried to instal Lady Jane Grey, even tried to forgive Jane, against the

advice of others, including the Holy Roman Emperor. 'My conscience will not permit me to have her put to death,' said Mary. And yet the name Bloody has stuck. It seems striking that she's 'bloody', not dubbed with words about burning or fire: a woman can be seen as bloody because women are captured by their menstrual cycle, hormonal, unreasonable – caricatured as all the more bloody because the cycle didn't serve its purpose and leave her pregnant.

Much of Mary's poor reputation came from two books, the wildly popular *Actes of Monuments*, known as the *Book of Martyrs*, by John Foxe as well as John Knox's *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*, which also attacked Mary, Queen of Scots. As he put it, 'who can denie but it repugneth to nature, that the blind shal be appointed to leade and conduct such as do see'. Women should serve men and anything else was against God and Nature. We have allowed Foxe's book to tinge our beliefs, his claim that after Edward VI 'the bloody Mary succeeded', has proved all conquering. This is men writing history and misogyny; what a man has written about a woman is more important than anything she actually did or said. And we come down so hard on Mary because there is a compulsion to make Elizabeth successful, an anomaly, out of the ordinary. To make Elizabeth the exception, we exclude not just the political efforts of her mother, Anne Boleyn, and indeed of Catherine of Aragon, as well as the short reign of Lady Jane, but we most of all lock out her sister, Mary. Of course Mary's executions were brutal. But her own father's executions were put at over 70,000 in the chronicles of Ralph Holinshed, although it is probably more like 20,000. Elizabeth executed many – and indeed had no patience with John Foxe, and came down hard on the Geneva church for harbouring him when he published the book. James I executed 2,500 women for being witches, thousands of men died under Edward VI. But it is Mary who is the bad one.

Mary was the warrior queen who saw off incredible odds to be the first crowned queen of England. As one East Anglian gentleman wrote, it was a feat 'more of Herculean than womanly daring'. Most other monarchs simply stepped into place after the death of their father. Mary gathered her troops. Her bravery was only more impressive, following as it did a life of exclusion, bullying and rejection from father, councillors and potential suitors, and a history of poor health and chronic pain. When Thomas Wyatt staged his

rebellion against her in the year after she became queen, Mary sent negotiators to meet him and then stood at the Guildhall, sceptre in hand. She declared she had tried to talk to Wyatt and he had sent an insolent answer. She instructed her people, if necessary, to 'take up arms' and fight for her throne. She explained she was married to the people of England and everything she did was for their advancement. It was a masterstroke. By the next day, 25,000 men were ready to fight for her. The rebellion crumbled. She was highly intelligent, well educated and quick-witted (even though these attributes are usually credited to her sister). Although Mary was fighting for her own legitimacy, and planned to have children, her act of taking her throne, against gargantuan odds, against the advice of the Holy Roman Emperor, secured the throne for Elizabeth also. But that is too often forgotten.

We have already seen how she was merciful to Jane. Indeed, even after Jane had been executed, Mary was kind to the remaining Greys. Frances, Jane's mother, and Katherine, Jane's sister, and another heir, were invited to court. It is also often forgotten how many of her laws and changes were popular, and how she laid down a template for queenship. We see, with her, a pattern we find over and over in this book. Society does not want a female ruler. But if it has to have female rulers, only one can be congratulated, written about in complimentary terms by the men around her. Ranavalona of Madagascar (who was compared to 'Bloody Mary') was demonised so Victoria could be made into the ideal queen. Elizabeth I is first presented as so different, so much better than her half-sister, Mary I, and then so different, so much better than her cousin, Mary, Queen of Scots. The bad queens are either monsters who have no resemblance to women in their cruelty or excessively feminine, too pretty, too stupid or too covered in blood.

Mary arrived in London after proclaiming herself queen, escorted by the 12,000 men who had joined her along the way. She was accompanied by Elizabeth in a united front of glory, along with trains of ladies and men who had only a few weeks previously been supporting Jane. The 37-year-old queen arrived in purple velvet, thickly embroidered with gold and pearls, her sleeves set with jewels. It is not always recognised that Mary was as

brilliant at displaying herself through dress as was her sister, Elizabeth I, because she did not record it in portraiture. But Mary looked magnificent. She put on the show people wanted.[8]

In the Tower, after she arrived, Mary called her council to her for a spontaneous meeting. She dropped to her knees in front of her council of great men, some of whom had actively supported Jane, and told them it was her solemn promise to govern for the benefit of all her subjects. The councillors were lost for words, 'amazed as they all were by this humble and lowly discourse unlike anything ever heard before in England'. It was a new model of queenship and monarchy, more collaborative, more grateful. It was a wise move.

On 1 October, Mary had her coronation in Westminster Abbey as the first crowned queen regnant of England. She had processed from the Tower clothed in gold and wearing a crown of jewels and pearls on her head that had been newly commissioned for her – she did not want to wear a consort's crown. Mary was followed by Elizabeth and their stepmother, ultimate survivor Anne of Cleves, gowned in silver, along with over sixty women of status. It was a festival of female power, in the train of a female monarch.

In the coronation itself she was gowned as a male monarch would be, in crimson velvet state robes. She processed to St Edward's Chair, the first woman to sit in it. Mary had spent hours in the Tower rehearsing her ceremony, practising the oaths and the costume changes to ensure that the ceremony proceeded with all possible dignity. She knew that one small mistake would be read as weakness by her enemies. She received the sword, as kings did, and the king's sceptre. But she also received the queen consort's sceptre, one topped with doves to symbolise peace. She touched the ceremonial spurs, rather than wear them – even though she had fought for her throne harder than most of her male predecessors.

Four days later, the first parliament of her reign declared her parents' marriage valid and reversed all the religious laws passed during the reign of her brother. She astutely allowed that Edward be buried in a Protestant ceremony. Mary's council of forty men also contained Protestants, including some of those who had supported Jane. The message was clear: she wished to return the land to Catholicism, but she could be merciful and tolerant of the faith changes that had occurred. In mid-December, she announced that

the mass would be re-established and all services would be in Latin. There was support for Mary's religious changes. Even before the queen had arrived in London on her journey from Framlingham, altars and crucifixes had begun to appear in churches. Some dated from Henry's time; clearly congregants had taken them and hidden them in case Catholicism returned. Many of Edward VI's laws had been mistrusted and feared, or seen as too rushed, particularly the English prayer book, and people preferred the familiar. Mary's reforms were more popular than is often admitted.

Mary knew that her mother had wanted her to rule as a second Isabella, show that a woman could occupy the throne with strength and intelligence and be just as loved as a king. Mary inherited a coinage that had been debased by her father and brother – indeed Henry's coins had been mocked as 'coppernose' because the copper of the coin showed from under the silver coating after a few uses. Her father had spent wildly and engaged in endless wars, and her brother had been so exploited by his advisors that much of the aristocracy had become used to doing as they pleased. She placed the monarchy on an even keel, made a great dynastic marriage, and went a long way towards improving the economic health of the country (certainly the marriage to Philip of Spain brought a lot of money into the royal coffers). But this isn't how she is remembered.

Mary had initially thought of remaining a virgin queen. As she said, 'I have lived a virgin, and doubt nothing, but with God's grace I am able to live still.' She said privately that she would never have married if she had not become queen. But she needed heirs. As she put it, she hoped 'to leave some fruit of my body behind me to be your governor'. She considered English men of Catholic sympathies. She knew that only recently elite men had paid homage to Jane, and she knew she needed a powerful ally. The Holy Roman Emperor himself, Charles, pondered wedding her. But plagued by ill health and overextended enough already in his realms, he decided after all that his son, Philip, would be a better choice. Philip was twenty-six, eleven years Mary's junior. Mary thus confronted the fatal dilemma of a queen: a married woman, strictly speaking, had no belongings of her own. Yet Mary was queen, owner of palaces, crowns and the country. Two lawyers consulted by parliament declared that 'by English law, if his highness marries the queen,

she loses her title to the crown and his highness becomes king'. A deputation from the House of Commons begged her to change her mind about marriage. She would not. She could not. She expected to found a new Catholic dynasty.

Mary's father excluding her from court and thus not marrying her off was the best thing he could have done for her. Married to a foreign king or a European duke, she would have been living overseas. Instead, having remained in England, she was popular – and, most importantly of all, knew which men were on her side. And yet, had she married earlier she would have most likely had a child, to continue her legacy. Her reputation would be different, for childless queens, unless they can spin it like Elizabeth, are criticised the most of all. Mary's relationship with Philip is often written about in misogynistic terms – she is cast as an older woman entranced by a handsome man, led by her feelings, and deluded (because how could she believe that Philip would ever love someone who was not young and pretty?), but her decision to marry him was political and religious. She wanted a Catholic dynasty. And she also knew that the men around her would only respect another man.

Only a few months before, lawyers had been claiming that, according to English law, on marriage she gave up even her title of queen and Philip took the monarchy. Mary I thought about every eventuality in her marriage contract. It was a spectacular document of independence and formed a template for all future queens and consorts. She was not bound to offer any assistance to Philip in wars. She was 'sole queen'. She imposed conditions on her husband, making it clear that he would assist her only, would support English laws, and could not appoint his friends from Spain to positions of power. Mary said she would not make Philip king (so his father had to, making him king of Naples and Jerusalem). The marriage contract noted that, although Philip could use the title of king, he could not do any more than assist the queen in governing the realm; after she died, he had no more rights over the country, and only the children from their marriage could take the throne. (Years later, William of Orange refused similar conditions when he took the throne with his wife, Mary, treated her largely as a consort and ruled after her death). He was a king but not a real one.

Jane Grey had refused to make Guildford a king. Both she and Mary saw the office of monarchy as superior to the hierarchy of man over woman – a radical approach. At the same time, an 'Act concerning Regal Power' or 'The Queen Regent's Prerogative Act' was passed in the House of Commons, declaring that 'the regal power of this realm is in the queen's majesty, as fully and absolutely as ever it was in any of her most noble progenitors'; in other words, Mary had power as totally as had her male predecessors. And she gets little credit for defining the role of the queen as superior to her husband. Among various acts, including matters about leathermaking and a causeway between Gloucester and Bristol, was this all-powerful act about female rule.

The queen had ridden into London accompanied by Elizabeth. Her half-sister knew that if she had not supported Mary, then she had never any chance of being queen. But she knew Mary's advisors and the imperial ambassadors suspected her ambition. She requested a private meeting with her sister and threw herself on her knees, begging to know why her sister was not well disposed towards her and declaring that she was only ignorant of Catholicism and willing to learn. But Mary's advisors were still dubious. After Mary had quashed Wyatt's rebellion, she requested that Elizabeth come to speak with her. She was suspicious that Elizabeth knew about it. Expecting that Elizabeth would claim she was unwell, she also sent two royal doctors. Mary was right: Elizabeth told the doctors she was ill, but they declared that she could travel. Elizabeth arrived gowned in white to show her innocence, and was lodged in a secure part of Whitehall Palace. One of the key conspirators had visited her at home and he and Wyatt had advised her to move to Donnington, a castle of hers near Newbury. At his trial Wyatt admitted he had advised her to position herself as far from London as she could. This evidence was enough for the council and Mary. The young princess, second in line to the throne, was to be imprisoned on suspicion of involvement in a traitorous plot against her sister.

When Elizabeth was told she must go to the Tower, she sat down to write to her sister, pleading that she 'never practiced, counselled or consent to anything that might be prejudicial to your person'. By the time she had finished, the tide had risen and it was too late for her to travel. The 'Tide Letter', a stunning document now in the National Archives, only bought her twenty-four hours. Next day, she was compelled to be taken by barge to the Tower. She tried to refuse to enter Traitor's Gate, declaring she was 'as true a

woman to the queen's majesty as any is now living', but she finally accepted she had no choice and had to walk across the drawbridge (actually, this was an invention by John Foxe; she walked in via Tower Wharf). She was near the spot on Tower Green where Jane had died and to the royal apartments, the rooms in which her own mother had stayed before she was executed. Elizabeth was questioned about the suggestions from Wyatt that she should move castle. She said she could not remember, but it seemed clear that she knew more than she said. This, however, was not enough proof for Mary's scrupulous standards. If Elizabeth was to be condemned, it must be according to the law and according to clear evidence. Mary decided that Elizabeth should be sent to Woodstock in Oxfordshire and live under house arrest, a suitable one, 'agreeable to our honour and her estate'. Unlike Mary, Queen of Scots some years later, imprisoned by Elizabeth, she would be well treated.

When Philip arrived in Southampton, there was bell ringing in London, but hardly wild celebrations. The populace wanted the queen married and the general belief was that he might do. They were married in Winchester on 25 July 1554, with the queen clothed in gold cloth and jewels. Diplomats noted that the ladies of the court were no longer dressed in the sober, plainer gowns that were expected in the court of Edward VI but were in colour and rich cloth. It is curious that Mary is so often thought to be dour and plain, when in dress, at least, her reign marked a return of colour and high fashion, as spectacular-sounding as Eleanor of Aquitaine. History would not allow Bloody Mary to be seen as charming or appealing, she must be all terrible.

Mary gave Philip cloth of gold to wear, embroidered with English roses and pomegranates (the symbol of Catherine of Aragon). By attempting to clothe her husband in these symbols, she was both noting that he was consort and reminding everyone of the excellence of her mother. He said it was too ornate, but he did wear another robe she had sent, a French robe of crimson velvet. Mary dressed her husband, just as she had made the rules about the marriage. At the end of the service, Philip and Mary were pronounced king and queen of England, Naples et al. Philip was essentially king of another country. Mary was queen regnant. She ruled. But it was hard

to know if people believed this. Philip had insisted that his name was first in the proclamation.

Philip and his chums didn't think much of their new home. As one complained, 'there are no distractions here except eating and drinking… they drink more than would fill the Valladolid river'. But the greatest problem was that he seemed to be going back on his promises to be a consort, assisting the queen only. Philip was behaving like a king. Coins were issued bearing both Mary's and his face.

For their wedding, he sent Mary a giant diamond with a pearl hanging from it. This was sometimes thought to be the famous La Peregrina, so large it continually fell out of its setting. It was once lost by its owner down a sofa at Windsor Castle during one of Victoria's balls and later found by Elizabeth Taylor being gnawed at by her dog. Mary's pearl was in fact the Tudor Pearl, which was even larger than La Peregrina, and was probably among the jewels she left to her husband, 'to keep for a memory of me'.

Mary's focus was returning the country to Catholicism. But her supporters would only allow so much: Mary had to agree that monastic and Church lands that had been given to royal friends over the years would remain theirs. Protestants fled abroad. Others were arrested for refusing to agree to the new regime and nearly three hundred were burned at the stake, including Archbishop Cranmer. Even the imperial ambassador advised Mary that the burnings were unwise and could lead to revolt. Her father had gaily executed whom he pleased, and it is ignored for he was male and Protestant. Mary thought she was saving the eternal souls of her subjects. She should have executed them at least, not burned them. Would history have treated her differently if she had? History has been so keen to make her the cruellest Tudor that even if she had executed them, she would still surely have been called 'Bloody'.

Mary had all the signs of pregnancy and, that November, her doctors confirmed it. The court rejoiced. Philip was keen to marry Elizabeth to his cousin, Emmanuel, Prince of Piedmont, and invited him over to visit. It would make Mary's life much easier if Elizabeth was married, especially if she was living abroad. But Elizabeth stalled, reluctant to marry a Catholic and ally herself so clearly with the Hapsburgs. Mary, happy to be about to

have an heir, decided to be indulgent and the matter was put in abeyance. It was agreed that, should Mary die in childbirth, Philip would be guardian of the child in its minority, although he would be limited by the marriage treaty. This was the first time consideration had to be given to what would happen should the monarch die in childbirth, as many women did. The risks that Mary would confront did not inspire any particular effort to try to research why women died in childbirth. Medical research at the time was focused on other matters. If a woman died, it was God's will after all.

On 30 April the following year the news was announced that the queen had been safely delivered of a prince. People partied in the streets and bells were rung. But then it was declared that there had been a mistake. No baby had arrived and, it became clear, none would and the courtiers who had been awaiting the birth were finally dismissed. It was a painfully cruel episode for Mary, who had perhaps been suffering from swelling and irregular menstruation due to perimenopause or perhaps pseudocyesis, when the body tricks itself into believing it is pregnant and produces the hormones that trigger pregnancy symptoms.

On 27 August, Philip and Mary rode from Hampton Court to Greenwich, through London. The people were delighted to see that the queen was alive, after rumours to the contrary. There seems to have been genuine sympathy for her; plenty of hopeful women had thought they were pregnant when they were not. Two days later, Philip left for Flanders, a visit he had been long postponing due to the pregnancy. Elizabeth, who had come to court for the birth, remained with Mary. The queen presumably either found her sister's presence a comfort or was determined to keep her close in a time of such ferment. Elizabeth went to mass with Mary every day. In mid-October she returned to her home, Hatfield. Mary had been convinced that her sister could be trusted.

Parts of Mary's reign saw hard times for the economy, with wet weather and spoiled harvests – all of which allowed those who hated her to claim she had brought bad luck. Another plot sprang up in 1556, led by Henry Dudley, a second cousin of Jane's old puppeteer, Dudley, along with the French ambassador and various aristocrats, to depose Mary for Elizabeth. Some she had pardoned after Wyatt's plots, other were related to men she had trusted.

She had been merciful, too much so. Philip had long been away and Mary was in shock, afraid for her safety. She refused to leave Greenwich Palace and was too fearful to sleep more than three hours a night. She wrote to Philip's father that if his son did not come 'great danger will ensue'. Elizabeth's house was put under guard, and her former governess and companion Katherine Ashley and other members of her household were arrested and taken to London for interrogation. Katherine Ashley's rooms at Somerset House, Elizabeth's residence in London, were searched and anti-Catholic literature was found. Ambassadors reported that the servants arrested said they had known of the plot. Elizabeth was in peril; it seemed impossible that the servants should know about it while she had been ignorant. She was informed that her servants had confessed but that her sister still trusted her. She was sent home but despite her faith in Elizabeth, Mary placed Sir Thomas Pope, a privy councillor and strong Catholic, in charge of her household. It was again the act of a merciful queen.

Mary's dream of the Catholic dynasty was receding, for she looked unlikely to have a child, not least because her husband was never with her. Elizabeth would inherit. Her father's will had decreed Elizabeth would take the throne after Mary, if there were no children, and it was on the basis of his will that Mary herself had claimed the throne – she could not override it now. Philip wrote to Mary insisting Elizabeth marry the prince of Piedmont. Mary threatened Elizabeth with declaring her illegitimate in parliament and announcing Mary, Queen of Scots as her heir. Elizabeth, in an act of brave brinkmanship, refused.

Philip finally returned. He wanted Mary's support in a war against France. Mary asked the council for support but they were unwilling to declare war, although they would offer financial support and ships. As they pointed out to Mary, the marriage contract prohibited Philip from waging war. And the economy was in the doldrums, they needed French trade, and war with France would anger the Pope. Mary refused to listen, and threatened the councillors into agreement – after, all the king of France had supported Jane's crowning and Wyatt's rebellion. War was finally announced and Philip again left England, mission accomplished. The queen sent an army to France and the French king retaliated by attacking Calais, the last English territory – and one with great symbolic value to the English, being all that remained of the Anglo-French empire of pre-Tudor times. On New

Year's Day, 1558, the French soldiers moved on the castle and town. It was a catastrophic defeat.

In January 1558, just after Calais was attacked, Mary wrote to Philip that she was pregnant – six months, she thought. The news, Philip wrote, 'of my beloved wife has given me greater joy than I can express' and has lightened the 'sorrow I have felt for the loss of Calais'. To spare herself the embarrassment of the previous time, Mary had waited until she was far along. She believed the child was due at the end of March, but it soon became clear that once again there was no baby. Perhaps she was experiencing menopausal symptoms. This final disappointment hit her hard, and her health began to decline. The country was in the grip of an influenza epidemic and Mary caught it. She became very weak. She wrote a codicil to her will, that, as God had sent her no child, she would be 'succeeded by my next heir and successor by the Laws and Statutes of this Realm'. She did not name Elizabeth but everyone knew whom she meant.

Philip still did not return. Instead, he sent his courtier to pay Elizabeth his respects and befriend the men in her circle and extract promises that she would be favourable to Spain. Elizabeth told him that she was grateful for his support when she was in prison and recognised that he had assisted in obtaining her release, but she would offer no hard promises. By early November, Mary was dying. The council begged her to specify that Elizabeth was heir. She pondered on Mary, Queen of Scots, but she had now married the Dauphin Francis, heir to the French throne – and Mary knew how much Philip did not wish the Dauphin to have any influence over England. Finally, on 6 November, Mary gave in and accepted that Elizabeth was her heir. Nobles rode to Hatfield to tell her the news and pass on Mary's request that Elizabeth pay her debts and keep England a Catholic nation. It was a vain hope.

In the early morning of 17 November 1558, Mary died at St James's Palace at the age of forty-two. She had received the Catholic last rites before she died. Elizabeth was immediately announced as queen. Mary had hoped to be buried with her mother, but as a queen she was interred at Westminster Abbey. If Mary had died with a child, even a baby, her reputation could have been secured. A childless female queen is generally seen as a failure – with the notable exception of Elizabeth's genius propaganda of herself as the Virgin Queen. Childless male monarchs tend

not to be so harshly judged. Mary fought for her throne, put down the Wyatt rebellion swiftly and decisively, and she was widely supported. She used the vision of being married to her country that Elizabeth would later deploy to such acclaim, roused men to fight for her and composed a marriage contract that ensured she held all the cards. It is often said that she claimed she would die with Calais inscribed on her heart. Funny that no one says the same about the kings who lost territory! It is more likely she died heartbroken that Elizabeth would end her Catholic reforms. And even if she did say such a thing, at least she was admitting mistakes – Henry VIII never claimed he would die regretting executing thousands or sacking the monasteries, attacking the Scots or wasting money on self-glorification (as with Queen Jayadevi in sixth-century Cambodia, a woman who thinks of the problems of her realm is cast as failing). But saying she regretted an act has been used against her as evidence of weakness.

To create Elizabeth as history's heroine, Mary Tudor must be dismissed as a failed, brutal, weak queen. This was not something Elizabeth herself fostered. She knew that Mary had fought for a throne, showed a woman could have the same authority as a male monarch, that an act had been passed that 'the regal power of this realm is in the queen's majesty, as fully and absolutely as ever it was in any of her most noble progenitors'. Thanks to Mary, who had done so much of the groundwork, Elizabeth could shine as the Virgin Queen. She would not have had such a reign without her sister. No one calls Mary a warrior queen, even though she raised troops for her throne. Anne Boleyn was made into a common adulteress and murderess, the stuff of sensational true crime ballads and pamphlets; so was Mary I. Mary's image as Bloody Mary is entirely unrepresentative, and yet it has stuck. When a woman has people executed, she is a monster. No one calls him Bloody Henry VIII.

When Mary, Queen of Scots was born in 1542, her father James V was devastated. He was already very ill, suffering after the cataclysmic loss of life against the English a few days before. That his baby by Mary of Guise was a daughter was terrible news. He said that his race was 'born with a lass' (Marjorie Bruce, daughter of Robert the Bruce of Scotland) and will 'gang with a lass' (i.e. end with a lass). Dying in pain, James thought that the birth

of a daughter would mean the English under Henry VIII would invade. After his death Mary, at only six days old, became queen. James had been wrong: Henry did not invade, but became bent on marrying baby Mary to his young son, Edward, to unite the kingdoms through marriage (in which Scotland was inferior as wives were). Mary's mother Mary of Guise agreed, stalled him, and begged for help from France. The French king sent military aid but demanded that Mary be sent over as a bride for his eldest son, the future king. At five, Mary was sent to the French court. On one hand, she was safe, away from Henry trying to kidnap her or force her to marry his son. But on the other she was a queen, and yet she had been sent to live at a foreign court like a princess or a future consort. At the sumptuous dinner after her wedding ceremony to the dauphin, six large mechanical boats sailed around the hall and the king swept her into his boat. He was, the narrator said, Jason leading the Argonauts. Mary was really the Golden Fleece. As one poet put it and much of Europe saw it, Scotland was to be 'fed on the breast of the great King of France'.[9] The hierarchy was clear. As the king put it in a letter to the Ottoman Sultan, 'I have pacified the Kingdom of Scotland which I hold and possess with the same power and authority as I have in France' and then declared he had England too, 'the three kingdoms together can now be deemed a single monarchy'. Mary had been compelled to sign a document saying that if she died without heirs, Scotland would go to France. It would also get all its money. It was the type of contract that Rome made client kings sign.

But the king died after a jousting accident only a year after the wedding, and Mary was queen at sixteen with her fifteen-year-old husband. A year later, Francis died. Mary returned to Scotland and took up her throne. Throughout her life, the men around her tried to undermine her, take her power, even kidnap her. But they could not take the final action against her reign until she had a son. She tried to gather hope from her relationship with Elizabeth, allying herself with English power, but Elizabeth declined to meet her. She married Lord Darnley, a man with a claim to the English throne. And, when she fell pregnant, it was the beginning of the end. She was taken prisoner by her lords, then eventually freed when Lord Darnley realised he couldn't trust them. Barely six months after the birth of her son, Lord Darnley was murdered, smothered next to his blown-up house, and

she was accused of his murder, despite the fact that it was the work of the same set of lords who had attacked her.

Not long after the murder, Mary was riding to Edinburgh when one lord, Bothwell, demanded that she come with him to his castle. He told her there were riots in Edinburgh. At the castle, he locked the doors and assaulted her. He wanted power over her, to force her to marry him so he could have the throne. He had already got all the other lords to allow him to marry Mary if he shared power with them – all the men had allied together to ensure a forced marriage, the rape of the queen, so that they could get a little more power. The lords effectively signed a document agreeing to Mary's rape; she wouldn't give them what they wanted so they'd use a man to get it. Mary had no choice but to marry him. She could be pregnant – indeed it turned out she was – and a child outside of marriage would have been impossible. Moreover, as we have seen, a woman raped in early modern England needed to fight back so intensively that she might die, to have any chance of being believed in a court. Rape was impossible to prove. Submission was consent for the courts of the time. One of the earliest assessments of a woman's rights in marriage, in 1736, stated that a wife could not be raped by her husband, 'on account of the matrimonial consent which she has given and which she cannot retract'.[10] And Mary knew that all the other lords had agreed Bothwell could do as he wished. What choice did she have? History has declared she must have consented; she set it up as a way to marry him, she pretended to be kidnapped, and she was a queen so, of course, she could resist. This wasn't what was thought at the time. The sixteenth century understood the power imbalance, and that if a man takes a woman back to his castle the likely consequence is that he would impose his will on her. Men who wished to marry women and were forbidden would often try to kidnap them, so their father was forced to agree. As we have seen, Eleanor of Aquitaine was in serious danger of kidnap and forced marriage when she was single. The same happened to Mary now, but she was the one who was blamed. Everyone knew that Bothwell had insulted her with 'doings rude'. But the same questions are asked that are asked of all victims: why did she speak to him, why did she marry him? She had no alternative; she thought she was pregnant – and she knew how the world worked. If Eleanor had

been kidnapped successfully by Geoffrey of Anjou, she would have had to marry him.

Historical accounts in the reign of Queen Victoria were particularly sure that a queen could not be sexually assaulted – with a queen on the throne, they did not want to admit it. The first law code in recorded history, from Sumeria 4,000 years ago, pronounced that: 'if a man violates the right of another and deflowers the virgin wife of a young man, they shall kill that male'. It was woman as property, woman as the 'right' of a man. Although the woman is not a person in the code, she is not killed for being raped or seduced; it is not her 'fault'. As women have gained in power in society and are no longer men's property, it has become, we might argue, more difficult to prosecute than before; because if a woman is seen as a person she can legally consent, and the rapists can say their victims consented. Rape is much easier to prosecute when a woman has no personhood and is just a man's possession, like a piece of furniture or a sheep; thus, we might argue, as soon as women get some sort of self-determination, it can be turned against them and they must have desired what befell them. Even when the attacker admits he did it, still the woman is frequently blamed, as happened with Mary and Bothwell.

If she had been any other woman abducted by Bothwell, she would have been more likely to be believed. People like to believe that a queen is more able to resist, that no one would dare. But a queen is in possession of power and marrying her by force is the way to get it. And then Mary was condemned for accepting him – she married him, surely she must have wanted it. So, queens are denounced for not being able to resist a patriarchal system in which women are property, used as possessions, condemned by Church and state alike for being pregnant outside wedlock. If you have lands and possessions like Eleanor of Aquitaine or Mary, Queen of Scots, you will be a target. Eleanor escaped, Mary did not.

Mary, Queen of Scots shows the limits of queenship in the sixteenth century – and that queens will never truly rule if they do not already have the assent of the men around them. A man can expect this, but for Mary it was impossible to win against the Scottish lords. The men in Mary's orbit tried to take over from the beginning. They had made a contract with Bothwell to share the rule, via one man's assault of her. After the marriage, Bothwell refused to share power – and so the lords took their revenge on

him for going back on their agreement and went to war against him and Mary. She was captured, forced to abdicate while having a miscarriage and locked up in the castle on Loch Leven.

Mary managed to escape her imprisonment in Scotland with a brave and daring plan, fled to England and was put under house arrest by Elizabeth. While under house arrest, Mary had occupied herself with embroidery. She was an immensely skilled needlewoman. On show now at Oxburgh Hall in Norfolk, the embroideries are at once the work of a typical Tudor aristocrat and the work of a resistant queen. There are flowers and plants, animals real and mythical, and fish and birds, many of which were copied from patterns. There is a dolphin, joyfully arching over water, a reference to her first husband – dolphin in French is dauphin. But Mary, watched all the time, her correspondence monitored, also sewed her own resistance into the quilt, her monogram, and the figure of a phoenix, her hope to rise once more. Another complicated embroidery features a hand cutting back a tree, which we read as the family tree of the Tudors. Some of her embroideries were for supporters, some she sent to Elizabeth. One of a crowned red-haired cat playing with a mouse is Elizabeth with a hopeless Mary. It was only going to get worse. Finally in 1586, after nearly twenty years of imprisonment, Mary agreed to a plot to free her and depose the queen. The letter from her agreeing to the plot was immediately intercepted and deciphered and Mary was soon arrested and put on trial for treason. Mary refused to bow to Elizabeth's court, for, as she said, she was a queen and could only be tried by God. Elizabeth did not want to execute Mary, Queen of Scots, even after she had been found guilty of treason. When she signed the execution warrant, she hoped she could keep Mary on death row until the Scots queen died of natural causes. Elizabeth feared the vengeance of Spain. But she also believed in the importance of monarchy and knew that, if she executed a queen, it would undermine the power of queenship – and she no doubt guessed that it would make it easier to execute a monarch in future. And she was right.

In 1584 Nicholas Hilliard and George Gower, the two distinguished portraitists of the age, cooked up a plan to control the image of Elizabeth I. Only they would be allowed to paint the queen. Gower wanted exclusive

rights to produce portraits of Elizabeth 'in oyle cullers upon bourdes or canvas'; Hilliard was to have a monopoly on the production of portraits in limning, essentially miniatures. This never came to pass. Elizabeth herself surely refused it. She wanted a range of artists to show her brilliance.

No one used iconography and symbolism quite like Elizabeth I, and she did so with increasing power as her reign progressed. She used the images of the phoenix, a symbol of rebirth and chastity, and the pelican, the image of sacrifice as it was said to give its own blood from its breast to feed its chicks, to symbolise purity and her devotion to the nation. Post the victory over the Spanish Armada, Elizabeth's portraiture was at its most grand, mythical, symbolic and intricate. In the white gown of the Ditchley Portrait, she is both Venus and the Virgin Queen, pure and eternal. In the Rainbow Portrait Elizabeth, gowned in orange, holds a very rainbow. The portraits are imbued with stories and symbolism, every detail suggestive of the myth-weaving of her brilliance. In her right hand, Elizabeth holds a rainbow and beside it is a Latin motto, '*NON SINE SOLE IRIS*', or 'no rainbow without a sun'. Elizabeth is the sun, the light, just as Hatshepsut once was. She is like a goddess, a fairy whose ruff and veil almost looks like wings. She wears a cloak covered in human eyes and ears, she knows all, she sees all. And she is adorned with emblems of purity, the pearls. The Queen is a fairy, pure, but all-powerful; she is to be both adored and feared. It is a brilliant feat of creating female majesty. And yet the focus of conversation is so often about the contrast between Elizabeth's age and the youthful face in the portraits. As if no male monarch (looking at you, Henry VIII and George IV) had himself painted looking younger than he was. It is often presented as a great revelation that around the time the Rainbow Portrait was painted Elizabeth, who was in her sixties, would have had hair that was greying and thinning, and she would have been wrinkled. It wasn't about what she really looked like, it was about the grandeur of majesty. She was Spenser's Fairie Queen, the virgin Queen, stepping in, we might argue, for the Virgin Mary, as the cult of Mary was compelled to fall away. As one woman who saw the queen on a progress declared in surprise, 'What? The queen is a woman?'[11] Most people would never see the images we recognise as Elizabeth I.

Elizabeth was the mighty wielder of image, refusing to give it up to one particular painter, but she is rather eclipsed by the brilliance of her

depiction: it can be disappointing when the reality doesn't quite live up to it, we prefer to think of her in terms of 'Armada' or 'Rainbow'. The ordinary people of her realm consumed her image through the coinage; the portraits were for the court, her power base, who all believed her timeless. The important point about these portraits isn't that she was depicted as younger than she was but how they show her as all-powerful when in fact her reign saw an active battle between her and her politicians; she wanted to retain full royal powers, they wanted to take them from her. There was a compulsion in art to show the female monarch as almighty, stupendous, when parliament was gaining the power.

Elizabeth is often seen as the greatest British queen in history. She fought for her throne throughout her sister's reign, using clever evasion to avoid what she did not want to do. She lost her position after her mother's death, was exiled by her father, was sexually harassed by Thomas Seymour and arrested by her brother, then nearly executed by her sister. She was a survivor. She brilliantly fostered supporters while living away from court during her sister's reign and thus, when she became queen, she had a circle of loyal advisors. She skilfully resisted efforts to marry her off. She developed a moderate religious settlement, Protestant in style but allowing some Catholic trappings to be retained. One of her own prayerbooks, shown to me at Hampton Court, shows a pondering of the meaning of prayer. But she was not permitted to be supreme head of the Church of England; such a title was too much for a woman. She would be supreme governor. The Bible had unequivocally stated that Jesus was the head of the Church, under God, and so the monarch would have no doubt become governor initially – as with the progress of constitutional monarchy, it happened in the reign of a queen. When her troops were about to go forth to fight the Spanish Armada land invasion force at Tilbury, she roused them with her ever-famous speech, 'I know I have the body but of a weak, feeble woman; but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and of a king of England too'. She declared that if a prince ever dared 'to invade the borders of my realm; to which rather than any dishonour shall grow by me, I myself will take up arms, I myself will be your general, judge, and rewarder.' Elizabeth was a leader, a judge and general. Few speeches by women have been reproduced or discussed more than the Tilbury speech. But some scholars suggest she never even said it, although it seems to follow her speeches, and resembles those of her sister.

And yet, her reign saw a diminution in the royal powers. With male monarchs, their advisors and their attendants were all in their chamber. With Elizabeth, her attendants and her advisors were in two different areas, and sometimes Elizabeth was excluded from meetings. Business could be more easily done without her – as would be the case when Mary, Queen of Scots was executed. One of Elizabeth's most loyal advisors, William Cecil, admired her and respected her, but he also wanted the rule of parliament to outweigh that of the queen. Every time she summoned Parliament, they pressed her to marry. Instead, she declined to call Parliament. Her advisors tried to terrify her that there were plots against her by Catholics; she largely ignored them. When it came to Mary, Queen of Scots, her advisors pushed Elizabeth to sign the death warrant, and when she finally acquiesced they met in secret and enacted the warrant without her awareness or say-so. And they constantly pushed her to marry, just as her father had imposed his decisions about marriage upon those around him.

Elizabeth was the Virgin Queen, the ruler who beat back the Spanish Armada, the heroic rainbow queen. She was revolutionary, respected by other nations. She ruled alone for forty-four years. But the men around her also attempted to gain power from her. Parliamentary monarchy progressed. When a woman is on the throne, we often see the growth of a parliamentary monarchy. This is better for a country; constitutional monarchy is often the key to democracy. And yet, this fast progress of the powers of parliament, the movement towards the monarch as more of a figurehead, happens with greatest speed in the reigns of women, especially Elizabeth I, Victoria and Elizabeth II. These three queens were superb at creating their own image, through portraits, photography and television respectively. Their speeches and public spectacles were pure propaganda wins. We see them as our greatest monarchs. But they have given up the most power, in terms of engaging with constitutional monarchy. Perhaps that is why we rate them the most highly. We congratulate men who take power (we are fascinated by Henry VIII despite everything), but we congratulate women for giving it up. Both Elizabeth and Mary, Queen of Scots, were surrounded by men who wanted their power. They took it from Mary by trying to seize her person, they left Elizabeth out of meetings. But Elizabeth, above all, knew that her strength came from remaining single, despite around twenty-six marriage proposals – especially after a childhood and adolescence of watching women

suffer and often die due to marriage. Elizabeth managed to create a successful base for power through lying to the men around her, creating a magnificent, magical image and ensuring, above all, that she, once a girl at the bottom of the pile overlooked by everyone, had achieved at the end of the Tudor dynasty that most great prize: stability.

The majestic Elizabeth I was not even permitted to die as she pleased. She wished to sit up, and did so, staring into space, eating little. Her advisors were constantly trying to force her to bed, to lie down, and she finally agreed, after being pressed – we might even say bullied. There, they pushed her to declare her heir, which she had always refused to do. She continued to refuse to name an heir, despite being constantly importuned. One wonders if some among them wanted to get her into bed to make her easier to press demands upon. She could no longer speak and, at one point, made a gesture with her hand towards her head. She was probably telling them to stop talking at her or that she was suffering from head pains, but instead her hand movement was taken as assent that James VI should be king. So in the end, even the great Gloriana wasn't allowed to die as she wanted.

As one scholar put it, she had lost her teeth and her hair and refused to be attended; she was 'pathetic' all the more so because throughout her reign she had been vain to the point of childishness.[12] But there is no proof that she was vain. Why such an obsession with 'vanity', whether it be that she looks too young in the portraits, or claiming her make-up killed her? But what do we even mean by vanity, a word often thrown at women, rarely at men (George IV is portrayed as spendthrift and selfish, rarely vain, and yet he wore more make-up at times than Elizabeth I). Like Cleopatra, Elizabeth created the pageants and shows her people wanted. Plenty of her portraits were commissioned by others. Mary I is condemned for being plain, mocked for thinking Philip could find her attractive. Elizabeth couldn't win. Hatshepsut, Cleopatra, Isabella of Castile, Elizabeth I: all accused of 'vanity', because that is what we throw at a woman who creates an image of grandeur. As Isabella told her confessor, she was using the jewels to show the splendour of Castile. So it was with Elizabeth and her Rainbow Portrait. Society wants women to fit certain ideals of beauty, and this is defined by what men want. Then, they do not like women using their image, controlling

their own image, whether through dress or jewels or portraits, because it is a form of independence and power.

In the British Library is the inventory of Elizabeth's jewels and plate, hundreds and hundreds of precious objects including gifts she had received and jewels she bought in Paris, the jewels she had inherited from the queens of Henry VIII and her sister and mother, queenly armour. She also had pieces previously belonging to Mary, Queen of Scots, including a huge necklace of pearls that Catherine de Medici had wanted for herself. After her death, the jewels were taken by James I and dispersed. One politician declared it a national loss, 'O! those jewels! The pride and glory of this realm!' One ring remains, and is now in Chequers, the countryside residence of the United Kingdom's prime minister. On it, diamonds mark out an E and an R for Elizabeth Regina. On the front of the ring is a locket, two-sided, with two portraits. One is clearly Elizabeth. The second is another, younger woman with a diamond at her breast. Many think (including me) the woman is Anne Boleyn, and that Elizabeth kept her mother secretly beside her. She did a lot to restore Anne's reputation as a virtuous mother, but also as 'the root and font of the reformation' – as the politician Anne had wanted to be.

After James VI came to the throne as king of England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales, he disinterred his mother, Mary, Queen of Scots, from Peterborough Cathedral and built her an ornate and beautiful tomb in Westminster Abbey, perhaps the grandest royal tomb in Britain. As the inscription declares: 'Conquered, she was unconquerable, nor could the dungeon detain her; slain, yet deathless.' As he put it: 'Great in marriage, greater still in lineage, greatest of all in her progeny, here lies buried the daughter, bride and mother of kings'; the execution of whom was 'an unheard-of precedent, outrageous to royalty'. He made his point.

After the sixteenth century, the mighty age of queenship, women's power in Europe generally decreased. James I, who followed one of the greatest

queens in history, was obsessed with burning 'witches': mostly poor, unprotected, elderly women. He personally interviewed a 'witch', Agnes Sampson, and sent her off for torture. He wrote a witch-hunting book to encourage more investigations. Witch trials spread across Europe; the accused might be women who talked too much, danced with the devil, claimed their own wisdom outside of the realms of men, women who were not married, women who said they preferred the devil to spending time with men. Women had spoken too much in the sixteenth century. The pendulum swung back.

Two years after the death of Elizabeth, there was a plot for a second Elizabeth to take the throne, because James was disliked and was seen as a religious extremist, unwilling to give Catholics leeway (or maybe the whole thing was a set-up to excuse more persecution of Catholics). Guy Fawkes hid in the cellars of Parliament, with gunpowder stashed under stacks of firewood, because he and his conspirators wished to instal James's nine-year-old daughter Princess Elizabeth as queen. People often forget that the Gunpowder Plot was about putting a woman on the throne. After Henry VIII had done everything to try to have a male child, the people of the seventeenth century were about to swap out a man for a young woman, not even her elder brother. Perhaps it was because they thought she could be controlled. But it was also the greatest testament to Elizabeth I: they wanted to unseat a man for a queen. The little princess Elizabeth married the future king of Bohemia, and the throne went to her line after all, after the death of Queen Anne, the last of the Stuart monarchs, who died without children. After Anne, Elizabeth's daughter, Sophia, was the heir, but she died just before Anne and so the throne went to her eldest son, George I. The Georgians took their legitimacy from women; they would not have existed if not for Elizabeth of Bohemia, the queen who never was.

When King Ngola Mbandi of Ngondo died in 1624, after seven years on the throne, he left instructions that his sister, Nzinga, should succeed him, even though he had a seven-year-old son. Nzinga, forty-two, swiftly took the throne. The child was under the guardianship of a war chief. She asked the chief to marry her; he accepted and then, after the wedding, she had the child killed. It was much less brutal than what her brother had done when

he came to the throne; he had killed rival claimants and relations (including Nzinga's son) and had her two sisters sterilised. But he had failed to protect the country against Portuguese invasions. It was clear that he thought only his sister could fight occupation.

As queen, Nzinga's challenge was to try to restore the land that her brother had lost. Immediately she had a battle on her hands, as her enemies said she was not legitimate because she was the daughter of an enslaved wife (like her brother) and because she was a woman. She asked that slaves on Portuguese plantations rise up and join her, after Portugal had refused to return them to their homelands. Soon, Portugal and the opposition in the kingdom were advocating for an alternative claimant to the throne, a minor male royal. Nzinga withdrew to the east.

In the following year, 1627, she sent a gift of 400 slaves and an offer to submit to Portugal if they allowed her to take the throne. They refused and beheaded her diplomat. But the new king was losing popularity, seen as a Portuguese puppet. She continued to regroup, and then, in 1631, deposed the queen of the neighbouring country, Matamba, which had long resisted Portuguese incursions. It was a country with a respect for queenship – and she was immediately accepted. She then used Matamba as her base for troops and expanding the slave trade to finance her wars and take profit from Portugal. She became all-powerful, adopted male titles and dress and installed male concubines and a female bodyguard. In war, you had to be a male leader.

Nzinga swiftly took back much of her own kingdom and expanded into others. In 1656, she signed a peace treaty with Portugal and then focused on attempting to consolidate her lands and riches, to pass on a flourishing kingdom to her sister. Now that the court was at peace, Nzinga abandoned her male titles and dress and disbanded the male concubines – after choosing one to marry in a Christian ceremony. In 1663, at the age of eighty, she died and her sister, Barbara, took the throne. Barbara and her son died in battle in 1681. Nzinga's masterstroke was to invade another country, Matamba, that respected female rule, and use it as her base to expand.

The seventeenth-century court was less about queens; it was the time of mistresses and favourites. Some gained political power but they focused on

amassing a fortune, aware that they could be swapped out at any minute. Louis XIV of France, the longest-reigning monarch in European history, built Versailles to keep a close watch on the aristocrats; better to have them under his eye, trapped in a complicated hierarchy of who sat where at dinner, rather than doing as they pleased in their chateaux in the regions of France. It became a battleground for women as Louis introduced competition over who won the ultimate prize and became his mistress. Such was the battle to love the king that the court became embroiled in The Affair of the Poisons, in which, essentially, courtiers were poisoning each other or buying love potions to access royal favour. Louis started investigating the networks of witches and spell sellers near to Versailles, and, under torture, they gave up lists of aristocratic clients who had bought poison to rid themselves of spouses (or parents) and bump off rivals at court. He realised that hundreds were involved. His own mistress, Madame de Montespan, had been buying love potions and even performing black masses to try to keep him. After thirty or so executions, the king called off the investigation. It seemed as if the entire court was about to be dragged into it. The pressures, the constant fear of losing your spot for one wrong word, the women resorting to spells and poisons to keep their place, such was the desire for influence at Versailles.

Anne, a respected, intellectual queen, took the throne of Britain in 1702. After her sister, Mary II, had given up essentially all her power to her husband William III in a joint monarchy (they had no children, so Anne took the throne after her), Anne marked a return to queenship. She made it clear that her husband, the Prince of Denmark, was a consort. He said, 'I am her majesty's subject, and have sworn homage to her… I shall do naught but what she commands me.' She presided over the emergence of the two-party system, a uniting of England and Scotland and an age of great architectural achievements and building. She reigned bravely through chronic illness and seventeen pregnancies; they nearly all ended in miscarriage or stillbirth, and a few of her children died as babies. She tried everything to avoid war – and maybe this is a reason why she's been doubted; perhaps society wants historical kings to have waged war. Her son, William, the beloved hope of all the family, fell ill just after his eleventh birthday and died. If she had managed just one child, she might be seen as one of the most successful monarchs in history, a queen who laid the foundations for Victoria and

other queens to come, including Elizabeth II, as well as reigning through long-term pain. Anne went to more cabinet meetings than any other monarch, despite all those pregnancies, child loss and illness, but the most recent film about her is all about eating too much cake. And, even if she was larger, why does it matter? Anne's reign was one of excellence at governing, at walking between the lines of political factions, creating diplomatic relations with foreign powers, presiding over a period of economic boom and the building of impressive churches in London. Poem after poem was written about her as a patron of the arts at court, as a lover of music and poetry. The architecture from her reign is superb. It was a reign that should be better remembered.

Queen Christina ruled Sweden for twenty-two years from 1632, and fostered perhaps the most intellectual and artistic court in modern Europe. She came to the throne on her father's death aged seven, with regents governing for her, chiefly the lord high chancellor. The council decided her mother was difficult and exiled her, and said the little queen should not have just one foster mother but a few, so that one woman would not gain too much power. Christina became a great philosopher and scholar. At eighteen she reached her majority and wanted to forge her own way, pushing forward the arts and intellectual causes, not war. The lord high chancellor wanted to maintain his power and tried to undermine her peace efforts with the Holy Roman Empire – he failed. She suggested she might follow Elizabeth I's example as a virgin queen. She said, 'it takes more courage to marry than go to war'. She created a court of learning and scholarship, which gave patronage to illustrious thinkers and artists. But she worked too hard. Finally, after eleven years, worn down by battles with the lord chancellor and exhausted, she abdicated for her cousin, Gustav. Christina did not wish to wear fussy hairstyles, and wore men's attire because she wished to get on with work rather than spending hours on dressing. Queens from Hatshepsut to Khadijah, and Nzinga in times of war, have found male dress an excellent strategy. And yet in the seventeenth century in Europe, it cast Christina as eccentric.

The sixteenth century, then, saw a mighty flowering of queenship. It also saw queens locked up and executed. Nearly all queens regnant and many queens consort risked imprisonment and execution at some point. The executions and imprisonments were testament to their power. Mary, Queen of Scots, threatened with kidnap as soon as she arrived in Scotland to take her throne as an adult, was finally executed; no one would have bothered if her power hadn't been so great. And yet, in the seventeenth century, queenship started to fade. Then with the eighteenth century there were even more battles over monarchy and power, the fight for constitutional monarchy and the rise of democratic institutions. The role of the queen became pivotal. And the most symbolic and significant figure in this fight over the meaning of monarchy was Marie Antoinette.

CHAPTER EIGHT
The Queen's Head: Marie Antoinette

Marie Antoinette was Madame Deficit.[1] At the height of her unpopularity in the 1780s, cartoon after cartoon was produced of her, declaring the ballooning national debt was thanks to her. She wore extravagant jewels and gowns, and she was spending all the country's money. We know, of course, that these are unfair, misogynist representations. The image of the extravagant queen, the female embodiment of spending, all parties and clothes (vanity rears its head again) is used to cover up the reasons why countries owe money. For France, the debt was caused by foreign wars, including assisting America in its fight for independence. As with other queens before her, the criticism reflected prejudices about women, and particularly women who had some command over men: they were uncontrolled, rapacious. But even though such visions of Marie Antoinette are unfair, aspects of them endure and shape our perceptions, whether we see her as extravagant or as having exquisite taste. Marie Antoinette was more alert to image than she has been credited with, more political and more influential on politics than she is allowed. The queen tried to contest the caricatures with images of herself as a devoted royal mother; this does not hold the public imagination now. So often she is depicted as an ornament, whether tragic or selfish.

Queens, especially queens consort, are expected to fulfil a decorative and symbolic function, to be on show, a dress-up doll for jewels, to lead fashion

(but not too much); they are supposed to be beautiful and splendid – but, if too splendid, they are vain. A queen who can control how she is depicted is a success. Few do. The problem for Marie Antoinette was that the roles she had expected to show herself performing were suitable for a certain type of monarchy: absolutist, moneyed, the top of the social tree. She had been perfectly prepared to be a consort in Versailles as founded by Louis XIV. She stood at first for what was seen as the aims of all consorts and princesses: to firm up and secure relations between monarchies, to bear an heir, to prompt industry with patronage of craftspeople, to lead the court, to show monarchy as being wealthy. When revolution came, the queen who had performed the role for which Versailles had been created, had accomplished what she thought was queenship, was now seen as the ultimate enemy and blamed for the whole royal edifice and inequal society. Many queens are blamed for vanity or spending; with Marie Antoinette, we see this in *extremis*. Because the stakes were so high, the people needed to be persuaded against the monarchy and she became the greatest symbol of royal and feminine excess in history.

During Marie Antoinette's time as queen, society changed. The aristocracy wanted more power, the growing merchant class wanted representation, the people wanted a share of the money, industry was burgeoning. And so, in her thirties, the queen became symbolic – but of bad things: debt, overspending, excess. As the story went, being queen had allowed her to indulge her worst nature. This played into an old narrative: society had to keep women restrained, because if you let them free then their passions would run wild, for spending, sex and money. The queen, in this set-up, was no longer the woman in a gilded cage told to perform royalty, perfectly imprisoned in a way that male power found useful and charming. She was the worst type of woman and evidence of how you must never give a woman any power, not one iota. Queenship was not a function or even a way of keeping a woman under control, it was a free pass for her (being naturally money mad) to do as she pleased, spend on lovers, sex and parties. Of course, Marie Antoinette and the court did spend eye-popping sums of money and they sat at the top of an extremely unfair taxation system. But rather than engage with the wider economic problems of war debt and how to fund the state, it was much easier to blame the queen. The French revolution was driven by discontent at monarchical privilege; an

unfair tax system that taxed merchants and peasants, not aristocracy; a succession of poor harvests; growing Enlightenment beliefs in the separation of Church and state, and equality; disagreement over who was represented at the Estates, a form of Parliament; and a massive debt balloon. And the aristocracy feature in the most major problems – taxation and representation. They didn't want to be taxed, and they didn't want cede representation to the merchant and lower classes (the Third Estate). Yet the French revolution is not popularly seen as a revolution against aristocratic privilege. It's seen as a rebellion against the king and queen. We might simplify by saying that the aristocracy, or more specifically aristocratic men, didn't want to pay significant tax (and were annoyed by being shut out of the queen's circle at Versailles) and so they turned the queen into a monster. The pamphlets and cartoons of her were not being produced by the poor, but by the aristocracy and the merchant classes. She was an easy doll to throw out of the window, some of them doing so to deflect attention from themselves. The images of her as Madame Deficit, her rumoured affairs with other women, made her into the human symbol of a nefarious government that had to be executed for the new to be born. The male heirs to the throne were left alive – her son and her husband's brothers, who would later take the throne. But even though women couldn't rule in France, could only ever be consorts, she had to be executed, indeed when her end was debated, the men in government said they had to put her to death to satiate the crowds. The woman had to be publicly killed to bring in a new ruling class that was entirely men.

Marie Antoinette was trained to be a queen from the day she was born. She was the fifteenth and last child of Maria Teresa, queen of Hungary, empress of the Holy Roman Empire, declared at her birth on 2 November, Day of the Dead, All Souls Day, 1755, a 'small, but completely healthy archduchess'. All Hapsburg archduchesses were christened Maria as a tribute to the Virgin Mary, and she was Maria Antonia, Antoine in the family. The child was, as her mother said, like all her children, 'born to obey', submissive, particularly to Hapsburg interests. Antoinette was brought up to grace court functions, with tutors for music, dance and deportment, as well as languages and drawing, treated to theatre, music and even a menagerie including a rhino

that had come by boat. One story had the six-year-old Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, after a private performance, telling the archduchess that he would marry her one day. She was skilled at music and particularly talented at dancing, although at writing and spelling she was less proficient, much to her mother's despair.

After smallpox swept the younger members of the family, killing her sisters, Maria Joanna and Maria Josepha and ruining the looks of Maria Elizabeth, who became a nun and extremely respected abbess, Marie Antoinette was pushed high on the marriage market. She was twelve and Maria Theresa wanted her wed to the dauphin of France. The child was judged small and thin, but the king of France was informed she had fine blue-grey eyes, a good complexion, teeth that had been well straightened with wires and thick fair hair. When she was thirteen and a half, she was finally betrothed to the dauphin, who was fifteen. 'If one is to consider only the greatness of your position, you are the happiest of your sisters and all princesses,' Maria Teresa told her. She told her daughter that she was to be, 'in her heart and in the uprightness of her mind', a child of Austria, and yet she must behave entirely as a French woman. The consort had to have a split personality. Marie Antoinette was married by proxy on 19 April 1770. Two days later, early in the morning, her carriage left for France. Her mother clutched her, weeping. 'Do so much good to the French people that they can say I have sent them an angel.' The weight on the fourteen-year-old's shoulders could hardly have been greater.

Antoinette travelled across Europe, bundled up in her golden carriage. On 7 May, she was officially handed over to France. Her stupendous Austrian wedding clothes were removed and she was entirely undressed, so not a stitch of Austrian clothing remained, not even underclothes. The grand clothes had only been for show at the handover and on the journey; her dresses and all of her Austrian wedding trousseau were taken by her senior French ladies for themselves. The little queen had to give up her beloved pug (although after she arrived in Paris, the dog was sent from Vienna). She was redressed in a French outfit. Marie Antoinette was now entirely alone, except for one senior Austrian male courtier, surrounded by French attendants and dressed in unfamiliar French clothes. At Strasbourg, the first French city to welcome the queen, she requested not to be spoken to in German. 'From

now on I want to hear no other language but French,' she said. The city set off fireworks 'as if it was the end of the world'.

Just under a week later, in the forest near Compiègne in northern France, she dropped to her knees in front of the king and met the dauphin. He wrote in his diary only, 'Meeting with Madame la Dauphine'. On the next day, she arrived at Versailles, an event to which around 6,000 aristocrats had been invited. She was given a six-foot-long trunk of crimson velvet, with drawers lined in pale blue silk, all containing the jewels of the dauphine, millions' worth of diamonds, pearls and other precious stones. The new dauphine, drowning in a brocade dress, was deemed rather small, but complimented on her regal bearing.

Marie Antoinette, trained to obey, to be dressed and smile like a model, was now in Versailles, a giant wedding cake of a panopticon. Still, everything hinged on the tiniest point of protocol; where one stood, sat or ate. There were thousands of courtiers at the palace, and it was the role of the king to maintain his position at the top of the pyramid, distributing favours and patronage, and to ensure that rebellious nobles were firmly squashed – and the queen was to do the same with the women. Versailles had perfected the art of keeping the aristocrats oppressed and obedient, by backbiting and precedence. There had not been a queen for years. Now a teenager would have to learn to fulfil the role. The levels of hierarchy were endless, and precedence was all; when dressing, the highest-ranking lady present had to pass Marie Antoinette the clothing, and if a lady of higher rank arrived, she had to move into position and start the ritual again, even if the queen was barely dressed and freezing. In the Archives Nationales in Paris lies an astonishing book. Commissioned between 1775 and 1780, it is handwritten, glued with swatches of materials – silks, laces, brocades, muslins, striped, pink, cornflower, white. When you turn the pages, it is history in your hands. For it is Marie Antoinette's wardrobe book. The queen would use the book to choose the gown that she would wear. The pages contain the queen's everyday life, the gowns that she was expected to wear to display majesty. And yet it was these same clothes that condemned her, fed into the image of her as a frivolous queen.

The ordinary people were also given royal access, allowed to wander the antechambers, and market women were allowed to address – and criticise – the queen at certain occasions. People could come to watch the royals dine.

It seems rather lacking in security, but it was the perception of the time: who could want to hurt the king? The Versailles hierarchy worked to keep the aristocrats and junior royals in line, and gave the subjects the sense of looking at animals in a menagerie, but where it failed to capture loyalties was within the ever-growing, ever-richer middle classes and minor aristocracy.

Just after Marie Antoinette arrived, the Austrian ambassador wrote to Maria Teresa of the dauphine and her new husband, 'with a little caution, she will be able to dominate him completely'. He spoke too soon. Marie Antoinette's grace and desire to please made her popular at court, and her dignity and rigorous training appealed to the crowds, but her husband seemed disinterested. Her mother chastised her that if she didn't fall pregnant, she was doomed, and 'you don't understand the danger'. The marriage could be annulled at any time. She did understand the danger. When one court lady gave birth to a stillborn baby, Marie Antoinette wrote that she would be pleased to give birth to any child, even a dead one. The dauphine took refuge in female friendships, chiefly with the pretty widow the Princesse de Lamballe. Finally, three years after she arrived, the king requested that a doctor examine and talk candidly to the young couple. The marriage was consummated.

In 1772 the king requested that the court jeweller, Claude Auguste Boehmer, make the grandest necklace possible for his mistress, Jeanne du Barry, at a cost of 2 million livres, around £13 million today. The king ordered his darling the most fabulous necklace ever seen at Versailles. He was ageing and Jeanne knew she needed to secure her future.

The following year the king fell ill with smallpox and sent Jeanne away, and, on 10 May 1774, at sixty-four, he died. The dauphin and Marie Antoinette, waiting in her apartments, heard a 'terrible noise, exactly like thunder'. The courtiers waiting in the rooms around the old king's bedroom had rushed to the new king and queen. 'We are too young to reign,' prayed the new king and queen; he was nineteen and she eighteen, now at the head of Versailles and France.

Marie Antoinette as queen was the head of a personal household of over five hundred, distributor of patronage, the social pinnacle. She was a symbol to be displayed, to show off, to lead France, and everyone who spoke to her did so because she was expected to have the king's ear. And her brother, the

emperor, wished her to influence the king to favour Austria. She made the Princesse de Lamballe the superintendent of her household – which other ladies of superior blood resented. The queen also became fond of another vivid young lady at court, the Comtesse de Polignac. Marie Antoinette, finally as free as she ever would be, began to throw her famous parties, with gambling at cards and dancing late into the night. She fostered a small group of friends, young, glamorous courtiers with an appetite for late-night celebrations. The little group pleased the queen and it meant that gossip didn't spread; however, the problem was that some of the greatest courtiers were excluded. It's often thought that the criticism of Marie Antoinette for her excessive spending came only from ordinary people, but the revolution was fuelled by disgruntled aristocrats, excluded from her circles, and propertied men who felt that they had been locked out of Versailles. The king needed to rule with an iron will, using patronage and invitation, but Louis was young and passive, and aristocrats began to do as they pleased and whisper against him. The Duc d'Orléans, prince of the blood, cousin to the king, one of the wealthiest men in France, brother-in-law of the Princesse de Lamballe and one of the most senior aristocrats at court, became a significant player in the revolution and was seen as an advocate for the wholesale reform of royal privilege.

Early in the morning of 19 December 1778, the queen went into labour. There was a mad dash to the queen's apartments to watch. As with everything in Versailles, it was at once a strict hierarchy and totally chaotic. The closer an individual was to the emerging baby, the greater their status. The queen gave birth to a daughter at 11.30 a.m. in a room so crowded and noisy that, as one lady said, it was like a 'place of public entertainment'. The crush was too much and, soon after the birth, the queen fainted – and no one realised. Finally, the attendees realised she had collapsed and men by the windows tore them open so that she could breathe some fresh air. That the queen was largely ignored after the birth of her child underlined her purpose.

The queen had not yet entirely fulfilled her role, for females could not inherit the throne. In October 1781, she gave birth once more. The room fell silent and then the king said, 'Madam, you have fulfilled our wishes and those of France, you are the mother of a dauphin.' Marie Antoinette was twenty-five and after eleven and a half years she had fulfilled the ultimate

role of the queen consort. Maria Theresa had died at the end of the previous year, saying she would not sleep: 'I want to see death come'. The queen gave birth to another boy in 1785 – this time her dear friend, the Comtesse, now Duchesse de Polignac, had been appointed royal governess and she kept quiet the news that Marie Antoinette had gone into labour (it was also Easter Sunday so the court were occupied and didn't realise it was happening), so the queen was able to give birth without the huge crowds of onlookers.

The debt burden on the French monarchy was swelling. Tax collection was extremely inefficient, and some collectors took a large cut, the aristocracy and Church were largely excluded and so the working classes, peasants and merchants were expected to pay more to make up for it, and some parts of the country paid more than others. It wasn't simply that the taxation was unfair, but the poor and merchant classes couldn't provide enough money. As the state modernised, the burden of paying for civil servants was growing, and war with Britain from 1778 to 1783 and sending troops to America for the revolution was wildly costly. The finance ministers took out expensive loans. With the country haemorrhaging money on overseas wars, inflation rising and foodstuffs becoming more expensive, the queen and her elaborate hairstyles and gowns was an easy target.[2]

It would have been better for the monarchy if Versailles had looked more modest, but there would still have been a revolution; too many interests wanted the monarchy out of the way. The queen did spend money, as did her court, but the debt mountain wasn't her responsibility. She was characterised by the satirists and pamphleteers as an excessive spender, frittering away the state's millions on jewels, hosting parties with her friends and having affairs with courtiers. She was mocked for her smaller villa in the grounds of Versailles, Le Petit Trianon, accused of acting out a fantasy of the simple life, even though it was built in the previous reign. She constructed a little farm nearby, Le Hameau de la Reine, with a farmhouse and a dairy and a dovecote, with a real-life working farm, producing fruit, vegetables, eggs and dairy, employing a chief farmer and various workers. These small model farms were very popular in the aristocracy at the time. But the reason why Le Hameau made the aristocrats so angry was that it was an area restricted to the queen's close circle. They felt shut out. And instead of accusing the

queen of being exclusive – because who in the wider public would really care about that very much? – it was easier to mock her as a pretend shepherdess, playing at farm work when the real farmers and shepherdesses were mired in poverty. The 'shepherdess' jokes continue today.

The Queen had a close friendship with Count Fersen, a young nobleman who had served in the army fighting the British in America. He became part of her inner circle. There was jealousy about his elevated position and he, along with others such as the Princesse de Lamballe and the Duchesse de Polignac, were satirised as her lovers. Scurrilous rhymes, cartoons and pamphlets were made about Fersen, accusing him of fathering royal children. Their correspondence was destroyed but some letters in code survive in France's National Archives. They were recently decoded and showed an affectionate relationship of concern and friendship. Perhaps as they were written in 1791 and 1792, in the later years of their relationship while the queen was under surveillance, they reflect the calmer relationship of former lovers – or perhaps they were only ever flirtatious friends. It was probably likely that her friendships with Fersen and Lamballe alike were effusive relationships, sentimental and affectionate.

The necklace commissioned in 1772 by the old king for Jeanne du Barry had finally been completed, and the jewellers expected the new queen to buy it. However, Marie Antoinette declared it too expensive, and said the country was more in need of ships than of jewels. Moreover, it had been made for a woman she had disliked, a mistress who she had felt had too much prominence. It comprised 650 stones probably from India, with giant threads of diamonds ending in diamond tassels. She disliked it, saw it as a cumbersome, excessive, nothing she would ever wear. The jeweller tried again after the birth of the dauphin, but the king and queen declined. The jeweller sent a dummy paste version out to other courts in the hope that another royal lady might buy it. Should ministers have examined the spending of Louis XV after his death and told the jeweller to stop, paid off the balance? Indeed. But Versailles ran on people not speaking their mind. Six years after it had been commissioned, the necklace languished unsold.

If the queen had bought it and stuffed it in her jewellery case, or sold off the diamonds, it might have been a minor scandal of spending. Instead, it turned into a drama that threatened to blow the monarchy apart. It is ironic

that refusing to buy something pitched the queen into being so hated that she would be cast as the spendthrift woman who dragged down the nation.

On a warm August night in 1784, Cardinal de Rohan crept into the gardens of Versailles, on the brink of the most wondrous meeting of his life. The one-time Paris ambassador to Austria, he had lost Marie Antoinette's favour; she believed he had talked unfavourably against her in her mother's court, even though in Versailles he had occupied prime position in the religious affairs of the royal household and gave the king communion. The cardinal was desperate to win back the queen's favour. And then, marvellously, the queen started writing to him, privately, all facilitated by Rohan's beautiful but poor mistress Jeanne de la Motte, who claimed she was a descendant of the illegitimate line of Henry II. Via Jeanne, Marie Antoinette told Rohan in her letters that she wanted Boehmer's huge necklace and hoped to buy it secretly, if he might be able to lend her some money. She arranged to meet him to discuss it, at night in the gardens.

Rohan was transfixed when the beautiful queen came towards him and offered him a rose, and gently said, 'You may now hope that the past will be forgotten.' It was, to him, a promise of an affair. The transported cardinal returned home and promptly set about negotiating to buy the necklace for his new love. Boehmer was delighted, knocked down the price and offered payment in instalments. Marie Antoinette sent over the money for a small deposit and Rohan received word that the necklace had been sent to her. Overjoyed, he expected the queen to show him evidence of her greater regard, hoping, presumably, for further night-time meetings in Versailles. But the queen continued to cold-shoulder him, and never wore the necklace. Then the jeweller said he had not been paid the balance and was on the brink of bankruptcy.

Finally, in July 1785, Rohan panicked and told Boehmer to contact the queen. Boehmer wrote, wondering when the dear queen would wear 'the most beautiful set of diamonds'. Marie Antoinette was entirely confused and decided that Boehmer was just trying to sell her something, and threw the letter away. A few weeks later, Boehmer paid a visit to the queen's first lady of the bedchamber, Madame Campan, and told her that the queen owed him a million and a half francs for the necklace after Cardinal de Rohan had

bought it for her. Astounded, Madame Campan replied that it was impossible; the queen had not spoken to Rohan since he came back from Vienna eleven years previously. Boehmer told her that the queen had been writing secretly to Rohan and had met him at night in the palace gardens. Madame Campan was in shock, and when told the queen couldn't believe it. The whole affair was told to the king. Louis was outraged that his wife's name had been so slandered. One advisor thought it was better to hush up the whole matter, it was all so scandalous. But the king and Marie Antoinette wanted to demand an open account about what had gone on from Rohan. They saw their chance to rescue her reputation from all the accusations of spending and adultery. Marie Antoinette had refused an expensive necklace: she cared about the country's coffers. The people would be proud of her!

On 15 August, about to officiate at the royal chapel, Rohan was told he must explain himself in front of the king and queen and ministers. There, questioned on the whole affair, he realised he had been duped and said, 'My desire to be of service to Your Majesty blinded me.' He produced one of the queen's letters. It was signed 'Marie Antoinette de France', a style that the queen never used; queens always signed themselves by name only – Elizabeth I always signed 'Elizabeth' and Elizabeth II wrote 'Elizabeth R' rather than 'Elizabeth Mountbatten' or 'Elizabeth Windsor'. The king could not understand it – Rohan *must* have known that the queen would never sign a letter thus. It was hard for him to believe that Rohan was not in on the whole affair. But the cardinal had been so urgently desirous of pleasing the queen, so flattered by Jeanne, and perhaps also thought that the queen did not use her correct signature because the correspondence was clandestine. Rohan was formally arrested and taken to the Bastille. On the way, he managed to get a message to his staff to burn all his correspondence related to Jeanne – so when the royal household searched his rooms, there was nothing to find. He wasn't entirely naïve. He was sentenced to stand trial. This is the story. Sometimes, I wonder, though, if Rohan wasn't in on the matter. History presents him as the innocent dupe of women. But perhaps he did know what was happening and acted from hurt that he had been excluded from the queen's court. He didn't foresee what would be the consequences.

The beautiful lady in the gardens of Versailles, handing a rose to Rohan, had been in fact a Paris sex worker, Nicole d'Oliva, hired by Jeanne for her

resemblance to the queen. Jeanne had forged the letters from the queen, and had taken the necklace and sent it to be broken up into stones and sold on the black market across Europe.

Rohan and Jeanne were due to stand trial. The queen thought she would be proved the innocent victim. She herself asked that the details of the night-time meeting between Nicole d'Oliva and the cardinal be kept from the public record – for she knew it would become gossip. Of course it got out. Nicole, who had thought she was being hired for a sexual game, was let off with a reprimand. Jeanne and her husband were sentenced to branding and life imprisonment. The cardinal was also acquitted, although he had to apologise for his 'temerity'. With this acquittal, the idea that the queen might meet a man at night was deemed believable. When the queen heard that the cardinal had been acquitted, she was heartbroken, 'greatly afflicted', in the words of the king. The queen had thought that the trial would clear her name and put an end to the stories; she was alive to public opinion. It might have been better if she hadn't cared about public opinion at all. Initially the reports were all about Rohan and Oliva and the rest. It looked as if Marie Antoinette had escaped censure, more or less.

The aristocrats were angered by proposals to bring in a land tax in 1786, which they vehemently opposed, and the wild spending and excessive queen was an easy target. For Marie Antoinette, everything changed mid-1787 when the Parlement refused to pass the new taxes, including the stamp taxes, and the Crown sent the members away. Aristocrats were furious, saying that only those who had to bear the taxes could agree them, and the whole thing became a symbol of royal tyranny. The Madame Deficit cartoon was set in motion – and those who hated her became newly fascinated with The Affair of the Diamond Necklace. Jeanne escaped prison, fled to London and published her sensational memoirs, which castigated the queen. Cartoons poured off the presses. Marie Antoinette was compared to the worst of queens: crueller than Agrippina, worse behaved than Cleopatra, more grasping than Catherine de Medici. The queen was licentious, spendthrift, a tool of foreign powers. The king had agreed to cuts but it had little effect: debts were spiralling, the wars were ruinously expensive, and the grandeur of Versailles was bad optics. The diamond necklace, the wild scandal of sex, secret messages, diamonds and the queen was the best food for the satirists, who were men, in the same way that we note that the male

chroniclers of medieval queens were not really writing about them but creating moral examples, and we might wish that some abbesses might occasionally have written (of course there would still be accusations of vanity, but perhaps more qualified with a recognition of the expectation of queens to perform grandeur). So the male chroniclers who complain about queens have been replaced by satirists and this time, the picture is potent. Marie Antoinette was seen as vengeful – putting an innocent man of the Church on trial – and immoral, the type of woman who *might* meet a man after dark. With 'jewels' or 'bijoux' also being a slang term for the female genitalia, the affair was a gift to the critics, and cartoons were produced showing the queen with the necklace dangled between her open legs. She was also accused of secretly transferring money to Joseph II, her brother in Austria.

Marie Antoinette was more alert to image than is often suggested. She tried her best to promote herself as a royal mother to counter the visions of her as a spendthrift seducer. She commissioned portraits of herself in the hope of appealing to the cult of motherhood. Élisabeth Vigée Le Brun took sittings for her portrait. The queen had recently had a baby, Sophie, in summer 1786, and so the queen, wearing a simple gown, sat with her children – her daughter by her side, her second son on her lap and the dauphin proudly pointing at Sophie in the cradle. But Sophie died in June 1787 and so, for display, the cradle in the portrait had to be repainted as empty, with the dauphin still pointing to where Sophie had been. It's a sad picture: an empty cradle, a woman trying to prove herself. A jewel cabinet is nearby, evoking the story of a Roman woman who said her children were her jewels. The whole composition recalls aspects of portraits of the Holy Family. Marie Antoinette compares herself to Mary, declares her children the only jewels she needs. When it was displayed, crowds came to see it – without 'discernible hostility', it can only be said, and it didn't create joy.[3] Some accused the queen of using her children as props. One wonders – why could not the queen have left Sophie in the picture? She was alive when the portrait was assembled. But perhaps she would have been accused of lying, using a dead child to garner sympathy. If Marie Antoinette had started to issue such images early on, it perhaps would have protected her. By 1787, it was too late. Her spending was seen as too great.

Marie Antoinette was both alert to image and politically astute: she took an active role in the affairs of the state, particularly as regards taxation. She encouraged the reinstatement of the finance minister, Jacques Necker, in the hope of creating political reform. Necker's suggestion was to increase the numbers of what was known as the Third Estate, the bourgeois and minor aristocracy, to counter the influence of the major aristocracy and the conservatives. This infuriated the conservatives. The Queen had defended their position in the past, and she is thus blamed for 'blocking' reform – she couldn't win, it was hardly her fault that they didn't want the numbers of the others increased. The Duc d'Orléans gained power and he had given bread to the poor, rendering him popular with them. He had philosophical and moral beliefs in constitutional monarchy and widening representation in government to the lower classes; but the same was not true of many of the aristocrats who rose up against her. The story is always that the poor came for Marie Antoinette, but the revolution was pushed forward by an aristocracy that didn't want to pay tax – and were affronted by being locked out of the queen's inner circle at Versailles.

The king declared that in May 1789 there would be a meeting of the Estates General – an assembly that had not met since the early seventeenth century – to discuss taxes. The assembly included representations from the nobility, Church and peasantry, although there were comparatively few from the peasant classes. A week before, there was a riot in Paris over wages and 300 people were killed. As she prepared to walk through the crowd in early May, the queen said, 'I must go like an actress, exhibit myself to a public that may hiss me.'

Early in the morning of 4 June, the little dauphin died, with Marie Antoinette at his side. While the king and queen were in mourning, the Estates General took decisions about the king and the constitution. The king announced tax reforms but stated that the three estates were essentially independent and could vote on their own reforms; the Third Estate protested, and then demanded that votes be counted by head, not estate, and the nobility refused. They were not going to give up privileges. The royals were blamed for everything going wrong and on 14 July, the hated Bastille was torn down. Nearly a hundred people were killed. The king wrote '*rien*' in his journal for that day; there was no hunting. But as one aristocrat told him, it was not a riot, 'It is a revolution.'

The poor were angry about shocking food shortages, spending sometimes half of their income on bread. The king and household finally realised the danger. The most unpopular courtiers were told to flee. The Duchesse de Polignac, so often Marie Antoinette's lesbian lover in the pamphlets, begged to stay. 'I am terrified of everything,' the queen told her. 'In the name of our friendship, go.' The king and queen insisted it was their duty to stay but, with so many of their household gone, they were even more unprotected. In Paris inflation, food shortages and bread and wage riots continued. There were constant declarations that the poor should march on Versailles, including at the property of the Duc d'Orléans, the Palais Royal in Paris. Did he encourage the calls to take Versailles? On Monday 5 October, a group of market women demonstrated in Paris against food shortages. More joined, they seized weapons and around 7,000 set out for Versailles. They gathered outside the palace. The queen refused to share the king's rooms in order not to endanger him. At four the next morning, the crowds broke into the apartments. Marie Antoinette was bundled to the king's apartments. She and the king appeared on the balcony with the children – and the crowds told them to send the children back into the rooms. The crowds demanded they go to Paris and at half past midday the royal family set out on a seven-hour journey, surrounded by angry crowds and escorted by the National Guard. At Versailles, the people rushed through the apartments and put a pike through the queen's bed.

The queen was the most hated of all. For there is always one more function of a queen. It is not just to be traded to create diplomatic bonds, to marry, to procreate, to head society, to support. It is to be hated. Detesting the king is too much – he might have been appointed by God, after all. Thus, when the monarchy is in trouble, the hatred is directed to the queen. As with Elizabeth I, women must be beautiful to be acceptable but, if a woman spends money or effort to be beautiful, then she is a problem. And as with Eleanor of Aquitaine, declared vain because she wore colourful gowns, if a woman creates her own appearance, she is dangerous and must be brought down. If female beauty can betray men, ensnare them, as with Cleopatra, it is hazardous, and must only be allowed in strict confines. Marie Antoinette had gone too far, entangled the king and the taxpayer into too much spending, so she had to be condemned.

The queen took only two gowns, one blue, one pink, and few belongings, for they thought they would return. The king thought that, if he departed willingly, all would be saved. The Princesse de Lamballe had greater foresight: 'We shall never come back,' she said.

They were taken to the Tuileries. They still retained a court around them and the old rituals of public dinners, and rising and going to bed, were maintained. The children played in the gardens. The royal family attended church services, Marie Antoinette's favourite hairdresser and dressmaker were permitted to come to her and the Princesse de Lamballe even staged some parties in her rooms. 'Kings who become prisoners are not far from death,' the queen said. But she decided that her strategy should be 'patience, time and inspiring in [the people] a great confidence'. Catherine the Great wrote from Russia, trying to be helpful. 'Kings should go their own way without worrying about the cries of the people, as the moon goes on its course without being stopped by the cries of dogs.' But those days were over.

'Our situation is frightful,' said Marie Antoinette. Count Fersen and others of her friends and advisors had been telling her to flee, but she refused to leave the king. She expected her brother the emperor to help, but she was told that he could not consider sending troops until the king and queen were safe and he did not advise them to flee. The royals decided to travel to Montmédy, a royalist town in the north-east, in the hope that, if the king showed himself, the town would rally and the emperor and other monarchs would send troops. They wouldn't be far from the border with the Austrian Empire, who could assist them. Count Fersen wanted to accompany the party all the way, but the king refused. Fersen suggested splitting up into two smaller carriages, but the royals would not be separated, and so they would travel in a giant carriage. The party would be the king and queen, their two surviving children, the king's sister and the royal governess, who was determined not to leave the children. No military man or commander used to thinking on their feet would go with them. Instead they would be led by the king, who was passive and indecisive, unused to command, and three women who had never ventured out of the royal gilded cage. They packed the king's robe and crown in the carriage.

On the morning of 21 June, servants went to wake the king and then the queen. They were not there. Soon all Paris was talking and a crowd gathered outside the Tuileries, calling for the queen. The birds had flown.

And then while they were travelling, a horse stumbled and broke its harness and the coach had to halt for it to be mended. When it set off again, the queen and her party were two hours later than had been forecast. It was only a two-hour delay, pretty standard for eighteenth-century coaching. But it was to ruin everything.

At Pont de Somme-Vesle, fifteen miles past Chalons, the Duc de Choiseul was waiting for the queen, the king and their children with a large military escort. He expected them between two-thirty and four-thirty and then the men would escort them to Stenay and then to Montmédy. The Duc, thirty-one, had been keen to help, and was both rich and avidly loyal although there had been some talk that he was 'chaotic'. His job was simple enough: wait in place for the coach. But when the coach did not arrive at the allotted time, the Duc worked himself into a spiral and decided that the queen and the rest had never departed and the plan had failed. He did not even wait for Valory, the courier who was riding ahead to update on progress. He just sent his man to inform the commanders of the troops waiting at the next posts that the 'treasure' would not be arriving after all. The soldiers left their positions and went to rest.

When Valory arrived at Choiseul's post at 6 p.m., there was no one there. He couldn't believe it. Thirty minutes later (two hours late), the royal family arrived and panicked. The king and Marie Antoinette were used to palace worlds in which everything ran like clockwork (the clocks so beloved of the king) and no one had to change plans swiftly. They had been travelling for over sixteen hours; they could not go back. They continued, hoping to find soldiers at the next stops. When they reached Sainte-Menéhould, there were no men there (there were actually forty present but they had unsaddled and were not waiting). Here they were spotted by a young official called Jean-Baptiste Drouet, who said he thought he saw the king. Perhaps Louis had looked out of the carriage. Or, more likely, the large vehicle escorted by horses, plus the presence of forty soldiers in the inn, had raised suspicions. An hour or so after the royal party had left, Drouet and another man received orders from the municipality to ride after them.

The party rolled through Clermont, where the Comte de Damas had been waiting with 140 men – who had also received the command to stand down and go to bed. Damas decided to gather what troops he could and send them after the king, an excellent decision. Finally someone was thinking on their feet. But they took the wrong turning. At 11 p.m, the royal family reached the small town of Varennes. They needed new horses, so the king's staff wandered around looking for some. To add to all the chaos, the bridge over the river was blocked as a furniture wagon had overturned. Marie Antoinette took refuge at the house of a local man who had once served the Prince de Condé, and was thus a friendly ally. If they had managed to assemble horses, they could have continued, even as late as next morning. But then Drouet arrived and the procurator, Monsieur Sauce, was informed that the king and queen were in his town. A barrier was put at the top of the town and Sauce summoned guards. The king and queen could have made a run for it, refused to stay. Instead, they accepted the invitation of Monsieur Sauce to take refuge at his house. He said that he merely needed to check their passports – he could not arrest or force them. They were only thirty-one miles from Montmédy. They were nearly there.

Sauce's house had two rooms on the upper floor and the king, queen and the rest of the royal party took one, the bodyguards the other. The queen asked for hot water and sheets for the children, the king sank into a chair. The Duc de Choiseul finally arrived and suggested they fight their way out. It was possible, for although there were people massing outside, they were local villagers, not armed men. Louis should have given the order; he did not. And Choiseul was also at fault, had already been told to use his sword if the king was arrested, and he should have just done it. Instead, Louis did what he had always done: styled himself as the nation's father and tried to address the crowds from his window, appealing to them as their king. He told them he would never leave France and simply wished to establish himself at Montmédy. They didn't believe him and accused him of wanting to flee over the border.

At six next morning, they were told they must go back to Paris. The queen was hopeful that another commander, the Marquis de Bouillé, and his troops might arrive to rescue them, for she had heard he was on his way. She and the rest of the royal family tried to delay their departure. But by seven-

thirty they could find no more excuses, and had to leave. The marquis and his men arrived an hour and a half later.

The flight from the Tuileries was possibly always doomed – it was unlikely that the king could have totally transformed his fortunes at Montmédy. People may have risen for him there, and there were royalist areas across France, but it was very unlikely that the crowds in Paris and the elites who wanted them out would change their minds. Perhaps the royal family could have fled into the Austrian Empire. If they had been accompanied by Fersen or another man of military experience and quick wits, they might have made it. It wasn't ideal that the royal governess had taken up a spot that could have held a commander such as Fersen. It was a disaster that Choiseul bolted after a mere two hours. His was the immense mistake after which all the dominoes fell.

The queen, the king and the royal family were captured, and escorted on their sombre journey back to Paris. Before the flight to Varennes, the royal family had been living in relative freedom in the Tuileries. Politicians had debated whether the king and queen might keep their position, as figureheads in a much cheaper and constitutional monarchy. But the flight had changed everything. The king wrote in his journal, 'Departure at midnight from Paris; arrived and stopped at Varennes-en-Argonne at eleven o'clock in the evening', an entry poignant in its brevity. It was the most catastrophic failed escape in history.

Marie Antoinette's hair had turned entirely white overnight (so said Madame Campan). The fair hair so praised by the early court – and so reviled by the satirists as part of her doll-like appearance – was gone, turned to that of a seventy-year-old woman. Crowds lined the streets in Paris. Forbidden to applaud the royal family or remove their hats, they watched in silence. The royals were put under guard in the Tuileries. Marie Antoinette wrote to Fersen, 'Be reassured about us, we are alive.'

In October 1791, a few months after the failed flight to Varennes, the new constitution was brought in. The Princesse de Lamballe had gone to Brussels but decided she belonged at the queen's side and hurried back. The 'only

hope that remains to me is that my son can at least be happy,' wrote Marie Antoinette. The royal couple became even more unpopular and Marie Antoinette was widely attacked in the press – a traitor now. On 20 June 1792, anniversary of the flight to Varennes, a crowd broke into the palace and told the king to wear the red cap of liberty. The queen wished to remain with the king but the Princess de Lamballe and her ladies told to her to hide, for fear she would be killed. There was talk of trying to escape again, possibly to Normandy and then England, but the king and queen thought this would mean the loss of their throne. They did not see that they were already lost. The queen believed she would be rescued by Austrian troops, that her brother would not leave her. The Austrian and Prussian armies invaded France, and Austria threatened never-to-be-forgotten vengeance if the royal family were hurt. But the invasion only pushed the revolutionaries to make plans for deposing the monarch. On 10 August, a huge crowd set out for the Tuileries. On hearing they were coming, the royal family had to leave for protection to the legislative assembly. They were later taken to the Tower at the Temple, not too far from the Bastille. The Tuileries was ransacked, courtiers and Swiss guards killed. A sign was affixed 'House to Let'.

The Princesse de Lamballe and other royal attendants were removed from the royal family and imprisoned. They were put on trial. Most were pardoned, including the royal governess. The Princesse de Lamballe agreed to promise the oath of liberty but refused to subscribe to 'hatred' of the king and queen and so she was sent out to the yard, where those found guilty were massacred (children aged around eight were, they said, those who held most tenaciously to life). At the sight of the blood and broken bodies, the Princesse had cried, 'I am lost,' and fallen back, but guards pushed her forward to be struck. The prison staff, who disagreed with the massacres, had allowed some prisoners to escape, particularly women, but the Princesse was too well known. She had to die.

On 3 September Marie Antoinette, in the Tower, heard a scream from downstairs and the shouts of the mob outside. The officers of the Tower hurried to close the shutters of the upper room, where she was sitting. For outside her window was the severed head of the Princesse de Lamballe, held

up on a pike by the crowd. The crowd wanted Marie Antoinette to kiss the Princess's mouth. The beautiful blonde ringlets were arranged as if she was still at Versailles. The crowd had stopped at a hairdresser on the way. Another pike bore her innards and another a bloody scrap of her torn chemise. The king heard the shouting and asked an officer for the reason. 'They are trying to show you the head of Madame de Lamballe,' he said. The people scrambled up the rubble by the walls of the tower to show the head to the queen. She fainted when she understood that her friend's head was outside. Fortunately and humanely, the commissioner of the Tower refused to allow the crowd to enter the precincts. The Queen wept all night for her friend.

On the afternoon of 20 January 1793, Marie Antoinette was told that her husband would be executed the next day – he had been put on trial and found guilty at the end of the previous year. The National Convention had voted to execute him, although a sizeable minority had preferred detention until peaceful times. She begged to spend this last night together, but the king said he had too much to prepare and would visit her and the children in the morning. He did not. He was executed to shouts of joy. The queen was now the 'Widow Capet', the wife of the deceased 'Citizen Louis Capet', not the queen or even an Austrian princess. The question was what to do with her. Some advocated sending her to the Holy Roman Empire, for money or for a prisoner swap. Thomas Paine thought she should be sent to America. On 3 July, the dauphin, eight-year-old Louis Charles was taken from the queen to be 'retrained' in revolutionary ideals and was sent to live with a cobbler. On 1 August, at two in the morning, Marie Antoinette was woken and told to dress in the presence of the guards and that she was to be escorted to the prison of the Conciergerie. She would live there as prisoner number 280. On the way there, she hit her head on the doorframe, and the guards asked if she was hurt. 'Nothing now can hurt me,' she replied.

The queen had to be killed. The Committee of Public Safety had decreed it. The king had been executed by the Convention, and according to a vote. But now Paris needed her death. As the most passionate to kill her, Jacques Hébert threatened to cut off her head himself, if she was not executed, saying to the others on the committee, 'I have promised it on your behalf to

the *sans culottes* who are asking for it' and he told the rest of the men that without the commoners 'you would not exist', a clear threat that the crowd needed to be satiated – Marie Antoinette had to be executed so the men could hold to power. She had even been hauled out of bed in the middle of the night on 12 October, and subject to a secret interrogation. They were desperately trying to find some accusations that stuck.

On 14 October, Marie Antoinette was put on trial. She was accused of presiding over wild orgies in Versailles, resisting the Revolution, emptying the treasury coffers to give it to Austria, the massacre of her guards, declaring her son to be king and committing incest with him. She was questioned about the affair of the diamond necklace and spending too much on the Petit Trianon, and constantly accused of ruling Louis. The king's trial had actually featured signed documents. Hers was mainly hearsay. The king had been allowed to discuss matters and evidence with his lawyers in advance, the queen was not. The first witness on 14 October was a national guardsman who had begun working at Versailles in 1789. He described years and years of orgies, none of which he had seen. Another witness said there had been wine under the queen's bed, which proved she was going to get the Swiss Guards drunk to kill French people. Someone else said they saw her give a cross look at the National Guards. Another found a paper with figures written on it and Marie Antoinette explained it was her son's maths practice. It was all hopeless stuff. She declared that she did not influence the king to make the flight to Varennes; the king made his own decisions. And this was an effective defence: if women were not thought much of by the Regime, secondary citizens who should have no influence over men, then Marie Antoinette should be believed when she said she had no power over the king. But then Hébert came in with more arguments, declaring he had interviewed Marie Antoinette's son and the boy said that she had sexually abused him. Marie Antoinette had been calm with the other witnesses, now she was overwhelmed with distress. Everything in the trial was what she had been accused of before: profligacy, sexual immorality, ruling over the king, being an agent for Austria. But the incest was new.

Her accusers said that the written proof would be found in papers of the king, but such papers were not shown. She was found guilty of sending money to Austria, conspiracy against the state and giving information to the Austrian enemy, which made her guilty of high treason. She had expected

life imprisonment. Instead, as she wrote to the king's sister at 4.30 in the morning on 16 October, 'I have been condemned to death, not to a shameful death, that can only be for criminals, but in order to rejoin your brother. Innocent like him, I hope to demonstrate the same firmness as he did at the end.' Unlike the king, she was not allowed visitors and not even a priest. In the midst of the revolutionary chaos, the new ruling class were afraid but sure, as Hébert had been, that if they killed the queen, the crowds would not kill them. And so her trial, her imprisonment, her execution were greatly more severe than that of her husband. A woman who could never have assumed the throne became public enemy number one.

Rosalie Lamorlière, the maid of Madame Richard, wife of the jailer, had become maid to the queen, and she arrived at seven to offer her food. She found the queen lying on the bed, in her black dress, looking at the barred window. Marie Antoinette had not eaten for days, and could eat only a few spoonfuls of the bouillon Rosalie pressed upon her. She was told that she could not wear black in front of the crowd, in case she was insulted for wearing mourning, so she had to wear white. She attempted to change in a small niche between the wall and the bed, with Rosalie in front of her, but the guard walked round to stare. She asked him, 'Monsieur, for decency's sake, let me change my chemise in private,' but he told her he had been instructed to watch her at all times. When she was dressed, the executioner, Charles Henri Sanson, came to chop off her hair, and then her hands were bound tightly behind her back. She pleaded, 'You did not bind the hands of Louis XVI.' But she was bundled off, into a cart, and through the crowds on the streets of Paris.

Marie Antoinette stood upright, gathering all her powers of dignity. At the sight of the Tuileries, her will failed her and tears came to her eyes. At the Place Du Carrousel, she walked swiftly up the steps of the scaffold, apologising to Sanson for stepping on his foot. 'I did not do it on purpose,' she said. She knelt at the guillotine, and her head was cut off at 12.15 p.m.. Her head, still beautiful, was exhibited to the exhilarated crowd. The gravediggers were eating their lunch at the time, so the body and head were left on the grass. While her head lay there, Madame Tussaud came to sculpt it in wax. Marie Antoinette, who had come from Austria at fourteen, had been trained to be the perfect queen, was dead at thirty-seven.

Prisoner number 280's belongings at the Conciergerie were then inventoried so they could be given out to the female prisoners at the Salpêtrière prison, as was customary. Marie Antoinette, the queen who had grown up in palaces, whose hairstyles and make-up had mesmerised the court and been blamed for everything, left behind her a few underclothes, two pairs of black stockings, a headdress, a length of black crepe and some 'pockets' for carrying belongings, a small box of pomade, a 'big fine sponge' and a box of powder.

Ultimately, Marie Antoinette became symbolic of the end of absolutist monarchy. The queen had been political, she had power, and for the male satirists and writers, she had done more than a woman should, so she should be torn apart as frivolous, extravagant, lascivious. No matter that Empress Josephine, wife of Napoleon, who succeeded her not too many years later, had even more attendants and expensive gowns. The execution of Marie Antoinette was used as the symbol of the guarantee of democracy; the execution of the king appears to be barely relevant. One woman became everything that was wrong with monarchy and therefore also became the symbol of everything that was wrong with women: spendthrift, scandalous, selfish, uncomprehending of the struggles of others. It is a curious question: if the monarchy is such a problem, why leave her son Louis Charles alive and kill Marie Antoinette? And why leave alive the king's brothers, the direct heirs? To be fair, Louis Charles died not long after his mother, of scrofula as well as ill treatment and cruel neglect under house arrest – but he could instead have been executed. Plenty of children were. And Louis XVI's younger brothers had fled earlier, and were safe in exile but left unscathed. Spies or agents could have killed them. They did indeed later take the throne as Louis XVIII and Charles X in the Bourbon Restoration and the son of the Duc d'Orléans became king after them. Marie Antoinette was no threat. At least the king had been put on trial with actual pieces of evidence and a democratic vote had been taken on his execution, after his trial. Marie Antoinette was despatched swiftly and the decision had been taken in secret, before the trial. For the ordinary people had been told that if they rid themselves of the monarchy, everything would improve, they would have bread and more representation. If the queen wasn't killed, then perhaps the

ordinary people might start asking questions – about whether they were going to be any better off under the new regime. The queen had herself painted and even defended herself at trial as a royal mother. Like Cleopatra she presented herself as a parent above all, but her efforts were ignored. Everyone remembers the young girl with thousands of dresses. And of her children, only her eldest daughter, Marie Thérèse, reached adulthood. She was later sent to Vienna in a prisoner exchange and lived there, married her cousin, and then lived in Buckinghamshire. She once, during Napoleon's regime, tried to take the throne – he declared her 'the only man' in the family.

Queens are always symbolic, and if they don't symbolise what the king – or the new ruling elite – wants, they are punished. The king had controlled Versailles and its spending. But the queen was blamed for it all. The story of Marie Antoinette tells us a lot about the function of the queen. The queen is there to support the king, to symbolise monarchy, to preside over events, to patronise and intercede. She has one more role: she is there as a human target. For when the country is angry with the king, it often does not want to admit it, so all the faults must be foisted on the queen. If you get rid of the queen, then you can purify the institution. Henry VIII did the same, declaring Anne had lost him everything. Women can be scapegoats for male governance going wrong, from Anne to James I's witches to Marie Antoinette. The last queen of France could not escape the image imposed upon her, Madame Deficit, the debt balloon, so she lost her head.

Catherine the Great, who had sent supportive (although totally unhelpful) words while the French royals were in crisis, died seven years after the French Revolution. In telling the king and queen that they should go their own way, she revealed her own understanding of monarchy: absolutist, always right, supported by its own godliness. Born Princess Sophia Augusta in the province of Pomerania, Prussia, Catherine was not Russian or even born into the position as the emperor's daughter. Like many queens from the ancient world and the 800s or around then, she was a consort who became a queen. She was married to her second cousin, Peter of Russia, in 1745 when

she was sixteen. In Russia, she applied herself to learning Russian – once catching pneumonia because she was up late working – even though French was the language of the court.

The first ever female ruler of Russia had been Catherine (born Marta), second wife of Peter the Great, who started out as impoverished, a servant, possibly a washerwoman. When Peter died in 1725, she decided she should be empress, even though they had sons. She didn't say she was ruling for her son, as women from Cleopatra to Wu Zetian had done. She was ruling alone. She died two years later, but she had set the stage for female monarchy. Nearly fifteen years after her death, following various other monarchs, her daughter Empress Elizabeth seized the throne from the infant Ivan VI and declared herself ruler and decreed her nephew would be her heir. He was a teenager at the time; she could present herself as custodian of the throne for him, but she was sole sovereign, claiming her birthright as the daughter of Peter the Great. 'Whom do you want to serve: me, your natural sovereign, or those who have stolen my inheritance?', she had said as she arrived at the headquarters of a military regiment; they agreed to march for her. Elizabeth was wildly popular during her eleven-year reign due to her efforts for diplomacy, her policy of kick-starting the economy with building projects and saying that no one would be executed during her reign – and clever references to her father as part of her imagery. In early 1762, when Catherine was thirty-two, the Empress Elizabeth died. Her nephew, Catherine's husband Peter, came to the throne and Catherine became empress. The new Peter was extremely unpopular for his pro-Prussian policies, and not six months later Catherine was plotting his ousting. In July 1762, the emperor was arrested and signed his document of abdication. He died eight days later, apparently from a stroke, but more likely he was assassinated. Catherine reigned for thirty-four years and continued Elizabeth's policy of building, increased trade and trade routes and expanded the borders of Russia, founding new cities as she did so. Her greatest innovation was in bringing in health services for her people, opening hospitals and creating a centralised medical administration, as well as trying to encourage mass uptake of the smallpox vaccination. She brought in a network of national schools across the country, even launching the first public girls' schools in Europe. Serfs were given the right to go to law if their

lord did not treat them as they should, and overall life improved for most people in Russia, although the system remained extremely unequal.

Catherine spearheaded a Russian enlightenment and fostered good relations with European powers. She died at the age of sixty-seven after proving Elizabeth's legacy: that a woman who was a consort, not even a king's daughter, could rule better than a man (although her successors were all male). But she is not primarily remembered for seizing the throne against the odds, guiding economic progress, bringing in state education or state healthcare, or military success. She is remembered for one thing: sex with a horse.

The story of the horse was an invention of British and French satirists (the French in 1796 hardly had much sympathy for absolute monarchy, so Catherine was an enemy), and was repeated by German critics of Russia, all to prove the shocking and uncivilised behaviour of the Russians. The essence was that Catherine had an endless and scandalous desire for sex, then had sex with horses, and finally she was killed when a horse with which she was having sex fell on her – justice is done, the bad woman is punished. Total rubbish: she died peacefully of a stroke at the age of sixty-seven. But why has something invented by her critics, and entirely nonsensical at that, stuck? So often with queens, the worst or most lurid thing that one satirist or critic, on the enemy side, says about them has come to entirely represent them: a strange synecdoche. Cleopatra is a sex-mad failure (according to the Romans), Mary I was the cruellest of Tudors. Marie Antoinette spent all the country's money on fashion and Catherine the Great had sex with her horse.

No matter what generations of scholars do, these representations are all-pervasive. These stories are like the whole problem of 'vanity'; women are allowed to be beautiful within permitted boundaries, but if they become preoccupied by it outside of these boundaries, or if their beauty gives them power, it is too challenging, they are accused of vanity. Beauty to fit in with male demands is a good thing, anything that might exceed male demands and is about projecting power is 'vanity'. The minute a woman uses looks or beauty to pursue political aims, she is accused of vanity, like Elizabeth I or Cleopatra. It makes women seem like they don't need men, and that's a problem. Or they could be trying to control men, and that's even worse. And

queens are monsters of power. The enemies of Catherine the Great wanted to cast this queen as unnatural, a horror in charge of a country they could not conquer so they said she had sex with horses. In the end, a queen or any woman with power cannot be a normal woman, especially one who deposes her husband. Marie Antoinette and Catherine the Great were both accused of excess. The charges stuck and still we believe in one queen whose hairstyles sank the economy and another who stole a man's position and replaced her husband with a horse.

CHAPTER NINE
Queens of Empire: Victoria

Victoria is Britain's most painted queen. She was on biscuit tins, mugs, souvenir items, portraits, newspapers and magazines. She understood the power of representation, the importance of royal spin. She had herself painted with Albert as Mary in the Holy Family, with her son, the future Edward VII, symbolising the baby Jesus (something of a stretch, considering he would be a keen womaniser). Victoria is often thought of as a dour older queen, never amused, the widow of Windsor in the photographs, but the image that prevailed through her reign was the young queen, vibrant, mother of a happy family, and it was used to encourage the expansion of the Victorian economy – and its empire machine.

'I am queen,' Victoria wrote when she came to the throne in 1839, only just eighteen, after a long campaign from her mother to make her subservient. When Victoria arrived on the throne she vowed to reign alone, without her overbearing mother. And there was deemed to be no model for her. By the time of Victoria's childhood, Elizabeth was seen as a poor example as a queen, castigated for her lack of a child and for executing Mary, Queen of Scots. For the men around Victoria, Mary I, Elizabeth and Anne were all failures because they had not produced heirs. Queen Anne had presided over cabinet meetings and the two-party system and developed a system of queenship by which her husband was very clearly consort and subject, but it seemed to mean nothing if she did not have an heir.

When Princess Charlotte, daughter of the future George IV, was the only heir to the throne, she was popular but the expectation among her family and her husband, Leopold, was that he would assume a significant role;

more a joint monarchy than queen and husband. Charlotte died in 1817 having delivered a stillborn son, after a labour of fifty hours. The doctors had not dared intervene and thus possibly lose the future queen, and the politicians who were the official witnesses (her parents were not present), ordered no intervention either. Charlotte's uncles raced to get married and produce the next heir to the throne – for power and money.

Victoria, born in 1819, daughter of a fourth son, Edward, Duke of Kent, prided herself on being 'the first person ever to be called Victoria' (although there had in fact been the occasional Victoria in the parish registers before her). She had been given the name, after her mother's Victoire, by the prince regent, the future George IV; it was a modern invented name, rather than those her father wanted, Charlotte or Augusta. The unique, many would have thought entirely bizarre, nature of her name, borrowed from the French no less (only a few years after the end of the Napoleonic Wars), was meant to signify that she would never be queen. When she came to the throne at the age of just eighteen, she was told, firmly, that she had to marry. Her uncles George IV and William IV had behaved cavalierly, the first had mistresses and the second illegitimate children (by the badly treated Dorothea Jordan) attending him at the palace. It was up to the young queen to correct the course and symbolise morality for the industrial age. And the monstrous potential of female rule had to be immediately corrected by marriage. Victoria's coronation saw fretting about women's independence: such as a cartoon in which two young ladies talking said that Victoria would create a 'parliament of women' and pass an act that 'women, married or single, are to have a roving commission to go where they like, do as they like, and work when they like and… shall have a gallon of cream of the valley each to drink health to the queen'. What horrors![1]

The husband question was a queen's biggest problem, still, in the nineteenth century. They wanted Victoria married, but they did not want a king.

In the 1840s, Princess Mamochisane was the right-hand woman to her father, King Sebetwane of the Makololo people. He had conquered swathes of the area of modern-day Zambia, and was praised for his merciful treatment of those he conquered. She led military campaigns for him and he decreed that she would succeed him when he died. In 1851 she took the

throne. The rule was that she would marry but alternate husbands, so that no one man saw himself as a king and tried to seize power. The Scottish missionary, David Livingstone, who had visited the realm with the agreement of her father, returned to see she had stood down in favour of her half-brother. Livingstone claimed it was because Queen Mamochisane wished to have one husband rather than many. It was a version of the Victoria and Albert monarchy imposed on Mamochisane, a vision from Livingstone that a woman would prefer husband and family to all else. She married a powerful neighbouring king later. More likely she was encouraged to step down for her half-brother, told the country would not be safe under her, she was better making a marriage alliance. Yet alternating husbands so that no one man got too much power didn't seem a bad solution to the husband problem.

Victoria walked the line between being monarch of a nation that wanted a myth of power and showing herself as corresponding to the expectations of correct female behaviour: devoted to husband and subservient. She said she would obey Prince Albert in her wedding vows in 1840, against the wishes of her ministers, and yet she refused to allow him to occupy a position in the House of Lords or bring German attendants – just as consorts such as Queen Charlotte, wife of George III, had been denied.

Victoria and those around her started the image-making early. Royal weddings had previously been quiet evening affairs with the bride wearing no particular gown, sometimes silver to show wealth. Weddings overall tended to be smaller affairs, with the bride wearing a dress of any colour; it was often the visits after the wedding that were significant. But the wedding of Victoria had to be a grand show. It was instead to be a large daytime event, so the crowds could see them driving to the ceremony. Victoria was gowned in white, to symbolise purity and remind the public that she was entirely unlike her debauched uncles and predecessors, George IV and William IV. A white dress for a wedding was almost unheard of. Onlookers thought that Victoria looked as if she was wearing her nightdress and there were comments that Albert appeared to be wearing 'borrowed clothes'. But the idea of a giant royal wedding, centred around the bride in white, a way of capturing loyalty and patriotic enthusiasm, had caught on now forever – and for non-royal women the white wedding spread like wildfire.

And yet, officially, a married woman still had no property of her own after marriage – in his will, a kindly husband would leave his wife all her belongings, right down to combs and stockings, as otherwise, strictly speaking they went to the heir. Victoria was styled with intensive efficiency as an ordinary woman of the rising gentry class, going off on her short honeymoon in a plain bonnet and gown. But there were aspects of her that, like queens before her, made her the form of a magical man; she was independent of her husband, and her palaces, royal belongings, and children would be hers, along with the country.

Victoria staked a claim for female monarchy. She demanded her ministers give her information, read newspapers avidly and even wrote to men and women across the empire to find out what was really going on. In terms of the image, she allied herself with a middle-class aesthetic, wearing a bonnet and dark dress for travelling like any industrialist's wife, having herself photographed standing next to Albert, as if she were attending to him. She turned motherhood, which had been seen as a weakness that excluded women from intellectual endeavour (of course poor women were supposed to keep working through pregnancy) into a strength, with effective photos of the entire royal family with her. She was a monarch of affordable consumerism, from publicising her tables of birthday presents to setting off the trend for Christmas, after a picture of her, Albert and their tree was published on the front of the *Illustrated London News* in 1848. In quick succession came the Christmas card, the Christmas cracker and the vision of Christmas as perfect families exchanging presents. Victoria's portraits, her drawings and photography, even her own travel book, *Highland Leaves*, intersected and inspired the creation of things for the middle classes to buy and for the working classes to desire, from the factories springing up across the country, and that was just what business wanted. For buying, displaying the right type of consumer product became the woman's job, from Christmas crackers to birthday presents. Victoria's use of image was so successful that it has barely been recognised as a strategy; it is elided with her. But her keen interest in reading, fiction and politics, has been long overlooked; newly recognised, it's not a jump to suggest she shaped her own imagery.[2]

After their wedding Albert began to push for power but was refused. By 1850, after a succession of children had meant he took over each time while the queen was in the later stages of pregnancy, Albert declared himself essentially as king. 'As the natural head of the family, superintendent of her household, manager of her private affairs, sole confidential advisor in politics, and only assistant in her communications with the officers of her government, he is, besides, the husband of the queen… her permanent minister.' So he claimed. He also claimed the role of consort meant dominance over the queen's affairs and he used that old chestnut of a word 'natural'. He was a man, so it was natural. The marriage that Victoria endlessly sentimentalised after his death was also a battle for control.

Like other influential Victorian women, Victoria corresponded just enough to prevailing norms, manoeuvring within them to gain power, often, like significant writers such as Charlotte Bronte and George Eliot, using conventional dress to veil unconventional attitudes. And yet, as the age wore on, she became complicit in the norms themselves, instructing her daughters and granddaughters, telling women how to behave. She declared the idea of votes for women a 'wicked folly'. And yet, dealing with her prime ministers, she was acute and avidly interested in current affairs. And when it came to the suffrage campaign, the campaigners repeatedly used Victoria as an example of how politics was not beyond female understanding. The queen was a woman entrusted with the most complicated political questions, and thus, if a queen could oversee politics, then surely a woman could vote?[3] Victoria as a queen had to intersect with expectations of feminine respectability, and the vote was not respectable – even if she'd agreed with votes for women, it would have diminished her own power to say so. And so, Victoria, despite her own professed horror of the 'folly', became one of the most persuasive arguments for votes for women.

Victoria's reign, like that of Elizabeth I, shows us how some of the reigns of the queens viewed as the greatest see a diminution of the royal authority. Elizabeth I's reign saw a significant progression in the power of parliament, and indeed her advisors, who could enact the execution warrant on Mary, Queen of Scots without her knowledge – and constant pressure to marry. In the course of Victoria's reign, the role of the monarchy was much reduced. It was, by the end, constitutional monarchy *par excellence*, allowing the

monarch only to advise and warn. We have seen before how the movement towards constitutional monarchy speeds up in the time of queens regnant. As one scholar of Victoria and the vote has written, 'misogyny played no small part in modernizing the monarchy'.[4] Elizabeth was excluded from decisions by her ministers. Victoria was informed by men what she should do. When she arrived on the throne she had had little training, so Lord Melbourne, her first prime minister, advised her on what her role should be. When Lord Melbourne tried to resign after he lost a vote of no confidence, she said she did not want to lose her ladies-in-waiting, who had been allies of Melbourne. Robert Peel said he could not form an opposition government in such a situation and so Melbourne limped on until he lost even more severely – and Peel then formed a government. Victoria was widely attacked and there were complaints the country was hanging on a 'schoolgirl's smile'. Victoria later said she regretted what had become known as 'The Bedchamber Crisis' but really it played into the hands of Peel, who got to form a government with a greater majority. It was a signal to Victoria: even your ladies-in-waiting must be chosen by the government. Elizabeth had relied greatly upon hers as friends and supporters; this could not be the case in the nineteenth century.

Queens consort had always been symbolic and were punished if they did not support the wishes of the king or the ruling elite. With Victoria, the queen took on a largely symbolic role. Her image became all-powerful. And she became the image of an expanding and oppressive empire through which other queens and monarchs lost their power.

Queen Victoria had dozens of godchildren, some of whom were royals and some were royals from the empire. Most were named with some combination of Victoria, Victor, Alexandrina or Albert. And it was an indication of imperial power: Victoria agreed to almost sixty requests to be a godparent and Prince Albert, as far as we know, did not receive any more than two. She displayed genuine fondness for many of her charges. Others were used mainly as buttresses for her political, religious and international reach; empire was proved as good. The image of the head of the British Empire accepting into her Christian circle children from the various colonies she ruled, sometimes the offspring of rulers her armies had

displaced, was a potent one, meant to show the beneficent nature of the empire. But they were always viewed as separate, not adopted children, but other to the queen's circle.

Aina was born in 1843, in Oke-Odan, in West Africa. Her village was invaded when she was five by the army of the neighbouring Dahomey kingdom, and the residents were killed or sold into slavery. Aina was taken to the court of the Dahomey king, Gezo.

A British mission under Captain Forbes arrived in 1850 to attempt to persuade King Gezo to end the slave trade. Captain Forbes thought seven-year-old Aina was about to be sacrificed in a show for the British, and told Gezo that Queen Victoria could not forgive the death of a child. The king offered the child as a gift to the queen. Forbes renamed her Sarah or Sally Forbes Bonetta after himself and his ship, the *Bonetta*, and wrote in his diary that refusing her as a gift would have 'signed her death warrant'. He brought her back to England and the Queen agreed to pay for her education and asked to meet her. Victoria wrote in her diary, 'She is 7 years old, sharp & intelligent, & speaks English.' Sarah apparently told the queen that she had been kept as a captive and told she would be sacrificed when the king desired it.

Sarah remained with the Forbes family for a short time, before it was decided that, because the cold climate was thought not to suit her, she would travel to Sierra Leone to attend a missionary school. She was listed in the register as the ward of Victoria. Victoria wrote to her from time to time and finding her a new home when Sarah returned to England at the age of twelve or so and was sent to live with a Kent missionary and his wife who had been in Sierra Leone. When she was eighteen Sarah was introduced into society, where she impressed thanks to her skills at music and languages.

At the age of nineteen, Sarah married a successful Sierra Leonean trader, James Davies, whose parents were Yoruba and had been enslaved and then freed. They had met while Sarah was in Freetown. Her relationship with Victoria meant their wedding was a society event and the queen oversaw details, including the wedding gown. They returned to West Africa and within the year, 1863, they had their first child, Victoria Forbes Bonetta Davies, who was goddaughter to the queen, and then had two more in relatively quick succession. Little Victoria was presented to Queen Victoria at around the age of four. The monarch invited her to visit on several

occasions. Sadly, Sarah was to die at the age of thirty-seven, from tuberculosis in Madeira. Victoria, aged seventeen, happened to be travelling to visit her godmother when she learned of the death of her mother. As the queen wrote: 'my black godchild… was dreadfully upset & distressed… Her father has failed in business, which aggravated her poor mother's illness… I shall give her an annuity.' Little Victoria was educated at Cheltenham Ladies' College, paid for by the Crown, and went on to marry John Randle, an African doctor based in Lagos who had been trained in Scotland. Princess Beatrice, the youngest daughter of the queen, became godmother to Victoria Bonetta's first daughter.

Another godchild of Queen Victoria was the daughter of Chikaveera (Chikka) Virarajendra, ruler of the Indian kingdom of Coorg (also known as Kodagu). In 1834, his kingdom was taken by the East India Company and he was deposed. Chikka spent years in exile in Benares with his children, but came to England in the early 1850s to plead with the queen for the restoration of his lands. His attempt was unsuccessful, but Victoria agreed to act as godparent for his eleven-year-old daughter. At her baptism she took the name Victoria Gouramma and converted to Christianity. Chikka died in 1859 and was buried in Kensal Green cemetery. Although the royal family had promised to care for Victoria – and they did look to her education and welfare – she was forbidden to spend much time with her real family, for fear that she would return to what were seen as heathen ways. Or so the line went; perhaps it was really because they didn't want her trying to claim her position as queen of Coorg.

Victoria Gouramma chafed against the restrictions placed upon her, and made attempts to escape the life that Victoria had planned. In the end she married someone considered unsuitable – he was thirty years older than her, and certainly not the man who had featured in the royal family's plans – but, after having one child, she died of tuberculosis at the early age of twenty-two. She could have been a queen, but the East India Company took that away from her.

Hare Pomare was a Māori child born in England after his parents Hare and Hariata came over from New Zealand as part of a touring group, performing Māori songs and dances at receptions and events. The tour had been organised by a lay preacher living in New Zealand, William Jenkins, who persuaded fourteen Māori people to join. They embarked for the

voyage in February 1863. They were promised that they would 'live with him and his Englishmen and eat with them', but instead Jenkins travelled first class and they travelled in steerage and were given very poor food, and relied on presents of extra food from soldiers. The stress was terrible and one of the Māori collapsed with mental distress during the voyage and was sent to an asylum. The party arrived in England and their performances were a great success, but they were not paid, they were housed in charitable institutions, and they were refused permission to return home. They performed for the queen at Osborne House on the Isle of Wight. Victoria realised that Hariata was pregnant, and suggested she might be the child's godmother. Having escaped Jenkins, the couple stayed in London with a woman who had previously been a missionary in New Zealand and who spoke Māori. Victoria paid their expenses.

After the birth of Hare and Haraita's child in October 1863, thought to be the first Māori born in Britain, and named Albert Victor after the prince consort and the queen, their host accompanied them to visit Victoria to present her new godchild. The queen then paid for the family to return to their homeland, first class. The rest of the Māori performers were abandoned by Jenkins, and Dorothea Weale, philanthropist, suffragist, advocate for female education and founder of St Hilda's College, Oxford, donated money for their support. Their passage back was arranged by the government; they finally arrived back in July 1864, although two died on the voyage.

We do not have a full understanding of Albert Victor's later life. We know that he was presented to Victoria's son, the Duke of Edinburgh, on a visit to New Zealand in 1869, but have very little further detail. He was said to have left New Zealand to find his fortune at sea, but his eventual fate remains uncertain.

Being a godchild didn't allow you to access the royal family.

In China in 1839, Lin Zexu, instructed by the emperor, wrote to Queen Victoria about the British trade in opium. He wrote, 'I have heard that you strictly prohibit opium in your own country… You do not wish opium to harm your own country, but you choose to bring that harm to other countries such as China.' There was no reply. Lin began confiscating opium pipes and banning its traders, and eventually seized over a million kilograms

of opium and ordered it to be destroyed. Lord Palmerston, the foreign secretary, pushed for war with China over the destruction of the opium.

In 1840, the year of the PR triumph of Victoria's white wedding, the first British ships arrived, and in 1841 captured the city of Canton. In 1842, the British and Chinese signed the Treaty of Nanking. The island of Hong Kong would be given to the British, to be used as a waystation for merchants. China also had to pay 6 million silver dollars for the opium that had been destroyed. In 1851, Lady Yehe Nara, aged around fifteen and from a minor aristocratic family, was put in competition with sixty other women for the position of consort to the emperor. She was chosen to enter the sixth rank of consorts and to be called Noble Lady Lan. She gave birth to a son in 1856 and the following year, when he turned one, she was raised to the position of third rank of consorts, the most senior position she could hold. At the same time, Britain was demanding full access to all of China; and in 1856 the French and the British began to attack forts in Canton. In 1860, the British burned and looted Beijing's Summer Palace on the orders of Lord Elgin, in revenge for the Chinese seizing British soldiers and officials and holding them as hostages; the palace's illustrious artworks were stolen, treasures dating back thousands of years.

When the emperor heard of the burning of the Summer Palace, he fell into a depression and was close to death. His heir, aged five, was the son of Noble Consort Yi. In August 1861, the emperor died; legend has it that he had invited both his empress and Yi, as mother to his heir, to his deathbed to discuss the future. But the key control would be with the eight regents overseeing the governing of the kingdom. Yi, now Empress Dowager Cixi, suggested to the empress that they might share power together, even though it was the custom that women did not participate in rule. She took over the political meetings with the regents and clashed with them frequently over matters of state. After plotting with courtiers during the period of the emperor's funeral (including the emperor's brother), she moved to execute three of the regents and assume power herself. She continued to rule the country until her death in 1908. The Opium Wars had left the Qing dynasty battered, but it was restored and regained power thanks to Empress Cixi.

In 1841 Victoria gave birth to her second child and first son, the future Edward VII. She wrote in her journal, 'my sufferings were really very severe, and I do not doubt that I should have died'. Her cousin Princess Charlotte was always a reminder to Victoria that even the wealthiest women could die in childbirth. After Edward's birth she began to suffer from postnatal depression; she saw 'spots on people's faces, which turned into worms', and 'coffins floated' in her mind. Childbirth was made worse for her because she had ministers in the room to attest that the child was born of the royal mother (as had been the case since James II's wife was accused of having a fake bump, then the baby smuggled to her bed in a warming pan, a seventeenth-century hot-water bottle); and her doctor recorded that they were behind a mere screen.

Victoria using chloroform to dull the pain for her eighth child, Leopold, was a great innovation: it had been thought that women needed to suffer the pain of childbirth to understand the sins of Eve. In April 1857, Victoria gave birth to her ninth and final child, Princess Beatrice. Albert had grown weary with Victoria's sufferings during pregnancy and childbirth, and told her she must 'struggle with them alone' and that 'if you were rather less occupied with yourself and your feelings and took more interest in the outside world', she might find it easier; pretty unfeeling words indeed. In the same month, a general election was held, prompted by a vote on Lord Palmerston and the actions that had led to the Second Opium War. Palmerston won a decisive victory.

The East India Company had been expanding its operations in India since the seventeenth century, for profit and conquest. Velu Nachiyar was a royal princess who married the king of Sivaganga in 1746 when she was sixteen. The king had been battling against a neighbour, the Nawab of Arcot, for whom the British were fighting, and he was killed in battle by soldiers. Velu, her infant daughter and a handful of courtiers fled to sanctuary. She longed for revenge, but for a friendless queen it seemed impossible. She finally gained backing from an ally, gathered her forces and set about her plan; she beat back the British and the Nawab of Arcot and resumed her throne, bequeathing it to her daughter. But few after her managed to successfully fight back. Kittur Chennamma married the prince of Kittur in 1793 when

she was fifteen. Her husband died in 1816 and her son followed eight years later. She adopted a child as heir but was told to accept British control. She resisted and won significant victories, but was finally captured and died in captivity.

The longest-reigning ruler in Indian history was the Rani Chennabhairadevi, who ruled the Vijayanagara Empire, or Karnata Kingdom, in southern India for fifty-four years until 1606, a reign ten years longer than that of Elizabeth I. Neighbouring kingdoms fought her for power, and, when Portuguese forces tried to seize her ports, she led troops against them, and also commanded the soldiers of other kingdoms including Gujarat and Kerala. They were forced to come to terms with her, and they nicknamed her the Pepper Queen, after her most lucrative export. Unfortunately, she then fell to her neighbours and was taken off to prison. Queens are imprisoned when they have too much power. If she or Mary, Queen of Scots had been weak monarchs, no one would have cared, and perhaps they would have been treated differently.

The Rani of Jhansi was born Manikarnika in Benars, the only child of a priest who took her to court and ensured her an excellent education and skills in martial arts (women in these turbulent times were often taught to defend the kingdom). Visiting diplomats decided she would be an excellent wife for the much older Maharaja of Jhansi. The marriage was confirmed when she was fourteen and she took on the name Lakshmibai. She gained influence at court and trained women to act as her guards, and even suggested they should be in the army. Her young son with the maharaja did not survive. They then adopted a boy, just before the maharaja himself died. The British political officer present was given a letter from the maharajah instructing that his wife should govern Jhansi after his death until the child came of age. But the British East India Company declined to recognise the adopted son as heir, took Jhansi, told her to give up the fort, and gave her a pension. In May 1857, a group of sepoys in Meerut, 300 miles from Jhansi, staged a mutiny against the British East India Company, which swiftly sparked other uprisings. They began capturing land. They arrived in Jhansi and attacked the Company troops. The Company fled, and the rebels

demanded the Rani pay them a ransom of 125,000 rupees for her kingdom. She brilliantly got them down to 15,000.

When the Company returned, they demanded surrender of the city, but the Rani was determined on independence. The British breached the city, and, as they headed to the palace, she escaped on her horse, along with her adoptive son and some guards. They took the town of Kalpi as their base, but Company forces attacked it. She fled to Gwalior with other rebel leaders, and hoped to lead the overall army, but instead the command was given to a prince who did not listen to her advice. The Company offered a bounty for her of 20,000 rupees, knowing the rebels could not be conquered until she was captured. No one would give her up. The Company attacked, the Rani fought, dressed as a soldier, and was killed. Some said she had been badly wounded and before she died asked a hermit to hide her body. The commander of the Company forces said she was 'the most dangerous of all the rebel leaders', due to her persistence, intelligence and kindness to subordinates (also her beauty, he declared). The power of the uprising was lost with her death. The Victorians called her a 'Jezebel' and said she had a harem of white men. After the rebellion, the East India Company was dissolved and their holdings transferred to the British Empire. Victoria recorded 'her feelings of horror and regret at the result of this bloody civil war' and requested that the transfer should 'breathe feelings of generosity, benevolence and religious toleration', but she still believed that the empire should be governed by Britain.

The Rani of Jhansi gave women fighting roles. The Begums of Bhopal, a dynasty of four women, improved the lives of their subjects, particularly women. In 1819, when her husband died, the young Qudsia Begum refused to assume purdah, and eventually took power and said her daughter, Sikander, would be her heir. Sikander founded girls' schools to give them an education. Sikander's daughter continued her reforms and efforts for women's education, as well as improving infrastructure – like roads and lighting. The last Begum abdicated for her son in 1926, bringing to an end over a hundred years of female rule in Bhopal.

In 1861, Prince Albert died at the age of forty-two. Victoria wrote to her eldest daughter, unable to imagine how she was to 'go on, to live, to move', and withdrew from the public gaze. After she had been mourning for a year, questions were raised about whether the queen was still ruling, and her ministers begged her to be seen out in person, to open parliament. The people had become used to seeing her – she had herself raised up the importance of the royal image by deploying portraits and her own art, so when they could not see her, they felt she was not behaving as a proper queen should. And yet, she continued to promote the royal image. In 1868 Victoria published her own book, *Highland Leaves*, extracts from her diary about her time in Scotland plus other travels. The image of the queen – content, outward-facing, energetically visiting and viewing Scotland – was a bestseller.

How could she be both widow and queen? If she had returned to public life immediately, she could have been seen as heartless, breaking the rules of womanhood. A middle-class widow was supposed to be long in mourning, reflecting the idea that a woman without a husband had no role in society. The queen followed this convention and was condemned for withdrawing from society. Throughout her reign, Victoria had styled herself as a typical mother of the upper mercantile classes, dressed in bonnet and gown; but this vision broke apart, when she became a widow, with the rules of widowhood. The queen had created an image and expectation of monarchy as being constantly seen, perpetuated through magazines and newspapers and being seen in public, associated herself with the country; so when she withdrew, she was in trouble, widely criticised, and republican feeling grew. In 1866, Victoria, after her long seclusion, finally opened parliament. In the same way as she was expected to resume duties soon after childbirth, she could not mourn as other women would.

In 1868, the British Army headed to Abyssinia. The emperor of Ethiopia, Tewodros II, was threatened by the advance of Ottoman forces as well as armies from Egypt harrying his empire from Sudan. He wrote for help to Russia, Prussia, France – and to Queen Victoria. But the British Empire wished to be on good terms with the Ottoman Empire and Tewodros's letter was not answered. When he encountered a British missionary who had

severely insulted Tewodros in a book, Tewodros was infuriated and had him and his assistant chained up and their servants beaten. He seized the British consul.

In April 1868, the British army beat Tewodros's forces at the Battle of Magdala and demanded unconditional surrender. The emperor released the hostages but would not surrender. The British bombarded the force, and the emperor committed suicide with a pistol that had been given to him by Queen Victoria. The soldiers were permitted – told – to loot the fortress. They needed elephants and over two hundred mules to carry all that had been taken. The empress had told the British she would stay, but the British said they were taking her young son, Alemayehu, to Britain – the justification was that he was being protected – and she decided to accompany him. She died before they arrived.

Alemayehu, aged seven, was presented to Queen Victoria at Osborne House on the Isle of Wight. He was sent to boarding school and then to the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst, but he was unhappy there. He went to stay with an old school tutor in Yorkshire. The queen recorded in her diary how unhappy he was and that people stared at him.

At seventeen, the prince caught pleurisy and died. He was interred at St George's Chapel in Windsor. At the time of writing, Ethiopia is asking for the body to be returned; it has not been.

In 1882, Victoria was leaving Windsor railway station when she was shot at. Two Eton schoolboys armed with umbrellas captured the shooter. Over her reign she was shot at seven times in total (one would-be assassin tried twice). In 1842 she was shot at by two men, one with a pistol loaded with scraps of tobacco pipe. Another assailant in 1850 hit her over the head with an iron-tipped cane, which left her with a black eye and scars on her face. 'What is this strange mania for queen-shooting?' asked her uncle. Victoria refused to listen to her ministers' requests that she stop driving out in public and declined suggestions such as a bullet-proof parasol. 'It is worth being shot at to see how much one is loved,' she said. Young men shot at the young queen, largely to gain notoriety, although some had political reasons. It is interesting that much has been made of the attacks aimed at Victoria but little has been said about how shooting, or hitting over the head, did not

happen to her male predecessors or successors. It is more acceptable to publicly assault female monarchs. Victoria gamely claimed it as evidence of how popular she was.

Out of all the female monarchs of Britain, constitutional monarchy progressed most under Victoria's reign. Walter Bagehot's *The English Constitution* was first serialised in 1865, published in 1867, explaining that the monarch should be able to warn, encourage and be consulted. As he put it in the book, the Queen's value is 'incalculable', although only if 'used in a dignified capacity'. Monarchy was a form of disguise and was a useful bolster to the government in terms of pageantry and mystique. It is no coincidence that this theory appears in Victoria's reign – and as this book shows, it is a theory that informs how Victoria was expected to reign, and also why it was justifiable to unseat other queens.

Victoria didn't always believe the information she received from her male advisors and politicians. She wrote directly to those on the ground, often ambassadors' wives.[5] She knew the men around her were trying to exclude her. They wished her to remain an image, to be sold across the world. The men wanted to make Victoria their puppet, the image of happy femininity, of procreative motherhood, while the power of the monarchy was gradually eroded. And yet, much to their annoyance, Victoria asserted herself, declared what kind of queen she would be, had her favourites, refused to come out of mourning. It is famously thought that, when gay sex was outlawed in 1885 as 'gross indecency' between men, ministers did not outlaw sex between women because Victoria thought it was impossible and shocking. In fact, the queen did not have this power. The politicians had decided not to include sex between women because they feared giving women ideas. As one lord put it, 'the mere discussion of subjects of this sort tends, in the minds of unbalanced people… to create the idea of an offence of which the enormous majority of them have never even heard'. Women were unbalanced, able to be influenced, weak – and easily dissuaded from having sex with men.

On 25 March 1900, in the last year of the queen's life, colonialist Frederick Hodgson arrived at a reception in Kumasi, previously Kwaaman, in the Ashanti Empire (modern-day Ghana). British troops had occupied the

nation four years previously, after a series of wars, and King Prempeh had been exiled to the Seychelles. Queen Yaa Asantewaa, the queen mother, remained – they underestimated her. The Ashanti Empire was declared by the British to be conquered and became part of the Gold Coast Colony, governed over by Hodgson. He wanted £160,000 a year plus interest to pay Britain for the costs of invading. Most of all, he wanted the sacred Ashanti Golden Stool, the symbol of royal authority. 'The queen is entitled to the stool, she must receive it,' he said. Queen Victoria, nearly eighty, suffering from bad arthritis and cataracts and with less than a year left to live, was still being used as the pinnacle, the reason for colonial demands.

In the years before, a black cloud arrived, rumbling like thunder and from it fell a golden stool. It descended onto the lap of Osei Tutu, who was thus decreed king of the nation. Okomfo Anokye, one of the founders of the Ashanti, spoke to say that the stool was the soul of the people, not merely the seat of the king's power but the heart of the nation. The stool was a curved seat inlaid with gold on a pedestal, made of one piece of wood. No one was permitted to sit on it. During the king's inauguration, he was lowered close to the stool but did not touch it and it sat beside him on important occasions. It was not a chair, as Hodgson insisted on seeing it, but the home of the spirit of the Ashanti people.

Hodgson demanded a search for the stool. It was a challenge to the soldiers accompanying him and a declaration of war. As David Lloyd George put it, his 'quest for the Golden Stool was something like the quest of the Holy Grail'. The queen mother, Yaa Asantewaa, at sixty, decided to lead a war.

After Hodgson's demand for the Stool, Yaa Asantewaa met with the remaining members of government. Some favoured peaceful negotiation. She thought this extremely unlikely to succeed. She stood up and declared:

> How can a brave and proud people like the Ashanti sit back and look while white men took away their king and chiefs and humiliated them with a demand for the Golden Stool. The Golden Stool only means money for the white men.[6]

She stood, held up a gun and fired, telling the men that if they didn't fight, they were cowards. It sparked a revolution. Many of the chiefs had realised

that negotiation wasn't going to work and Yaa Asantewaa was elected leader of the battle. She hid the Golden Stool in the forest and gathered her troops.

Yaa Asantewaa declared war. Hodgson's forces retreated to the fort and the Ashanti besieged them and cut the telegraph wires. The British were rescued by a new arrival of troops, Yaa Asantewaa and her army were defeated and she and fourteen chiefs judged dangerous were sent to the Seychelles, arriving in June 1901. They were sent to the main island, Mahé, to an Ashanti enclave called Le Rocher near the capital, Victoria, where the other exiles lived with Prempeh. When Prempeh had arrived in 1900, the British governors of the Seychelles agreed to lease a house at Le Rocher on a large estate of land about two miles away from the capitol of Victoria, to be reimbursed by the governors of the Gold Coast. The house had only six rooms and the rest of the Ashanti party were sent to live in small huts. The government supplied them with very little furniture, including five mugs, six buckets and four hurricane lamps. They grew their own vegetables, and their wives were permitted to sell them at the market in Victoria and buy items that they needed.

In July 1905, one of Prempeh's wives gave birth to twins, whom he decided should be called Victoria and Alexandra after the queen, even though she was the symbol of the empire that had deprived him of power. Within a year of arriving, Prempeh was requesting a return to his lands, and continued to do so throughout his period of exile.

Yaa Asantewaa died in exile in the Seychelles in 1921; three years later, King Prempeh and other political exiles were invited back to Kumasi, on condition that they lived as private individuals. The king had Yaa Asantewaa's body brought back for burial. In 1920, some builders found the Golden Stool in the forest, where the queen mother had hidden it. They destroyed it and were sentenced to death, although they were exiled before they could be killed. The Golden Stool was the last significant battle of the empire that Victoria had symbolised. And the empire, slowly, was dying.

On 22 January 1901 Queen Victoria died at Osborne House, with her son and grandson by her bedside. After nearly sixty-five years she was the longest-reigning monarch in Britain and the longest-reigning queen regnant in the world – until Elizabeth II, her great-great-granddaughter, passed her

in 2015. With Victoria's reign, the queen had become the symbol of domestic happiness, middle-class materialism, overseas wars, an energetic interest in the country, a powerful image of contented femininity at the same time as monarchy became largely ceremonial. And yet her queenship, as we have seen, was used to promote the importance of something that she and her male advisors would never have agreed to: votes for women.

CHAPTER TEN

Books and Quilts: Liliʻuokalani, the Queen of Hawaii

In the sacred walls of the Iolani Palace in Honolulu is the quilt of Liliʻuokalani, queen of Hawaii. Very large, 95 inches by 97, it is made up of panels and embroidery, all sewn or designed by the queen herself. Two are fragments, but you can just make out the writing. It has nine main squares, full of colour, rectangles and triangles, names of friends, the Hawaiian flag, butterflies, flames, flowers, all worked in the fashionable style of the time. The materials are velvet, silk, ribbon, scraps of the queen's and her ladies' gowns and stocks of material. In these vibrant colours, cut, stitched and embroidered, we see the queen's dresses that she had worn in her time of freedom. And we see her resistance. For Queen Liliʻuokalani sewed the quilt in prison. Deposed and under house arrest at the Palace in 1895, denied writing materials or newspapers, she was allowed a needle. She used it to sew her quilt of resistance. As she embroidered on it, 'Imprisoned at Iolani Palace… We began the quilt there'. In the centre are four squares in scarlet and blue, with detailed embroidered writing about her life, telling the story of four key moments of her life, her birth, her dethronement, her imprisonment and her abdication. It is astonishing she produced such a catalogue of challenge and opposition right under the noses of her guards. They presumably dismissed it as just women's sewing. Instead, in this quilt, a document of defiance by a woman facing execution, she told her story and said, 'I am Queen', wrongly deposed.[1]

The last queen of Hawaii was cast as a monster who would behead Americans, accused of cruelty, unreasonableness, excess. But unlike so many queens, she took control of her own representations. When she was finally allowed pencils and paper in prison, she wrote music. And later she began writing her book. Unlike the other queens in this book, she told her own story, in her writing, but also in the songs and music she composed and collected. The room in which she was imprisoned is small and shuttered, dark wood-panelled, the bright light of the island blocked out. The quilt is the centre, under glass. Standing at it, looking at it, you see the queen's own words. It bears the touch of her fingers, and the imprint of her heart, as she battled through imprisonment.

And outside, beside the palace, are the Hawaiian Archives, full of her letters – and telling the story of how the queen lost her throne. For she would not simply accept being deposed. Her book wasn't going to be an image of a queen as lover of Scotland, like Victoria, but a book that was so incendiary that her publishers had to censor its drafts in attempting to find a version that would not be banned. The queen was determined to express herself. When she was allowed pencil and paper in imprisonment, she knew she had to be careful about memoirs or political writings, but she could write music. She wasn't allowed an instrument, but she could use her voice to help her, and she said she was occupied and comforted by 'the statement of my thoughts in music'. And later, she put her musical writings in the Congressional Library for safe keeping, because she knew they were a rebellious act, could be destroyed by her enemies.[2]

She sewed and she composed to communicate her thoughts – and when she was free, she wrote her story and refused to be stopped. Published by Lee and Shepard in Boston in 1898, *Hawaii's Story by Hawaii's Queen* was a sensation. The queen writes to win over her audience, especially Americans, against visions of her as a monster. She shows herself as a gentle, sociable woman, a beloved queen. She was clearly very popular, especially with other women. But she also refused the representations of her that had been imposed on her and those of her people and wrote up the annexation of Hawaii as a violent act, unwanted by the Hawaiian people. No one could claim after reading the book that it had been a triumph for democracy. The queen writes of the importance of her ancestry and Hawaiian family, staking

her claim for an individual Hawaiian identity. She counters her critics, writes back, and in a rather brilliant feat for a nineteenth-century woman subject to sexist expectations, she portrays herself as both a cruelly treated innocent woman and possessed of a powerful intellect.

The queen was first cast as the enemy of her people. But when that didn't stick, when she received sympathy in Hawaii and in the United States, the new role pushed onto her was a sentimental memory, invited to parties and receptions as a human image of a bygone past. She refused it. She wanted to be seen as a queen regnant – up until her death.

The future queen was born Liliʻu Loloku Walania Kamakaʻeha on 2 September 1838 in Honolulu, in a house on the slope of what is now called Punchbowl Crater. A rainbow appeared in the sky as she was born. Her mother named her using the words *liliʻu* (smarting), *loloku* (tearful), *walania* (a burning pain) and *kamakaʻeha* (sore eyes) because she was suffering from an eye infection and it was customary to name children after an event from their birth. Liliʻuokalani's parents were members of the Hawaiian nobility and descended from the great Kamehameha I. When a child of a high chief was born in Hawaii, they were given their own chant, recalling the child's ancestors and their acts of valour. The chant was learned off by heart and passed around the family, and would be sung again when they were dead.

The Iolani Palace, full of nineteenth-century furniture (and even a telephone), the palace that Liliʻuokalani occupied as queen, where she was later put on trial and imprisoned, is now the only palace on American soil. Near the palace, by the giant Lahaina banyan tree, planted in 1873, a gift from missionaries in India, in the Hawaiian archives are, poignantly, the inventories of properties and all her gifts. She had decreed that after her death her most precious belongings would be sold, even though she was entreated to keep them in a museum to remember her reign. She had already sold some of her land in order to found a home for orphans. In the end she decided, with everything she had been through, her dethronement, her efforts to get her throne back, her 'trials and tribulations', that she wanted to give all she had gained as queen to the home. Day one of the sale was her jewels, day two was the Hawaiian leis that the queen wore about her shoulders and hair for occasions of state. The hall for the jewellery sale was

packed full of Hawaiian women 'no longer young', who had once attended on the queen, wearing their own jewels of similar design: 'they were with their queen in spirit'. Few Hawaiians wanted the sale to go ahead. But those visitors who snapped up her jewels got an excellent deal. As reported, her 'famous tiger's claw necklace', a gift from the king of Siam, was knocked down to below the asking price of $250 and snapped up by a Mr W.H. Wallbridge of Toledo, Ohio. As the newspaper reported, 'into many strange hands went these jewels – into the keeping of those who had probably never heard of Queen Lili'uokalani a few months ago'. This included her grand diamond necklace and her 'tiara, the diadem which seemed like a crown on state occasions', bought by a Lloyd Schmidt, a quartermaster from the US army.

Also sold was a handsome 'diamond butterfly which adorned the queen's person' on state occasions and when she attended the golden jubilee of Queen Victoria. Lili'uokalani bought it from a London jewellery shop when she came for the jubilee. A photograph remains of her dressed for the occasion and wearing her new butterfly brooch; it is displayed in the palace galleries, alongside the butterfly itself. The jewel, one of her favourites, marks the beginning of her strife. For it was while she was in London, representing Hawaii at the festivities, that everything began to break apart. She received urgent word that her brother had been forced at threat of death to sign a constitution that gave up Hawaiian rights and she had to abandon the celebrations and return immediately. It was the beginning of the events that would end with her imprisonment. Throughout her life she wrote diaries, in little pocket notebooks produced by the Bancroft Company of San Francisco, that came with helpful printed pages such as tables of measurements, in coloured Moroccan leather – tan, grey and maroon. The very same notebooks were used by women and men across America for all sorts of notes, professional, personal, shopping lists, diaries. In them, the queen told the story of her life. Some were seized by her enemies, used against her, never returned; some are in the Hawaiian archives, some in the archives of the Bishop Museum in Honolulu. Every word on the often-cramped pages is the word of a queen who fought for the Hawaiian people.

The queen allowed her jewels, the riches that had shored up her image of monarchy, to be sold. She was sad when she decided this. But the vision of a queen that she had wished others to know – generous, well-liked,

courageous and devoted to the people – lives in her memoirs and her book. Many of the queens in this book have been imprisoned or under house arrest but anything they said has been filtered by those who were hostile to them. The Queen of Hawaii actually spoke, and her words have been preserved, by her own efforts, despite all the threats of censorship. She didn't need to deposit her jewels in a museum. She had left the world her words.

The story of Hawaii began when Pele, a descendant of the Sky Father, was expelled by her family from Tahiti. She travelled by canoe and found a mountain; she decided this spot would be her land and built herself homes in the volcanoes. Her sister chased her to the islands and killed her and Pele became a goddess, living in the Kīlauea volcano. Pele became symbolic of the islands themselves, as the goddess of power and of life and death, as well as of fire and volcanoes. The islands were first settled by Polynesian travellers in the thirteenth century. On one of the islands, Hawaii, or Big Island (Honolulu and the Iolani Palace are on Oahu), you can go to the very end of all of Hawaii, and indeed the entire United States. The southernmost point of the islands is on the rocks jutting out into the Pacific; you can stand there in the rough seas, near to Kealakekua Bay where in 1779 Captain Cook tried to capture the island's chief and died as the people fought back. The arrival of Cook began the wave of traders, missionaries, settlers and invaders. The arrivals aimed to implement a European-style system of land ownership (and family structure) and a constitutional, figurehead monarchy, so they could assume the land. During Liliʻu's life they would gain more power, along with the new religion.

By the time of the birth of little Liliʻu, Christianity was very strong in the islands. Until the late eighteenth century, the islands of Hawaii were controlled by different independent chiefs. In 1795, Kamehameha I of Hawaii conquered most of the other islands, and in 1810 the last two remaining joined the kingdom. Kamehameha opened trade routes and made the arrival of missionaries possible. He believed that the presence of citizens from the United States would protect Hawaii from Britain, France and Japan, who were all eyeing it for their empires. When he died, his son Kamehameha II inherited the throne, but Queen Kaʻahumanu refused to give up power to such a young child and ruled with him as co-regent. The new queen regent moved against the old religion, apparently encouraged by the high priest himself, who had grown weary of the old religion and was

interested in Christianity. Within a year, the first missionaries had arrived, in March 1820, from Massachusetts. Arriving as they did at a moment when the new queen wanted to show her power over the old system, they gained influence and the ruling class swiftly became Christians, were baptised and learned to read and write English. A few months after her birth, she was christened by missionaries as 'Lydia'.

In 1824, fourteen years before Liliʻu's birth, her great-aunt, Kapiʻolani, had travelled to the sacred Kīlauea volcano, the home of the goddess Pele. There, Kapiʻolani refused to make offerings and descended into the volcano, telling the people that if she returned without being killed by the goddess, they should turn Christian. She headed towards the lake of fire, singing Christian hymns. She returned intact. As Liliʻu wrote, 'this was the act which broke forever the power of Pele, the fire goddess, over the hearts of her people'. It is part of the national park on Hawaii now, still smoking and erupting, the fire goddess still speaking.

By 1831, the king had officially outlawed the old religion, decreeing that worshipping of idols and ancient Gods was forbidden and only the Christian God was allowed. The sacred hula dance was forbidden (missionaries also decided it suggestive). Seven families were eligible to succeed under the 1840 constitution – but they had to have converted to Christianity. Most families kept their household gods and still used healers, but the old religion was gone. The first foreign-owned sugar plantation had been established in 1835 under Kamehameha III, when Massachusetts landowner William Hooper leased nearly 1,000 acres from the king. Plantations spread across the islands and, fifty years later, the sugar industry dominated the economy. After claiming they had protected the islands from the British Empire (a British naval captain had arrived to investigate claims that the British were being denied land, erected a flag, said the king was deposed and was pushed back), the settlers lobbied the king and in 1850 were legally allowed to buy land. Systems were put in place to allow Hawaiians to claim land that they cultivated, but most did not because the system was alien and bent to favour the settlers. The majority of the land was sold to foreign landowners or corporations. The king retained around one-third of the land. This made him a target.

After Liliʻu's birth, in keeping with the practice of informal adoption, she was sent to live with another couple from the royal family, Abner Pākī and Laura Konia. As she recalled, 'I was wrapped in the finest soft tapa cloth, and taken to the house of another chief, by whom I was adopted,' and saw them as her father and mother. Liliʻu was brought up with their daughter, Pauhi, in a household with strong Christian beliefs. As Liliʻu put it, the system of adoption was hard to explain to 'those alien to our national life, but it seems perfectly natural to us' and it 'cemented the ties of friendship between the chiefs' and 'fostered a community of interest and harmony', commonality of family, in the same way that land was commonly owned. Her brothers and sisters were given to foster parents in the same way. The Hawaiians believed that land belonged to everybody, and the concept of private land ownership, like that of the nuclear family, did not exist. As the queen put it in her memoirs, the people could not mortgage or sell land and 'rent, eviction of tenants' was 'unknown'. The chief in general was seen as the owner, but the land wasn't entirely his either. He was more of a custodian. And those settlers who arrived wanted to own the land.

Like all her royal circle, Liliʻu was sent to Christian boarding school. She arrived in Honolulu aged four and a half, the youngest student – along with Princess Victoria Kamāmalu, who she had seen often in her early childhood – one of the thirteen royal children there, including her foster sister Pauhi, and later her younger sister, Kaʻiminaʻauao, who had been adopted by the king himself. The school was called the Chiefs' Children's School but later became the Royal School because, as she put it in her memoir, 'its pupils were exclusively persons whose claim to the throne was acknowledged'. The school buildings are right by the palace, near the State Capitol. In the bustling centre of Honolulu, this building, no longer a school, is the place where she suffered, and one might surmise, saw the beginnings of her mistrust of the missionary class.

King Kamehameha III had founded the school in 1840 to educate the next generation of Hawaiian royalty with children from the seven families allowed to inherit the throne. By Liliʻu's time it was run by a Connecticut missionary and his wife. The king chose the children allowed to attend and appointed the missionaries. There were dining and sleeping areas for the

children and the missionaries, and a parlour for visitors. Liliʻu and the other children were allowed home on holidays and the occasional Sunday, but she was deeply unhappy there. The missionaries aimed to instil rigid standards of behaviour, and the treatment was not kind. Her overwhelming memory was of hunger, as she said: 'when I recall the instances in which we were sent hungry to bed, it seems to me that they failed to remember that we were growing children'. She recalled that the children were often desperately hunting for food and searched the garden for plants they could cook on makeshift fires. We do have to thank them for one thing though: they encouraged the children to write journals. Liliʻu's journals have given us the most enduring document of the queen, her indomitable voice. If only all the queens in this book had written so!

The children took solace in friendship with each other and, through school, Liliʻu knew all the powerful royals. She attended the school with future kings Kamehameha IV, Kamehameha V and Lunalilo, as well as Queen Emma. She became good friends with the king's nephew and designated heir, Iolani or Alexander. She also met her future husband, John Owen Dominis, six years her senior, an American child, son of a sea captain and his wife who had moved to Hawaii. He attended a school next to the Royal School and would peer through the fence at the royal children. He became friendly with them, as the 'boys used to climb the fence on their side for the purpose of looking at the royal children'.

'I was a studious girl,' said the queen. She was taught English, reading, writing, geometry, algebra, maths and physics, geography and composition – a better education than girls in Britain, where maths was often an optional extra. She noted that they were particularly trained in the 'proper use of the English language'. There was little engagement with Hawaiian culture. In 1848, when Liliʻu was barely ten, a brutal measles epidemic swept the school – a disease that Hawaiian people were not used to, not helped by the children's poor diet. Her younger sister, Kaʻiminaʻauao, died, along with other pupils. Liliʻu remembered the painful day that the children were buried together in the royal mausoleum: 'This sad event made a great impression on my younger years, for these relatives and companions of my youth died and were buried on the same day, the coffin of [Kaʻiminaʻauao] resting on that of the others'; the usual mourning period was abolished in an attempt to stop the disease. As measles and smallpox swept the country,

there was talk in the papers about it bringing about the end of the Hawaiian people.

After the deaths, Liliʻu returned to live with her adoptive parents and was then sent to another missionary school, a day school in Honolulu, and 'I was better satisfied than with a boarding school.' She was particularly skilled in music, and her facility at sight reading was complimented by her tutors. She said to 'compose was as natural to me as to breathe'. The 1850s, as she became a teenager, would be a time of change. She continued her education and received piano lessons and taught herself on the ukelele and became fluent in both English and her native language – a useful skill for the future. She was part of a social whirl in Honolulu of dances and parties, wearing gowns imported from Paris, London and the United States. Liliʻu was stylish and refused the dreary, 'modest' dark clothes demanded by the missionaries. She was intelligent, strong-willed – and a total believer in her country's independence.

Kamehameha III died of a stroke in 1854 and Liliʻu's old friend Iolani came to the throne as Kamehameha IV. He married his classmate, Emmalani or Emma (even though some said he should have married Liliʻu); Liliʻu was part of their social circle and was bridesmaid at their wedding and regularly served as lady-in-waiting. The following year, Liliʻu was about to travel to another island by boat when her old schoolmate Lunalilo, first cousin to the king, proposed marriage and declared a priest was onboard, ready to conduct the marriage. He had been engaged since infancy to the king's sister Princess Victoria, but the king and his brother were blocking the marriage because any children from the union would have had a higher rank than the king. Liliʻu worried he had been engaged to Victoria and, 'I did not consider it right to marry him on the impulse of the moment.' She then changed her mind and agreed to be his wife.

The king told Liliʻu to break off the engagement and, to show obedience, she did so. She was also being courted by John Owen Dominis, her childhood friend, who after working in San Francisco and in a Honolulu office had become part of the royal staff. He lived with his mother since his father had gone off on a voyage and never returned. The king didn't want anyone of royal blood intermarrying, because of the potential challenge to

him (his sister died unmarried) and so John was a pleasing choice – as Liliʻu was the highest-ranked unmarried woman, marrying her to John rather than Lunalilo meant she was pushed out of power. In 1860, when she was twenty-two, the two became engaged, but their wedding was postponed for two years at the request of the king. They finally married in an Anglican ceremony at the Arlington Hotel, attended by the royal family, and moved into the Dominis estate, Washington Place, built by John's father, which remained the queen's private residence after the end of her reign.

Washington Place is now the residence of the governor of Hawaii, very near the Capitol and the palace, and the school in which she suffered. Her home was in the centre of power. Liliʻu's mother-in-law was disappointed by a Hawaiian bride, and showed it. Although Liliʻu said her husband was 'kind and considerate', he was later unfaithful. 'How provoking John is tonight,' she once sighed in her diary.[3] Her status as a married woman did however strengthen her position at court and it would give her (some) social capital with the missionary class. Kamehameha IV died in 1863 with no heir and his brother inherited as Kamehameha V, and promptly declined to sign the 1840 constitution. As Liliʻu put it, both the 1840 constitution and its 1852 successor 'were doubtless drafted under the supervision and advice of the missionaries'. Relations between the monarchy and the missionaries had become increasingly difficult, as the Hawaiians felt the missionaries were gaining control. The new king appointed Liliʻu's husband as governor of the main island and Liliʻu accompanied him on his annual tour. Her political status and role gave her satisfaction. One might have thought that an American husband would have brought Liliʻu more protection later; however, this was not the case.

In 1869 Queen Victoria's son, Prince Alfred, arrived as part of an official visit, after travelling to Australia as well as Japan, New Zealand and India. Liliʻu was in mourning for her mother, but she was permitted to hold a reception for him at one of her homes; he gave her a gold armlet with an anchor pendant and one of his musical compositions.

Liliʻu loved music and became leader of the choir in the Kawaiahao church. The king noted that Hawaii had no national song, no 'statement of patriotism and love of country in its own music', and indeed they were using the British national anthem 'God Save the Queen' for national occasions. She

said he asked her to write a national anthem, but it is more likely that she suggested it to him – and she did so in a week: 'He Mele Lāhui Hawai'i', The Song of Hawaii. The king was delighted and it became the national anthem and remained so for the next twenty years. Lili'u's genius was writing in the Hawaiian tradition with influences of the Western classical music she had learned. She created a unique style of music and a strong and powerful tradition of Hawaiian song against the missionary songs that the ministers wished to see exclusively sung on the islands. I might hazard that her writing was particularly focused on a higher register and slanted to soprano voices, reflecting her particular interest in female friendship throughout her life. Either way, she effectively used Western forms of music to create resonant songs of Hawaiian identity.

In 1872, Kamehameha V was on his deathbed. Lili'u was called to attend, with other royal women including Queen Emma and Pauhi; as Lili'u put it, 'all eligible candidates in the female line'. The king had once been destined to marry Pauhi, Lili'u's adoptive sister, who had in the end married an American businessman instead. He told Pauhi that the throne was hers and she said, 'No, no, not me; don't think of me.' She told him that there were others, and suggested his sister, Princess Ruth. He replied that Ruth would not be capable and Pauhi said, 'Oh, but we will all help.'

The prospect of a female monarch was growing closer, openly discussed and considered. But the foremost candidate was the king's cousin, Lunalilo. He suggested it should be put to an election, on a popular vote with no property qualifications imposed on voters. Lunalilo won a resounding victory and became the first elected monarch of Hawaii. He aimed to create a more democratic, constitutional monarchy; but in 1874, after only two years on the throne, he died childless. Once more, Lili'u and the royal women stood over a king's deathbed. Queen Emma, Lili'u's old friend and wife of Kamehameha IV, hoped she might be designated heir, but the legislature chose Lili'uokalani's brother, Kalākaua, with thirty-nine votes to Emma's six. He would be king, with his wife, Queen Kapi'olani.

In 1877, after only three years as heir apparent, the king's younger brother, William, died of rheumatic fever. His adoptive mother had wished to be decreed heir, but Kalākaua refused and named Liliʻu. She officially dropped 'Lydia', the name that the missionaries had given to her and turned her Hawaiian name, Liliʻu, into Liliʻuokalani, the 'name that I was formally proclaimed princess and heir apparent to the throne of my ancestors'. Liliʻuokalani wrote, 'At noon on the tenth day of April 1877, the booming of the cannon was heard which announced that I was heir apparent to the throne of Hawaii.' She made a tour of the islands, so that everyone, 'planter or fisherman', could become acquainted with her. Liliʻuokalani was effective at touring to secure loyalties and enthusiasm. She declared that, when she travelled around Oahu, everyone watching was 'only too eager to compete with each other for the privilege of showing to us their loyalty and love', and so elided herself with the country and promoted herself as the heir. She requested that her husband be made governor of two further islands so that they could tour together. 'We had vanquished the hearts of the people… they welcomed me as Hawaiians always have the ruling chief.' The following year, 1878, despite her husband's disapproval, Liliʻuokalani adopted a child of family friends, Lydia. Now she was heir to the throne the power balance in the marriage was reversed, and she could adopt a child if she wished. In the same year, she and her husband sailed to California for her health. It was her first sight of 'that great country, the United States, of which land I had thought almost without cessation from earliest childhood'. They stayed in the Golden Eagle Hotel and made various visits around the area to members of local society. She returned in much better health and with new relations in the United States.

When Kalakaua became king, he agreed to cede Pearl Harbor – the port near Honolulu where since 1841 the USA had been asking for a naval base – to the United States on a temporary basis, in return for the tariff-free entry of sugar and other goods. Before he became king he had claimed that Hawaiian land should be for Hawaiians, so he was taking a risk in doing this. His acts were extremely beneficial to the landowners and corporations but, as Liliʻuokalani said, no one was grateful. The sugar farmers blamed him for poor sales and said they could not find workers. In 1881 the king planned a world tour, to California, Japan, China, Burma and then across Europe, to gain support for Hawaii, and to encourage workers to come to

the sugar plantations. He asked Liliʻuokalani to act as regent while he was away but told her that the cabinet wished her to have a council of regency who would have to be consulted. She was indignant at the thought that she could not occupy the role and described it as early evidence that the 'missionary party' were at work to 'undermine at every point the authority of the constitutional rulers of the Hawaiian people'. By missionary party, she meant the wealthy businessmen and landowners. She convinced the king that she could do it alone and so he appointed her as sole regent, since, as she put it, 'my views of the situation were founded on reason and justice'. She had set both herself and him against the missionary party – it was courageous to suggest that it might be a battle she could win.

The king set off on his travels. During his 281-day world tour, Liliʻuokalani showed herself an effective monarch. He had only been gone a few weeks when the dreadful smallpox broke out, probably brought in by contracted workers. One of Liliʻuokalani's most formative memories was seeing measles sweep her school, and she acted quickly. She closed the ports, stopped travel between the islands and most importantly of all introduced an efficient system of quarantine of the infected and exposed, thus confining the illness to Honolulu. But as she put it, 'it was a serious thing to confine its ravages to the city of Honolulu, in which there were eight hundred cases and around three hundred deaths'. Closing the ports was very unpopular with the sugar plantation owners. They were wrong; her act slowed down the disease and saved many lives.

Liliʻuokalani reigned well for her brother while he was away. The king's tour allowed him to meet politicians and notables across the world, including discussing introducing the electric light to Hawaii with Thomas Edison. Liliʻuokalani was distressed that the king was criticised for having a jolly holiday when he was trying to help the landowners and establish relationships for Hawaii. She worried about bringing in workers, for the landowners had too much power. The settlers, she said, had 'become wealthy and acquired titles to lands through the simplicity of our people' and 'their love of power proportionately increases'. And 'as soon as they had become rich and powerful, forgot his generosity'. They wanted to make the king's cabinet 'their tool'; and 'what they wanted was primacy in our political affairs'. The king's travels had given him a lot of influence in the Pacific, and this was making him a threat.

Liliʻuokalani devoted herself to philanthropy and, after visiting a leprosy settlement, persuaded the government to fund a leprosy hospital. She also founded a bank for women called Liliʻuokalani's Savings Bank. She recognised, crucially, the importance of women having bank accounts and that women wishing to set up businesses struggled due to lack of finance. She also founded the Liliʻuokalani Educational Society for girls. As we have seen, most female monarchs shy away from improving the lives of ordinary women; it is too much of a risk. Liliʻu did not. She wished above all that Hawaiian girls be trained by ladies from Hawaii – she did not explicitly say that she was setting herself up in opposition to the missionary schools, but it was clear this was what she was doing (after all, one had nearly killed her). It was a radical act.

For Liliʻuokalani, her brother's reign was 'the golden age of Hawaiian history' as the wealth and importance of the islands increased 'always as a consequence of the king's acts'. She was furious that the enrichment of the islands was often credited to the missionary party. The king published the *Legends and Myths of Hawaii* in 1888 and brought back the sacred hula dance – which was hugely popular but disliked by the missionaries and seen as opposition to their goals. He also encouraged surfing and martial arts, which had been banned due to their part in religious rites. Liliʻu and her brother were the guardians of Hawaiian traditions, restoring what had been erased. All the while, she was writing in her journals.

On his return, King Kalākaua began converting Iolani Palace, long dilapidated, into a royal palace, at huge expense. Iolani was based on the model of a royal palace in Europe, where monarchy was still strong. The ground floor was taken up with a large throne room and dining room – it was a palace to create political associations. He filled it with items he had bought while on his world tour.

In 1883, the king's accession was ratified and he planned a coronation and a year of celebrations. He and Queen Kapiʻolani would wear golden crowns covered with precious stones sent from London and gowns were ordered from London designers for the royal women. Liliʻuokalani bought a Parisian gown of gold and white and the newly completed palace was ablaze with beauty, and the hula was performed every night (annoying the missionaries!). Three years later, in July, he invited the population to see the newly installed electric lights in the Palace – that he had commissioned after

visiting Edison's studio in the United States – and five thousand spectators came to marvel at the new technology. Three years later, the king celebrated his fiftieth birthday with a celebration at the palace lasting two weeks, including fireworks, a ball, a regatta and athletics races. He spent tens of thousands of dollars. The Palace cost nearly 350,000 dollars. It was cheap compared to a European palace, now the most beautiful building, a tribute to the Hawaiian monarchy, standing proud, looking out to the sea. Liliʻuokalani was at her brother's side and enjoyed the endless festivities, recalling that 'citizens and visitors [were] almost surfeited with merrymaking'. But the landowner population portrayed the king's celebrations as reckless extravagance. The tour, the palace, the grand party were all grist to their depiction of the king as a despot obsessed with money.

In 1887, Liliʻuokalani set off by boat to London to represent her brother and Hawaii at the golden jubilee of Queen Victoria, along with Queen Kapiʻolani. On the way, they landed at San Francisco, and travelled across the United States. In Washington she and the queen had an official meeting with the president, Grover Cleveland. In the UK, she was shown Elizabeth I's mace in Ipswich and conducted on a tour of a castle. They arrived in London along with many other royals and dignitaries from across the world. After taking up residence in the Alexandra Hotel, they had a reception with Queen Victoria at Buckingham Palace – she had already received the king, on his huge world tour – and socialised with other royals and dignitaries at the giant jubilee celebrations, where the women were wearing so many diamonds 'that to compute its worth would be to lose oneself in a maze of confusing calculation'. There Liliʻuokalani bought her own diamond butterfly from a London jeweller, still, amazingly, on show in the basement of the Iolani Palace, its delicate wings decked with diamonds. It had later been re-purchased from its buyer at the jewellery sale. The London jewellers had a bonanza from her and the other royals. Of all the jewels she could have bought, this fragile, fleeting thing had a poignant beauty: for the princess was about to be trapped.

While she was away, the enemies of her brother saw their chance to strike. An armed militia demanded that King Kalakaua dismiss his cabinet and submit to a new constitution (written by the landowners of course) or entirely lose his throne. As Liliʻuokalani put it, 'the men of foreign birth rose one day en masse' and 'forced the king… to sign a constitution of their own

preparation', which 'deprived the sovereign of all power', made him their 'tool' and barred nearly all Hawaiians from voting or participating in government. Liliʻuokalani received the news after returning to her rooms at the Alexandra Hotel after a garden party with Queen Victoria. She rushed to return. Back in Honolulu, she saw tears on the cheeks of their staff – they knew but could not say what 'had been forced upon the king'. As he declared, the king had been forced to sign, told he would be assassinated if he refused. She met the king and saw anxiety written on his face 'although this was only the commencement of the troubles preparing for our family and nation'.

While Liliʻuokalani had travelled back by boat, everything had changed. Three-quarters of the Hawaiian population were now excluded from voting and the legislature, filled with settlers, controlled the country and took up positions in the government (the prime minister was bundled off to San Francisco). Conditions for entry to the upper house of the legislature were set at high amounts of property and money, making it impossible for native Hawaiians to enter. To have 'resident' status, you only needed to have lived in the country for three years, and so those who had done so, who owned property, got to vote.

Liliʻuokalani judged that the aim of the landowners was 'annexation to the United States', and she was correct. The missionary party changed its name to the Reform Party, and presented themselves as reforming an outdated institution. The Hawaiians asked the king to renege on the constitution, since he had been forced to sign it. He said he could not; he feared unrest. Liliʻuokalani was now in danger. The Hawaiians were begging her to reverse the constitution when she came to the throne and she agreed, but secretly for fear of being killed. The next in line after her was her niece, Kaʻiulani, then nearly thirteen. Kaʻiulani's family, worried for her safety, sent her to boarding school in Northampton.

Liliʻuokalani was soon approached by a young man on behalf of the landowning party, asking if she would be queen if her brother was pushed off the throne. She demanded to know how her brother might be dethroned – 'were they going to murder him?' The messenger refused to answer her, which was terrifying. Another came to tell her that her brother must abdicate and she must become sovereign. Liliʻuokalani supposed they thought 'I would be a willing tool'. They thought she was just a woman, a

wife of an American, that they could tell her what to do. She told them she would 'have nothing to do with them', a heroic move. At the same time a new rebel group was hoping to put the king back in full power. They were meeting at her countryside home. She claimed she had no idea – but this was not true. She walked a tightrope between being civil to the landowners and letting the rebels develop their plans in her house. John Dominis, who had not been the best of husbands, was now an excellent shield for her; they underestimated her because she was a woman and thought that she would fall in line because of her husband. She made every effort to avoid the landowning group; everyone knew that the king could be killed.

In 1890, the king decided to travel to the United States, ostensibly for his health but also to speak to the Hawaiian minister in Washington. Lili'uokalani begged him not to leave the country, fearing that he would lose popularity if he did, but he sailed in November. Lili'uokalani was again regent and in the firing line. As she put it, with only twenty-five soldiers to guard the palace and 'many signs of domestic unrest', she decided not to sleep at the palace but in her home at Washington Place.

On 29 January the king's ship was seen heading to port at Honolulu, adorned as a mourning ship. Lili'uokalani went to the wharf and there she was told that the king had passed away from a stroke in San Francisco. She was stunned, 'so dazed with the suddenness of the news' that 'I hardly realized what was going on about me, nor did I appreciate for the moment my situation'. Fifty-two-year-old Lili'uokalani was now the first ever queen of Hawaii. She was immediately on her guard, fearful of 'those who stood waiting as a wild beast watches for his prey'. The landowning majority were determined to make her their puppet. They demanded that she immediately take the oath of office and thus agree to the hated constitution. She asked to defer and they informed her she had to take it 'then and there'. She was heartbroken to be forced to take the 'oath to the constitution, the adoption of which had led to my brother's death'. She was then told by the cabinet ministers that they were going to stay in position. Lili'uokalani had a battle on her hands, and she outmanoeuvred them – she informed them she would not be dealing with such matters until after her brother's funeral. It was a

valiant move, signalling that she would not be their doll. It was an act of war, queen-shaped.

The queen watched her brother's body taken to lie in state at the palace. 'No king was ever more beloved by his people,' she said. Liliʻuokalani had come to the throne with strong intentions to restore the former constitution. Had she agreed to be a figurehead, signing legislation and waving at events, she would have been happily embraced by the missionary and landowning interests. But she wished to represent Hawaii and to protect her people and their traditions. She told the minister of foreign affairs that she'd prefer him to be governor of Oahu, telling him, 'I felt sure he would enjoy visiting the outside districts.' He declined. She told other councillors to resign and that she would reappoint them. They refused and she sent the question to the supreme court. The court found for her and decreed that the offices expired with the death of the king. She told the ministers she would accept their resignations, and they had little choice but to do so. When she came to reappoint, she did not reappoint the minister of foreign affairs; she made her point. It was the first battle of her reign and one she won conclusively. She then confirmed that her heir would be Kaʻiulani, still at school in England. Thus, the first queen regnant would pass the throne to a second. She was carrying on her dynasty and no one was going to tell her otherwise. The Reform party had thought a woman would be easy to govern.

John Dominis was made prince consort and she restored to him the governorship of Oahu, a role that he had lost after the king, his brother-in-law, had been forced to accept the new constitution. He was too unwell with rheumatism to live at the palace, as it had lengthy flights of stairs. Without him as a support, Liliʻuokalani was exposed; he was a useful shield, his presence convinced the missionary party she was no threat. In the summer after she came to the throne, she embarked on a tour of the islands and was enthusiastically received. When she returned her husband was very much sicker. 'I was entirely alone by the side of my husband when he died,' she wrote. He lay in state with the honours of a monarch. She was heartbroken that he had been taken when 'I most needed his counsel and companionship'.

The queen had no husband, her heir was a child and she was on her own, with most politicians opposed to her aim to restore the constitution and the power of the Hawaiian monarchy. As the election of 1892 grew close, she

said that 'petitions poured in from every part of the Islands for a new constitution'. Out of her 9,500 registered voters, around two-thirds were writing to her asking for a new constitution. To ignore it would mean she was 'deaf to the voice of the people'. Two of the major political parties of opposition also advocated for it. But because she wanted this change, she was in serious danger.

The sugar planters wanted to incorporate Hawaii into the United States in order to sell sugar direct, without tariffs. In the war of words, two of Lili'uokalani's policies were used against her; her attempt to exercise some control over the opium trade by regulating it (her point was that it could not be stopped, so at least it should be regulated); and her lottery to raise money for the government. Both were portrayed as ungodliness, as well as evidence that the monarchy owned too much land and had too much power.

Lili'uokalani, with the help of opposition politicians, wrote a revised constitution that restored the vote to native Hawaiians and also immigrants, mostly Chinese workers, and returned rights to the monarchy. The new constitution was a brave move and some of her advisors had recommended against it. Her choice was stark: be a puppet and smile while the rights of her native population were further eroded, or try to fight. She wanted to fight. By her new constitution, she would not need the assent of the cabinet to govern, and any bills would have to be signed by her in order to become law. The queen's lands – which constituted around a third of the island – would remain hers. Most revolutionary of all: those Americans and Europeans who had gained the right to vote would now lose it.

The queen's new constitution was an act of war.

Scurrilous stories were put out about Lili'u, including that she wished to execute her enemies and even behead all of America. She was told that the US president would recognise her only if she and the people behaved peacefully; if not, the army would invade. There were rallies, demonstrations and formations of armed groups to overturn the queen. Lorrin Thurston was the grandson of the first missionaries to arrive in Hawaii and one of the lawyers who had drafted the Bayonet Constitution. He was intent on annexing Hawaii, and he had been integral to the forming in 1887 of a secret society, the Hawaiian League, in which all of the four hundred or so members, all European or American, vowed to protect each other and 'the white community of this Kingdom against any arbitrary or oppressive action

of the government'. Thurston was the Queen's mortal enemy and wanted her gone. They plotted a rebellion along with their armed wing, the Honolulu Rifles, around two hundred men. In early January 1893, the Marshal of the Kingdom (chief of police) got wind of this armed coup, asked the United States government minister, John L. Stevens, for permission to arrest the key players, the so-called Committee of Safety, and was refused. So he collected a force to defend the queen. Liliʻuokalani heard that a group of her supporters were planning for battle and begged them not to do so. Stevens wanted the country and disliked the queen. He ordered over the *USS Boston* bearing marines and sailors, ostensibly to protect US property if anything happened. They were officially neutral, but everyone knew they might rise up. It was easy to portray the queen to US home audiences as the equivalent of George III, a tyrant over American independence, refusing representation to the ordinary people. The strong sense of anti-monarchism in the nineteenth-century, based in the American revolution, meant that it was straightforward to portray Liliʻuokalani as another oppressive monarch, holding back trade.

On 17 January 1893, a Hawaiian policeman was shot and wounded while trying to stop a wagon containing guns and ammunition being taken to the Honolulu Rifles and the Committee of Safety. It was the beginning; both sides were ready to fight. Liliʻuokalani was told there would be mass bloodshed, civil war. On the brink, though, she could not bear to see her people die, and ordered her forces to surrender.

The minute she offered surrender, her position was lost. The Honolulu Rifles took over the palace and declared a provisional government. The president of the Committee of Safety declared that the monarchy was no more and a provisional government would rule until terms of unity with the United States had been agreed. The Queen had lost – but she had not had much choice. Yes, she thought of her people, but there were US marines and sailors ready to fight. They would defend the Committee of Safety if the government tried to arrest them. As she wrote in a protest to the US President at the time, she wasn't giving in to the 'Provisional Government' but to the 'superior force of the United States' in the form of Stevens' companies of marines. It had been an invasion. Almost immediately after the coup, Lorrin Thurston and other men on the Committee chartered a

steamer for the States, in order to get there faster to speak to the government than the queen's agents.

The queen was told she would receive a yearly stipend of $20,000 and her heir, young Kaʻiulani, would be given a lump sum of $150,000 – but they would no longer have power. The US flag was raised over Iolani Palace. The queen remained in her residence, but she was in danger. She saw:

> men going around town with firearms, shots were at all times flying about the city, whistling through the air, or penetrating houses to the great danger of the inhabitants, and no one was responsible for the local disorder. Words of harm towards my person had been openly spoken by the revolutionists; spies were in my household and surrounded my house by day and by night.

She looked out of her window and saw men standing opposite her residence, in front of the church, recording who was visiting her and how long they stayed.

The queen wrote the letter to the US president, Grover Cleveland, to protest. Her words had an effect – they stopped the Provisional Government in their tracks. Cleveland asked the new president of Hawaii, Sanford Dole, to reinstate Liliʻuokalani and commissioned an investigation into the matter of the queen's arrest, sending a Georgia congressman, James Blount, to Hawaii to investigate. Blount concluded that the Committee of Safety had conspired with the US ambassador and used the threat of US troops to remove the queen. He informed the president that if a vote was taken of all the people of Hawaii on whether they supported the annexation, it would fail. As he put it, 'the undoubted sentiment among the people is for the Queen, against the Provisional Government and against annexation'. Liliʻuokalani couldn't be cancelled out so easily. The president decided they needed to take steps to restore the queen and her government and sent a diplomat to persuade the Provisional Government to withdraw and tell the queen to forgive all who had participated. The queen felt they had committed treason and although she was willing to say they should not be imprisoned, she wanted them to be banished. Liliʻuokalani said, 'this being the second offence of these individuals, they were regarded as dangerous to the community'. The newspapers said she had wanted her enemies

beheaded; she insisted she had said no such thing. In December, she offered to agree to the American terms: amnesty for those who had overthrown her, restoring the Bayonet Constitution and paying the Provisional Government's debts (i.e. paying for their efforts to overthrow her!), saying everybody involved in the new government would have 'full amnesty' for persons and property, but she made it conditional on whether they 'would work together with me in trying to restore peace and prosperity to our beautiful and once happy islands'. Her offer of mutual co-operation was turned down. The Provisional Government couched their protests in language that harked back to the American revolution. As one put it, one day 'the native population of Hawaii… will thank God that there were people willing to risk their lives, their property, their all to establish true liberty in Hawaii'. The way they saw it, they had lived there, been born there, they should own it. The President was told that the new Government refused to 'betray… the sacred trust of Christian civilization'. It didn't matter that the queen and most of the ruling class had long converted to Christianity.

Of course, the impasse was spun as the queen's fault: she had refused to properly forgive (like a true Christian, like a true woman should) and therefore she had lost her throne.[I] In her book, she answers back. As she puts it, 'it would not have made the least difference what I had said or what I had not said; for these people, having once gained the power, were determined never to relinquish it'. She was not wrong. The following year, on 4 July 1894, the Provisional Government established the Republic of Hawaii. The queen grew ill due to the 'long agony of suspense' and was prescribed, as she put it, electricity treatment for mental strain and anxiety.

Outside the palace walls, attitudes to the new republic were growing more critical, among the settlers as well as the Hawaiians. People's incomes had plummeted due to instability – and perhaps they had thought there might be a sharing out of the crown lands. The sugar planters who weren't directly in government found themselves no better off. Hawaiians and discontented settlers wanted change.

In January 1895, rebels started an uprising to restore Lili'uokalani to her throne. The rebels were arrested and an informer told the authorities that there were weapons and munitions at Lili'uokalani's house, Washington Place. On 16 January, two government men came to the queen and told her

they had a paper for her arrest, although they refused to allow her to look at it. She was told she had to leave immediately, so she obeyed, presuming she was being taken to a police station. Instead, she was driven to the Iolani Palace, which was surrounded by troops.

The Iolani Palace was now her prison. She was taken up the staircase to one of the bedrooms, at the front, which had probably been a guest room or an office. She saw a large room with a single bed, a sofa, a table, a chair and a cupboard for food, with a small bathroom and another bedroom off the room. She asked for her favourite attendants and for her meals to be sent from her house. She was then left with her single lady-in-waiting, Mrs Eveline Wilson. No visitors were allowed and she would not be allowed out on the balcony to exercise. As she said, everything was intended so that she was 'reminded every instant that I was a prisoner'. The guards paced 'backwards and forward through the hall, before my door and up and down the front veranda. The never ceasing footsteps as they tramped on their beat fell incessantly on my ears.' She was not allowed newspapers, reading materials (other than prayer books) and even initially denied paper and pencils.

The 'first night of my imprisonment was the longest night I have ever passed in my life', she wrote. Her lady-in-waiting couldn't sleep so, next morning, Lili'uokalani told her to return to her children. As she was imprisoned, she was told that all of her 'diaries, the petitions I had received by my people – all things of that nature which could be found were swept into a bag and carried off by the chief justice'. All her staff were arrested. Her household manager was thrown into a dark solitary cell without food or water in the hope that he would say she was guilty. Soldiers were sent to ransack her home and 'every drawer of desk, table or bureau was wrenched out, turned upside down, the contents pulled over the floors'. The diaries that they could find were seized and never returned to her. All her papers and her husband's papers, her records of her reign, were gone.

She had not been four years on the throne, and she was forbidden to write or even to play an instrument – did they fear someone might hear her music and be swayed? The Queen was allowed sewing materials though; no one thought they could be a threat. Their mistake. What had started out as a

fashionable 'crazy quilt', sometimes also called 'mosaic patchwork', became an ardent political statement.

Lili'uokalani had lost everything. She was distressed that the men of the Church, to whom she had given money and 'helped to build their churches and ornament the walls', never, apart from one bishop, remembered her in her prison. Four days after she was arrested, she was visited by a government minister who asked her: was she willing to die? She said that she was. He told her that she would have to die – others had been shot and it was likely she would be too. She was then told she must abdicate. She said she would not, and was told that this was the only way to save her followers who were imprisoned and sentenced to be hanged. As she said, she was 'sick, a lone woman in prison, scarcely knowing who was my friend… without legal advice or friendly counsel'. And so 'the stream of blood ready to flow unless it was stayed by my pen'. She said she would rather have chosen death than sign, but it was the only way of freeing her people.

She signed the document of abdication at her palace on 24 January. They told her she must sign as Lili'uokalani Dominis – as she said, 'to humiliate me' and there 'never was… any such a person as Lili'uokalani Dominis'; she had never assumed her husband's name, even though Christian tradition demanded she should, and as queen her signature, like that of most monarchs, was her first name only. She was later told that she had to say she had consulted advisors before she signed, but was adamant that she had not. 'I still believed that murder was the alternative,' she wrote. Despite what she had been told, her supporters were sentenced to death. As she pointed out, the document held no weight because she had been compelled, and 'the acts of any person deprived of civil rights have no force nor weight, either at law or at equity'. It didn't matter. Once they had her signature, they had what they wanted. We have seen other queens told that they need to agree to what men say to avoid bloodshed, like Joanna of Castile. Women are told their actions could create civil war, and they submit; male monarchs go ahead and shed the blood.

She said she had known nothing about any weapons secreted at her house. She explained that she had often scolded her gardener for untidy-looking soil and had later realised that perhaps this was due to people digging up the soil to hide weapons. Also, her husband had been a keen collector of historic weapons. It is likely that she did know about the buried

arms. But even though her brother had been forced to sign away rights under threat of death and she had been forced to surrender due to the fear of violence from armed men, for her to arm her people in response was seen as terrible treason. Troops were sent by the president to protect others, but if she tried to protect herself it was a crime.

She was told that she would be put on trial and advised that she should choose not to appear because it would be humiliating. At this, Lili'uokalani was infuriated. 'Humiliation!' she replied. 'What had I left?' They had taken her homes, her papers and her belongings, seized her throne and confined her. She said she would attend her own trial and be 'proud of it'. She knew what they were trying to do. They were trying to silence her because they feared that the queen speaking for herself could prove a powerful weapon. They claimed her speaking would be 'undignified' – a criticism of a woman. Accusers never wanted queens to speak at their own trials, from Catherine of Aragon to Mary, Queen of Scots to the Queen of Hawaii, they were terrified of what she might say.

The queen insisted on appearing at her trial for treason, on 8 February. She would speak, she declared; be a 'martyr to the people'. Her trial took place in the former throne room of her own palace and was led by her former attorney general, and attended by ministers, the diplomatic courts, church ministers and people from all classes including society ladies. It was a show. Throughout the trial she was referred to by the judge-advocate as 'that woman' and 'the prisoner', said 'with such affectation of contempt and disgust'. As she said, the object was to 'make me break down in the presence of the staring crowd'. She refused to submit to them and noticed how 'disappointed they were that she remained proud'; in their own report, they noted her 'haughty carriage'. She was insufficiently humble for their tastes.

Then she spoke for herself. It was a passionate defence. She said, at the request of 'the majority of the Hawaiian people' and with cabinet consent, she had made 'changes in the constitution' for the 'advantage and benefit of my kingdom and subjects and residents'. She said her alterations 'did not deprive foreigners of any rights' under the 1887 constitution. Then, she insisted, a 'minority of the foreign population made my action the pretext for overthrowing the monarchy'. She spoke of how the people had not been

consulted on whether the monarchy should exist. 'To prevent the shedding of the blood of my people, natives and foreigners alike, I opposed armed interference and quietly yielded to the armed forces brought against my throne,' she said and noted that she herself had prevented the people fighting for her, to avoid death. 'By my command and advice, the native people and those in sympathy with them were restrained from rising against the government in power.'

Lili'uokalani's powerful defence was a total disaster for the government. The new government must have wished they had forced her not to come. She pointed out that it was thanks to her that there was no war, that she had 'yielded' to save lives. She said that much had been done to scare people about the 'bloodthirstiness of Hawaiians', with the local people being made into dreadful monsters when 'those who know the Hawaiian temper' knew they were peaceful. She finally declared that they had no right to try her in a court, that it violated their own constitution and laws. 'I would ask you to consider that your government is on trial before the whole civilised world and that in accordance with your actions and decisions will you yourselves be judged.' The court requested that much of her statement be withdrawn from the record. They were afraid of her words.

At two o'clock on 27 February, the queen was called into the court. She was found guilty of treason and sentenced to five years of hard labour in prison and a fine. She noted wryly that she wasn't allowed to take the paper on which her sentence was written, with other relevant papers, in case she 'might have valued them, perhaps, as souvenirs'. She was escorted back to her room. There, she said, her imprisonment remained the same, although now she was allowed paper.

Captive, sequestered on the upper floor of the palace, the queen was told she would be allowed to walk on the veranda, but after business hours when her jailers were sure that there was no one around to see her. She was only allowed to receive flowers or fruit, no books or newspapers. She had many supportive female friends who expressed their sympathy with gifts of cakes and jellies; no men sent her presents. Her friends wrapped her bouquets in layers of paper with sections of newspaper hidden underneath, and she seized upon these scraps, insight into the outside world. She was allowed

letters, but they were opened and checked to verify they were personal correspondence only, no political inferences.

She composed music with pencil and paper and tried to get through the days. She wrote down her song of origin, in case she died alone in the palace and it was forgotten. She also translated the *Kumulipo*, the Hawaiian creation chant, over two thousand words long, a tale featuring the birth of sea, air and land animals, plants and finally people. Unlike in the Genesis story, woman comes first; Laʻilaʻi is the first woman and from her brain comes Kiʻi, but then she decides she would prefer to have children with her brother, God. She has eight children in total – whose families come to be the tribes of Hawaii. The queen was writing and transcribing songs and poems, and for political reasons. As she wrote of her desire to compose, 'this gift of nature, never having been suffered to fall into disuse, remains a source of the greatest consolation to this day. I have never yet numbered my compositions but I am sure that they must run well up to the hundreds.' As she estimated, about a quarter of them had been printed. Liliʻuokolani wrote 'Aloha Oe', a song of lost love that became one of Hawaii's four national anthems. In total, the queen wrote over 150 songs and prayers that we know of. As she said, the people of Hawaii were 'from time immemorial lovers of poetry and music'. There was an immense and mighty tradition of songs, but they had been passed down orally, and so she was writing them down as a record. For her, the painful months of imprisonment passed more quickly 'occupied and soothed by the statement of my thoughts in music' and even though she was forbidden an instrument she had 'the tones of my voice'. The guards would have stopped her from writing political statements or noting about her past; they saw her composing music and thought it was a harmless female pastime. Instead, writing was her political statement, as she promoted and memorialised Hawaiian music and songs. She had realised that they might be lost, and so conserving them, writing them down was a political act.

As she put it, three of her songs 'found their way from my prison to the city of Chicago', where they were printed, among them the 'Aloha Oe', giving readers an important insight into the Hawaiian culture that the missionary party claimed was non-existent. She was, in recording songs and religious chants, beating the missionary party at their own game. The Hawaii they had arrived in had not believed in land possession or writing down oral histories – and they had used this to condemn the country as not civilised. Perhaps

the songs were smuggled out in an empty cake box, via her network of women, and sent to Chicago. Other songs, including one to her nephew, it has recently been discovered, were smuggled out and published in pro-monarchy papers in Honolulu.[4] The women who Lili'uokalani listed, including 'Mrs Mary Carter, Mrs Haalelea and Mrs Victoria Ward' and 'many other ladies to whom I am sure I have never ceased to be grateful' were not just cake and flower givers; among them were women acting as secret agents, under cover of sending over jellies and flowers. Perhaps some of them were the women who came to her jewellery sale after her death to show solidarity, 'no longer young' in their finest gowns.

And Lili'uokalani continued her quilt, her record of her life and her resistance, created by the needle, an item that the authorities thought was no threat but which was a weapon. The nine squares are a riot of colour; it is most likely that her lady-in-waiting, Mrs Wilson collected fabrics from other ladies and visited the queen's wardrobe for gowns. On the colourful panels, the queen and Mrs Wilson and those who were eventually allowed to visit record names of supporters, the Hawaiian motto and the coat of arms – and in one block, the Hawaiian flag and the words '*Kuu Hae Aloha*' (my beloved flag). This block also carries many symbols of freemasonry. Her husband had been a senior mason and her brother, the king, had been a Master Mason; she visited the Masonic Lodge in Washington in later years, asking for permission to wear her husband's jewels, and perhaps hoped for their support. There is an extensive family tree of her lady-in-waiting, Mrs Wilson, a phoenix, an anchor and butterflies. We might argue that flowers and butterflies and fish were cover for the political message but, alternatively, we can see it as political; the missionary party had been trying to claim Hawaiian land as their own on the basis it was their 'garden'; the queen showed that she too owned the garden.

The eight colourful blocks surround a central panel that is the most important. As she embroidered, in her own hand, she was 'Her Majesty Queen Lili'uokalani Imprisoned'. The central panel is composed of four squares and these most political sections, arranged around the Hawaiian coat of arms designed for her brother's coronation, are mainly text, and the text is embroidered straight onto single pieces of material, as opposed to the crazy quilt style of the other squares. In one square, she has her name under

a crown surrounded by a wreath and other symbols of the Hawaiian monarchy. In the second square, where she writes of being imprisoned in the Iolani Palace, it appears as if the words were written on the material before embroidery and it looks like the queen's own hand. The third explains how she has been dethroned and notes the date of the uprising for her. In the square on her abdication, she lists all the witnesses who signed her abdication document in 1895. She recorded the names and the dates. No one was going to be able to pretend they weren't there, compelling her to sign the document.

The queen who wasn't allowed to walk on her balcony in case she sparked a rebellion sewed a quilt full of stories. Everything in the quilt was a message of independence and defiance – and from one who loved her country. It seems astonishing that the queen, Mrs Wilson and other visiting ladies were able to embroider such a political statement while watched by guards. No doubt the eventual plan was for Mrs Wilson to take the finished quilt home, carry what seemed like a piece of harmless fancy work in a basket and get it out into the world.

The sentence was later commuted to palace imprisonment. There would have been outcry from the United States if the government had enacted the sentence of hard labour on a queen, and a woman in her sixties. That a sovereign could be sentenced to hard labour for not really doing anything apart from – perhaps – having weapons buried in her garden (which no one could prove were hers) made a mockery of the democracy that was being pretended. She was eventually allowed her autoharp and guitar and also to have pet canaries, as well as books, and to cultivate potted flowers and ferns. She occupied her time with her quilt, reading and music, even though she was growing weaker in health. When cholera swept the city – she also caught it – she donated a house for the benefit of those suffering.

On 6 September, about eight months after her arrest, she was told that she could leave the palace that afternoon. It is most likely that US ministers were demanding her release and her ill health was a concern – the new government didn't want a dead queen on their hands. She was driven to her home, Washington Place, and told she was on parole. She was to have a custodian, and she was forbidden gatherings at her house or to go to where

there were gatherings – including to church. The following February, she was officially told that she would not serve hard labour, but also that she could not leave the island. In October, while repotting her ferns, she was given a document, which she saw was an absolute pardon and a restoration of her civil rights. But, as she pointed out, if she had been deprived of her civil rights at imprisonment then how legal was her abdication document?

No matter. The country had been taken and its fate decided. They were giving her rights because influential people in Washington did not like the world thinking she had been locked up and Hawaiians were very unhappy about it. The justification given to the US audience for the annexation was that it was a way of protecting Hawaii from Japanese (and also British) imperialism; but if it was an act of benevolent protection, then why lock up the queen? The settlers were keen to move to an agreement that the United States would absorb Hawaii, and then they would be able to export without tariffs, and, after the complaints across the USA about Lili'uokalani, they had to set her free; even though they feared what she might do.

For standing up for her realm, the queen was widely attacked in the US press. One man called her 'a study in superstition', one missionary descendant, Rev. Sereno E. Bishop, wrote a piece, 'The Royal Palace Democratized', about the 'disgusting orgies' that had 'polluted' the Iolani Palace since the times of her brother and declared she and her brother had not been legitimate but illegitimate children of a mulatto shoemaker and thus 'white Hawaii loathes them and native Hawaiians have no respect for them'. They were attacking her hard because they feared her. One of the few female journalists to write about her produced the most sympathetic take, writing she 'has lived a spotless life as child, woman and wife; it was not until she was fifty years old that scandal assailed her'. Even the more positive writers called her 'Queen Lil', a version of her name she detested.

The queen knew she had to speak for herself. Lili'uokalani decided to travel to the United States. She felt that away from Hawaii she could be free, without 'every word, every look, every act of mine… being noted down by spies'. And she wanted to try to win over men of influence. She arrived in San Francisco and travelled through California, wondering why 'this great and powerful nation' must voyage 2,000 miles to 'take from the poor

Hawaiians their little spots in the broad Pacific'. The queen travelled by train, and there was much interest from the crowds; the guards had to lock up her carriage to prevent people from breaking in. Lili'uokalani spent the winter with her husband's relatives in Massachusetts, visited Niagara Falls and began writing her memoir, *Hawaii's Story by Hawaii's Queen*. She would not have been allowed to publish it in Hawaii. The queen wanted her voice and words listened to. Despite all her claims otherwise, she was on a political mission. And it was not safe. She was told that she was 'surrounded by enemies, some of whom from home were entirely unscrupulous', and it was said that 'evil was intended' against her. It would make everybody's life easier if she just happened to fall down the stairs. She was an older lady, after all.

'What is the queen doing in Washington?' demanded newspapers. They suspected she wanted her throne back. The queen visited President Cleveland in January and praised him for his efforts to right the wrong done to Hawaii, effectively flattering him into listening to her. In Washington, she received callers and gave a fortnightly reception, usually numbering around five hundred people. The queen was lobbying hard; she said she only returned calls to those connected with the government, particularly governors and those in the Houses. Washington society couldn't get enough of her, and schools, organisations and charities all wanted a visit. She was convinced that, if she explained her cause to the powerful, justice would prevail. She estimated that she met 5,000 callers and from nearly all those she received, by words or facial expression, 'sympathy and encouragement'.

The queen was pushing forward the cause of Hawaii. Alas, although she was gaining sympathy and was the most popular guest in Washington, particularly among women, people thought the deal to annex Hawaii was done. Everybody saw her as an exiled queen; they wished to meet her. But for some she was merely a curiosity; others felt sorry for her but thought that the wider good had been served. Hawaii had to be protected from Japan or Britain and monarchy was an anachronism.

Lili'uokalani was heartbreakingly hopeful that she might get her throne back, brave in travelling to Washington despite threats to her life and enemies spreading 'vile and baseless slanders'. She continued writing her memoir, working with an American journalist. She put in biographical sketches of her enemies, but her publishers told her she must remove them for fear of libel. Drafts were rejected, because they were too inflammatory.

The queen did not want to be an object of pity or interest, a tragic case. She wanted to be seen as a queen. She placed volumes of her music and her translation of the *Kumlipo* into the Congressional Library. As she knew, records and words were important in the United States, and the missionary party wanted her songs to be forgotten.

In June 1897, the new president, William McKinley, presented plans for annexing Hawaii, which would involve dropping the moneys given to the queen and her heir. The president's plans were defeated in the Senate, but eventually passed by Congress. Liliʻuokalani wrote, 'I declare such a treaty to be an act of wrong towards the native and part-native people of Hawaii… in violation of international rights… finally, an act of gross injustice to me.' She painted an emotive picture of Hawaiians 'excluded from their own halls of legislation'. She met with the president and felt he was sympathetic. She stopped short of asking him for help, diplomatically attempting to keep relations cordial. But the annexation continued.

Liliʻuokalani had thrown all her efforts into trying to gain support. She had received thousands of people in Washington, spoken to the powerful, met with the president, yet 'for the Hawaiian people, for the forty thousand of my own race and blood… for them has this mission of mine accomplished anything?' In the end, her country had been taken. The commission into Hawaii later agreed that the monarchy had been overthrown, but the new government was in place and 'therefore the question would not be reopened'. Case closed. As she said, she was not told of the decision or given a chance to challenge it – 'not one of my friends was given the opportunity to raise a voice on behalf of the disfranchised Hawaiian people or their persecuted queen'.

She had one last bombshell up her sleeve: her memoir. In February 1898, she published her book *Hawaii's Story by Hawaii's Queen*, in Boston. The publisher was hardly huge – it had published various books, including a copy of *Pilgrim's Progress*. It didn't seem the most obvious home for such a formidable story. Sections of the book might seem easy and pleasant, with long lists of her American and European lady friends and descriptions of where she went, receptions and meetings. But these are significant: they show her networks of supporters and how she was no aloof monarch, locked up in a castle. She presents herself to correspond with social expectations of upper-class women in the nineteenth century: gentle, sociable, charitable.

But she also tells the story of how she was imprisoned, locked up, deprived of everything. The queen, like so many of the royal women who created successful self-representations, managed to generate an image of herself that was aligned with the expectations of female behaviour but also showed her as uniquely determined to advocate for her country, and she totally and successfully resists the vision of selfish, heathen monstrousness that had been imposed upon her.

In her book Liliʻuokalani told the story of how she'd been deposed, informed she was to be shot, sentenced to death. It was a bombshell. The cover of the book, complete with a crown, a wreath and symbols of monarchy, looks to me similar to the square about her life that was in the centre of her quilt; both book and quilt were strategies of resistance. She explained that the missionary party had been bent on annexing the islands from the beginning, against the wish of the people. She used the strategy of the missionary party, who had used newspapers to condemn her, and used the Western form of the memoir to write her own story – in the same way as she used Western musical trends with Hawaiian writing to create songs of Hawaiian identity. She also confirms Hawaii as entirely opposed to how it had been presented by her enemies. It was a modern gregarious world of receptions and a monarchy who listened to the people, a Christian religion and a strong Hawaiian identity. It is particularly interesting how much she writes about female friends, both Hawaiian and American, and her sociability with them, evoking networks of female friendships. Showing Hawaii and Honolulu as equally 'civilised' as Washington, she also stakes a claim for individual Hawaiian identity. As we have seen, she describes the tradition of adopting children, admitting that 'it is not easy to explain its origin to those alien to our national life'. And, as she says, refusing accusations they are pagan, she says, yes people still throw offerings into the volcano for Pele but it's the same as Americans throwing rice after a bridal couple, a clever comparison.

The queen used Hawaiian words, staking a claim to their importance. She also used Hawaiian vocabulary to beat the censors. As one scholar has shown, she wrote about one of the missionary party cabinet ministers to whom 'the popular appellation *kauka-kope-kala* subsequently adhered'. What did she mean? Only Hawaiian readers would know. It was that he had 'scraped all the money in the Treasury'. She essentially calls him a corrupt

thief, and it remained in the text as readers didn't understand.[5] The queen's book of her life and her independence made it very clear: she had been wrongly deposed and Hawaiians had been mistreated. There was nothing about 'true liberty' in the taking of Hawaii. Despite being repeatedly edited and having had sections removed, it was a powerful text on the legitimacy of the monarchy – and a counterweight to arguments that the Hawaiians had wanted to be rid of an undemocratic queen.

Of course, the book was brutally reviewed. Lorrin Thurston claimed it had been ghostwritten by an American male journalist, declaring she didn't have the English to write so clearly. This argument has even hung around, until comprehensively disproved by a study of her diaries that showed a similar voice in diary and book.[6] It is impossible to read the queen's extensive diaries now and not think that it is the queen's own voice in her memoir. One critic said she was 'warped and partial' and so readers should rely on the works by those such as William Ellis – the missionary writer, who we will meet again as he published on Madagascar. The same critic strongly contests her representation of Hawaiian societies as scholarly: they were heathen. However, plenty noted the importance of her book, including *Public Opinion*, which noted it was a 'valuable contribution' to understanding when there had been many efforts to 'mislead public opinion'. *The Book Buyer* noted that the information in the book was 'not likely to be accessible elsewhere'. They were right.

When the queen had arrived in Washington, the papers had asked what she was doing there. Now, she had gone one further than talk to people at parties, she had written her book. It proved beyond any doubt that the Hawaiian people had not wanted the new constitutions, that they were already 'civilized' and that the queen had been popular and beloved. There was no change in the political attitude towards her claim. But she laid down a record of Hawaiian identity and resistance.

On 12 August 1898, the president of the government of Hawaii handed sovereignty of the country to the president of the United States. No native Hawaiian attended the ceremony. Lili'uokalani and her supporters shut themselves up in the palace, so she did not have to see the Hawaiian flag being lowered. The Hawaiian national anthem was played for the final time.

The queen had lost.

Despite risking death, fighting back with her words, her presence and even her needle, she could not win. The Queen of Hawaii's enemies were afraid, even when they had taken everything from her. This book has seen queens choosing to abdicate, queens thrust off their thrones in revolutions funded by those who wanted power, but most of them are queens who were thrown out in favour of another relation, usually a younger male; here the queen was entirely taken from the throne, imprisoned yet left to live. She tried to take back her lands, lobbied politicians and even in 1909 filed a lawsuit against the US government. All failed. Her lands were so extensive that she was never going to get them back. In 1911, she was granted a pension of $1,250 a year.

Lili'uokalani lived out her final days at Washington Place. In 1917, it was reported that the queen was unable to hold her traditional birthday reception due to ill health. By November she was dying, and on 11 November, at the age of seventy-nine, Lili'uokalani passed away. The guns were fired seventy-nine times as her tribute. She lay in state and was given a state funeral, as the crowds on her route sang the song she had composed, 'Aloha Oe'. In modern-day Hawaii, in Oahu and beyond, the queen's name and those of the royal family are seen on buildings, hospitals, schools and roads. She remains a powerful symbol of independence.

Lili'uokalani, 'tearful' and 'sore-eyed', tried to instal a new constitution, and for this brave effort she lost everything. And yet, unlike many other queens who were forced out, she was able to write her own account, in her quilt and her book. Her aim in writing was to be restored to the throne, but the memoirs also gave powerful voice to her desire to refuse everything that had been forced upon her.

The men that took her throne first wanted her to be the image of monstrousness. But the queen's own voice, dangerous and distrusted, created sympathy. Her book was incendiary. And it was an act of resistance against being cast as the monster. It was effective, but still she was seen as a bygone queen, a symbol of a lost world, a prize guest for fashionable receptions. She wanted to be seen as queen until the end of her life. And, then in the twentieth century, she was. Near to the Hawaiian State Capitol and the former royal palace is a bronze statue of the queen, over six foot high. It was dedicated in 1982. The queen holds a copy of the constitution for which she

advocated, a copy of her song 'Aloha Oe' and the creation chant that she translated in 1895 while imprisoned. The base originally bore the dates of her reign, 1891–1893, but recently a new plaque was installed, which adjusted it to 1891–1917, the date of her death. Lili'uokalani was queen of Hawaii until she died. Still, in modern-day Hawaii, Queen Lili'uokalani is a symbol of resistance and independence.

Queens are frequently the final monarchs before empire. Such was the case for the queens in countries in the Pacific, near Hawaii. Tahitian and Polynesian society in the South Pacific was one in which women had power, strongly matrilineal, where women could inherit property and were the centre of life, respected. But for powers looking to expand their empires, a queen was a signal of weakness.

Captain Cook also stopped by Tahiti, 2,600 miles south of Hawaii. In 1790, Chief Tu, using the weapons and arms of some of the British who had settled in Tahiti after staging a mutiny on the *Bounty*, took power. At about the same time as King Kamehameha I was doing the same in Hawaii, Tu became Pōmare I. He and his descendants extended their influence across the region, and took the name Pōmare. In 1827 Aimata, aged fourteen, daughter of Pōmare II, came to the throne. She became Pōmare IV, the first queen of Tahiti, taking the same name as her male predecessors.

Ten years after Pōmare IV's reign began, after two priests were expelled, a French minister arrived, allied with chiefs hostile to the power of the Pōmare dynasty, and told her to accept a French protectorate. Pōmare was a keen Anglophile and Protestant, and begged Queen Victoria for help, as well as King Louis Philippe of France. The British pressured the French to withdraw and there were threats of war. A bloody conflict between the Tahitians and French ensued and, although the French won, the scale of the local rebellion and threats from the British meant they could not occupy the island; instead, it would be a protectorate. Pōmare fought for her fellow queens, and extracted a promise that her allies in Bora Bora, Huahine and Raiatea-Tahaa would not be overrun. The queen ruled until 1877 and was the longest-reigning monarch of Tahiti.

Her son, Pōmare V, took the throne, but after only three years he was forced to abdicate and give the territory to France in full. His consort,

Joanna Marau-Taʻaroa Tepaʼu, was the last queen consort of Tahiti. The daughter of a royal princess and a British merchant from Hastings who had settled in Tahiti, twenty-year-old Joanna travelled to Paris and became a fashion sensation; and on the voyage back to Tahiti she met a French naval officer and fell in love, and they may have had children. She divorced the chief. The American writer Henry Adams, a friend, wrote her biography. Queen Pōmare and her people had been strong, they had resisted colonialism, but with the advent of her son independence was gone.

The island of Huahine, 125 miles from Tahiti, has a name that translates as 'woman's sex' – its mountain does look like a pregnant woman lying down. Huahine was another country that fostered female monarchy. When Captain Cook arrived to stake his claim there was a queen, Tehuacana I, who had come to the throne in 1735. In later years there was another queen on the throne, Queen Teriitaria, who ascended in 1815. She had lived quite the life: born into an exiled royal family, married to Pōmare II of Tahiti, regent over his young son Pōmare III and pushed out the year after Pōmare IV came to the throne. But then in 1845, the French, with the support of two local chiefs, planted a flag in Huahine. Teriitaria commissioned a ship and went with her men to chop it down. But independence was doomed. The last monarch was a queen, Tehaʻapapa, who came to power in 1893 and was deposed by French annexation in 1895. Female power was part of Polynesian life. But for potential colonists, it was an invitation.

In Raiatea-Tahaa, the French wished for the island and the king, Tamatoa VI, in 1888 agreed to annexation by the French and abdicated. Tuari, a princess of the royal family, promptly assumed the throne, and she and a minor chief led a revolt against the French and offered the islands to Queen Victoria. She travelled to the Cook Islands to attempt to enlist British support, but the British declined. The rebels were forced to surrender. Tuari was given a pension, on the basis that she would make no protest or difficulty. The other rebels, including the chief, were exiled to New Caledonia or conscripted as forced labour.

The kingdom of Bora Bora retained its independence. In 1873, the two-year-old queen Teriimaevarua III came to the throne. By 1888 the French had taken the island, but she stayed as a figurehead until 1895, when she was replaced by a French vice-president. The 1890s was truly the time for queens

being removed, in the final flush of empire, as countries forced their way to power and railroaded through the Pacific.

A woman on the throne is often the end of the monarchy; it can be presented by the invading powers as a dwindling of the bloodline, lack of healthy male heirs, a weakness that must be taken. Equipped with the theories of Walter Bagehot that monarchs should advise, encourage and warn, empires could claim that, as was the case in Hawaii, the queen was overstepping and should be deposed.

Tonga was the only country of the Pacific to retain its monarchy, following the signing of a treaty between Britain and the rulers. Queen Salote, the longest-reigning monarch in Tongan history, put in place the movement away from the treaty and towards total sovereignty, leading the country to join the Commonwealth in 1970, five years after her death. At Elizabeth II's coronation there was much comment on Queen Salote, who travelled to the ceremony, in an open carriage, next to the Sultan of Kelantan. Who was that man next to the queen? Noël Coward was said to have declared 'her lunch', although he denied it and there is no source for the quote. Whoever said it – if they even did – it's an anecdote that has been repeated ad infinitum. Sexist, sizeist and above all implying that a queen from Tonga, a Pacific Islander, ate people, it didn't reflect the feelings of the crowd. They were delighted by Salote, whose carriage was the only one to stay open in the rain.

So often, the last monarchs of any country, from Ancient Egypt to nineteenth-century Hawaii and Tahiti, have been queens. Perhaps it is coincidence; but for many invading powers, even though Victoria was on the throne of Britain, a queen was a weakness, an invitation, any loyalty to her easily overridden. In the end, female power was an aberration and deposed by men.

Liliʻuokalani wanted to be seen as a powerful queen and as a symbol of hope for restoration. Her quilt was sewn with images of Hawaiian identity. She wished her speeches to be remembered. She wanted the throne back. She didn't want the image of the sad, tragic queen that was imposed upon her. In this book full of sources that have misrepresented, attacked, reduced queens, Liliʻuokalani wrote her own story and it has survived. She above all managed to direct her representations. But what she wanted was her throne back. She did not get it. She used the tools of the invaders against them,

preserving the oral culture, writing song after song, preserving the words and the songs and the music of Hawaii, in an effective use of music as a political statement. She sewed a quilt full of political messages. She wrote her own words in her memoir. She refused to be forgotten. And she was not.

I. One hundred years later, in 1993, President Bill Clinton signed the Apology Act, which noted that the Hawaiian people did not relinquish control of the country.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Palace Coups: The Queen Ranavalonas of Madagascar

Queens are made into monsters, none more so than Ranavalona I of Madagascar, less so in portraits than in the word images of the missionaries she tried to ban from her realm. A recent biography of her is called *The Female Caligula*. In all writing about women in the past, so often by men, we must attempt to sift out fact from misogyny and fantasy; still more so when our source for an African ruler is accounts by Europeans who wanted her money or the souls of her subjects, casting her as the worst type of queen: killing, rapacious and merciless. There were three Ranavalonas of Madagascar, and they ran the gamut of representations of female rulers: evil overlord woman to suffering tragic deposed monarch. Ranavolona I, the first woman on the throne of Madagascar, a country so vital to European trade routes, was cast by the Victorians as 'a female fury', a 'monster of cruelty', a 'heathen queen', and 'a woman combining in herself the worst traits of character of Jezebel, Athaliah, and bloody Queen Mary'; it was three women used as symbols of sexual immorality, slaughtering children and religious intolerance resulting in death to the faithful.[1] And she was cast as that old chestnut 'unnatural'.[2] Of all the female rulers in this book, many of whom have been cast as horrors and sexualised, Ranavalona has been the most attacked and maligned. Perhaps she was the most brutal. We shall see. But also, her unwillingness to cede to foreign powers cast a die for independence. And because the Victorians already had a woman – Victoria – on the throne they couldn't say female monarchy was all bad. They had to

claim that *this* one was bad, evil and cruel. All of our chapters have been about the question of sources: women are written about by male chroniclers and mocked by satirists, their heads are cut off to serve men's purposes, their papers are destroyed, even their portraits, we have to search for them in the gaps. But it is not just about sexism, queens are written about more harshly than ordinary women; in the end queens are attacked with words and pictures to try to seize their power. A queen must be used as an example of why no women should have power. So it's a problem, as with Ranavalona, if there's a queen everyone wants to keep her throne – Victoria – reigning at the same time as a 'monster'. Queens who fight back are hated, whether for defending Egypt or defending Catholicism. Resistance causes much more anger and fightback when it is led by a woman.

Ranavalona came to the throne on 1 August 1828 after a palace coup pushing out her husband. The men who put her in power thought she would be their doll – how we have seen that before. This would not be the case. She said at her coronation in June 1829, 'do not think that because I am a woman, I cannot govern the kingdom: never say, she is a woman weak and ignorant, she is unable to rule over us.'[3] These words were reported by William Ellis, a British man who visited Madagascar. They are curiously similar to those attributed to Elizabeth I at Tilbury about the 'body of a weak and feeble woman' but the heart and stomach of a king. Elizabeth was an ambivalent figure for most Victorians: a successful queen, but one who executed her enemies and failed to marry. Ranavalona probably did make reference to the criticisms of her sex when she spoke; whether she used 'weak and ignorant', one wonders. A minor royal woman, not a favoured wife, a woman with no son, vaulted into position, Ranavalona had been underestimated – and she was about to prove her strength. As she continued in her crowning ceremony, the Great God and the lesser gods and goddesses had given this land to her. She raised her sceptre to the sky and declared, 'I *will* rule here, to the good fortune of my people and the glory of my name! The ocean shall be the boundary of my realm and I will not cede the thickness of one hair of my realm.' But the Europeans wanted it, for its wealth but most of all for its position on the way to the East.

Madagascar, just off the south-eastern coast of Africa, is the largest independent single-island nation in the world, almost three times as big as the United Kingdom. As the island was early on separated from the landmass that became much of the southern hemisphere, the plant life, insects, birds and animals on the island developed in their own way. The lemur is the unique animal of Madagascar; it once lived across the world, but it lost out on space to monkeys and apes, and it is now only found in Madagascar. A British captain of an East India Company ship in 1608 was the first European to record a sight of lemurs in the forests, 'a great store of beasts, as big as Munkies… the furre very fine'.

Traders and settlers came from Borneo, and later Oman and Africa, and brought with them plants such as rice and mango and set up trading posts. The trade in slaves began. By the mid-seventeenth century the French had founded a colony, which they planned to use to take the island, but after local resistance they instead departed for Réunion. As the people of the island gathered into kingdoms, the legendary animals and birds of Madagascar, including the elephant bird and the Madagascan hippo, died out. Andrianampoinimerina became ruler of the kingdom of Imerina or Merina in 1787, expanded across the whole island, and agreed to trade with the French, exchanging slaves for money and weapons. He established the capital city's first marketplace and regularised units of measurement for easier buying and selling.

Ranavalona I, Rabodoandrianampoinimerina or Ramavo, had been born in 1778, the daughter of minor royals. When she was twenty-two, her father informed King Andrianampoinimerina about a plot against him, and as a reward the king betrothed Ramavo to his sixteen-year-old son, Radama, declared she would be his adopted daughter, and said her children would be first in line to the throne, even though his son had other wives. Radama I inherited the kingdom at the age of seventeen when they had been married for a year. She was one of his twelve senior wives, but not his favourite, and her lack of a son or any child meant she lacked valuable leverage. When Radama came to the throne, he executed various of her relatives, which was customary, but no doubt hardly delighted his wife. Ramavo was a mere consort.

King Radama continued the expansion of Merina influence, and understood that the most effective way to reduce the influence of colonial powers was to play the French and British off against each other. The British wanted Madagascar because it was a key port on the way to India and wanted an alliance with the king to counter French efforts to gain influence in the area. They pursued a friendly agreement with Radama, in which he would provide various supplies in return for recognition of him as king of all Madagascar and supplies of guns and gunpowder (they also wanted an end to the slave trade, and did not get it). He eventually controlled around two-thirds of the island. Radama allowed missionaries from the London Missionary Society to set up schools on the island, even in the grounds of the palace, as well as a printing press. By the end of his reign, there were half a million converts. The British alliance with Madagascar meant that there was a form of colonial government euphemistically called a 'resident'.

King Radama died at thirty-five, after eighteen years on the throne. The two people by his deathbed supported Rakotobe, son of his sister, and did not announce the death. Others thought one of his daughters, Raketaka, should succeed, although she was very young. When a powerful group heard the king had died, they decided to install Ramavo. She was the eldest of the queens, and had been plotting behind the scenes with supporters. As one review of a British account declared, 'she was powerfully assisted by the idol-keepers, who made the gods speak in her favour, probably having their fears about the accession of a pupil of the Christian teachers'.[4] She had also secured two generals of divisions, and the soldiers came in to defend her. They whisked her away, along with another senior wife, drummed up support from the court, including judges, soldiers and religious leaders and presented the most senior officer in the capital with a fait accompli. The king's bodyguard declared that the king had left his throne to his nephew and was promptly killed. With no way for anyone to prove otherwise, Ramavo announced that she had been named successor by Radama. Then, according to tradition, she had the nephew, his family and other relatives of her husband captured and executed or starved to death, and others of their associates also killed. She spared Raketaka and a few rivals managed to flee. She took the name Ranavalona, or 'kept away' or 'folded', the first ever

female ruler of the Merina kingdom, since its beginnings in the sixteenth century.

The powerful men who supported Ramavo expected that she would be their puppet. But the new queen defied their expectations. She was determined to find a way for Madagascar – or, at least, the parts she controlled – to reduce European influence and restore its ancient customs and religions. She set about reversing her former husband's legacy of being friendly to Europeans. It is curious how her efforts to reverse the hold of the Christian religion are attributed to her desires alone by those who wrote about her in French and English. As it was these men of the old religion who manoeuvred her installation, her to-do list when she came to power was clearly laid out.

At her coronation, the Sultan of Zanzibar arrived bearing gifts of pearls and horses and offering 2,000 men to fight for the queen – if she would marry him. She refused. In September 1829, at the age of forty-one, the queen gave birth to her only child, Prince Rakoto, recognised as the son of her former husband, although this was unlikely as he had died more than nine months before. Other female monarchs lost power when they had a son but Ranavalona did not. She remained the queen.

The new queen's primary aim was independence for Madagascar, and she saw trade, friendly relations with Europeans and missionaries as encroaching colonialism. She ended the agreement made by Radama with Britain and said she would no longer be trading or buying weapons. The French attempted an invasion, but it failed. And so began the writing of her as a terrible tyrant. Ranavalona conscripted an army of 30,000 and attempted to expand her domain across the entire island with military campaigns. There were other groups on the island who were happy to ally with Europeans to rebel against the queen, including those the Merina had enslaved. The campaigns exerted a heavy death toll on both sides and many of the queen's soldiers caught malaria. Towns and villages that resisted suffered mass executions and those who survived were usually enslaved. The British prohibition of slavery was seen by the queen as an insult – and an attempt to limit Madagascar's power.

Ranavalona was characterised as a dreadful queen, a Caligula, because so many of her population died. Some figures suggest the population was halved from 5 million to 2.5 million in the early period of her reign, mainly from military campaigns, forced labour, malaria and punishments to those who were not loyal. But plenty of men were lost by the European powers in warfare and this was seen as necessary, not blamed on the monarch. Ranavalona was attempting to resist European influence, just as the colonial movements were rising.

Ranavalona initially allowed the missionaries to continue their efforts in the country and there was much printing of religious materials. Certainly, the missionary schools were offering a valuable education and literacy was growing. She soon grew dubious about their influence and in 1831 banned church attendance for all of her people, and soon baptism was also prohibited, as well as Christian marriages. The Europeans were allowed to continue. In 1835, Ranavalona called a meeting of all the Merina people at which they were told Christian practices were banned, on pain of death. She made it clear that the Europeans could proceed, as they had done, but not preach to others, and apparently thanked them for their knowledge. It hardly seems like the most brutal of policies. The missionaries began to leave. The last two missionaries remaining printed and distributed an English–Malagasy dictionary and Bibles and other Christian literature – and then fled. One might suggest that they could have stayed with the people they converted, even if not allowed to preach. In exile, they received reports about the executions of Christian converts, and these lurid accounts coloured the terrible vision of Ranavalona. It is hard to know how many were executed, possibly under a hundred. It is nothing compared to the rates of various male monarchs. But making Ranavalona into a monster, unlike her forgiving predecessor Radama who allowed Christians to come and preach, was the new mission.

No trading with the Europeans meant less money coming in and no arms supplied. Ranavalona attempted to create home-grown military power by tapping the knowledge of shipwrecked Europeans. One, Jean Laborde, was brought to the queen and tasked with setting up and running a factory making arms and gunpowder. Forty miles outside the capital, he built a giant complex of workshops and furnaces, making paints, glass, dyes, bricks, tiles and cement as well as muskets and cannons. The queen's soldiers could fight

the Europeans with the same weapons. Laborde also built for the queen her palace made of wood, on top of the highest hill in the capital city and surrounded by pillars 80 feet high, which for many years was the biggest wooden building in the world. As one visitor said, it was 'one of the wonders of the world'. 'Five thousand persons were employed and twelve days were occupied in its erection.' Ranavalona also requested a French-style summer town where she and the court could pass the dry season.

In 1836 Ranavalona sent ambassadors to attempt to negotiate with Britain and France, to discuss fostering trade and good relations, but on her own terms, dealing directly with the ministers, rather than intermediaries. The Malagasy ambassadors, who arrived in the final year of William IV's reign before the advent of Victoria, were whisked around Britain's sights, such as the Tower of London, the Mint, the Bank of England and even Woolwich Docks, and repeatedly told of the country's military and industrial brilliance. They were then sent to see the directors of the London Missionary Society – who wanted their officials back on the island. The ambassadors were invited to Windsor Castle to meet King William IV and Queen Adelaide. The meeting was cordial but Queen Adelaide did ask to 'tell the queen of Madagascar from me, that she can do nothing so beneficial for her country as to receive the Christian religion'.[5] It was telling her, not asking her, a statement that would only annoy the queen and convince her that Christianity was merely an excuse for the Europeans to gain a foothold of power. And there was something insulting about the message coming from Adelaide, not the King himself. Ranavalona sent two letters to William IV, noting that the 'law of [her] country' would not be led by others. She would not allow Christianity or a resident British agent or indeed any Europeans to live on Madagascar, or engage in trade. Despite this clarity of purpose, Lord Palmerston suggested a new treaty between the two countries in which British traders and travellers were allowed unlimited access to the island. The reply was no. The French were told that the ambassadors could not agree to anything and would simply report back to the queen.

The queen had hoped to come to terms with England and France as an equal power; but the European governments made it clear that they wanted nothing short of full access to the island for traders, governors and missionaries, and she was supposed to listen to Adelaide's request for

missionaries. It is once more curious that the woman cast as such a horror actually sent out diplomats to have a conversation – but all they wanted was total access. The diplomats left and the 'monstrous' narrative stepped up a gear, with, as has been noted, comparisons made between savage Ranavalona and the gentle, virtuous Victoria, who came to the throne in 1837, just eighteen.[6] And then William Ellis, foreign secretary of the London Missionary Society, published his *History of Madagascar* in 1838. He had never actually been to the country but compiled the reports of missionaries – and added his own colour. For him, the queen was 'barbarous' and saw the people as there for her use. She was a triple horror, female, a non-constitutional monarch and a total tyrant. As argued above, Victoria was encouraged to see the role of the monarch as constitutional, advising and warning. Even 'travel' books were really about ensuring that female rule was ringed round and restricted. As one commentator pointed out, the real problem was that Ranavalona had engaged in 'paternal government'.[7] William Ellis's wife, Sarah, was a keen writer of conduct books, and had written about queenship in her conduct book *Women of England*, published in 1839, that the 'female sovereign' should set an example to all women in their domestic spheres, to use their 'female influence' and that queens should be exemplars of 'moral excellence'. This was what Victoria was supposed to be, gently influencing her country, as a woman did her household. Of course she was not. And Ranavalona was, quite frankly, barely a woman in the way she behaved.

Thus, with Ranavalona, we see what we have seen with so many female monarchs, the writing about them isn't really about monarchy, it's about the problem of women in modern society. A queen doing anything other than behaving as a divine mother or a back-up to men was anathema. Women whose sexuality is untrammelled by men, like Cleopatra, those who use appearance to pursue their aims, like Elizabeth I, those who refuse to bow down to Europe, like Catherine the Great, and even Mary I who killed many fewer than her father, brother or even sister is the bloody one; they embody the great fear of society, a woman who exists outside the parameters of men. Ranavalona was not married, seemed to ignore advisors, and most of all declined the 'advice' of Europe. She refused to allow men to govern her or make friendly treaties, unlike her husband. As William Ellis complained the

country was unused to 'female domination'. Soon her barbarous policies would induce 'universal anarchy'.[8] He was wrong.

Ranavalona sent out more troops to conquer the last resisting parts of the island to ensure that provinces independent of her did not welcome any invasion from the British or French. When she set out on a hunting expedition, she ordered a road to be built ahead of her, with 12,000 men clearing forests and moving stones at a breakneck pace, only one day ahead of the advancing royal party. Some said that 10,000 people died to create the road. Ranavalona restored the Tangena punishment by which the accused ate a poisoned fruit and guilt or innocence was decided through observing the effect of the fruit, which could be fatal. Some pleaded just to be executed.

In 1845, the British and French joined together in an attempt to invade, which was quickly repelled. Ranavalona wrote to the English captain to say she wondered how Victoria or Louis Philippe would take it if 'she were to meddle with their countries', and as for putting the heads of the enemies on a pole, how was that different from Victoria sending prisoners into exile? Moreover, Ranavalona wanted them to know she was an equal. She informed the captain and all agents that she would only respond to letters from Victoria herself. The Queen did write and ask that the two countries were put back on the 'ancient footing of friendship' but this meant the terms of the old treaty and entry to missionaries and so it was a no. And so Ranavalona was treated to all the descriptions: barbarous, savage and as bad as Queen Mary I. And William Ellis popped up again, visiting Madagascar on behalf of the Foreign Secretary. He arrived bearing copies of the Victoria quasi-fanzine the *Illustrated London News* in the hope of persuading the queen to be more like Victoria (her representations at least): gentle, deferential. Of course, if Ranavalona had allowed access to the island, the accused cruelty to her people would not matter. He also offered engravings of the Queen, Albert and Windsor Castle, which Ranavalona received politely. He was expecting this image of Victoria to transform Ranavalona, make her deferential. But as we know, Victoria only played deference; she was constantly contesting her ministers or trying to counter the ways in which they locked her out of decisions, writing to other women on the ground. She played out obedience in her portraits and photographs, attempting to seem as if she bowed to Albert, when she did not. It might

seem a strange oxymoron that images of the woman who was used to justify empire invasion and expansion were being given to a woman who was resisting it. One might say that claiming the excellence of images of Victoria actually suggested that a woman should head up a country that fought. But Victoria – the young wife at least – was seen as just what men wanted, dutiful, humble, an image of constitutional monarchy overseeing and allowing what her politicians and business interests wanted to do.

The queen was all-powerful. But she had one weak spot – her son, Rakoto. The trader Jean Lambert, born in Mauritius and who had been trading slaves in the region, aimed to find a way of gaining power over Madagascar for the French government. In 1854, he manoeuvred an invitation to meet the queen, accompanied by a man he claimed was his secretary but was really a Jesuit missionary in disguise. There, he allied with Jean Laborde. Laborde, who had become wildly rich due to his work for the queen, had decided she must be replaced. He and Lambert persuaded her son to sign a treaty that would depose Ranavalona; Rakoto would become king and then would pay back Lambert for his support with the rights to the island's unoccupied land, forests and mines, in return for a 10 per cent fee, as well as control of the infrastructure such as road- and canal-building and also the coinage. It was a terrible contract for Madagascar.

Lambert also took a letter from Rakoto, addressed to Emperor Napoleon III, offering the island as a French protectorate and suggesting an armed force be sent to instal him as king. However, Napoleon III was cautious – the army was already overstretched in Crimea – and Lambert was told they could only attack Madagascar if the British agreed. The British also said their army was too extended. Lambert returned to Madagascar intending to launch his own coup. He arrived accompanied by Ida Pfeiffer, an Austrian traveller, who declared Ranavalona 'one of the proudest and [most] cruel women on the face of this earth'.

On 20 June, the plotters decided to launch their attack. Raharo, chief of the army, would keep the gate open to enable them to enter and seize power. They were ready. Then they received word that Raharo would not be able to open the gates. It had all failed. It is likely that Ranavalona's spies had already informed her and she had let the coup play out, guessing that Raharo would panic. She immediately said no one could accuse her son.

The queen summoned the people of the city to a meeting in the central market and there it was declared by her messenger that she was going to punish Christians. Ida and Lambert were warned by a messenger from Prince Rakoto to destroy all correspondence, and the house was invaded by soldiers. The queen then set up a council debating the fate of the Europeans who had plotted, including Ida, Lambert and Laborde. They were put on trial and found guilty but informed that, because the queen had never yet 'deprived a white person of life', she would not do so on this occasion and instead they would suffer 'perpetual banishment'. Laborde's estates were seized; he had lost all his accrued wealth of twenty-five years to a vain plot. They were then escorted very slowly by soldiers to the coast to sail to Mauritius, making stops in areas prone to malaria. The queen's plan does seem to be to ensure that they caught a fever and died on the way. However, they just about survived the journey, and sailed to Mauritius.

By her late seventies the queen was weakening, and she died in August 1861 aged nearly eighty-three, after thirty-three years in power. Tens of thousands, even millions, had died to pursue her vision. But she had done as she said she would: not given up an iota of her realm.

An adult son is dangerous. Caesarion might have thrown aside Cleopatra, had they lived. Ranavalona's son, Rakoto, as Radama II reversed nearly all of his mother's policies. He signed treaties with European powers, reopened churches and missionary schools and allowed European influence. Lambert and his associates returned from Mauritius and demanded the treaty be recognised, and set up a company to pursue the exploitation of rights and land. The Merina people were horrified that Lambert had been given so much land.

Radama's wife, Rasoherina, the niece of Ranavalona I, was born in 1814. She had already been married to a politician, Raholary, but had divorced him in 1847, and she was swiftly married to Rakoto. The prime minister, Rainivoninahitriniony, began to plot against Rakoto. After two years on the throne, army officers strangled the king in his bedroom. Rasoherina was informed that she could be queen, but only if she agreed to certain conditions. She would not be absolute sovereign and was not allowed to pass laws without the consent of the nobles and the heads of the people. Power

was to be shared between monarch and nobles but essentially lodged in the prime minister and his circle, and this would be symbolised by her immediate marriage to the prime minister – who had plotted against her husband (the PM would be her third husband). From then on, the monarch would be a queen who was married to the prime minister. As we have seen, monarchy's power is often handed at least partially to politicians when a woman comes to the throne. Here, it was facilitated by marrying the queen to the politician.

Rakoto's new husband let his powers go to his head, making poor decisions and displaying drunken behaviour. He also apparently threatened her with a knife. After a year she removed him from power and promoted his younger brother, Rainilaiarivony, to the role of prime minister – and also married him (he was husband number four). Rasoherina abolished the Lambert treaty and paid a compensation to France. She signed a treaty with Britain whereby its citizens could rent property and there would be a resident installed, and also signed a treaty with the USA. As she saw it, the way to stave off French influence was to foster relations with other powers. She named as her successor her cousin, Ramoma, who had also been one of Radama II's wives.

On 1 April 1868, the queen died and Ramoma, aged thirty-nine, took the throne as Ranavalona II and was married to Rainilaiarivony. The prime minister was thus on his second queen as a wife. Ranavalona II had spent much time with missionaries when she was growing up and was an advocate for Christianity. She declared the nation Christian and burned the sampy – religious talismans – showing she eschewed them, not long after she came to the throne. She chose to continue Rasoherina's policy of refusing Lambert the rights that Radama had promised. The French invaded on the basis that a citizen was being denied his rights. France occupied Mahanjanga and Toamasina, the most important seaports. Ranavalona II died in the midst of war, on 13 July 1883, aged around fifty-three.

Ranavalona III, born Princess Razafindrahety and niece of Ranavolona II, had been a favourite of her aunt and was aged only two when the coup occurred that ensured a queen could only take the throne with a prime minister husband. Ranavolona II sent the princess first to a tutor from the

missionary society and then to a missionary girls' school, making a priority of her education, and treated her as the future queen. She was studious and clever, and impressed tutors with her serious personality. She was baptised as a Protestant. After leaving school, she married a nobleman. If she was to be queen, she was destined to marry the prime minister, but presumably her aunt thought that would be many years in the future, and her heir could later divorce. By the late spring of 1883, when the princess was twenty-one, Ranavalona II was sickening. The princess's nobleman husband was strangely found dead in May 1883, leaving her a widow. It may have been that he was poisoned by the allies of the prime minister, to ensure the heir to the throne was single.

Razafindrahety was declared the new queen by Rainilaiarivony, who was thirty years her senior and on his third queen marriage, and she took the name Ranavalona III. The new queen was thrust into an impossible situation, threatened by an invasion justified by the treaty signed by the king who had most recently ruled, King Radama. She took up residence in the grounds of the royal palace and was crowned on her twenty-second birthday, 22 November 1883. At the coronation, she replaced the customary soldiers with school pupils, the girls dressed in white. She and the prime minister installed a British officer, Digby Willoughby, as head of the armed forces to push back the French. To buy weapons, Rainilaiarivony had the tomb of Ranavalona unsealed and took £50,000 worth of silver and gold coins. Other colonial monarchs had been forced into compromises. Radama had freely given up all the riches of his country in exchange for pushing his mother off the throne. And the queens who followed had barely a chance of fighting back. One man's greed condemned them all.

In 1885, beaten down by war, Ranavalona III and the prime minister signed a treaty allowing a French resident in the capital, and a payment of 10 million francs to the French. The queen and prime minister questioned the imposition of a resident and an explanation of the powers was added to the treaty by the French negotiators. The queen and her husband deemed this enough to make it clear that they were still in power. But when the treaty was published in France, the explanation was not added. For the French authorities, the queen and prime minister had submitted to a protectorate. Rainilaiarivony refused to allow the resident to oversee trade or international relations, and the queen dealt directly with the United States

and other nations. She asked for help from the United States and sent gifts to President Grover Cleveland, but he was unwilling to intervene. In 1894, the French demanded that the queen and prime minister submit to a protectorate and to the French interpretation of the treaty. They refused.

The queen had an interest in French culture and preferred clothes sent from Paris and London, even though they were at war with the French. She also had an interest in magic and invited the celebrated French magician, Marius Cazeneuve, to the island. Cazeneuve, forty-seven when he arrived in Madagascar, was also a French spy, tasked with working to overthrow British influence and ensure that France gained control over the territory. His shows included jokes against the British (he carefully gauged perceptions from the response to them). But most of all, he was supposed to create a friendship with the queen and report back. In his later autobiography, he declared he had been Ranavalona's lover, which is unproven and unlikely, but he certainly became a confidant, a spy on the queen and her hopes. A French army of 15,000 men advanced towards the capital city, building roads as they went. Six thousand were lost to disease and so reinforcements were brought in.

When the palace was attacked, the queen ceded power to the invaders. On 1 January 1896, the French declared Madagascar their possession and sent the prime minister into exile in Algiers. The queen remained in position, but with no power. She was told she must appoint a new prime minister. She suggested a French general and worried that she must be supposed to marry him, but she was told she would not have to. In December the Malagasys, mostly the island's peasants, rebelled against the French annexation. The queen and her advisors came under suspicion. Ranavalona was compelled to meet the recently installed military governor of the island, and told that she must sign over all royal property to the French state and be placed under house arrest in the palace, where she would only be allowed visitors with the prior agreement of the governor. She had lost everything. She suggested she might convert to Roman Catholicism, but it was too late for such concessions. The governor decided that even the presence of a queen was impossible to accept.

At 1.30 in the morning on 27 February 1896, Queen Ranavalona III of Madagascar was wakened and told to leave the palace and travel to a port. She had little in the way of possessions – the French authorities now owned

everything of value, and left her only a few pieces of jewellery. On the following day, the new military governor abolished the monarchy, which had reigned for over 350 years. At the port, Ranavalona met her aunt, sister and niece (who was only fourteen and pregnant with the child of a French soldier), and they were all sent to Réunion.

Ranavalona III, last queen of Madagascar, had been only two when the rebellion against King Radama II occurred that would one day ensure that she was queen – a rebellion that created a unique form of government of a female monarch married to a male prime minister. Now the monarchy was gone.

In Saint-Denis in Réunion they were taken to a hotel, where her niece went into labour and died. They christened the baby Marie-Louise in a Catholic ceremony. Ranavalona was no longer queen, but she saw the child as her heir – an optimistic vision. She hoped to be restored as a figurehead, a peaceful queen. The party moved to a two-storey house in Saint-Denis, near the government offices, and the queen, who was allowed to worship with her private minister, lived quietly for two years in Réunion, careful not to step out of line, always willing to show the authorities that she was accepting of her fate. But the authorities became concerned about the prospect of another Madagascan rebellion, supported by the British, and decided that the queen was too close and must be moved again. She was ordered aboard a boat with her family and was forbidden from speaking to anyone who was not French – such was the fear that she could foment revolution.

Ranavalona had hoped to go to Paris, and was devastated to be told that they were travelling to Algiers. 'Who is certain of tomorrow?' she wept. 'Only yesterday I was a queen, today I am simply an unhappy, broken-hearted woman.' She knew that in Paris she had a chance of gaining sympathy for her cause. In Algiers, she began to socialise with high society, and was allowed to host events at her home. She was given 25,000 francs a year as an allowance, taken from the budget of Madagascar, but it was not enough. The governor repeatedly asked for more money for her, to no avail.

Ranavalona was hopeful of getting her throne back or gaining support from those around her, but she was treated as a social oddity, an amusing guest at balls, an entertaining addition. She begged repeatedly to visit France. She was finally allowed to travel to Paris ten years later. There she took a flat near the Champs Élysées, and was invited to many high-society

events and balls, visited the Palace of Versailles as well as holidaying in Bordeaux, and spent on fashions in the shops of Paris. She was often accompanied by her family, including her adopted daughter, Marie-Louise. Press photographers followed her everywhere she went. Her visit was widely covered in the newspapers and there was much expression of sympathy about her lack of money. Her dignified behaviour and resilience after losing her home won her a lot of popularity and there were frequent campaigns to increase her pension, which was finally raised to 75,000 francs a year. It seemed as if a deposed queen was quite the thing in fashionable society, whether Lili'uokolani in Washington or Joanna of Tahiti and Ranavalona III in Paris. She returned six more times, visiting various areas of France, staying in Paris, visiting the opera and observing a session of the House of Representatives. She wished above all to travel to Madagascar once more, but was always refused.

When the First World War broke out, the queen remained in Algeria, fundraising for the Algerian Red Cross and assisting in its activities. Ranavalona III died of an embolism at her villa in Algiers on 23 May 1917 at the age of fifty-five. Her funeral was attended by high society in Algiers and fellow workers from the Red Cross. After much neglect, in 1938 she was removed from her tomb in Algiers and taken to be buried with Queen Rasoherina in the royal tombs.

Marie-Louise was allowed to attend school in France, married an engineer and worked as a nurse. She was given the Legion d'Honneur for her services during the Second World War and received a small pension from the government throughout her life. She died without children in 1948, twelve years before Madagascar won the fight for independence, the last queen of Madagascar who never was.

In the year that Ranavalona III died, monarchy took its most momentous hit. The First World War was a lesson to European monarchs. Alexandra, tsarina of Russia, had been married to Tsar Nicholas when she was twenty-two, against the wishes of her grandmother, Queen Victoria, who wanted her to be Britain's queen consort, 'the greatest position there is', and worried about the 'insecurity' of Russia. When Nicholas was away with the troops during the First World War, she was regent, and was seen as too autocratic,

too fascinated by the mystic (or, for some, fraud) Rasputin. The people were asking for more rights. In March 1917, people were rioting for bread in the streets. The duma, a new legislative assembly, asked the tsar to address their concerns. He dissolved the duma. By the middle of the month, he had abdicated, and in July 1918 the royal family were shot.

Queen Victoria had an astonishing forty-two grandchildren, and had been the doyenne of a dating game, trying to marry them all to each other. Her dream of creating peace through her grandchildren did come to fruition, with Princess Marie. The royal family considered her for marriage to King George V and the idea was approved of by Queen Victoria. She married the king of Romania instead. She essentially forced him to side with the Allies in the First World War and nursed in the hospitals. She was a hugely popular queen of Romania, and then her reputation was attacked by communist officials.

Ranavalona I was painted with words. Of all the monarchs in this book, she was seen as the most monstrous, most hated. She held back the forces of colonialism but her final successor, like so many queens in the time of Empire, saw her powers seized from her – countries decide there is an opportunity when a queen is on the throne. Ranavalona III had been part of a new form of government; a female monarch married to a male prime minister. Just over thirty years later, her throne was taken. She was the last queen of Madagascar.

Most of the monarchs of Africa and the Pacific in the nineteenth century lost their thrones to empires. In the twentieth century, the poor of these same empires rose up. And then in the mid-twentieth century, television arrived.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Queens as Movie Stars: Grace of Monaco and Elizabeth II

The image of Elizabeth II at her 1953 coronation is dazzling. The vision of this young woman decked in gold, the crown on her head, all dignity and responsibility, was black and white on TV but the portrait published revealed all the gold. Her first adult speech, on her twenty-first birthday, dedicated her life to duty. Such was the image of Elizabeth II: spectacular outfit but committed to service.

When Elizabeth II came to the throne in 1952, she was underestimated because she was young and female. When he heard the news, Winston Churchill declared her 'only a child', although she was twenty-five. His private secretary, who had previously served the royal family, tried to console him that he would find the new monarch charming, attractive, intelligent, conscientious.[1] One man was telling another that he would be able to work with a young woman – his monarch – because she was pleasant, pretty, hardworking. In other words, it would be fine, because she was attractive.[2] *The Lancet* published an article that suggested that, as a mother of two small children, the job of queen was beyond her and she should step back until she was older. Winston Churchill later changed his mind and declared that no movie star could have played the role better; again, it was all about her looks. As he puts it, 'All the film people in the world, if they had scoured the globe, could not have found anyone so suited to the part.'[3] His daughter later said, he 'fell under her spell'. The new queen was made magical, youthful, pretty for a 1950s world that wanted women

back in the home post-World War II – being a movie actress was one of the few ways in which a woman could earn serious money. As Princess Margaret put it, the 'coronation was like a phoenix-time. Everything was being raised from the ashes. There was… nothing to stop anything getting better and better.' The new queen, the first since Victoria, wasn't a working woman, she was a magical being, like a phoenix, swathed in gold. A working woman, a CEO, a businesswoman would have been too unpalatable for the time. The whole country was being told she was 'charming'. As this book began with Hatshepsut, a woman on a throne over three thousand years earlier, we mentioned that a woman, to rule, must claim duty and sacrifice, be chosen by God. Elizabeth I, declaring she was married to the nation, was essentially declaring the same sacrifice and duty; her country came first and she would forego what other women enjoyed. Elizabeth II was expected to reign, the daughter of the king, but coming to the throne in a world of sexist attitudes to working women, as well as post-war uncertainty about the role of the monarchy, she leant hard into the ideal of sacrifice and service. As she put it in her broadcast to the country when she was twenty-one, 'my whole life, whether it be long or short, shall be dedicated to your service and the service of our great imperial family to which we all belong'. The empire was coded as family, its oppression made into bonds of blood. And the future queen presented herself as serving the country and serving a family. This was a consistent image throughout her reign, with one of her last public messages, on the event of her Platinum Jubilee in 2022, signing herself 'your servant'. Service to a family, self-sacrifice to a family's needs, along with duty, and also combined with a representation of her as speaking only judiciously; all qualities valued in women. Elizabeth II effectively wielded them to hold onto influence. As we have noted in this book, constitutional monarchy progresses when women rule. Parliament progressed in its powers when Elizabeth I was on the throne, increasingly removing her decisions from her, and her Privy Council famously executed the death warrant on Mary, Queen of Scots without her knowing. Her father, Henry VIII, would not have recognised her way of governing. Victoria's interference in politics was presented as girlish temper – and she was constantly informed late of decisions. No coincidence that Walter Bagehot's famous theories on what constitutional monarchy was were laid down in 1865, in Victoria's reign. The monarch, in Bagehot's theory, which has been so widely adopted, was there

to advise, to encourage and to warn. Any more was to overstep. The queen was there, essentially, to provide a listening ear. As we have seen with the case of Victoria and Ranavalona, the queen was presented as excellent because she did entirely as the men around her wished. Ranavalona refused it. That same perception of Victoria increasingly immersed her, even though she used her widowhood effectively to push back against it. And then with Elizabeth II, constitutional monarchy progressed yet further; she signs documents, she reads the government's priorities, but she cannot change it. The government allows the monarchy influence, but it is mainly to protect its own money, tax affairs and family misbehaviours – the monarch can't change the laws. Of course, constitutional monarchy is what we want. But it is interesting that it progresses in the times of queens. As we have also seen in this book, monarchies often end when there is a woman on the throne. Either way, it seems, command held by women is seen as easier to take. Under Elizabeth II, the law was changed in 2013 finally to abolish male primogeniture in England, catching up with the rest of Europe, many of whom had changed the law in the 1990s. But this was rather late in the day.

Elizabeth agreed that her 1953 coronation could be televised, the first time this had happened in history, and it was a win for the monarchy. The young queen, undergoing with complete solemnity the rituals of coronation, was a sensation, watched, it was said, by an average of seventeen viewers per UK TV set. Footage was flown across the world, quite literally dashed across the Atlantic by RAF Canberra bomber aircraft so viewers in the United States and Canada could watch the coronation mere hours after it ended.

In the months leading up to the coronation, British people bought more TVs than they ever had before; around 2.5 million were installed before the event. In the run-up, TVs showed the talented cookery broadcaster Marguerite Patten giving tips on a coronation banquet and two policemen advising how to ensure one was not burgled on the day. The new queen's own uncle, the former Edward VIII, now the Duke of Windsor, who abdicated his throne when she was just ten, watched it on television in Paris, sitting on a special gold chair. The young queen, immortalised on television and then photographed by Cecil Beaton, was a golden image; a magical vision. TV made it so. The queen, as one onlooker said, was 'radiant with spiritual exaltation'. Elizabeth's reign would see the retraction of monarchical powers and the surging of constitutional monarchy. And the all-importance

of the royal image, with colour photography and TV beaming her across the world. The young queen would be coded in terms of duty and service, shown as a 'good queen'. Saying little, humility and service were applauded until this strategy failed after the death of Princess Diana. So, in order to win back popularity, she had to speak and use the television to carry her message.

It was the beginning of monarchy as modern media. In 1957, the queen gave her first televised Christmas speech (they had formerly been on the radio), in which she said that she must seem 'remote' to many watching, as a 'successor to the kings and queens of history; someone whose face may be familiar in newspapers and films but who never really touches your personal lives'. As she noted, that 'it is possible for some of you to see me today is just another example of the speed at which things are changing all around us'. She was the first television queen, an early adopter of technology. Her reign saw this idea that the monarch never really touched the personal life of people collapse. But once the TV door opens, it cannot be closed.

It was a time when there were few women in significant roles – the appointment of the first female bank manager in 1958, Hilda Harding, a career Barclays employee, caused shocked headlines: 'Bank Manager is a WOMAN'. Elizabeth II had to push for significance – and clearly realised that her image and how television disseminated her put her in a strong position – just as Elizabeth I exploited painted portraits to show her brilliance and Victoria deployed the photograph. In times of national crisis, whether in the aftermath of the death of Princess Diana or during the Covid pandemic, the queen addressed the nation on television. In 1983, at the height of the fear of nuclear weapons and a fear of a new bellicose leadership of the USSR, a talk was written for her to deliver in the event of nuclear war – or World War III. Only recently released by the National Archives, this fascinating speech had the queen say:

> Now this madness of war is once more spreading through the world and our brave country must again prepare itself to survive against great odds. I have never forgotten the sorrow and the pride I felt as my sister and I huddled around the nursery wireless set listening to my

> father's inspiring words on that fateful day in 1939. Not for a single moment did I imagine that this solemn and awful duty would one day fall to me. We all know that the dangers facing us today are greater by far than at any time in our long history. The enemy is not the soldier with his rifle nor even the airman prowling the skies above our cities and towns but the deadly power of abused technology.

She could not offer much practical advice, but encouraged families to 'remain united' and offer shelter to those living alone. The same files showed an estimate that 33 million people would die in the event of nuclear attacks – 1 million in London alone. Predictions were made that urban populations would flee to the countryside, massive anti-war demonstrations would take place, and hospitals would be looted for medicines. There were comparatively few bunkers for the population, and ordinary people would have to take their chances with deadly weapons, mass deaths and shortages. One wonders if there were further plans to ask the queen to keep speaking to the nation after an attack, to tell everyone to pull together – surely there were. There were strict plans made on how to protect the queen in the event of a nuclear war, including the Royal Yacht or in a nuclear bunker in London or Windsor. These were important, according to documents in the 1983 file, because she would have to appoint the new prime minister. One might suggest that if over 30 million were killed and hospitals were being looted, a new prime minister could be appointed without the queen. But still, even in times of such extreme crisis, the government made plans for the constitution as enabled by monarchy.

The government believed that, in the event of nuclear war, people would turn on their televisions to watch the queen.[4] Nowadays, if we heard that there was a possibility of a nuclear weapon hurtling towards us, we would rush to social media. But I hazard we would still expect to hear from the monarch, as well as world leaders, and a monarch or a leader who did not give a speech would be shirking their duty.

Elizabeth II was the queen of television, but television would also undermine her. When the BBC documentary *Royal Family* was transmitted in 1969, it was watched by nearly 40 million viewers in the UK. It showed, as well as the queen attending engagements, her buying an ice cream for Prince Edward and the royal family enjoying a barbecue and eating breakfast. By

the 1970s, the documentary had been locked away. It had let in too much light on its subjects. Unlike portrait-painting and photography, the royal image communicated through TV cannot be controlled. And sometimes the TV image is too powerful and swamps the reality. Such was the case, as we will see, for the unforgettable fairy-tale wedding of Charles and Diana. Even the happiest marriage could not have lived up to it.

The queen's coronation created a fever dream of female royalty on TV that has proved all-pervasive. Elizabeth II said, 'I have to be seen to be believed.' She was right. The final act of the queen was to be photographed in Balmoral, meeting the new prime minister. It was the last photograph of her age; she passed away two days later. If there had been no photograph, people would not have believed it. Television was particularly helpful to monarchy. In the past, caricaturists could draw Marie Antoinette, and she could only counter with portraits. With television, there can be imitators and fake queens, but only the real queen can give access to the actual moving image. Of course, Elizabeth II was never going to be attacked like an absolute monarch; with constitutional monarchy there is less at stake, but she used television so effectively to counter criticism and bad representations and low popularity, such as after the death of Diana, that her own image always superseded. She was memorialised as the young girl coming to the throne in a blaze of glory, devoted to duty, and then the nation's grandmother, in bright colours, equipped with handbag. Elizabeth II's reign ended as it began: in spectacle, with the biggest-ever televised funeral that, I would say, will never be equalled.

'Royals are only private in the womb,' said the then Princess Elizabeth's governess, Marion Crawford, a striking comment considering she said it in the 1930s. By the 1980s, royal women were to be stared at, dissected, discussed in their golden cage, expected always to be perfect in photographs. And if a monarch was compared to a movie star, playing a 'part', then maybe the queen should be a movie star. Like Grace Kelly.

The film of Grace Kelly's wedding to Prince Rainier of Monaco shot an image around the world. She is kneeling in front of the altar, bowing her head to receive the blessing, her hands folded, her magnificent gown all lace, her face perfectly serene. Grace is pure virtue, innocence, gravity, embarking

on the most serious religious moment. And yet, she was acting the role. She had entered the cathedral in Monaco to see only a barrage of camera lenses. 'It was a nightmare really, the whole thing,' she said later. 'All I remember is that the flower arrangements in the cathedral were filled with Rolleiflexes, Hasselblads and Nikons with telephoto lenses and flashbulbs.' The cathedral was a movie set.

Thirty million people across the world watched the ceremony on TV – 'The Wedding of the Century', as MGM called it. It was three years after Elizabeth II's coronation had galvanised the world, and every monarchy wanted their own TV-friendly queen. Monaco, a principality in the South of France that few in America had ever heard of, smaller than Central Park and with a population of fewer than 30,000, a place where women couldn't vote, was receiving its new princess.[I] The engagement between Grace and the prince of Monaco had been swift, their first meeting orchestrated by a magazine, and the wedding was all about bringing a sheen of Hollywood glamour to the principality; its origins were in a plot cooked up by Aristotle Onassis, a heavy investor in Monaco. In his address, the bishop told Rainier to use love with his authority, but instructed Grace to remember that beauty was brief and of no importance. She was being told to obey. She was also being told that her beauty, so feted by the screen, was as nothing. A royal wife had to be attractive to appeal, then men told her that all they valued about her was not important. Women are expected to be beautiful, but then punished for paying any attention to maintaining their looks. We are fascinated by beauty, then we berate the women for our fascination with them. Men say they are saving them from vanity; we have seen this accusation thrown at women before when they look to have too much power. The bishop was making it clear: her value would henceforth be judged by men. Grace, an intelligent woman with dynamic business sense, was being dismissed in front of the world, told she was only 'beauty'. If queens and royal women are all about image, Grace Kelly is the ultimate: an actress who sold Hollywood's dreams to America, and who then, at twenty-six, was entranced into selling Monaco to the world, as the ultimate princess.

We have seen, through this book, how forms of words and pictures are used against royal women. From Plutarch with Cleopatra to medieval chroniclers, to the cartoonists for Marie Antoinette and Catherine the Great.

The queens who succeed manage to override these reputations, whether because others produce more influential portraits or descriptions, as with Elizabeth I, or because, like the Queen of Hawaii, they sew, compose and write their own story so powerfully that it cannot be denied. Grace Kelly created the representations herself that swamped her. She was key to shaping and producing the fairy princess romance in the interviews and 'The Wedding of the Century'. She commissioned the dress from the illustrious MGM designer Helen Rose, played the role, and it is surely unlikely that such an experienced film professional didn't have some input into the planning of what would be filmed and where the cameras would be positioned. But the fairy princess image engulfed her and she battled to free herself, despite speaking candidly about how her life was the opposite. Unlike most of the other royal women in this book, the image she was trying to escape was one she had made so successful herself. Partly it is because TV and movies are so potent they overwhelm everything else – no word can hold up to a filmed image. But also, the deal with monarchy and acting is different. As an actress, she played a role and was congratulated for making it believable; everyone knew it was her skill. But when you make monarchy beautiful and believable, you are expected to stay there. Grace made an industry that used and threw aside women look dignified, then she made a monarchy of male privilege look like a fairy tale. Sometimes, society wants to see royal women as bad, vain and seductive. Then in the modern day, with constitutional monarchy, when royal women are more of a symbol than ever, they want to see them as constantly happy. You got to be the princess, what more could you ever want?

Grace Kelly started off as a young model in New York advertising bug spray, but now she was a walking, talking advertisement for Monaco, a place that most Americans had never heard of (another film star, confusing it with Morocco, had asked her how she would live with all the camels). The world fell in love with the romance of her wedding. The camera created Grace, made her a star. And then it became her nemesis. The wedding ceremony made it clear to her: she was there to play the role of princess. A real princess was a symbol and that was what she had to be. She had been tumbled into the wedding and had not realised what strict conditions would apply. Grace left a lot of personal commentary – in interviews, about her life as princess of Monaco – but her words have often been overlooked. We want

the fairy tale but, as Grace said much later, 'I never saw anything fairy-tale-ish about it.'

The wedding was all about creating a cinematic, beautiful moment for Monaco. The prince was keen to promote his realm – but only so far. As his spokesman said, 'His Highness is sorely afraid that somebody is going to advertise soup or soap or something in connection with his marriage.' Grace knew she had to advertise Monaco at her wedding but, as she knelt in the cathedral, she was also telling her father – and all the men of Hollywood who treated even the most celebrated actresses as fodder for their desires – that she had escaped them. Being a princess, she had thought, would set her free.

'The Wedding of the Century' didn't make MGM as much money as they'd hoped. But it put Monaco on the map, creating the dream of glamour, and the place became a magnet for tourists to the casinos and individuals and corporations wanting to live tax-free. And when, six years after the wedding, Monaco and France came close to war, France backed down because of international pressure: because they had watched Grace marry the prince.

Grace Kelly was the ransom for turning Monaco into an economic success: to be the advertising model for the country was, as she had not realised before, a lifelong job in which she must *be* Monaco. Commentators and historians ask – why did she do it? Why give up her film career, why leave the United States, the freedom she had enjoyed in New York? Various (usually male) critics have opined that she thought she was getting old. The truth was that Grace was whirled into marriage. 'Of course I'm a little sad to be leaving home, but I hope to be back often,' she told a journalist as she embarked on her voyage by sea to Monaco from New York. She believed (she was still under contract to the studio) that she could do more films, this time as the wife of the prince. She was wrong. She had no idea of Rainier's plans for her. 'No more movies for Miss Kelly,' he said. As she later explained, 'My husband was determined to turn me into a real princess and it was with so much patience and understanding that he showed me the way.' Her life would be entirely devoted to playing the princess role, as laid out to her by Rainier. Grace had given up a life that was every film-loving girl's dream as well as independence, wealth and success, and her sacrifice would be used to prove the wonders of Monaco.

Grace Patricia Kelly was born in 1929 in Philadelphia, the third child of four, the least successful at gaining family affection, especially from her father Jack, a champion rower and Olympian turned millionaire builder and business owner, and Democratic mayoral candidate in 1935. Her mother, Margaret, had been the first woman athletic coach to lead women's athletics at the University of Pennsylvania. 'We were always competing,' said Grace of her family later, 'competing for everything – competing for love.' They were like that other great Irish American family, the Kennedys, always battling for precedence. When Grace was at the height of her fame, her father declared, 'I thought it would be Peggy', her elder sister. Grace grew up rich; in the family backyard there was a giant train set, complete with waterfalls and trees. After school, she attended the American Academy for Dramatic Arts in New York and signed with an agency as a model. Her first television advertisement showed her spraying insecticide. Grace, only nineteen, unmarried and living in Manhattan, was used to promote the image of the 1950s housewife to American shoppers, showing off the latest cleaning item.

Grace had a career consisting of only five years and eleven films, but she is one of the most famous actresses in history. If Marilyn Monroe was the sex goddess, then Grace was the 'lady'. Her success came initially from playing opposite men very much her senior. She started in television and then the actor Gary Cooper spotted her and recommended her to play opposite him in a western, *High Noon*, written by the great Carl Foreman. A town marshal, played by Cooper, has to face a gang of killers or leave town with his new bride, twenty-one to his fifty. John Wayne had turned down the role as he thought the themes were anti-blacklisting. This was the height of the Hollywood blacklisting hysteria, when The House Committee on Un-American Activities was demanding to interview Hollywood figures to investigate accusations that communist propaganda had been inserted into films. If *On the Waterfront* – a film that Grace turned down – is the most successful film that allegorises forgiveness for informers, *High Noon* was the most overtly anti-blacklisting film – until *Storm Center* in 1956, in which Bette Davis is a librarian who refuses to remove a book from the shelves. Grace, the image of an all-American girl, was a good shield for *High Noon*, which was perhaps one reason why she was chosen.

High Noon was nominated for seven Oscars. It was Grace's breakthrough; she was subsequently sent to Nairobi for *Mogambo*, a romance set in Africa with Clark Gable and Ava Gardner – including a scene where Gable rescues Grace from a panther (the title was totally random – named after the popular Mocambo nightclub on Sunset Boulevard).[5] She won a Golden Globe. Grace admired Gable. Some said they had an affair. Treated as a contract player, competing against a hundred other women, Grace quickly realised that the way to be a leading lady was to win favour from the biggest actors. Male actors and directors had all the power and leading men often vetoed or chose the actresses next to them. The on-screen norm was a man in his fifties with a woman in her early twenties, a fantasy of male power. Grace was, she said, 'the feminine background for the male stars who carried the action and the story'. A woman was background support and she was also seen as available. 'You couldn't work with Grace without falling in love with her,' said a producer. Such was the expectation of a woman on set: to be fallen in love with – it was her job to create love in the men around her. Women in Hollywood were trafficked, and those were paid well who could make it seem that they were not; either because they were 'ladies' or good-time girls who did it all for fun. The girls reading the film magazines in Ohio couldn't know the truth. Men wanted to use women, but it couldn't be known; the actresses had to seem independent and determined.

Grace's usually male biographers puzzle over what they see as a conundrum; that she was dignified in appearance but had affairs, the dichotomy that Alfred Hitchcock said he liked to dramatize. He called her a snow-covered volcano, gesturing at sexual passion under her ladylike, white-gloved appearance. There are endless accounts from contemporaries of Grace as a 'nymphomaniac', man-mad. It's distasteful, reading all these male power brokers of the 1950s enthusing about the passionate, sexual self they claim to see 'underneath' in a young woman barely out of her teens. They wish to excuse and dress up the exploitation that was part and parcel of Hollywood by saying that the women wanted it. It is so interesting that everyone talks of how much sex she had, but no one questions why she had so many trysts with men twice her age who were in positions of power. She has so often been written about by men.

Grace had a vivid intellect and personality. But the industry around her didn't want to admit it. Her meteoric rise and her success in weighty films is seen by critics as a thing divorced from her love life – as if she simply had affairs with powerful actors for the fun of it. Biographers have claimed that she was seeking love in the arms of unavailable older men, or put it down to her desire for a father figure. The truth was that she had no choice if she wanted to work in the career she loved. Don Richardson, her early acting teacher and lover, complained she had affairs after him 'with everybody who she came into contact with who was able to do anything good for her at all… agents, producers, directors'. Most female roles were, as Grace said, support for the men, and the actresses for them were chosen by men. While some directors and actors chose actresses with no expectation of an affair, many did expect to receive such a bonus. Grace wasn't having affairs with camera operators or restauranteurs, or junior actors at her level, or struggling writers or would-be directors, in their twenties like her, yet no one seems to comment on that. Her lovers were men of power twice her age, because they were the gatekeepers. No one wonders if she might have preferred a man her own age. It is interesting that Oleg Cassini, with whom she had discussed marriage before she met Rainier, was a movie fashion designer – creative and important in the industry but simply not able to veto which actresses got roles in the same way as a leading man or director could. The fantasy that she played on screen – that a woman in her twenties wants a man double her age – took hold and everyone writing on her wanted to believe that she had affairs with directors the age of her father because she wished to do so.

In the spring of 1954, Grace flew to complete an MGM film in South America, *Green Fire*. The actor playing against her, Stewart Granger, forty to her twenty-four, recalled cheerfully in his autobiography that, while they were performing a screen kiss in the rain, he grabbed her behind and claimed to 'save her embarrassment' in her wet clothes. The story concludes, 'if you look closely at that kiss, you'll see Grace give a start as those two eager hands take hold'. The man who claimed in his book he was too happily married for an affair (implying that Grace would have been available if he had not been) had literally groped his co-star on set and no one had stopped him. He was proud of his 'eager hands' for giving her a 'start'. And by this stage, Grace was sought after and powerful; so how much worse it must have

been for struggling and first-time actresses? Grace had to strike up alliances with much-older lead actors and directors – they could protect her and, if they were in a relationship with her, at least she could call some of the shots.[6]

And then Grace met Alfred Hitchcock, hardly a feminist but a director who saw actresses as more than 'background'. 'She has yet to play the character about whom a film is built,' he said. Hitchcock was enthralled by Grace's delicate appearance, and declared that her image as a 'lady' gave him more freedom in the highly censored film world, as a director 'can afford to be more *colourful*'. With him, Grace said, she learned that acting 'wasn't just about the eyes; to be a success, you had to learn to act with your whole body', and the strategies an actor can use to 'think of the story as a whole'. The most maverick of directors, never awarded an Oscar, was thus an unlikely creator of the royal image. Grace's brilliance at upholding the royal image was partly due to her education from him. MGM hired Grace out to Hitchcock at $15,000 per film – much more than they paid her. She would make three films with him, *Dial M for Murder*, for which she turned down *On the Waterfront, Rear Window* and *To Catch a Thief*, playing respectively a wealthy socialite wife, a New York career woman working in fashion and a rich tourist who has the measure of burglar Cary Grant. Hitchcock took her seriously, saw her skill.

In 1954, while she was working with Hitchcock, Grace was cast in *The Country Girl*, opposite Bing Crosby. Bing, whom she had met and tried to charm, thought Grace wasn't right to play a downtrodden wife, but he finally gave in to the producers. She had an affair with the director, William Holden, which included discussing marriage, although he was married already. The affair was exposed in the gossip magazines. Grace said she felt under 'persecution' and distressed that 'as an unmarried woman, I was thought to be a danger'. One columnist said, 'She's supposed to be so prim and proper, but then look at all those whispers.' It was all so hypocritical. Hollywood needed some of their women to be 'a lady', but the only way to succeed was by pleasing men, charming them, having affairs with them. There was no other way than to be the woman the men with power 'fell in love with'. And then it was the woman who was punished for it. 'Sometimes I

think I really hate Hollywood,' Grace said. 'It's a town without pity. Only success counts.' And she knew what she had to do to achieve success. She was always trying to fight back against the studio system. She asked to be allowed to choose her own roles. The studio said no. As she said later, 'I've often said that it was a pitiless place… The unhappiness out there was like the smog – it covered everything.'

In 1955 Grace won the Oscar for *The Country Girl*, beating Judy Garland in *A Star is Born*, who had been the favourite. A reporter at the ceremony asked her to kiss Marlon Brando for a photo, and she said, 'I think he should kiss me.' A power move. 'I simply can't believe Grace won,' her father told a journalist. He wasn't joking or impressed, it was another expression of his early thought that Grace was the least remarkable of his children, that Peggy would be the success. Grace was always trying to prove herself to her father. As a former flame and old friend said of Grace and her father, 'The thing she wanted most in the world was to win his approval.' Her third film with Hitchcock was *To Catch a Thief* with Cary Grant, filmed in the South of France in the summer of 1954. There she was visited by Oleg Cassini, who genuinely loved Grace and was asking her to marry him. According to him, they became secretly engaged.

In 1953, just before he was due to marry Jacqueline Bouvier, John F. Kennedy told a woman that he had only once fallen in love at first sight before – with Grace Kelly. The two families were friendly, and the all-powerful Joe Kennedy had pondered Grace as a potential bride, then decided she was 'too Hollywood' for his son with political ambitions – quite something when Jack's other girlfriends had included a suspected Nazi spy. Joe heartily approved of Jackie, but Jack had been slow to commit, so Jackie's mother had suggested she go to London to cover Elizabeth II's coronation for her newspaper on the basis that absence makes the heart grow fonder. John proposed while she was in London and they married later that year; the coronation created American royalty. Later, when Jackie and John were looking at pictures of the Monaco wedding, John declared, 'I could have married her.' This did not please Jackie.

And an actor often expected sex scenes to be real. One Grace played against early on complained that she was 'sexless' and his evidence was that

when he walked her home they held hands but nothing happened: 'no stampede'. In other words, if you didn't have sex with your leading man, they didn't believe you could play sex. If you didn't have an affair with them then, as in the case of Stewart Granger groping her on set, they would grab you anyway. Hollywood traded women but it knew the value of pretending to 1950s America that some of the actresses were 'ladies'. Grace had played the perfect 1950s housewife as a young model; now she was the fantasy wife, the all-American Philadelphia girl.

Talented, skilled, intelligent, Grace's genius was managing to translate her alliances with powerful men into acting capital. Hollywood's men exploited women and the reward for these women was frequently nothing. She was gaining position. Hollywood was rewarding her. The men could tell themselves she was a blank sheet, a sex-mad girl, anything rather than admit the reality of the world over which they presided, in which they used their privilege to have the actresses they wanted. Grace made Hollywood look pure and her recompense, hopefully, was the possibility that one day she would reach a position where she might be able to choose for herself, without having to win over a man. By 1955, thanks to *The Country Girl* and her collaboration with Hitchcock, she was reaching this position. Then she met Rainier.

'I am keenly sensitive to the political implications of my bachelorhood,' said Prince Rainier of Monaco in late 1955. According to a 1918 treaty, if he died without an heir the country would revert to France. In the fifteenth century, Jean I had allowed for female rule, as long as the woman kept her surname of Grimaldi, and her husband and children took the same name. After Jean's death, his son Catalan took the throne and provided that after his death, his only child, a daughter, Claudine should marry her cousin and take the throne, with Jean's wife, Pomellina, as regent. But when Catalan died when Claudine was six, the cousin demanded power and a struggle between Pomellina and the cousin ensued – best not to marry, clearly. In the early twentieth century, when the only heir to the throne seemed to be a German duke, France demanded an alternative heir. The Prince, Louis II, had had an

illegitimate child, Charlotte, with Marie Juliette, a nightclub hostess, in 1898, and she was installed as heir, but it was later decreed this would not work and the constitution in 1918 allowed the Prince to adopt an heir. He promptly adopted Charlotte and she later renounced her claim in favour of her son, Rainier. During World War I, France had pushed Monaco to sign a treaty that put French approval on accession (in return, importantly, France agreed that its army would defend Monaco). In such shaky post-war times, Rainier wanted a son.

In May 1955, Grace was heading to the film festival in Cannes for a ten-day stay. The editor of *Paris Match*, Pierre Galante, met her on the train to Cannes and had an idea for a photo shoot: he asked his actress wife, Olivia de Havilland, to encourage Grace to meet Rainier in Monaco. Grace knew nothing of the principality. 'I don't see why it's so important to you that I meet the prince,' she told her train companions. 'But if you all think it's such a good idea, I'll do it.' Galante told the palace to issue an invitation. Was he already matchmaking? Was the train chat a set-up, as there were other powerful people who wanted Grace to meet Rainier? Most likely.

Prince Rainier was thirty-two. The day before Rainier's twenty-first birthday, his mother Charlotte renounced her claim and he became the heir. In 1949, on the death of his grandfather, Rainier came to the throne at the age of twenty-five. The royal coffers were almost empty, and the casino industry had been decimated by the war. The European elite was poor, no one was travelling for gambling, and Monaco was on the brink of bankruptcy. And if it went entirely bankrupt, France, always the great power next to little Monaco, could very well absorb it entirely. In 1953, shipping billionaire Aristotle Onassis had bought shares through front companies and gained control of the company in Monaco that oversaw the casino, hotel and opera, and he wanted to see his investment make good. In Onassis's plan, an American bride would sprinkle movie star glamour over an impoverished little principality and turn it into a cash generator. The pressure on Rainier was on. He needed a princess.

Rainier had a long love affair with Cannes-born actress, Gisèle Pascal, but she had failed fertility tests, so he had to break it off (she later married and had a daughter, proving the tests wrong) – although he had rather wavered over marrying her, perhaps because she was from an Italian shopkeeper family. He liked actresses; he'd had an affair with Elizabeth Taylor when she'd

been visiting Monaco for her honeymoon, after another giant MGM wedding. Onassis decided that the bachelor prince should marry Marilyn Monroe, who had broken through to stardom in 1950 with *All About Eve*. Marilyn was wildly amused by the plan of marrying 'Prince Reindeer', as she called him, and declared, 'Give me two days alone with him and of course he'll want to marry me.' But she never took the idea seriously. She was focused on her career. Like Grace, she found the studio system restrictive (particularly to women) and fought an extensive battle against Fox to start her own production company – the press ridiculed her. Both women had battled the studio system and could not win.

Onassis continued to ponder the women of Hollywood. Grace had one significant advantage – she was Catholic, like the royal family of Monaco. And, unlike Marilyn, she came from money – as well as having the image of a 'lady' rather than, in the words of legendary gossip columnist Hedda Hopper, a 'cheesecake queen' turned 'box office smash'. Rainier's personal priest, Father Tucker, knew the Kelly family and was encouraging the Prince to think of her. *Paris Match* arranged the photoshoot at the Palace. But after arriving in Cannes, Grace said she might go to the hairdresser instead. Actor Jean-Pierre Aumont told her she couldn't possibly cancel because 'he's a reigning prince'. Still, the meeting had to be moved from four to three o'clock because she needed to be back in time to host a VIP reception at half past five. Galante was told that the prince would agree to the new time, even though he was with friends at his villa in Beaulieu, 'He will do his best to be back by three.'

Grace arrived on time, at three, accompanied by Galante, pen in hand. The prince was late. Rainier was usually punctual. Perhaps he was simply making his status clear: he was more important than Grace and her VIP reception. Grace waited for an hour. Finally, the prince appeared at the palace. Photos were taken of their meeting. He asked Grace if she might like to see the palace, and she said she already had. 'Then let's go and look at the gardens,' he said, and led Grace and the team from *Paris Match* past his private zoo. He had a tiger in a cage and put his hand through the bars to pet it. Grace seemed entirely won over by the prince's solicitude; 'We felt like indiscreet onlookers,' Galante said (well, he was keen to take responsibility for setting up the romance of the century). Grace had to leave immediately

to make the VIP reception. The prince told her he was considering a visit to the United States soon and hoped to see her again.

'He is charming,' said Grace in the car back to Cannes, 'so very charming.' When she returned to America, all the publicity concerned her meet-ups with Jean-Pierre Aumont, not the prince. But even though the American press had little interest, the plotting at the Palace was still alive. Rainier might have seemed a bit diffident, but his wingman Father Tucker wrote to express his feelings, writing to Grace and praising her for 'showing the prince what an American Catholic girl can be and for the very deep impression this has left on him'. She wrote back to Father Tucker, and this acted as an introduction: then Rainier began to write to her. She was filming *The Swan* (finally a job she wanted to do from MGM) about a beautiful princess who must choose between love and duty, complete with gowns by Helen Rose and filmed at a Vanderbilt-built chateau in North Carolina. 'It's like a palace,' Grace said. By this point, she was being courted to be a real-life princess. Rainier was raising the subject of marriage in his letters.

'A bachelor's life is lonely, empty,' the prince told a journalist at *Collier's* magazine in November 1955, half a year after meeting Grace, after months of correspondence and as he was planning to come to see her and her family. But, as he said, his 'greatest difficulty' was his position. For, 'if you met a pretty girl at a party and you were attracted to her and she to you, well, you could say, "What are you doing next Saturday evening?" and you could ask her to go to a movie, or a dance, or perhaps a dinner. I cannot do that. I have neither the free time nor the privacy.' The prince told the magazine he would be travelling to the United States in December. 'I am not shopping for a bride,' he said. Everybody knew he was. He declared in the interview that his ideal woman should be 'five to ten years younger', pretty and used to handling servants, but a competent housekeeper and cook. Such was what a modern princess should be, younger and useful, as opposed to adept at conversation or diplomatic skills. Grace was hardly a cook, even though she had advertised cooking equipment with gusto in New York. He wasn't telling the whole truth. He was trying to sound like a typical 1950s husband, looking for a pretty young woman to run his home. Rainier's wedding was about bringing glamour and money to Monaco, as well as heirs.

The correspondence between the pair had been largely chatty descriptions of what they were doing, rather than declaring high romance. But they all knew why he was coming. It was going to be almost impossible to say no.

Grace was filming *The Swan* right up until Christmas, so the prince, along with his doctor and Father Tucker the priest, arrived at the Kelly home at 7 p.m. on Christmas Day. That evening, the priest told Jack Kelly that Rainier was going to ask Grace for her hand – not as if Rainier would lower himself to ask Grace's father himself. Grace knew he was visiting her to propose marriage. Although *Paris Match* wasn't watching this time, it was still a visit washed in publicity. Within three days of his arrival, the pair were officially engaged and the announcement was made on 5 January. Grace and Rainer were on the front pages of newspapers for days. Photos were taken in the Kelly family home. Marriage to a man she barely knew was being sold as the ultimate whirlwind love story. It wasn't immediately leapt on by all as a great romance. *Time* magazine dubbed it the marriage of a 'blonde from North Philadelphia and the proprietor of an amusement park'.

Grace told Oleg Cassini, who still thought they were engaged, that she would marry Prince Rainier and 'I will learn to love him'. The Kelly family started weaving the myths. 'Here I am a bricklayer's wife and my daughter's marrying a prince,' said Mrs Kelly (although it was never clear how long Jack spent as an actual bricklayer, perhaps a day or two). Jack Kelly, as an Irish Catholic, was excluded from elite Philadelphia society. Marrying his daughter to Rainier would mean he was the father of a real-life American princess.

The prince, having secured his bride, set off back to Monaco. Now, after Grace had said yes, she was informed of two demands. Father Tucker told her she would have to undergo a fertility test. Grace agreed to have the nerve-wracking and invasive test at a private clinic in Philadelphia – she told a friend, Don Richardson, about it. One male writer on Grace doubts the whole story, saying that fertility tests for women weren't possible in the 1950s, pre scans.[7] But versions of fertility tests, with varying levels of reliability, have been inflicted on royal wives since the beginning of marriage – and there certainly were versions of 'checking' the organs with the doctor's

eye and hand. The male doctors had ultimate confidence in their abilities to predict a woman's fertility. One also wonders if it also wasn't a virginity test under a different name. The second demand was that the prince expected a dowry and the figure was two million dollars. Grace's father was infuriated and marched out of a meeting with the prince's lawyers, saying he refused to pay a 'damn broken-down prince' from 'a country over there that nobody ever knew anything about'. Father Tucker told him that it was the European way. Grace herself made the difference: she offered to pay half the dowry from money she had saved from her films. At the height of her career, around her engagement, MGM paid her a weekly salary of $1,500. She had been consistently underpaid, so this money would have been all she had – one wonders if perhaps she had to borrow money. Rainier had asked her to marry him in a very public way, and she couldn't go back now. Grace's tenacious personality, that had made her succeed in sexist Hollywood, was to the fore. It is likely that the other half came from her future inheritance from her father – she was impoverishing herself.

Marrying Grace would make it much easier for Rainier and the principality to borrow from American banks (as well as giving him a handy two million dollars). It would also guarantee interest from the all-powerful American public. As a TV announcer put it at the time, 'it's not often a film star's marriage affects a map of Europe, but this one may'. He meant that Rainier needed a legitimate heir. But it really would affect the map of Europe, as the 'pocket state' went up against France. She brought him everything. What was in it for her? She thought she could carry on acting, but with the status of a princess, not subject to the vagaries of Hollywood any more. Grace was asked by a reporter if she would give up her work. She replied that her contract with MGM had years left and 'I have always been faithful to any agreement I have made.' The next film she was due to make, *Designing Woman*, told the story of a romance between a fashion designer, loosely based on MGM's Helen Rose, who had designed so many of Grace's outfits, and a sports journalist. Grace was excited about playing the part, which had been largely written for her. Although most American women stopped work on marrying, film stars often continued, as had Elizabeth Taylor and Marilyn Monroe, especially those who married actors or producers. The head of the studio, when Grace told him she was to marry, said, 'I think that's wonderful, Grace – we'll have a big reception for you.' The

studios liked their actresses married; it gave them a veneer of respectability in 1950s America and hopefully reduced the potential scandal.

The prince had other ideas. 'I don't want my wife to work,' he said to the media. She tried to persuade him to allow her to fulfil her contract or at least make one or two more films, but he was adamant and, as the gossip columnists scented disagreements between the couple, she was told that she should make it clear that she and the prince were one on the matter. Resignedly she told a journalist, 'If that's the way he wants it, that's the way it will be.' Rainier was jubilant. 'No more movies for Miss Kelly,' he said. Lauren Bacall was given the lead role in *Designing Woman*. Grace told her, 'I'll never forgive you… it was written for me.'

'She got the prince, I got the part,' Lauren Bacall concluded.

Grace then learned that if the marriage failed she could leave, but any children would remain with Rainier, property of Monaco. As a friend said, 'Everybody said, "Oh, go on, it's the chance of a lifetime." But she became trapped.' She wore her huge diamond and ruby engagement ring to act in *High Society*, her last film.[II]

Hollywood was confused by the news that Grace was moving to Monaco for good. As Hedda Hopper wrote, 'Her friends are completely baffled, half of them don't believe she and the prince will ever reach the altar.' MGM were highly displeased to lose their star but agreed to release Grace from her contract – on condition that they would have exclusive rights to distribute the film of the wedding and split the profits with Monaco. Grace had initially thought she would be married in Philadelphia, but Monaco would not have it; they needed the boost from tourism and visitors. Queen Victoria had begun the fashion for large state weddings and introduced the notion that weddings secured public loyalty, and Elizabeth II had shown the world what the potent blend of royalty, ceremony, youth and television could do. Grace's was to be a televised spectacular, a fairy-tale movie, for everyone.

On the voyage over, the wedding dress was kept in a steel box resembling a coffin; an MGM plan to foil reporters. Designed by Helen Rose, it was an astonishing creation featuring 100 yards of silk net, the most expensive gown that Rose had ever created. Seven hundred wedding guests arrived, including stars of the screen, and thousands of tourists and onlookers. Hitchcock did not attend. One delighted American soldier who drove over

on a whim from his base in Germany said, 'The entire town was open twenty-four hours a day.'

'That was some wedding,' concluded Jack Kelly after the ceremony. Onassis's plan to boost Monaco's coffers had been successful beyond his wildest dreams. Everyone was thrilled by the romance. The bride had always wanted to free herself from the studio system; now she was in the most oppressive studio of all, and it was being cheered by the world. MGM too were, in the end, disappointed. Although *The Wedding of the Century* had been a hit, unfortunately it entirely overshadowed Grace's film *The Swan*, which did not make much money. The real-life princess fantasy had beaten the made-up story.

When one of her co-stars in *High Society* asked her how she thought her life might change after marriage, Grace said she didn't know. But after the wedding and the lengthy honeymoon on a yacht around the Mediterranean, the princess had nothing to do. Grace moved into the rather dark private apartments in the 220-room palace and waited for her husband to finish his work. It was clear to her that she would not be expected to assist him in the offices or offer advice, other than in the personal sphere. She had said she wanted a husband with a 'strong personality to hold his own against the fame of an actress. I have never wanted to marry a man who would have allowed himself to become Mr Kelly.' In choosing the prince, she had left Miss Kelly entirely behind. Rainier was often overworked and hard to talk to. French did not come easily to her and she could not leave the palace without a lady-in-waiting and a guard. Her life was, as Grace said, to be one that 'centers around my husband'. The people did not want to be friends with their princess, but to admire her from afar. As she said later, she felt very much a 'stranger coming into their midst… to many people I am considered a foreigner and always will be'. She wrote to her old Hollywood friends and asked them to visit, even though Rainier disliked her friends and had banned her films from being shown in Monaco. She quickly discovered she was pregnant. She was eager to have children, but she was aware of what she had promised: that whatever happened, those children would remain in Monaco. It would be impossible for her to leave. This was the 1950s, a world of technology, antibiotics and televisions, but Grace was like a medieval

princess on the chess board, was marrying into another family in the same way as Marie Antoinette had done, leaving her entire Viennese self at the border, or Catherine of Aragon, no longer Spanish the minute she arrived in England. She was expected to leave everything behind. 'I had to separate myself from what had been Grace Kelly, and that was very difficult for me. But I could not be two people—an American actress and the wife of the Prince of Monaco.' The problem was, unlike Marie Antoinette or a medieval princess, she *had* been Grace Kelly at the wedding, the brilliant image beamed around the world had entirely depended on her. So how could she throw it away? But she was expected to do so.

Princess Caroline was born on 10 January 1957, and Grace was soon pregnant again. On 14 March 1958, Prince Albert was born and the male heir so longed for had arrived. Rainier was delighted. Princess Stephanie arrived in 1965. When Rainier had said he was looking for a good cook and housekeeper, presumably because it was what the audience wanted to hear, it was dismissive of the role of the princess as his consort. Grace founded the Garden Club of Monaco, the Princess Grace Foundation, supporting unwell children and their families, including in French hospitals – a valuable act of diplomacy – and became president of the Monaco Red Cross; the Red Cross Ball became one of the most significant society dates in the calendar. She also founded the International Festival of Arts, now called the Spring Arts Festival. It was important work, and work that she loved, especially gardening. As she later said, 'I feel that every city, every town, every village should have a garden club… It is as necessary for the lifeblood of a community as a library, art gallery, museum.' Grace found her solace not in the home (even though she said she did to correspond to what society expected) but in boards, charitable organisations and being a CEO – in the way that a princess was allowed to do. And she also spent her own money supporting others. When she heard that the great actress and dancer and Second World War resistance agent Josephine Baker had run out of money and lost her home in the South of France, where her 'Rainbow Tribe' of children lived, Grace and the Red Cross bought Josephine a house near Monaco. She herself said, 'During those first years, I lost my identity. My husband and his life absorbed me until the children came, and it helped when I began service work in Monaco. Then, gradually, I joined up with

myself again.'[8] The image of a princess, the beautiful woman on her wedding day, had subsumed her, kept her stymied as everybody wanted her to be that forever, as if set in aspic. She had been so successful at creating the most wondrous vision of monarchy that it almost overwhelmed her. The work helped her get her sense of self back again.

Grace had turned Monaco into an international tourist destination, one of the most glamorous spots in Europe. Guests flocked to Monaco and Rainier was invited to yachts and parties. Grace attended receptions and balls, the movie star working the room. But the long-term disagreements between Rainier and his national council were not solved; in fact, the circus of the wedding had only infuriated them more. Essentially, Rainier wished to act as he pleased, without limitation by constitution, and was determined on modernising the principality and on economic expansion through building, even though the council opposed many of his measures.

A year after the birth of Prince Albert, the impasse between Rainier and his council came to a head. He wanted a budget approved, they said no. Rainier fought back by suspending the constitution, abolishing the council and outlawing political demonstrations. With a male heir, he felt emboldened to rule as he saw fit. He called a new national council, determined to prove his power. He then decided to take on France and its new President, Charles de Gaulle. He decided that French media companies and state-owned media owned too much of Radio Monte Carlo and were poised to take it over, thus broadcasting France's point of view to citizens of Monaco. He instructed that no more stock be sold. This was seen as a hostile act by France and de Gaulle moved in to make demands that he felt were long overdue. Some wealthy French people had moved to the principality to avoid tax, and France, after all, was maintaining services for Monaco, including defence. He said that the Monaco people and corporations should pay taxes to France, especially all the French people living there. If Rainier refused, France made it clear, much was at stake. A customs border could be imposed, the Bank of France could refuse to lend Monaco money, imports to France could be halted and, most seriously of all, Monaco could be entirely cut off – France supplied electricity and gas to the principality and even ran its railway. And France would no longer defend Monaco in the event of an attack. Rainier was in an

impossible situation. The principality was dependent on France. He could not afford to lose Monaco's tax-free status. He gave in, allowed Radio Monte Carlo to be traded and wrote to de Gaulle to express loyalty.

Rainer had overplayed his hand. But he was saved – and by the attention that his wife had created. Few before the wedding would have cared about the struggle between France and a small principality that wanted to avoid tax. But Grace Kelly had put Monaco on the map and now English-speaking newspapers covered the crisis in full, casting Monaco as David against Goliath. American public opinion sided with Monaco. De Gaulle had to back down and agree that Monaco retain independence, and an agreement was made about French citizens and corporations and tax and Rainier agreed to instal a new constitution and govern with the council.

It was unlikely that anyone in Rainier's circle would admit it, but Grace had saved them. The 'Wedding of the Century' had both brought investment to Monaco and protected it from French demands. Grace got no credit. But she made one request of her husband. She asked that the new constitution, post the crisis, should allow the women of Monaco to vote and stand in elections. Finally, in 1962, some of the last in Europe, Monaco women had the vote, largely thanks to a woman who hadn't been able to vote since she was in her twenties. Grace, the princess in the image, had had to change everything about herself for marriage, 'separate' herself, and 'never saw anything fairy-tale' about it. And yet the woman dismissed as a 'blonde from North Philadelphia' had been the ultimate defence of her adopted country and radically improved the lives of all women living there. The 'princess' might have been dismissed at the wedding in the address as having brief beauty, but what she had created was diplomacy.

'She never thought for one moment that she wasn't going to go back to acting,' Grace's friend and bridesmaid, Rita Gam, said. Grace had hoped that her husband might change his position after she had given him his male heir, but the arguments between them grew and in 1962 she was, as she put it, 'worn out and literally falling apart'. When Alfred Hitchcock asked her to star in his next film, *Marnie*, she begged her husband to allow her to work. It was during the crisis with France. Perhaps Rainier thought it might help their cause with the American public. The announcement was put out to the

press that 'Princess Grace has accepted to appear during her summer vacation in a motion picture.' Rainier said privately that it was only one film and she was 'not making a comeback'. He presumably hadn't read the script, in which Marnie is a thief. But even if the princess had been slated to play a nun, it wouldn't have worked. The people of Monaco flooded the palace with letters of protest. And there were claims that Grace was working in order to get money for Monaco, in the midst of the international situation. And what could be worse than a woman going to work? Rainier had to tell her she could not do the film. 'When she found out she couldn't do *Marnie*, she was undone,' Rita Gam said. She locked herself in her room. 'She was very artistic and needed an expression for this, but Rainier took away everything she wanted to express herself,' said another friend. Grace's friends were hard on Rainier. He had tried to give her this outlet for expression, but public opinion would not countenance it. Grace had 'separated' herself too well, she was the 'wife of the Prince of Monaco' now and could not go back to being 'Grace Kelly'.

With Grace as his wife, Rainier went from strength to strength. Aristotle Onassis may have plotted the wedding, but not ten years later Rainier felt he could rid himself of one of the richest men in the world. Rainier declared that he would print more shares in the company of Monaco, reducing Onassis's share to under a third. Onassis took him to court, but the supreme court of Monaco found for the prince (of course), and Onassis sold the rest of his shares to Monaco, for nearly ten million dollars, and departed. Grace had made millions for Hollywood, giving it a sheen of respectability and 'class'. She enabled a Monaco renaissance and stunning economic turnaround. In return, she got a gilded cage. As one film critic who interviewed her wrote, 'Grace Grimaldi plays a role which has lasted longer than any part which Hollywood might have created for her and she plays it in public with elegance and authority.' Her last film had been years previously, but she was still seen as an actress.

Rainier allowed her to make a short appearance in a film about drug addiction commissioned by the UN children's fund. For her fortieth birthday she held a Scorpio party, inviting only Scorpios like her or those partnered to a Scorpio. There was speculation in the papers about the separate lives of the couple. She had hopes for her children and spent time in Paris with them. 'In her wildest dreams, Grace wanted Caroline to marry

Charles,' said a Grimaldi relation of Caroline and Prince Charles, Prince of Wales. But although Grace had catapulted Monaco into stardom, it still was not accepted by European royalty, who did not attend her wedding. Caroline had ideas of her own and married a French banker at the age of twenty-one, divorcing him two years later. As Grace's children grew into adulthood, she found more projects that she could do that Rainier approved. She narrated a film that won an Academy Award and began touring poetry readings. Grace's work and charity work allowed her, as she put it, to become herself again. She was moving into a new phase of self-expression.

At nine thirty in the morning of 13 September 1982, Grace and Princess Stephanie, then seventeen, left their house in the South of France for the palace. Grace disliked driving and didn't like the car, a Rover 3500, or the route to Monaco with its sharp hairpin bends. A lorry driver saw the car swerve on the road. The car righted itself, then sped up and fell over the edge, crashed onto the ground and landed on its roof. Stephanie managed to crawl out and beg for help for her mother. Ambulances arrived within five minutes, and Grace was rushed to the Princess Grace hospital. The press aide said that she had suffered a few broken bones, but in fact she was on life support. At noon on 14 September, Rainier gave permission to switch off the princess's life support. The official explanation was that Grace had a stroke and lost control of the car. Stephanie told Rainier, 'Mommy panicked. She didn't know what to do,' which suggested that she may have had the beginnings of a stroke, righted the car and then blacked out. Grace was gone.

Grace had once paid part of a giant dowry. It was all absorbed by her husband and the palace. All she had at the time of her death was $10,000 and a small cottage in Ireland, where her grandfather had once lived. Wives and consorts show money and perform money, wearing tiaras and diamonds, but they don't get to own it. They are not supposed to engage in business activities. Diana, when she divorced, had to accept that some of the belongings she had amassed would remain with the royal family. Catherine

of Aragon had to give up everything she owned to her husband's next wife. Consorts don't get to keep many of their possessions.

Grace's story reveals what unites all royal women: that they have to be performers. And how great is the irony, that even one of the most illustrious and decorated actresses from the golden age of Hollywood could not play the role to perfection: she could not hide her 'troubled water', the unhappiness and loneliness. 'I wouldn't have been able to do my job as well as I do it now had I not been an actress,' Grace once said.

Becoming a princess in the age of television meant serving the cameras. Grace Kelly was expected to keep up the image of the fairy tale, the princess who gave up everything for her happiness, even nearly thirty years after the wedding. The Bishop had told her at the wedding that beauty was fleeting. She had created business and cultural opportunities for Monaco, given it diplomatic strength. Yet, all people wanted to read about was the princess fairy tale, even after nearly thirty years of marriage. Her story couldn't make it clearer. Even in the twentieth century, with women in political roles across the world, a consort was still required as she had been instructed to be by *The Mirror for Ladies*: supportive, virtuous, keeping up an image that is what the male ruler desires, giving up her 'self' on marriage, like Marie Antoinette relinquishing all her belongings at the French border. Even in the twentieth century, this was what was expected. Why is this? Why can we not allow women in courts to be congratulated for business endeavours, charity, diplomatic work? They must be 'wife', and support. Even in a world of modern marriage, we expect the consort to be a medieval princess, but it is even harder as she has also to keep up the perfect image in a TV world. One wonders what would have happened if Marilyn Monroe had married 'Prince Reindeer', since by the mid-fifties she was increasingly refusing to perform happiness for anyone.

It was March 1981 and Diana, Princess of Wales's first official event after the announcement of her engagement to Prince Charles: a charity gala in the City of London. Diana was nineteen and wearing a black dress designed by her wedding dress designers, as she'd thought black the 'smartest colour'. She was immediately criticised on the grounds that royals only wore black in mourning and it was too low cut. Diana recalled the evening as a

'horrendous occasion' as she had no idea of when she should go out of the door or on which arm to hold a handbag. 'I was terrified,' she said. Grace Kelly, then fifty-one, was present. She had been Princess of Monaco for nearly half her life. She took Diana to the powder room to talk. Diana later remembered 'how wonderful and serene she was, but there was troubled water under her, I saw that'. She told Princess Grace how difficult she found the publicity and press attention and that she was nervous about the future. 'Don't worry,' said Grace. 'It will get worse.'

Grace Kelly was a movie actress who was already familiar with how to 'separate' oneself between fantasy and reality, playing a role, had done it quite brilliantly in the snake pit of Hollywood. Even she found the 'separating' of being a royal woman extremely hard. If even a movie star can't uphold the royal image, then surely it is impossible. And if one of the most recognisable women in society is only congratulated for how well she performs the role of wife and fairy tale, as opposed to a real-life person who advocated for votes for women, it says little for the lives of women overall.

I. Women had been given the vote in local elections in 1945, but could not vote or stand in national elections.

II. Her mother gave interviews to a reporter, detailing all of Grace's love affairs with famous men, including Gable, Crosby and Cassini. 'My mother's going to destroy everything overnight,' said Grace. Her mother was showing her who had the power.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN
Royal Books: Diana, Princess of Wales

On 29 July 1981, a few months after meeting Princess Grace, Diana stepped out of the Glass Coach outside St Paul's Cathedral, London, in her ivory silk taffeta dress, the Spencer diamond tiara and an ivory silk tulle veil on her head – and 750 million people watching on television in over seventy countries. 'Here is the stuff of which fairy tales are made,' said the Archbishop of Canterbury at the ceremony. Diana, in her voluminous Emanuel dress, which she herself had planned, photographed by the world, was the image of the perfect princess. 'The public side, they wanted a fairy princess to come and touch them, and everything will turn into gold and all their worries would be forgotten,' Diana said. The picture shot across the world. Diana in her gown, the bodice embroidered with pearls, about to be married, the ultimate photograph of her, the one the world fell in love with. It was the image she would spend the rest of her life fighting. For as she said, the 'fairy princess' was 'crucifying herself inside'.[1]

A mere ten years later, in 1991, a doctor cycled out of Kensington Palace, waved through by the police. Radiologist James Colthurst had met Diana on a ski trip when she was seventeen and had been visiting her in her rooms at the palace. He was carrying a precious cargo of tapes. Andrew Morton, a royal journalist, had sent questions for Diana and she had returned her answers by tape. Colthurst would transport six tapes in all. The contents would become the book *Diana: Her True Story* and the country – and the world – had never read anything like it, with its details of everything from

her suicide attempts to Charles's long-term infidelity. 'Obviously we are preparing for the volcano to erupt,' Diana wrote to Morton before publication. Monarchy would not be the same again.

The 1980s were the Diana years – and they were the years when she pushed off the wedding dress image. The Queen of Hawaii wrote of her time in prison that she was pleased to be able to compose music to express her thoughts – and then she put her music in the Congressional Library because she knew how incendiary they were. How does a queen express her thoughts? Throughout this book we have viewed so many different commentators and chroniclers making points about royal women to make examples of them, from Plutarch and Cassius Dio writing about Cleopatra and Boudica, to monks commenting on queens, and satirists and caricaturists or newspaper critics on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century women. Often, as we have seen, what they write isn't about the actual queen herself, but what she is perceived to stand for: luxury, despotism, selfishness, or even humility, duty, devotion. Or her behaviour is used, like one of our earliest mythical queens, Queen Helen, to justify a Greek landgrab, or like Cleopatra, to cover up the fact that soldiers are being sacrificed to solve an argument between men, or even that a section of society don't want to pay tax. And then, as we move into the twentieth century, the power of words is superseded by the dominion of pictures. And with Diana, we might say, the paparazzi take the place of the medieval satirists or the eighteenth-century cartoonists: they create images of the royal women to express and animate what causes anxiety in the realm they depict: a growing importance of women and a refusal of women to be confined to their image. With Diana, we see a battle over how a royal woman is seen. There is an expectation that she is to be the beautiful fairy princess, happy ever after, content with what she is given by marriage. Yes, this is about expectations of monarchy and the princess dream, but it is also about feminism and its growing power in the 1980s. Diana might not be who people see as a feminist icon, but everything about the presentation of her is about the expectations of women at the time – which she contested. Diana broke out of this with the use of her words, writing her own story. And by turning the picture against itself, using the photo to show that a woman could do more in society than smile and agree.

As we have seen, what is said about royal women is a version of what is said about all women. A princess or a queen is the universally recognised woman in society, someone that is so widely known she often needs only a first name to be identified, and thus what is said about her reflects what is expected of women – and what society doesn't want them to do.

'I have it, on very good authority, that the quest for perfection our society demands can leave the individual gasping for breath at every turn.' Diana was speaking in April 1993, one year after the publication of her book and now separated from Charles. She was, on paper, an unlikely royal revolutionary. She had been, as she had said, 'leapt on' by the royals as the perfect wife for Charles, for she seemed so suitable – young, aristocratic, from a family with a long relationship with the royals. She had been ready to play the princess, then queen. But when she realised the truth behind the life she had been brought into, she tore apart the princess vision with her book, her speeches, her work to expand the role. She talked about how the pressure on her image had been so great that she had suffered from a punishing eating disorder – and had it dismissed as, she said, 'female vanity'. Royal women, women in the public eye, all women were expected to look a certain way, criticised when they did not, called self-indulgent when the pressure on them pitched them into suffering. As we have seen, from the earliest history of queens, the accusation of 'vanity' has been thrown at them when they have too much significance or are 'getting out of hand', like Eleanor of Aquitaine or Elizabeth I. So Diana's illness was dismissed as 'vanity'. The whole set-up reveals the impossibility of women and appearance: they must get their appearance right, because otherwise that offends society, but if they get it *too* right, are too attractive, this is too much power and they are condemned as ambitious, selfish or airheaded.

A few months later, in July 1993, the princess spoke even more explicitly, saying that 'we as a society continue to disable women' by pushing them to 'live in the shadows of others', do things only for their family. And they had to pretend they were happy and smile. When Morton went to his publisher about making Diana's revelations into a book, the publishers asked why, if she was so unhappy, was she always smiling? As Tina Brown noted, every photographer in Fleet Street throughout the eighties and nineties 'lived for –

and on – Diana's smile'. As this book has suggested, a woman should, to gain power or influence, claim sacrifice and service, devoting all to the family. Grace Kelly's sacrifice of her career was made much of in publicity. Now, Diana at a talk about women's mental health said it was bad for women to encourage 'them to believe they should only do things that are thought to benefit their family even if these women are "damaged" in the process… if they feel they must sacrifice everything for their loved ones even at the cost of their health, their inner strength and their own self-worth', this life is 'bleak beyond belief'. Here is a future queen saying the expectation of women to sacrifice was false in the first place.

This was in 1993, post-Margaret Thatcher, the first female prime minister, a world in which women were gaining more of a foothold. And yet, the question that troubled society was how could women have a career and also fulfil the expected role of a woman? It was only eleven years after the law had made it illegal to refuse to serve women in pubs, not twenty years after women were allowed to sign for a credit card or loan without a male guarantor – and women were not taxed separately to their husbands until 1990! It was only two years after rape in marriage was made illegal, but still rape seemed almost impossible to prosecute. And 1993 was a year of social panic about single mothers. Politicians made speeches about young women who had babies without attempting to form a relationship with the father, social ills and crimes were blamed on them and in the following year, Prime Minister John Major launched the 'Back to Basics' campaign about returning to traditional values – widely perceived as a return to 'family values', or in other words the nuclear family, the woman at home. Diana, talking about how women should not 'sacrifice' everything for their family, was making a radical statement. The woman who everyone had tried to reduce to her appearance was speaking out.

'History fascinated me,' Diana once said of her school life, particularly the Tudors and Stuarts – her ancestors – and 'I never anticipated that I'd end up in the system, in the books.' Diana felt that she 'wasn't any good at anything', deprecated herself, said she was poor at school – and history has believed her, described her as unintelligent, when in fact she had an extraordinary intuition and emotional intelligence, and most of all an intellectual flexibility and curiosity. Diana is frequently dismissed as unintellectual as a way of ignoring what she is saying, particularly about women.

Diana was born on 1 July 1961 at Park House on the Sandringham estate, to the sound of applause after a player at the nearby Sandringham Cricket Club had scored a century. She was named Diana Frances, after her mother and an ancestor, Lady Diana Spencer. In 1975, when Diana was nearly fourteen, the seventh earl died at the age of eighty-three and Diana's father became Earl Spencer. 'I'm a Lady. I'm Lady Diana now!' she said. The family moved to Althorp. It was, as Charles, her brother and heir to the estate, recalled, 'a difficult phase in all our lives, uprooted from our childhood haunts and friends and marooned in a park the size of Monaco'.

Diana would bring a dose of Stuart blood to the royal family, for she was descended from two of the illegitimate sons of Charles II via two of her great-grandmothers, as well as from the line of the kings of Scotland – she was in fact a sixteenth cousin to her husband. The Spencers were in 1603 ennobled with a barony by James I.[I] Diana's great-great-great-great-aunt was Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, eldest daughter of John Spencer (grandson of Sarah Churchill), who had once been the confidant of Queen Anne (and both had been attacked for the fact that the queen chose to trust a female advisor rather than men). Georgiana had been the most celebrated political hostess and powerbroker of her time in the late eighteenth century.

Johnnie Spencer, Diana's father, heir to the magnificent Althorp estate, had served in the Second World War and been equerry to George VI and Elizabeth II. He married the Honourable Frances Roche in 1954. In September 1967, when Diana was just six, she and her siblings were told that her parents were embarking on a trial separation. 'It was a very unhappy childhood,' Diana recalled.

In 1977, sixteen and on weekend leave from school, Diana met the 28-year-old Prince of Wales at a shooting party at Althorp. He was then dating her sister, Sarah. As she said, she'd known the queen 'since I was tiny, so it was no big deal'. After her school, West Heath, Diana was sent to a Swiss finishing school near Gstaad. When she returned, Diana was, as her brother put it, 'going to be a swan'. Her sister Sarah had a splendid coming-out ball, with Earl Spencer, their father, dressed as Henry VIII and Sarah herself in an Anne Boleyn costume. But by Diana's time, things were changing and the coming-out ball was no longer the thing. She wanted to live in London with

flatmates. She and her friends would sometimes go for late-night drives around London and, on one occasion, she wondered if she 'might stand a chance' with Prince Charles. 'It could be quite fun. It would be like Anne Boleyn or Guinevere!' she said. The royal women at the forefront of her mind were tragic ones fallen in love with, who then lost everything. Anne Boleyn, also a royal woman who refused the visions imposed on her, was quite the role model.

Charles had been born in Buckingham Palace. Elizabeth II, then Princess Elizabeth, had been spared the ritual of politicians witnessing the royal birth. George VI had abolished the tradition for his daughter. If the royals put it on a TV screen, people would watch. Lord Mountbatten, Charles's great uncle, who had installed himself as an advisor told him in 1974 that he should 'sow his wild oats' and then for a wife, 'choose a suitable, attractive and sweet-charactered girl before she met anyone'. It was dating advice straight out of Henry VIII's court. Mountbatten decreed it was 'disturbing for women to have experiences'. According to Fleet Street, he kept a slush fund for paying off women who complained. Camilla Parker Bowles, Charles's former lover, had been married since 1973 to Andrew Parker Bowles, whom Princess Anne had once dated, but her hold over the prince was still strong and he turned to her for advice about his life.

In 1953, a *Sunday Mirror* reporter had spotted Princess Margaret at the coronation together with Group Captain Townsend, a hero of the Second World War, who was recently divorced, had known her since she was very young and had been equerry to her father. Soon the story exploded. Margaret was given the choice of giving up Townsend (his divorced status was a problem) or giving up her place in the line of succession and her title. She chose the royal family, as she put it 'conscious of my duty to the Commonwealth'. In 1959, she married Antony Armstrong-Jones, a talented photographer. He was a genius at wielding the royal image – he orchestrated the 1969 investiture of Prince Charles as Prince of Wales at Caernarfon Castle into a TV-friendly vision of loyalty. The coronet made for the Prince of Wales had been seized by Edward VIII when he abdicated, so a new crown had to be made, with a gold-painted ping-pong ball on top.

The royal family simply hadn't thought about a role for Margaret other than marriage and family – and if princesses weren't sent off to foreign families any more, what sort of ordinary man would be judged right to

marry a princess? With the growth of the power of the newspapers, photos of royal women became useful food to the press. Both Margaret and Armstrong-Jones had affairs, but it was hers that got all the coverage. In 1976, the *News of the World* printed pictures of Margaret and Roddy Llewellyn, seventeen years her junior, in Mustique. Diana being twelve years younger than Charles was seen as romantic, but Margaret having a lover with a similar age gap was viewed as her preying on a younger man. MPs called her a 'royal parasite'.

After the Margaret and Llewellyn scandal, the relationship between the press and the royal family was transformed. Royal photos were the big game hunt, and ideally photos of women. On one occasion, a comment piece declared of one of Charles's girlfriends whom they had photographed in a clinch with the prince in Scotland, that if Charles proposed, 'I have chilling news for him. There is a risqué picture of [her] in circulation, and I have a copy of it.' Shaming and judging women was all entertainment and those women who dated royal men were considered fair game.

The prince had declared publicly that he thought thirty the perfect age to be married. By 1980, he was turning thirty-two. 'The media will simply not take me seriously until I do get married and apparently become responsible,' he wrote.[2] Mountbatten lectured him that he was becoming selfish, 'beginning on the downward slope that wrecked your uncle David's life and led to his disgraceful abdication'. Charles thought that choosing the woman who everyone wanted would make him more popular. One newspaper even invented a bride, photographing a young secretary called Sarah in a tiara, and saying she was a perfect princess. Charles should 'take her, she's yours. And of course, ours.'[3] That was it about a future princess: she would be 'ours', our belonging. Women had increasing autonomy (although not in terms of tax!) in marriage, but a royal woman would be a national possession.

At a house party in West Sussex in July 1980, Diana was told by the hosts that Charles was staying and 'you're a young blood, you might amuse him'. The host was a friend of Prince Philip, the hostess lady-in-waiting to the queen. The queen mother had been looking at Diana as a candidate (Diana's grandmother, Lady Fermoy, was a friend and attendant). That evening, Diana was seated next to Charles on a hay bale, and she told him that 'my

heart bled for you' when she watched him at Lord Mountbatten's funeral. He was entranced by her expressions of sympathy, and told her she had to come to London tomorrow with him, which she declined as it would be rude to the hosts. Instead, he invited her to the royal yacht and the opera, with Lady Fermoy as chaperone. Diana was also invited to Balmoral to be introduced to the royal family. Photographers spotted her with Charles in Scotland and found her at Aberdeen airport on her way back and the 'Lady Di' frenzy began. Diana Spencer was the ultimate fairy tale the public wanted, driving to work in her bright red Mini Metro (now in Coventry Transport Museum). Royal women have been shaped for public consumption by sculptors and writers – and now in the 1980s by photographers. 'We all fell in love with her,' remembered one of the royal correspondents from the *Sun*. 'We really got behind Diana and pushed her towards him. I am absolutely convinced that the media forced Charles to marry her.'

One photographer said Diana would often drive so fast that she escaped him, and he felt she was signalling to him, saying, 'catch me if you can'. It was fun to him. In fact, Diana hated being chased. 'I just couldn't cope with it,' she said. Buckingham Palace press office said they were unable to help. Sixty MPs drafted a motion about it. But the hunt continued. Diana herself dreaded the coverage if Charles broke it off. 'I won't be able to show my face,' she said. Britain in the 1980s was full of couples dating and then breaking it off. But when it came to Diana, it was like Victorian times; one meeting meant marriage. As the reporter said, everyone 'fell in love with her'.

In early February 1981, in the nursery at Windsor Castle, Charles proposed to Diana, telling her he had missed her greatly while on a skiing holiday. 'You do realise that one day you will be queen,' he said. Diana said yes to the proposal, told him she loved him and he, she recalled, said, 'whatever love means'. Diana was ecstatic, and that evening she went for a drive around London with her flatmates to celebrate. Debrett's predicted that it would be the last great state event of the twentieth century.

On the night before the engagement announcement on 24 February 1981, Diana left her London flat to move to Clarence House, the queen mother's home. She thought it was 'like going into a hotel'. She was hoping for a family to envelop her in their life; instead, she was in a draughty palace where royals sent messages via servants if they wished to dine together, otherwise living, as one courtier said, each in their own 'water-tight

compartment'. There was a letter on her bed, not from Charles or the queen mother, but from Camilla, asking her to lunch.[II]

At the engagement interview, broadcast on TV that evening, Charles talked about how 'amazed' he was that Diana would be taking him on. 'And in love?' prompted the interviewer. 'Of course!' said Diana. 'Whatever love means,' added Charles, fatefully – the same phrase Diana recalled him saying after he'd proposed. She laughs nervously. The journalist, about to wrap up the interview, says ebulliently, 'it obviously means two very happy people'. The cameras roll and Diana's face looks frozen. As she later said, 'And that threw me completely. I thought, what a strange answer. God, absolutely traumatised me.' The words have become emblematic, repeated as evidence that the marriage was doomed from the start. The thing was that no one else really seemed to notice. As Tina Brown argues, the remark did not feature in any of the newspaper write-ups, 'the print press literally erased [it] from their accounts.[4] Everyone wanted the dream. In the engagement photos, Charles stood on a box to make him a foot taller than Diana (in fact they were of similar height). He said their 'base' would be Highgrove. 'It will be marvellous to have someone to take it on and organise everything because it's completely empty at the moment,' he said. Such was the role of a wife.

Diana was the first Princess of Wales since 1901. George VI had refused to allow Princess Elizabeth to be Princess of Wales, as it was a title for the wife of the Prince of Wales. A relation thought 'she was young enough to be totally moulded into conforming as the future queen'. Lady Susan Hussey, lady-in-waiting to the queen, gave her tuition in regal history and how to wave. This was hardly enough for such a role, especially when she was thrust into it with so little warning. After her lunch with Camilla, Diana was suspicious of her friendship with Charles. She began to worry that she shouldn't go ahead; and she was exhausted and nervous after all the relentless coverage. Her sisters told her, 'Your face is on the tea-towels, so you're too late to chicken out.' The royal image always won.

Diana showed her early genius for image by leaning into the princess dream with the gown that became, for many, emblematic of the 1980s: wide puffed sleeves adorned with bows and the voluminous skirt billowing from a tiny

waist, all ivory silk taffeta and antique lace, with 10,000 pearls. Although it was criticised as 'too much dress', that was its genius, for this was the 1980s fairy tale and no dress could have been too 'much'. The style and look of the gown, the creative direction, had been Diana's idea. New designers David and Elizabeth Emanuel had to move to Buckingham Palace to construct it (a second one was made just in case the secret was leaked). David said that Diana wanted to have the longest train in the history of royal weddings, five feet longer than the then-current record holder at 25 feet. She lost so much weight in the run-up to the wedding that the Emanuels had to make five versions of the bodice. She later said she felt like 'a lamb to the slaughter' although she said at the time that it was 'heaven' and was, according to one of her bridesmaids, excited to see herself on television.[III]

It was the beginning of the 1980s, a decade of wild consumption, globalisation, mass expansion of air travel, the first mass-market home computer in the ZX Spectrum, an explosion of plastics used for everything from toys to furniture to the bold, coloured earrings worn by the high-fashion eighties girls and the New Romantic boys who gelled their hair, like Birmingham band Duran Duran (Diana's favourites). Unemployment had hit a 50-year high at 2.5 million, Irish Republican Army prisoners were on hunger strike and Britain was riven with riots, fuelled by deprivation and police action in black communities, with uprisings in Brixton, London, and in Birmingham and Liverpool. And it was a decade of Di mania. Diana, just turned twenty, was an obsession, the 'good news' story, the boost to the British economy and fashion, the shot of energy into the staid monarchy. The UK was a man's world in which women still did not have statutory maternity leave, it was only six years after it was made illegal to discriminate against women in work and education, but there were two women in power, prime minister Margaret Thatcher and the queen herself; images of women dominated. Diana was the young one in the triumvirate of women, the new girl with as much hairspray as Mrs Thatcher, and the one who wouldn't get to speak for herself, but the one who was determined to find a way to express her thoughts. Diana had been presented by the press as a real-life Cinderella (even though she was from a great aristocratic family). The nursery teaching assistant, who had met Prince Charles not much over a dozen times in their six-month courtship and called him sir until their

engagement, had all the weight on her shoulders: of symbolising Britain and the royal family. She was expected to express the feminine in the new decade, the ideal princess, the future queen.

When Diana, now Princess of Wales, came out of the cathedral to the enthusiastic cheers of the huge crowd, she was excited. 'I had tremendous hopes in my heart.' In September 1981, after the wedding, two songs topped the charts, 'Tainted Love' by Soft Cell, followed by 'Prince Charming' by Adam Ant – everyone had the Prince Charming fantasy, not so much spoiled love. On honeymoon, Diana said later that her questions increased as she realised Charles was wearing cufflinks that Camilla had given him. Meanwhile the world was watching reruns of the wedding, ordering copies of the wedding dress, still invested in the fairy tale. One newspaper wrote that Charles, a 'respected, worthy' prince, was 'adding to his other accomplishments a wife'. Diana was like an 'accomplishment', useful to a prince.

She hadn't been told what a royal wife was expected to do: be attractive and charming, improve the image of the royals, devote her time to bolstering her husband's image, always remember she was below him in the pecking order and cancel desires of her own – as she said later, she had to 'sacrifice' for the family. 'I hadn't got enough background on what the Princess of Wales was supposed to do,' Diana said. 'I learned to be royal, in inverted commas, in one week.'[IV] Charles and the family had expected everyone to stop admiring Diana after the wedding and accept that she was only a wife. But the 1980s was fascinated by youth and beauty and the only royal the people wanted was Diana. When she and Charles conducted their walkabouts, the couple would each cover one side of the street. Those who received Charles were disappointed. 'He was jealous,' Diana recalled. 'I kept saying, you've married someone and whoever you'd have married would have been of interest.' She said it was like 'Marilyn Monroe publicity'. The royal business – and it is a business – runs on a strict hierarchy of attention, and attention should go first to the monarch, then down the ladder. But the cameras decide who they love best and, when Diana married into the royal family, it was her. She upended the traditional hierarchy of senior royals gaining all the attention. 'The princess had everything going for her except the ability not to upstage the prince,' said one courtier. As her advisors

recalled, she asked them how to improve the response to him on his side. But there was nothing to be done. 'I'm nothing more than a carrier of flowers for my wife,' he said in Wales. Like Rainier, he had thought he could start up the royal image and stop it when he wished. As Diana said, 'the relationship certainly changed… because I was a threat, wasn't I?'

Princess Grace died in the year after Diana became Princess of Wales. Diana wanted to go to her funeral. 'I think it's important because she was an outsider who married into a big family and I've done the same,' she said; 'I admired her so much and she was so sweet to me.' The queen's private secretary thought not, but the queen agreed to it. Diana was disappointed on her return not to receive any congratulations from the royal family for how she had conducted herself. 'Look at the papers,' said one of her advisors. 'They say you did brilliantly.'

William was born and Diana suffered severe postnatal depression, as she put it, 'it was the baby that triggered off all else that was going on in my mind' and she was constantly terrified that Charles was going to die – and it wasn't much better understood than when a young Queen Victoria had become petrified of death after giving birth, seeing coffins and imagining worms coming out of people's faces. At William's christening, she burst into tears because she felt so 'excluded'. The time was wrong for the baby's schedule and 'it was all decided around me. Hence the ghastly pictures'. There could be no stopping the juggernaut of the royal picture. When Harry was born, two years later, Charles was disappointed not to have a girl and Diana's mother snapped at him, 'How lucky you are to have a child that's normal.' Diana's bulimia grew worse, and she was frustrated by the 'Camilla thing', which no one would acknowledge. Being the fairy princess was increasingly impossible. In her work, she found solace with the sick and the excluded, 'hospices, AIDS, cancer, I'd do that full time'. In a 1980s world where the message was that if someone did not succeed, it was because they were lazy, Diana visited homeless shelters and hospitals. In 1987, Middlesex Hospital invited the princess to open the first ever AIDS ward in the UK. The stigma of AIDS was such that nurses and doctors treating patients kept their identities secret, for fear of being chased from their homes, and patients suffered terribly from prejudice. Diana attended the ward and shook hands – without gloves – with twelve male patients, only one of whom agreed to be photographed, his back to the camera. As one AIDS

expert said, people did not want to learn about it, they disliked hearing about it, but 'she gave it respectability and a profile'. It was revolutionary.

Diana was turning the photograph back on itself, using the image that had been imposed upon her for her own causes – and breaking out of the expectation of a royal woman that she not only 'sacrifice' for her family but she is 'ours' – she was her own person. Diana garnered all the attention, but not the money. Her husband controlled the Duchy of Cornwall and she had no independent income, either for herself or for her charities. She had asked about setting up a 'Princess of Wales trust' to raise money, but she was refused. She believed Charles thought it would divert money and attention from his own charities. In 1975 it had been made illegal for banks to treat women differently, and women were now allowed to sign for their own credit card and mortgage without a male guarantor, although lone women were still seen as a poor bet well into the 1980s. But a woman in the 1980s royal family was as financially dependent as an eighteenth-century wife, who in marriage was given no separate money of her own.

The marriage was unbearable for Diana but she knew she could not simply leave, for she would be criticised in the press for breaking up a fairy-tale marriage. On a tour to India in early 1992, she was photographed in front of the Taj Mahal, alone and pensive, and the image shot around the world. She was using the photograph for her own means once more. Prince Andrew and Sarah Ferguson announced their separation in March 1992 and Princess Anne and Captain Mark Phillips announced their divorce in April. The fairy tale was already collapsing. In August, *Paris Match* printed a picture of Sarah sunbathing with her 'financial advisor', and she was attacked by the public and politicians. Sarah later commented that her 'public vivisection' was a warning to Diana of what would happen should she step out of line. 'No woman,' Sarah later said, 'leaves the royal family with her head.'

The front cover of *Diana: Her True Story* showed the princess in a dark jumper and trousers, smart and ready for business. The focus now was not on her appearance, but her words. 'Diana Driven to Five Suicide Bids by Uncaring Charles', was the headline in *The Sunday Times*, who had won the serialisation rights. The princess and Morton denied that Diana had contributed directly to the book, so the conversation was all focused on who

might have leaked the stories to him. Nobody doubted, though, that the text came from Diana's words. 'I could hear my wife talking as I read those extracts,' said Charles. The palace had suggested they put out a statement saying that Diana disassociated herself from the book. Diana declined to sign it.

The War of the Windsors began. In August 1992, a newspaper printed a conversation between a woman declared to be Diana and a friend, James Gilbey. Curiously, the call, which had taken place in 1989, was between Diana's landline at Sandringham and Gilbey's mobile phone, and was said to have been recorded by two separate amateur radio receivers, one of whom, Cyril Reenan, a retired bank manager, sold the call to the *Sun*. And yet a *Sunday Times* analysis suggested that the equipment of the man who sold it could not have picked up a call from a landline. It was checked by two experts. Reenan swore he'd recorded it on 4 January, even though the call had taken place on New Year's Eve. The only possibility seemed to be that the call had been recorded by someone bugging Diana's phone and then rebroadcast until it was picked up. 'I think I was set up,' said Reenan later. He was surely right. If it was the security services, it's no wonder that Diana thought the establishment was out to get her.

In November, on the queen and Prince Philip's 45-year wedding anniversary, a cataclysmic fire burned down a swathe of Windsor Castle. The boys from Eton College watched it burn orange against the sky. When it was announced that the state would pay for the repairs, upwards of twenty million pounds, there was a public outcry and calls for the queen to pay income tax. In December 1992, Charles and Diana's separation – but not divorce – was announced by the prime minister, John Major. Diana would live at Kensington Palace, and the pair would share custody of the children. Diana moved her belongings from Highgrove. She took from there only her photographs and some ornaments, a few drawings and cushions she had brought from her London flat. The possessions that she had accrued during the marriage were very few. Royal women make the monarchy look rich, but they don't get to keep much.

Diana decided she did not want police royal protection, as she already feared that they spied on her. Now, she felt, would be her time to truly show the world what she could do as a philanthropic leader. She met with charities, dignitaries, celebrities and politicians. She talked of eating

disorders and suffering, illness and rejection. She travelled to Zimbabwe for the Red Cross. She was using her hard-won, painful platform. And she threw the cruel attacks back. As she told one audience at a charity meeting, knowing it would immediately be on the front pages, they were lucky to have her there because 'I am supposed to be dragged off the minute I leave here by men in white coats.' As she continued, 'If it is all right with you, I thought I would postpone my nervous breakdown to a more appropriate moment.' Diana was, now she was separated, able to resist the endless misogyny that had been hurled at her.

In January 1993, a newspaper published a recording of a phone conversation between the prince and Camilla from 1989. 'Your great achievement is to love me,' he told her, and there were references to private meetings. Diana was angered at the lies that had been told to her by friends who had sworn the pair were not meeting; not only that, it also made life harder for her – for, fearing the damage to Charles's reputation, the palace machine tried everything to vindicate him, at the expense of Diana. 'I was now the separated wife of the Prince of Wales. I was a problem, I was a liability.' Diana was blocked from visits she wanted to make. In 1994, Charles gave an interview to Jonathan Dimbleby, against the advice of his staff, in which he admitted the affair with Camilla but insisted that it started only after the marriage 'became irretrievably broken down'. The *Daily Mirror* noted that he wasn't the first royal to be unfaithful but the 'first to appear before 25 million of his subjects to confess'.[V]

In 1993 it was proclaimed that Japan was getting their own Princess Diana, as the heir to the throne was to marry Masako Owada. Masako, brought up in a diplomatic family, was an impossibly gifted student. She graduated from Havard and later studied at Oxford, and took the entry exam for the Japanese foreign service. Of the 800 who took it, only twenty-eight passed, including Masako and only two other women. The prince had met her just before she took her foreign service entry exam in 1986, when she was twenty-three. She was concerned about the strictures of the royal household and wanted a career in diplomacy. In 1992 she accepted his proposal, after being convinced that being crown princess was another form of diplomacy. But Masako's sufferings would be significant, due to criticism for not having

a male heir. For even though there were empresses in the early days of Japan, and again in the eighteenth century with Empress Go-Sakuramachi, laws were passed in the nineteenth century with the restoration of imperial rule, and again in 1947, that made it strictly male occupants only. It is generally thought the block to women is long-held tradition, but it is in fact a comparatively recent law written in a time of national self-doubt. There was debate about changing the law to allow their daughter, Aiko, born in 2001, to inherit, but when the crown prince's brother had a son in 2006 he was decreed as future heir and the discussion about changing the law was shelved. But still Masako suffered in the imperial household. After an absence from the public eye in the early 2000s it was announced that she was suffering from adjustment disorder and she withdrew from foreign travel. Her husband, the prince, referred to 'developments that were regarded as denying Masako's career [as a diplomat] as well as her personality'. He explained to the public that his wife was 'continuing to make her utmost efforts' and asked, 'Please continue to watch over her kindly.' A woman can be a Harvard graduate and succeed at one of the most competitive professional exams in the world, but she is still not considered to be good enough.

In 1995 Diana agreed to an interview with BBC journalist Martin Bashir, after he had shown bank statements to her brother that were evidence that the former head of security for the Spencer family, and Diana's long-term chief of staff, and another member of the royal household had been selling stories. These bank statements were later proved to have been forged in order to win the trust of Earl Spencer. As he put it later, Diana 'didn't know that the whole of the obtaining of the interview was based on a series of falsehoods'.[5] Diana told Bashir that 'I would like to be queen of people's hearts' and expressed doubt about Charles's ability to be king. The royal family decided the situation was untenable. Diana was going to be punished for speaking. The queen wrote to the prince and princess insisting on their divorce.

On 16 July 1996, in a small room at Court Number 1 in Somerset House, the marriage of couple number 31 was dissolved in a matter of minutes. It was the Prince of Wales v. HRH the Princess of Wales. Two weeks after

Diana's thirty-fifth birthday, the marriage was over. The decree absolute was granted on 28 August. On that day, Diana attended a luncheon at the English National Ballet to meet the new dancers. Four hundred photographers were waiting for her when she arrived.

The princess was given a lump sum of around 17 million pounds but the title of HRH was taken from her. Prince William said that he would 'get it back for you one day when I am king'. She suggested a joint television interview with Charles to announce the divorce. He refused. He was right, it would not have gone well for him.

Diana was free. 'I no longer want to live someone else's idea of what and who I should be.' Robert Fellowes had telephoned her on the morning of the decree absolute, to wish her luck. 'It's a tragic end to a wonderful story,' he said. 'Oh no,' she said. 'It's the beginning of a new chapter.' She had plans – and she was going to continue turning the royal image in on itself, the paparazzi who had sold her image played at their own game, to use her ability to capture the media attention for greater ends than what was expected of royal women (cheering on their family). 'I'd like to be an ambassador for this country,' Diana said. 'When I go abroad, we've got sixty to ninety photographers, just from this country, coming with me, so let's use it in a productive way.' She began working with the Red Cross on landmines and in early 1997 travelled to Angola, where at that time 70,000 people had been maimed after stepping on a landmine but there were very few artificial limbs available. In one hospital in Huambo, she visited a hospital and met a seven-year-old girl, Helena, who had lost her intestines after stepping on a mine. Opposition politicians from Labour and the Liberal Democrats supported her, along with major military figures. Conservative politicians did not; one, sitting on the defence select committee, declared that 'It doesn't add much to the sum of human knowledge. This is an important and sophisticated argument.' He declared it 'didn't help' to have 'a very-ill-informed princess' to 'point at the amputees and say how terrible it was'. ('Princess' here is, interestingly, essentially an insult.) What exactly, one wonders, was the 'important and sophisticated argument' that suggested mines should remain, killing seven-year-olds? When asked why she was involving herself in politics, Diana said, adeptly, that her work had nothing to do with politics. 'I'm a humanitarian, not a politician.' As in the 'men in white coats' speech a few years previously, when she used humour to fight

the misogyny, she knew it wouldn't be accepted if she were to get angry, and so she pointed to the greater picture, the 'human story'. She was, she was saying, talking about bigger subjects than arguments between UK politicians; this was about the world stage. In 1998, Labour Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook, during the second reading of the Landmines Bill, praised Diana for 'bringing home to so many of our constituents the human cost of landmines'. His words suggest that many people had been prompted by Diana's work to write to their MPs. Diana was moving at this point towards a global role.

At Cuito, the most mined town in Africa, Diana walked, wearing visor and body armour, through an area that was said to have been cleared – although mines were visible. The press asked her to do the walk again, as they hadn't got their shot. She did. 'She realised that this was one of the shots that was really going to make a big impact around the world,' said the director general of the British Red Cross. It was courageous and the most effective use of the royal image for humanitarian purposes in history. Diana's image was beamed around the world and, thanks to her, the stories of maimed children and suffering people were brought to the wider public. The Conservative government had to back down and said they would support moving towards a worldwide ban. It was too late; they were seen as uncaring. John Major's government was on its way out already, but attacking Diana's efforts would have lost them votes.

It was akin to an 'asteroid hitting the planet and destroying practically all life on earth'. So said the BBC's expert when reviewing the exit poll of the general election on 1 May 1997, which forecast a giant Labour landslide victory. As the night went on, the exit polls were proved right. Tony Blair and the Labour party had gained the largest parliamentary majority to date and inflicted the worst defeat on the Conservatives since 1906. Blair, the leader of the Labour party since 1993 after the death of John Smith, had galvanised the press and public with his charisma and centrist 'New Labour' doctrine, backed up by astute strategy behind the scenes. The New Labour anthem 'Things Can Only Get Better' by D-Ream played on repeat, people threw glitter in the air. Diana was watching on TV.

Diana and Tony Blair had a series of meetings about shaping her role for the country as an informal ambassador. Diana had recognised Prince William's ability to charm the press and was including him in some of her meetings with journalists. 'I am hoping he will grow up to be as smart about handling the media as John F. Kennedy Junior,' she said. JFK Jr was then thirty-six and one of the most famous men in the world, the little boy who had been known for saluting the coffin of his father John F. Kennedy after his assassination. After John's death, Jackie's adept comparison of his presidency to King Arthur's Camelot proved lasting. Having remarried to Grace Kelly's power broker, Aristotle Onassis, in 1968, Jackie herself was, like Diana, attacked for not wishing to be the single woman tending the flame for ever. In 1995, when John Jr was thirty-five, he launched his glossy monthly political magazine *George*. He and Carolyn Bessette, a PR for Calvin Klein, married on an island in Georgia in 1996. Carolyn was endlessly photographed and characterised as icy and fashion-obsessed, attacked so John could be the Prince of Camelot. That Diana saw her son like a future American president as well as a future king suggested how her new freedom was giving her new ideas about the monarchy as well as global charity.

Diana was promoting charities with her image but also wanted to take a more active role, planning a project to build a series of hospices across the world, working towards the career fulfilment she had hoped for. She had changed. She was courted by various men, but some just wanted a trophy. Donald Trump wondered if he might take her for dinner. She did want to marry again, but who would marry the most famous woman in the world?

In summer 1997, Diana had been invited to take William and Harry to the Hamptons by billionaire Teddy Forstmann, but the security services declared that it would not be safe for the princes and so she could not go.[6] It was a strange assessment of the enclave of some of the most security-conscious people in the world. It was later claimed that US security had bugged Forstmann's private plane and telephone to monitor his relationship with Diana, and this was what put intelligence on their guard. But Diana was no doubt bugged by security services everywhere she went. Perhaps it was because Forstmann was too formidable a potential husband, his friends influential billionaires and philanthropists from across the world. So even

though Diana was free, she was still controlled: told who she could see and indeed marry, and the excuse was the safety of her children. Once you have been royal, you are never really free. And your children are not yours. As Grace Kelly was informed before her marriage, she would be able to leave Monaco, but she wouldn't be able to take any children with her.

Instead, Diana accepted an invitation to holiday on the South of France yacht belonging to Mohamed Al-Fayed, with his wife and four children. As has been recently exposed, female employees had been forced to sign NDAs about his sexual harassment. There had already been an article alleging mistreatment of employees in *Vanity Fair* in 1995, so the security services had some idea of what had been going on. Why did they let her stay with him, and veto Forstmann? Fayed's son, 41-year-old Dodi, had been engaged to an American model, Kelly Fisher, but in the course of the trip fell in love with Diana (as his father had hoped). To Al-Fayed, Diana was a prize, and he wanted to try to win her for an advantageous marriage for his son. Royal women didn't come with huge estates any more like Eleanor of Aquitaine, whose wealth helped Henry II get the English throne, but instead they had public attention and social capital and that was worth more than money.

On 31 August 1997, Diana and Dodi flew to Paris, and there Dodi asked his driver to take them to the Bois de Boulogne, specifically the Villa Windsor, the former home of the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, the exiled Edward VIII and Mrs Simpson, which his father had bought. It was one of Dodi's flourishes to impress her, but Diana found it 'spooky' and only stayed for half an hour. She had no desire to tour the fourteen rooms of a royal exile, another who had fallen from the fold. While in Paris, Dodi bought a ring, but there is no proof that it was an engagement ring (it was much cheaper than a usual Al Fayed engagement ring, so if it was an engagement ring it was a placeholder). They couldn't go out to dinner thanks to the paparazzi and people staring, and the Ritz Hotel was no less private, even though it was owned by Dodi's father. 'If I had Diana with me, I would take her to the jungle, not the Ritz,' said Dodi's uncle. They decided instead to return to Dodi's apartment. The aim was to escape out of the back entrance of the hotel without being seen; but the photographers were already there, ready to pursue them.

At 12.24 a.m., the car entered the Place de l'Alma underpass and the driver Henri Paul, who had been going at 100 miles per hour after drinking

on his time off, lost control, and the car collided with a pillar. Dodi and Paul died immediately. The press, around 300 metres behind, were first on the scene. One photographer opened the door to, he said, try to check Diana's pulse, but once the door was open all the cameras crowded in, flashing in Diana's face. A passing doctor came to help. She was struggling to breathe but was conscious enough to tell him she was in pain. When the policeman arrived, he recognised Diana, and saw her look towards Dodi beside her, already dead, and her injured bodyguard in front. 'My God,' he thought she said. Diana closed her eyes. The photographers kept going – as the police said, there were 'camera flashes going off like gunfire'. The last thing Diana would have seen was camera flashes as men fought to get a better photo of her face.

None of them saw Diana as real; she was not human but a commodity (even though it is a crime in France not to help victims of an accident). By the time she was released from the wreckage, the internal bleeding had been too severe for her to survive. 'I always believed the press would kill her in the end,' said Earl Spencer, next morning. 'Forgive us, Princess,' begged an Italian newspaper.

Tony Blair spoke swiftly. 'She was the People's Princess and that is how she will stay, how she will remain in all our hearts and memories for ever.' The royal household suggested that Diana should be mourned as a private individual, with a private funeral, since she was divorced from Charles, but Blair and his advisors were adamant that she should receive a full ceremonial funeral. On Sunday and the following days, public anger against the royal family soared, intensified by anger that there were insufficient condolence books to be signed and that the flag at Buckingham Palace was not flying at half-mast – and they hadn't heard from the queen or Charles, no TV statement, no tributes. The newspapers, tapping into the public mood and also afraid of being blamed, joined in. 'Where is the queen?' demanded one tabloid. 'Show us you care,' headlined another.

The queen managed to quell much of the anger by addressing the nation on the eve of Diana's funeral. Her address was carefully pitched 'as a grandmother', praising Diana as an 'exceptional and gifted human being' and 'her energy and commitment to others', especially her sons. It was suggested by some that there was concern that Charles might be attacked or mocked in the funeral procession and that the presence of the boys would prevent this.

William and Harry were asked by the royal family to walk with their father, uncle Earl Spencer and grandfather behind the coffin, at the ages of fifteen and twelve, surrounded, as Harry would later put it, 'by thousands of people watching me'. At the funeral, Earl Spencer spoke of how his sister, a woman named after the famous huntress, had become 'the most hunted person of the modern age'.

Diana, the flesh and blood woman turned by press and public into the image of femininity and monarchy, had died being photographed, and the stacks of flowers outside Buckingham Palace became a potent image of loss with which the monarchy could not compete. Diana was rendered immortal, the vision created by a million expressions of pain, hope, desires and dreams. There were efforts, after the funeral, to direct attention to Charles once more, but the public wanted still to express their grief and talk of Diana. She had the most impact on charity in the twentieth century; the power of the image of a charismatic woman would now be a part of global charity strategy. On 18 September the convention against landmines was drafted, and by December it had been signed by 122 countries. At the end of the year, the International Campaign to Ban Landmines was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. It would have been one of Diana's proudest moments.

A royal, already symbolic, is doubly so when she is female. The monarchs who have used image most effectively have been female: Elizabeth I and portrait paintings, Victoria and photography, and then Elizabeth II in the age of television. Her coronation was an exemplar of the new technique of live filming that was used to further broadcasts of not just drama and documentary but also mighty events, including other coronations and weddings and the funeral of John F. Kennedy. The royal image was paramount, all-commanding. And then Diana came and broke it apart. The royals chose her, telling themselves it was for traditional reasons – her family were familiar with the royals, she was young and virginal. But they chose one of the most televisual women of the twentieth century, whose charisma collided with the camera like a gigantic star. She was presented as a fairy-tale princess in 1981 with the biggest royal wedding ever seen, her face on the tea towels, and then expected her to fall back into silence. Instead, she took all the insults and turned them back against those who had attacked her, and

used the royal image to further her aims of ending global suffering and building herself a world platform. We might compare it to if Marie Antoinette had drawn caricatures of the lawyers and bankers who hated her, or Cleopatra had popped in and stolen Plutarch's pen.

In 2021, Princess Mako, Masako's niece, left the Japanese royal family to marry, after suffering post-traumatic stress caused by criticism of her fiancé. Meghan, Duchess of Sussex, the first woman of colour to marry into the royal family, left in January 2020, after attacks on her and claims that she was an unsuitable royal. Five years after Diana's death, a novel was published, *69 Things to Do With a Dead Princess*. It was about a man obsessed with Diana and was well reviewed as a meaningful piece of literary fiction. Clearly it is not misogyny if it's about a princess, because princesses are not real women. It's seen as radical from a man to want to attack royal women, but it really isn't radical. As we have seen in so many examples, royal women are allowed to exist so they can be attacked. When the Princess of Wales was unwell in 2024 and provided no updates, social media exploded in discussions that she was dead. Princesses are not allowed to be ill. As the Duchess of Sussex said, marriage into the royal family could 'destroy your life'.

Diana was a royal revolutionary, but not much has changed for royal women; they are still congratulated only if they 'sacrifice' everything. We don't have many queens any more, for countries have kings, whether by accident or restricting women from the throne, but we still have royal wives and daughters, and still, despite a world of riches, they get a short straw. For we live in a world of business and making money, and the princess dream makes money. Diana's smile was always business; it was not just Fleet Street hanging on her smile. She was sold as an image. She contested representations of her, writing her story, using her image for good with landmines. Diana was a royal woman, a nearly queen, who actually managed to turn the image that made money for so many others and use it to create her own platform. But the princess fantasy was powerful. No matter how much she fought against it, acted differently to how she was expected to, spoke out, it still survives.

I. In 1765, George III upgraded their title to an earldom.

II. Nigel Dempster at the *Daily Mail* had noted to readers that Diana had been endorsed by 'the two happily married women who influence [him] most on personal matters, Lady Tryon and Camilla Parker Bowles'.

III. The wedding guests ate 'Princess of Wales' chicken stuffed with lamb mousse.

IV. On her first royal tour to Australia and New Zealand in 1983, there were one hundred members of the press from the UK and seventy more photographers from across the world.

V. Captain James Hewitt told his story of an affair with Diana to a journalist, Anna Pasternak, in late 1994 and she published the tale as a book. Hewitt then began to panic that he could be guilty of treason for an affair with Diana and sentenced to death – like Anne Boleyn.

Afterword

Royals have always used image. Female royals have always been an axis of expression for the dynamism of image, for it is women who are most objectified by their societies. Perhaps, considering the long history of female power, we should retire the word kingdom, replace it with queendom. Or at least swap it around sometimes. Statistically, the majority of queens were at first queen consort, became queen regnant. They saw both sides of what they had to pretend to be. The Queen of Hawaii wrote of her time in prison that she was pleased to be able to compose music to express her thoughts. And that is the challenge: how does a queen speak? As often, we don't want to hear it. We want her to be the symbol.

Queens must represent and, if society changes its mind as to what it wants, they might be killed. Modern-day consorts and queens must also advertise, bring in tourists, promote their realm. In the earliest days of monarchy, there was a perception that the king was the body of the country, that the king's health reflected the country. The royal female body is meant to signify more than it ever can: the purity of the nation, femininity, beauty, grace, duty, motherhood and total sacrifice, business vibrancy, personality, service. Men do not have to symbolise their rule in the same way.

Queens regnant are allowed to speak, have personality, although they are preferred to say little and choose their words wisely. They must never resist the image imposed upon them, whether by speaking at their own trials or writing their own books. Queens consort are supposed to be only the image. As this book has explored, a queen consort gaining more power at court makes it more likely she can push forward herself or her daughter as queen regnant, from Hatshepsut to Elizabeth I. And these periods of female power cluster around 400–900, the sixteenth century and the nineteenth century. It is particularly striking how, as we see countries resisting absorption into

empire in the nineteenth century, we also see, across the world, so many last queens of the line on the throne. Queens are often regnant and so most visible when their society is changing, shaky, unstable. As such, we shouldn't be surprised that so many are seen as failures; they are working against impossible odds. Thus, with Elizabeth II, the young queen comes to the throne when Britain is facing a decline in its power in the world, the collapse of its influence after the war, the end of empire. But the image of her wondrous coronation, her magical queenship, the idea of rebirth and regeneration was the image the country desired as it confronted the decline of once vast manufacturing power and wealth, which proceeded at an accelerated rate through her age. Elizabeth II was a genius at image, and the two strongest parts of her image were her emphasis on service and behaving as queens should, restraining her words. This intersected brilliantly with the requirement of a monarch to be politically neutral. And yet service and saying little are traditionally roles for women. The most effective queens deploy images of traditional femininity for political power, yet merge them with images of authority, as in Elizabeth I's Rainbow Portrait – it combines what is approved for women, purity and innocence, with what goes past femininity: power over the weather and all-seeing eyes. Similarly, the Queen of Hawaii writes a brilliant text in seemingly gentle tones with large sections about female sociability – at the same time as contesting every word of the missionary party, overturning their arguments about democracy and demanding the restoration of her throne.

This book has looked at queens from across the world, some conventionally successful, some fighting for their throne, some thrown off it. Cleopatra came from a long tradition of queenship but was cast as a seducer when she was saving her country; Hatshepsut seized power and used male symbolism; Zenobia was the ultimate regent who ended up a wife; Boudica fought a vain fight and died for it; Isabella of Castile proved she could be queen, but her legacy was taken back; Catherine of Aragon and Anne Boleyn were nearly flattened by Henry, but their determined fight for power led to the illustrious queenship of their daughters. And when sixteenth-century England thought that if you made a monarch a woman, she would be your puppet, Lady Jane Grey chose to command.

Over and over, we see women put into place as queens who then promptly fight to govern, causing consternation in the men around them.

Ranavalona II, forced to marry the prime minister, swapped him for another. And yet all these women, whatever they do, are so often reduced to a single image, whether a sexual fantasy of a queen, a tragic queen of loss, or a gruesome killer. We forget that they all came to the throne with the support of the elites around them – otherwise they would not have been allowed. Hatshepsut and the queen of the Maldives deposed men (in the case of Khadijah, three men); which they wouldn't have been able to do without support for their rule. They weren't on their own.

Queens can fight back against impossible powers, whether empires or executions. Some perpetuate inequality, some reform, some make their country very much worse. The successful ones are presented as exceptional, too unlike ordinary women to be of relevance to our lives, often seen in varying degrees as a form of man, whether because she truly transforms, like Orompto, has the heart and stomach of a king or owns her own property in a country where no other married woman can. King and queen seem the most heavily gendered titles, wholly based on what sex the holder is. But all queens, whether it is entirely dressing in male dress or simply existing in a man's world, move between genders.

Queens deemed unsuccessful tend to impact on our understanding of all women: flirtatious, spendthrift, greedy. If a queen can't manage her money, why should any woman be able to do so? As we see with the sudden appearance of the Tour de Nesles sex scandal about female licentiousness in France when there was a concern about female rule, we can look at the perceptions of queens for what society wants to say about women. Rome doesn't want women making demands for representation, so Cleopatra, who fights back, is a seductive disaster. The new Revolution wanted to be a man's world, so it came down harder on Marie Antoinette than the king. And with Diana, mocked for speaking out, for refusing to perform endless contentment, we see the unease at the heart of the new globalised world of the 1980s and 1990s: if women got more of a stage, what would happen to the family? Chroniclers of medieval queens write tinged with a fear of all women and their threat to the moral teachings of the Church, as they are weak and prone to the devil, and there is panic that the populace will copy them. But it's not just in the medieval period; when we look at how a queen is written, that we can see what is desired and not desired in the society at the time. She is like a prism. Indeed, the image created of a queen is often

used to try to stop female independence. In the nineteenth century when women were beginning to 'go where they like, do as they like', the image of Victoria as dutiful wife was pushed on to women at home and queens abroad. (This didn't work.) And she is also a doll to be hauled out and pelted with stones in public; she is like a Roman gladiator that we like to watch fighting the tiger for a while before she is vanquished and order resumes.

As this book has argued, we should see female power in patterns and traditions. Women gain power after others pave the way – like Elizabeth I and Mary I, and consorts beginning the process for their daughters. In M.M. Kaye's children's novel, *The Ordinary Princess*, the greatest gift a princess can have is that she is ordinary. So it is, for the women who reign. They are not magical; they are not once in a lifetime. We should see those women deemed successful and powerful as not just possible but ordinary, not exceptional.

Monarchies are slowly waning, we might argue. And yet despite it all images of royal women, dead and alive, still dominate public life. They are often our most-seen women. Most queens don't get the image they want. Lady Jane Grey wanted to be a Protestant martyr, Lili'uokalani wanted to be seen as powerful, not sad. Diana wanted to put an end to the princess fantasy around her. Some, like Elizabeth I and Elizabeth II, wielded the technology to create a powerful image: in the procession at Elizabeth II's platinum jubilee, three months before she passed away, the Gold State Coach (famously uncomfortable and unsuitable for a 96-year-old) displayed a hologram of her as she was in 1953, twenty-seven years old, waving, looking as if she was leaving her coronation.

And perhaps images like that hologram, forever twenty-seven, full of hope and promise, are the future. If image is everything in royalty and queens and princesses are given an image and then attacked for not living up to it, then perhaps we shouldn't have real women doing the job at all. Maybe we don't want a real queen, with all her problems and mistakes. Maybe we would prefer a hologram, perfect, untrammelled by flaws and desire, always smiling, always there.

Queens, as we have seen, are subject to many unrealities. Images and visions are imposed upon them; representations, from statues to photographs, present them as almost unreal. They are far away in their castle. And then, if they tumble out of the castle, whether by challenging the status quo or falling foul of political elites or even being a victim of a crime,

they are seen as bad. Perhaps, years in the future, there will be no royal families, no queens. But even if so, will we really be able to say that we have freed ourselves from the complex views on and attitudes to women in positions of power and influence that we see around queens? That a woman in power won't still be accused of vanity, lack of foresight, self-indulgence? We cannot. A medieval queen might seem a million miles away from whether a woman gets to speak on the Internet without being attacked in modern life, but when she is accused of vanity or self-promotion, so rise the spectres of these women who were once the most visible in their community, called vain for performing queenship, mad or stupid for attempting to reform matters, blamed for their own sexual assault. When the queen's body is a world possession, national possession, how can women have power over their own? It might seem that how the world sees Marie Antoinette or Anne Boleyn or Cleopatra is entirely irrelevant to whether a woman will be elected president: it is not. Queens might live in a golden cage, but they are demonstrations of what has been felt about all women when you give them a modicum of power: it is too much.

Acknowledgements

I am profoundly grateful to all the archivists in the many archives I visited, for their assistance and generous patience – and all their work in maintaining precious collections of letters and documents, most particularly to the staff of the Hawaii State Archives, a new archive for me, who were so helpful and generous with their expertise, and particularly so my most visited archives: British Library, National Archives and Archives Nationales. I am extremely thankful for their superb work in conserving and cataloguing these most precious of manuscripts.

I am most grateful to the staff who tirelessly manage historic houses and monuments across the world. Being able to visit everywhere from Hampton Court, Kensington Palace and the Tower of London, to Holyrood Palace and Stirling Castle to Versailles, Madame du Barry's apartments and the Trianon, to the Prince's Palace of Monaco and the Cathedral where Grace was married and buried, and the incredible Iolani Palace, Washington Place and Bishop's Museum in Honolulu, to Angkor Wat and particularly the Roulos temples, Alhambra and the Royal Chapel in Granada, the Roman Forum, the Pantheon and the tombs at Petra, to the Victoria market in the Seychelles, the Deir el-Bahari and the Valley of the Kings, to the Temple of Dendera, where the staff were incredibly helpful, even though they had a film crew arriving that day. I don't know what this would look like, without all of those people who conserve this heritage. So many volunteers and staff were so helpful and full of enthusiasm. Our historical fabric is constantly under threat and we are always in the debt of those who preserve it.

This book has been a long project, seemingly Sisyphean at times, when I never thought I'd ever get to the top and I am grateful to the historians who have read sections, commented, provided advice, suggested sources or ideas, reflections on individuals, periods and themes, thank you all. I couldn't

write it without the community, for whom I am so endlessly grateful. And to those who gently moderated my more wacky suggestions (e.g. why not a title 'Weak and Feeble', it's irony) and crazy plans (yes, all those years of writing the same book does send you a bit wild), thank you! Nathen Amin, Zeinab Badawi, Tracy Borman, Helen Carr, Helen Castor, Jessie Childs, Antony Delaney, Owen Emmerson, Emily Hauser, Lisa Hilton, Antonia Fraser, Amanda Foreman, Lindsey Fitzharris, Peter Frankopan, Joel Felix, Sarah Gristwood, Robert Hardman, Eleanor Janega, Dan Jones, Kate Lister, Suzannah Lipscomb, Kate McCaffrey, Kate Mosse, Olivette Otele, Luke Pepera, Campbell Price, Rebecca Rideal, Imogen Robertson, Hallie Rubenhold, Gareth Russell, Dan Snow, Nicola Tallis, Alex von Tunzelmann, Alison Weir, Lucy Worsley and Fay Young – particularly to Campbell, Luke, Lisa and Olivette, who kindly rescued me from some very large holes, to Lindsey, Rebecca and Alex for solving matters, and to the dear friend who articulated the thoughts of so many when she said, 'Kate! Are you still writing that wretched queens book?' and my beloved unofficial writing chatters support system – thank you! Thanks to all of the historians out there, whose work has been so invaluable. Two of my favourite things that I was shown while writing the book were the tiny books in Queen Mary's Library in the Royal Library at Windsor and Elizabeth I's prayerbook by Antony and Antonia Texeira at Hampton Court – thank you! I am grateful to my colleagues at CNN and Reading University, and over five years' worth of students, who were generous enough to pass on their thoughts about everything from Hatshepsut to the women in the Bayeux Tapestry – and also those from Scoula Holden, Turin and particularly my MA and PhD students. And to my podcast, Queens, Kings and Dastardly Things with Robert Hardman and to all those TV shows who have let me talk on about the royals. I am so thankful to booksellers and librarians who do so much for books, cheering them on in a world where books matter more than ever. Libraries were a saviour to me as a child; we must never lose them. And always, to Marcus and my family for everything, you are all very patient! Both my grandmothers were interested in royalty, one in Victoria and the other introduced me to Grace Kelly. I would dedicate it to them but I am not sure they would agree with all I have written!

I have finished it but I don't feel I have ever finished. If I could make this a google doc and be constantly adding to it and changing it, I would, for the

story of women and power, women and deprivation of power, and how historical, long-dead women are seen and used to articulate what we feel about women having power now, obscuring their reality, goes on and on. When we talk about women and power, and why they shouldn't have it, precedent will always be dragged up, and women are seen as too vain, too selfish, too weak, too chained to their unstable bodies. And this isn't just about high office either, or who gets to reign, rule, govern. It's about whether all women get to control their rights, their vote, their education, their bodies.

My biggest gratitude goes to readers. We are lucky to have you. Thank you all.

About the Author

Professor Kate Williams is an award-winning author, *New York Times* bestselling historian and broadcaster. Her eleven historical books include *Rival Queens, The Royal Palaces* and the *New York Times* bestselling *Becoming Queen*. She has presented many TV series on the BBC and Channel 5, including *Restoration Home, Inside Versailles* and *Secrets of the Royal Palaces*, and is CNN's in-house historian, as well as hosting the podcast *Queens, Kings and Dastardly Things*. She has a DPhil from Oxford, has taught at various universities and is currently Professor of History at the University of Reading. She has been a consultant on various historical films and TV series, as well as for the Royal Mint and companies including Cunard, Find My Past and the Versailles Ball. She has won *Celebrity Pointless, Mastermind, Antiques Road Trip* and *House of Games*. She has also appeared on *The Wheel, The Great British Bake Off, Insert Name Here* and *Would I Lie To You*. She gives talks all over the world and likes nothing more than a dusty document.

PEGASUS BOOKS
DISTRIBUTED BY SIMON & SCHUSTER
WWW.PEGASUSBOOKS.COM

Notes

Introduction

1 Michael Haag, *The American University in Cairo Press Guide to Luxor and Aswan* (AUC Press, 2004), p. 301.

Chapter One

1 William C. Hayes, *The Scepter of Egypt: A Background for the Study of the Egyptian Antiquities in The Metropolitan Museum of Art, vol. 2—The Hyksos Period and the New Kingdom (1675–1080 B.C.)* (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1978), p. 82.
2 See for example, Jun Yi Wong, *The Afterlife of Hatshepsut's Statuary* (Antiquity, 2025).
3 Campbell Price, *Senenmut* (Manchester University Press, 2025), p. 87.
4 Édouard Naville, *The Temple of Deir el-Bahiri* (London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1894), p. 110.
5 Kara Cooney, *The Woman Who Would be King: Hatshepsut's Rise to Power in Ancient Egypt* (New York; Crown Publishing, 2015), p. 34.
6 Ronald Lephroron, 'The Programmatic Use of the Royal Titulary in the Twelfth Dynasty', Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt 33 (1996), 30.
7 Price, *Senenmut*, p. 67.
8 Cooney, *Hatshepsut's Rise*, p. 45.
9 Joyce Tyldsley, *Hatshepsut: The Female Pharoah* (London: Viking, 1996), p. 119.
10 For this quote, see Dorman, Peter F., 'The Early Reign of Thutmose II: An Unorthodox Mantle of Co-Regency' in *A New Biography of Thutmose III*, ed. Cline, Eric H. and O'Connor, David (Ann Arbor, Michigan University Press, 2006), pp 39–68 (41).
11 As it says, she Belongs to the Sedge Plant and the Bee.
12 For translation, see David Warburton, *Architecture, Power and Religion: Hatshepsut, Amun and Karnak in Context*, (Vienna: Verlag, 2012), p. 229.
13 Diamond, Kelly-Anne. 'Hatshepsut: Transcending Gender In Ancient Egypt' *Gender & History* 32, 1–21.
14 For the translation, see Lichtheim, Miriam, *Ancient Egyptian Literature II: The New Kingdom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), p. 28.
15 Cooney, *Hatshepsut*, p. 285.
16 Cooney, *Hatshepsut*, p. 176.
17 See Dorman, Peter F., 'Royal Steward Senenmut' in Roehrig, Catherine H. et al, ed. *Hatshepsut: From Queen to Pharoah* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2005), pp. 107–109 (108).
18 Tyldsley, *Hatshepsut*, p. 142.
19 Troy, Lana, *Patterns of Queenship in Ancient Egyptian Myth and History* (Uppsala: Uppsala University Press, 1986), p. 141.
20 Cooney, *Hatshepsut*, p. 230.

Chapter Two

1 The main Roman sources for Cleopatra used repeatedly during this chapter are: Plutarch, *The Age of Alexander: Nine Greek Lives* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973) and *The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1927), Cassius Dio, *The Roman History*, books L-LXII, Jackson, J., trans (London: Loeb, 1927), Horace, *Collected Odes and Epodes*, edited by Niall Rudd. Loeb (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), Lucan, *Pharsalia*, ed. Susan F Braund (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

2 *De viris illustribus*, 86, 4.

3 William Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, ed. Rene Weis (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2015).

4 Horace, *Collected Odes*, poem 37.

5 Al-Masudi, 896–956 CE, cited in Okasha El Daly, *Egyptology: The Missing Millennium. Ancient Egypt in Medieval Arabic Writings* (UCL Press, 2005), p. 79.

6 Plutarch, *Lives*, p. 45.

7 One Latin author later claimed that in 4 BCE the Athenian Agnodice had been barred from studying medicine due to being female, so she travelled to Alexandria in disguise to learn from the great co-founder of the medical school and then returned to Greece to practise.

8 See Jean Bingen, 'Cléopâtra VII Philopatris', *Chronique d'Egypte*, 74 (1999), 118–23.

9 Joann Fletcher, *Cleopatra the Great: The Woman Behind the Legend* (London: HarperCollins, 2011), p. 70.

10 See Plutarch, *Lives*, pp. 60–1, Cassius Dio, *History*, pp. 34–5, and Lucan, *Pharsalia*, p. 55.

11 See Cassius Dio, *History*, pp. 34–5, and Lucan, *Pharsalia*, p. 56.

12 See Susan Walker, 'Cleopatra in Pompeii', *Papers of the British School at Rome*, 76, (2008), pp. 35–46.

13 Plutarch, *Lives*, p. 67.

14 Plutarch, *Lives*, p. 123.

15 Speech on 1 January 33 BCE.

16 Cassius Dio, *History*, p. 50.

17 Horace, *Odes* 37, Propertius, *Elegies*, 65.

18 Horace, *Odes*, 37, Plutarch, *Lives*, p. 145, Cassius Dio, *History*, p. 82, Florus, *The Epitome of Roman History*, 'The War with Antony and Cleopatra', XI, trans E. S. Forster, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1929), p. 102; Livy, *History of Rome*, trans. Foster, Loeb (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1919), p. 87.

19 See Mary Beard, *The Roman Triumph* (Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 115, and John Whitehorne, *Cleopatras* (Routledge, 2001), p. 221.

20 See Adrian Tronson, 'What The Poet Saw: Octavian's Triple Triumph, 29 B.C.: Jeremiah Markland's Conjectures At Propertius' in *Acta Classica*, Vol. 42 (1999), pp. 171–86 (173) and Beard, *The Roman Triumph*, p 150.

Chapter Three

1 See Cassius Dio, *The Roman History*, books L–LXII, Jackson, J., trans. (London: Loeb, 1927), LXII, p. 110. The main sources for Boudica are Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, Tacitus, Publius Cornelius, *The Annals of Imperial Rome*, Vol XIV, Jackson, J., trans. (London: Loeb, 1937) and Julius Caesar, *The Gallic War*, H. J. Edwards, trans. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1917).
2 Cassius Dio, LXI.
3 Caesar, *Gallic War*, p 608; Cicero, Letter to Atticus XV in Cicero, *Letters to Atticus*, Vol II, Shackleton Bail, D. R., ed. (London: Loeb, 1937).
4 Tacitus, *Annals*, XIV, p. 67.
5 Cassius Dio, LXII.
6 Tacitus, *Annals*, XIV, p. 68.
7 Tacitus, *Annals*, XIV, p. 69; Cassius Dio, *History*, LXII, p. 115.
8 Claudia Severa to Sulpicia Lepidina, The Vindolanda Tablets, British Museum, 1986,1001.64.
9 For most of the references about Zenobia, see *Historia Augusta*, David Magie, trans. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, revised 2022).
10 See Yasmine Zahran, *Zenobia Between Reality and Legend* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2003), p. 114.
11 *Historia Augustus*, VI, 6.
12 See Nathanael Andrade, *Zenobia: Shooting Star of Palmyra* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 256, and Zosimus, I, 59.
13 Procopius, *History of the Wars*, I, xxiv, Dewing, trans. (New York: Macmillan, 1914), p. 220.

Chapter Four

1 There have been criticisms, including claiming that the bones were disturbed and a female skeleton inserted.
2 Price, N., Hedenstierna-Jonson, C., Zachrisson, T., et al. 'Viking warrior women? Reassessing Birka chamber grave' Bj.581. *Antiquity*. 2019 (367), 181–198.
3 The Smithsonian, April 2025: https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/why-were-these-teenagers-chosen-as-human-sacrifices-at-an-ancient-mesopotamian-cemetery-180986363
4 Trude Jacobsen, *Lost Goddesses: The Denial of Female Power in Cambodian History* (Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 2008), p. 37. Also Barbara Watson, *The Flaming Womb: Repositioning Women in Early Modern Southeast Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006), pp. 171–9, Tamara Loos, 'Sex in the Inner City: The fidelity between sex and politics in Siam', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 64 (2005), 870–85, 884.
5 Jacobsen, *Lost Goddesses*, pp 42–3.
6 Jacobsen, *Lost Goddesses*, p. 42.
7 Cedes, *The Indianized States of South East Asia*, p. 84.
8 Yuriy Polyukhovych et al, 'The Hieroglyphic Stairway of House C, Palenque, Chiapas: New Approaches', February 2020, *Journal of Mesoamerican Studies*, XVII, 1, pp. 20–4.
9 Joel Skidmore, *The Monarchs of Palenque*, p. 39; Martin and Grube, *Chronicle of the Mayan Kings and Queens*, pp. 159–60.
10 Linda Schele, 'Some Thoughts on the Inscriptions of House C.' In *Seventh Palenque Round Table*, 1989, edited by Merle Greene Robertson and Virginia M. Fields, pp. 1–10 (San Francisco: Pre-Columbian Art Research Institute, 1989).
11 It has been suggested that some men assumed female dress – the skirt-type outfit of the maize god – which might suggest it is a male in female dress, but it also seems likely that it is the mother. David Stuart, *The Inscriptions from Temple XIX at Palenque: A Commentary*, (San Francisco: Pre-Columbian Art Research Institute, 2005).
12 Battutah, Ibn, *The Travels of Ibn Battutah*, edited by Tim Mackintosh-Smith (London: Picador, 2002), pp. 236–237.

Chapter Five

1 Instructions to Commander Nicolas De Ovando, 16 September 1501, in John H. Parry & Robert G. Keith, eds., *New Iberian World: A Documentary History of the Discovery and Settlement of Latin America to the Early 17th Century* (Times Books, 1984), Vol. II: The Caribbean, pp. 255–8.

Chapter Six

1 See Emmerson, Owen, and McCaffrey, Kate, *Capturing a Queen: The Image of Anne Boleyn* (London: AB Publishing, 2026).

2 G.A. Bergenroth, Pascual de Gayangos and Garrett Mattingly eds, *Calendar of Letters, Despatches and State Papers relating to the negotiations between England and Spain preserved in the archives of Simancas and elsewhere*, vols 1–5, Supplement and Further Supplement to vols 1 and 2 (London: Longman, 1862).

3 *The Love Letters of Henry VIII*, ed. H. Savage (London: Bell, 1949). See also Borman, Tracy, *Anne Boleyn and Elizabeth I: The Mother and Daughter who Changed History* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2023); Ives, Eric, *The Life and Death of Anne Boleyn* (Blackwell, 2004); Guy, John and Julia Fox, *Hunting the Falcon: Henry VIII, Anne Boleyn and the Marriage That Shook Europe* (London: Bloomsbury, 2023), Lipscomb, Suzannah, *1536: The Year that Changed Henry VIII* (London: Lion, 2009); *The King is Dead: The Last Will and Testament of Henry VIII* (London: Head of Zeus, 2015).

4 Coast, D., 'William Tyndale, Henry VIII, and the Obedience of a Christian Man', *The Historical Journal*, 2021; 64(4):823-843.

5 CSPPSp, IV, I, no 2214, pp. 3511-2.

6 BL Additional MS, 335830, State Papers, 1553-1561, 71009, Court Ceremonies and the Coronation of Queen Anne.

7 Loades, ed. *Papers of George Wyatt*, LP, Vol VI, No 1069.

8 Calendar of State Papers, Sp, V, ii, no. 9.

9 On the age of Anne Boleyn, see Gareth Russell, 'The Age of Anne Boleyn' (2010).

10 Gairdner, J. (ed.), *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII*, Vol. 10: 1536 (London, 1887), 873.

11 National Archives: PRO 31/18/2/2, f. 246r.

12 See BL, Cotton MS, and CSPSp, V, ii, 55.

13 Hall, Edward, *Hall's Chronicle Containing the History of England… to the end of the Reign of Henry VIII*, ed. Ellis, H, (London: 1809), Vol II, pp. 64-65.

14 This has recently been re-edited and retranslated by JoAnn Della Neva, throwing much light on the poem. JoAnn Della Neva, *The Story of the Death of Anne Boleyn: A Poem by Lancelot de Carle* (ACMRS Press, 2021).

Chapter Seven

1 For the main sources on Lady Jane Grey, see *An Epistle of the Lady Jane, a right virtuous woman* (London, 1554) and Geary, D., ed. *The Letters of Lady Jane Grey* (Ilfracombe: 1951).

2 See Tallis, Nicola, *Crown of Blood: The Deadly Inheritance of Lady Jane Grey* (London: Michael O'Mara, 2016), p. 232. As Nicola Tallis has noted, the jewels brought to Jane were largely broken; suggesting that others may have been reserved elsewhere.

3 Nov. 14. Vienna, Imp.Arch.E.20.Simon Renard to the Emperor. 'Spain: November 1553, 11-15', Calendar of State Papers, Spain, Volume 11: 1553 (1916), pp. 352-363.

4 The Chronicle of Queen Jane and of Two Years of Queen Mary, and Especially of the Rebellion of Sir Thomas Wyat.

5 Ives, Eric, *The Life and Death of Anne Boleyn*, (Blackwell, 2004).

6 'The Chronicle of the Grey Friars: Mary', *Chronicle of the Grey Friars of London*, Camden Society old series, Vol. 53 (1852), pp. 80–98.

7 'A London Chronicle: Mary', *Two London Chronicles from the Collections of John Stow* (1910), pp. 27–43.

8 For the sources on Elizabeth and Mary, see Cotton MS, inc Titus B, fo 161, Titus CVII fo 50v, Davison on Mary Queen of Scots, Cotton MS Orotho CX fos 232r-232v, Anne's letter to Henry VIII from the Tower, fo 234r-234v, on Elizabeth's clothes. Cotton MS Vespasian CXIV Elizabeth I papers, Egerton, MS 3320, Hargrave MS 497, Papers relating to Queen Elizabeth I's funeral. Kings MS 396, Elizabeth's family tree. Sloane MS 814, New Year presents to Elizabeth I between 1572–1587. *Calendar of State Papers Relating to England and Mary Queen of Scots*, Bain, Joseph, ed., 5 vols (Edinburgh: 1898–52), *Calendar of State Papers Domestic Series of the Reigns of Edward VI, Mary, Elizabeth, 1547–1625*, eds Robert Lemon and Mary Anne Everett Green (London: 1871) *Calendar of State Papers, Foreign Series, of the Reign of Elizabeth*, Stevenson, Joseph et al. eds (London: 1863–1950), Camden, W., *Annals of Queen Elizabeth* (London: 1688), *State Papers Relating to the Custody of Princess Elizabeth at Woodstock in 1554*, Manning, C. R., ed. (Norwich: 1855). Whitelock, Anna, *Mary Tudor: England's First Queen* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009); Hilton, Lisa, *Elizabeth: Renaissance Prince* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2014), Tallis, Nicola, *Young Elizabeth: Princess, Prisoner, Queen* (London: Michael O'Mara, 2024), Weir, Alison *Elizabeth the Queen* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1988), Borman, Tracy, *Elizabeth's Women: The Hidden Story of the Virgin Queen* (London: Vintage, 2010), Gristwood, Sarah, *Elizabeth and Leicester* (London: Transworld, 2002), *Elizabeth the Queen* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1988), Williams, Kate, *Rival Queens: The Betrayal of Mary Queen of Scots* (London: Random House, 2018).

9 Estienne Perlin, 1558.

10 'History of the Pleas of the Crown by Sir Matthew Hale', a former chief justice of the Court of King's Bench in England.

11 Hilton, *Elizabeth*, p. 178.

12 G. I. Meyer, *The Tudors: The Complete Story of England's Most Notorious Dynasty* (Delacorte, 2010).

Chapter Eight

1 For the sources on Marie Antoinette, see: Archives Nationales, Paris, 440AP/1-440AP/4, Marie Antoinette, Correspondence de Marie Antoinette et Count Fersen, 440AP/1, inc. 1-4. Lettres autographes de la reine Marie-Antoinette au comte de Fersen. 1791-1792. 58-60. Lettres de la reine Marie-Antoinette a la reine d'Espagne, a l'impératrice Catherine II de Russie, au chancelier d'Autriche Kaunitz. Copies d'époque. 1792. 61-95. Lettres de la reine Marie-Antoinette a Madame Élisabeth (1791, 1793), a sa mere Marie-Th érerese (1770), a lempereur Joseph II (1780), a la duchesse de Polignac (1780, 1789-1790, 1792), au duc de Choiseul (1785), a la princesse de Lamballe (1789), a la marquise de Tourzel (1789), au comte de Mercy (1791), au comte d'Artois (1791), a l'empereur Léopold II (1791), a l'impératrice Catherine II (1791), au comte de Provence (1792–1793), au général de Jarjayes (1793), au président de la Convention nationale (1793). Copies faites au XIXe siecle par le baron de Klinckowström. 1770-1793. 96-97. Lettres reçues par la reine Marie-Antoinette de l'empereur, 6-97. Lettres reçues par la reine Marie-Antoinette de l'empereur Léopold II. Copies faites au XIXe siecle par le baron de Klinckowström. 1791. Papiers Campan. 1783–1788. Pieces 1–3. Notes et mémoires comptables. 1783-1785. Pieces 4-10. Listes de livres et Regina V2.indd 377 06/03/2026 378, d'estampes adressés a M. Campan pour la reine. 1785-1787. 440AP/4. Supplément Marie-Antoinette. 1787-1881. Dossier 1, pieces 1-4. Lettres autographes de la reine Marie-Antoinette a la duchesse de Polignac. 1789-1790.

See also Antonia Fraser, *Marie Antoinette: The Journey* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2001), Evelyn Lever, *Marie Antoinette* (London: Little Brown, 2006), Lynn Hunt, 'The Many Bodies of Marie Antoinette: Political pornography and the problem of the feminine in the French Revolution', in *The French Revolution*, ed Gary Kates (London: Routledge, 1997), Schama, Simon, *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution* (London: Penguin, 2004).

2 Marie Antoinette's role had been to be top of the money pyramid: her spending on gowns, furniture and jewels was supposed to spur the economy, to highlight the most sought-after and fashionable belongings.

3 Gruder, V.R., 'The Question of Marie-Antoinette: The Queen and Public Opinion before the Revolution', *French History*, 2002, 269-298 (285).

Chapter Nine

1 For more on cartoons of Victoria, see Homans, Margaret, *Royal Representations: Queen Victoria and British Culture, 1837–1876* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Homans, Margaret, and Munich, Adrienne, eds. *Remaking Queen Victoria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

2 Fields, Gabrielle, 'Queen Victoria's Library: The Place of Reading and Writing in Victoria's Political Education, Self-Improvement, and Self-Curation', PhD Thesis (University of Exeter, 2025).

3 Chernock, Arianne, *The Right to Rule and the Rights of Women* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), p.299.

4 Chernock, *The Right to Rule and the Rights of Women*, p. 213.

5 Fields, Gabrielle, 'Queen Victoria's Library: The Place of Reading and Writing in Victoria's Political Education, Self-Improvement, and Self-Curation', PhD Thesis (University of Exeter, 2025), p. 178.

6 For more see Pepera, Luke, *Motherland: A Journey through African History Culture and Identity* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2025), Stoeltje, Beverley, 'Asante Queen Mothers in Ghana', *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), Akpan, Paula, *When We Ruled: The Rise and Fall of Twelve African Queens and Warriors* (London: Trapeze, 2025), Aidoo, Agnes Akosua, 'Asante Queen Mothers in Government and Politics in the Nineteenth Century', *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, Vol. 9, 1977, pp. 1–13.

Chapter Ten

1 For detailed transcription of the quilt, see Huckler, Rhoda E. and Woodward, Loretta G. H., *The Queen's Quilt* (Honolulu: The Friends of Iolani Palace, 2004).

2 This chapter uses as key sources, Queen Lili'uokalani, *Hawaii's Story by Hawaii's Queen* (Boston: Lee & Shepherd, 1898) and Queen Lili'uokalani, *Diaries, 1865–1900*, Forbes, David W., ed. (Honolulu: Hui Hanai, 2019). And Hawaii State Archives, Honolulu, Manuscript Collection, Lili'uokalani Manuscript Collection, Honolulu, Newspaper Articles, Honolulu, including PPWD, Boxes 5-10 and 13-20, Correspondence, boxes 6-68. The Queen's Accounts, Boxes 10-20. Catalogue of the Queen's Jewellery Sale. Queen Lili'uokalani Papers, Boxes 1-6, Dominis Papers, Boxes 1-6, Seized Documents, Lili'uokalani Collection. Hawaii State Archives, the Music of the Queen's Collections, M93-M94, inc. Index of Hawaiian Songs, 'Ahe Lau Makani', 'Hooheno', 'Ka Oiwi Nani', 'Ka Wai Mapuna', 'Kuu Pua I Paoakalani'.

3 Thursday 5 March 1885, in the *Diaries of Queen Lili'ukolani*, ed. David W. Forbes (Honolulu, 2009), p. 13.

4 Morris, Cynthia, 'The Prison Songs of Lili'uokalani' (PhD Thesis: University of Santa Cruz, 2013).

5 Kualapai, Lydia, 'The Queen Writes Back: Lili'uokalani's Hawaii's Story by Hawaii's Queen' in 'Honoring A. Lavonne Brown Ruoff', *Studies in American Indian Literatures Series 2*, Vol. 17, No.2 (Summer 2005), pp.32-62. This excellent article explores the many different ways in which the queen countered her critics in the book and even used the cover, with her true name surrounded by a lei to stake a claim for Hawaiian identity.

6 Fuchs, *The Diaries of Queen Lili'uokalani*.

Chapter Eleven

1 Chernock, Arianne, 'Victoria and the "Bloody Mary of Madagascar"', *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 55, No. 3 (Spring 2013), pp. 425-449. Akpan, Paula, *When We Ruled: The Rise and Fall of Twelve African Queens and Warriors* (London: Trapeze, 2025).
2 Anon, *Madagascar Past and Present*, (1847), p. 243.
3 Ellis, *History of Madagascar*, Vol. 2, p. 426.
4 'Review of William Ellis's *Three Visits*', *The British Quarterly Review* 1859-04-01: Vol. 29 Iss. 58, p. 400.
5 Ellis, *History of Madagascar* Vol.1, title page.
6 Chernock, 'Queen Victoria and the "Bloody Mary of Madagascar"', *Victorian Studies*, 55 (2013), pp. 425-449.
7 'Review of William Ellis's *History*', *Tait's Edinburgh Review*, 1839, p.233.
8 Ellis, *History of Madagascar*, Vol. 2, p.522.

Chapter Twelve

1 '"Monarchical No.1" – Churchill and Queen Elizabeth II', International Churchill Society.
2 https://winstonchurchill.org/publications/finest-hour/finest-hour-175/monarchical-no-1-churchill-and-queen-elizabeth-ii
3 Lord Moran, *Winston Churchill: The Struggle for Survival, 1940–1965* (London: Constable, 1966), p. 403.
4 Most people thought they would be able to go to state-owned nuclear bunkers. In fact there was little room, with space only for ministers and important people – and no doubt the queen herself.
5 The title itself had no meaning; it was invented by the producer after the name of a Hollywood nightclub, presumably because it sounded 'African'.
6 The head of MGM, according to one female staff member, didn't understand women. 'That's the reason we didn't have Marilyn Monroe – because he felt that Marilyn was just a little trollop he could pick up anytime for a day's work at $350 a day. He didn't understand Marilyn and he didn't get Grace.'
7 Robinson, Jeffrey, *Grace of Monaco: The True Story* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2015). This has been a particular key source for this chapter.
8 Spoto, Donald, *High Society: The Life of Grace Kelly* (New York: Crown Publishing, 2009).

Chapter Thirteen

1 This chapter uses Morton, Andrew, *Diana: Her True Story – In Her Own Words* (London: Michael O'Mara Books, 1998) as the key source for the quotations. If only we had more words from the royal women in this book! Also the British Library Newspaper Archive has been invaluable in constructing this chapter.
2 As his official biographer, Jonathan Dimbleby, suggested, the prince had 'more time on his hands than he either wished or cared to admit'.
3 The *Observer*.
4 Brown, Tina, *The Diana Chronicles* (New York: Doubleday, 2007), p. 282.
5 Webb, Andy, *Dianarama: the Betrayal of Princess Diana* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2025).
6 Webb, *Dianarama*, p.206.

Bibliography

Manuscript Sources

Hawaii State Archives, Honolulu, Manuscript Collection, Liliʻuokalani Manuscript Collection, Newspaper Articles, Honolulu, including PPWD, Boxes 5-10 and 13-20, Correspondence, Boxes 6-68. The Queen's Accounts, Boxes 10-20. Catalogue of the Queen's Jewellery Sale.

Queen Liliʻuokalani Papers, Boxes 1-6, Dominis Papers, Boxes 1-8, Seized Documents, Liliʻuokalani Collection. Hawaii State Archives, the Music of the Queen's Collections, M93-M94, inc. Index of Hawaiian Songs, 'Ahe Lau Makani', 'Hooheno', 'Ka Oiwi Nani', 'Ka Wai Mapuna', 'Kuu Pua I Paoakalani'.

Archives Nationales, Paris, 440AP/1-440AP/4, Marie Antoinette, Correspondence de Marie Antoinette et Count Fersen, 440AP/1, inc. 1-4. Lettres autographes de la reine Marie-Antoinette au comte de Fersen 1791-1792. 58-60. Lettres de la reine Marie-Antoinette à la reine d'Espagne, à l'impératrice Catherine II de Russie, au chancelier d'Autriche Kaunitz. Copies d'époque. 1792. 61-95. Lettres de la reine Marie-Antoinette à Madame Élisabeth (1791, 1793), à sa mère Marie-Thérèrèse (1770), à lempereur Joseph II (1780), à la duchesse de Polignac (1780, 1789-1790, 1792), au duc de Choiseul (1785), à la princesse de Lamballe (1789), à la marquise de Tourzel (1789), au comte de Mercy (1791), au comte d'Artois (1791), à l'empereur Léopold II (1791), à l'impératrice Catherine II (1791), au comte de Provence (1792-1793), au général de Jarjayes (1793), au président de la Convention nationale (1793). Copies faites au XIXe siècle par le baron de Klinckowström (1770-1793). 96-97. Lettres reçues par la reine Marie-Antoinette de l'empereur Léopold II. Copies faites au XIXe siècle par le baron de Klinckowström. 1791. Papiers Campan. 1783-1788. Pièces 1-3. Notes et mémoires comptables. 1783-1785. Pièces 4-10. Listes de livres et d'estampes adressés à M. Campan pour la reine. 1785-1787.

440AP/4. Supplément Marie-Antoinette. 1787-1881. Dossier 1, pièces 1-4. Lettres autographes de la reine Marie-Antoinette à la duchesse de Polignac. 1789-1790.

British Library, London, Additional MS, including 335830, State Papers, 1553-1561, 71009, Court Ceremonies and the Coronation of Queen Anne.

Cotton MS, inc Titus B, fo 161, Titus CVII fo 50v, Davison on Mary Queen of Scots, Cotton MS Orotho CX fos 232r-232v, Anne's letter to Henry VIII from the Tower, fos 234r-234v, on Elizabeth's clothes.

Cotton MS Vespasian CXIV Elizabeth I papers, Egerton, MS 3320, Hargrave MS 497, 32-39, Papers relating to the Investiture of Anne Boleyn as Marquess of Pembroke, Papers relating to Queen

Elizabeth I's funeral. Kings MS 396, Elizabeth's family tree. Sloane MS 814, New Year presents to Elizabeth I between 1572-1587.

The National Archives, London. PRO/C1/E3 Madagascar and Comoro Islands, Foreign and Domestic Various. Jan.-Dec. 1847. fo 48/5. National Archives, Kew. Calendar of the Close Rolls. C193 fo 80, Warrant issued by Henry VIII to Sir William Kingston on Anne's execution, SP11/4 fo 3, The Tide Letter, 1554, SP/215 fo 114, Robert Dudley's last letter to Elizabeth I, SP70 fos 1-11, Elizabeth's translation of Boethius's *The Consolation of Philosophy*.

Printed Primary Sources

Ainsworth, Mitchell, C. ed. *The Evidence of the Casket Letters* (London: 1927)

Arneth, Alfred von, ed. *Marie Antoinette, Joseph II* (Leipzig, Paris and Vienna: 1866)

Arneth, Alfred von, and Hammermont, Jules, eds. *Correspondence Secrète du Comte de Mercy-Argenteau*, 3 vols (Paris: 1874)

Ascham, Roger, *The Whole Works of Roger Ascham* (London: 1865)

Aspinall, A., ed. *The Correspondence of George, Prince of Wales, 1770-1822* (London: 1964)

Aungier, G., ed., *The French Chronicle of London* (London: 1844)

Bell, D. C., *Notices of the Historic Persons Buried in the Chapel of St Peter ad Vincula* (London: 1844)

Bernard of Clairvaux, *Letters*, trans. B. S. James (Stroud: 1998)

Bertin, Madame, *Memoires de Madame Bertin sur la Reine Marie Antoinette* (Paris: 1824)

Bernier, Olivier, ed., *Imperial Mother, Royal Daughter, the correspondence of Marie Antoinette and Maria Theresa* (London: 1969)

Bond, E. A., ed., *The Chronicle of Meaux* (3 vols) (London: 1866)

Brewer, J.S. et al, *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic of the Reign of Henry VIII, 1509-47* (London: 1862-1922)

Bruce, J., ed., *Correspondence of Matthew Parker* (Cambridge: 1853)

Buchanan, George, *The Tyrannous Reign of Mary Stewart*, ed. W. A. Gatherer (Edinburgh: 1958)

Caesar, Julius, *The Gallic War*, H. J. Edwards, trans (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1917)

Calendar of the Close Rolls, Edward I to Edward III, 1447-1500 (London: 1892-1941)

Calendar of Letters, Despatches and State Papers Relating to the Negotiations Between England and Spain, 13 vols (London: 1863-1954)

Calendar of Letters, Despatches and State Papers Relating to the Negotiations Between England and Spain, Supplement to Vol I and II (London: 1868)

Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, of the Reigns of Edward VI, Mary, Elizabeth, 1547-1625, eds. Robert Lemon and Mary Anne Everett Green (London: 1871)

Calendar of State Papers, Foreign Series, of the Reign of Elizabeth, Stevenson, Joseph et al. eds (London: 1863–1950)

Calendar of State Papers Relating to English Affairs Preserved Principally at Rome at the Vatican Archives and Library, Rigg J. M., ed. (London: 1916–26)

Calendar of State Papers and Manuscripts Relating to English Affairs Existing in the Archives and Collections of Milan, Hinds, A. B., ed. (London: 1912)

Calendar of State Papers Relating to England and Mary Queen of Scots, Bain, Joseph, ed., 5 vols (Edinburgh: 1898–52)

Camden, W., *Annals of Queen Elizabeth* (London: 1688)

Campan, Madame, *Mémoires de Madame Campan: premiére femme de chambre de Marie Antoinette*, Chalon, Jean, ed. (Paris: 1988)
Cassius Dio, *The Roman History*, books L-LXII, Jackson, J., trans. (London: Loeb, 1927)
Choiseul, Duc de, *Mémoires*, Bonnet, Philippe, ed. (Paris: Editions, 1987)
Cicero, Letter to Atticus XV.15 in Cicero, *Letters to Atticus*, Vol II, Shackleton Bail, D. R., ed. (London: Loeb, 1937)
Collins, A. F., ed. *Jewels and Plate of Queen Elizabeth I: The Inventory of 1574* (London: 1955)
Collins, A. F., ed. *Letters and Memorials of State, in the reigns of Queen Mary, Queen Elizabeth, etc….2 vols* (London: 1746)
Commendore, G. C., *The Accession, Coronation and Marriage of Mary Tudor* (Barcelona: 1956)
Della Neva, JoAnn, ed. and trans., *The Story of the Death of Anne Boleyn, A Poem by Lancelot de Carle* (Tempe, Arizona: ACMRS Press, 2021)
Dowling, Maria, ed. *William Latymer's Chronickille of Anne Bulleyne*, Camden Society, 30 (London: Camden, 1990)
Elizabeth I: Collected Works, edited by Leah S Marcus and others (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2002)
Elizabeth I: Letters of Queen Elizabeth, Harrison, G. B., ed. (New York: 1958)
Elizabeth I: Autograph Compositions and Foreign Language Originals, Marcus, Leah S., and Mueller, Janel, eds (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2003)
Ellis, Sarah Stickney,
—*Home Life and Letters of Mrs Ellis, compiled by her nieces* (London: 1893)
—*Madagascar: Its Social and Religious Progress* (London: Nisbet, 1863)
—*The Women of England: Their Social Duties, and Domestic Habits* (London, 1839)
Ellis, Mercy, *Memoir of Mrs Mary Mercy Ellis* (Boston: Crocker, 1836)
Ellis, William, *History of Madagascar: Comprising also the progress of the Christian mission established in 1818, and an authentic account of the persecution and recent martyrdom of the native Christians* (London: Fisher, Son & Co., 1838)
—*Madagascar Revisited* (London: Murray, 1867)
—*Three Visits to Madagascar During the Years 1853–1854–1856* (New York: Harper, 1859)
An Epistle of the Lady Jane, a right virtuous woman (London, 1554)
Faulker, R. O., *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts* (Warminster: Atis & Philips, 1969)
—*The Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts: Spells* (Warminster, Artis & Philips, 1973)
—*The Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts, Vols 1-3* (Warminster: Artis & Philps, 1977)
Feuillerat, A., ed., *Documents Relating to the Revels at Court in the Time of King Edward VI and Queen Mary* (Louvain: 1914)
Feuillet de Conches, Félix, *Louis XVI, Marie Antoinette et Madame Elisabeth: lettres et documents inédits*, 6 vols (Paris: 1864)
Florus (Lucius Annaeus), *Epitome of Roman History*, Watson, John Selby, trans. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960)
Foxe, John, *Acts and Monuments*, Townsend, G., ed. (London: 1843-9)
Gairdner, J., ed. *Letters and Papers Illustrative of the Reigns of Richard III and Henry VII*, 2 vols (London: 1861-1863)
Gairdner, J. ed. *Letters and Papers: Foreign and Domestic of the Reign of Henry VIII*, 21 vols (London: 1862-1932)
Geary, D., ed. *The Letters of Lady Jane Grey* (Ilfracombe: 1951)
Geoffrey of Monmouth, *History of the Kings of Britain*, Thorpe, L., trans. (Harmondsworth: 1966)
Gervase of Canterbury, *The Historical Works of Gervase of Canterbury*, 2 vols, Stubbs, W., ed. (London: 1879)

Godwin, Francis, *Annals of England* (London: 1650)
Guaras, Antonio de, *The Accession of Queen Mary*, Garret, Richard, ed. (London: 1892)
Haynes, A., *A Collection of State Papers Relating to Affairs in the Reigns of King Henry VIII, King Edward VI, Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth, left by William Lord Cecil at Hatfield House* (London: 1740)
Hayward, M., ed., *1542 Inventory of Whitehall: the Palace and the Keeper*, 2 vols (London: Society of Antiquaries, 2004)
Heylin, Peter, *Affairs of Church and State in England During the Life and Reign of Queen Mary* (London: 1660)
Holinshed, Raphael, *Holinshed's Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland*, 6 vols (London: 1965)
Horace, *Collected Odes and Epodes*, edited Niall Rudd. Loeb (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004)
Hornung, Erik, ed. *The Ancient Egyptian Books of the Dead* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999)
Jordan, W. K, ed. *The Chronicle and Political Papers of King Edward VI* (London: 1966)
Kipling, Gordon, ed. *The Receyt of the Lady Kateryne* (Oxford: Early English Text Society, 1990)
Knox, John, *First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*, Arber, E., ed. (London: 1878)
Lamolière, Rosalie, *Relation de Rosalie Lamolière, servant à la Conciergerie*, Lenotre, ed. (Paris: 1938)
Lettres, Instructions et Memoires de Marie Stuart, Labanoff, A., ed. (Paris: 1844)
Lichtheim, Miriam, *Ancient Egyptian Literature I: The Old and Middle Kingdom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973)
—*Ancient Egyptian Literature II: The New Kingdom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973)
Lili'uokalani, Queen, *Hawaii's Story by Hawaii's Queen* (Boston: Lee & Shepherd, 1898)
—*Diaries, 1865-1900*, Forbes, David W., ed. (Honolulu: Hui Hanai, 2019)
Livius, Titus, *Ab Urbe Condita, History of Rome*, XIII, Schlesinger, Arthur, trans. (London: Heinemann, 1951)
Louis-Philippe, *Mémoires*, 1773-1793, Hardman, John, ed. (New York: 1977)
Louis XVI, *Journal*, Nicolardot, Louis, ed. (Paris: 1873)
Lucan, *Pharsalia*, ed. Susan F Braund (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008)
Madden, F., ed., *Privy Purse Expenses of the Princess Mary* (London: 1831)
Marie-Clothilde, *Lettres Inédites de Marie Antoinette et de Marie-Clothilde de France*, Comte de Reiset, ed. (Paris: 1877)
Mueller, J., ed., *Katherine Parr: Complete Works and Correspondence* (Chicago: 2011)
Nichols, J., ed. *A Collection of All the Wills now known to be extant of the Kings and Queens of England* (London: 1780)
*The Noble Triumphant Coronacyon of Queen Anne (*London: 1533)
Parkinson, R. B., *Voices from Ancient Egypt: An Anthology of Middle Kingdom Writings* (London: 1991)
The Passage of our Most Dread Soveraigne Ladye Queen Elizabeth through the Citie of London to Westminster the Daye Before Her Coronacion (London: 1559)
Pizan, Christina, ed. *The Book of the City of Ladies*, Brown-Grant, Rosalind, ed. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1999)
Pfeiffer, Ida, *The Last Travels of Ida Pfeiffer: Inclusive of a Visit to Madagascar; with a Biographical Memoir of the Author* (London: Routledge, 1861)
Plant, I. M, *Women Writers of Ancient Greece and Rome: An Anthology* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004)

Plutarch, *The Age of Alexander: Nine Greek Lives* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973)
—*The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1927)
Prince, Mary, *The History of Mary Prince*, Salih, Sarah, ed. (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 2008)
Procopius, *History of the Wars*, I, xxiv, trans Henry Dewing (New York: Macmillan, 1914)
Richard of Devizes, *Chronicon de Tempore Regis Ricardi Primi*, Howlett, R. G., ed. (London: Rolls Series 3, 1886)
Round, J. H., *Calendar of Documents Preserved in France, illustrative of the History of Great Britain and Ireland* (London: 1899)
State Papers Relating to the Custody of Princess Elizabeth at Woodstock in 1554, Manning, C. R., ed. (Norwich: 1855)
Stockwell, A. H, *The Letters of Lady Jane Grey* (Ilfracombe: 1951)
Stow, John, *The Annales of England faithfully collected* (London: 1592)
Suetonius, *The Lives of the Caesars*, Holland, Tom, trans. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2023)
Tacitus, Publius Cornelius, *The Annals of Imperial Rome*, Vol XIV, Jackson, J., trans. (London: Loeb, 1937)
Tourzel, Madame, *Mémoires de Madame de la Duchesse de Tourzel, Gouvernante des Enfants de France de 1789 à 1795* (Paris: 1986)
Tudor Royal Proclamations, Volume 2, The Later Tudors, 1553-1587 Hughes, Paul, and Larkin, James F., eds. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1969)
Victoria, Queen, *Leaves from the Journal of Our Life in the Highlands, 1848-1861 & More Leaves, 1862-1882*, Marschner, J., Homans, M., and Munich, A., eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2025)
Vives, Juan Luis, *The Education of a Christian Woman: A Sixteenth-Century Manual*, Fantazzi, Charles, ed. and trans. (Chicago and London: 2000)
Whitelock, Dorothy, ed., *English Historical Documents, 500-1042* (London: 1955)
William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, Mynors and Winterbottom, eds and trans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998-2002)
William of Tyre, *A History of Deeds Done Beyond the Sea*, Babcock, E., and Krey, A.C., eds (New York: Harper, 1943)
Wood, Mary Anne Everett, *Letters of Royal and Illustrious Ladies of Great Britain*, 3 vols (London: Wood 1846)
Wyatt, George, *Extracts from the Life of the Virtuous, Christian, and Renowned Queen Anne Boleigne* (London: Fisher, 1817)

Secondary Sources

Adams, Blessin, *Great and Horrible News: Murder and Mayhem in Early Modern Britain* (London: Collins, 2023)
Aidoo, Agnes Akosua, 'Asante Queen Mothers in Government and Politics in the Nineteenth Century', *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, Vol. 9, 1977, pp. 1–13
Akinjogbin, I. A., *Dahomey and Its Neighbours: 1708-1818* (Cambridge University Press, 1967)
Akpan, Paula, *When We Ruled: The Rise and Fall of Twelve African Queens and Warriors* (London: Trapeze, 2025)
Alford, Stephen, *All His Spies: The Secret World of Robert Cecil* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2024)
—*The Watchers: A Secret History of the Reign of Elizabeth I* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012)
Amin, Nathen, *The House of Beaufort: The Bastard Line that Captured the Crown* (Stroud: Amberley Publishing, 2017)

—*Son of Prophecy: The Rise of Henry Tudor* (Stroud: Amberley, 2024)
—*Tudor Wales* (Stroud: Amberley, 2014)
Amirell, Stefan, 'Female Rule in the Indian Ocean World (1300–1900)', *Journal of World History*, Vol. 26 (3), 2015, pp. 443–89
Andrade, Nathanael, *Zenobia: Shooting Star of Palmyra* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018)
Aram, Bethany, *Juana the Mad: Sovereignty and Dynasty in Renaissance Europe* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins Press, 2005)
Ashton, Sally-Ann, *The Last Queens of Egypt* (London: Pearson, 2003)
Awolalu, J. Omosade, *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites* (London: Longman, 1979)
Badawi, Zeinab, *An African History of Africa* (London: Allen, 2024)
Barraclough, Eleanor, *Embers of the Hands: Hidden Histories of the Viking Age* (London: Profile, 2024)
Beard, Mary, *The Roman Triumph* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007)
—*Women and Power* (London: Profile, 2018)
Beem, Charles, *The Lioness Roared: The Problems of Female Rule in English History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2008)
Berg, Gerald M., 'Writing Ideology: Ranavalona, the Ancestral Bureaucrat', *History in Africa*, Vol. 22, 1995, pp. 73–92
Bernard, E. and Moon, B. eds., *Goddesses Who Rule* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000)
Bianchi, Robert S., *Cleopatra's Egypt. The Age of the Ptolemies* (New York: Brooklyn Museum, 1998)
Bingen, Jean, 'Cléopâtra VII Philopatris,' Chronique d'Egypte, 74 (1999), 118-23.
Boahen, A. Adu, *Yaa Asentewaa and the Asante-British War of 1900-1*, Akyeampong, E., ed. (London: James Currey, 2003)
Bolland, Charlotte, ed. *The Six Wives: The Stories of Henry VIII's Queens* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 2024)
Boonstra, Stephanie, and Price, Campbell, *Ancient Egypt in 50 Discoveries: Highlights from the first century of the Egypt Exploration Society* (London: Egypt Exploration Society, 2025)
Borman, Tracy, *Anne Boleyn and Elizabeth I: The Mother and Daughter who Changed History* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2023)
—*Crown and Sceptre: A New History of the British Monarchy, from William the Conqueror to Elizabeth II* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2012)
—*Elizabeth's Women: The Hidden Story of the Virgin Queen* (London: Vintage, 2010)
—*Matilda: Wife of the Conqueror, First Queen of England* (London: Vintage, 2012)
—*The Private Lives of the Tudors: Uncovering the Secrets of Britain's Greatest Dynasty* (London: Vintage, 2017)
—*Stolen Crown: Treachery, Deceit and the Death of the Tudor Dynasty* (London: Vintage, 2025)
Boruchoff, D. et al., *Isabel La Catolica, Queen of Castile: Critical Essays* (New York: University Press, 2003)
Bowman, A. K., *Life and Letters on the Roman Frontier: Vindolanda and its People* (London: British Museum Press, 2003)
Bradford, Sarah, *Diana* (London, Viking, 2006)
—*London and the Reformation* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1991)
—*Queen Elizabeth II: Her Life in Our Times* (London: Viking, 2012)
Brown, Tina, *The Diana Chronicles* (New York: Doubleday, 2007)
Brown, Mervyn, *A History of Madagascar* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995)
Busia, Kofi Abrefa, 'The Ashanti' in *African Worlds: Studies in the Cosmological Ideas and Social Values of African Peoples*, Forde, Daryll, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954), pp. 191-220.

Caldwell, Lauren, *Roman Girlhood and the Fashioning of Femininity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015)
Canfora, Luciano, *The Vanished Library: A Wonder of the Ancient World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990)
Cannadine, David, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (London: Vintage, 1998)
—*Lords and Landlords: The Aristocracy and the Towns, 1774–1967* (Harmondsworth, Penguin: 1980)
—*Ornamentalism: How the British Saw their Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001)
—'Splendor out of Court: Royal Spectacle and Pageantry in Modern Britain, c. 1820–1977' *Rites of Power: Symbolism, Ritual and Power since the Middle Ages*, Wilentz, Sean, ed. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1999) p. 206–43.
—*Victorious Century: The United Kingdom 1800-1906* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2018)
Cannadine, David, ed. *Westminster Abbey: A Church in History* (New Haven: Paul Mellon, 2019)
Cargill-Martin, Honor, *Messalina: A Story of Empire, Slander and Adultery* (London: Head of Zeus, 2023)
Carr, Helen, *The Red Prince: The Life of John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster* (Oneworld Publications, 2021)
—*Sceptred Isle: A New History of the Fourteenth Century* (London: Random House, 2025)
Campbell, Gwyn, Muttenzer, Frank, and Pollini, Jacques, eds., *Perceptions and Representations of the Malagasy Environment Across Cultures* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2023)
Campbell, Gwyn, Machado, Pedro, and Fee, Sarah, eds., *Textile Trades, Consumer Cultures, and the Material Worlds of the Indian Ocean: An Ocean of Cloth* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2018)
Campbell, Gwyn, A*frica and the Indian Ocean World from Early Times to 1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019)
—*David Griffiths and the Missionary "History of Madagascar."* (Leiden: Brill, 2012)
—*An Economic History of Imperial Madagascar, 1750-1895: The Rise and Fall of an Island Empire*, African Studies Series (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005)
—*The Travels of Robert Lyall, 1789-1831: Scottish Surgeon, Naturalist and British Agent to the Court of Madagascar* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020)
Carley, James P., *The Books of King Henry VIII and his Wives* (London: British Library, 2004)
Castle, Terry, *The Apparitional Lesbian: female homosexuality and modern culture* (New York: Columbia University Press: 1993)
Castor, Helen, *The Eagle and the Heart: The Tragedy of Richard II and Henry IV* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2024)
—*Elizabeth I* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2019)
—*She-Wolves: The Women Who Ruled England Before Elizabeth* (London; Faber & Faber, 2011)
Chase, Karen, and Levenson, Michael Harry, *The Spectacle of Intimacy: A Public Life for the Victorian Family* (Princeton University Press, 2000)
Chauviré, Roger, *Le Secret de Marie Stuart* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1937)
Chernock, Arianne, *The Right to Rule and the Rights of Women* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019)
—'Queen Victoria and the "Bloody Mary of Madagascar"' *Victorian Studies*, 55 (2013), pp. 425-449.
—'Gender and the Politics of Exceptionalism in the Writing of British Women's History: Queens, Warriors, and Other Worthies', in Pamela Nadell and Kate Haulman, eds., *Making Women's Histories: Beyond National Perspectives* (New York University Press, 2013), pp. 115-136.
Childs, Jessie, *God's Traitors: Terror and Faith in Elizabethan England* (London: Bodley Head, 2014)

—*Henry VIII's Last Victim: The Life and Times of Henry Howard, Earl of Sussex* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2006)
Churchill, Laurie, ed., et al, *Women Writing Latin: Women Writing Latin in Roman Antiquity, Late Antiquity and the Early Christian Era* (London: Routledge, 2002)
Clark, Nicola, *Gender, Family and Politics: The Howard Women, 1485-1555* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018)
Colley, Linda, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992)
Cooney, Kara, *The Good Kings: Absolute Power in Ancient Egypt and the Modern World* (Washington: National Geographic, 2021)
—*When Women Ruled the World: Six Queens of Egypt* (Washington: National Geographic, 2018)
—*The Woman Who Would be King: Hatshepsut's Rise to Power in Ancient Egypt* (New York; Crown Publishing, 2015)
Dalrymple, William, *Anarchy: The Relentless Rise of the East India Company* (London: Allen Lane, 2023)
—*The Last Mughal, The Fall of Delhi, 1857* (London: Allen Lane, 2008)
Darnton, Robert, *The Forbidden Bestsellers of Pre-Revolutionary France* (London: Norton, 1996)
Debriffe, Martial, *Madame Élisabeth: La Princesse Martyre* (Paris: Sémaphore, 1997)
Delaney, Antony, *Queer Georgians: A Hidden History of Lovers, Lawbreakers and Homemakers* (London: Doubleday, 2025)
Desai, Gurav, *Subject to Colonialism: African Self-Fashioning and the Colonial Library* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001)
Diamond, Kelly-Anne, 'Hatshepsut: Transcending Gender In Ancient Egypt', *Gender & History*, 2018 (32), pp. 1–21
Diop, Cheikh Anta, *The Cultural Unity of Black Africa: The Domains of Matriarchy & of Patriarchy in Classical Antiquity* (London: Karnak House, 1989)
Dixon, Suzanne, *The Roman Mother* (London, Routledge, 2013)
Doran, Susan, ed., *Elizabeth: The Exhibition at the National Maritime Museum* (London: Maritime Museum, 2003)
Dorman, Peter F., 'The Early Reign of Thutmose II: An Unorthodox Mantle of Co-Regency' in *A New Biography of Thutmose III*, ed Cline, Eric H. and O'Connor, David (Ann Arbor, Michigan University Press, 2006), pp 39-68.
Dorman, Peter F., *The Monuments of Senenmnut: Problems in Historical Methodology* (New York: Kegan Paul, 1988)
Draycott, Jane, *Cleopatra's Daughter: Egyptian Princess, Roman Prisoner, African Queen* (London: Head of Zeus, 2022)
—*Fulvia: The Woman Who Broke All The Rules in Ancient Rome* (London: Atlantic, 2025)
Duffy, Eamon, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400-1580* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992)
—*Fires of Faith: Catholic England Under Mary Tudor* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009)
Dunn, Daisy, *The Missing Thread: A New History of the Ancient World Through the Women Who Shaped It* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2023)
Dunn, Jane, *Elizabeth and Mary: Cousins, Rivals, Queens* (New York: Knopf, 2004)
Earenfight, Theresa, *Queenship in Medieval Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013)
Elliot, J. H., *Imperial Spain, 1469-1716* (London: Collins, 1963)
Ellis, Stephen, 'Witch-Hunting in Central Madagascar 1828–1861', *Past & Present*, 2002 (175), pp. 90–123

Emmerson, Owen, and McCaffrey, Kate, *Capturing a Queen: The Image of Anne Boleyn* (London: AB Publishing, 2026)
Emmerson, Owen, and Ridgway, Clare, *The Boleyns of Hever Castle* (London: Madeglobal, 2021)
Evers, Sandra, Campbell, Gwyn, and Lambek, Michael, eds., *Contest for Land in Madagascar* (Leiden: Brill, 2014)
Faraday, Christina F., *The Story of Tudor Art: A History of Tudor England Through its Art and Objects* (London: Apollo, 2025)
Field, Ophelia, *The Favourite: The Life of Sarah Churchill* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2003)
Fields, Gabrielle, 'Queen Victoria's Library: The Place of Reading and Writing in Victoria's Political Education, Self-Improvement, and Self-Curation', PhD Thesis (University of Exeter, 2025)
Fitzharris, Lindsey, *The Facemaker: One Surgeon's Battle to Mend the Disfigured Soldiers of World War One* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2022)
Flamarion, Edith, *Cleopatra: From History into Legend* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1997)
Fletcher, Joann, *Cleopatra the Great: The Woman Behind the Legend* (London: HarperCollins, 2011)
Foreman, Amanda, *Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire* (London: HarperCollins, 1999)
Forster, E. M., *Alexandria: A History and a Guide* (London: Michael Haag, 1982)
Fox, Julia, *Jane Boleyn; The Infamous Lady Rochford* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2019)
—*Sister Queens: Katherine of Aragon and Juana Queen of Castile* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2011)
Frankopan, Peter, *The Earth Transformed: An Untold History* (London: Bloomsbury, 2023)
—*The Silk Roads: A New History of the World* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015)
Fraser, Antonia, *Love and Louis XIV: The Women in the Life of the Sun King* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2006)
—*Marie Antoinette: The Journey* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2001)
—*Mary Queen of Scots* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2008)
—*The Six Wives of Henry VIII* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1992)
—*Warrior Queens* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2011)
—*The Weaker Vessel: Women's Lot in Seventeenth-century England* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson. 1984)
Frye, Susan, 'The Myth of Elizabeth at Tilbury', *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 23 (1992), pp. 101-103.
Fuentes, Marisa, J, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence and the Archives* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016)
Gardiner, Allen, *Egypt of the Pharaohs* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961)
Garret, Christina Hallowell, *The Marian Exiles: A study in the Origins of Elizabethan Puritanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938)
Gillam, R., *Performance and Drama in Ancient Egypt* (London: Duckworth, 2005)
Goldstone, Nancy, *In the Shadow of the Empress: Maria Theresa and her Daughters* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2021)
—*Joanna, Queen of Naples and Sicily* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2010)
—*Rival Queens: Catherine de Medici, Margaret of Valois and the Betrayal that Ignited a Kingdom* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2015)
Goldsworthy, Adrian, *Antony and Cleopatra* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2008)
Gómez, Maria et al, *Juana of Castile: History and Myth of the Mad Queen* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2008)
Goodman, Dena, *Marie Antoinette: Writings on the Body of a Queen* (New York: Routledge, 2003)
Grandin, Greg, *Empire of Necessity: Slavery, Freedom and Necessity in the New World* (New York: Holt, 2014)
Grant, Lindy, *Eleanor of Aquitaine: Woman, Queen and Legend* (London: Reaktion Books, 2014)

Grant, Sarah et al, *Marie Antoinette Style: the Official Exhibition Book* (London: V & A Publishing, 2025)
Graves, Michael, *The House of Lords in the Parliament of Edward VI and Mary I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981)
Green, Janet M., 'My Self: Queen Elizabeth's Oration at Tilbury Camp', *Sixteenth-Century Journal*, 28 (1997), pp. 25-45
Gristwood, Sarah, *Elizabeth and Leicester* (London: Transworld, 2002)
—*Game of Queens: the Women Who Made Sixteenth Century Europe* (London: One World, 2016)
—*The Tudors in Love* (London: One World, 2007)
Guy, John, *The English Reformation, Religion, Politics and Society Under the Tudors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993)
Guy, John and Julia Fox, *Hunting the Falcon: Henry VIII, Anne Boleyn and the Marriage That Shook Europe* (London: Bloomsbury, 2023)
Hackett, Helen, *Virgin Mother, Maiden Queen, Elizabeth I and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1995)
Hall, Catherine, *Civilizing Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830-1867* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002)
Hanley, Catherine, *Matilda, Empress, Queen, Warrior* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2020)
Hardman, Robert, *Queen of Our Times: The Life of Queen Elizabeth II* (London: Macmillan, 2022)
—*Queen of the World: Elizabeth II: Sovereign and Stateswoman* (London: Century, 2018)
Hauser, Emily, *Mythica: A New History of Homer's World., Through the Women Written Out of It* (London: Transworld, 2024)
Henrmelrijk, E. A., *Matrona Docta: Educated Women in the Roman Elite from Cornelia to Julia Domna* (London: Routledge, 1999)
Heywood, Linda, *Njinga of Angola* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017)
Hilton, Lisa, *Athenais: the Real Queen of France* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2010)
—*Elizabeth: Renaissance Prince* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2014)
—*Queens Consort: England's Medieval Queens* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2008)
Holland, Tom, *Dynasty: The Rise and Fall of the House of Caesar* (London: Little Brown, 2008)
—*Persian Fire: The First World Empire* (London: Little Brown, 2011)
—*Rubicon: The Triumph and Tragedy of the Roman Empire* (London: Little Brown, 2008)
Homans, Margaret, *Royal Representations: Queen Victoria and British Culture, 1837–1876* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998)
Homans, Margaret, and Munich, Adrienne, eds. *Remaking Queen Victoria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997)
Houlbrooke, Ralph, *Death, Religion and the Family in England, 1480-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998)
Houston, Gail Turley, *Royalties: The Queen and Victorian Writers* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1999)
Huckler, Rhoda E., and Woodward, Loretta G. H., *The Queen's Quilt* (Honolulu: The Friends of Iolani Palace, 2004)
Hughes, Bettany, *Helen of Troy: Goddess, Princess, Whore* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2013)
Hunt, Lynn, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (London: Routledge, 1992)
—'The Many Bodies of Marie Antoinette: Political pornography and the problem of the feminine in the French Revolution', in *The French Revolution*, ed Gary Kates (London: Routledge, 1997)

Ikram, Salima, and Dodson, Aidan, *The Mummy in Ancient Egypt: Equipping the Dead for Eternity* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998)
Ives, Eric, *The Life and Death of Anne Boleyn* (Blackwell, 2004)
Jacobsen, Trude, *Lost Goddesses: The Denial of Female Power in Cambodian History* (Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 2008)
James, Sharon L., and Dillon, Sheila, eds. *A Companion to Women in the Ancient World* (Malden: Blackwell, 2012)
Janega, Eleanor, *The Once and Future Sex: Going Medieval on Women's Roles in Society* (London: Norton, 2023)
Jardine, Lisa, *Worldly Goods: A New History of the Renaissance* (London: Collins, 1996)
Jarman, Cat, The Bone Chests: Unearthing the Secrets of the Anglo-Saxons (London: Collins, 2024)
—*The River Kings: The Vikings from Scandinavia to the Silk Roads* (London: Collins, 2021)
Johnston, Anna, 'The Strange Career of William Ellis', *Victorian Studies* 49 (2007), pp. 491–501
Jonas, Raymond, *The Battle of Adwa: African Victory in the Age of Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011)
Jones, Dan, *Henry V: The Astonishing Rise of England's Greatest Warrior King* (London: Head of Zeus, 2024)
—*The Hollow Crown: The Wars of the Roses and the Rise of the Tudors* (London: Faber & Faber, 2014)
—*The Plantagenets: The Warrior Kings and Queens who Made England* (London: Head of Zeus, 2013)
Jorgensen, Jay, *Grace Kelly: Hollywood Dream Girl* (New York: Dey Street, 2017)
Karaade, Baba Ifa, *The Handbook of Yoruba Religious Concepts* (Massachusetts: Weiser Books, 2002)
Keay, Anna, *The Crown Jewels: The Official Illustrated History* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2012)
Kelly, R, *Mark Antony and Popular Culture: Masculinity and the Construction of an Icon* (London: Taurus, 2014)
Keshebo, Fantaye A., *A Void in Ethiopian History 1865-1941: Untold History of the Southern Ethiopian Peoples* (New York: Crown, 2012)
Kleiner, Diana E., *Cleopatra and Rome* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2005)
Kyerematen, A., 'The Royal Stools of Ashanti', *Journal of the International African Institute*, 39 (1969), pp. 1–10.
Lacey, Robert, *Grace: Her Lives, Her Loves* (New York: Puttnam, 1994)
Laidler, Keith, *The Female Caligula: Ranavalona: The Mad Queen of Madagscar* (London: Wiley, 2007)
Larson, Pier, M., '"Capacities and Modes of Thinking": Intellectual Engagements and Subaltern Hegemony in the Early History of Malagasy Christianity', *American Historical Review*, 102 (1997), pp. 969–1002.
Laynesmith, Joanna, *The Last Medieval Queens* (Oxford: 2004)
Lea, Henry Charles, *History of the Inquisition of Spain*, 4 vols (London: Macmillan, 1906-7)
Leigh, Wendy, *True Grace: The Life and Times of an American Princess* (London: HarperCollins, 2014)
Lever, Evelyn, *Marie Antoinette* (London: Little Brown, 2006)
Levin, Carole, *The Heart and Stomach of a King: Elizabeth I and the Politics of Sex and Power* (Philadelphia: 1994)
Lindsay, Jack, *Daily Life in Roman Egypt* (London: Muller, 1963)
Lipscomb, Suzannah, *1536: The Year That Changed Henry VIII* (London: Lion Books, 2009)
—*The King is Dead: The Last Will and Testament of Henry VIII* (London: Head of Zeus, 2015)
—*A Visitor's Companion to Tudor England* (London: Ebury, 2012)

Lisle, Leande de, *After Elizabeth: The Death of Elizabeth and the Coming of James* (London: HarperCollins, 2025)
—*The Sisters Who Would be Queen: The Tragedy of Mary, Katherine and Lady Jane Grey* (London: HarperCollins, 2008)
—*Tudors: The Family Story* (London: 2013)
Llewelyn-Jones, Lloyd, *The Cleopatras, the Forgotten Queens of Egypt* (London: Wildfire, 2024)
Lister, Kate, *A Curious History of Sex* (London: Transworld, 2024)
Lloyd, J. A. 'Memoir on Madagascar', *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London* 20 (1850), pp. 53–75.
Loades, David, *Censorship and the English Reformation* (London: Bloomsbury, 1991)
—*Elizabeth I: The Golden Reign of Gloriana* (London: Bloomsbury, 2003)
Loos, Tamara, 'Sex in the Inner City: the Fidelity between Sex and Politics in Siam', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 64 (2005), pp. 870–85.
Lovell, Julia, *The Opium Wars: Drugs, Dreams and the Making of Modern China* (London: Abrams, 2014)
Lovell, Mary, *Bess of Hardwick: First Lady of Chatsworth* (London: Macmillan, 2005)
Lownie, Andrew, *Entitled: The Rise and Fall of the House of York* (London: Harper Collins, 2025)
—*Traitor King: The Scandalous Exile of the Duke and Duchess of Windsor* (London: Harper Collins, 2021)
Loxton, Alice, *Eighteen* (London: Macmillan, 2022)
—*Eleanor: A 200-mile walk in Search of England's Lost Queen* (London: Macmillan, 2025)
McCaskie, T. C., 'The Life and Afterlife of Yaa Asantewaa', *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 77 (2007), pp. 151-179
MacCulloch, Diarmid, *A History of Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2009)
—*Reformation: House Divided, 1490-1700* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2003)
MacKay, Angus, *Spain in the Middle Ages: From Frontier to Empire, 1000-1500* (London; Macmillan, 1977)
Mackay, Duncan, *Echolands: A Journey In Search of Boudica* (London: Hodder, 2024)
MacKay, Lauren, *Among the Wolves of Court: The Untold Story of Thomas and George Boleyn* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021)
McKenzie, J, *The Architecture of Alexandria and Egypt, c. 300 B.C. to A.D. 700* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007)
Matić, Uroš, '(De)queering Hatshepsut: Binary Bind in Archaeology of Egypt and Kingship Beyond the Corporeal', *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory* 23 (2016), pp. 810–831.
Montserrat, Dominic, *Sex and Society in Graeco-Roman Egypt* (London: Kegan Paul, 1996)
Montefiore, Simon Sebag, *Catherine and Potemkin: Power, Love and the Russian Empire* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2010)
—*The World* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2020)
Morton, Andrew, *Diana: Her True Story – In Her Own Words* (London: Michael O'Mara Books, 1998)
Morris, Marc, *The Anglo-Saxons: A History of the Beginnings of England* (London: Random House, 2021)
Mosse, Kate, *Feminist History for Every Day of the Year* (London: Macmillan, 2025)
—*Warrior Queens and Quiet Revolutionaries: How Women (Also) Built the World* (London: Macmillan, 2022)
Naville, Édouard, *The Temple of Deir-el-Bahiri: its plan, its founders and its first explorers* (London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1894)

Nolhac, Pierre de, *The Trianon of Marie Antoinette* (Paris, Editions: 1925)
Norton, Elizabeth, *Anne of Cleves: Henry VIII's Discarded Bride* (Stroud: Amberley Publishing, 2010)
—*England's Queens: The Biography* (Stroud: Amberley Publishing, 2011)
Nunn, John Francis, *Ancient Egyptian Medicine* (London: British Museum Press, 1996)
Olusoga, David, *Black and British: A Forgotten History* (London: Picador, 2016)
Otele, Olivette, *African Europeans: The Untold Story* (London: Basic Books, 2022)
Oyěwùmí, Oyèrónké, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997)
Penn, Thomas, *The Winter King: The Dawn of Tudor England* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2012)
Pepera, Luke, *Motherland: A Journey through African History Culture and Identity* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2025)
Pinch, Geraldine, *Magic in Ancient Egypt* (London: British Museum Press, 1994)
—*Votive Offerings to Hathor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993)
Plunkett, John, *Queen Victoria: First Media Monarch* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003)
Podany, Amanda, *Weavers, Scribes and Kings: A New History of the Ancient Near East* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2025)
Porter, Linda, *Crown of Thistles, the Fatal Inheritance of Mary, Queen of Scots* (London: St Martins, 2013)
—*Katherine the Queen: The Remarkable Life of Katherine Parr* (London: St Martins Press, 2010)
—*Mary Tudor: The First Queen* (London: Little Brown, 2007)
—*The Thistle and the Rose* (London: Little Brown, 2023)
Prawdin, Michael, *The Mad Queen of Spain* (New York: Harper, 1939)
Prescott, W. H., *History of the Reign of Ferdinand and Isabella: the Catholic, of Spain* (London: Fisher, 1854)
Price, Campbell, and Thorne, Julia, *Golden Mummies of Egypt: Interpreting Identities from the Graeco-Roman Period* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2023)
Price N., Hedenstierna-Jonson C., Zachrisson T., et al. Viking warrior women? Reassessing Birka chamber grave Bj.581. *Antiquity*. 2019 (367), 181-198.
Quirke, Stephen, *Who Were the Pharoahs? A History of their Names with a List of their Cartouches* (London: British Museum Press, 1990)
Ramirez, Janina, *Femina: A New History of Medieval Britain* (London: Allen, 2021)
Rediker, Marcus, *The Slave Ship: A Human History* (London: Viking, 2007)
Rideal, Rebecca, *1666: Plague, War and Hellfire* (London: John Murray, 2016)
Roberts, Alice, *Domination* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2026)
Roberts, Andrew, *George III: The Life and Times of Britain's Most Misunderstood Monarch* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2022)
Robins, Gay, *Women in Ancient Egypt* (Cambridge: Havard University Press, 1993)
—'The Names of Hatshepsut as King', *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, 85 (1999), pp. 103-112.
Robinson, Jeffrey, *Grace of Monaco: The True Story* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2015)
Roehrig, Catherine H. et al, ed. *Hatshepsut: From Queen to Pharoah* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2005)
Roller, Duane W., *Cleopatra's Daughter and Other Royal Women of the Augustan Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007)
Rounding, Virginia, *Catherine the Great: Love, Sex and Power* (London: Random House, 2006)
Rubenhold, Hallie, *The Five* (London: Transworld, 2021)
Rubin, Nancy, *Isabella of Castile: The First Renaissance Queen* (Lincoln, Nebraska: ASJA Press, 2004)

Russell, Gareth, *The Palace: From the Tudors to the Windsors, 500 years of British History at Hampton Court* (London: HarperCollins, 2023)
—*Queen James: A New History About the Life and Loves of Britain's First King, James Stuart* (London: HarperCollins, 2025)
—*Young, Damned and Fair: The Life and Tragedy of Catherine Howard at the Court of Henry VIII* (London: HarperCollins, 2019)
Sanghera, Sathnam, *Empireland: How Imperialism has shaped Modern Britain* (London: Viking, 2021)
Schama, Simon, *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution* (London: Penguin, 2004)
—'The Domestication of Majesty: Royal Family Portraiture, 1500-1850', *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 17 (1986), pp. 155-183
Schiff, Stacy, *Cleopatra: A Life* (London: Little, Brown, 2010)
Schutte, Valerie and Jessica S. Hower, eds, *Writing Mary I: History, Historiography and Queenship* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2022)
Sebba, Anne, *That Woman: The Life of Wallis Simpson: Duchess of Windsor* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2012)
Shulman, Nicola, *Graven with Diamonds: The Many Lives of Thomas Wyatt: Courtier, Poet, Assassin, Spy* (London, 2011)
Skeat, T. C., 'The Last Days of Cleopatra: A Chronological Problem', *Journal of Roman Studies*, 43 (1953), pp. 98-100.
Southon, Emma, *Agrippina the Elder* (New Haven: Yale, 2024)
—*A History of the Roman Empire in 21 Women* (London: Oneworld, 2023)
Somerset, Anne, *Queen Anne: The Politics of Power* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2006)
Spada, James, *Grace: The Secret Lives of a Princess* (New York: Doubleday, 1985)
Spencer, Charles, *The White Ship: Conquest, Anarchy and the Wrecking of Henry's Dream* (London: HarperCollins, 2021)
—*A Very Private School* (London: Harper Collins, 2024)
—*Killers of the King: The Men who Dared Execute Charles I* (London: Harper Collins, 2014)
Spawforth, Tony, *Versailles: Biography of a Palace* (London: St Martin's Press, 2010)
Spoto, Donald, *High Society: The Life of Grace Kelly* (New York: Crown Publishing, 2009)
Stoeltje, Beverley, 'Asante Queen Mothers in Ghana', *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021)
Sullivan, Karen, *Eleanor of Aquitaine, as It Was Said: Truths and Tales about the Medieval Queen* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2023)
Tallis, Nicola, *Crown of Blood: The Deadly Inheritance of Lady Jane Grey* (London: Michael O'Mara, 2016)
—*Elizabeth's Rival: The Tumultuous Tale of Lettice Knollys, Countess of Leicester* (London: Michael O'Mara, 2017)
—*Uncrowned Queen: The Treacherous Life of Margaret Beaufort, Tudor Rebel* (London: Michael O'Mara, 2019)
—*Young Elizabeth: Princess, Prisoner, Queen* (London: Michael O'Mara, 2024)
Taraborrelli, J. Randy, *Jackie: Public, Private, Secret* (London: St Martin's Press, 2023)
—*Once Upon a Time: Behind the Fairytale Marriage of Grace Kelly and Prince Rainier* (London: Macmillan, 2003)
Taylor, J. H., *Death and the Afterlife in Ancient Egypt* (London: British Museum Press, 2001)
Thompson, Dorothy, *Queen Victoria: the Woman, the Monarchy and the People* (London: Virago, 1990)

Thurley, Simon, *Hampton Court: A Social and Architectural History* (London and New Haven: Paul Mellon, 2003)
—*Royal Palaces of Tudor England* (London and New Haven: Paul Mellon, 1993)
Tremlett, Giles, *Catherine of Aragon: Henry's Spanish Queen* (London: Walker, 2010)
—*Isabella of Castile: Europe's First Great Queen* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017)
Troy, Lana, *Patterns of Queenship in Ancient Egyptian Myth and History* (Uppsala: Uppsala University Press, 1986)
Tunzelmann, Alex von, *Fallen Idols: Twelve Statues that Made History* (London: Headline, 2021)
—*Indian Summer: The Secret History of the End of an Empire* (London: Headline, 2016)
Tyldsley, Joyce, *Cleopatra: Last Queen of Egypt* (London: Profile Books, 2008)
—*Hatshepsut: The Female Pharoah* (London: Viking, 1996)
—*Nefertiti: Unlocking the Mystery Surrounding Egypt's Most Famous and Beautiful Queen* (London: Viking, 1999)
Walker, Susan, 'Cleopatra in Pompeii', *Papers of the British School at Rome*, 76 (2008), pp. 35–46
Walker, Susan, and Ashton, Sally-Ann, *Cleopatra Reassessed: British Museum Occasional Papers* (London: British Museum Press, 2003)
Walker, Susan, and Higgs, Peter, *Cleopatra of Egypt: From History to Myth* (London: British Museum Press, 2001)
Warburton, David, *Architecture, Power and Religion: Hatshepsut, Amun and Karnak in Context*, (Vienna: Verlag, 2012)
Warnicke, Retha, *The Rise and Fall of Anne Boleyn* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998)
Watson, Barbara, *The Flaming Womb: Repositioning Women in Early Modern Southeast Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006)
Webb, Andy, Dianarama: *the Betrayal of Princess Diana* (Harrmondsworth: Penguin, 2025)
Weir, Alison, *Eleanor of Aquitaine: By the Wrath of God, Queen of England* (London; Jonathan Cape, 2013)
—*Elizabeth the Queen* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1988)
—*Elizabeth of York: A Tudor Queen and Her World* (London: Ballantine, 2000)
—*Henry VIII: King and Court* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2001)
—*Katherine Swynford: The Story of John of Gaunt and his Scandalous Duchess* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2008)
—*The Lady in the Tower: The Fall of Anne Boleyn* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2009)
—*Queens of the Age of Chivalry, Five Consorts in Turbulent Times* (London: Vintage, 2022)
—*Queens of the Crusades: Eleanor of Aquitaine and her successors* (London: Vintage, 2021)
—*Queens at War* (London: Vintage, 2025)
Weisburger, Barbara, *Isabel Rules: Constructing Queenship, Wielding Power* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000)
Whitelock, Anna, *Elizabeth's Bedfellows: An Intimate History of Elizabeth's Court* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012)
—*Mary Tudor: England's First Queen* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009)
Whitelock, Anna and Diarmid MacCulloch, 'Princess Mary's Household and the Succession Crisis, July 1553', *Historical Journal*, 50 (2007), pp. 265-87.
Wilkinson, R. H., *The Complete Temples of Ancient Egypt* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000)
Williams, Kate, *Becoming Queen* (London: Random House 2009)
—*Rival Queens* (London: Random House, 2018)
—*The Royal Palaces* (London: Frances Lincoln, 2024)
Wilson, A.N., *Victoria: A Life* (London: Atlantic Books, 2014)
Woodacre, Elena, *Joan of Navarre: Infanta, Duchess, Queen, Witch?* (London: Routledge, 2022)

Woodacre, Elena, and Fleiner, Carey, eds. *Virtuous or Villainess? The image of the Royal Mother from the Early Medieval to the Early Modern Eras* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2016)
Woodacre, Elena, Laynesmith, Joanna, et al, eds. *Later Plantagenet and the Wars of the Roses Consorts* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2023)
Worsley, Lucy, *Courtiers: The Secret History of the Georgian Court* (London: Faber & Faber, 2008)
—*Queen Victoria: Daughter, Wife, Mother, Widow* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2018)
Yalom, Marilyn, *Blood Sisters: The French Revolution in Women's Memory* (New York: Basic Books, 1993)
Zewde, Bahru, *History of Modern Ethiopia, 1855-1991: Updated and Revised Edition* (London: James Currey, 2011)
Zahran, Yasmine, *Zenobia Between Reality and Legend* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2003)

Index

A note about the index: The pages referenced in this index refer to the page numbers in the print edition. Clicking on a page number will take you to the ebook location that corresponds to the beginning of that page in the print edition. For a comprehensive list of locations of any word or phrase, use your reading system's search function.

Actium, battle of 63

Æthelflæd, king of England 113

Agrippina, Roman empress 89

Ahmose of Egypt 19, 20, 26

Albert, Prince 244, 245, 253

Alexander the Great 37

Alexandria 37, 39, 42, 43, 60, 62, 73

Al-Fayed, Dodi 360–61

Alfred the Great 113

Aminatu, queen of the Hausa States 178

Amun 11–12, 17

Angkor Wat 108, 110, 111

Anglo-Saxon England 113, 114

Anne of Cleves 177

Anne, queen of England 214

Antoinette, Marie

– childhood 218–19

– children 222, 227, 229

– clothes 220

– debt 217, 222–3, 227

– execution 218, 237, 238

– extravagance 216
– failed escape from Paris 231–3
– politics 228
– Princesse de Lamballe 221, 223, 230, 234–5
– scandal 224–6
– trial 236
Ashanti Empire 256–8
Aud the Deep-Minded 103–4
Auletes 40–41, 43
Aurelian 96–8

Bacall, Lauren 333
Bayeux Tapestry 114–15
Beaufort, Lady Margaret 137–9
beauty 18, 33, 45–6, 101, 117, 210, 230, 241, 320, 352
Bernard of Clairvaux 117
Boleyn, Anne
– alleged infidelity 167
– arrest 168–9
– birth date 154, 166
– birth of Elizabeth 161
– coronation 162
– execution 173–5
– first meeting with Henry VIII 147
– French court 155
– Henry Percy 156, 165
– Henry VIII's letters to 157–8
– marriage to Henry VIII 160–61
– portrait 141–2
– refusal to Henry VIII 156
– religious reform 159, 163, 164
– seductress 153–4, 165
– trial 170–72

Bothwell, Lord 204–5
Boudica, queen of the Iceni
– appearance 74
– as emblem of suffrage 87
– as embodiment of Britain 86
– battle speech 82, 84–5
– daughters 81, 86
– final battle 85
– flogged 81
– magic 75, 83
– rebel army 83–4

Caesar, Julius 31, 33, 47–50, 52–3, 55, 78
Caesarion 31–2, 52, 55, 61, 64, 69
Cambodia 108–111
Camulodunum 83
Caratacus 77, 88, 89
Cartimandua, queen of the Brigantes 88
Cassini, Oleg 325, 327, 331
Cassius Dio 35, 48, 75
Catherine of Aragon
– ambassador for Spain 145
– annulment of marriage 148, 150, 151
– bloodline 143
– character 152–3
– death 152, 163
– education 142
– marriage to Arthur 144, 150
– marriage to Henry VIII 146
– regent 146–7
Catherine of Valois 137, 139–40
Catherine the Great 239–40
Chapuys, Eustace 164, 167, 171, 172

Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor 134, 135, 148
Charles, Prince 346–7, 348, 355–6
childless queen 195, 202
China 104–6, 250–51
Christianity 91, 114, 124, 125, 263, 303
Christina, queen of Sweden 214–15
civil service 19, 106–7, 122, 124, 128
Cixi, empress of China 250–51

Claudius 79, 89
Cleopatra
– adopting Egyptian traditions & language 45
– appearance 33–5, 45–6
– as co-ruler 41, 40
– as enemy of Rome 62
– as goddess 52, 61
– as Isis 45, 61
– birth 37
– burial 70
– Caesar's death 55
– children as heirs to Rome 61–3
– crowning 43
– deposed 46
– education 39
– indebted to Rome 41
– Mark Antony 56–61
– Mark Antony's death 64–5
– meeting with Caesar 47–50
– Octavian's invasion of Egypt 64–6
– pregnancy 51, 55, 58, 60
– Roman sources on 35–6
– royal image 31, 44
– sacred bull 44

– sex goddess 1–2, 34, 68
– Shakespeare on 35
– suicide 66–8
– talent with languages 41
– visit to Rome 53
Cleopatra Selene 70–71
Cleveland, Grover 278, 288, 310
concubine 37, 104, 106–7, 153, 165
Constantinople 100–101
constitutional monarchy 246, 255, 269, 315–16
Cranmer, Thomas 151, 173, 177
Cromwell, Thomas 151, 163, 164–7

Dendera, temple of 32, 55, 71
Diana, princess
– Andrew Morton book 354
– Bashir interview 357
– charity work 353, 355, 358
– childhood 345–6
– children 353
– death 361–2
– divorce 357
– eating disorder 353
– engagement to Charles 349–50
– image 341, 344, 350, 354, 358
– met Prince Charles 348
– relationship with Dodi 360–1
– sacrifice 344–5
– separation from Charles 355
– Tony Blair 359, 361
– upstaging Charles 352
– wedding 342, 350–2
– funeral 362

Dudley, John 182, 185

Edward I 120
Edward IV, king of England 138
Edward VI 180–81, 183
Edward the Confessor 115
Egypt 9, 12–14, 18, 27, 37–8, 55, 69, 71
– economy 42, 51, 59, 69–70
– female gods 43
– female rule 41–3
– Octavian's invasion 64–6
– relationship with Rome 33–4, 38, 40, 47, 50, 56, 61
– vast wealth 69, 73
Eleanor of Aquitaine 117–19
Elizabeth I
– armada 208–9
– heir 210
– imagery 207–8
– imprisoned by Mary 197
– jewels 210–11
– Mary Queen of Scots 206–7
– queen of England 181
– Virgin Queen 209
Elizabeth II
– coronation 314, 316, 366
– threat of nuclear war 317–18
– service 315, 366
– television 316–17, 318–19
Elizabeth of Bohemia 211–12
Elizabeth of York 139
Elizabeth, empress of Russia 240
Emma of Normandy 115
Ethiopia 254–5

Ferdinand, king of Aragon 127, 131, 133–4
First World War 312–13
Forbes Benetta, Sarah 247–8
Foxe, John 192
France 117–18, 120, 155, 157, 203, 213, 219–221, 239, 309
French Polynesia 293–95

Genmei, empress of Japan 107–8
Geoffrey of Anjou 115, 118
Grey, Lady Jane
– arrest 186–7
– crowned 184
– execution 189–90
– husband 184
– named queen 183–84
– portrait 180
– trial 188

Hatshepsut of Egypt
– achievements 29
– association with Amun 11, 16–18, 20, 25, 26, 52
– birth story 11–12
– commissioning buildings 20–21, 25
– death 28
– declared full ruler 21
– erased from history 4, 9–10, 29
– expedition to Punt 26–7
– high priestess 17–18
– male imagery 22–4, 28
– relationship with priest class 19, 20, 21
– Senenmut 10, 21
– storyteller 13
Hawaii 259–65, 268–70, 273–4, 276–9, 289

Henry I 115

Henry II 117–18
Henry VII 138–9, 144, 145, 146
Henry VIII 140, 146, 149, 151, 157, 162, 163, 181
Himiko, empress of Japan 107–108
Historia Augusta 93, 98
Hitchcock, Alfred 324, 325–6
Holy Roman Empire 113, 164, 214, 235
Howard, Catherine 177
Hypatia 73

Iceni 77, 79–80
India 122, 248, 252–3, 354
Isabella of Castille
– Catholicism 129
– colonies 129–130
– death 130
– jewels 127
– marriage 127
– reforms 128
– succession 130
Isis 14, 32, 43–5

Japan 107–8, 356–7, 363–4
Jayadevi, Khmer queen 109, 111
Jayendrabha, queen of Sambhupura 109
Joan, Princess of France 120–21
Joanna, queen of Spain 123, 126
– death 136
– declared unfit to rule 131–32
– heir to Castille 130
– Henry VII 146

– husband 131–33
– imprisoned 134–6
– threat of civil war 134
Julia Aquilia Severa 90–91
Jyestha, queen of Sambhupura 109–110

Kalakaua, king of Hawaii 270–72, 273–74
Karnak 4, 10, 16–19, 25
Kelly, Grace
– affairs 324–6
– charity work 335, 339
– children 335, 339
– death 339
– dowry 332
– fertility test 332
– Alfred Hitchcock 324, 325–6, 338
– image 320–21
– movie career 323–8, 333, 338
– Princess Diana 340–41
– wedding 319–320, 322, 334
– women's vote 337
– Prince Rainier 319–320, 330–31
Khadijah, queen of the Maldives 121–22
Khmer Empire 109–111
Kubaba of Mesopotamia 14
Kulaprabhavati, Khmer queen 109

Laborde, Jean 302, 306–07
Lamballe, Princesse de 221, 223, 230, 234–5
Lambert, Jean 306–07
Lili'uokalani, queen of Hawaii
– abdication 281, 287
– arrest 277–8, 280

– birth 261
– death 292
– deposed 279
– husband 267, 276
– jewels 261–2
– journals 265, 272, 280–81, 291
– made queen 275
– memoir 289–91, 292
– music 259, 268, 284–5
– new constitution 276–7, 282–3
– Queen Victoria 272–73
– quilt 259, 281, 285–6
– regent 270–71, 273
– schooling 265–6
– trial 282–3
– visit to America 287–9
– named heir 269
London 79, 83–4, 113, 116, 186, 193, 272, 346
Louis IX 117
Louis XIV 213
Luxor 11, 19, 24

Madagascar 299, 311
Maldives, the 121–22
male imagery 16, 22–4, 122, 123, 212, 215
Mamochisane, queen of the Makololo people 243
Margaret Tudor 147
Margaret, Princess 315, 347
Margeret of Anjou 138, 139
Mark Antony 33, 40–41, 55–6, 63–5
Mary I, queen of England 153, 161, 184–5
– 'Bloody Mary' 191–2, 203
– crowned 194

– death 202
– declared queen 186, 193
– Lady Jane Grey 187–8
– marriage 195–6, 198
– pregnancy 199, 201
– relationship with Elizabeth 200, 202
– religious reforms 194
– Thomas Wyatt 192–3
– war with France 201
Mary, Queen of Scots 124, 203–207, 211
Masako, princess of Japan 356–7
Matilda, Empress 115–17
Maya, the 111–112
Meghan, Duchess of Sussex 363
Melbourne, Lord 246
Merneith, queen of Egypt 15
Mesopotamia 14, 96, 104
Monaco 320–322, 336–7
Monroe, Marilyn 329
Morton, Andrew 342, 344, 354

Neferure of Egypt 20, 21, 27
Norris, Henry 167–8
Nzinga, queen of Ngondo 212–13

Octavian 55–6, 60, 62–7, 69–70
Odaenathus, king of Palmyra 94–5
Onassis, Aristotle 329, 338
Orompto, queen of Oyo Empire 123
Otto II, Holy Roman Emperor 113
Owain Glyndwr, prince of Wales 118

Palenque 111–12

Palmyrene Empire 92–5
Parker Bowles, Camilla 347, 350, 353, 356
Parr, Catherine 178, 181–2
Petra 91–2
Philip II, king of Spain 195–6, 198, 200
Philip IV, king of France 120
Plutarch 35, 36, 41, 48, 67, 77
Pompey 47, 50
Pothinus 46, 50
Prasutagus, king of Iceni 78, 80–81
primogeniture, male 316
Ptolemy XIII 46, 50, 51

queen consort 5, 12, 14, 42, 85, 104–105, 107, 125, 139, 142–3, 153, 175–6, 216, 240, 340, 365
queen regnant 5, 42, 60, 92, 108, 120, 125, 126, 139, 186, 193, 258, 365

Rainier, Prince of Monaco 319, 322, 328–31, 332, 336–7
Ranavalona I
– British/French invasion 305
– death 307
– death toll during reign 301–302
– Madagascan independence 301
– named queen 300–305
– Queen Victoria 305–306
– relationship with Europeans 301, 302–303
– slavery 301
– son 301, 306, 307
Ranavalona II 309
Ranavalona III 309
– exile 311–12
– house arrest 311
– treaty with France 310
Rasoherina of Madagascar 307–8

revolution, French 217–18, 229
Roman client queens 77, 93
Roman conquest of Britain 78–9
Roman Empire 60, 73, 77, 89, 90, 94, 100
Rome 34, 40, 41, 47, 52–4, 60, 62–3, 69–70
Rudrama Devi, queen of the Kakatiya dynasty 122

Salic Law 120–21, 124
Seondeok, queen of Korea 108
Seymour, Jane 176
Seymour, Thomas 181–82
Shotoku, empress of Japan 108
Sobekneferu, queen of Egypt 15–16
suicide 34, 40, 63, 68, 96, 255, 342, 354
Suiko, empress of Japan 107

Tacitus 75, 81, 89
Thebes (Luxor) 11, 19, 24
Theodora, empress of the Eastern Roman Empire 100–101
Theophanu, regent Holy Roman Empire 113
Thurston, Lorrin 277–8, 291
Thutmose II 20–21
Thutmose III 4, 10, 24, 28–9
Tour de Nesle affair 120

United States 276, 278, 287, 292, 310

Vaballathus of Palmyra 95–7, 98
vanity 10, 45, 117, 127, 210, 216, 230, 241, 320, 344, 403
Vestal Virgins 90–91
Victoria I
– children 251
– assassination attempt 255
– death of Prince Albert 253–54

– empire 253, 256, 258
– godparent 247, 248–50
– image 242, 244–5, 254
– marriage 244
– war with China 250–51
– women's suffrage 246, 258
Vikings 103, 113

warrior queen 75, 76, 99, 102, 104, 114, 138, 186, 192, 202
weakness 63, 74, 109, 117, 194, 202, 245, 293, 295, 298
witchcraft 62, 164, 175, 211, 213
Wu Zetian, empress of China 104–6
Wyatt, Thomas 188, 192, 196–7

Yohl Ik'nal, queen of Palenque 111–12

Zenobia of Palmyra 36, 92–3
– as Roman empress 97
– birth 92
– captured 98
– coinage 97
– conquest of Egypt 96
– education 93
– marriage to Roman senator 99
– regent 95

REGINA

Pegasus Books, Ltd.
148 West 37th Street, 12th Floor
New York, NY 10018

Copyright © 2026 by Kate Williams

First Pegasus Books cloth edition October 2026

Jacket design: Faceout Studio, Kate Gendruschke
Cover imagery: Bridgeman Images

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in whole or in part without written permission from the publisher, except by reviewers who may quote brief excerpts in connection with a review in a newspaper, magazine, or electronic publication; nor may any part of this book be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or other, or used to train generative artificial intelligence (AI) technologies, without written permission from the publisher.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available.

Hardcover ISBN: 979-8-89710-204-4
Ebook ISBN: 979-8-89710-205-1

Distributed by Simon & Schuster

www.pegasusbooks.com