

## Breakfast with Lucy & Henry

Lucy enjoyed her leisurely breakfasts with Henry ever since he had retired last summer. She looked across to him as she was buttering another slice of toast.

"Anything interesting in the paper, dear?" she asked.

"I was just reading, Luce, about those bones they dug up in that car park near Leicester," he replied.

"What, the ones that turned out to be the Pretender, Henry Tudor?"

"Yes, those - it seems they're now arguing about where they should be reburied," he replied.

"Why?" Lucy asked. "I thought they'd just bury him in the cathedral graveyard, if the university weren't going to keep him. After all, he wasn't really royalty."

"No," said Henry. "He was from minor nobility from Penmynydd in Anglesey. I think he based his claim on his mother's side, but even that was tenuous."

"So," asked Lucy, "what's the problem about his bones?"

"It seems," replied Henry, "that St David's in Pembrokeshire are claiming he should be buried there because he was born in Pembroke castle."

"They can have him, for all I care," said Lucy, eating her toast.

"I don't know," said Henry. "It might encourage the Welsh separatists. It was Leicester University that found his bones, so he may as well stay there."

"I wonder," said Lucy, as she put more bread into the toaster. "Do you think he was really such an avaricious monster as Shakespeare made out?"

"Who knows?" said Henry. "I guess there's a bit of Plantagenet bias in the play."

They were silent a bit, as Lucy got another pot of marmalade from the kitchen and Henry looked for the crossword in his newspaper.

"I wonder," she said, when she came back, "what do you think would have happened if he'd defeated Richard?"

"We'd probably all be speaking Welsh now," muttered Henry. "Fortunately the Plantagenets held on, though Richard's reign continued to be dogged with problems."

"Yes," said Lucy. "He wasn't lucky in marriage was he? A widower at the time of the Battle of Bosworth Field, with no legitimate heir - and no heirs from his next marriage either."

"Yes, Bosworth Field," said Henry, with half his mind on the crossword and half listening to Lucy. "Pretty near thing, you know. I mean, Richard's forces outnumbered the Pretender's by two to one and expected to win easily; but it wasn't easy. In the end it could have gone the Pretender's way. I think the slaughter that day brought England to its senses."

"What do you mean?" said Lucy.

"Well, the country had been badly weakened," replied Henry, "by the Black Death in the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century; and the Hundred Years War, continuing into the middle of 15<sup>th</sup> century, caused further social unrest and financial troubles. As if that weren't enough, when the disinherited Henry Bolingbroke invaded England and had himself crowned as Henry IV, it broke the old principles of Plantagenet succession. From then on it showed that anyone powerful enough with some claim to Plantagenet blood could fight for the crown - hence the fighting between the two cadet lines of Lancaster and York."

"I see," said Lucy, "and the slaughter at Bosworth was the last straw."

"Exactly," said Henry. "Both finances and morale were weak and there was no stomach for more internecine war. Besides, both Magna Carta and de Montford's Parliament had clipped the Plantagenet wings and attempted to exercise some control over the monarch. So it was no surprise that Parliament was able to step in and choose the next monarch when Richard died."

"Jolly good thing too," added Lucy, finishing off her toast and marmalade. "Elected monarchs are much better. Look at the results of all the inbreeding among the hereditary royal families over in Europe before Napoleon got rid of most of them. I must say, our House of Electors and House of Commons have served us well."

"Also," added Henry, who was always happy to exercise his knowledge of history, "over the following century Councils were established for Wales and for Ireland on the model of the existing Council of the North."

"What about the Council of the South?" asked Lucy.

"Oh, that came almost two and a half centuries later when it was thought better that Parliament should be truly federal and not also be acting like a council of southern England as well."

"Oh," said Lucy. "Well, at any rate the Federal Dominion of England, Ireland and Wales has generally held together well."

"Yes," said Henry, as he filled in another answer in his crossword. "Probably the Scots had something to do with that."

"Oh them," said Lucy, "a troublesome lot - and those dreadful Stuarts, trying to be absolute monarchs like the French ones, and seeming to upset their subjects whatever they did. Thank goodness we had no monarchs like them!"

"No, indeed," muttered Henry, as he filled in another answer.

"But what did you mean," asked Lucy, "by saying the Scots probably helped the Federal Dominion keep together?"

"Well," said Henry, looking up again, "the English had had centuries of quarrelling with the Scots and were always suspicious of the intentions of them and their kings; and the Irish were worried the Lowlanders and the Gaels would export their religious conflicts to them, so they were happy to make common cause with England."

"Yes," said Lucy, "the Scots were a quarrelsome lot. But what caused their religious conflicts?"

"The Lowlanders," replied Henry, "took to Calvinism, and the Gaels reacted either by clinging on more ardently to their Catholicism or by embracing a far more radical Calvinism than the Lowlanders; and the three factions all tried to embroil their Irish neighbours in their quarrels."

"I'm glad we didn't have all that infighting in England," said Lucy.

"Yes indeed," said Henry. "The north was always staunchly Catholic, and the south west pretty much so as well. I guess the innate conservatism of the south east meant people there were not keen to embrace change either."

"But," said Lucy, "wasn't there some trouble over in East Anglia and down in Kent with Lutheranism, or was it Calvinism?"

"Calvinism," answered Henry, "Lutheranism never made much impact here. Yes, it is true there were Calvinist movements in Kent; but in East Anglia it was mainly confined to Essex; Norfolk and Suffolk largely remained Catholic. On the whole, however, we learnt to avoid excessive conflict. After all, our country offered shelter both to the Calvinist French Huguenots and to French Catholics

who fled the terrors of the Revolution.”

“Yes, that's true,” said Lucy. “And the only way the Scots resolved their conflicts was by having a revolution in the French style, with all the blood-letting that involved!”

“Yes,” said Henry, “and their republic has had its ups and downs ever since. It's been a bumpy ride for them. Now we've got that Alex Salmond and his Scottish Federalists going to hold a referendum about applying for union with our Federal Dominion.”

“I know,” said Lucy. “Not sure I want that quarrelsome lot to join us, though. They're sure to be a drain on our resources.”

“We shall see,” muttered Henry, turning to his crossword again.

“And,” said Lucy, “I suppose they'll expect their white saltire to be added somehow to the red saltire of St Patrick on the Federal Flag.”

“Of course,” grunted Henry.

“And,” added Lucy, “They're be wanting their bits of blue stuck in there as well. I like our red, white, yellow and black just the way it is. They'll make it look ghastly!”

“Probably,” muttered Henry, not really listening.

“Henry, you're not listening!” said Lucy loudly.

“Eh, what?” said Henry. “Sorry, Luce - the crossword, you know.”

“OK,” said Lucy. “In any case, it's time the breakfast was cleared away. You know, Henry, you need to get out more. With all your knowledge of history, why don't you join the local History Society?”

“I might do that,” said Henry. “By the way, how's your creative writing group going? The Voles, isn't it?”

“Moles, actually,” Lucy replied. “They're fine, and that newspaper article you found has given me an idea for this month.”

“Has it?” asked Henry.

“Yes,” said Lucy. “We have to write a counter-factual story. I think I'll do one on what might have happened if the Henry Tudor had defeated Richard at Bosworth.”

“Probably have been an arrogant ruler,” said Henry, “centralizing royal power and clipping the wings of the fledgeling parliament. I bet he wouldn't have been happy with the Council of the North either.”

“Now Henry,” said Lucy, “don't go doing it for me. Let me do my own story.”

“All right, Luce” said Henry, adding with a chuckle: “But you'd better brush up your Welsh.”

“Oh, you're impossible!, “ said Lucy with a laugh as she took the breakfast things out to the kitchen, leaving Henry to get on with his crossword in peace.