

## Tom's Implausible Book

"Well," said Tom, as he closed the book he had been reading. "What a load of nonsense!"

"What's that, dear?" said his wife, Penny, looking up from her book.

"That book Cyril gave me for Christmas, love," replied Tom. "I've just finished it. I've never read so much nonsense in my life."

"Oh," said Penny, "it got some good reviews. Was it really that bad?"

"It's well enough written, I suppose," replied Tom. "In fact the guy clearly knows how to tell a story. It's the writing that saves it. But the story itself is stupid."

"What's it about, dear?" asked Penny.

"It's a counterfactual history," replied Tom. "The author has Henry VII's heir, Arthur, Prince of Wales, die from the disease he and princess Catherine contracted in March 1502, and his younger brother, Henry, Duke of York, eventually becomes King of England."

"Well," said Penny, "it could've happened, I suppose. You usually like counterfactual histories."

"I like them if they're *plausible*," said Tom. "But this one's ridiculous. He has Henry marrying *six* times! I mean two, maybe three, wives might be plausible. But six of them – Is that likely!"

"It does seem a bit over the top," agreed Penny. "Was he so unlucky that they kept dying on him?"

"Most of them didn't," replied Tom. "The author has only his third wife dying on him as a result of infection, following a difficult childbirth."

"Only too possible," observed Penny. "But what about the others? If they didn't die, what happened? The Church would not sanction divorce. Surely he couldn't have had all the other marriages annulled. That's not likely, is it?"

"Well," said Tom, "the author does allow his last wife to outlive him, but he has the marriages to the other four wives *all* annulled."

"Ridiculous!" interjected Penny.

"That's not all," Tom went on. "To stretch our credibility further, he has the king also having his second and his fifth wives beheaded after their marriages had been annulled!"

"Why annul *and* behead?" asked Penny. "That's pointless. He makes your king seem a vicious swine. But does he really have the Church going along with all *four* annulments?"

"Well, that's another unlikely bit," said Tom. "The author has Rome refusing to annul his first marriage which, by the way, was to his brother Arthur's widow after special dispensation from Rome. So guess what he had the king doing?"

"Following Luther, I guess," replied Penny. "Desacramentalizing marriage and making it a civil institution."

"Nothing as obvious and simple as that," said Tom. "He has Henry still regarding marriage as a sacrament but has him forming his own English church and making himself its head!"

"What!" exclaimed Penny. "A king making himself head of his own church? I've never heard of such a thing! I'm glad none of our monarchs were so presumptuous."

"Quite so," agreed Tom, "and his church seemed to retain many Catholic teachings with some bits of Lutheranism – not one thing or tother, if you ask me."

I don't think the author thought it through. But having Henry head of his own church means, of course, he can have Henry making sure all those marriages are annulled."

His wife laughed. "It sounds very far fetched," she said. "I suppose you'll be telling me he also has Henry executing Lutherans as well as Catholics who didn't go along with his mongrel church."

"Quite right," said Tom, "he does. I told you the whole story is ridiculous."

"And," asked Penny, "why all those annulments? If it was lust, Henry could have taken mistresses as other monarchs did. It doesn't make sense to me."

"The author allows him mistresses, all right," laughed Tom, "but has him having trouble getting his wives to produce a legitimate male heir."

"Good grief," said Penny. "Good thing Arthur didn't die. In the real world, Catherine gave him a male heir and another son to spare, as well as the princess Mary. It doesn't sound as though the author thought much of Henry. It certainly doesn't seem he would have been a very nice man."

"No, indeed," said Tom. "The author makes him out to be even more paranoid and bloodthirsty than his father had been."

"Yes, Henry VII," mused Penny. "No, he wasn't particularly nice, was he? But at least he had only one wife. Thank goodness Arthur succeeded him."

"Yes," agreed Tom "Arthur was a breath of fresh air after the tyranny of the latter part of his father's reign."

"Nor was he still stuck in the Middle Ages," said Penny, "like Henry was here with his love of jousting. It was a jousting injury that eventually caused Henry's death, I seem to recall."

"Yes, it was," replied Tom, "- a leg injury he got in 1536. It never properly healed and it turned septic; he died within the year. But Arthur was an enlightened monarch; he brought England firmly out of the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance. He was a friend of Renaissance humanists like Erasmus of Rotterdam and our own Thomas Moore - Thomas, by the way, was one of the Catholics the author has his king Henry execute."

"Huh," interjected Penny. "A good thing for Thomas More that he lived in our real world and not in your author's fictitious one."

"A good thing for all of us, I think," said Tom. "I dread to think how things would have worked out after the death of *that* Henry VIII. Pretty bloody, I expect. Fortunately, we had Arthur I."

"In fact," said Penny, "the three Arthurs seemed to have been generally good monarchs. The marriage in - er, 1560 something, wasn't it? - of the future Arthur III to the newly widowed Mary, Queen of Scots, brought the crowns of England and Scotland together."

"1561- Yes, it did," agreed Tom, "and it was an astute move to have Arthur and Mary both reign as *joint monarchs* of the United Kingdom of Great Britain."

"Wasn't there some argument, however," asked Penny, "whether Arthur should be styled 'Arthur III' or 'Arthur I of Great Britain'?"

"Yes, there was," said Tom. "In the end they decided they should take the higher number in the English or Scottish lines. That's why Arthur and Mary's daughter reigned as Queen Margaret II, even though there had been no reigning queen called Margaret in England before; but Scotland had had a Queen Margaret in 1286."

"Queen Margaret II," mused Penny, "- good Queen Meg. Yes, she was a feisty woman, but a very fair queen, I think."

"I think so too," agreed Tom. "The joint monarchy has worked well, with the heir to the throne being Prince (or Princess) of Wales, holding court at Ludlow, or Llwydlo as the Welsh call it. It not only means that Wales has remained a principality within the joint monarchy, but it has also meant that the heir to the throne has had a proper role, which prepares him or her for being monarch."

"Yes, indeed," said Penny. "Otherwise we might have had the situation where the heir has no responsibility and either hangs around idly, probably annoying other people, or gets into all sorts of trouble. What happens in your book?"

"It's not clear," said Tom. "The author has Henry abolish Wales as a separate entity, incorporating it into England; so presumably he no longer thought of Wales as a principality. He didn't give his son the title of Prince of Wales. But the son was, it seems, only nine years old when Henry is supposed to have died."

"Oh, well," said Penny, "we needn't worry about that fictitious world. It sounds a right mess."

"It certainly was!" said Tom emphatically, "and it's all so implausible. I don't think I'll be reading any more of that bloke's books. I'm glad we're living in the real world and not in his."

"Yes," agreed Penny. "Our united monarchy has served us very well. It's a pity that nearly five centuries later the Scottish Nationalists want to separate the two kingdoms once more."

"Not only a pity," said Tom, "but barmy, if you ask me. They say they will keep our King Harold as their king also. But if both nations have the same king, what is the point of separating the kingdoms, especially as Scotland is virtually self-governing as far internal affairs are concerned? Let's hope the Scottish people have more sense."

"Well," said Penny, "at least the Welsh seem quite happy with their semi-autonomous principality and, indeed, seem somewhat proud that it is *their* prince or princess who becomes the monarch of Great Britain."

"Yes," said Tom. "Arthur and Catherine must have liked their time at Ludlow, since Arthur confirmed it as the capital of the Principality; and it was an astute move of his to make the Prince of Wales an hereditary title, with real responsibilities."

"It was, indeed," agreed Penny. "After the dubious start under Henry VII, the Tudors proved to be enlightened and their settlement of the nations of Great Britain has stood the test of time."

"That's true," said Tom, "unlike the paranoid and dysfunctional Tudors in my book. But enough of all that. What about the book you're reading, love?"

"It's a whodunit," replied Penny. "'Murder in the Cotswolds.'"

"Any good?" asked Tom.

"Um, yes," said Penny, "a complicated plot as whodunits usually are – but quite gripping. Yes, I'm enjoying this. It sounds a lot better than your book."

"That's not difficult," replied Tom. "I'll leave you to your reading, while I go and make us a cuppa each."

"Umm, yes," murmured Penny, as she turned back to her book. "That'll be nice, dear."