

Margaret and Mary Tudor's Trouble with Love

Rebecca A. Schwartz

College of Arts and Behavioral Sciences

Nominated by Robert C. Braddock, Professor of History



Rebecca Schwartz, a senior at SVSU, is finishing her degree in Secondary Education. She has a double major in English education and History education, along with the Social Studies endorsement. Rebecca looks forward to having her own classroom and working to teach her students that history is more than just memorizing facts and dates. Rebecca also hopes to encourage and inspire her students into doing more reading and writing.

Henry VIII's trouble with love has captivated the attention and imagination of scholars for decades. Much has been written not only about Henry VIII and his six wives, but about the difficulty with marriage many of rulers of the Tudor dynasty experienced. Despite the multitude of research on the Tudors' troubles with love, two of its members have remained relatively overlooked by scholars. Like their famous brother, the Tudor sisters also had troubles with love and marriage, especially in their choices for their second spouses. Like all princesses, Margaret and Mary Tudor's first marriages were arranged marriages and their husbands were chosen strictly for political reasons. After the deaths of their first husbands, the Tudor sisters would do something remarkable and choose their own second husbands. Much like Henry VIII's choice in Anne Boleyn for a second wife, Margaret and Mary Tudor's choices would lead to very tumultuous periods of their lives and put a strain on their families. Margaret's second marriage would cost her a crown and her kingdom; Mary's would result in her almost losing Henry VIII's favor and doom her to a period of financial hardship.

This interesting theme of complicated second marriages in the Tudor family has been largely overshadowed by the religious conflicts that enveloped much of the Tudor dynasty; however, Margaret and Mary Tudor's lives and marriages need to be more deeply examined by scholars in order to fully understand this generation of Tudor government. These second marriages are historically important, because from these marriages, the line of Tudor succession after Henry VIII becomes further complicated. Margaret's granddaughter was Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots, and Mary's granddaughter was Lady Jane Grey, the Nine Days' Queen. This paper will examine the Tudor sisters' second marriages in detail, showing that like Henry VIII, Margaret and Mary also had trouble with love. Margaret and Mary Tudor's choices in spouses for their second marriages would have grave consequences, not only for themselves and their own happiness, but for the Tudor family as well.

Margaret, Queen of Scotland

Margaret Tudor, born in 1489, was the second child of Henry VII and Elizabeth of York. Named after her grandmother Lady Margaret Beaufort, Margaret would prove to be a valuable asset to Henry VII's work to create stability and peace on the English throne after the turbulent War of the Roses. From 1495, when Margaret was just six years old, Henry VIII had been working on marrying her to James IV of Scotland, with the hope that their

marriage would create a peace between England and Scotland.¹ In July of 1503, the 13-year-old Margaret left England for Scotland to meet her 30-year-old husband. Margaret and James would have two children together before he, along with 10,000 Scots, died facing the English army at the Battle of Flodden on September 9, 1513.² Their one-year-old son, James V, was crowned on September 21, 1514, at Stirling, and James IV's will made Margaret regent over their son.³

To some extent, Margaret had to have been aware of her complicated situation as a regent and widowed Queen, especially in a country that disliked her and was divided over her regency. In the Scots' minds, Margaret was not only a woman trying to do a man's job, but she was also a foreigner and sister to the hated English king. In this context, Margaret's first major decision as regent would prove disastrous. After Flodden, a number of bishoprics were left unfilled and Margaret wrote to Pope Leo X with suggestions of men to fill those positions. Though James IV would have done the very same thing, because Margaret did so without consultation or approval from her council, she was seen as abusing her power.⁴

Margaret was now also of high interest to single men of means. Widowed Queens were the Holy Grail for available men, because in marrying a widowed Queen, men could potentially make a huge leap forward in social standing, power, and wealth. Margaret was likely terrified and feeling extremely vulnerable. After the retribution she faced over her letter to the Pope, Margaret might have also begun to feel that her regency was in jeopardy. Remarrying might help secure her place on the throne and make the Scottish nobles happy. However, Margaret's choice of Archibald Douglas, the 6th Earl of Angus, was perhaps the worst choice she could have made. When Margaret and Angus were married on August 14th, 1514, the nobles were furious.⁵ They immediately called John Stuart, Duke of Albany, a French nobleman who had a claim to the Scottish throne, to be regent in Margaret's place, and demanded that Margaret issue no more proclamations and hand over the Great Seal.⁶

Having been Queen of Scotland for a decade, Margaret must have known that the Douglas family was greatly disliked by the rest of the nobles. The house of Douglas had been principal antagonists in a feud with the Crichton family, which had quickly developed into a bloody and brutal civil war. The civil war had finally ended when James II of Scotland became of age and murdered William Douglas, 8th Earl of Douglas, and made the 9th Earl submit to the crown in 1452. Despite this, the families' feud continued until the Douglas lands were seized.⁷ The Douglas family had just now begun to regain power, which made many of the nobles uneasy. Margaret should have known all of this about Angus, and that she was already vulnerable after her disastrous letter to the Pope. Why did she marry Angus? The 24-year-old Queen might have been charmed by the 19-year-old Douglas's attention and fallen in love.⁸ Another possible reason is that Margaret may have come to see her regency in danger and felt the Douglas family was powerful enough to protect her and her children. She also might have thought, in vain, that by marrying a Scot, she would win over the nobles. It has never been determined why Margaret took such a risk in marrying Angus, but it is likely a combination of all three reasons. Nevertheless, her decision, as far as the nobles were concerned, meant she was forfeiting the regency, and they quickly disposed of it.⁹

¹ Patricia Hill Buchanan, *Margaret Tudor: Queen of the Scots* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1985), 9 -10.

² Richard Glen Eaves, "Margaret (1489-1541)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford UP, 2004; online edition, <http://www.oxforddnb.com> (accessed January 10, 2012).

³ Maria Perry, *The Sisters of Henry VIII: The Tumultuous Lives of Margaret of Scotland and Mary of France* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 69-70, 59.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁶ Buchanan, *Margaret Tudor*, 89.

⁷ Perry, *The Sisters of Henry VIII*, 77.

⁸ Buchanan, *Margaret Tudor*, 87.

⁹ Perry, *The Sisters of Henry VIII*, 79.

Margaret found herself with few options when Albany accepted the regency and the nobles refused to grant her control or maternal supervision of her children.¹⁰ Even Henry VIII would not help her.¹¹ Margaret diligently tried to work with Albany, but the nobles' unhappiness with her recent marriage and the self-interested abandonment of the Douglas family to Albany's side prevented her from making any progress.¹² Finally, in July 1515, Parliament ruled that the young King and Duke of Ross were no longer to be under their mother's supervision.¹³ Things were looking hopeless and Margaret, in a last desperate attempt to keep her sons, locked herself and her sons inside Stirling castle in an attempt to fight Albany's now tight control. In a letter to Francis I, the King of France, Henry VIII described his displeasure with Albany's actions, and demanded that Francis address the problem in Scotland:

The Duke of Albany, whom [Francis] has sent into Scotland, not only desires to take the government from the Queen against the will of her late husband, but to take the keeping of her children into his hands, which has compelled the Queen to retire with them into a strong castle called Stirling, to which the Duke has laid siege in the hope of reducing it by famine.¹⁴

The letter had no impact. Albany's siege lasted for six days before Margaret surrendered and handed her sons over to Albany's control.¹⁵

Margaret and Angus would spend the rest of their marriage fighting for control over Margaret's children. In September 1515, Margaret, who was pregnant, was forced to flee to England, while Angus stayed behind to save her sons from Albany's control.¹⁶ Henry VIII welcomed his sister with open arms, allowing her to live at Harbottle Castle, where Lady Margaret Douglas was born on October 7, 1515.¹⁷ Margaret was extremely sick after this birth and had to stay in England to recover; unfortunately, as she recovered, her life in Scotland fell further apart. Margaret's youngest son Alexander died and his death was kept from her until her health was out of danger, fearing it would cause her to die from the shock.¹⁸ To make matters worse, Angus had taken up his former fiancée, Lady Jane Stewart, as his mistress. They were living on the Queen's lands and Jane was expecting Angus' child.¹⁹ Margaret finally re-entered Scotland in April of 1517, and by late January 1518, Margaret had become aware of Angus' unfaithfulness and deception.²⁰ Margaret quickly resolved to divorce the man who had caused her to lose everything and described so in a letter to her brother. Ironically, Henry was shocked and vehemently advised against the divorce.²¹ Margaret's mind would not be changed, even after brief attempts at reconciliation by Angus.

It took Margaret until 1524 to regain the favor of the Scottish people and to have Parliament return her regency.²² However, her troubles with Angus were only just beginning. Like Margaret, Angus had also risen to power again and was now a member of the regency council. Angus persuaded the regency council to declare the 14 year old James V of legal age on June 14th, 1526, and then prevented the boy from appointing new officials,

¹⁰ Buchanan, *Margaret Tudor*, 90.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 101.

¹² Perry, *The Sisters of Henry VIII*, 117-122.

¹³ Nancy Lenz Harvey, *The Rose and the Thorn: The Lives of Mary and Margaret Tudor* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1975), 140.

¹⁴ *Letters and Papers Foreign and Domestic of the Reign of Henry VIII* (London, UK, 1864), vol 2, pt 1, 222.

¹⁵ Buchanan, *Margaret Tudor*, 103.

¹⁶ Eaves, "Margaret."

¹⁷ Buchanan, *Margaret Tudor*, 119.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 124.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 130-31.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 149, 158-163.

²¹ Harvey, *The Rose and the Thorn*, 167-68.

²² Buchanan, *Margaret Tudor*, 206.

so Angus himself would assume all of those jobs.²³ Angus kept James as his personal prisoner and surrounded him with Douglas family members. James exchanged secret letters with his mother, but despite her best efforts, there was little she could do about his situation.²⁴ Finally, in February of 1527, Pope Clement VII granted Margaret her much-sought-after divorce, but word did not reach her until December that same year.²⁵

Margaret's choice of Douglas was perhaps the worst choice she could have made. Douglas was from a family that had many enemies in the Scottish government, which she had to have known about prior to marrying him. Though she could not foresee Douglas' infidelity and betrayals, they certainly were unforgivable blows to Margaret. Like her younger brother, Margaret would not accept infidelity in her spouse, even if at the time of her divorce Henry VIII opposed that option. Though Margaret would lose her government and her children and eventually be humiliated by her second husband, she refused to be dismissed or forgotten. She worked tirelessly to gain a divorce from the man who cost her everything and did eventually regain her regency and her crown.

Margaret used her new-found freedom to make her relationship with Henry Stewart public and entered into her third marriage in early 1528.²⁶ Unfortunately, Margaret's third marriage to Henry Stewart would be an unhappy marriage. Stewart would become both greedy and power hungry after his elevation in status by his marriage to the Queen. Like Angus, he also kept a mistress and denied Margaret money from her estates.²⁷ Stewart kept strict control over Margaret's money and left her completely poor and miserable.²⁸ Margaret again sought divorce for her unhappiness, which was granted by the Pope; however, James V refused to acknowledge or publish it officially. Margaret died on October 18, 1541, as the result of a stroke,²⁹ with only "2,500 marks" to her name.³⁰ Margaret's final wish was for James V to forgive Angus, which James ignored.³¹

Mary, Queen of France and Duchess of Suffolk

Margaret's sister Mary was the last surviving child of Henry VII and Elizabeth of York. Although there is some controversy surrounding Mary Tudor's birthday, the generally accepted year of her birth seems to be 1495.³² Growing up, Mary would become close to Henry VIII, who was five years older than she was, and they would hold a deep respect and regard for each other throughout their lifetimes. However, that closeness would also put them at odds later during Mary's second marriage.³³

Mary's first husband was Louis XII of France, through an arranged marriage. Louis was desperate for a male heir, having only two daughters from his previous two marriage attempts.³⁴ France's salic law prevented women from inheriting the throne and if Louis failed to produce a son soon, France's next king would be his son-in-law, Francis.³⁵ By 1514, when the marriage took place, Louis was 52 years old and Mary was 18 years old.³⁶

²³ Ibid., 221.

²⁴ Harvey, *The Rose and the Thorn*, 207.

²⁵ Perry, *The Sisters of Henry VIII*, 171.

²⁶ Buchanan, *Margaret Tudor*, 227.

²⁷ Ibid., 248.

²⁸ Ibid., 270.

²⁹ Ibid., 269.

³⁰ Perry, *The Sisters of Henry VIII*, 221.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Walter C. Richardson, *Mary Tudor: The White Queen* (London: University of Washington Press, 1970), 3.

³³ David Loades, "Mary (1496-1533)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford UP, 2004; online edition, <http://www.oxforddnb.com> (accessed January 10, 2012).

³⁴ Richardson, *Mary Tudor*, 76.

³⁵ Ibid., 77.

³⁶ Loades, "Mary."

After their proxy marriage in England on August 13, 1514,³⁷ Louis XII and Mary were publically married in France by October 9.³⁸ But Louis died on January 1, 1515, and Mary was now a widow, having been Queen of France for only 85 days.³⁹ Though it seemed unlikely that Mary was pregnant given the King's ill health throughout their marriage, Francis could not be crowned until it was made certain that Mary was not pregnant. Mary was placed in seclusion at Hotel de Cluny, the traditional mourning place for the Queens of France.⁴⁰ Once she had physical proof that she was not pregnant, Francis, eager to be King, cut short the traditional mourning period and was crowned at Reims by the end of January.⁴¹

Not much is recorded about Mary's reaction to her marriage to Louis; however, Mary seems to have known, even before leaving England, that she would not be Queen of France long. Several historians discuss the idea of a water-side promise that Mary extracted from Henry VIII on the beach just before leaving England for France;⁴² this promise would have allowed Mary to marry whomever she chose after Louis' death. Most of these historians seem to dismiss this as a romantic fabrication meant to add excitement to Mary's second marriage, but there is some evidence of an agreement between Mary and Henry about her future marriages. Mary wrote a letter to Henry on March 5, 1515, after Louis' death, pleading that he "remember that she had consented to his request, and for the peace of Christendom, to marry Lewis of France, 'though he was very aged and sickly,' on condition that if she survived him she should marry who she liked."⁴³ Mary's reminder to her brother about their arrangement indicates that there was indeed a promise, regardless if Henry ever intended to keep it.

Mary's next moves have fascinated historians for decades, as they have tried to piece together the events of the next few months. Like her sister Margaret, she found being a young widowed Queen a very uncertain fate. Mary was extremely valuable on the marriage market. Now that she was the Dowager Queen of France, Mary's next marriage could be arranged by Francis or by Henry once again. Mary had to be aware of how uncertain her fate was. She was too valuable a commodity for England and France to be left a widow for long. Mary did have that promise from Henry, but even she knew that a King's promise was good only for the moment it was given. Francis also seemed to have been infatuated with his young stepmother-in-law, and rumors were circulating that he might leave his own wife to marry her.⁴⁴ Mary would need to act fast this time if she wanted to marry someone of her own choosing, and when the man she had been waiting for returned to France, she seized her own fate.

Mary's second husband would be Charles Brandon, the Duke of Suffolk. Brandon had been a close favorite of Henry VIII since boyhood.⁴⁵ Brandon's father, Sir William Brandon, had fought and died at Bosworth and his uncle, Sir Thomas Brandon, was one of Henry VII's trusted courtiers. Charles had grown up right alongside Henry VIII and they had become good jousting buddies.⁴⁶ Brandon had been knighted in 1512 and played a leading role in Henry VIII's invasion of France. It became clear in 1514, when he was made Duke of Suffolk, that he was second only to Wolsey in his influence on the King of

³⁷ Richardson, *Mary Tudor*, 80, 87.

³⁸ Perry, *The Sisters of Henry VIII*, 99-100.

³⁹ Harvey, *The Rose and the Thorn*, 112.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 108.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 112.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 92, 118; Richardson, *Mary Tudor*, 89-90; Perry, *The Sisters of Henry VIII*, 89, 93, 109.

⁴³ *Letters and Papers*, 75.

⁴⁴ Perry, *The Sisters of Henry VIII*, 110.

⁴⁵ Harvey, *The Rose and the Thorn*, 39.

⁴⁶ S. J. Gunn, "Brandon, Charles, first Duke of Suffolk (1484 – 1545)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Oxford UP, 2004; online edition, <http://www.oxforddnb.com> (accessed June 11, 2012).

England.⁴⁷ Brandon had accompanied Mary to France, and now returned to help bring Mary back to England in February of 1515.⁴⁸ Brandon may have been Mary's childhood infatuation which blossomed into deep affection and love, especially since she had been solely dependent on him during her travels and establishment in France. Certainly, Henry had to have known of his sister's fondness for Brandon, because in Mary's February 15th letter to Henry, she described telling Francis of her hopes to marry Brandon.⁴⁹ Despite this knowledge, Henry would still be surprised by Mary and Brandon's actions. How the sequence of events unfolded has been preserved in the *Letters and Papers Foreign and Domestic of the Reign of Henry VIII*.

Brandon wrote a letter to Henry VIII on January 31, 1515, telling him that upon his arrival in Paris, the Queen professed her feelings for him, stating "she would never have none but me."⁵⁰ Mary hastily gave Brandon an ultimatum: either he marry her in Paris, or not at all. Brandon told Henry that he tried to convince her to seek the good will of both Henry and Francis before they did anything of the sort, but Mary was not willing to listen. Mary believed that upon returning to England she would be forced to marry Charles of Castile, a former suitor before her marriage to Louis. Brandon wrote of the incident:

[If Mary] went into England, she should go into Flanders. To which she said that she had rather to be torn in pieces than ever she should come there, and with that wept. Sit, I never saw woman so weep; and when I saw (that) I showed onto her grace that there was none such thing (upon) my faith, with the best words I could: but in none ways I could make her to believe it.⁵¹

Mary then told Brandon that he had better marry her immediately or "look never after this day to have the proffer again."⁵² Brandon informed Henry that "she and I [were] married" with fewer than ten witnesses at their wedding.⁵³ Brandon then begged Henry's forgiveness and closed the letter. The anxiety of waiting for the King's response must have been unbearable, because he quickly followed it with a letter to Cardinal Wolsey on March 5, 1515.

Brandon wrote Wolsey that "when he came to Paris he heard many things which put him and the Queen in great fear. 'And the Queen would never let me (be) in rest till I had granted her to be married; and so, to be plain with you, I have married her harettylee and has lyen wyet her, in soo muche (as) I fyer me lyes that she by wyet child.'"⁵⁴ Brandon also pleaded for Wolsey's help in presenting and managing this matter with Henry, since both he and Mary had committed a grievous crime by not asking for Henry's permission before they married.

In Wolsey's reply letter to Brandon, the Cardinal told him that the King was furious when presented with the news, especially "considering that the King, out of love to Suffolk, was content 'that with good order and saving of his honor ye should have in marriage his said sister. Cursed be the blind affection and counsel that hath brought ye hereunto! fearing that sudden and unadvised dealing shall have sudden repentance.'"⁵⁵ Wolsey also told Brandon that he was "in the greatest danger that ever man was in."⁵⁶ Wolsey mentions an earlier promise between Brandon and Henry VIII, that Brandon would be allowed to marry Henry's sister in "good order" if he "saved his honor." This might explain why Brandon consented to Mary's proposal. Both Mary and Brandon were banking very heavily on

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Perry, *The Sisters of Henry VIII*, 109-110.

⁴⁹ *Letters and Papers*, 57.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 26.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 73.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 74-75.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 75.

Henry VIII's feelings for them, and despite Henry's love for them, their betrayals would cost them both dearly. Both of them had full knowledge of the danger of their actions, and now they had to deal with the King's fury.

Over the next few days, Brandon, Mary, and Henry exchanged many letters. In Mary's letters she took the blame for their hasty marriage and reminded her brother over and over of the water-side promise.⁵⁷ Mary also begged him for forgiveness and played up his favor for her. Brandon adopted a similar strategy and told Henry that "there was never man that had so loving and kind a master as himself, or master that had so true a servant as the King had in him."⁵⁸ By March 9, 1515, Mary offered her brother "all such plate and vessel of clean gold" and "the choice of special jewels as my late husband King of France gave to me."⁵⁹ Mary had found the perfect remedy to calm her brother's anger: money. In the end Brandon and Mary had to pay Henry 4,000 pounds annually, the jewels and plate that were part of her original dowry, as well as all of the jewels Louis had given her.⁶⁰ Mary would have only 6,000 crowns a year to live on from the money Francis gave her as part of her marriage contract to Louis XII.⁶¹ This of course was a small sum considering the things they needed as part of the royal court of England. Brandon would also have to be very careful how he played politics in the future to ensure that money from France kept coming to them annually, because without that money, they would never be able to repay Henry.

Mary and Brandon, the Duke and Duchess of Suffolk, returned to England in May 1515, Mary having been gone from England for only seven months.⁶² Despite Henry's still simmering anger, Brandon and Mary were not punished any further. Within a few weeks Brandon was granted stewardship of some crown lands and Henry forgave 5,000 pounds from their debt.⁶³ Mary and Brandon would slowly return to their previous places in Henry's eyes. All seems to have been mended by March 11, 1516, when Mary and Brandon had their first child, a son, whom they named Henry after the King. Suffolk writes, "The King and my Lord Cardinal were godfathers; the Lady Katharine godmother."⁶⁴ Though it would take years to repay their debt to Henry, Mary and Brandon would live a relatively peaceful life together, in comparison to her sister Margaret's life with Angus. The couple would have four children, two boys who would both die, and two girls, Francis and Eleanor, who survived to adulthood.⁶⁵ Both Mary and Brandon would play a relatively active life in Tudor court until their deaths. Mary died on June 25, 1533, from an unspecified illness.⁶⁶

The events of Mary and Brandon's marriage have puzzled historians for decades. Henry was clearly aware of Mary and Brandon's affections for each other and might have even consented to their marriage. According to Mary, Henry's water-side promise had allowed her to marry whomever she chose. Wolsey also made reference to a promise between the King and Brandon about a potential marriage between Brandon and his sister. However, if Henry had promised Mary's hand to Brandon, it would have been only after he brought her back to England. It seems unlikely that Mary knew about Henry's promise, because of the ultimatum she gave Brandon once he arrived in Paris. The scene that Brandon described in his January 31st letter gives us a vision of a panicked woman who perhaps felt that time was running out on her chance to marry the man she loved. Mary knew there were too many unknown factors to leave to chance. So rather than see what waited for her in England or allow Francis the chance to create a match for her, she chose

⁵⁷ Ibid., 75, 76.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 75.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 78.

⁶⁰ Richardson, *Mary Tudor*, 177.

⁶¹ *Letters and Papers*, 102-3.

⁶² Richardson, *Mary Tudor*, 185.

⁶³ Ibid., 189.

⁶⁴ *Letters and Papers*, 460.

⁶⁵ Loades, "Mary."

⁶⁶ Richardson, *Mary Tudor*, 212.

her second husband for herself, the biggest gamble of her life. Fortunately, unlike her sister Margaret, Mary's gamble seems to have led to matrimonial happiness.

Conclusion

Margaret and Mary Tudor's choices in spouses for their second marriages would have grave consequences, not only for themselves and their own happiness, but for the Tudor family as well. Margaret's choice of Archibald Douglas would cost her the trust of the Scottish people and nobility, which resulted in her losing her government and regency over her children. To make matters worse, Douglas would be unfaithful to her and try to monopolize control over the young king and keep him separated from Margaret, even after she regained the regency.

Mary's choice in Charles Brandon would shock the European world because of how quickly it came after the death of her first husband. It was also done in secret, without public consent from Henry VIII. This hasty marriage would doom them to years of financial hardship and almost cost them their places at court. Their financial debt also put Brandon in the political position of having to side with France frequently, in order to keep Mary's payments from her marriage treaty to Louis XII.

This trend of difficult second marriages in this generation of the Tudor dynasty merits further study. The consequences both women faced after choosing their own second marriages were enormous and incredibly difficult. Some of the consequences would be similar to what Henry VIII would face in his courtship and marriage to Anne Boleyn. Margaret and Mary had fewer spouses than their famous brother; however, it cannot be denied that, for better and for worse, these Tudor women had very similar troubles with love.

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