

CHAPTER 3

Catherine

England's Beloved Spanish Queen

And if a man shall take his brother's wife, it is an unclean thing: he hath uncovered his brother's nakedness; they shall be childless.

Leviticus 20:21

Spain 1492

FOR OVER HALF a millennium the Spanish have marvelled at how incredible a year 1492 was. No sooner had Christian Spain wrested back its old Iberian world from the Moors than Christopher Columbus appeared at Court with dreams of a new American world awaiting exploitation.

The last Moorish king of Granada retreated from the splendid Alhambra as his mother scolded him for weeping like a woman over that which he had not defended like a man. His sorrow was in sharp contrast to the joy of King Ferdinand of Aragon and Queen Isabella of Castile that January day as they rode through the gates of that beautiful city with their five children. The youngest was six-year-old Catherine. Fair-skinned, with auburn hair and blue-grey eyes, she was not destined to spend her adult days in the warm Iberian sun, but far north in a land more accustomed to damp, fog and short winter days. The daughter of Spain's greatest royal couple would marry a notorious English king. The magnificent splendour of her origins would make her later treatment and her humble end all the more pitiful.

Queen Isabella's fourth daughter Catherine was born at Alcalá de Henares on 16 December 1485. The fact that Isabella's mother was Catherine of Lancaster probably accounted for the fairness of them all; it also meant that they could count Alfred the Great and Henry II among their ancestors. Being the child of great and powerful rulers had its advantages, but it also meant your parents could use you as a pawn. Hardly out of childhood, you might be placed at some foreign