



To the Tower Born

By Robin Maxwell
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Introduction

With *To The Tower Born*, Robin Maxwell returns to a subject beloved by historians and writers from Shakespeare to Josephine Tey. What really happened to the two little princes who disappeared from the Tower of London under the reign of Richard III?

Maxwell bases her story on the behind-the-scenes power of women and on the friendship between Princess Bessie, daughter of King Edward IV and Queen Elizabeth, and Nell, daughter of William Caxton, the man who brought the printing press to England. These intelligent and adventurous girls are involved in nothing less than the founding of the Tudor dynasty. When the little princes, Bessie's younger brothers, go missing, it is Nell and Bessie who get to the heart of the mystery, out-maneuvering older and more powerful players at every turn. Maxwell gives us a new villain who had plausible reasons to want those boys out of the way and the power to accomplish the deed. Rich in

period detail, this is a real page-turner, with plenty of heart-stopping moments along with poignant and genuinely moving characters.

Questions for Discussion

1. The novel opens with a scene in which Nell is getting divorced and requesting that she be allowed to keep her original name, Caxton. She observes that the judge seems to dislike women. (Page 1) What bearing does this scene have on the rest of the story?
2. Discuss the importance of William Caxton's contribution to English history, the printing press. What are some of the effects this invention had on English society, as shown in this novel?
3. Maxwell begins and ends her story with Nell and Bessie as grown women, and the story of the novel takes place as they recall it for Bessie's son Henry, who we know will become Henry VIII. Is this an effective method? In what ways?
4. In what ways is Nell Caxton different from other young women of her time?
5. In this novel women wield a great deal of power. How do women exercise power differently than men, and why? In what ways does this novel illustrate this?
6. What do you think of the character of Queen Elizabeth Woodville, Bessie's mother? Does Maxwell provide us with any way to feel sympathy for her?
7. Would you have wanted to be part of a royal family in these times? Why or why not?
8. On Page 55, Nell describes Margaret Beauford as, "So tiny, yet so . . . resolute. She seems to have a rod of steel in her spine. I think she terrifies her husband." What are some of the forces that may have made this formidable woman into the person she is in this novel?
9. Do Bessie's feelings for her uncle Richard prevent her from clearly observing the political shifts taking place around her?
10. What do you think of Maxwell's answer to the mystery of the little princes' disappearance?

About the Author

Robin Maxwell is the acclaimed author of *The Wild Irish*, *The Secret Diary of Anne Boleyn*, *The Queen's Bastard*, and *Virgin: Prelude to the Throne*. She lives in Pioneertown, California.