

APPENDIX B**Mary's Aborted Flight, 1550s**

In July 1550, a Flemish warship drew near the Essex coastal town of Maldon. The ship, sent by Mary of Hungary, Regent of the Netherlands for her brother, the Habsburg emperor, Charles V, was on a mission to rescue an highly-placed religious dissident: Mary Tudor. On this covert rescue ship was the Regent's envoy, Jean Dubois, charged with the mission to bring Mary safely out of England. Although Mary had appealed to the Imperial ambassador for years to bring this about, she changed her mind at the last minute. Mary mobilized her household and exploited prevailing gender conceptions to deliberately sabotage Dubois' mission. 1

Dubois' mission was to land on the English coast where Mary's household would make contact with him immediately. Then the household officers and Dubois would arrange for the princess to be brought aboard his ship. Once the princess was aboard his ship Dubois would then take Mary first to the Flemish court of the Regent and then to the Imperial establishment of the Emperor Charles. The information for this incident comes from a report filed by Dubois to the Regent and is detailed in an unusually long and detailed abstract in the *Calendar of State Papers, Spanish*.¹ 2

Mary's staff failed to contact Dubois after he landed. This jeopardized the entire mission. The longer the ship was in port, the more suspicious the Maldon townspeople would become of Dubois and his Flemish warship. It took Dubois a whole day before he managed to track down and meet with Mary's most senior household officer, her comptroller or treasurer, Sir Robert Rochester. Rochester ominously began the meeting by stating he was not sure it was a good idea for Mary to leave England at all. Thoroughly alarmed, Dubois recalled to Rochester how throughout the previous year, 1549, Mary had relentlessly petitioned for asylum at the Habsburg courts. Thus Dubois' mission was the result of a year's worth of planning, mainly by the princess herself. Dubois could not resist reminding the embarrassed Rochester that the thirty-four-year-old Mary had claimed she was "like a little ignorant girl" who placed herself in the keeping of her Imperial relatives. 3

Dubois insisted that Mary come to his ship that night if there was any chance for her escape to be successful. Instead, much to Dubois' annoyance, Rochester relayed a command from the princess herself ordering Dubois to come to her lodgings for an interview. This would cause further delay since Mary insisted that she could not see Dubois until the evening. This meant effectively that the schedule would be thrown off for another day. 4

If Dubois was frustrated by this delay, there was worse yet to come. When Dubois presented himself at Mary's lodgings, Mary kept him waiting in the antechamber. To add insult to injury, Rochester appeared to keep Dubois company and regaled him with yet more objections to the 5

proposed escape plan. When the princess finally received him, Mary announced that the earliest she could leave with Dubois was not for two more days yet. No doubt suppressing his annoyance as best he could, Dubois began then and there to work out the details of a new escape plan with Mary.

Before Dubois could finalize the details with the princess and, perhaps, salvage the mission, Rochester interrupted the interview with the news that Maldon officials were about to impound Dubois' ship. According to Dubois, the princess immediately panicked and began wailing "What shall we do? What is to become of me?" Dubois argued that the best thing was for the princess to accompany him back to the ship immediately as originally planned. At this critical juncture, Rochester suddenly remembered that he had heard that the watch in Maldon would be doubled that night. **6**

The bad situation now thoroughly disintegrated. Dubois and Rochester hotly debated whether the princess should leave that night while Mary continued to wail in the background "but what is to become of me?" The tension was broken when Dubois wearily suggested that maybe he should just return to the ship by himself. Suddenly there was silence. In this silence, no one actually acknowledged that this would effectively mean the end of the mission, but the calm that now prevailed spoke volumes. Even more revealing was Mary's parting remark to Dubois. She said, "You see that it is not our fault now." **7**

Some days later, in his report to the regent Mary of Hungary, Dubois noted bitterly that the watch had not been doubled that night as Rochester had claimed. Furthermore, Dubois learned that his ship had never been in any danger of being impounded. Dubois laid the blame for the failed rescue attempt squarely upon Rochester: "I suspected that the Controller had made out the situation in Maldon to be more dangerous than it was in reality." Dubois left the English coast for good a few days later without Mary. **8**

The reason that I have chosen to break with current scholarly convention and quote so extensively from an abstract in *Calendar of State Papers* is that Dubois' letter to the Regent is abstracted in the calendar in unusual length and detail. Perhaps for this reason, this incident enjoys popularity amongst Mary's modern biographers for its obvious farcical elements.² Reading Dubois' letter transparently, as the editors of the *Calendar* surely did, later scholars have suggested that Rochester decided independently that it would be political suicide if Mary left the country. The idea is that Rochester, not Mary, realized that she would have a difficult time enforcing her claim to the throne if King Edward died while she was abroad. Historians assume from Dubois' report that Mary was too politically inept to grasp the complexities of the situation presented by Dubois' ships and, therefore, relied upon the decisive advice of Rochester. **9**

I suggest here that a critical reading of Dubois' letter reveals clues pointing to a very different scenario. Dubois described the details of the failed escape so exhaustively because he was returning to Brussels without the Princess Mary and would have to account to the Regent (and through her to the Emperor) for the deployment of ships and money to no avail. Naturally, his first concern is to exonerate himself of any blame. **10**

Of course, someone must be to blame. It may initially appear that Dubois casts blame overtly on Rochester but covertly upon Mary also. It is this covert blame that has resonated with Mary's twentieth-century biographers. Although Dubois' depiction of Mary may strike modern readers as cloying or relentlessly conventional, it was very much in agreement with the conventions of female behavior found in contemporary conduct literature. Dubois' depiction of Mary is entirely appropriate to the desired behavior of a female—she was passive, needy, and dependent. In other words, Dubois may have tailored his depiction of Mary in order to exonerate rather than blame her. Dubois absolves her of blame because she was merely a helpless female as contemporaries understood the term. **11**

Indeed, it would have been counterproductive for Dubois to disparage Mary too roundly. Dubois was, after all, writing to Mary's maternal relatives. Moreover, rank was important here. Dubois was merely an untitled envoy writing to royalty about royalty. So Dubois exonerates the princess by portraying Mary as an "ignorant little girl" being ruthlessly manipulated by the real villain of Dubois' account, the comptroller, Sir Robert Rochester. **12**

Dubois' self-interested, though understandable, concern with blaming others for the failed rescue attempt does open the door for reading his letter critically. We cannot take everything he wrote at face value. He surely had an agenda. If one would rather not claim so much then one must at least search for outside confirmation of his depictions. Were there, for instance, other accounts that indicate that Mary completely relied upon her servants, upon Rochester in particular, to make important political decisions for her? Had Mary ever allowed an household officer, like Rochester, to act on his own initiative and determine her future? **13**

What evidence survives for Mary's relationship with her servants presents a stark contrast to the depiction of Dubois in his letter to the regent. I have argued in chapter 2 that there is enough evidence to indicate that a "culture of reverence" persisted in her preaccession household. All surviving evidence suggests that Mary's servants were acutely conscious of her rank, exalted ancestry from two royal houses, and potential future as a sovereign ruler. **14**

In fact, other evidence indicates that Rochester in particular was overawed by Mary. As detailed in chapter 2, Rochester chose imprisonment in the Tower rather than attempt to pressure Mary into conforming to the king's orders regarding religion. Rochester's misgivings appear to have been confirmed by Mary's reaction to the very idea that her servants could exert any kind of influence upon her on politically sensitive issues. A few months after Dubois **15**

left England, Mary informed a delegation from the privy council that she would never blur the distinction between mistress and servant by asking their advice on political or religious matters. The privy council registers record her as declaring that the princess would "wurst endure" her servants "to move her in any suche mattiers."³

16
Either Mary's and Rochester's relationship had undergone a sea change in the weeks following Dubois' departure or Dubois' depiction is a less-than-accurate representation of their relationship. It is hard to credit that Rochester, who would literally rather face death than attempt to overrule the princess, would, a few weeks earlier, have deliberately sabotaged an escape plan she herself had planned for a year if she was still committed to it. It is even harder to credit that Mary would have played along or allowed him to take such initiative.

17
I am not suggesting that Dubois deliberately misrepresented the dynamic between Mary and Rochester. Rather, Dubois quite accurately represented a staged scene orchestrated by Mary and Rochester. In fact, there are clues in Dubois' report that indicate that it was Mary who sabotaged the rescue and that she allowed, even encouraged, her servant Rochester to take the blame for it upon himself.

18
There is a telling remark contained in the abstracted version of Dubois' letter that Dubois attributes to Rochester, though the source of the information could only have been the princess herself. Dubois claimed that Rochester was convinced from a recent casting of the king's horoscope that Edward VI would not live out the year. If Rochester knew of this horoscope, it was certainly because Mary had commissioned it and therefore knew of it also. It was a treasonous offense to cast the monarch's horoscope. It was too great a risk for Rochester to do this on his own initiative. Just as Elizabeth would commission the casting of Queen Mary's horoscope, it appears that Princess Mary did the same for her brother, Edward VI. What this apparent non sequitur in Dubois' letter tells us is that Mary was convinced from a recent casting of the king's horoscope that she would soon be inheriting the throne. It was not a good time for her to leave the country.

19
The situation in which Princess Mary found herself in the summer of 1550 when Dubois arrived with his "rescue" ship was complicated. She was the leader of the Catholic opposition to her brother's Protestant regime. It was a regime, moreover, that was putting ever-mounting pressure on her and her household to attend the new Protestant service as a show of political loyalty to the crown. As the heir to childless Edward VI, Mary's conformity was of national importance. What had helped her to resist this pressure thus far was her blood ties to the Habsburg imperial family, in particular to the emperor Charles V and to Mary of Hungary, Regent of the Netherlands. The leaders of Edward VI's government were unwilling to risk open conflict with Charles V or disrupt the important wool trade with the Netherlands over Mary's persistent Catholicism. As the Edwardian government slowly but persistently

increased pressure upon Mary to conform to Protestantism, it must have seemed like good sense, in 1549, for Mary to canvass plans with the Imperial ambassador to flee the English realm and seek refuge at the courts of Mary of Hungary and Charles V.

Yet by midsummer 1550, the king's horoscope indicated to Mary that she would shortly inherit the throne. Then Mary heard that Dubois' ships had left port, and soon thereafter they were sighted off the Essex coast. What was she to do? If she went through with the rescue plan then she might forfeit the English throne through her absence. If she refused the help offered by Dubois on behalf of the Emperor and the Regent, then she risked alienating her vital imperial allies. According to Dubois' letter, Mary tellingly referred to the dilemma I have just outlined: "I do not know how the Emperor would take it if it turned out to be impossible to go now, after I have so often importuned his Majesty on the subject." The best strategy that allowed her to remain in England and yet not frustrate the attempts to render imperial aid was for her to stall for time and make it appear as if the rescue failed due to circumstances beyond her control. The best result would be for Mary to be able to claim, "You see now it is not our fault" that the rescue failed. **20**

It is surely more than a coincidence that this is exactly the scenario that Dubois depicted. Given what other evidence reveals about the relationship between Mary and Rochester, it is clear that Mary would not have allowed Rochester to sabotage her escape plans if she was still fully committed to them. Moreover, it should be remembered that Mary was thirty-four years old at the time she was claiming to be an "ignorant little girl" and wailing in the background "But what is to become of me?" It is hard to credit that she was being anything but disingenuous with Dubois. After all, this was the same woman who, a few weeks later, would yell at privy councilors from a second-story window that it was stupid of them to assume that her servants could influence her in any way. **21**

Dubois' portrayal, when interpreted in the light of Mary's history as an householder and Dubois' own agenda in constructing the account, indicates that Mary and her household put on a performance for Dubois that he was only too happy to detail in his letter to the Regent. By allowing Rochester to assume responsibility for the failure of the escape plan, by acting the part of an "ignorant little girl," Mary could hopefully escape blame for the unraveling of the scheme to which the Emperor and the Regent had committed ships and money. Mary's gender and the loyalty of her household servant endowed her with plausible deniability in a tricky and tense political situation. For his part, Dubois could exonerate himself of any blame without insulting the princess to her relatives. **22**

Notes

Note 1: *CSP, Spanish, X*, pp.124–35

Note 2: See D. M. Loades, *Mary Tudor: A Life* [Oxford, 1989], p.156, and F.M.H. Prescott, *Mary Tudor* [London, 1952], p.139

Note 3: *APC, III*, p.350