



The Queen's Secret

Jean Plaidy

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At the power and mercy of the court her life was a struggle to keep the Queen's Secret.

Katherine of Valois is born a princess, the daughter of King Charles VI of France. But by the time Katherine is old enough to know her father, he is called "Charles the Mad," given to unpredictable fits of insanity. Aged 19, she marries Henry V of England in what was a happy but tragically brief union ending with his untimely death.

As Joan of Arc incites the French to overthrow the English, Katherine's loyalty to England is intensely scrutinised so much so her baby son, the new king, is taken from her and she was forbidden to re-marry. The young Queen is alone and desolate. But when she meets handsome Owen Tudor, her life is changed forever as she is drawn into a dangerous but irresistible love.

The Queen's Secret Details

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Karla says

This was the first Plaidy book I'd read in years, ever since high school actually. I remembered loving her stuff back then, but as I read this one & The Sun in Splendour, I had the sense that the books were copiously cribbed histories with a minimal effort at dramatizing the whole thing. (No doubt a reason why she was so prolific.)

I still like Plaidy, and will go to her first before a wealth of other HF authors (including such hyped stars of today like Elizabeth Chadwick and Sharon Kay Penman). Plaidy's a childhood sentimental favorite, but I know she has her flaws and less-than-great titles.

Kimberly Watson says

This book is a repetition of the same few themes over and over - what a horrible childhood/mother I had, my poor fill-in-the-blank who died, I never knew love until, I was afraid for me/my children/my servants/my husband... and so on. Why say something once when you can say it 25 times and call it a book?

As a lover of historical fiction, this is one of the most juvenile books I've read. Think Tudor Judy Blume without the empathy and charm. Icky.

Danielle says

Jean Plaidy isn't one to disappoint.

Even though her historical accuracy is now somewhat disputed, at the time she held great accordance with the known facts of the time. This novel explores the life of Katherine of Valois, a daughter of France neglected by her mother and disturbed by her father's mental health. She goes on to become of Queen of England, marrying Henry V and bearing him one son, Henry VI before his untimely death. When her son is raised without her, she seeks comfort in Owen Tudor, a nobody Welshman in her household.

I don't know much about Katherine but she came across as a relatively naive character, she thought it was completely fine to marry a member of her household without thinking of the dangers to her lover and future 'husband' Owen as well as the children she bore him. Still, she is character who relies heavily on her family, even when she is forced to be away from them. She often resents her position and wishes she was humble instead of grand. An interesting character.

Other characters of significance were Owen Tudor, a relatively clever man with an art for war. He takes the dangers of his and Katherine's relationship seriously and without her steady mind they would have been caught much sooner. Apparently he was held high in Henry V's eye though he never mentioned it and is sometimes embarrassed of his relationship with the Queen because of her deceased husband. He's quite sweet and thoughtful. Guillemonte is caring woman and the local nanny. I quite liked her. Henry VI was established early on as a pious young which was believable and the Duke of Gloucestershire made for a good

villain.

Overall, a well written piece. The reason for it not being five stars is because the love didn't feel completely real to me, I didn't feel it and the speed it happened was somewhat unrealistic. It was also a bit repetitive but a good and interesting novel.

Claire Eastin says

This seemed written on a juvenile level. It was just a little too "cheesy" for my tastes. Although billed as historical fiction, so much of the book is contrary to the history books of this time period. I am not sure I am interested in reading more by this author, even though I had very high hopes.

Michele says

For many fans of historical fiction, Jean Plaidy's books are a treasure. For me, they are like a favorite blanket: perhaps a little dated and not on the cutting edge of a fad, but something familiar and comfortable.

The Queen's Secret, originally published in 1990 by G.P. Putnam's Sons and then reissued by Three Rivers Press in 2007, was one of Plaidy's later works and tells the story of Katherine of Valois, wife of Henry V, mother to Henry VII and by virtue of her second marriage to Owen Tudor, the founder of the Tudor kings of England.

The story is told in Katherine's voice and begins with her childhood in France as the daughter of King Charles VI, known to history as King Charles the Mad. Unable to maintain his lucidity or authority, France deteriorated into civil war in the early 15th century and the English, led by King Henry V, were able to divide, invade and conquer.

In the aftermath of the infamous Battle of Agincourt (remember? Shakespeare, anyone?), a tentative peace treaty was negotiated which acknowledged Henry to be the successor to the French crown once mad King Charles kicked the proverbial bucket and also threw in poor Katherine to sweeten the pot for Henry. They were married soon after and she bore him one child who would later become King Henry VI, although her new husband croaked soon after.

Being a widow turned out to be a good thing for Katherine. She fell in love with a Welsh commoner named Owen Tudor. They married in secret and went on to have four children, through which the Tudor line of kings would emerge. For those unfamiliar with this part of English history, I won't give away the ending, but it is a compelling tale.

Plaidy is, as usual, very true to her characters and historical facts. The voice of Katherine is almost child-like, which helps Plaidy disseminate the convoluted politics of the day in a manner readers can easily keep up with, but also likely reflects Katherine's actual knowledge of events. Despite being Queen of England, there seems to be little historical evidence that Katherine had anything to do with political intrigue. The dialog is beautifully simple, as well. Think Anna Sewell and Black Beauty.

The only complaint I had was a slight mix-up in the author's own timeline: in the story, Katherine and Owen,

we are told, become lovers on the night that Katherine's young son, Henry VI, is taken from her at the age of two to be raised in another household. Later, we skip ahead in time and young Henry is now five years old when Katherine discovers she is pregnant by Owen. Plaidy writes

"Why I should have been so surprised, I cannot imagine. Owen and I had been passionate lovers for some months."

(Katherine in *The Queen's Secret*)

Well, I suppose three years can be considered "some months," but the inconsistency leaped out at me. This, coupled with the constant foreshadowing of doom and gloom, were my only bugaboos about the story.

But these small flaws should be overlooked in the face of such a wonderful tale. This is a time period not often covered by historical fiction authors. Katherine and her contemporaries, such as Joan of Arc, were to change the fate both England and France. I highly recommend this read to any historical fiction fan as it makes accessible a time period too often overlooked.

Mandy Moody says

The story of Katherine of Valois, from her childhood in France to her death. I really loved this book, it's my favorite Plaidy so far.

I did find the writing a bit formal and stilted feeling, but that didn't take away from the story. I felt like it actually made Katherine come alive more - as if it was her upbringing and strict manners that influenced the writing.

This book clears up where the Tudor claim to the throne came from...and boy was it tenuous! Not that it ended up mattering, but it was very interesting!

Elaina says

This book was horrible. The writing style made my eyes bleed. The entire book was completely passive. There was no action, little dialog, no emotion and little to no character development. I wouldn't wish this book on anyone.

Bonnie Wilson says

This is one of the "mystery books" that's been laying around the house for years have no idea where it came from - some bag sale years ago? Someone left it? I'd never picked it up because I knew that Plaidy was Victoria Holt, but it somehow never made it into one of the donate bags. I finally decided to give it a try.

All I can say is how on earth has this writer sold many millions of books - as of the publication of this edition in '07 was "over 14 million" -? The writing is unbelievably flat and boring. Opening at random:

I knew so well by now the story of Jacqueline's second marriage to the Duke of Brabant who had foolishly allowed himself to be tricked by her scheming uncle, who had made a treaty with the Duke that all the property left by his late brother to his daughter should pass to him.

And it's all like that. Or worse. The love scenes are quite hilarious:

There were times when we lay in bed when Owen would whisper to me of what was going on in France.

"It is always dangerous," he said, "when a country extends its dominions. Communications have to be kept up. Armies have to be sent to guard the outposts. It is never easy."

Such passion! And so convincing as 15th century pillow talk! Just like the protagonist referring to "the ruling class" and constantly wishing she had been born in a "humble cottage" and not a princess.

There are best-selling authors in every genre who are bestsellers because they deliver well-written, engaging tales that allow the reader to suspend disbelief and become immersed in the story. If this book is typical of Plaidy/Holt, she is not one of them.

Helen Robare says

Jean Plaidy is a wonderful historical author. Her subjects are intriguing and because it's history things don't change. Sometimes there are no happy endings but if you back and read more about the subject, you will begin to understand why. Jean Plaidy doesn't get in depth so she is a good author for a first introduction to history (especially British and European history). For anyone who wants to learn about history but doesn't want tons of boring facts listed in order, this is the author for you to start out with.

Anna says

I have memories of always enjoying Jean Plaidy's historical fiction, but this one fell flat for me.

It had momentum in the beginning, during Katharine's childhood with her mad King father (Charles VI of France) and her seductress mother (Isabeau of France). It kept that momentum when Katharine was given in marriage to the new conqueror of their country, Henry V of England. It lost that momentum after Henry's death, which disappointed me because at that point in the story Katharine enters into an illicit relationship with one of her servants, Owen Tudor (that last name sounds vaguely important) and they have to keep their marriage and the multiple children that they have an absolute secret, hence the title "The Queen's Secret". It should arguably be the most interesting, suspenseful part of the book at that point.

The problem for me was that this is written from Katharine's point of view, and she is very blah. I'm sure that the actual Katharine wasn't blah, but Jean Plaidy drops the ball in portraying her. Her only thoughts are how much she loves Owen and her children and how scary it would be to lose Owen and her children. Makes sense to think/feel these things, but when you just read POV variants of those same 2 thoughts for 300 pages it. Gets. So. Repetitive. I kept checking back to make sure Plaidy wasn't copying/pasting because so many of the sentences sounded familiar and similar and just so uninteresting. If the Katharine of this book were a

color, she would be the most boring beige.

I gave this book an average 3 stars because the first 1/3 really is adequately interesting and I enjoyed reading both about the royal family of France at that time and about Katharine's arranged marriage with Henry V, the enemy of her country. I am going to have to read more Jean Plaidy to figure out if this was just an anomaly book, or whether my reading tastes have matured and changed so much that Plaidy's writing no longer appeals to me.

Joan says

I forget which book I read recently that made me decide to try a Jean Plaidy title again. I guess I wanted to know more about some of the more obscure queens of England or some such. Well, you learn from your mistakes! I forgot that these books are romances with a thin veneer of history added to them. The main character, the one recounting her memories, is Katherine, widow of Henry V, mistress of Owen Tudor, of utterly no interest whatsoever except accidentally being the ancestor of Henry VII and his larger than life Tudor royal family. Now I'll have to find a historical based account of this lady to find out if history documents her as being as helpless and whiny as she is presented in this book. I would like to think that a woman who is ancestor to the redoubtable Elizabeth I; the terrifying but fascinating Henry VIII; the courageous, brilliant, but completely helpless Lady Jane Grey; and the other fascinating people of this family was something more than a limp nothing of a person. The most interesting person in the book is Katherine's horrid mother who was not of French origin. I'd have loved to know where this woman came from. I'm betting she was Italian and that is where she learned her poisoning skills. Unless of course, Plaidy is making it all up. After all, it was not uncommon for children particularly to die at this time. That actually was true for childhood/young adult/adult death until the early part of the 1900s when we started making real breakthroughs with vaccinations and hygiene. According to Plaidy, either 2 or 3 of Katherine's brothers were poisoned by dear Mom, presumably for not being compliant enough. She did leave the last brother alive, realizing I suppose that she'd be out of power if she didn't have one son to be king of France. Sorry for the inexact number of deaths but I returned the book before writing this review. I wanted that book out of the house before it could contaminate any other book I have! If you are interested in strong women of English history, read Alison Weir. Don't read Jean Plaidy. I realize Plaidy was writing a good while ago now, but decent writers of historical fiction give you an afterword, footnotes or even a foreword to let you know fiction from truth. Now to get another book started to try to remove the bad taste from my mouth.

H.A. Mims says

This was a fantastic retelling of the life of Katherine, wife of Henry V and later mother to the Tudor dynasty. One thing I particularly enjoyed about her story is that unlike the majority of other women you read about in this genre, she wasn't particularly concerned with power or advancement. Nothing wrong with those stories either, of course, but I do enjoy a little variety in this respect. I found it lovely to read about her devotion to her family and enduring love for Owen Tudor.

Stacie (MagicOfBooks) says

I will also do a video review here at my channel: <http://www.youtube.com/magicofbooks>

"The Queen's Secret" by Jean Plaidy tells the story of Katherine of Valois, daughter of King Charles VI of France, wife of King Henry V, mother of King Henry VI, and grandmother to King Henry VII. Katherine grows from a princess to a queen and witnesses the wars between France and England and the inspiration of Joan of Arc.

My first Jean Plaidy novel. I've heard nothing but good things about her historical fiction. "The Queen's Secret" was well researched and well written. I think my only negative about the book was that it was a rather short read. I'm used to more lengthy historical fiction. I felt like many of the events in this book, like Katherine's childhood and the death of Henry V, flew by and then she's married to Owen Tudor. I felt like Plaidy took her time with the middle of the story, with Katherine's second marriage and the turmoil going on between France and England and the arrival of Joan of Arc. After the middle, I felt like the entire ending flew by. Owen, Katherine, and their children are separated, they're all imprisoned, and then Katherine dies days after childbirth. The good thing is that this book is in no way boring, nor does it read like a textbook. Just read much too quick for me. I would have liked events to have slowed down and Plaidy to have taken time with the narrative and the development of the characters. Other than the speed of the novel, I had a fun time reading this. I'm still a bit unfamiliar with this bit of the Plantagenet dynasty, though I'm slowly gathering more and more information as I go. Every now and then facts would pop up that I found myself going, "oh, I didn't know that." For instance, I don't think I ever connected the dots that Katherine's sister Isabelle was married to King Richard II.

Overall, a lovely, quick read. I definitely think I want to check out more of Jean Plaidy's novels. I have a feeling they might all be similar in style and length. I highly recommend this book if you're looking for a nice starting point when it comes to Plantagenet/Tudor fiction. Plus, if you don't like numerous, graphic sex scenes, this book was incredibly tame (which I wasn't particularly a fan of, but that may be just me). If you are in need of a quick historical fiction fix, this is certainly a perfect book to pick up.

Sara G says

This is a lovely historical fiction book about Katherine of Valois, and her relationships with both Henry V of England and Owen Tudor. It's told entirely from Katherine's point of view, but manages to discuss the main events of the time, mainly because she was in the middle of most of it! Katherine is a lesser known queen in English history, probably because of her scandalous relationship with the Tudor as well as her short reign, so it was fun to read a decently written book about her.

English says

Finding this book sitting of my Grandmother's bookshelf, I gravitated towards it because it involved the wife of Henry V, and so Henry himself, who I am perhaps a little obsessed with.

It is written in the 1st person from the perspective of Katherine de Valois herself (Henry's wife) in the form of a diary of sorts. The details of Katherine's early life were interesting, and the subject of her father's madness was treated sensitively. I utterly despised her sex- mad megalomaniac mother, Isabeau of Bavaria, and, if what Plaidy says about her is true, Katherine was fortunate to be free of her in England.

A more recent novel in this subject presented King Henry as a bad husband, who was abusive. I do not know

if there is any evidence or historical basis for this, but Plaidy did not hold to this view. Henry does appear to have loved Katherine, though she was not his first or only love, as he was also ambitious, loved his country and also the idea of being King of France.

Thier all-too brief marriage which culminated in Henry's untimely death after only 2 years is presented as a tragedy for both Katherine and the country, as it indeed was.

The narrative then follows onto Katherine's life after Henry's death, and here is does become somewhat weaker and a little repetitive. To sum up she met and fell in love with a young Welsh squire, Owen Tudor, but as the Mother of the King she was forbidden from marrying again, so thier relationship marriage had to remain a secret.

How she was able to keep her numerous preganacies, and the birth of several children a secret is questionable, espeically as in one scene it was claimed that she was seen in public only days before the birth of one of her children.

The novel ends somewhat abruptly, but, as it was meant to be Katherine telling the story, the author could not really have gone much further. If you are intersted in Henry V, the second phase of the Hundred Years war, and the events leading up to the wars of the Roses, you may be interested in this one.
