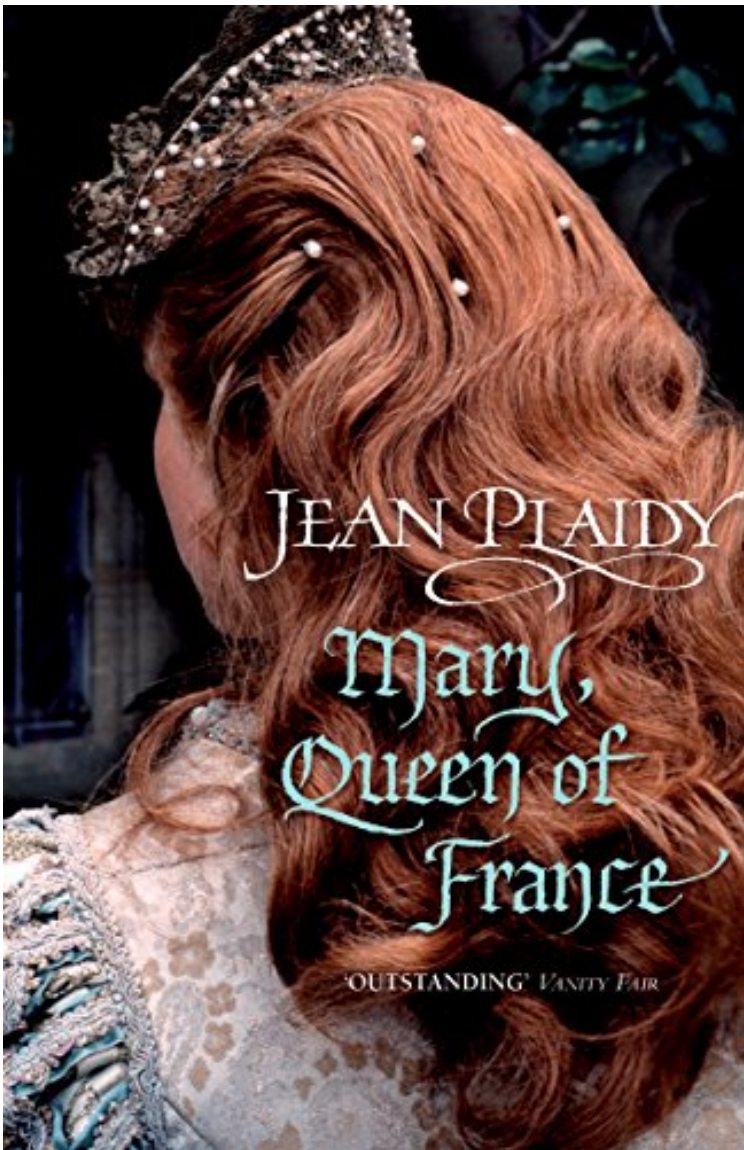


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Mary, Queen of France: (Tudor Saga)



Par Jean Plaidy
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurThe ninth of Jean Plaidy's Tudor novels - the story of Princess Mary Tudor, a celebrated beauty and born rebel who would defy the most powerful king in Europe; her brother, Henry VIII.Princess Mary Rose is the youngest sister of King Henry VIII, and one of the few people whom he adores unconditionally. Known throughout Europe for her charm and beauty, Mary is the golden child of the Tudor family and is granted her every wish. Except when it comes to marriage. Henry, locked in a political showdown with France, decides to offer up his pampered sister to secure peace between the two mighty kingdoms. Mary is unwillingly sent to France to marry the ailing King Louis, leaving behind her true love, Charles Brandon. But she will do anything to be reunited with Charles, even defy her brother, the most

feared man in Europe...ExtraitAlthough the wind blew from the northeast, whipping the cold waters of the Thames, bending the rushes and long grasses on the banks and throwing itself, as though in anger, against the Palace walls, the barges continued to arrive, and great personages alighted at the privy steps. The young girl kneeling in a window seat watched them with satisfaction. "Why, Katharine," she said, without turning to look at her sister-in-law, who sat sewing on her stool near the window, "my lord Dudley and my lord Empson are arriving now. Who next, I wonder." She pulled at her plentiful red-gold curls. "And to think, Katharine, that they are coming to honor me!" "Nay, Mary, you are over-vain. You should remember that it is not you they honor, but your fathers crown." "By God's Holy Mother," retorted Mary, "is it my fathers crown then who is going to solemnize its nuptials tomorrow in this Palace?" "We know it is yourself who is going to do that. But the honor these men do is not for an eleven-year-old girl, but because she is the daughter of the King of England." "I am twelve, I would have you know," retorted Mary. "Twelve and..." She began to count on her fingers. "Twelve years and nine months. Almost thirteen. So there!" "That is not so very old, and it is unseemly that you should use such oaths, which are in truth blasphemy." "Oh, Katharine, you are such a dull creature." She jumped from the window seat and, running to Katharine, put her arms about her. "There, I did not mean that. But you are so good...and I can never be good. At least I don't intend to be until I am so old that I must think of repentance. But you are not of that age yet, Katharine. Why don't you stop thinking about what is right, and think more about what is amusing?" She put her head on one side and regarded Katharine. Poor Kate! A widow already and of some years standing. It must be...she tried to count again...six years since Arthur had died, and poor Katharine had been growing older and sadder ever since. "We are not put on earth to amuse ourselves, Mary," said Katharine quietly. "But I was," persisted Mary. "You are young, and you are not as serious as you should be; but as a Princess you have your duty, and that is something you should never forget." "Duty!" cried Mary, and she swung round so that her tawny, damask petticoats showed beneath her green velvet gown. She pointed her toe and went on: "Oh, Katharine, have you tried the new dance? It goes like this. Henry showed me." She danced awhile, her hair streaming out behind her, her round face pink with the exertion, her blue eyes brilliant. Katharine said a prayer for her. She was so beautiful, so passionate, so self-willed, so spoiled; for even the King, who thought of little but enlarging his exchequer, softened at the sight of his youngest child. "And," went on Mary, coming to a sudden halt, "I should like to remind you that Henry uses that oath, and if Henry does, then so shall I." "You should not imitate his bad habits." "Henry's bad habits! He has none. He is my wonderful brother. Do you know, Katharine, I love him better than anyone in the world." Her face darkened suddenly. "I should love Charles, I suppose, but he is not like Henry." She ran to the picture which she had propped up on the window seat, and coming back, sat at Katharine's feet holding it out before her. It showed the Prince of Castile, a boy with sleepy eyes and a heavy jaw; his mouth was slightly open, and it was scarcely a prepossessing face. "Now can you imagine anyone less like Henry?" went on Mary. "And that is Charles, my bridegroom. Oh, what a wonderful thing it would be if Henry were not my brother. Then I might marry him." "You are very frivolous and talk a great deal of nonsense," said Katharine primly; but in spite of herself she was smiling. She thought: It is the same with us all. We tremble for her; we deplore her frivolity; and yet there is not one of us who is unaffected by her charm. After all, she is but a child. She will grow up. "Dear sister," she went on, "tomorrow is a very solemn occasion for you. If you would like to pray with me..." Mary shook her head emphatically. "I have said my prayers for the day, and you are quite wrong, Katharine. It is a joyous occasion. Did you not hear the bells ringing out this morning? There will be music in the streets and the people will make bonfires and dance round them. They are all so pleased because I am going to marry Prince Charles. There is nothing solemn about it. My father says it is a good marriage. So do all the old men from Flanders. They say that trade will flourish because of me...and that in marrying Charles I shall be doing my duty to England and my fathers House. So if I am doing all that, I'll not be solemn too. How the wind howls! They say it is hot in Spain. Is it? You know, because it was once your home. Katharine, one day I shall be Queen of Spain." Katharine shook her head resignedly. "My poor, poor Katharine," Mary rushed on. "All this talk of marriage makes you sad. You remember your own marriage and poor Arthur. Oh, Katharine, I am sorry. But smile. You shall dance tomorrow. Did you know that there is going to be bull-fighting and bear-baiting? There'll be hunting and hawking, and I'll swear there'll be jousting. It is going to be so exciting. Henry says that we do not have enough gaiety at Court, and when he is King..." She stopped and put her fingers to her lips. "But it really will be a very fine ceremony, Katharine, and you should enjoy it, with the rest of us." She heard the sound of laughter from below, and running to the window, she knelt once more on the seat. "It is Henry," she cried. "He is returning from the hunt. Henry!

Henry...!" She was tapping vigorously on the window, and the group of young men below looked upward. In their center was her brother Henry, already, although not yet eighteen, over six feet tall. He stood, legs apart, hands on hips, for the groom had taken his horse. He was soberly dressed, but only because his father deplored extravagance, and he managed to wear his clothes with a jaunty air; and indeed their very sobriety accentuated his dazzlingly healthy looks. "Hey, sister," he called; then he turned and spoke to his attendants who immediately burst into laughter, implying that his wit was irresistible. He entered the Palace and in a few minutes had flung open the door of the room and was striding toward his sister. She leaped up at him, putting her arm about his neck; he swung her round and she shrieked with delight. Katharine, quietly watching, thought how much they resembled each other and how pleasant it was to observe the affection between a brother and sister. It was particularly comforting to realize that Henry was capable of such deep feeling, because she hoped that one day she might be the object of his devotion. She saw in this young man her chance of regaining her lost dignity, and the humiliation of the last years had been almost beyond bearing. Had she not made a great effort to suppress her feelings, she could have hated the King of England who had treated her with such cold indifference since the death of her mother had reduced her value in the eyes of the world. But now her father, Ferdinand of Aragon, was no longer merely King of Aragon. He had enjoyed great successes in Europe and therefore his daughter had ceased to be as insignificant as she once had been. She knew it was solely for this reason that she was allowed to be the companion of the Princess Marystill humble, it was true, yet no longer completely banished from Court. When her mother was alive, this dazzling young Prince had been promised as her second husband; she still hoped that he might remember that promise. So in his presence she was nervous, eager to please and yet afraid that she would betray her anxiety to do so. "I can scarce wait for tomorrow," Mary was saying. "Are you so eager to leave us then?" demanded her brother. "Henry, I never want to leave you!" His smile was sparkling. He loved praise and could never have enough of it. "And you know," went on Mary, "it is only a ceremony. I am not to go away for years and years..." "Let us hope not," cried Henry. "Then you would have no sisters near you. You have already lost Margaret. Oh, Henry, I wonder what it is like in Scotland. Do you think Margaret ever misses us?" "She has a husband to think of now, but they say Scotland is a dour country. Id rather be here in Richmond." "Henry, perhaps Charles will come and live here, and I neednt go away." "Is that what you would like, little sister?" "Will you command him to do so?" "I...command the Prince of Castile!" "Indeed you must, because you will be able to command the whole world when...when..." The sister and brother looked at each other for a few seconds, then Henry remembered the presence of Katharine. He turned to her and said: "My sister prattles, does she not, Madam?" "Indeed, she does, Your Highness." "Katharine has been telling me I should pray more and talk less. I wont, Henry. I wont. I wont." "You are a bold creature," said Henry. "Now listen to me. When the ceremony is over there will be a banquet and afterward a great masque. We will show these Flemings how we can dance and sing. You and I...with a few of my friends...will slip away and disguise ourselves. Then we will return and dance before the Court. They will be enchanted with us and, when they are asking each other who we can be, we will throw off our disguises and show them." Mary clasped her hands together and looked up at the ceiling. "Oh, Henry, you think of the most wonderful things. I wish...oh, how I wish..." "Tell me what you wish?" She regarded him solemnly. "That I need never go away from you and, because being a Princess I must marry, I wish there was one who looked as you do, who spoke as you do, and was so like you in all ways that people could not tell you apart." Henry gave a bellow of laughter. He looked at Katharine asthough to say: What do you think of my sister? Is she not ridiculous? But he was contented that she should be so. He was indeed a contented young man. He believed that everything he wished for would soon be his. Every direction in which he turned he found adulation, and very soonit could not be long because the old man was coughing and spitting blood regularly nowhe would be the King of this country. His friends paid him all the homage he could wish for; when he rode through the streets of his fathers cities he was cheered more loudly than any. He knew that the whole of England was eagerly awaiting that day when they could call him their King. He would have everythinggood looks, good health, charm, gaiety...and all that great wealth which his father had accumulated so single-mindedly over the years. Yet nothing pleased him quite so much as the adoration of this little sister because, knowing her well, he knew too that when she expressed her love she spoke from the very depth of her heart. Young Mary had never attempted to hide her love or her hatred; had he been a beggar she would have loved him. He sensed too the yearning tenderness in the demeanor of the other woman, and he felt some regard for her. This was a happy day for, although on the morrow Marys nuptials were being solemnized, it was only by proxy and she would be with him for some time to come. So he had not to think of parting with her

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