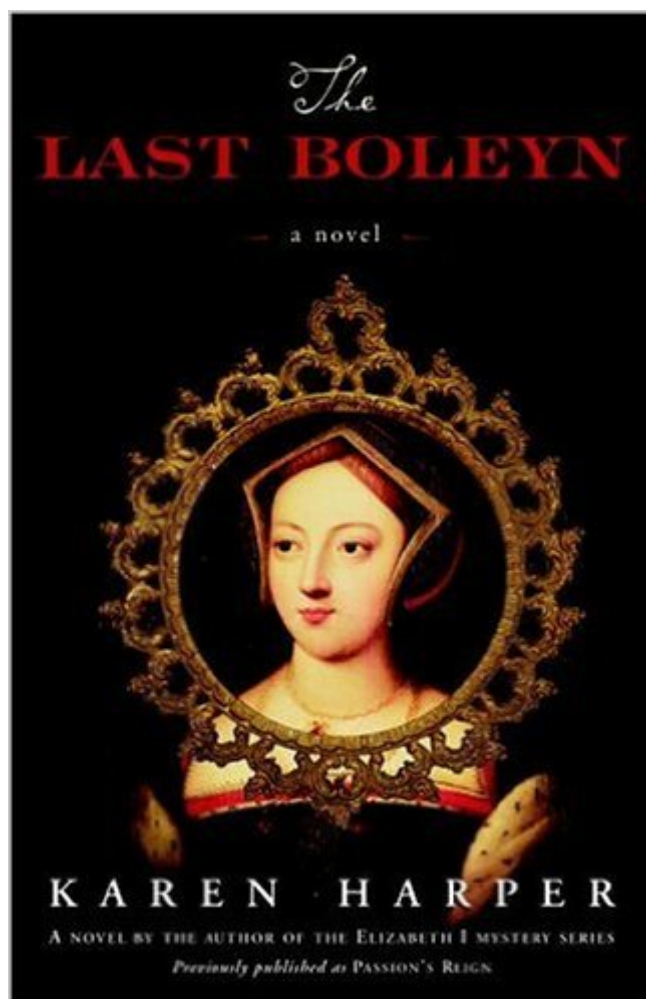


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The Last Boleyn: A Novel



Synopsis

She Survived Her Own Innocence, and the Treachery of Europe's Royal Courts. Greed, lust for power, sex, lies, secret marriages, religious posturing, adultery, beheadings, international intrigue, jealousy, treachery, love, loyalty, and betrayal. The Last Boleyn tells the story of the rise and fall of the Boleyns, one of England's most powerful families, through the eyes of the eldest daughter, Mary. Although her sister, Anne, the queen; her brother, George, executed alongside Anne; and her father, Thomas, are most remembered by history, Mary was the Boleyn who set into motion the chain of events that brought about the family's meteoric rise to power, as well as the one who managed to escape their equally remarkable fall. Sent away to France at an extraordinarily young age, Mary is quickly plunged into the dangerous world of court politics, where everything is beautiful but deceptive, and everyone she meets is watching and quietly manipulating the events and people around them. As she grows into a woman, Mary must navigate both the dangerous waters ruled by two kings and the powerful will of her own family in order to find a place for herself and the love she so deeply desires.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

History has continued to be a very fertile field for novelists. After all, the characters and most of the actions are already there, ready to be molded and tweaked into shape by the author, and if it's done well enough, then the few liberties that are taken sometimes can be forgiven. But if an author plays a bit too far with what happens in history -- or rather as we can perceive history to be -- then the story is turned into a laughable mess. One of the few authors that I've read who has taken on Tudor

England, and make it work, has been Karen Harper. Her first novel, *Passion's Reign*, has been reissued in large trade paperback format and retitled *The Last Boleyn*. The novel opens with an eight-year-old Mary Bullen overhearing her parents discussing her future. Unlike her elder brother, George, and her younger sister, Anne, Mary has inherited the fabulous looks of her mother's highborn family, the Howards. She is blonde, blue eyed and very pretty, just the sort of beauty that is coveted. Her father, a fast rising courtier in Henry VIII's court, has been named as an ambassador to the Netherlands, and he intends to bring Mary with him to acquire social graces and an education, while her mother is heartbroken to be losing her elder daughter. Little does Mary realize what this new twist in her life is going to bring to her. We follow Mary's life from an innocent child, to when she is made a part of Henry VIII's sister Mary Tudor, as she briefly married to the French King. Mary is at first enchanted with the French court, sophisticated and gay, but as she grows up, we also see her falling under the spell of the new king, Francois I, with his seductive, wiley ways.

(both with other books about the era and with Karen Harper's later work) Anyone who needs a dose of humility regarding just how little we know about history should read this book (originally published in 1983 as *Passion's Reign*) in conjunction with Philippa Gregory's *The Other Boleyn Girl*. Although the portrayal of Anne Boleyn's sister Mary as well as the basic plot outline, following history, is similar in the two books, the details, interpretations of relationships and behavior, and many other things are completely different. Some of this is due to advances in historical research. For example, it was originally accepted that Mary was the elder sister; now Anne is generally believed to be, but the fact is that as members of the relatively minor gentry the years of their births were considered to be too unimportant to be recorded at the time. Much of the difference, however, is just due to different emphases and the interpretations of the individual authors. What was Mary's relationship with William Carey (her first husband) like? Did she marry him when barely into her teens or after she already had caught King Henry VIII's eye? Was he or the king the father of her children? When did she meet her second husband? The records are not always clear, and this leaves a lot of room for authorial creativity. In the highly-regarded Elizabeth I mysteries, I have generally found Harper's historical research to be impeccable, but it is quite a bit more shaky here. For example, numerous references are made to the Duchess of Suffolk's daughter "Margaret," when a glance at any basic genealogy would have shown that there was no such person.

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