



The Six Wives of Henry VIII

By Antonia Fraser

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"Divorced, beheaded, died; divorced, beheaded, survived.' So the six wives of Henry VIII - Catherine of Aragon, Anne Boleyn, Jane Seymour, Anna of Cleves, Katherine Howard and Catherine Parr - have become defined in a popular sense not so much by their lives as by the way these lives ended. In the same way their characters are popularly portrayed as female stereotypes: the Betrayed Wife, the Temptress, the Good Woman, the Ugly Sister, the Bad Girl and, finally, the Mother Figure. But, as Antonia Fraser brilliantly and conclusively proves, they were rich and feisty characters. They may have been victims of Henry's obsession with a male heir, but they were not willing victims. On the contrary, they exhibited remarkable degrees of spirit and defiance of which women living now might still be proud. They displayed considerable strength and intelligence at a time when their sex supposedly possessed little of either. Antonia Fraser deals with each woman in turn with sympathy - the sympathy they deserve for having had the unenviable fate of being Henry's wife. Inevitably there was great rivalry between them, so high were the stakes in the great game of marrying the King of England. There was jealousy too - the desperate jealousy of Queens who found themselves abandoned, but also the sexual jealousy of the King who discovered himself betrayed. The story Antonia Fraser tells is romantic and cruel, funny and sad, dramatic and enthralling. This is historical biography at its best. "An intoxicating mixture of sex, sentiment and court intrigue...Fraser has the knack...of making history not merely readable but irresistible" Sunday Times

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