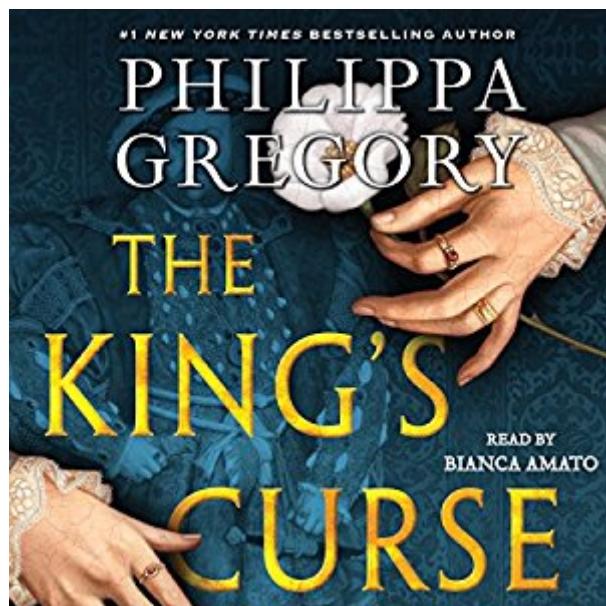


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The King's Curse



Synopsis

Regarded as yet another threat to the volatile King Henry VII's claim to the throne, Margaret Pole, cousin to Elizabeth of York (known as the White Princess) and daughter of George, Duke of Clarence, is married off to a steady and kind Lancaster supporter - Sir Richard Pole. For his loyalty, Sir Richard is entrusted with the governorship of Wales, but Margaret's contented daily life is changed forever with the arrival of Arthur, the young Prince of Wales, and his beautiful bride, Katherine of Aragon. Margaret soon becomes a trusted advisor and friend to the honeymooning couple, hiding her own royal connections in service to the Tudors. After the sudden death of Prince Arthur, Katherine leaves for London a widow, and fulfills her deathbed promise to her husband by marrying his brother, Henry VIII. Margaret's world is turned upside down by the surprising summons to court, where she becomes the chief lady-in-waiting to Queen Katherine. But this charmed life of the wealthiest and "holiest" woman in England lasts only until the rise of Anne Boleyn, and the dramatic deterioration of the Tudor court. Margaret has to choose whether her allegiance is to the increasingly tyrannical king, or to her beloved queen; to the religion she loves or the theology which serves the new masters. Caught between the old world and the new, Margaret Pole has to find her own way as she carries the knowledge of an old curse on all the Tudors.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Fine historical detail narrated from a woman's point of view. Lots of research and a careful and minutely imagined description of the lives of the rich and aristocratic class of ladies. The royal

Plantagenet Lady Margaret who is the narrator has an astoundingly varied life from rich to poor to rich again and finally meeting the ultimate disfavor of Henry VIII. Many children and other ladies of the aristocracy are a constant buzz in her life. Death was a constant presence and the capricious nature of divine kingship made life even more challenging.

I really love this author, but this book was not one of her better ones from the Cousin's collection. It seemed to be more about the telling of political/personal events with King Henry than about the character who is telling the story. The timeline also overlaps some of her other books and is a recap of information. Still a great book though and a must read if you've started the series.

While other protagonists in the Cousins War series are obsessed with gaining or retaining the throne, the King's Curse is narrated by Margaret Pole, the daughter of George Duke of Clarence and the niece of Edward IV and Richard III. If you have read The Kingmaker's Daughter, you know about her tragic childhood - her mother died young, her father disappeared into the tower for treason, and her maternal aunt, wife of Richard III died broken-hearted before the Battle of Bosworth. Margaret and her younger brother survived all this, and at the beginning of The King's Curse, she is married and banished to the country out of the new king's sight. Her brother is not so lucky, banished to the tower as a punishment for being born too close to the throne. Margaret doesn't seem to have any ambitions to regain the throne for herself or her family. She is happy with minor royal responsibilities, such as looking after the new Spanish princess Katherine who comes to England to marry Arthur Prince of Wales. While she suffers indignities and injustices under Henry VII, she chooses to pursue a rewarding country life, looking after her lands and her people. Henry even stifles this ambition when he drives her into poverty after her husband dies. Then Henry VIII becomes king and he does not seem to have his father's craven mistrust of Margaret's heritage. She is welcomed back to the palace where she attends the beautiful young queen Katherine. When Katherine gives birth to her first son, Henry asks his beloved cousin Margaret to raise this new prince. But the baby prince dies and the new king becomes obsessed with his own failure to sire an heir to his throne. He tests his power to the limit, violently defying his subjects, his advisers, his loyal wife and even his God as if a tantrum could get him a son. Meanwhile Margaret quietly nurtures her family of four boys and a girl, so they become powerful and influential members of court without ever admitting how close they are to the succession. Over the years, during Katherine's downfall and the rise of Anne Boleyn, Margaret has to do some fast talking to protect her family and her lands, without being accused of treason. She narrates the horror of Henry's reign, describing a brutal tyrant

who would not listen to rational argument and executed good men simply for disagreeing with him. She also describes the disastrous effect when Henry dissolves the monasteries, which worked as England's social security system, offering shelter and support to the sick and poor. Margaret is pragmatic, with a fierce desire to live. Her death is one of the defining moments of Henry VIII's reign - he executed his cousin, the woman who had helped raise him, had raised his daughter Mary and whose sons had supported him without ever hinting that they had a comparable claim to the throne. He executed her when she was in her 60s without a trial - her death is legendary because she fought back when the executioner swung his axe. Most books about Henry VIII focus on his personal life rather than the life of citizens during his reign - this book is the exception because even though Margaret is a peripheral member of the royal family, she describes how Henry's obsession with absolute power affected the country. This book brings home the arbitrary brutality of Henry's reign and shows the far-reaching effects of allowing certain favourites to seize land and treasures from the monasteries. It's maddening not to be able to tell Henry to concentrate on his own beautiful daughters who were both there, and both non-threatening successors to the throne. After reading this book, I wonder if the desire for a son was more about proving his manhood than securing the throne for future generations. An enjoyable and thought-provoking read for a long time Tudor fan! While this book might end The Cousin's War, I could see some threads towards future books - I'm guessing I'll see Reginald Pole and Princess Mary again!

I'm enjoying all of the Gregory novels in this period study. With each one a fuller picture of the different roles of the cousins becomes clearer. Looking at the details of history from different women's fills out the period's many effects on the culture of the times. Gives great background for the historical facts that you knew but couldn't fully appreciate before. Fun read.

I love the character of Margaret Pole in the other books and this goes a little further. It is interesting how each of the main characters are dismissive of the power of the throne until it benefits them and then actually harms them in the end. It is also instructive in this political climate to see the effects on government when the person in charge lies or denies the truth about matters unchecked by the underlings. In those days, people who lost favor when the lies affected them lost their heads. Nowadays they just lose their careers (or maybe end up in prison).

As usual I am hooked on Philippa Gregory's writing although this book wasn't quite as good as others I've read. Sometimes I think not as much effort has been put into the creation of the story.

Although, I am not usually disappointed in Ms. Gregory's books. She is one the top writers of Historical Fiction as far as I am concerned.

I really like Phillipa's books but this one I liked the least. It starts a bit slow and repetitive. I guess she tried a different view of the already infamous life of Henry VIII, but Margareth, although present in his life even before he was crowned, suffered and lived in fear like most everybody else during his reign. It's a chance to know more about the Yorks alive after the Tudors came to power but I would say that told as it was didn't hold my interest as the other books from the series did...

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