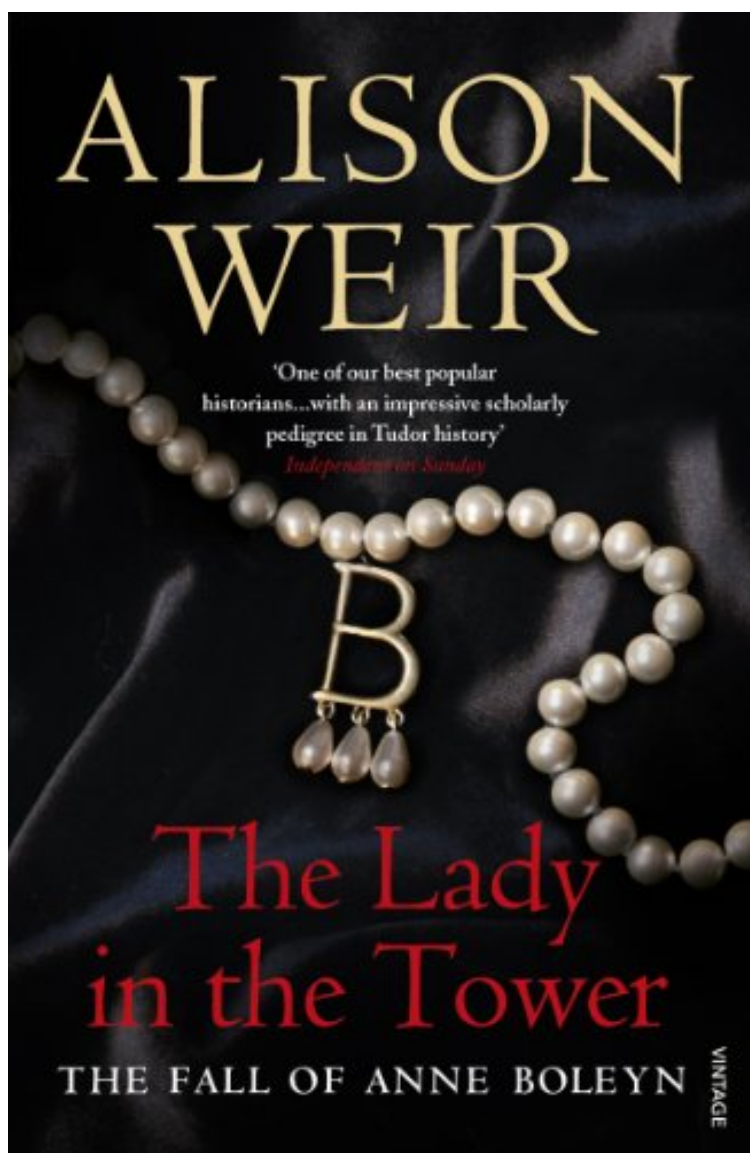


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# The Lady In The Tower: The Fall of Anne Boleyn (Queen of England Series)



*Par Alison Weir*

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## Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurOn 2 May, 1536, in an act unprecedented in English history, Anne Boleyn, Henry VIII's second wife, was imprisoned in the Tower of London. On 15 May, she was tried and found guilty of high treason and executed just four days later. Mystery surrounds the circumstances leading up to her arrest - did Henry VIII instruct Thomas Cromwell to fabricate evidence to get rid of her so that he could marry Jane Seymour? Did Cromwell, for reasons of his own, construct a case against Anne and her faction, and then present compelling evidence before the King? Or was Anne, in fact, as guilty as charged? Never before has

there been a book devoted entirely to Anne Boleyn's fall; now in Alison Weir's richly researched and impressively detailed portrait, we have a compelling story of the last days of history's most charismatic, controversial and tragic heroines.

Chapter One Occurrences That Presaged Evil

Three months earlier, on the morning of January 29, 1536,<sup>1</sup> in the Queen's apartments at Greenwich Palace, Anne Boleyn, who was Henry VIII's second wife, had aborted--"with much peril of her life"<sup>2</sup>--a stillborn fetus "that had the appearance of a male child of fifteen weeks growth."<sup>3</sup> The Imperial ambassador, Eustache Chapuys, called it "an abortion which seemed to be a male child which she had not borne three-and-a-half months,"<sup>4</sup> while Sander refers to it as "a shapeless mass of flesh." The infant must therefore have been conceived around October 17. This was Anne's fourth pregnancy, and the only living child she had so far produced was a girl, Elizabeth, born on September 7, 1533; the arrival of a daughter had been a cataclysmic disappointment, for at that time it was unthinkable that a woman might rule successfully, as Elizabeth later did, and the King had long been desperate for a son to succeed him on the throne. Such a blessing would also have been a sign from God that he had been right to put away his first wife and marry Anne. Now, to the King's "great distress,"<sup>5</sup> that son had been born dead. It seemed an omen. She had, famously, "miscarried of her savior."<sup>6</sup> Henry had donned black that day, out of respect for his first wife, Katherine of Aragon, whose body was being buried in Peterborough Abbey with all the honors due to the Dowager Princess of Wales, for she was the widow of his brother Arthur Tudor, Prince of Wales. Having had his own marriage to her declared null and void in 1533, on the grounds that he could never lawfully have been wed to his brother's wife, Henry would not now acknowledge her to have been Queen of England. Nevertheless, he observed the day of her burial with "solemn obsequies, with all his servants and himself attending them dressed in mourning."<sup>7</sup> He did not anticipate that, before the day was out, he would be mourning the loss of his son with "great disappointment and sorrow."<sup>8</sup> Henry VIII's need for a male heir had become increasingly urgent in the twenty-seven years that had passed since 1509, when he married Katherine.<sup>9</sup> Of her six pregnancies, there was only one surviving child, Mary. By 1526 the King had fallen headily in love with Katherine's maid-of-honor, Anne Boleyn, and after six years of waiting in vain for the Pope to grant the annulment of his marriage that he so passionately desired, so he could make Anne his wife, he defied the Catholic Church, severed the English Church from Rome, and had the sympathetic Thomas Cranmer, his newly appointed Archbishop of Canterbury, declare his union with the virtuous Katherine invalid. All this he did in order to marry Anne and beget a son on her. It had not been the happiest marriage. The roseate view of Anne's apologist, George Wyatt reads touchingly: "They lived and loved, tokens of increasing love perpetually increasing between them. Her mind brought him forth the rich treasures of love of piety, love of truth, love of learning; her body yielded him the fruits of marriage, inestimable pledges of her faith and loyal love." Yet while some of this is true, in the three years since their secret wedding in a turret room in Whitehall Palace, Henry VIII had not shown himself to be the kindest of husbands. In marrying Anne for love, he had defied the convention that kings wed for political and dynastic reasons. The only precedent was the example of his grandfather, Edward IV, who in 1464 had taken to wife Elizabeth Wydeville, the object of his amorous interest, after she refused to sleep with him. But this left Anne vulnerable, because the foundation of her influence rested only on the King's mercurial affections.<sup>10</sup> His "blind and wretched passion"<sup>11</sup> had rapidly subsided, and from the time of Anne's first pregnancy, following true to previous form, he had taken mistresses, telling her to "shut her eyes and endure as more worthy persons had done"--a cruel and humiliating comparison with the forbearing and dignified Katherine of Aragon--and that "she ought to know that he could at any time lower her as much as he had raised her."<sup>12</sup> And this to the woman whom he had frenziedly pursued for at least seven years, and for whom he had risked excommunication and war; the woman who had been the great love of his life and was the mother of his heir. "The King cannot leave her for an hour," Chapuys had written of Anne in 1532. "He accompanies her everywhere," a Venetian envoy had recorded at that time,<sup>13</sup> and was so amorous of her that he gladly fulfilled all her desires and "preferred all that were of [her] blood."<sup>14</sup> Similarly, a French ambassador, Jean du Bellay, had reported that the King's passion was such that only God could abate his madness. That was hardly surprising, since the evidence suggests he did not sleep with Anne for six or seven frustrating years. It has been suggested that it was Henry who, having enjoyed a sexual relationship with Anne during the early stages of their affair, resolved to abstain as soon as he had decided upon making her his wife, since the scandal of an unplanned pregnancy would have ruined all hope of the Pope granting an annulment.<sup>15</sup> The theory that the couple were lovers before 1528 rests on the wording of the papal bull for which the King applied that year. Because Anne's sister Mary had once been his mistress, he needed--in the event of his marriage to Katherine being

dissolved--a dispensation to marry within the prohibited degrees of affinity, which was duly granted; and he also asked for permission to marry a woman with whom he had already had intercourse.<sup>16</sup> He must have been referring throughout to Anne, whom he had long since determined to make his wife. But the wording of this bull does not necessarily imply that he had already slept with her: he was looking to the future and hopefully to making Anne his mistress in anticipation of their marriage. He was covering every contingency. Moreover, his seventeen surviving love letters to Anne strongly suggest that the more traditional assumption is likely correct, and that it was she who kept him at arm's length for all that time, only to yield when marriage was within her sights. Despite all the years of waiting and longing, there had been "much coldness and grumbling" between the couple since their marriage,<sup>17</sup> for Anne, once won, had perhaps been a disappointment. She was not born to be a queen, nor educated to that end. She found it difficult, if not impossible, to make the transition from a mistress with the upper hand to a compliant and deferential wife, which was what the King, once married, now expected of her. Years of frustration, of holding Henry off while waiting for a favorable papal decision that never came, had taken their toll on her as well as the King, and made her haughty, overbearing, shrewish, and volatile, qualities that were then frowned upon in wives, who were expected to be meek and submissive, not defiant and outspoken. And Henry VIII was nothing if not a conventional husband.<sup>18</sup> George Wyatt observed that, rather than upbraiding him for his infidelities, Anne would have done better to follow "the general liberty and custom" of the age by suffering in dignified silence. These days, Anne was no longer the captivating twenty-something who had first caught the King's eye, but (according to Chapuys) a "thin old woman" of thirty-five, a description borne out by a portrait of her done by an unknown artist around this time, which once hung at Nidd Hall in Yorkshire; one courtier even thought her "extremely ugly."<sup>19</sup> She was unpopular, and she had made many enemies in the court and the royal household through her overbearing behavior and offensive remarks. Nor had her much-vaunted virtue, employed as a tactical weapon in holding off the King's advances, been genuine. We may set aside Sander's malicious assertion that Anne's father sent her to France at the age of thirteen after finding her in bed with his butler and his chaplain, but she did go to the notoriously licentious French court at an impressionable age. "Rarely, or ever, did any maid or wife leave that court chaste," observed the sixteenth-century French historian, the Seigneur de Brantome, and in 1533, the year of Anne's marriage to Henry VIII, King Francis I of France confided to Thomas Howard, Duke of Norfolk, her uncle, "how little virtuously [she] had always lived."<sup>20</sup> Given the promiscuity of Anne's brother George and her sister Mary, and the suspect reputation of their mother, Elizabeth Howard, as well as the fact that their father was ready to profit by his daughters' liaisons with the King, it would be unsurprising if Anne herself had remained chaste until her marriage at the age of about thirty-two. In 1536 a disillusioned Henry told Chapuys in confidence that his wife had been "corrupted" in France, and that he had only realized this after their marriage.<sup>21</sup> Anne, however, would stand up one day in court and protest that she had maintained her honor and her chastity all her life long, "as much as ever queen did."<sup>22</sup> But that chastity may have been merely technical, for there are many ways of giving and receiving sexual pleasure without actual penetration. Henry VIII, perhaps not the most imaginative of men when it came to sex, and evidently a bit of a prude, was clearly shocked to discover that Anne already had some experience before he slept with her, and his disenchantment had probably been festering ever since.<sup>23</sup> It would explain the rapid erosion of his great passion for her, his straying from her bed within months of their marriage, and his keeping her under constant scrutiny. He believed she had lied to him, thought her capable of sustained duplicity, and may also have been suspicious of her naturally coquettish behavior with the men in her circle. On the surface, however, he had maintained solidarity with Anne. He could not afford to lose face after his long and controversial struggle to make her his wife, nor would he admit he had been wrong in marrying her. He took the unprecedented step of having her crowned with St. Edward's crown as if she were a...

Revue de presse [Weir] is well equipped to parse the evidence, ferret out the misconceptions and arrive at sturdy hypotheses about what actually befell Anne. The New York Times Well-researched and compulsively readable . . . Acclaimed novelist and historian [Alison] Weir continues to successfully mine the Tudor era, once again excavating literary gold. Booklist It is a testament to Weir's artfulness and elegance as a writer that *The Lady in the Tower* remains fresh and suspenseful, even though the reader knows what's coming. The Independent (U.K.) Weir does a Herculean job of re-creating the doomed queen's final weeks. Boston Herald Compelling stuff, full of political intrigue and packing an emotional wallop. The Oregonian From the Trade Paperback edition.