



Doomed Queens: Royal Women Who Met Bad Ends, From Cleopatra to Princess Di

By Kris Waldherr



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Illicit love, madness, betrayal--it isn't always good to be the queen

>Marie Antoinette, Anne Boleyn, and Mary, Queen of Scots. What did they have in common? For a while they were crowned in gold, cosseted in silk, and flattered by courtiers. But in the end, they spent long nights in dark prison towers and were marched to the scaffold where they surrendered their heads to the executioner. And they are hardly alone in their undignified demises. Throughout history, royal women have had a distressing way of meeting bad ends--dying of starvation, being burned at the stake, or expiring in childbirth while trying desperately to produce an heir. They always had to be on their toes and all too often even devious plotting, miraculous pregnancies, and selling out their sisters was not enough to keep them from forcible consignment to religious orders.

From Cleopatra (suicide by asp), to Princess Caroline (suspiciously poisoned on her coronation day), there's a gory downside to being blue-blooded when you lack a Y chromosome. Kris Waldherr's elegant little book is a chronicle of the trials and tribulations of queens across the ages, a quirky, funny, utterly macabre tribute to the dark side of female empowerment. Over the course of fifty irresistibly illustrated and too-brief lives, *Doomed Queens* charts centuries of regal backstabbing and intrigue. We meet well-known figures like Catherine of Aragon, whose happy marriage to Henry VIII ended prematurely when it became clear that she was a starter wife--the first of six. And we meet forgotten queens like Amalasantha, the notoriously literate Ostrogoth princess who overreached politically and was strangled in her bath. While their ends were bleak, these queens did not die without purpose. Their unfortunate lives are colorful cautionary tales for today's would-be power brokers--a legacy of worldly and womanly wisdom gathered one spectacular regal ruin at a time.



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Editorial Review

Review

"It isn't often that one encounters a book that invites the reëmergence of childhood fantasies, then eviscerates them in a few words. Even less common is the book that manages to make the process utterly satisfying. Such is the rush I got from Kris Waldherr's deliciously perverse *Doomed Queens*.... *Doomed Queens* is also a concise, humorous, and keenly observed history of women and power."--*The New Yorker*

"If you need an antidote to the Disney-fied princess culture popular among young girls today, this dishy, irreverent book is it."--*Atlanta Journal Constitution*

"A smart, sassy overview of the 'dark side' of the crown and scepter. It makes a girl glad she was born a commoner."

--Robin Maxwell, bestselling author of *Mademoiselle Boleyn*

"A fascinating journey through thousands of years of the world's most dangerous job -- being queen!"

--Eleanor Herman, author of *Sex with the Queen*

From the Author

Welcome to your favorite dream--and worst nightmare. You are cosseted in silk, crowned with gold, and bowed to. Courtiers laugh at your jokes and compliment your beauty, even when you know you're having a bad hair day. All envy you, but things change. Just years later, even those who admired you steer clear of your path.

Your influence is on the wane for any number of reasons. The fault could be yours--maybe you weren't as clever as you thought in the scheming department. Or it could be that others are scheming against you. When the end finally comes, it arrives with the stroke of an ax at noon-- a topsy-turvy Cinderella tale--or with a drumrolled march to the scaffold. The battlefield may provide you with a convenient grave. Or you might lose your crown as you labor to bring forth an heir to the kingdom. Biology becomes destiny. Best case scenario: You will survive a coup and be allowed to live out your days in awkward exile, where opportunistic stragglers will still suck up to your royal majesty, just in case.

No matter how your end finally arrives, one truth remains: Your fall from grace is not your call, though your actions may encourage it. It is your fate. After all, you are a doomed queen--and, if one is to go by the lessons of history, the only good queen is a dead one.

For too many royal women throughout history, the scenario I've sketched here was their dark reality. The members of the doomed queens club--a club I suspect few would care to join--are legion, stretching from biblical times to the present day. Their names range from the infamous--Cleopatra, Anne Boleyn, Marie Antoinette--to those whose deaths are hidden within footnotes, such as Blanche of Bourbon and Thessalonike.

Within *Doomed Queens* I've presented fifty of these lives from around the globe and throughout the ages. While each queen's final destiny may differ, one fact remains consistent: Despite the perks of royalty, it's usually not good to be the queen.

Remember, those who don't learn from history are doomed to repeat it. May you read and beware.

My very best,

Kris Waldherr

About the Author

Kris Waldherr is an author, illustrator, and designer whose art has been exhibited in the National Museum of Women in the Arts. She is the author of *The Lover's Path* and *The Book of Goddesses*, and creator of *The Goddess Tarot*. She lives in Brooklyn, New York.

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