



The King's Grey Mare

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The King's grey mare was Elizabeth Woodville, Queen and wife of Edward IV. Beautiful beyond belief, with unique silver-grey hair, she had once known joy of a marriage based on love—only to see it snatched away on the battlefield. Hardened and changed by grief, Elizabeth became the tool of her evil ambitious mother—the witch, Jaqueta of Bedford—who was determined that her daughter should sit on the throne of England. By trickery, deception, and witchcraft, Jaqueta's wish was fulfilled. But even a witch could not have known the tragedy which lay in store for the King's grey mare.

The King's Grey Mare Details

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From Reader Review The King's Grey Mare for online ebook

Lora Shouse says

A focus on the lives of the women of the story, and an emphasis on witchcraft, or the influence of spirits, gives sort of an unreal, dreamlike quality to this book. Nevertheless, even knowing more or less how things turned out, it was hard to put down.

This is primarily the story of Elizabeth Woodville, the wife of King Edward IV. She was disliked in some quarters for securing positions of power for the members of her family – a circumstance which was the more deeply resented because she came from a large family. It was, of course, the very people who wanted these powerful positions for themselves who resented it the most, but these were people who had other sources of power and were not afraid to use them.

The book is filled with scheming and plotting – everything from Elizabeth's mother's use of witchcraft (of the old time-honored sticking pins in wax dolls variety) to the more mundane switching sides in the various political intrigues, which everybody did several times. Amid all the fighting and political maneuvering, it would have been difficult to tell whether the water spirit Melusine, venerated by the Woodville women or the Welsh dragon, Cadwallader, venerated by the partisans of Henry VII, could have made any real difference in the actual outcome of the struggle even if they were real and as powerful as their followers believed them to be.

Misfit says

Jarman recounts the life of Elizabeth Woodville, daughter of Richard Woodville, Earl Rivers and Jacquetta of Luxembourg. As a young girl she serves at the court of Henry VI as maid of honor to Marguerite d'Anjou until she meets and marries John Grey (a true love match according to the author) and bears two sons. When Grey is killed while fighting for the Lancastrians, Elizabeth's mother Jacquetta sets her sights on Edward IV and herein Jarman weaves the story of the Woodville's alleged sorcery and descent from Melusine as they drive Edward mad with lust that can only be slated with a wedding ring.

The novel then moves on to known history, Elizabeth's marriage to Edward, her times in sanctuary, the infamous Jane Shore, Edward's death and the ascent of Richard III to the throne as through Titulus Regius Edward and Elizabeth's children are named illegitimate. After Richard is defeated at Bosworth the story then focuses more on Edward's illegitimate daughter, Grace Plantagenet, and her love/hate relationship with Elizabeth.

This all sounded promising, even though the witchcraft and descent from Melusine are allegedly nothing but rumor and speculation. Unfortunately the author's over the top flowery prose and the "visions" and "dreams" not only didn't hold my attention, she completely lost me at times that I found it quite difficult to get back into the story. A minor quibble and not being a historian I can't say if its right or wrong, but the author had both Marguerite d'Anjou and Elizabeth (when Queen) addressed as "My Liege" instead of "Your Grace", or she switched between the two and that also kept throwing me out of the story. In the end, it's certainly not the worst book I've read on the period but then it's far from being the best either. Get it from the library if you must and then buy it if you love it. Three stars.

Joy H. says

Added 10/27/11.

Lisa (Harmonybites) says

I admit my high rating may be due to early imprinting and nostalgia, but this was one the novels that made me fall in love with both English history and historical fiction. I was maybe fourteen when I still read this book but I can still remember it vividly decades later. Jarman is known as someone sympathetic to Richard III, who thinks him much maligned--you can see that in his depiction in Jarman's *We Speak No Treason* centered on Richard III. Ordinarily, ardent Ricardians are harsh on Elizabeth Woodville, a woman of the minor gentry who caught the eye of a king and became Queen and mother of the Two Princes in the Tower and an ancestor of Elizabeth I (and II). This portrait does have its hard edges, but I did feel sympathy for her Elizabeth--more I felt the pull of her charisma, and I think Jarman does well by her subject. I also enjoyed Jarman's *We Speak No Treason* and *Crown in Candlelight* about the wife of Henry V who'd become an ancestress of the Tudors. *The King's Grey Mare* though remains my favorite novel by her. (And when a friend I lent my copy to returned it with the copy ripped off, let me tell you that was the beginning of the end of our friendship.)

Bryn Greenwood says

This is one of those deeply researched and passionately felt historical novels that help fill in all the blanks left by a public school education and a Herman and the Hermits record. Everything feels real, even the things that historians can't possibly know and must therefore imagine. In that sense, Jarman is the perfect mix of historian and fiction writer. I go away from this book, feeling sure that these exact conversations were had.

My only lingering complaint is Jarman's (or her editor's) habit of taking great chronological leaps, with only a blank space between paragraphs to separate one year from another. I found myself annoyed on several occasions when I would be a paragraph into the next section only to be jarred by the realization that months or even years have passed in that little white space.

Cheryl says

This is the first time I've read a Rosemary Hawley Jarman novel and based on this it won't be the last. I just thought this was wonderful and very well researched. It's the first time I've seen the idea that Henry VII had the princes killed, which I found interesting given that Richard III is seen as a bit of a bad guy in this book. Although to Elizabeth Woodville everyone was a bad guy. I really liked the love story between the young Elizabeth and John Grey and I even liked the character of Grace Plantagenet. Sure there were some slow places in this and sometimes the whole Melusine storyline gets a little too "witchy" for me, but it is part of the Jacquetta/Elizabeth Woodville story so it is not out of place here at all.

Jenny says

I was disappointed, to be honest. As the book went on, I found myself skimming more and more. I felt it was clunky and full of irritating archaisms (eg boys and girls become 'knaves' and 'maids') and I wondered why at this late stage of the Middle Ages women are being addressed in French as 'Madame' all the time.

The problem already noted elsewhere of great time jumps between paragraphs was also a hindrance and I didn't feel any characters really stood out as real people, except perhaps for Gloucester / Richard III.

And this stuff about 'worshipping' Melusine just didn't make sense in a medieval setting - the modern notion that witchcraft is linked to paganism simply didn't exist at the time.

This is a good story, but not very well told - I wish Norah Lofts could have done it.

Freda Warrington says

Thoroughly enjoyable – she handles a complicated historical period (the Wars of the Roses) with great elegance. She achieves this by telling much of it in flashback; we see Elizabeth Woodville, or other characters, in a situation but thinking about a battle that's just taken place or a person who's been killed, thus changing the course of history. This however is done so well that I didn't even notice that a lot of the story was “told” rather than “shown”. (Actually “show don’t tell” is a writer’s rule that often needs to be ignored – you can’t dramatise everything, and shouldn’t).

RHJ is a bit naughty for changing viewpoints mid-scene, though – I think this is careless style, and confusing. But lots of otherwise good writers seem to do it, so what do I know?

The descriptions are as sharp and vivid as anything by Tanith Lee. I particularly enjoyed a scene where Elizabeth W has what seems to be an attack of synesthesia. She’s just received news that her husband Edward IV has lost a battle: “There were a lot of names, and all had colours. The King: bright blue and gold, with a cage round it – for Warwick had the King fast, a prisoner... Hastings, and Richard Gloucester – both dull brown, having fled, escaped. Anthony, her brother: a rainbow name shot with fear and hope... George of Clarence: over the courier’s head, and through the window, she could see ravens, pecking at the battlements. Black. The colour of Clarence, who had allied himself to the foul fiend. To Warwick, blacker than black.”

Orsolya says

Elizabeth Woodville, wife of Edward IV, was surrounded with intrigue. Whether it is due to her ‘hasty marriage’ to Edward, her supposed witchcraft (doubtful!), or being the mother to the Princes in the Tower; her legend lives on. Rosemary Hawley Jarman brings this captivating Queen to life in, “The King’s Grey Mare”.

“The King’s Grey Mare” follows Elizabeth Woodville’s life from a young girl to her rise and somewhat-considered fall on fortune’s wheel. Although the initial pages immediately cast a ‘witchcraft’ focus on the

Woodvilles (no pun intended); the novel isn't as fluffy and unbelievable as many other historical fiction novels. In fact, it is relatively tolerable and doesn't inhibit Jarman from weaving a strong, historical essence in "The King's Grey Mare".

Elaborating on this, Jarman's text is quite historically accurate (with liberties that only versed readers will notice) and only contains a few staunch positions on topics which are considered speculation amongst historians (this may also be a result of the book being published in the 70s). The novel is rich, dense, and truly brings the events and era to life. So much so, that the plot and imagery begins to play out like a film with colorful settings and emotions. Granted, sometimes Jarman's writing is *too* descriptive and one wants to tell her to get on with the story, already.

Elizabeth's character arc is strong and she truly comes alive more so than the few other novels which surround her. She displays charm and multiple layers which either unravels or grows as the story progresses and thus, strengthens the novel. All of the characters in "The King's Grey Mare" are compelling and not the usual black-and-white. Furthermore, Jarman doesn't feel the need to over-explain the figures or their roles making "The King's Grey Mare" perfect for those familiar to the topic and, although possibly overwhelming; also a great lesson for those new but seeking historical merit.

"The King's Grey Mare" can become tiresome as it is divided into sections versus chapters and therefore the story doesn't breathe with enough breaks. Several times, the novel advances in years or months from one paragraph to the next which is distracting and causes confusion. Also annoying is Jarman's extensive use of exclamation points within mid-sentences (I've heard this was a common British stylistic) and the addition of several poems, songs, and lyrics amongst the text which could be omitted without depleting the plot value. Aside from that, Jarman's language is well-written, beautiful, and very accurate with the times.

As "The King's Grey Mare" progresses, the story is told from various character view points. Instead of causing misunderstanding, this heightens drama and reveals 'insider' information eliminating the hated, "As you know, Bob..." style of writing common to HF. The pace and excitement levels are elevated, while drama increases. Unfortunately, the magical elements within the story also increases and will deter true-to-history fans.

Approximately midway through, "The King's Grey Mare" takes a climatic turn which although exciting is also a bit chaotic and "all over the place". Thankfully, this evens out and Jarman finely captures the various emotional states of Elizabeth making her relatable and 'human'. Also compelling is the addition of Grace Plantagenet to the story (although her actual plot is much too fluffy). A negative: Jarman has the habit of skimming important events versus engaging in them, which rushes the story.

Surprisingly, Jarman doesn't hide her allegiance to Richard III or her resentment towards Elizabeth and eventually, Henry VII. This is odd merely because "The King's Grey Mare" is a Woodville novel and yet doesn't portray Elizabeth in the best light. Jarman even pinpoints the death of the princes on Henry.

As "The King's Grey Mare" rounds out, the plot begins to wane and Jarman stretches the story (especially with the Grace sub-plot). The pace slows and encourages an ending which doesn't seem to come. Even with the weak conclusion however, Jarman creatively maintains her stance on historical events without forcing them and seamlessly interlopes them into the plot. This gentle pushes raises historical debate versus angering the reader on historical liberty-taking. "The King's Grey Mare" does not (sadly) include an author's note to reveal the historical mirth taken which would be helpful for general readers.

Despite complaints and a weak ending; "The King's Grey Mare" is absolutely terrific in comparison to much

of today's HF. It is dense, rather accurate (more accurate than not), and well-written, bringing the Wars of the Roses and Elizabeth alive. "The King's Grey Mare" is 100% recommended for a less Romanticized view of the Plantagenets.

Shawn Thrasher says

Jarman's book about Elizabeth Woodville came long before The White Queen, but they cover almost exactly the same ground. Jarman is a more lyrical and old fashioned writer; Gregory flushes out some of Jarman's ideas in a more meatier and interesting way (the witchery of the Woodvilles, for example, is more deftly written by Gregory than Jarman). This isn't a bad book by any means; if you like the Wars of the Roses, then you'll (mostly) enjoy Jarman's book. My only beef was the zig and zag of the characters, particularly that of Elizabeth Woodville herself. It's like Jarman couldn't decide if Elizabeth was a romantic heroine or a monstrous bitch, and tried to make her into both. She could have succeeded at that with some transition, but that lack of transition makes Elizabeth into a bizarre and schizo character and not completely believable. If you want to only read one novel about Elizabeth Woodville, stick to Gregory. But if you like your Wars of the Roses almost ornate and poetic, give Jarman a try.

Sara says

Back in my days of obsession over Plantagenet & Tudor history, this book was heads & shoulders above most of what I read. The story is told from the viewpoint of Elizabeth Woodville, the much vilified wife of Edward IV. The story of her first marriage (for love, as portrayed in this book) is very sympathetic although the account of her later life is more in line with conventional portrayals.

Kara says

Surprisingly, this book becomes a strong message on why killing your enemies will not, in the long run, work. Elizabeth Woodville uses every feminine wile in the book to try and get her way, over and over getting obsessed with someone and wanting their head on a plate, then a few pages later getting obsessed with someone new, each time thinking killing *this* person will solve everything.

While I think Elizabeth was a very active member of Plantagenet politics, I don't think she was *quite* as influential as the author gives her credit for – Edward was perfectly capable of deciding to execute people on his own. And the Melusine angle was overplayed, but the idea was good.

Meanwhile, Margaret Beaufort hangs out in the background, popping up every other chapter to say something about how her young son Henry Tudor is doing. She smirks knowingly a lot, like she somehow got her hands on a copy of Richard III and knows how it's all going to end – a stage littered with bodies and the House of Tudor triumphant.

Any story that deals with this era has to touch on the Princes in the Tower mystery.

Spoiler

In this book, the theory is Henry VII ordered the deaths after he came to the throne (plausible), but, and here's a twist, here it was Elizabeth Woodville, their own mother, who started the rumor, while they were still very much alive, that they were dead to try and shake Richard III off his throne. Elizabeth thinks she can have her cake and eat it too. Later, when she outright demands Henry VII to let her see her sons, he can very coldly tell her: Richard killed them - you said so yourself. And she's left without a leg to stand on.

Audrey says

Excellent book based on the wars of the Roses and the life of Elizabeth Woodville and her marriage to Edward IV. Fascinating and terrible it shows the cost of unbridled ambition. It deals with intrigue, murder, betrayal and love. It vividly brings to life Elizabeth and her times and the politics of the Court. This book is highly recommended. A fascinating read about a bloodthirsty and tumultuous period of British history,

Helene Harrison says

Review - I always viewed Elizabeth Woodville as being a strong-willed woman, who always did what she wanted, but in this novel we see her firmly under the hand of her witch mother, which I don't believe. It immediately put me off. I was bored within the first few pages, but plodded on for a couple of chapters. Nevertheless, I couldn't finish the book as the description seemed at times to be overwhelming, and there wasn't enough action.

Genre? - Historical Fiction / Drama

Characters? - Elizabeth Woodville / Edward IV / John Grey / Thomas Grey / Jacquetta of Luxembourg / Anthony Woodville, Earl Rivers / Cecily Neville / Richard III / Anne Neville / George Plantagenet, Duke of Clarence / Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick

Setting? - Grafton & London (England)

Series? - N/A

Recommend? - No

Rating - 7/20

Joanna Gawn says

I love Plantagenet and Tudor history, and always look forward to reading any novel which has these at its foundation.

This was not an easy book to read, in terms of both vocabulary and style; occasionally I was unclear on what

was happening to whom, as the prose was so intricate.

I feel a slight sadness for books whose progress I mark ten or twenty pages at a time, knowing that I am unlikely to read it again!

Still, I am glad I took the time - and effort - to read it this once. However I would choose Sharon K. Penman or Philippa Gregory for a more 'enjoyable' read.
