

You loved your last book...but what
are you going to read next?

Using our unique guidance tools, Love**reading** will help you find new
books to keep you inspired and entertained.

Opening Extract from...

Sisters of Treason

Written by Elizabeth Fremantle

Published by Michael Joseph

All text is copyright © of the author

This Opening Extract is exclusive to Love**reading**.
Please print off and read at your leisure.

Sisters of Treason

ELIZABETH FREMANTLE

MICHAEL JOSEPH

an imprint of

PENGUIN BOOKS

MICHAEL JOSEPH

Published by the Penguin Group

Penguin Books Ltd, 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England
Penguin Group (USA) Inc., 375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014, USA
Penguin Group (Canada), 90 Eglinton Avenue East, Suite 700, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4P 2Y3
(a division of Pearson Penguin Canada Inc.)

Penguin Ireland, 25 St Stephen's Green, Dublin 2, Ireland (a division of Penguin Books Ltd)

Penguin Group (Australia), 707 Collins Street, Melbourne, Victoria 3008, Australia
(a division of Pearson Australia Group Pty Ltd)

Penguin Books India Pvt Ltd, 11 Community Centre,
Panchsheel Park, New Delhi – 110 017, India

Penguin Group (NZ), 67 Apollo Drive, Rosedale, North Shore 0632, New Zealand
(a division of Pearson New Zealand Ltd)

Penguin Books (South Africa) (Pty) Ltd, Block D, Rosebank Office Park,
181 Jan Smuts Avenue, Parktown North, Gauteng 2193, South Africa

Penguin Books Ltd, Registered Offices: 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

www.penguin.com

First published 2014

001

Copyright © Elizabeth Fremantle, 2014

The moral right of the author has been asserted

All rights reserved

Without limiting the rights under copyright reserved above, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise), without the prior written permission of both the copyright owner and the above publisher of this book

Printed in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

HARDBACK ISBN: 978-0-718-17708-9

TRADE PAPERBACK ISBN: 978-0-718-17709-6

www.greenpenguin.co.uk

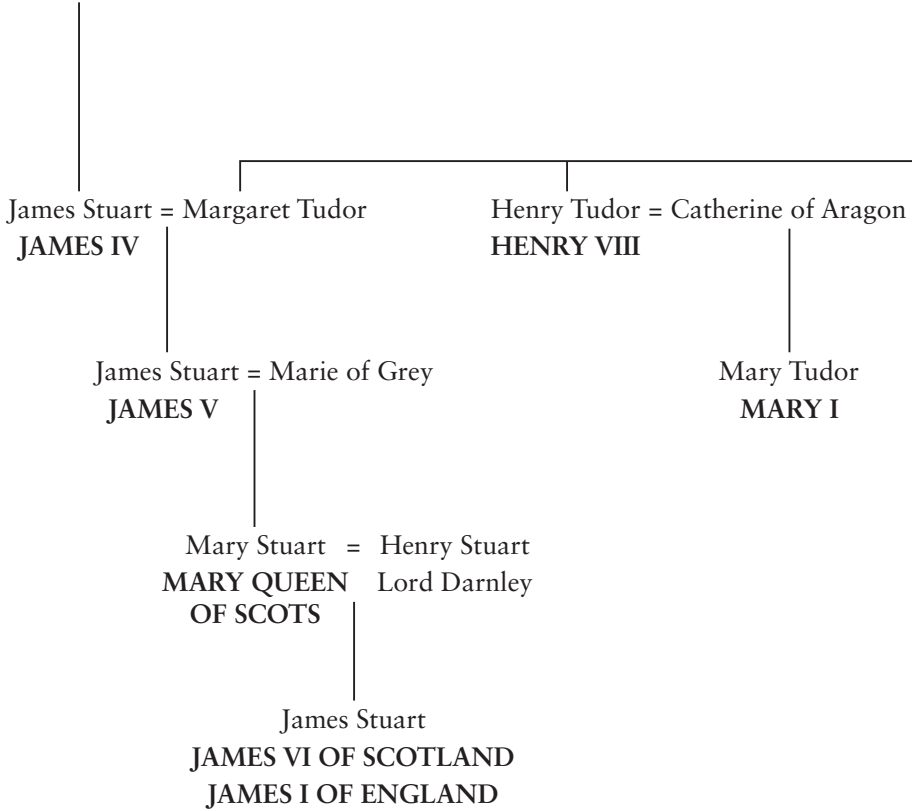


Penguin Books is committed to a sustainable future for our business, our readers and our planet. This book is made from Forest Stewardship Council™ certified paper.

For Raphael and Alice

THE TUDOR AND

SCOTLAND



Monarchs are in bold and only marriages that produced heirs are shown

STUART SUCCESSION

ENGLAND

Henry Tudor = Elizabeth of York
HENRY VII

• Anne Boleyn • Jane Seymour

Elizabeth Tudor Edward Tudor
ELIZABETH I **EDWARD VI**

Mary Tudor = Charles Brandon
'Queen of France' Duke of Suffolk

Frances Brandon = Henry Grey
Duchess of Suffolk Duke of Suffolk

LADY JANE GREY

Katherine Grey = Edward Seymour
Countess of Hereford Earl of Hertford

Mary Grey

Edward Seymour
Viscount Beauchamp

Thomas Seymour

Prologue

February 1554

The Tower of London

Levina

Frances is shaking. Levina takes her arm, tucking it firmly into the crook of her elbow. A bitter wind hisses through the naked branches of the trees and smacks at the women's clothes, lifting their hoods so the ties cut into their throats. The winter sky is blotched grey, like the inside of an oyster shell, and the White Tower is a dark shape against it. A hushed collection of people shuffles about beside the scaffold, rubbing hands and stamping feet to keep warm. A couple of men trundle past them pulling a cart, but Levina does not really see for she is gazing up towards a window in a building across the yard, where she thinks she can see the outline of a figure.

'Oh Lord!' murmurs Frances, slapping a hand over her mouth. 'Guildford.'

Levina looks, understanding instantly. In the cart is a bloody bundle; it is the body of Guildford Dudley. Frances's breath is shallow and fast, her face pallid, not white as one might imagine, but green. Levina takes her by her shoulders, narrow as a girl's, facing her, holding her eyes with a steady look, saying, 'Breathe deeply Frances, breathe deeply,' doing so herself, in the hope that Frances will mimic her slow inhalations. She cannot imagine what it must be for a mother to watch her seventeen-year-old daughter die and be powerless to stop it.

‘I cannot understand why Mary –’ She stops to correct herself, ‘why the Queen would not let us see her . . . Say goodbye.’ Her eyes are bloodshot.

‘Fear has made her ruthless,’ Levina says, ‘She must fear plots everywhere, even between a mother and her condemned daughter.’ She reaches down to her greyhound Hero, stroking the peaked landscape of his spine, feeling the reassuring press of his muzzle into her skirts.

Levina remembers painting Jane Grey in her queen’s regalia, not even a year ago. She was mesmerized by the intensity of the girl’s gaze, those widely set, dark eyes flecked with chestnut, her long neck and delicate hands, all somehow conspiring to give the impression of both strength and fragility. Painted is perhaps not quite the word, for she had barely the chance to prick the cartoon and pounce the charcoal dust through on to the panel, before Mary Tudor arrived in London with an army to pull the throne out from under her young cousin, who will meet her death today on this scaffold. It was Frances Grey who helped Levina break up that panel and throw it on the fire, along with the cartoon. The wheel of fortune turns fast in England these days.

Over her shoulder Levina notices a gathering of Catholic churchmen arrive; Bonner, the Bishop of London, is amongst them, fat and smooth, like a grotesque baby. Levina knows him well enough from her own parish; he has a reputation for brutality. There is a supercilious smile pasted on his face; pleased to see a young girl lose her head – sees it as a triumph, does he? Levina would love to slap that smile away; she can imagine the ruddy mark it would leave on his cheek, the satisfying smart on her palm.

‘Bonner,’ she whispers, to Frances. ‘Don’t turn. If he meets your eye he may try and greet you.’

She nods and swallows and Levina guides her away, further

from the men so she is less likely to have to confront any of them. Not many have come to see a girl that was queen for a matter of days die; not the hundreds, it is said, that came to jeer at Anne Boleyn – the one whose death started the fashion for decapitating queens. No one will heckle today, everyone is too horrified about this, except Bonner and his lot, and even they are not so crass as to overtly assert their pleasure. She thinks of the Queen at the palace, imagining how she would paint her. She must be with her closest women; they are likely at prayer. But in Levina's mind the Queen is alone in the empty expanse of her watching chamber, and has just been told that one of her favourite young cousins has been murdered at her bidding. The look on her face is not one of carefully suppressed triumph like Bonner's, nor is it one of fear, though it should be, for after all it is only days since a rebel army sought, and failed, to depose her and put her sister Elizabeth on the throne – no, her pinched face is blank as a sheet of new vellum, eyes dead, detached, suggesting that the killing has only just begun.

'This is her father's doing,' Frances mutters. 'I cannot help but blame him Veena . . . His mindless ambition.' She spits the words out as if they taste foul. Levina glances once more towards that tower window, wondering if the figure there, watching, is Frances's husband, Henry Grey, who also awaits a traitor's fate. The cart has come to a halt beside a low building some distance from them. Its driver leans down to chat with a man, seeming just to pass the time of day, as if there is not a butchered boy in the back. 'It is a house of cards, Veena, a house of cards.'

'Frances, don't,' she says, putting an arm round her friend's shoulder. 'You will drive yourself mad.'

'And the Queen, where is her mercy, Veena? We are her close kin. *Elle est ma première cousine; on était presque élever ensemble.*'

Levina grips her more tightly, without speaking. Frances often forgets that she doesn't understand much French. Levina has never asked her why, given she is English to the bone, she favours that language in spite of its being quite out of fashion at court. She assumes it has something to do with her Tudor mother, who was a French king's widow. A man approaches, his cape blowing out in the wind giving him the look of a bat. He stops before the two women with a polite bow, removing his cap, which he holds crumpled in both hands.

'My Lady,' he says, with a click of his heels. 'Sir John Brydges, Lieutenant of the Tower.' There is a sternness about him, he *is* a guardsman, Levina supposes; but then his formality drops. 'My heart goes to you, My Lady. My wife and I . . .' He falters, his voice quivering slightly. 'We have become fond of your daughter, these last months. She is a remarkable girl.'

Frances looks like a woman drowning and seems unable to form a response, but takes one of his hands and nods slowly.

'She is to be brought down now.' He drops his voice to little more than a whisper. 'I can give you a moment with her. She refused to see her husband before he –' He means 'before he died,' but has the tact not to say it. 'She has asked for you.'

'Take me to her,' Frances manages to mumble.

'The utmost discretion is required. We do not want to attract any attention.' It is clear he refers to Bonner and the pack of Catholic hounds. 'I shall leave now. You follow me in a few moments. Take the back entrance of the building yonder.' He waves an arm towards a diminutive house tucked under the Bell Tower. 'We shall await you there.'

He turns to leave and the women follow on after a time, giving the impression of seeking shelter from the wind. The

door is low and they have to duck under the lintel, closing it behind them, finding themselves in darkness. It takes a moment for their eyes to adjust. There is a further door opposite and Levina wonders whether they should enter, feeling that she must take the initiative, as Frances seems incapable of anything. As she moves towards it, the door creaks open and Brydges peeps round. Seeing the two women, he opens it further and there is Jane, head to toe in black, holding a pair of books in her tiny white hands. She wears a smile and says, 'Maman!' as if it is any ordinary day.

'*Chérie!*' exclaims Frances, and they fall into one another's arms, Frances whispering, '*Ma petite chérie,*' over and over again. The French gives the moment a dramatic quality, as if it were scene from a pageant. It strikes Levina, too, that Jane seems more the mother than Frances; she is so very poised, so very in control of herself.

Levina steps to one side, half turning away for decency's sake, not that they seem to even remember she is there.

'I am sorry, *chérie* . . . so, so very sorry.'

'I know, Maman.' Jane breaks away from the embrace, gathering herself, straightening her dress. '*Ne vous inquiétez pas.* God has singled me out for this. I go willingly to Him, as an envoy for the new faith.'

The girl Levina remembers drawing just a few months ago is all gone; this is a woman before them, standing straight, polished, calm. It strikes her, with a painful twist of irony, that Jane Grey would have made a far better, wiser queen than Mary Tudor will ever be. If the people had seen her as she is now, they would never have thought to raise an army to depose her and put her Catholic cousin on the throne.

'If I had but a salt-spoon's measure of your courage,' murmurs Frances.

'It is time, Maman,' Jane says, glancing towards Brydges,

who nods solemnly. Then she passes one of her books to Frances, whispering the words, 'There is a letter for you within, and one for Katherine; hers is written in the book itself, for she is sure to lose it otherwise – my sister never was one for holding on to things.' She laughs, a tinkling sound that even raises something approximating a smile from Frances, and for an instant they look so like one another that Levina finds herself smiling too. But Jane's laughter drops away as quickly as it came, and she adds, 'Protect Katherine, Maman. I fear she will not stand it so well.'

Levina is struck by the horrible inevitability of Jane's younger sister becoming the new focus of reformist plots – someone will surely seek to depose Catholic Mary Tudor and put one of their own faith on throne – like a line of dominoes, set to fall one after the other.

'And Mary? What shall I tell her from you?' Frances refers to the youngest of her three daughters.

'Mary is clever. She has no need of my advice.' Then, with a flutter of her birdlike hand, she is gone and the inner door is closed behind her. Frances, gripping the book, puts out her free hand to the wall to steady herself.

'Come,' Levina says, grasping her upper arm, leading her out, back into the wind and the waiting scaffold where a few more have gathered, though still it could not be called a crowd.

They appear then, Brydges first, ashen-faced, after him the Catholic man who was unable to convert her, both with their eyes cast down. And there she is, bold and straight, her psalter held open before her, lips moving in prayer, flanked by her two women who are barely holding back their tears. The scene engraves itself on Levina's mind: the jet black of Jane's dress against the drab stone of the Tower behind; the way the wind lifts the edges of everything suggesting flight;

the almost weeping ladies, their gowns lurid splashes of colour; the exact pallor of Brydges's skin; the look of solemn serenity on Jane's face. She is compelled to render this in paint. A great gust of wind sends a branch of a nearby tree crashing to the ground, close enough to Bonner and his acolytes to make them jump back and scatter. She wonders how many are wishing, as she is, that it had struck a softer target.

Jane Grey mounts the few steps and stands before the onlookers to speak. She is close enough that were Levina to reach up she could touch the edge of her skirts, but the wind takes the girl's words and only snippets reach them. 'I do wash my hands thereof in innocence . . .' She makes the action, rubbing those small hands together. 'I die a true Christian woman and that I do look to be saved by no other mean, but only by the mercy of God.' She is cleaving to the new faith to the last and Levina wishes that she had a pinch of this girl's unassailable fortitude.

When Jane is done she shrugs off her gown, handing it to her women, and unties her hood. As she pulls it away from her head her hair looses itself from its ribbons and flies up, beautifully, as if it will lift her to the heavens. She turns to the headsman. Levina supposes he is begging her forgiveness; she cannot hear their exchange. But his face is utterly stricken – even the executioner is horrified by this, then. It is only Jane who seems entirely composed.

Jane then takes the blindfold from one of her ladies and, refusing help with a small shake of her head, wraps it about her eyes, then drops to her knees, pressing her hands together swiftly and mouthing out a prayer. All of a sudden, the prayer finished, her composure seems to fall away as she flounders blindly, reaching for the block, unable to find it in her sightless state. Levina is reminded of a newborn animal, eyes still welded shut, seeking, in desperation, its source of succour.

Everybody watches her but nobody moves to help. All are paralysed with horror at the sight of this young girl groping for something solid in a dark world. There is barely a sound; even the wind has dropped to a deathly hush, as if Heaven is holding its breath. Still Jane seeks for the block, arms flailing now in space. Levina can bear it no longer and scrambles up on to the platform, guiding those cold little hands, a child's hands really, to the place; tears sting at her eyelids as she clammers back down to Frances, who is blanched with shock.

Then it is done, in a flash of steel and a brilliant crimson spurt. Frances collapses into Levina, who holds her upright and covers her eyes for her as the executioner holds up Jane Grey's head by the hair, to prove his job is done. Levina doesn't know why she looks up then, but what she sees when she does is not reality; it is a scene conjured in her imagination: the Queen in the place of that headsman, her fingers twisted through the bloody hair of her young cousin, her face placid, oblivious to the spill of gore over her dress. The gathering is silent, save for the desperate gusting wind, which has started up again as if in protest.

Levina steps to the side and vomits into the gutter.