



Days of Splendor, Days of Sorrow: A Novel of Marie Antoinette

By Juliet Grey

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A captivating novel of rich spectacle and royal scandal, *Days of Splendor, Days of Sorrow* spans fifteen years in the fateful reign of Marie Antoinette, France's most legendary and notorious queen.

Paris, 1774. At the tender age of eighteen, Marie Antoinette ascends to the French throne alongside her husband, Louis XVI. But behind the extravagance of the young queen's elaborate silk gowns and dizzyingly high coiffures, she harbors deeper fears for her future and that of the Bourbon dynasty.

From the early growing pains of marriage to the joy of conceiving a child, from her passion for Swedish military attaché Axel von Fersen to the devastating Affair of the Diamond Necklace, Marie Antoinette tries to rise above the gossip and rivalries that encircle her. But as revolution blossoms in America, a much larger threat looms beyond the gilded gates of Versailles—one that could sweep away the French monarchy forever.

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Editorial Review

Review

Praise for *Days of Splendor, Days of Sorrow*

“Charming....Juliet Grey creates an unforgettable tapestry of court intrigue, royal scandals, and dangerous romances all set against the spectacular background of Versailles. Grey spoils her readers with her deliciously descriptive details of eighteenth-century fashion.” —Bookloons.com

“It’s a mixture of sober historical fiction and fluff that will appeal to many readers.” —Seven Days

“This engaging voice, coupled with vibrant descriptions of clothing, palaces, masques, and dinners, really thrusts the reader into the story...Exceptionally well done!” —Historical Novel Review

“Grey has the gift of truly bringing Marie Antoinette to life. Many authors have written about the Queen of France, but no one has managed to give her such a voice as Grey. —Examiner.com

“This is a full and rich look at Marie Antoinette’s life as queen....Grey really does offer the best portrayal of Marie Antoinette in historical fiction.” —Pittsburgh Historical Fiction Examiner

“Juliet Grey is an absolute master at bringing 1700’s Versailles alive.” —Book Drunkard

“Tells a good story, using her imagination to fill in the gaps of the official history. Her story is filled with the pageantry of the times and provides a glimpse of a lavish and intrigue-filled period in history.” —Fredericksburg Free Lance-Star

"Grey’s characterization of Marie Antoinette is complex, making her such a multi-layered and interesting woman." —Amoxcalli

"Juliet Grey does a wonderful job of crafting the world of this much maligned queen. " —Bippity Boppity Book

"I enjoyed the exceptionally detailed look at Marie's life as Queen of France." —The Eclectic Reader

"Grey has put a great deal of research into this book as you can feel the tension, love, and sorrow as if you were there." —The History Nerd

"Every little detail in this book is delectable, and I savoured it thoroughly. Written in good taste, nothing is amiss, and everything is possible." —Enchanted by Josephine

About the Author

Juliet Grey is the author of *Becoming Marie Antoinette*. She has extensively researched European royalty and is a particular devotee of Marie Antoinette, as well as a classically trained professional actress with numerous portrayals of virgins, vixens, and villainesses to her credit. She and her husband divide their time between New York City and southern Vermont.

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Queen of France

^Twelve Years Earlier &

May 8, 1774

to: comte de mercy-argenteau, ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary to the court of versailles:

My Dear Mercy,

I understand that the death of my sovereign brother is imminent. The news fills me with both sorrow and trepidation. For as much as I account Antoinette's marriage to the dauphin of France among the triumphs of my reign, I cannot deny a sense of foreboding at my daughter's fate, which cannot fail to be either wholly splendid or extremely unfortunate. There is nothing to calm my apprehensions; she is so young, and has never had any powers of diligence, nor ever will have—unless with great difficulty. I fancy her good days are past.

Maria Theresa

^La Muette, May 21, 1774 &

“My condolences on the passing of His Majesty, Your Majesty.”

“Your Majesty, my condolences on the death of His Majesty.”

“Permit me, Votre Majesté, to tender my deepest condolences on the expiration of His Majesty, Louis Quinze.”

One by one they filed past, the elderly ladies of the court in their mandated mourning garb, like a murder of broad black crows in panniered gowns, their painted faces greeting each of us in turn—my husband, the new king Louis XVI, and me. We had been the sovereigns of France for two weeks, but under such circumstances elation cannot come without sorrow.

Louis truly grieved for the old king, his late grand-père. As for the others, the straitlaced prudes—collets-montés, as I dubbed them—who so tediously offered their respects that afternoon in the black-and-white tiled hall at the hunting lodge of La Muette, I found their sympathy—as well as their expressions of felicitations on our accession to the throne—as false as the blush on their cheeks. They had not loved their former sovereign for many decades, if at all. Moreover, they had little confidence in my husband's ability to rule, and even less respect for him.

“Permettez-moi de vous offrir mes condoléances. J'en suis désolée.” I giggled behind my fan to my devoted friend and attendant Marie Thérèse Louise de Savoie-Carignan, the princesse de Lamballe, mimicking the warble of the interminable parade of ancient crones—centenarians, I called them. “Honestly, when one has passed thirty, I cannot understand how one dares appear at court.” Being eighteen, that twelve-year difference might as well have been an eternity.

I found these old women ridiculous, but there was another cause for my laughter—one that I lacked the courage to admit to anyone, even to my husband. In sober truth, not until today when we received the customary condolences of the nobility had the reality of Papa Roi's death settled upon my breast. The magnitude of what lay before us, Louis and me, was daunting. I was overcome with nerves, and raillery was my release.

The duchesse d'Archambault approached. Sixty years of rouge had settled into her hollowed cheekbones, and I could not help myself; I bit my lip, but a smile matured into a grin, and before I knew it a chuckle had bubbled its way out of my mouth. When she descended into her reverence I was certain I heard her knees creak and felt sure she would not be able to rise without assistance.

"Allow me, Your Majesty, to condole you on the death of the king-that-was." The duchesse lapsed into a reverie. "Il était si noble, si gentil . . ."

"Vous l'avez detesté!" I muttered, then whispered to the princesse de Lamballe, "I know for a fact she despised the king because he refused her idiot son a military promotion." When the duchesse was just out of earshot, I trilled, "So noble, so kind."

"Your Majesty, it does not become you to mock your elders, especially when they are your inferiors."

I did not need to peer over my fan to know the voice: the comtesse de Noailles, my dame d'honneur, the superintendent of my household while I was dauphine and my de facto guardian. As the youngest daughter of Empress Maria Theresa of Austria, I had come to Versailles at fourteen to wed the dauphin; and had been not merely educated, but physically transformed in order to merit such an august union. Yet, there had still been much to learn and little time in which to master it. The comtesse had been appointed my mentor, to school me in the rigid rituals of the French court. For this I had immediately nicknamed her Madame Etiquette, and in the past four years not a day had gone by that I had not received from her some rebuke over a transgression of protocol. Just behind my right shoulder the princesse de Lamballe stood amid my other ladies. Our wide skirts discreetly concealed another of my attendants, the marquise de Clermont-Tonnerre, who had sunk to her knees from exhaustion. I heard a giggle. The marquise was known to pull faces from time to time and kept all of us in stitches with her ability to turn her eyelids inside out and then flutter them flirtatiously.

"Who are you hiding?" quizzed Madame de Noailles. My ladies' eyes darted from one to another, none daring to reply.

"La marquise de Clermont-Tonnerre est tellement fatiguée," I replied succinctly.

"That is of no consequence. It is not comme il faut. Everyone must stand during the reception."

I stepped aside. "Madame la marquise, would you kindly rise," I commanded gently. With the aid of a woman at either elbow she stood, and the vast swell of her belly straining against her stays was as evident as the sheen on her brow. "I believe you know the comtesse de Noailles," I said, making certain Madame Etiquette could see that the marquise was enceinte. "I am not yet a mother, mesdames, although I pray for that day. I can only hope that when it comes, common sense will take precedence over protocol. And as queen, I will take measures to ensure it." I offered the marquise my lace-edged handkerchief to blot her forehead. "As there is nowhere to sit, you may resume your former position, madame, and my ladies will continue to screen you from disapproving eyes."

I glanced down the hall, noticing the line of courtiers stopped in front of Louis a few feet away. There was much daubing of eyes, yet only his were genuinely moist. Then I returned my attention to the comtesse de Noailles. We were nose to nose now; and I was no longer an unruly child in her custody. One mother who scolded me at the slightest provocation was sufficient; I had no need of a surrogate. “You and your husband have served France long and faithfully,” I began coolly, “and you have devoted yourselves tirelessly without respite. The time has come, therefore, for you to take your congé. My husband and I will expect you to pack your things and retire to your estate of Mouchy before the week is out.”

Her pinched face turned as pale as a peeled almond. But there was nothing she could say in reply. One did not contradict the will of the Queen of France.

“The princesse de Lamballe will be my new dame d’honneur,” I added, noting the expression of surprise in my attendant’s eyes and the modest blush that suffused her cheeks. I had caught her completely unaware, but what better time to reward her loyalty?

The comtesse lowered her gaze and dropped into a deep reverence. “It has been an honor to have served Your Majesty.” The only fissure in her customary hauteur was betrayed by the tremolo in her voice. For an instant, I regretted my decision. Yet I had long dreamed of this moment. From now on, I would be the one to choose, at least within my own household, what was *comme il faut*. As the comtesse rose and made her way along the hall to offer her condolences to the king, I felt as though a storm cloud that had followed me about from palace to palace—Versailles, Compiègne, Fontainebleau—had finally lifted, leaving a vibrant blue sky.

At the hour of our ascension to the throne, after the requisite obsequies from the courtiers, we had fled the scene of Louis XV’s death nearly as fast as our coach could bear us, spending the first nine days of our reign at the Château de Choisy on the banks of the Seine while the innumerable rooms of Versailles were scrubbed free of contagion. Yet I was bursting to return, to begin making my mark. No one alive could recall when a queen of France had been much more than a dynastic cipher. Maria Theresa of Spain, the infanta who had wed the Sun King, was almost insignificant at court. She spent much of her time closeted in her rooms drinking chocolate and playing cards with her ladies and her dwarves, and had so little rapport with her subjects that when they were starving for bread she suggested that they eat cake instead—this much I had learned from my dear abbé Vermond, who had instructed me in the history of the queens of France when I was preparing to marry the dauphin. The mild-mannered abbé had accompanied me to Versailles as my reader, to offer me spiritual guidance, and he still remained one of my only confidants.

In any case, Maria Theresa of Spain had died nearly a hundred years ago. And her absence from public life had afforded Louis XIV plenty of opportunities to seek companionship in the arms of others. They, not his dull queen, became the arbiters of taste at court.

My immediate predecessor, Marie Leszczyńska, the pious consort of Louis XV who passed away two years before I arrived at Versailles, had been the daughter of a disgraced Polish king, forced to live in exile. She bore Louis many useless daughters, but only one dauphin to inherit the throne—the father of my husband—and he died while his papa still wore the crown. Like the queen before her, she endured a shadowy existence, maintaining her spotless propriety while my husband’s grand-père flaunted his latest *maîtresse en titre*. No one noticed what she wore or how she dressed her hair. Instead, it was Madame la marquise de Pompadour who had defined the fashion in all things for a generation. And then Madame du Barry, Louis XV’s last mistress, set the tone, but there was no queen to rival her—only me. And I had failed miserably, never sure of myself, always endeavoring to find my footing; desperate to fascinate a timid husband who could not bring himself to consummate our marriage. I had wasted precious time by allowing the comtesse du Barry to exert her influence, over the court and over Papa Roi, much to the consternation of my mother.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Peggy Ross:

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