



My Just Desire: The Life of Bess Raleigh, Wife to Sir Walter

Anna Beer

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Young, beautiful, and connected by blood to the most powerful families in England, Bess Throckmorton had as much influence over Queen Elizabeth I as any woman in the realm—but she risked everything to marry the most charismatic man of the day. The secret marriage between Bess and the Queen's beloved Sir Walter Raleigh cost both of them their fortunes, their freedom, and very nearly their lives. Yet it was Bess, resilient, passionate, and politically shrewd, who would live to restore their name and reclaim her political influence. In this dazzling biography, Bess Raleigh finally emerges from her husband's shadow to stand as a complex, commanding figure in her own right.

Writing with grace and drama, Anna Beer brings Bess to life as a woman, a wife and mother, an intimate friend of poets and courtiers, and a skilled political infighter in Europe's most powerful and most dangerous court. The only daughter of an ambitious aristocratic family, Bess was thrust at a tender age into the very epicenter of royal power when her parents secured her the position of Elizabeth's Gentlewoman of the Privy Chamber. Bess proved to be a natural player on this stage of extravagant mythmaking and covert sexual politics, until she fell in love with the Queen's Captain of the Guard, the handsome, virile, meteorically rising Raleigh. But their secret marriage, swiftly followed by the birth of their son, would have grave consequences for both of them.

Brooking the Queen's wrath and her husband's refusal to acknowledge their marriage, Bess brilliantly stage-managed her social and political rehabilitation and emerged from prison as the leader of a brilliant, fast-living aristocratic set. She survived personal tragedy, the ruinous global voyages launched by her husband, and the vicious plots of high-placed enemies. Though Raleigh in the end fell afoul of court intrigue, Bess lived on into the reign of James I as a woman of hard-won wisdom and formidable power.

With compelling historical insight, Anna Beer recreates here the vibrant pageant of Elizabethan England—the brilliant wit and vicious betrayals, the new discoveries and old rivalries, the violence and fierce sexuality of life at court. Peopled by poets and princes, spanning the reigns of two monarchs, moving between the palaces of London and the manor house outside the capital, *My Just Desire* is the portrait of a remarkable woman who lived at the center of an extraordinary time.

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