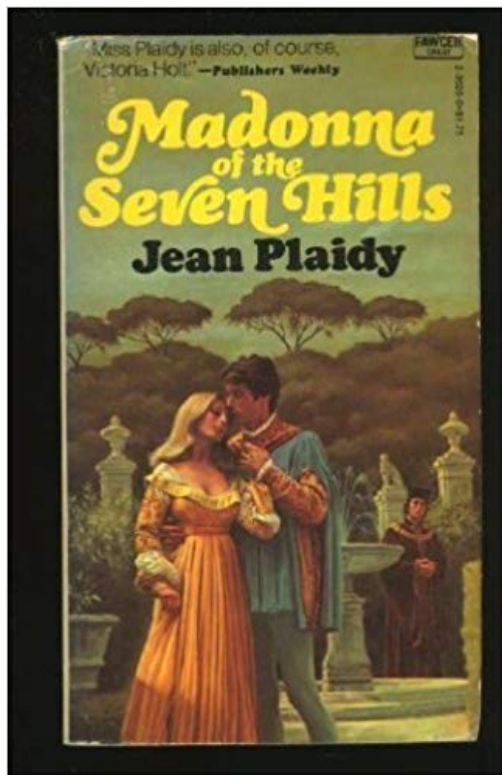
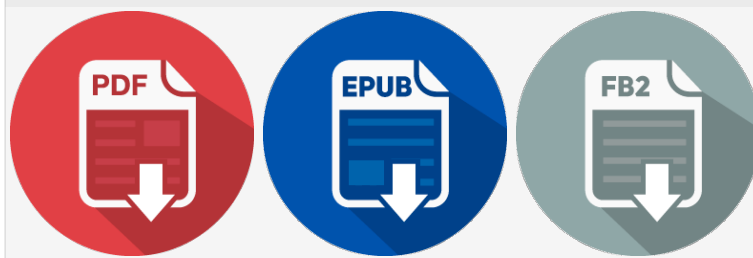


## Madonna of the Seven Hills by Jean Plaidy



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This is the story of Lucrezia Borgia, who love and hate with equal passion.



## Reviews of the **Madonna of the Seven Hills** by Jean Plaidy

caster

Poor Lucrezia! Born into such a strong male-domineering Borgia family, she didn't stand a chance. To add insult to injury, she was saddled with the undeserved label of an incestuous poisoner. Before we discuss this book, "Madonna of the Seven Hills", it is helpful to know in advance that it is only the first book of a two books series about Lucrezia.

The author wisely warned us *altri tempi, altri costumi*: different times, different customs. Renaissance Vatican was notorious for being corrupt. Shortly after Alexander VI and Julius II, Leo X famously proclaimed upon being elected Pope in 1513, "God has given us the papacy. Let us enjoy it." It is a miracle that the Church survived.

All stories about the Borgia family must center around Rodrigo, Pope Alexander VI. As Cesare said,

"All blessings flowed from him." As it was a very close-knit family, all their stories were interlinked. You can't talk about one without talking about the rest of them. So, even though this story is supposed to be about Lucrezia, it is really about the entire Borgia family. I am glad the author chose to stick closely to the already juicy history and resisted the temptation to show off her creativity by reinventing a new saga.

Rodrigo was a shrewd politician. He rose to the papacy by careful plotting and long term planning. As a Spaniard in a sea of Italians, he could trust only his family. Fortunately, being a priest and having children were not mutually exclusive at the time, and nepotism was the norm in any circle. He forced his oldest son Cesare to join the Church because he knew that's the source of real power (that's why every powerful family had a son in the Church) and appointed his middle son Giovanni to lead the papal army because even power needs military support. His daughter Lucrezia and youngest son Goffredo were pawns for political alliances to be married off as needs arose. Unfortunately, brilliant fathers always beget foolish sons. Giovanni got himself murdered after he humiliated himself at his one and only battle and Cesare left a promising career in the Church to become a mere condottieri. Sure enough, after Alexander died, without a powerful patron in the Church, the Borgia family fortune soon came crashing down.

As hygiene and food safety were unknown but sickness was rampant, poison was the generally accepted cause for any unexpected death, that's why anyone who's anyone always had a taster. A dagger in a dark alley was the easiest way to dispose of an enemy, that's why you had an entourage and bodyguards following you wherever you went. Bribery was how you do business and simony was the most convenient charge leveled at your enemies. Only a handful of popes were not tainted by it. Alexander VI had the misfortune to be followed by his mortal enemy Julius II who vowed to destroy Alexander's reputation by any means. A widespread smear campaign was launched and no Borgia was spared. Rumors of every kind were thrown at them and some stuck. Thus, Alexander became a greedy lecher, Cesare became a murderous brute, and Lucrezia the femme fatale with a poisonous ring. As incest was so repugnant an idea, it was often used to demonize one's enemies. The Borgia family was likewise so accused.

In Jean Plaidy, Lucrezia found her champion. She was portrayed with sympathy, as a kind-hearted golden girl torn between her loyalty to her family and her conscience. As this is the first of a two books series, it only covered her childhood, her first marriage to Giovanni Sforza, and her love affair with Pedro. The family dynamic was explained through their childhood. To make her more angelic, it was necessary to belittle Giovanni Sforza as unworthy of her and praise Pedro as her true love. The author incorporated every rumor in circulation to plump up the story. However, as a female writer, she avoided any gruesome details of battles and murders. And as it was originally published in 1958, there were no graphic details for any sexual encounters. The story of her second and third marriages, the fall of the Borgia family, and her later years are covered in the second book of the series, "Light On Lucrezia". Can't wait to read it!

Nern

I love biography and I had wanted to read about Lucrezia Borgia but I had hesitated to pick one book to read from the many versions of her life that are available. I had watched some of the mini-series about the Borgias and I was a little confused about how to pick a factual version vs. just a "rollicking read". One of the other reviewers referenced Jean Plaidy's name and that made me look for her take on Lucrezia and I'm glad I did. I will eventually order the next book but I think I got what I was looking for in this book: a fascinating life, with some in-depth research and if Ms. Plaidy is pushing a little of her version of Lucrezia in opposition to other versions, I'm OK with that.

Braswyn

The first book in the Lucrezia Borgia series, there are only two, it's a good start. It wasn't as compelling as I thought it would be, but it did have a lot of information that I didn't know before. I've

read a few pages on her from the Internet, and have heard of her from other sources, but this book fills out the information in a fun and easy way. I also like that, having read other Plaidy books, this one would fit into those. I already knew some of the people from her other books. It didn't seem so out of place.

When I say it wasn't as compelling as I thought, I'll admit I've been watching *The Borgias* on TV. I could imagine the people, but the book is lacking that umph the show has. But it's not a bad book because of that. It was written far before the Showtime show. Lucrezia is depicted as innocent and a pawn in the schemes of her father and brother. Alexander VI is even likeable here. The Borgias seems to be missing him often, like he's extra. None of the characters in the book are extra. They all have a reason to be there and all further the book along.

The book starts from her birth and through her first marriage. It may seem weird, she had three, to stop there, but there is a lot to know.

This is classic Plaidy and a nice departure from her English series books. If you've been reading them you'll enjoy this. And, like I said, it won't seem foreign to you.

Brariel

I didn't know much about the Borgia's before reading this, and I had such a great time learning about them as I was reading this! Just like any other book by Plaidy, you can always count on her to tell a story in such an interesting way that you don't even realize it's based on history.

The Borgia's are such an interesting family, I loved the dynamic Plaidy portrayed between the brothers and Lucrezia, as well as their father, who loves them more than anything in the world. Alexander is just as conniving as any King you've read about in any historical piece, politicking his way to the top of the Church and placing his children in strategic positions both in the church and around the rest of Italy.

Poor Lucrezia is stuck in the middle of everything, a pawn in everyone's game, used for whatever suits Alexander and to a lesser extent, her brothers. It makes me feel so bad for all the women during this time period, they have so little choice and get lucky every now and then to have an understanding husband once they're married. Lucrezia is lucky to have a father who protects her from everyone but her own family, which is both good and bad considering how manipulative her brothers can be.

I really enjoyed this story and since it's the first of a two books about the Borgias, I'll definitely be reading the second one. I think this is a great introduction to the Borgia family, shining a great light on Lucrezia and showing us fabulous insight into the her family and the time period. I'd recommend this book to anyone who enjoys historical fiction, or anything set in Italy during this time frame.

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