

"This might be the best book you read this year."  
—Karen Swallow Prior, author of *Booked* and *Fierce Convictions*

ERIC METAXAS

*New York Times* Bestselling Author of *Bonhoeffer* and *Seven Men*

WOMEN

AND THE SECRET OF  
THEIR GREATNESS

# PRAISE FOR *SEVEN WOMEN*

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“It’s the rare male who can portray women so vividly. Eric Metaxas proves he’s one of the rare ones with his new book *Seven Women*.”

— Kathie Lee Gifford, Emmy Award–winning host of *Today*

“Eric Metaxas offers a refreshing view of womanhood as he holds up a plumbline by which we can measure ourselves. Faith strengthened by fire, courage to forsake personal comfort, boldness to take great risks, sacrificial compassion for others, convictions to live . . . and die . . . by, are just some of the common denominators of *Seven Women*. Although I don’t measure up, this book makes me proud to take my stand as a Christian woman.”

— Anne Graham Lotz, author and speaker  
([www.annegrahamlotz.org](http://www.annegrahamlotz.org))

“Some authors give us words that are delicious to read. Others provide content that is good and necessary. Eric Metaxas consistently brings us the rare gift of both at the same time. If we are pulled toward complacency or discouragement, Eric gives an irresistible push toward hope and inspiration. ‘If they could do it then, we can do it now! Here am I, send me!’ We need to be inspired—*breathed into*. We need the wind of God in our sails for our time. In *Seven Women*, the familiar breeze is stirring again.”

— Twila Paris, singer-songwriter and author

“In writing about these seven singular, extraordinary women, Eric Metaxas does honor to all women. After finishing *Seven Women* feeling more blessed and encouraged in simply being a woman than ever before. The accomplishments of these women—from across time and circumstances—have indelibly shaped the world we know today. Their stories will educate, encourage, and inspire every reader. This might be the best book you read this year.”

— Karen Swallow Prior, author of *Booked: Literature in the Soul of Me* and *Fierce Convictions—The Extraordinary Life of Hannah More: Poet, Reformer, Abolitionist*

“What we have in *Seven Women* is a great biographer, Eric Metaxas, writing, with his inimitable genius for depicting moral greatness, about the lives of seven great women. Once you have read *Seven Women*, you will: a) understand what makes male and female greatness both similar and—even more importantly in an age that depicts men and women as essentially identical—different; b) wonder what you didn’t know about all of these women before; and c) implore Eric Metaxas to immediately write the biography of seven more women. That’s how good *Seven Women* is.”

— Dennis Prager, nationally syndicated radio talk show host and columnist, *New York Times* bestselling author

“To say that Eric Metaxas is an inspiration would be an understatement. It’s not very often I com

across a book such as *Seven Women* that has such a profound impact on my life. Eric's ability to engage readers through the lives of these seven women will not only empower you, but will ignite a fire in you to know that we as human beings all have the power to impact the world."

— April Hernandez Castillo, film and television actress and speaker

"Religion poisons everything—except, it seems, for the untold people touched by the lives of the seven incredible women. Your jaw will drop as you read these portraits of courage, each inspired by a personal vision of God and a convictional embrace of self-sacrifice. Metaxas's beautifully written book answers the question: How can you change the world? The answer: find seven women, turn the loose, and watch Satan tremble in their presence."

— Owen Strachan, author, *The Colson Way*

"Eric Metaxas's *Seven Women* is the encouragement and inspiration to rally on as a woman trying to make a difference in our culture. The women Eric chose gave me more energy than any protein shake. This book will be required reading for my four daughters."

— Carolyn Copeland, Broadway producer, *Amazing Grace: The Musical*

"Eric Metaxas writes *Seven Women* with a tender brotherly love—both in his admiration and gratitude for the women he profiles and with his challenge to men not to overlook this book and a culture to reconsider its view of women's greatness. As he's been known to do, Metaxas reintroduces some long forgotten fundamentals here and urges us to be better by showing how it's done."

— Kathryn Jean Lopez, senior fellow, National Review Institute

"I was one of those who hoped Eric would write *Seven Women*, not only because I loved *Seven Mountains* but because I knew it would be a book I would want my daughters to read. It is. Eric celebrates the women not only as remarkable people who happened to be women, but as remarkable because they were women. I can't wait to read this with my girls."

— John Stonestreet, speaker and fellow, Colson Center for Christian Worldview

"What a felicitous idea to write a book about women who lived up to their noble and great mission of marriage, the family, and the world. Eric Metaxas is responding to an urgent call: to reawaken women who have fallen into the trap of feminism—a murderer of chivalry—to wake up and thank God for being privileged to have the same sex as the mother of Christ."

— Dame Alice von Hildebrand, Catholic philosopher, theologian, and professor emerita at Hunter College

"Here is a biographer who is refreshingly and unashamedly attentive to the moral and spiritual qualities of great leaders. In these deftly written accounts, Eric Metaxas reminds us why each of the unforgettable women delivered such a bracing challenge to the spirit of their age, why each represented a unique profile in courage. A careful study of their lives and careers would be a tonic to the

leadership crisis that besets our own day.”

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— Joseph Loconte, professor at the King’s College and author of *A Hobbit, a Wardrobe and a Great War*

“Metaxas makes these women come alive. I can’t help wanting to gather them all in a room and ask a million questions. . . . Until that group meeting happens, this book is the next best thing.”

— Joy Eggerichs, director of Love and Respect Now

“Eric Metaxas’s new book *Seven Women* demonstrates, once again, Eric’s incredible gift for storytelling. In the span of only a paragraph or two, he skillfully draws the reader into a narrative that is at once informative, historical, observational, and even whimsical.”

— Marybeth Hicks, author, columnist, and speaker

“Metaxas has done it again, bringing renewed insight into these women from across the centuries. Men as well as women will benefit from reading about the struggles that made these women great, the crucibles that shaped their character, and the greatness that comes from simple, deep faith.”

— Chuck Roberts, pastor, Peachtree Presbyterian Church

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# SEVEN WOMEN

AND THE SECRET OF  
THEIR GREATNESS

ERIC METAXAS



An Imprint of Thomas Nelson

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ISBN: 978-0-7180-2186-3 (eBook)

**Library of Congress Control Number: 2015942142**

ISBN: 978-0-7180-2183-2 (HC)

ISBN: 978-0-7180-3729-1 (IE)

15 16 17 18 19 RRD 6 5 4 3 2 1

FOR SUSANNE

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# Introduction

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Before I wrote this book, I wrote two long biographies, one about Dietrich Bonhoeffer<sup>1</sup> and one about William Wilberforce.<sup>2</sup> I was overwhelmed at the response to these books. It was clear that these stories had deeply impacted and inspired many readers, and though I knew the stories of many other extraordinary and inspiring figures, I didn't plan to write any more long biographies. But then I realized that I could write shorter ones—and so I wrote *Seven Men*.<sup>3</sup> The response to this book was also beyond what I had expected or hoped and further confirmed my belief that there is a great hunger for heroes in our culture.

Although I was never sure whether I would write a book that included the biographies of seven women, people kept asking me about it, and the more I thought about it, the more I knew that I must do it. I've always admired the women in this book and realized that many people didn't know their stories. To be clear, in neither *Seven Men* nor this book is the list of seven persons in any way definitive. There are many other inspiring men and women I might have included. For each book I simply chose seven people whose stories I found most compelling and inspiring—and there's no doubt that the stories of the seven great women in this book are hugely inspiring, and not just to women. I hope men will read these stories and not deny themselves the inspiration of these truly extraordinary lives. For the many men whose view of women has been twisted and dented by our cultural assumptions, these lives will be inspiring and encouraging news.

But whose stories should I tell? I began asking friends for suggestions and soliciting their thoughts. In doing so I encountered an assumption about women's greatness that wasn't surprising but that is worth mentioning here. Many people suggested women who were the first ones to do something that men had already done. Amelia Earhart, who was the first woman to fly solo across the Atlantic in 1932, was mentioned, as was Sally Ride, who was the first American woman in space. No one mentioned Shirley "Cha Cha" Muldowney, who was the first female Top Fuel dragster champion, but I'm sure she would have come up eventually. But what these women had accomplished didn't exemplify the kind of greatness I had in mind—neither for men nor women. If it had, in writing *Seven Men* I would have replaced Wilberforce and Bonhoeffer with John Glenn and Charles Lindbergh—and I might have replaced Pope John Paul II with Don "Big Daddy" Garlits or perhaps even Don "The Snake" Prudhomme, two of the greatest drag racers in history.

What struck me as wrong about these suggestions was that they presumed women should somehow be compared to men. But it seemed wrong to view great women in that way. The great men in *Seven Men* were not measured against women, so why should the women in *Seven Women* be measured against men? I wondered what was behind this way of seeing things, that women should be defined against men? Or that men and women should even be compared to each other?

Two interrelated attitudes seemed at play. First, men and women are in some way interchangeable, that what one does the other should do. Second, women are in some kind of competition with men, and for women to progress they need to compete with men. This thinking pretends to put men and women on equal footing, but it actually only pits them against each other in a kind of zero-sum competition in which they usually tear each other down.

When I consider the seven women I chose, I see that most of them were great for reasons that derive precisely from their being women, not in spite of it; and what made them great has nothing

do with their being measured against or competing with men. In other words, their accomplishments are not gender-neutral but are rooted in their singularity as women. All of them existed and thrived. All of them women and stand quite apart from anything touching the kind of thinking I encountered.

The first woman I chose, Joan of Arc, is a good example. She is sometimes thought of as great because she did what men do—she donned armor and became a warrior—but that is far off the mark. Joan of Arc was no fierce amazon. Far from it. There was nothing even slightly “manly” about her. On the contrary, it was her youth, innocence, purity, and holiness that made it possible for her to do what she did. Only just past girlhood she was deeply affected by the suffering she saw in the battles around her, never becoming inured to the carnage and agonies of war, as a male soldier typically will do. It was precisely her vulnerability and womanly virtue that stunned and inspired the rough soldiers in a way that no man ever could do. It was because of these qualities that they were in awe of her and respected her. Though her spirit was as large as anyone’s who has ever lived, she herself was neither big nor strong. In other words, there could never be a male Joan of Arc. The very idea is a laughable oxymoron.

Similarly, Rosa Parks was specifically chosen to do what she did because she was a woman. Those who wanted to make a federal case out of her arrest knew they must have the right person, and they knew it must be a woman. Her feminine dignity was vital to the case, so there never could have been a male Rosa Parks. Obviously Susanna Wesley—who bore nineteen children and raised the surviving ten—could not have been a man; and Saint Maria of Paris wanted to be a mother to all she encountered and positively exuded motherhood. Hannah More was considered a model of femininity by those who knew her, and because of this she was especially valued and respected by the many men with whom she called friends. She was nothing like their male friends, and so the cultural influence she wielded was not a result of her being “one of the boys.” Quite the contrary. Corrie ten Boom exudes an unmistakably feminine warmth; and who can doubt that it was Mother Teresa’s femaleness that so flummoxed and disarmed and charmed those with whom she dealt? Can we as easily imagine a male Corrie doing what she did?

So the stories of these great women show us that men and women are not interchangeable. There are things men can and should do that women cannot, and there are things that women can and should do that men cannot. So comparing men and women is something like comparing apples and oranges, except apples and oranges are actually far more like each other than are men and women. Apples and oranges can exist without each other, but men and women cannot. Men and women were deliberately designed to be different. Indeed we are specifically created as complements to each other, as different halves of a whole, and that whole reflects the glory of God. It’s patently obvious that we were physically created to fit together, and of course if that weren’t the case, we could not create life. So when men cease to be such or when women deny their uniqueness, they make that complementarity impossible, and the whole, as it were, suffers. There’s much to be said on that subject, but the point to make here is that we are meant to be different and God wants us to celebrate and rejoice in our differences, never to suppress them or denigrate them.



I’m privileged to be friends with someone whose husband was born in 1889. For context, that’s the year Vincent van Gogh painted *Starry Night*, Jefferson Davis died, and Adolph Hitler was born. Alice von Hildebrand—her friends call her Lily—is a delight, so much so that I’ve now twice had h

as my guest at Socrates in the City,<sup>4</sup> a forum that encourages busy and successful professionals thinking about the bigger questions in life. Her age (ninety-one as I write this) gives her a great measure of authority, but it hasn't dimmed her fire even slightly. It would not be inaccurate to describe her as a pistol. I mention her now because she has written two books that deal with the issues of men and women. One is *The Privilege of Being a Woman*,<sup>5</sup> and the other is *Man and Woman: Divine Invention*.<sup>6</sup> As she fiercely declared in my most recent interview with her,<sup>7</sup> she is tremendous pro-woman—and she was that evening we spoke—but she also makes it abundantly clear that it is precisely for this reason that she is a devoted and lifelong opponent of feminism. She firmly believes feminism to be anti-woman because it pressures women to become more like men. Everyone who heard her speak that evening was surprised, but we were sternly schooled by Dame von Hildebrand on this subject.

The lesson in all this is that to pit women against men is a form of denigration of women, even though their measure must be determined by masculine standards. The worst standards of masculinity—value—power usually at the top of those long lists—become the very things that some women are told they must aspire to meet. How ironic that modern culture, by so often intimating power as the highest good, should force women to accept what amounts to nothing less than patriarchal thinking, in the most pejorative sense of that adjective.

Of course this is entirely understandable. Some men have misused their power and strength to harm women. As I say in the introduction to *Seven Men*, whatever God gives us is meant for us to use to bless others, and God gives men strength and power, generally speaking, only so they will use it to bless those who do not have it. But when men fail to do so, women who are victims of the worst expressions of manhood—in fact, abrogations of real manhood—feel that the only way to deal with this is to wrest that power from men. So the idea of “female empowerment” arose, until it became another ubiquitous and thought-free cliché. But the problem with this idea is that it presupposes the tremendously harmful and distorting idea of a competition for power.

That idea was famously popularized in 1973 in the so-called “Battle of the Sexes,” the much heralded and nationally televised tennis match between Billy Jean King, a woman, and Bobby Riggs, a man. The cultural climate at the time was that there were two ways of seeing the world. One was the bigoted “Male Chauvinist Pig” way, and the other was the enlightened “I Am Woman (Hear My Roar)” way. In this scenario women and men were pitted against each other as bitter adversaries, and the only way for women to lift themselves up was to denounce men as sexists and cavemen.

Billie Jean King was then in her prime, twenty-six years younger than Bobby Riggs, who had been a tennis champion in the 1940s. That she prevailed was no great surprise to anyone paying attention, but the way the match was publicized made it out to be an epochal event. The most important and terrible thing was that it portrayed the relationship between men and women as a zero-sum game. If one won, the other lost. In this view of the relationship between the sexes, there can be no equity, no mutual admiration, no mutual encouragement, and of course, no real love. That night it was this view writ large: the only way for one to win was for the other to lose. It made for great television ratings, but this idea is a pernicious lie, one that has hurt men and women terribly.

Whether we like it or not, men and women are inextricably intertwined. Because the Bible says that we are made in God's image—“male and female He created them” (Gen. 1:27)—the fortunes of one are so linked to the fortunes of the other that there is no way to lift one without lifting the other and no way to degrade one without degrading the other. So whenever men have used their positions of authority or their power to denigrate women, they have denigrated themselves and have denied

themselves the fullness of manhood God intended for them. When women have tried to ape the behavior of power-hungry men, they have degraded themselves and denied themselves the dignity of being above that vulgar fray.

It is all the more noteworthy that the great women in this volume stood on their own as women but not in a defiant stance that pitted them against men. On the contrary, they were large-hearted enough and secure enough in who they were to show remarkable magnanimity toward men, with whom they had notably warm relationships. Joan of Arc's relationships with the soldiers who served under her is nothing less than moving; Susanna Wesley's love for her sons and their reverence for her speak volumes; Hannah More's relationships with her four sisters were at the very heart of her life, but she also had a pronounced capacity for friendship with men, including David Garrick, Horace Walpole, Dr. Samuel Johnson, and William Wilberforce. Maria Skobtsova's (Saint Maria of Paris) love for her son and relationship with Father Dimitri Klepinin tell us everything about her, as does Corrie ten Boom's relationship with her father. Mother Teresa's friendship with Pope John Paul II was well known, and it is clear that Rosa Parks's relationship with her husband was at the center of her life and accomplishments.



Perhaps the best thing about biographies is that they enable us to slip the strictures of time and provide a bracing corrective to our tendency to see everything in the dark glass of our own era, with all its blind spots, motes, beams, and distortions. We must be honest enough to recognize that each era cannot help having a pinched, parochial view of things, and of course the largest part of that parochialism is that each era thinks it is not parochial at all. Each era has the fatal hubris to believe that it has once and for all climbed to the top of the mountain and can see everything as it is, from the highest and most objective vantage point possible. But to assert that ours is the only blinker-less view of things is to blither fatuousness. We need to delve into the past to know that we have not progressed to any point of perfection and objectivity, and in examining the lives of these seven women, we are doing just that. We see that our view of many things, not least our view of how women can be great, is fatally tinged by our own cultural assumptions. The Bible says we are to humble ourselves, and in reading the stories of great men and women from the past, we inevitably do just that. But in humbling ourselves in that way we ironically gain a far greater objectivity and a far better vantage point from which to see things.

May the true stories of these seven great women help you to see yourself and your own time and world all the more clearly.

— Eric Metaxas  
New York City  
July 2014

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# Joan of Arc

1412–1431



Even to those who know it well, the story of the woman called Joan of Arc is an enigma. I knew little about her until I saw the landmark silent film *The Passion of Joan of Arc*<sup>1</sup> some years ago. But after seeing the film and reading more about her, I quickly understood that her character and her exploits were so extraordinary as to be almost beyond belief. They are certainly without equal. But what are we to make of this woman? Those who would make her out to be an early feminist, or a religious fanatic, or a lunatic subject to strange delusions may be forgiven their confusion, because—although she was none of those things—her life stands well apart from all others. She was so pure and so brave and so singular in her faith and obedience to God that, perhaps like Francis of Assisi or even like Jesus himself, she challenges many of our deepest assumptions about what a life can be.

To get a sense of who Joan of Arc was, imagine a teenage farm girl entering the halls of the Pentagon in Washington, DC, and forcefully demanding to see the secretary of defense, saying that God had given her a plan to end all terrorism aimed at the United States and her allies, and all she required was an army of soldiers with weapons. Most people would sensibly assume such a young woman was mentally ill or perhaps simply extremely naive. The last thing we would imagine is that she was actually sent by God, and that everything she said was true and would come to pass precisely as she said it would. But this was approximately the scenario that faced French military and political figures in 1429, when a humble, uneducated seventeen-year-old girl from a small village appeared before them.

In order to appreciate what this girl was proposing, we have to understand the situation in France at that time. The war that came to be known as the Hundred Years War had been raging on and off since 1337. The English, having taken over vast tracts of France by 1429, were winning, and they now hoped to literally crown their efforts by putting an English king on the French throne. At the time, this practically seemed a *fait accompli*. But Joan innocently and forcefully explained to French officials that she had been sent by God to drive the English out of the great city of Orléans. What's more, she claimed that she would ensure that the proper Frenchman—Charles VII—was crowned king of France. Taking her seriously was out of the question; and yet somehow, in the end, the befuddled and desperate leaders of France did just that. They had run out of sensible options and knew they had nothing to lose. But far less bizarre than their taking her seriously is the fact that she would actually succeed in everything she said she would do. It is preposterous to consider, and yet history records

that it happened.

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Jeanne d’Arc—or Joan of Arc, as she is called in English—was called Jeanette by her parents. She was born in 1412 into a peasant family in Domrémy, a village in northeastern France. With her parents and four siblings, she lived in a simple stone house next to the village church.

Like most peasant girls of that time, when she was old enough Joan helped her father, Jacques, in the fields. She also took care of the family’s animals, weeded the vegetable garden, and helped her mother in the house. She is said to have especially enjoyed weaving and spinning. Joan was never taught to read or write, but she had a passionate interest in the church and in God. At an early age, she prayed frequently and fervently. Long after her death her childhood companions remembered how they had teased their friend for her piety.

Life was precarious for the citizens of France. The Hundred Years War had been the agonizing backdrop of their lives for as long as anyone could remember. The English firmly believed that France should be part of England, and because of much intermarrying between the royal families of England and France, the line of succession was unclear.

The confusion started around 1392, when the French began hearing rumors that the man they considered the rightful king of France, Charles VI, was suffering bouts of madness. His uncle, Philip the Good (so-called), seized the reins of the kingdom. He and Charles’s unpleasant wife, Queen Isabeau, were attempting to end the war in a way that was handsomely profitable to themselves and England, but decidedly detrimental to France.

Philip was also the powerful Duke of Burgundy, whose lands—constituting a considerable portion of France—were under English control. He wanted France to give in to English demands in order to stop the endless fighting. Queen Isabeau went along with this plan and wheedled her mentally compromised husband into signing the Treaty of Troyes. This treaty gave Charles VI the right to rule France during his lifetime, but upon his death, Henry V of England would rule both countries. To make the provisions of the treaty more palatable, Henry V married Princess Catherine, the daughter of Charles VI and Queen Isabeau, so any children they had would be half-French.

It all might have worked, but for one person: Princess Catherine’s younger brother, the crown prince Charles—or the Dauphin, as the French called him—who was intent on remaining in the line of succession. In 1422, to complicate things further, King Charles VI died. But the Duke of Burgundy and Queen Isabeau’s plans to have England’s Henry V succeed him were no longer possible because Henry himself had died two months earlier. Who then would become the next king of France? That was the question that burned in the hearts of every Frenchman—and that burned in the heart of the inhabitants of Joan’s village, Domrémy.

There were two principal contenders: the Dauphin (Charles VII) and Henry VI, the infant son of Henry V and Catherine. The English and their allies, the Burgundians, who controlled northern France, predictably supported Henry VI, while those in southern France supported the Dauphin. So the war raged on, and now the French were fighting not only the English but each other as well.

Most of the Hundred Years War had been fought on French soil, and the French had not won any significant victories in decades. By 1429, when Joan was seventeen, the English had managed to conquer a good deal of France’s northern territory, and sections of southwestern France were under the control of the Anglo-allied Burgundians. The French populace had suffered greatly during the bubonic

plague pandemic (the Black Death) that first spread from China to Europe in the 1340s. French merchants were cut off from foreign markets, and the French economy was in shambles.

Joan and her fellow Domrémy villagers strongly supported the Dauphin and considered the English a foul enemy, in part because it was not unusual for English soldiers to march into French villages, killing civilians, burning homes, and stealing crops and cattle. But what could they do to ensure that the Dauphin would become king? It was not something that anyone would have thought probable. But around the time Joan was twelve, something began happening that would catapult her into the center of these events and make her the principal player in leading France to victory and making the Dauphin her rightful king: she began hearing voices and seeing visions. Joan said that messengers from heaven were visiting her in her father's garden. She believed them to be the archangel Michael, Saint Catherine, and Saint Margaret. At first they didn't say anything about France or her role in saving France from the English; they just encouraged Joan in her already deep faith.

Joan looked forward to and loved her interactions with these heavenly visitors, but over time the words they spoke to her became quite specific and serious. They informed her that she had a great mission to perform. She was to rescue France from the English and take the Dauphin to the city of Reims to be crowned. Like Mary, the mother of Jesus, Joan was amazed at what these heavenly visitors told her. Who was she to lead an army? She hardly knew how to mount a horse, much less how to lead soldiers into battle. But as she was a girl of deep faith, she did not doubt that these messengers were indeed from heaven and must be taken seriously.

Joan was not the only person in the family to be troubled by things difficult to understand. One night her father dreamed that his pretty, adolescent daughter would run away with soldiers. Misunderstanding its meaning, he dramatically instructed his sons to drown their sister if she ever did such a thing. He also preemptively began to plan for Joan's marriage to a local swain. Unbeknownst to her father, however, Joan had made a private vow to God never to marry. So when the time came, she refused to go through with the ceremony, despite the fact that her so-called fiancé went to court over the broken arrangement.

When Joan was about sixteen, her "voices," as she called them, told her that her time had come to last. They gave her specific instructions to travel to the town of Vaucouleurs. Once there, she was to ask Governor Robert de Baudricourt to provide her with an armed escort to the castle of Chinon where the Dauphin and his court lived. Knowing how her parents would react, Joan told them she wished to visit her married cousin, Jeanne Laxart, who lived a short distance from Vaucouleurs. They allowed their daughter to go.

She did visit her cousin but then talked her cousin's husband, Durand, into taking her to see Robert de Baudricourt. The governor patiently listened to Joan describe how God had instructed her to lead an army in driving the English out of France and then to oversee the crowning of the Dauphin as king of France. But what was the esteemed and dignified governor to make of this simple girl's outrageous story? He did what anyone else likely would have done: he told Durand to send her home immediately but not before boxing her ears for all the trouble she was causing.

The frustrated Joan returned home, but no sooner had she arrived than the horrors of the war finally came to her own doorstep. Burgundian soldiers swept into Domrémy and cruelly laid waste to the entire village by fire. She and her fellow villagers fled to a nearby fortified town. Then, a few months later came worse news: the English had surrounded the great French city of Orléans and were laying siege to it. Joan's voices gave her an urgent new message: God intended for her to rescue Orléans.

Joan, now seventeen, returned to Vaucouleurs and spent the next six weeks attempting to see the governor again. While waiting, she spoke openly to all who would listen about her God-given mission. The Vaucouleurs townspeople remembered a famous prophecy that France would one day be lost by a woman and then restored by a maiden—a virgin. They came to assume that the woman who would lose France was the despicable Queen Isabeau and that the maiden who would restore their country might well be Joan. As for the governor, he was less encouraging and again dismissed her and her preposterous ideas.

But Joan did not take his rebuffs to heart. “I must be at the King’s side,” she insisted. “There will be no help if not from me. Although I would rather have remained spinning at my mother’s side . . . yet must I go and must I do this thing, for my Lord wills that I do so.”<sup>2</sup>

There’s little doubt that Joan really did wish to remain at home with her family, doing the things she had grown up doing. But she knew that God himself was calling her to the task at hand. She would not disobey, and she would not relent until she had done what God called her to do.

Baudricourt agreed to see the persistent farm girl again, but this time, Joan told him something remarkable, something she had no way of knowing. In Mark Twain’s fictional account of Joan’s life, which he researched and wrote for twenty years, the outspoken religious skeptic presented this account of Joan’s meeting with Baudricourt:

“In God’s name, Robert de Baudricourt, you are too slow about sending me, and have caused damage thereby, for this day the Dauphin’s cause has lost a battle near Orléans, and will suffer yet greater injury if you do not send me to him soon.”

The governor was perplexed by this speech, and said:

“To-day, child, to-day? How can you know what has happened in that region to-day? It would take eight or ten days for the word to come.”

“My voices have brought the word to me, and it is true. A battle was lost to-day, and you are in fault to delay me so.”

The governor walked the floor a while, talking within himself, but letting a great oath fall outside now and then; and finally he said:

“Harkye! go in peace, and wait. If it shall turn out as you say, I will give you the letter and send you to the King, and not otherwise.”

Joan said with fervor: “Now God be thanked, these waiting days are almost done.”<sup>3</sup>

Word arrived that the French had indeed lost the battle. The governor was flabbergasted and finally convinced.

Orléans, located along the Loire River, was the final obstacle to an assault on the rest of France and therefore of tremendous strategic importance. Given the unlikelihood that Orléans could long endure a lengthy siege, rescue of the city was essential if France were ever to rule itself again. But to see the Dauphin, Joan would have to travel to Chinon, where the royal court had relocated from Bourges.

Joan began working out practical details of her 350-mile journey. It was for her own safety while traveling across enemy territory that she decided to cut her hair short and dress as a man. The citizens of Vaucouleurs clearly saw the sense in this and provided her with masculine clothing—a tunic, hose, boots, and spurs. They also provided her with a horse, and Baudricourt himself gave Joan her first



sword.

On a cold February night, Joan—who now simply called herself “La Pucelle,” which translates “the Maid,” or “the Maiden,” meaning a young woman or a virgin—swung herself atop her horse and began the long journey to Chinon, accompanied by six male escorts. They had agreed to travel by night and sleep by day in order to avoid enemy soldiers, whom they might otherwise encounter, so they rode through hostile Burgundian lands.

Eleven days later Joan and her escorts stopped in Fierbois, a three-hour ride from Chinon. There Joan dictated a letter to the Dauphin, asking to meet with him. The Dauphin agreed, and soon the little band clattered onto the cobblestoned streets of Chinon. Joan was met by many curious stares, for the stories of the virgin who claimed she would save France had preceded her.

Like Robert de Baudricourt, the Dauphin had prepared a test for Joan. She had hinted in a letter that, although she had never met him, she would be able to identify the Dauphin. So Louis de Bourbon, Count of Vendôme, led Joan through a stone passage opening into the castle’s grand hall, where she found herself in the company of hundreds of gorgeously dressed and bejeweled guests. After looking around for a moment, Joan walked straight toward the Dauphin and knelt before him. “God give you life, gentle king,” she said.<sup>4</sup>

“I am not the king,” the Dauphin replied. “There is the king!” he said, pointing to another man.

Joan responded, “In God’s name, Sir, you *are* the King, and no other! Give me the troops wherewith to succour Orléans and to guard you to Rheims to be anointed and crowned. For it is the will of God.”<sup>5</sup>

Still not quite convinced, the Dauphin took Joan aside to speak privately. In an effort to prove she had been sent by God, she told him about something he had done in private: he had prayed that God would reveal to him whether or not he was actually the son of Charles VI. His mother, hardly a virtuous woman, had claimed he was not. If he were not the son of the late king, the Dauphin prayed that God would take away his desire to rule.

The Dauphin was overjoyed when Joan told him that he was, indeed, of royal blood; she said that she knew this because her voices had told her. He then gave Joan a room in Chinon Castle’s Tower of Coudray, along with a household staff, including a young page, who, all his long life afterward recalled Joan’s “prayers and her fervor.”<sup>6</sup> She was also given a knight, John d’Aulon, and a chaplain, John Pasquerel, who later wrote a lively biography of her. Among the men who met with Joan was Jean d’Alençon, the celebrated Duke of Alençon and a cousin to the king, of whom Joan became fond, calling him her “handsome duke.”

But not all the king’s men were impressed with Joan. Georges de La Trémoille, Count of Guînes, who had substantial influence over the Dauphin, said that he “found it absurd . . . that a young a girl of low birth, unlettered, lately come from nothingness, should play the leader.”<sup>7</sup>

It was he and other advisers who urged the Dauphin to investigate Joan’s background and claim and determine whether these voices of hers came from heaven or hell. Additional precious weeks passed as Joan was thoroughly investigated. She was required to travel to Poitiers, a university town where the council of church scholars examined her. These men insisted she perform a miracle, which she refused to do. She might have told them about the miracle of her knowing the Dauphin’s secret worries about his legitimacy, which he had confirmed, but she chose not to embarrass him by doing so.

The Dauphin’s advisers remained skeptical. But Joan had no doubt about what God had told her and had grown impatient. “In the name of God,” she replied, “I came not here to Poitiers to work

miracles. At Orléans you will see miracle enough. With a few men or with many, to Orléans will go.”<sup>8</sup>

Joan then prophesied to them that four events would take place. She said, “Orléans I shall relieve. The Dauphin I shall crown in Rheims. Paris will come back to its true king. The Duke of Orléans, captive in the Tower of London, will return home.”<sup>9</sup>

In the end they agreed that the Dauphin would accept Joan’s help. By then, as biographers Régine Pernoud and Véronique Clin put it, Joan “had come to personify hope, the type of hope that (according to the witnesses of her time) the distressed kingdom no longer maintained—that is, the hope of divine assistance.”<sup>10</sup> She was given a military retinue consisting of a steward, pages, two heralds, messengers, and her brothers, John and Peter, along with the equipment she would need as the leader of an army. She was fitted out with a specially designed suit of armor, and the Dauphin himself gave her a magnificent horse.

Joan also required a standard. This flag was necessary so that soldiers would have a way of recognizing their commander when his—or her—visor was down, as it must be during the fighting. Joan explained that the voices had described to her just how it should appear. It should be made of “fine white linen, with the lilies of the realm scattered on it and sewn, and there was to be painted on it the figure of Our Lord with the world in His hand, and on either side two angels adoring, with the motto: ‘Jesus, Mary.’ ” On Joan’s blue shield was painted a white dove holding in its beak a scroll upon which were written the words “By command of the King of Heaven.”<sup>11</sup>

Joan already had a sword. Nonetheless she sent a letter to the priests of the shrine of Sainte Catherine de Fierbois, the place where she had prayed while waiting to travel to Chinon. She told them to dig behind the altar, where they would discover a rusted sword that was engraved with five crosses. Her voices had told her the sword was there, and *mirabile dictu*—indeed it was. The priests dug and found it, removed the rust, and then sent it to Joan. The Maid did not intend to ever harm anyone with the sword. It was, she said, intended merely to be a symbol of command.

Joan began giving commands to her soldiers, instructions that probably astonished these rough men. She made it clear that the army she commanded would be God’s army in every way. She told the men that they must not swear and must confess their sins. They also were to be just in everything they did. And although they would indeed be conquerors, they must not do what soldiers in those days almost always did: loot the villagers’ homes and burn them. Joan personally chased “immoral women” from the camp. Her army also included priests, who morning and evening were assembled to sing hymns to the Virgin Mary.

Having a female leader, and a young one at that, was a new and challenging experience for the French soldiers. An eyewitness to the attitudes of the soldiers who fought under Joan’s command, Gobert Thibault, described the phenomenon of an innocent young girl living among virile men: “I heard many of those closest to her say that they had never had any desire for her; that is to say, they sometimes felt a certain carnal urge but never dared to let themselves go with her, and they believed that it was not possible to desire her; I have questioned several of those who sometimes slept the night in Joan’s company about this, and they answered as I have, adding that they had never felt any carnal desire when they saw her.”<sup>12</sup>

Before engaging in the Battle of Orléans, Joan sent a letter to English leaders during Holy Week of 1429, urging them to “surrender to the Maid, who is sent here from God, the King of Heaven, the key to all of the good cities that you have taken and violated in France. . . . She is entirely ready to make peace,” it read, “if you are willing to settle accounts with her, provided that you give up France and

pay for having occupied her.”<sup>13</sup>

In the letter she ordered English troops to leave France and warned, “If you do not do so, I am commander of the armies, and in whatever place I shall meet your French allies, I shall make them leave it, whether they wish to or not; and if they will not obey, I shall have them all killed. . . . If you do not wish to believe this message from God through the Maid, then wherever we find you we will strike you there, and make a great uproar greater than any made in France for a thousand years.”<sup>14</sup>

The English were not impressed. They warned Joan that if they caught her, they would burn her at the stake. Joan and her troops likely assembled at the Blois fortress on the Loire, about halfway between Tours and Orléans. Both Tours and Blois were controlled by the French. The English controlled the Loire’s right bank, upriver. Joan’s confessor, John Pasquerel, described this moment: “They marched out on the side of the Solonge [the south bank of the Loire] . . . camped in the field that night and the following day as well. On the third day, they arrived near Orléans, where the English had set up their siege along the bank of the Loire. And the king’s soldiers came so close to the English that Englishmen and Frenchmen could see one another within easy reach.”<sup>15</sup>

Joan was about to meet the man who would become her great ally: Jean d’Orléans, the Count of Dunois, known throughout his life as the Bastard of Orléans because he was the illegitimate half brother of the Duke of Orléans. But this Bastard, alas, believing he knew far more about battle tactics than a teenage girl, had deceived Joan. He was now in charge of Orléans troops (because his half brother, the duke, was being held prisoner in London). He arranged for Joan’s soldiers to make a long detour, causing them to come in “well arrayed up to the banks of the Loire on the Sologne side.”<sup>16</sup> He had decided on this detour in order to keep clear of the English, who had staked out positions in the vicinity of Orléans. But Joan, eager to begin fighting, discovered that she and her men had been duped and had in fact bypassed Orléans.

Joan was livid and gave the Bastard a tongue-lashing he would never forget. Approaching him on horseback, she asked, “Are you the one who gave orders for me to come here, on this side of the river, so that I could not go directly to [General John] Talbot and the English?”

As the Bastard recalled later, “I answered that I, and others, including the wisest men around me, had given this advice, believing it best and safest.”

“In God’s name,” Joan replied, “the counsel of Our Lord God is wiser and safer than yours. You thought that you could fool me, and instead you fooled yourself; I bring you better help than ever came to you from any soldier to any city: It is the help of the King of Heaven.”<sup>17</sup>

The English soldiers had camped mainly along the Loire outside the western gate of Orléans. Joan said the English would not come out from their forts or their camp, and she was right. Their strength was insufficient, so for the time being they stayed with their guns, waiting for reinforcements to arrive. If she had gone there when she had wanted to, her forces would have had the advantage.

Joan at last made a triumphal entry into the besieged city on the evening of April 29, 1429, accompanied by the Bastard and many other noblemen and men at arms. The crowds, holding torches high, cheered and reached up to touch her as she made her way from the Burgundy Gate across the city to the home of Jacques Boucher, today the Maison de Jeanne d’Arc. Seeing the famous Maid gave the people tremendous hope. She was wise beyond her years and yet innocent; she was strong and yet vulnerable; she was bold and humble. She was all these things at once, and she seemed to embody France itself, and hope itself too.

Joan lodged at Boucher’s home and spent the next nine days impatiently waiting to go into battle.

The Bastard had convinced her to wait until reinforcements arrived from the Dauphin. She twice went out to stand on the bridge of Orléans and trade insults with the English; she urged them to surrender or be slaughtered. The English in turn called her a cow-herd and insulted her soldiers with crude epithets.

In the meantime, the Bastard had ridden out to meet the French reinforcements, and when he returned he had news: a new English army, commanded by the famous captain John Fastolf, had been sent to Orléans to lead the battle against them. Joan was delighted that at last the battle would begin, but she took no chances that the Bastard might again deceive her. Turning to him, she warned, “Bastard, O Bastard, in God’s name, I order you, as soon as you know of Fastolf’s coming, to let me know it!”<sup>18</sup> He promised that he would.

But when the first short skirmish occurred, Joan was asleep, and nobody thought to wake her. The Bastard took the army to attack the fortress at Saint-Loup. Joan suddenly awoke, telling her steward Jean d’Aulon, that her voices had told her to “go against the English,”<sup>19</sup> but she was unsure whether this meant she should attack their fortifications or Fastolf, who was coming to resupply them.

After lashing out at her page for neglecting to wake her while French blood was being spilled, Joan shouted for her horse to be readied and her standard brought while she dressed quickly. She then rode to the Burgundy Gate, where a battle was raging. As soon as the French forces saw Joan, their spirits soared. They raised a shout and managed to take both the *bastide* (fortified town) and the fortress itself. In terms of territory, the victory was rather insignificant, but the revitalizing effect it had on French forces was extraordinary.

The brutal reality of war, however, which Joan had never before seen, greatly disturbed her, and when she saw the many wounded and dead French soldiers, she wept. Joan went to confession afterward and urged her fellow soldiers to “confess their sins publicly and to give thanks to God for the victory that He had granted.”<sup>20</sup>

Two days later Joan was readying herself for combat when she ran into Raoul de Gaucourt, the governor of Orléans, who told her he would not allow her to make an attack that day because the captains did not want her to do so. But Joan was defiant. “[W]hether you wish it or not,” she told him, “the men-at-arms will come and gain what they gained the other day.”<sup>21</sup>

So Joan and her soldiers crossed the Loire. The Maid led her troops to the left bank, where the English had erected another bastide. But then she saw that it was deserted. The English had escaped up the river to a second bastide, one that was stronger. The English withdrawal made a French advance more dangerous, but Joan rode toward them nonetheless. An eyewitness, Jean d’Aulon, noted:

When they perceived that the enemy was coming out of the Bastide of the Augustinians to rush upon them, the Maid and La Hire, who were always in front of their men to protect them, immediately couched their lances and led the attack upon the enemy. Everyone followed them, and they began to strike the enemy in such a manner that they constrained them by sheer force to withdraw and to return to the Bastide. . . . With great diligence, they assailed that bastide from all directions so that they seized it and took it by assault quickly. The greater part of the enemy were killed or captured.<sup>22</sup>

Joan had again won a tremendous victory, but once more the Dauphin and his counselors dithered about what to do next. They complained that there were too few French and too many English. The city of Les Tourelles was well provisioned with food, they said, so why not simply guard it while

waiting for the king's help?

Joan would have none of it. She ordered Pasquerel to rise early the next day, May 7, 1430, and prepare for battle. They would attack the fortress of Les Tourelles. She prophesied that she would be wounded in the fighting above the left breast, but that the wound would not be fatal, and the French would take Les Tourelles. This was precisely what happened.

The great Anglo-French writer and historian Hilaire Belloc described the battle: "The stone wall of the rampart swarmed with the scaling ladders full of men hurled down [under an assault of arrows] and assault upon assault repelled, and the Maid in the midst with her banner; when, at noon, a shaft struck right through the white shoulder plate over her left breast and she fell."<sup>23</sup>

Joan bravely pulled the arrow out herself, had the wound treated with olive oil, rested awhile, and then leapt back into the fray. By nightfall the soldiers had spent thirteen exhausting hours in battle. The English were certain of victory, especially when they heard the Bastard's trumpets sounding retreat. But Joan had no doubt that the French would win. After going away for a time of prayer while her exhausted men rested and had something to eat, Joan convinced the Bastard to make one final assault. Holding her standard high so that her men could see it in the fading light, she shouted, "When the flag touches the stone, all is yours!"<sup>24</sup> The weary soldiers rose to the occasion magnificently, breaking down the English defenses and pouring over the walls.

The English ran for their lives toward a wooden drawbridge, but the French had torched a boat and sent it floating beneath the bridge. It caught fire. As the English raced across it, a portion collapsed. All those soldiers who fell into the water in their heavy armor drowned. The citizens of Orléans came forward to patch the bridge with ladders and planks then rushed across the structure "to attack the foe from the rear, setting it on fire with flaming arrows."<sup>25</sup> At last the towers fell, and everyone within the fortress was killed or taken prisoner.

It was a tremendous victory, so great that today, nearly six hundred years later, the French still celebrate it every May 7. Despite her injury Joan visited the bridge that night to see the rejoicing of the citizens of newly freed Orléans. From his position on the far side of the river, the English general Lord Talbot, heard bells of celebration ringing through the night. He pulled his troops out of the remaining forts that surrounded Orléans.

Orléans was relieved, just as Joan had prophesied. Now she must crown France's rightful king in Reims. The following day she and the Bastard rode to the castle of Loches to meet the Dauphin, who was overjoyed to see her. She urged him to travel immediately to Reims, the traditional place for crowning French kings. But again the Dauphin's counselors were unwilling to act quickly. They would spend nearly two weeks debating what should be done next. She continued to press the Dauphin to act. Her voices had told her that she would have only a year to achieve her goals. "Dauphin, noble Dauphin," she said, "linger not here in council with many words, but come to Reims and be crowned. For the voice calls to me: 'Go forward, Daughter of God; I am with you. Go! Go!'"<sup>26</sup>

In the end the Dauphin was finally convinced, and the army set out to clear the towns for his unimpeded passage to Reims. The objective of the Loire campaign, commanded by the Duke of Alençon, "was to dislodge the enemy from their entrenched positions on the banks of the Loire River and in the plains to the north, in order to protect the rear of the army when it departed for Reims."<sup>27</sup>

But Reims was roughly twice as far away as Paris and deep within enemy territory, so the idea that the Maid and her soldiers would travel there was unthinkable to the English. They assumed the French would do the sensible thing and attack Normandy or attempt to recapture Paris.

It was a stunning campaign, taking just one week. First, the French captured Jargeau, the town which the English had fled following their rout at Orléans. Joan “stood to see the firing of the great gun brought from Orléans, and when . . . a tower fell, [the Duke of] Alençon dreaded the breach, thinking it not wide enough yet and too high piled with stone; but she said to him: ‘To the Breach and fear nothing! This is the hour of God’s pleasure; and do you not remember how I told your wife . . . Tours that I would bring you home?’ ”<sup>28</sup>

Joan was injured during this battle when she attempted to scale a ladder. A stone struck her helmet, causing her to tumble to the ground. But she quickly recovered and shouted to her men: “O friends, on! Hearts high! We have them in this hour!”<sup>29</sup>

Once again inspired by the Maid, her soldiers captured the town. Many English lost their lives, and the English leader, the Duke of Suffolk, was captured. Then Joan and the Duke of Alençon rode triumphantly back to Orléans. By now, her reputation was such that English-held towns simply opened their gates to her. With no effort, her soldiers took the towns of Meung-sur-Loire and Beaugency.

But at last the army of Sir John Fastolf had arrived, and Lord Talbot would have help. The combined forces marched confidently toward the French in what would be remembered as the Battle of Patay. The French victory on June 18 was a rout, one of inconceivable and absurd proportions. History records that the French lost three men, while the casualties on the English side numbered more than four thousand.

When Joan and her army returned victorious to Orléans, the citizens erupted with jubilation. She would at last travel with the Dauphin to Reims to crown him king. But again his court wrung the hands and delayed his departure. There were still some walled cities held by the Burgundians, they said, so they did not think the Dauphin should make the trip. She went to him and urged him to go to Reims immediately. He must be crowned king, she said, and soon! The Dauphin thanked her for her victories on his behalf but suggested she first rest before they make the journey. She knew this would be a mistake and persisted. Finally the Dauphin relented, and in late June, Joan and her men set out for Reims, with the Dauphin following two days later.

Upon the Dauphin’s arrival in Reims on July 16, the citizens cheered themselves hoarse for joy. Even Joan’s father and mother had traveled there to witness the great, almost incredible accomplishment of their daughter. Two of her brothers had come as well. But even in the midst of this long-sought climax, she was already looking forward to what lay ahead. The following morning, as preparations went forward for the coronation, she dictated a letter to the Duke of Burgundy demanding that he make a “firm and lasting peace with the king of France.”

“You two must pardon one another fully with a sincere heart, as loyal Christians should,” she added. “I must make known to you from the King of Heaven, my rightful and sovereign Lord, for your good and for your honor and upon your life, that you will win no more battles against loyal Frenchmen.”<sup>30</sup>

Later that day, to shouts of acclamation, the Dauphin rode his horse into the Cathedral of Reims himself, there to be crowned king. And standing beside the Dauphin was the humble Maid whose faith and fire had brought it all to pass. As the crown was set upon the Dauphin’s head, Joan knelt beside the man who now, in this moment, was officially King Charles VII. With tears running down her face she said, “High-born King, now is the will of God accomplished. For He it was who ordained that you should free Orléans and bring you here to this city of Reims for your sacring, to blazon it forth that you are Rightful Lord. And now the Realm of France is yours.”<sup>31</sup>

As a reward for her services to him, King Charles granted Joan’s wish that her home village of

Domrémy be forever exempt from paying taxes. That was all she had asked, and this promise was kept for four centuries.

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Tragically, however, this weak monarch would in a very short time betray the noble woman who had done so much to place the crown of France upon his head.



The crowning of Charles would have significant consequences. Cities that had been under the control of the English-allied Burgundians were now prepared to recognize Charles as their rightful ruler. And Joan's army, under the command of the Duke of Alençon, was eager to take back Paris—just as she had prophesied—and not only that, but to drive the English out of all of France once and for all.

Joan had not once failed in her advice to the king; all she had said had, in fact, come to pass. Nonetheless, Charles and his advisers didn't trust her instincts. They had ideas of winning the war in other, easier ways. They hoped to persuade the Duke of Burgundy to break his alliance with the English and to join the French side. They did not tell Joan that the king had agreed to a fifteen-day truce with the Duke of Burgundy, wherein the duke had promised to surrender Paris at the conclusion of that time. In truth, the deceptive duke would double-cross them. He had only bought time with his lie and was awaiting the arrival of reinforcements from England—some thirty-five hundred of them.

When Joan became aware of the truce, she was immediately suspicious, so on August 5, she wrote to the citizens of Reims:

It's true that the King has made a truce with the Duke of Burgundy lasting fifteen days, by which he [Burgundy] must turn over the city of Paris peaceably at the end of fifteen days. However, do not be surprised if I don't enter it [Paris] so quickly. I am not at all content with truces made like this, and I don't know if I will uphold them; but if I do uphold them it will only be in order to protect the honor of the King; also, they [the Burgundians] will not cheat the Royal family, for I will maintain and keep the King's army together so as to be ready at the end of these fifteen days if they don't make peace.<sup>32</sup>

In the meantime Joan and the French army marched through towns near Paris, in each case not having to fight but accepting a peaceful surrender.

Joan knew that attacking Paris would be difficult, much more so than the Battle of Orléans. Paris was well fortified and even surrounded by a moat. But she was undeterred. As she had always done before attacking, she shouted to the English to surrender or die; and as they had before previous battles, they vowed to fight.

On September 8, the French forces under Joan's leadership began the attack. At one point, she decided that she herself would determine the depth of the moat. But just as she was dipping her lance into the moat's water, an arrow from an English crossbow struck her in the thigh, in the very place where her armor did not protect her. Lying on the ground in pain, she urged her soldiers to leave her where she was and continue the battle, but the Raoul de Gaucourt and others came to her and carried her off, ending the assault.

It is worth noting that Joan had not received any instructions from her voices regarding this battle and was now acting on her own initiative. She was never to receive their advice again regarding battle.

tactics.

The next day brought terrible news. King Charles himself had ordered that they cease the assault on Paris altogether. Once again the timorous, irresolute Charles had been influenced to take this step by his advisers—particularly Grand Chamberlain Georges de la Trémoille, who disliked Joan.

The Maid's brief but remarkable military career was now nearing its end. Her voices had warned her in June that she would soon be captured, that she should "take it favorably,"<sup>33</sup> and that God would aid her.

In October Joan's army captured Saint-Pierre-le-Moûtier but failed to take La Charité-sur-Loire. King Charles had signed a truce with England, leaving a frustrated Joan idle—until the truce ended the following spring. In May 1430 English and Burgundian forces attacked Compiègne, and Joan traveled there with a small force of four hundred men to take part in the city's defense.

During the May 23 battle the French, seeing six thousand Burgundian reinforcements approaching and fearing that they would be overwhelmed, rushed onto the bridge of boats that Guillaume de Flavacourt had strung out across the Oise. Joan, who never withdrew without regret, protected their retreat. Perceval de Cagney later described what happened: "During that time, the captain of the place, seeing the great multitude of Burgundians and Englishmen ready to get on the bridge, out of fear that he would lose his position, raised the drawbridge of the city and closed the gate. So the Maid remained outside and only a few of her men were with her."<sup>34</sup> Joan fought the enemy bravely until one of the English yanked her off her horse and threw her to the ground.

Biographers have their doubts about this description. Pernoud and Clin, for example, noted that this was not "the main gate of the city that had been closed but a gate in the curtain wall, which was not vital to the defense of the city proper and which presumably cut off the combatants' retreat. This is why—though reasonable skepticism persists—some believe that Joan's fear of betrayal was fulfilled."<sup>35</sup>

Joan now became a prisoner of Lionel of Wandomme, a lieutenant of John of Luxembourg, who was, in turn, under the Duke of Burgundy's control. Lionel transported her to Margny-lès-Compiègne where she was kept under guard in a tower at Beaufort Castle until November.

The English, who had come to believe they would never win glory on the field of battle while the Maid lived, rejoiced at her capture and immediately began pressuring the Duke of Burgundy to hand her over to them. The duke eventually agreed, accepting a ransom of ten thousand francs, in addition to six thousand francs for the soldiers who had actually captured the Maid.

Joan far preferred death to being given over to the English, and while these negotiations regarding her fate took place, she seems to have wished to end her life, leaping from the seventy-foot-high tower in which she was being held. But somehow she survived, landing on a patch of soft earth. She was discovered unconscious hours later and returned to her cell, having escaped not only death, but injury. This was one of several efforts she made to escape. But now one of her voices—she said it was Saint Catherine—told Joan to "confess myself and ask pardon from God for having jumped."<sup>36</sup>

King Charles had initially promised vengeance for the capture of Joan. After all, it was her fearless obedience to God that had brought him the French crown. But, in fact, he did nothing to help her during this time.

Joan was then taken to Rouen, the seat of the English occupation government, where she was put in chains in a castle dungeon to await trial. There, five male guards mocked and insulted her and made efforts to violate her. Fear of rape led Joan to continue wearing her masculine attire, which offered more protection than a dress.



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