



## The Queen of Subtleties

By Suzannah Dunn  
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### Introduction

With rhetorical grace, author Suzannah Dunn brings a tumultuous era to life in *The Queen of Subtleties*, as she boldly reimagines the rise and descent of a legendary queen, Anne Boleyn, the second wife of King Henry VIII. After just three years of marriage and many more years of turmoil, Boleyn would die by the headsman's sword, leaving behind a young daughter destined to rule as the greatest of all British monarchs.

Here, Dunn traces the parallel life of Lucy Cornwallis, the only woman servant in Henry's retinue, and a witness to the great and terrible events from her perch in the royal kitchens. These two women -- both serving at the whim of a volatile monarch, both prisoners in a world of power and unspeakable cruelty -- share nothing except an inside view of the intricate workings of a merciless court, and an ultimately devastating relationship with a talented young musician.

### Questions for Discussion

1. What do the chapters narrated by Anne Boleyn reveal about her character, her feelings about marriage and motherhood, and her vision of the monarchy?
2. How would you describe life at court under the rule of Henry VIII, and how did that courtly life differ for servants of the king?
3. Why do you think Suzannah Dunn, the author of *The Queen of Subtleties*, chose to alternate Anne Boleyn's narration with that of Lucy Cornwallis?
4. What aspects of the history of the 16<sup>th</sup>-century English monarchy explored in *The Queen of Subtleties* were especially intriguing to you?
5. To what extent was Henry's desire to end his marriage to Catherine in order to wed Anne the reason for England's separation from the Catholic Church?
6. What role did Mark Smeaton play in Anne Boleyn's death, and how was Lucy Cornwallis complicit in that role?
7. Did Anne Boleyn's inability to bear Henry VIII a male heir make her politically redundant as a queen?
8. How does the theme of betrayal wind its way through *The Queen of Subtleties*?
9. Why do you think the author chose to convey these historical characters using a more contemporary vernacular, and how did that choice impact your reading experience?
10. Do you see Anne Boleyn as a villain, a victim, or as something in between?

### About the Author

Suzannah Dunn is the author of seven previous works of fiction, all critically acclaimed and well received in the U.K. *The Queen of Subtleties* is her first work of fiction to be published in the United States. She lives in Brighton, England.