



The Queen's Lover

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Catherine de Valois, daughter of the French king Charles VI, is born into troubled times. Brought up in a royal court, she is Catherine is married off to England's Henry V before she is even out of her teens as part of a treaty honoring his victory over France. Within two years she is widowed, and mother to the future King of England and France -- even though her brother has laid claim to the French crown for himself. Caught between warring factions of her own family and under threat by the powerful lords of the English court, she must find a way to keep her infant son safe. History comes alive in this lyrical and moving true story of one woman's courage and the inception of one of the most famous royal lineages of all time.

- Catherine and her brother Charles are brought up underfed and unnoticed by their royal family, despite being at the heart of the most glittering court of Europe. What effect does this neglect have on each of them? Do you think that children can overcome the emotional stunting caused by early lack of care?
- In the Middle Ages, love was seldom taken into consideration as a reason for marriage among the wealthy and high-ranking. In modern times, marrying for anything but love is considered suspect. Do you think we take romantic love too seriously today, and undervalue other considerations which might also lead to the creation of successful families, such as friendship, compatibility, shared values, and similar educations?
- Unusually for a medieval woman, Christine de Pizan, who'd always wanted to be as learned as her father, used her widowhood to educate herself and earned a living for herself and her children from her learning. Why do you think she was only able to go back to her books as a widow? How easy has it become in modern times for women to juggle families and careers? To what extent are we free of de Pizan's dilemma?
- War destroys lives, not necessarily directly by battle. The three main female characters in this book ' Catherine, Christine de Pizan, and Joan of Arc ' each drastically reshape their lives as war touches them. Catherine embraces a royal marriage to her enemy; Christine gives up writing and locks herself away in the nunnery; Joan of Arc leaves her sheep to take up a sword and fight. How successful are they?
- The people who have the most worldly success in *The Queen's Lover* are the fighting, or diplomatic, men who make it their primary business simply to agree on troop movements and strategic objectives, without looking too deeply into each other's hearts ' Henry V and his warrior brothers. Do you think it's possible to be highly effective and, at the same time, develop a more sensitive side?
- As a Welshman ' part of a defeated race ' Owain Tudor finds his Welshness makes it hard for him to educate himself, hold land, or marry in England. Are there people you can think of today whose development has been hindered by an accident of birth, whether poverty, gender, or ethnicity? What routes have they found to circumvent the problem?
- Despite years of neglecting her children, Catherine's mother does eventually make an unexpected grand gesture of love, sacrificing her own reputation to ensure Catherine's future. The time will come when Catherine is likewise asked to sacrifice her own interests for those of her son. How important a part of mother love is the possibility that a mother might give up everything for her child?