



A Secret Alchemy

By Emma Darwin
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Introduction

The cruel fate of the Princes in the Tower is one of the most fascinating—and most troubling—of all England's historical murder mysteries. But what was the truth behind the deaths of the young Edward V and his brother, Dickon, taken from their mother, Elizabeth Woodville, King Edward's IV's beautiful widow, and their guardian, Anthony Woodville? And what about the man who would become King Richard III?

In a brilliant feat of historical daring, the acclaimed author of *The Mathematics of Love* reimagines the tragedy of the youngest victims of the Wars of the Roses. Through the voices of Elizabeth, Anthony, and Una—a historian who herself knows grief, betrayal, and secret love—Emma Darwin re-creates the lethal power struggles into which the boys were born, their heart-wrenching imprisonment, and the ultimate betrayal of their innocence.

Questions for Discussion

1. Pilgrimage is a key idea in *A Secret Alchemy*. How is this reflected in the story of each of the three narrators, and in the shape and texture of the novel as a whole?
2. Why do you think the author decided to tell Elizabeth and Anthony's stories in two different voices?
3. Does *A Secret Alchemy* challenge or contradict your idea of the history in which it's rooted? If so, in what ways?
4. 'I loved you because you were the nearest thing I ever had to a son.' Discuss the role of uncles and surrogate fathers within *A Secret Alchemy*.
5. Discuss the ideas of storytelling, myth, fact and fiction in *A Secret Alchemy*.
6. What do you think of Una's realization that there's only one way to get at the real, human truth of Elizabeth and Anthony?
7. How does the ancient Greek myth of Jason work within the story?
8. Marriage—secret, alchemical, political—and other sexual partnerships are central to *A Secret Alchemy*. Discuss the ways in which such partnerships are portrayed.
9. What did you think of the ending? Would you have liked it to end differently?
10. What other books would you compare this to? What books would you recommend to other readers who have enjoyed this book?

About the Author

Emma Darwin studied drama and theatre arts at Birmingham University and then worked in academic publishing before turning to photography and writing. A great-great-granddaughter of Charles Darwin and his wife, Emma Wedgwood, Emma now lives in London with her two children. The author of *The Mathematics of Love*, she is finishing a Ph.D. in creative writing at Goldsmiths College.