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The Queen's Companion

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Reviewed by Paige Lovitt for Reader Views (5/11)

The story begins in 1554 during the time of the Inquisition. Queen Catherine of Montalcino finds herself becoming distressed over the Church's abuse of power. People of her realm, whom she considers under her protection, are being falsely accused of heresy and then tortured and murdered. Catherine personally finds a woman being brutally tortured and raped. This woman, Lady Isabella, has had her whole family branded heretics and murdered. As Catherine helps her to recover she finds herself falling in love with her. This goes against everything she believes is right. She is afraid that God will punish her for these feelings.

The Queen also has a Bishop in her court who she knows hates her and would like to destroy her. This Bishop is not a good man, and he has a sick attraction to boys. In her determination to help save her people Catherine has to try to make sure that her allies will support her, and she must also avoid being accused of heresy by this Bishop. In order to hide her relationship with Lady Isabella, she agrees to marry. She seeks a man to be King who will help her bear an heir and then leave her alone. When she finds the perfect Prince for this role, she marries him and they have a daughter named Sofia.

As she continues with her efforts to try to halt the abuse of her people by the Inquisitors she becomes beloved to the people of her realm.

Undaunted by the Queen's appearance of a normal life, the Bishop decides to use Catherine's daughter to his advantage. Knowing that he has been warned about having his unnatural tastes for boy revealed should he try to hurt the Queen, the Bishop uses subterfuge to get to her daughter and try to convince her that her mother is a heretic. These actions set a course of events into action that will have a devastating effect on all who are involved.

Once I started reading "The Queen's Companion," I found it difficult to put down. I immediately became totally wrapped up in the lives of the characters. Interweaving actual historical events about the Inquisition into the story really brought the reality of what was happening at that time to life. The descriptions of the ways that people were tortured was both educating and disheartening. Catherine and Isabella's relationship was really beautiful, and it made me realize how hard it must have been at that time for women, especially for one in a role of leadership.

Readers who enjoy historical fiction will really enjoy reading this novel. The author's chapter at the end of the book will also cause goose bumps! I highly recommend "The Queen's Companion," and especially recommend it to reader's groups.