

FICTION

The Queen's Companion

Maggi A. Petton

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It's the mid-1550s in beautiful Montalcino and Queen Catherine must take a husband, or risk losing her small "Italian" kingdom to Bishop Thomas Capshaw and the bloody paranoia of the European Inquisition.

While it's known to many that the nineteen-year-old queen, who inherits her ephemeral reign from her father, carries forbidden love for Lady Isabella of Acquapendente, this proposed marriage of deception—and subsequent birth of an heir—could stop the Privy Council, and the Church, from prying further power from her intensely protected homeland. (Bishop Capshaw, once a close friend of the late King, it is revealed, is just as passionate for the touch of young boys as he is to hold his position over Montalcino.)

The ongoing struggles for power and truth, and royal versus religious rule, ensnare all of Petton's characters in this intensely gripping (and wholly satisfying) page-turner, set in the geographical wonder of what we know today as Italy.

An investigation into random countryside violence in the name of the Inquisition gives the novel its start, when Queen Catherine's royal party finds Lady Isabella (her family killed) incapacitated and dying at the hands of a rapist. As "Bella" recovers over months as a guest in Montalcino Castle, Princess Catherine changes from an aloof royal, removed from the struggles of her kingdom during the Inquisition, to a brave Queen personally involved in liberating a village from the deadly clutches of Inquisition opportunists.

Will the kingdom be saved by Queen Catherine's marriage to Prince Ambrose, and by Sofia, the child they bear? Will Queen Catherine's graphic and steamy affair with Bella be revealed as blatant heresy?

Interestingly, as the narrative races toward a rather surprising conclusion, the enlightening words of Catherine's friend Father Tim seem to resonate as much today as they might have in the sixteenth century. So the lessons of over 600 years of religious wrongdoing will not be lost, Petton personally helps to uncover the Inquisition's ultimate hypocrisy...and holocaust.

An exciting, entertaining new literary voice, Petton has a unique talent for detailed, inspiring, and humorous characterization. She has pulled a fascinating, transcendental tale out of this period—forgotten of late in our mundane age of communications technology.

(January 2011) Brandon M. Stickney