

City of Ladies

Sarah Kennedy

Knox Robinson Publishing (Nov 4, 2014)

Hardcover \$27.99 (310pp)

978-1-910282-09-0

Rich historical detail roots this story of a strong, sassy woman in Tudor England.

England during the reign of King Henry VIII was a treacherous place. One minute it's the Catholics who are in favor, the next it's the Protestants. God help those who fall into the wrong group. Sarah Kennedy deftly explores the impact of these policies in her Cross and the Crown series, mixing history and mystery in a compelling, female-driven story.

This is the second book in the series, which follows Catherine, a former nun who was forced out of her convent when Henry VIII declared himself head of the Church of England and outlawed Catholicism. Now married to a landholding gentleman, Catherine has just given birth to their second child. Her husband is pushing for her to serve at Hatfield House, where the King's children reside, but she finds herself torn when the former nuns she has taken into her home start to disappear one by one.

Kennedy is a professor of English at Mary Baldwin College and holds a PhD in Renaissance literature. Much of a historical novel's success lies in the author's ability to accurately cement the story in its time and place, and Kennedy excels in this aspect with detailed descriptions of the daily life of her characters, from clothing to architecture to medicine.

While the setting fits seamlessly within the context of Tudor England, Kennedy's protagonist does not. Catherine is self-assured, with a strong personality and an educated upbringing that are both at odds with the societal norms of the time. However, Kennedy is successful at keeping Catherine believable within her time, making her just sassy enough to create a natural tension between her and other characters without going too far. For example, when the constable overstays his welcome while questioning the household members about the recent disappearances, he finds himself on the receiving end of her spirited wit: "'I thought women kept their ears to keyholes when men were conversing,' he says to her. 'And where did you hear that?' she replies. 'At a keyhole?'"

It is not necessary to read the first novel in the series to enjoy this book, but those finding this their first introduction to Catherine will surely search out the first novel to spend more time with this feisty woman in her richly detailed world. This novel will appeal not only to those who enjoy English royal history, but also to fans of interesting mysteries with strong female leads.

CHRISTINE CANFIELD (Winter 2015)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. No fee was paid by the publisher for this review. Foreword Reviews only recommends books that we love. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.