



Death of the Queen of Hearts

Roman A. Clay

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This delightful cross-genre story brings intrigue to the British royals.

In *Death of the Queen of Hearts*, Roman A. Clay crafts an engrossing story that deftly combines the genres of mystery and thriller while offering trenchant commentary on duty, anonymity, and coming-of-age.

Upon turning twenty-one, the United Kingdom's Prince James receives a DVD containing footage of his dead mother in which she claims her demise was orchestrated rather than accidental. Suddenly, he finds himself questioning official records—and even his own sanity—as his family members prevent him from discovering the truth of how Princess Christina died.

The book's spare prose and lucid dialogue establish and maintain logical character development for primary and secondary players. James transitions smoothly from an obedient, unsure youth to a confident, informed man secure in his choices.

Alba, the writer of an unauthorized tell-all about the death, moves from beguiling source to full-fledged partner in the investigation in a realistic amount of time. As an added bonus, James and Alba start out as friends and gradually become romantically involved. Refreshingly, their relationship is one small facet of the plot rather than the main focus.

Even James's mother, Christina, grows from a mere memory to a peaceful, powerful person who remains very much alive within the context of the book, as other characters refer to her constantly. She appears as a protective presence to her son in ways that elevate the trope of "help from beyond the grave" into an integral, believable, and necessary plot device.

Circumstances surrounding Christina's death bear similarities to the way that well-loved Princess Diana died. *Death of the Queen of Hearts* touchingly evokes Diana's legacy, portraying another princess who is sweet and universally adored. That James is able to resolve the mysteries around his mother's death may be a consolation to those denied such happy conclusions in comparable real-life stories.

For all its intense intrigue, the book also contains sly bursts of humor. For example, when James purposefully ditches his security detail, they reliably find him at his friend's bookshop, even if it takes the guards a while to get there. Also, the prince's mother nicknamed him "Bunny" as a little boy; now old enough to have his own car, James drives a Volkswagen Rabbit.

This unique cross-genre narrative will delight those who love political intrigue, as well as veteran royalty watchers. Some knowledge of the inner workings of the United Kingdom's monarchy is helpful, but not required, in order to enjoy this story.

JILL ALLEN (January 27, 2016)

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