



★ **Queen of Coin and Whispers**

Helen Corcoran

The O'Brien Press (Aug 2, 2020)

Softcover \$16.99 (464pp)

978-1-78849-118-1

Royal robes and palace walls hide treachery in plain sight in Helen Corcoran's *Queen of Coin and Whispers*.

When Lia's uncle dies, she inherits the throne of Edar. But her uncle's rule was marked by selfishness at the expense of Edar's people. Lia, who's not even twenty, knows she has an uphill battle righting her uncle's wrongs, though those within the court who are responsible for draining the coffers are not eager to comply.

A mutual friend connects Lia with Xania, a young woman seeking vengeance for her father's death. Xania suspects that Lord Vigrante, the head of the government, is responsible, and the two women connect over their common enemy. Lia offers Xania a job as her Whispers, a spy selected by royals to ferret out threats against them. The position includes the access Xania needs to find proof of Vigrante's involvement, but the life of a Whispers is not known for its longevity, and she must tread carefully if she wants to stay alive long enough to obtain the justice she seeks.

The royal court is a character as much as a setting, with its rote restrictions of formality proving more threatening than any villain. Politics surrounding courtships, favorites, and social classes form a life-and-death game of chess. The two women rely on one another as they navigate—and circumvent—the rules.

Lia and Xania are a formidable team. Both are determined, with strong senses of duty: Lia to her people, and Xania to her family. Both are hesitant to trust others, too. Their relationship is steady to build toward earned respect, loyalty, and, finally, affection. Xania's younger sister, Zola, is a warm breeze cutting through the tense air of the novel, while Lord Vigrante is a creeping threat masked in politeness.

In this novel marked with twists and betrayals, it is not safe to trust anyone until the final page.

DANIELLE BALLANTYNE (July / August 2020)

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