

The King's Sisters

Sarah Kennedy

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With Kennedy's flair for language, well-known members of the Tudor court come to life with a fresh perspective.

The King's Sisters, by Sarah Kennedy, is the third book in the Cross and the Crown Series, which tells English history through the experiences of its heroine, Catherine. A nun until Henry VIII closed all convents, Catherine manages the kitchen at Richmond Palace for Anne of Cleves, Henry's fourth wife, who has been given the title "the King's beloved sister."

This novel begins with the beheading of Henry's fifth wife, and the efforts of royals to secure a position during these uncertain times parallel Catherine's efforts to marry Benjamin Davies, the father of her unborn child. In the Tudor world, where "the king trades one wife for another, and all his people trade each other," the fortunes of all subjects are fraught with danger. If she hopes to secure her children's future and her own happiness, Catherine must guard all her words and actions.

Kennedy combines her scholarly knowledge of Renaissance England with a talent for producing interesting characters. Familiar historical figures are presented with a fresh perspective. The future Elizabeth I is an emotional teenager, and her half-sister, Mary Tudor, is smart and influential. This is a tale of strong women seeking to control their own destinies. Yet the plot also has elements of a romance novel. The imprisoned Catherine is the damsel in distress, depending on her secret love to save her from the unsavory villain.

Kennedy has published several books of poetry. Her flair for language is most evident when revealing the realities of life in Tudor England, where the smells of rotting fish assault Catherine as she is led down cramped London lanes. The sun has "a great cold eye" at dawn and "yawns" in the evening. At points, though, the imagery becomes heavy-handed. As Catherine wonders about her future, "a storm fester[s] in the far west." The book ends with her walking onto "slick, uneven steps."

Clearly, Kennedy has more to tell about the intrigues of Tudor England and her heroine.

GERALDINE RICHARDS (Winter 2016)

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