

Workhouse Lass

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The fine line walked by the members of Queen Elizabeths court is the subject of *A Constant Heart* (Bethany House 978-0-7642-0431-9) by Siri Mitchell. Beautiful young Marget has been trained in the ways of a courtier since childhood. But once she marries the Earl of Lytham she finds that she wasnt prepared for the tasks of earning his trust or gaining favor with the queen. She must disguise her naturally pale skin under a layer of paint and bleach her hair to a light red. As her friend explains to her at court the queen is the only woman whom men are allowed to love and women must flatter her by imitating her pale skin and red hair.

Readers are immediately drawn into this world where true love even between husband and wife is an unforgivable crime where a courtiers leisure time is spent crafting ways to advance her husbands position and where the quest for “beauty” can result in painful and disfiguring lead poisoning. The narrative alternates between Margets perspective and her husbands providing readers a glimpse at the lives of both men and women of nobility. The idleness of life at court which breeds rumors and gossip causes many misunderstandings but readers will root for these flawed characters and mourn with them when things go wrong. Mitchell is the author of five other novels two of which were Christy Award finalists.

WHITNEY HALLBERG (February 13, 2009)

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