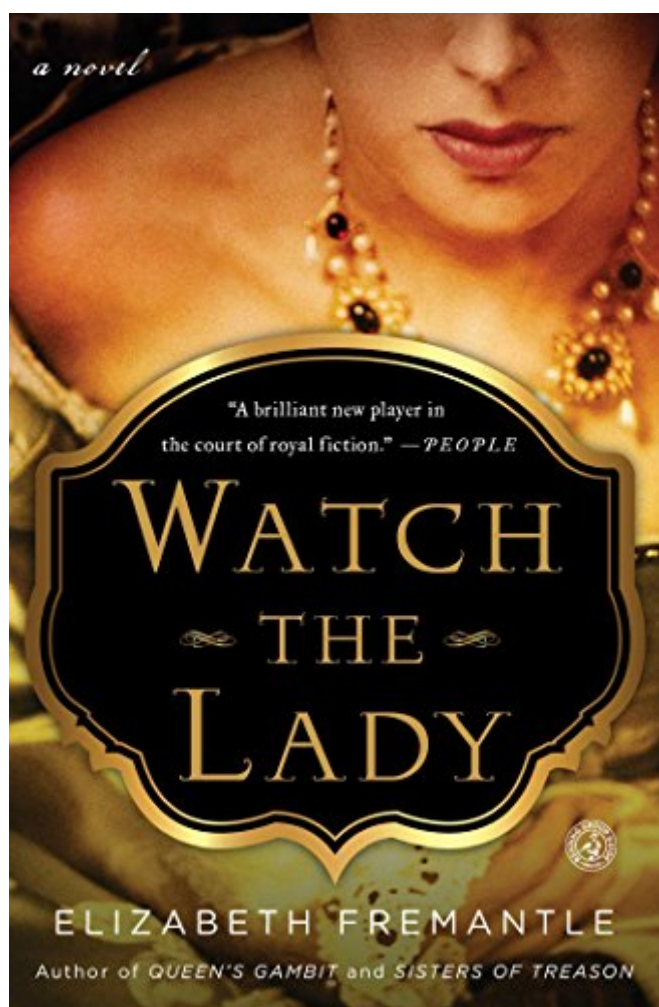


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Watch The Lady: A Novel



Synopsis

From the brilliant new player in the court of royal fiction • (People), comes the mesmerizing story of Lady Penelope Devereux—the daring young beauty in the Tudor court, who inspired Sir Philip Sidney's famous sonnets even while she plotted against Queen Elizabeth. Penelope Devereux arrives at Queen Elizabeth's court where she and her brother, the Earl of Essex, are drawn into the aging Queen's favor. Young and naïve, Penelope, though promised elsewhere, falls in love with Philip Sidney who pours his heartbreak into the now classic sonnet series *Astrophil and Stella*. But Penelope is soon married off to a man who loathes her. Never fainthearted, she chooses her moment and strikes a deal with her husband: after she gives birth to two sons, she will be free to live as she chooses, with whom she chooses. But she is to discover that the course of true love is never smooth. Meanwhile Robert Cecil, ever loyal to Elizabeth, has his eye on Penelope and her brother. Although it seems the Earl of Essex can do no wrong in the eyes of the Queen, as his influence grows, so his enemies gather. Penelope must draw on all her political savvy to save her brother from his own ballooning ambition and Cecil's trap, while daring to plan for an event it is treason even to think about. Unfolding over the course of two decades and told from the perspectives of Penelope and her greatest enemy, the devious politician Cecil, *Watch the Lady* chronicles the last gasps of Elizabeth's reign, and the deadly scramble for power in a dying dynasty.

Book Information

File Size: 5686 KB

Print Length: 561 pages

Publisher: Simon & Schuster (June 9, 2015)

Publication Date: June 9, 2015

Sold by: Simon and Schuster Digital Sales Inc

Language: English

ASIN: B00P434DPG

Text-to-Speech: Not enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #127,717 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #77

inÂ Books > Romance > Historical > Tudor #179 inÂ Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Literature & Fiction > Literary Fiction > Biographical #307 inÂ Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Literature & Fiction > Historical Fiction > Biographical

Customer Reviews

A compelling novel of the Elizabethan Court, the interactions of Elizabeth favourites, including Robert Dudley, the Earl of Essex and his sister Penelope Devereux. We are treated to a tale that exposes the jealousies and jostlings for Elizabeth's favour of the major and minor satellites that surround her. Penelope Devereux remained one of Elizabeth's preferred ladies-in-waiting for more than twenty years. Elizabeth, ever jealous of her favours arranges marriages to her accord. Woe betide those maids who marry outside her will. Banishment, the tower, penury--all are weapons Elizabeth employs against those who thwart her will. As Lettice Devereux, Essex and Penelope's mother, can attest. The pages are riddled with examples of Elizabeth's grasp upon those she favours. Essex and Penelope are no less touched by this control. Penelope at a young age is promised to Philip Sidney (portrayed as a chivalrous poetic knight), whose sonnets of Astrophil and Stella are tributes to her. She is heartbroken when instead of Sidney she is married to Rich, orchestrated it is later discovered by Elizabeth. Robert Cecil is another who's family star is ascendance. Firstly via the work of his father, a favoured advisor, and then through his own efforts. Presented as a machievellian figure, with a spy network that stretches into the heart of the Spanish court and beyond, Cecil is a character in constant turmoil as he forever seeks with his actions, approval by his father and his Queen. This is a novel of the last days of Elizabeth's reign when the fears for succession become a political nightmare of intrigue, self serving greed, compromise and ambition.

If history and current interpretations of events have taught the modern reader anything, it is that the most dangerous place in England to walk into during the 16th century was the Tudor court. It is depicted as an infamous nest of sharp-tongued vipers and den of hungry wolves that held no guarantee for one who stepped foot into the halls would survive to see another winter or spring. Multiple footnotes and passages of history books support this depiction that behind the pageantry and forced smiles lurked ill-intent and no one be that man, woman or innocent child seemed safe from being deemed an enemy or the poisoned whispers of gossip that if dripped into the right ears could lead to banishment, imprisonment or death. And it is into these exact harrowed chambers that Watch the Lady takes the reader and introduces us to a figure many may have never

heard of before. Her name Penelope Devereux and her journey in this den of secrets, lies and webs of complicated games of power is one that just may garner excitement from different types of fiction admirers alike. Those familiar with Ms. Fremantle's novels know all too well what may happen in these pages and be tempted to peek and fully research the names in *Watch the Lady* before finishing. That is your decision but I personally prefer in looking after and finding that strange or shocking events that were mentioned in these types of stories are actually based on truth and that the author has put the time into proper researching and made the events come alive; but that is just me. I love to be surprised while I'm reading and in *Watch the Lady* there were some very fascinating twists and turns but a lot of patience was required on my part to get to those chapters.

This was another great read by Elizabeth Fremantle. This time she delves into the later years of the reign of Elizabeth I by telling the story of Penelope Devereux, lady in waiting to Elizabeth and sister of Elizabeth's favorite of the time; the second Earl of Essex, Robert Devereux. What I loved most about this novel was how the author was able to create the atmosphere of backbiting and jealousy in Elizabeth's court. The rivalry between Robert Devereux and Robert Cecil (son of William Cecil, Lord Burghley, and later Earl of Salisbury under James I) was vicious at times. The novel was full of intrigue and conspiracy and yet not to the point of conjecture on the author's part, keeping this novel's foot holding firmly in the historical fiction pool and not in its subgenre of historical mystery. Not that I don't love a good historical mystery but often they can favor speculation and hyperbole over fact and as the author states at the book of this novel: "I have adhered closely to historical fact". Penelope Devereux is a fascinating character and what I particularly enjoyed was that the author did not concentrate solely on her being the inspiration for Sir Phillip Sidney's "Astrophel and Stella" sonnet series. Yes Sir Phillip is in the novel but it is the later years of Penelope's life that make for the most interesting read. She had a sharp mind and a keenness for politics. She was in contact with James VI of Scotland long before he became James I of England. She was part of her brother's rebellion of 1601, although to what extent we can only speculate. It is very interesting that Penelope was the only person on the list of rebels given to the Queen that did not face trial. Overall I found this to be a compelling and enjoyable read.

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