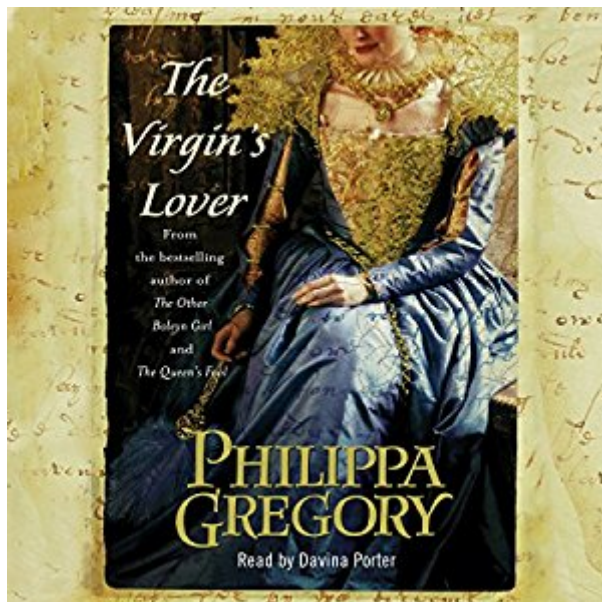


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The Virgin's Lover



Synopsis

In the autumn of 1558, church bells across England ring out the joyous news that Elizabeth I is the new queen. One woman hears the tidings with utter dread. Amy Dudley, wife of Sir Robert, knows that the peal of bells she hears will summon her husband once more to power, intrigue, and a passionate love affair with the young queen. Elizabeth's excited triumph is short-lived. She has inherited a bankrupt country where treason is normal and foreign war a certainty. Her faithful advisor, William Cecil, warns her that she will survive only if she marries a strong prince to govern the rebellious country, but the one man Elizabeth desires is her childhood friend, the irresistible, ambitious Robert Dudley. Only Robert truly revels in the opportunities of the new reign. He knows he can reclaim his destiny at Elizabeth's side. Elizabeth cannot resist his courtship, and as the young couple slowly falls in love, Robert starts to think the impossible: can he set aside his wife and marry the young queen? Philippa Gregory paints a picture of a country on the brink of greatness, a young woman grasping at her power, a young man whose ambition is greater than his means, and the wife who cannot forgive them.

Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 17 hours and 10 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Simon & Schuster Audio

Audible.com Release Date: January 24, 2011

Whispersync for Voice: Ready

Language: English

ASIN: B004KNER98

Best Sellers Rank: #51 in Books > Romance > Historical > Tudor #113 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Romance > Historical #424 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Fiction & Literature > Historical Fiction

Customer Reviews

Philippa Gregory often bases her books on people who were close to a member of the monarchy but not the "main character" historically. Two examples of this are Mary Boleyn in "The Other Boleyn Girl" and Prince Arthur in "The Constant Princess." This novel is based on the life of Robert Dudley, the man Queen Elizabeth Tudor loved for decades. The story takes place in the very beginning of

Elizabeth's long reign. Robert, her childhood friend, is a member of her court, and serves as her Master of Horse. He truly loves Elizabeth-but he desires her throne as well. Despite having a wife, he sets out to seduce the young queen; and he gradually becomes her primary advisor. His ultimate goal is for Elizabeth to grant him a divorce-so he can become king. This novel is fascinating because the reader meets Elizabeth BEFORE she becomes the revered and fascinating icon celebrated in history. Here the reader sees her as she was in the beginning of her reign: brilliant and perceptive but young, vulnerable, and blinded by love. We also meet Robert's deserted wife, Amy, a pretty, sweet and fragile woman caught between the desires of two charismatic figures. Ms Gregory beautifully brings out the intrigue, tension, and daily realities of court life-and offers a very interesting theory about a murder that stopped Lord Dudley's rise to power- but still remains unsolved nearly 500 years later. Definitely one of Ms Gregory's best.

I really enjoyed TVL. While it's not as good as some of Gregory's other novels (and certainly no more historically accurate...) it's a very interesting portrait of the early days of Elizabeth's reign and of the monumental problems faced by the country. I appreciated seeing the situation from the point of view of the common people, not just the courtiers, and it was a wonderful analysis of a woefully mismatched marriage. I like that Amy Robsart isn't a martyr without any faults: she's a childish, overly dependent, sometimes really annoying person who is willfully blind to her husband's true character and ambitions, and she and Robert Dudley are completely and utterly unsuited for each other, however much they may love one another. But... This isn't a criticism of TVL so much as all of Gregory's books: what IS Gregory's beef with Queen Elizabeth I?! Okay, so the real Queen wasn't the saint popular media (both then and now) make her out to be: she was devious, grasping, petulant, bad-tempered and she also committed some atrocities that get swept under the rug. It's good that Gregory shows her faults in this fictional portrait. But--and here's the thing--a lot of Gregory's other characters behave just as badly, and they are not judged nearly as harshly for it. Take Elizabeth's relationship with Dudley, for instance. When Elizabeth has an affair with him and becomes so dependent she feels like she can't function without him (two circumstances that I find highly unlikely, by the way), Gregory portrays her as a slutty little ditz who's being ruled by men. But when Queen Mary Tudor becomes so dependent on her husband, who cares nothing for her, that she's willing to finance his monumentally stupid war and has a complete breakdown when he leaves her--causing her to utterly neglect her royal duties while her country is sliding into chaos--then she's a martyr to love and a traumatic past who deserves all our sympathy. Similarly, when Elizabeth screws around with other women's husbands, she's a promiscuous, unscrupulous seductress who

openly rejoices over other women's pain. But when, say, the White Princess screws around with someone else's husband--incidentally, her own biological UNCLE--while the wife is DYING!--then she's a blossoming young innocent caught up in the nasty machinations of others. When Elizabeth is dismissive of other women, she's a vile traitor to her gender; when Elizabeth Woodville does the same thing, she's just being her glamorous self. Even in the latest novel ***SPOILER***when Elizabeth lies through her teeth about how great the royal portrait is, she's "corrupted beyond hope"--even as the heroine, Kateryn Parr, is also lying! Even Margaret Beaufort's murder of the Princes in the Tower is somehow not as bad as Elizabeth flirting with her courtiers and taking advice from Cecil, a man who actually has her interests at heart. Gregory writes about many interesting, powerful women; none of them are saints. But, somehow, Queen Elizabeth I is the only sinner.

I have fallen in love with Phillipa Gregory's books ~~ "The Queen's Fool" and "The Other Boleyn Girl" ~~ so it was with anticipation that I settled down for this book and found out that it wasn't nearly as good as the other two in the series. I was highly disappointed. I love her writing style, and that hasn't changed at all. Maybe I am just disappointed in the way she portrayed Elizabeth, Dudley and Dudley's wife. It was just a big soap opera (which it was) and this time, none of the characters were full developed like in previous books. Elizabeth is portrayed as a wishy washy woman controlled by Dudley and Cecil, her trusted advisor. Amy Dudley, a woman who is definitely wronged by her husband for sure, is such a boring character ~~ all she ever did was weep as she went from house to house. She never showed any spunk or spine in fighting for her man. What started out to be a woman to feel sorry for ended up a woman you just wish would go away (basically, that's how every other character felt in this novel!). Elizabeth is a big disappointment ~~ in "The Queen's Fool" she was a flirtative woman, but strong. Now? She is portrayed as a woman who doesn't know what she wants. Dudley and Cecil are the only characters in this book that are worthy of mention ~~ two ambitious men ~~ one for himself and the other for his country. Their clashes and their thoughts are typical of men in power. The conflict between the two of them made this book a lot more bearable. I would not dismiss this book as easily as I write this review. It's very compelling to read. It is well-written. It's a fast read. It's just not Gregory's best book by far. I would read it to continue on with the Tudor series. Hopefully, the next one "The Boleyn Inheritance" is much better. 4-10-07

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