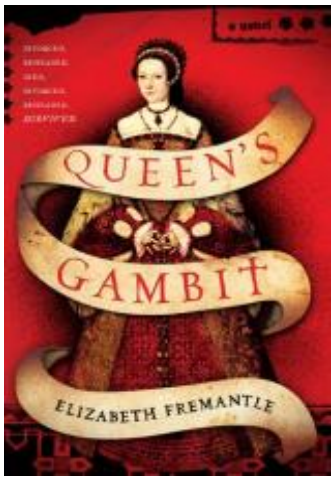
ReadingGroupGuides
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Queen's Gambit

by Elizabeth Fremantle



About the Book

Widowed for the second time at age thirty-one Katherine Parr falls deeply for the dashing courtier Thomas Seymour and hopes at last to marry for love. However, obliged to return to court, she attracts the attentions of the ailing, egotistical, and dangerously powerful Henry VIII, who dispatches his love rival, Seymour, to the Continent. No one is in a position to refuse a royal proposal so, haunted by the fates of his previous wives---two executions, two annulments, one death in childbirth---Katherine must wed Henry and become his sixth queen.

Katherine has to employ all her instincts to navigate the treachery of the court, drawing a tight circle of women around her, including her stepdaughter, Meg, traumatized by events from their past that are shrouded in secrecy, and their loyal servant Dot, who knows and sees more than she understands. With the Catholic faction on the rise once more, reformers being burned for heresy, and those close to the king vying for position, Katherine?s survival seems unlikely. Yet as she treads the razor?s edge of court intrigue, she never quite gives up on love.

Discussion Guide

TOPICS & QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Elizabeth Wilhide has praised QUEEN'S GAMBIT, saying, ?Fremantle?sheds an intriguing new light on Katherine Parr, one of history?s great survivors.? Aside from surviving her marriage to Henry VIII, in what ways is Katherine Parr a survivor? What do you think her greatest act of survival is? Why?

2. Neither Katherine nor Meg will talk about what happened at Snape. How have the events affected each of the women? Do you agree with Dot?s decision to keep Meg?s secret? Why does Dot finally tell Katherine the truth about what Meg endured at Snape?

3. Clothing is important throughout QUEEN'S GAMBIT. The first time we encounter Henry, he is ?absurd in his minstrel garb.? (p. 25) How does this color your impression of him? Why does Henry wear this costume? Katherine, too, places a lot of importance on her jewels. She ?insists on wearing her finest things, the most bejeweled of her dresses, her heaviest hoods, in spite of the cloying heat,? and, although she tells Dot that she would give up all of her jewels, ?still she insists on wearing them.? (p. 218) Why do you think Katherine adamant about wearing her heavy clothing and jewels? Do you believe her when she says that jewels mean nothing to her?

4. The first time we encounter Henry, he invites Katherine to play against him in a game of chess. When she makes her first play, she employs the queen?s gambit. Henry accepts the play and tells her ?You mean to route me at the centre of the board.? (p. 28) How does this game foreshadow Katherine?s relationship with Henry? Why do you think that Fremantle has chosen QUEEN'S GAMBIT as the book?s title?

5. When Katherine becomes regent, she thinks ?My enemy?s enemy is my friend.? (p. 145) In what ways do you see this sentiment playing out in the Tudor court? Are there any allegiances that were surprising to you? Which ones?

6. Although Huicke is originally sent to care for the dying Lord Latymer in order to gather information about Katherine for Henry, the two forge an close friendship. Why do you think that Huicke reveals the true purpose of his visits to Katherine? When back at court, Huicke will not tell his peers ?of his genuine fondness for her. The air is too thin for friendship at court, so this is precious to him.? (p. 149) How does their friendship evolve as Katherine?s favor with the King ebbs and flows? Why is the friendship so valuable to both Katherine and Huicke?

7. The power of the written word is a major conceit throughout the novel. While the papers, containing the last testimony of Anne Askew, that are found on Dorothy?s person lead to her imprisonment, it is her ability to read them that saves her. In what other instances does the written word prove dangerous? How does the book that Elwyn gives Dorothy while she is imprisoned cause her to rethink Anne Askew?s actions?

8. Elizabeth Tudor tells Jane Grey, ?Think of the power. I would like the feeling of that, to have all the women in the world do your bidding. I would make a good man I think.? (p. 323) What do you think she means when she says, ?I would make a good man?? What sort of power do the men in the Tudor court wield over the women? Do they abuse their power?

9. When Dot visits her mother after being married, she ?felt distant from her, as if she was a foreigner and a great ocean separated them.? (p. 295) In what ways has Dot changed? Why is Dot?s mother unwilling to meet William? Do you agree with her decision?

10. Both Katherine and Dot ?had married for love. A daft thing to do really?. (p. 319) Why is marrying for love seen as folly in the Tudor Court? Compare and contrast Katherine?s and Dot?s marriages. Do your opinions of Thomas Seymour and William Savage change throughout the course of the book? In what ways?

11. When Katherine ultimately marries Thomas Seymour, she does so without the blessing of the king although she could be charged with treason for doing so. Why do you think that she agrees to go along with the clandestine wedding? Why do you think that Seymour delays asking the king for permission?

12. Although Katherine is committed to religious reform, when Henry dies, she stops the archbishop from praying over

him in English, asking that instead that they pray ?In Latin. He would have liked that.? (p. 285) Why do you think she does so? Although Katherine?s beliefs remain, her ?dreams of bearing the torch are gone.? (p. 307) What do you think precipitated this change in her?

13. Family is particularly important to Katherine. When Huicke suggests that Elizabeth be sent away after it seems she?s gotten too close with Seymour, Katherine will not because ?that would mean breaking up her fragile family and she will not do that.? (p. 306) Why does Katherine ultimately sent Elizabeth away? Do you think that she is justified in doing so? Compare Katherine?s views on family to that of her brother Will who ?has never really thought of [Katherine?s] *happiness*.? (p. 287)

14. Before Katherine sends Elizabeth to Lord Denny?s house at Chestnut, Katherine tells Elizabeth, ?There are events in life from which we learn our most profound lessons and sometimes those events are the ones of which we are most ashamed.? (p. 317) Do you agree with Katherine? What shameful things has Katherine done throughout the course of her life? Do you think that she?s learned any lessons as a result? If so, what sort of lessons has she learned?

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1. Much of QUEEN'S GAMBIT takes place at Hampton Court Palace. Visit the official site (http://www.hrp.org.uk/HamptonCourtPalace/stories/palacehighlights/ALivingTudorWorld.aspx) to find out more about the Palace, take a virtual tour of the Hampton Court Palace Gardens and watch a video about the clothing that Katherine Parr wore on her wedding day.

2. To learn more about Katherine Parr and Henry VIII?s other wives, visit http://tudorhistory.org/wives/.

3. There are many magnificent feasts in QUEEN'S GAMBIT, including one celebrating Katherine?s marriage to Henry. Visit http://www.sixwives.info/tudor-food-recipes.htm to see how the members of Henry?s court ate. Then, adapt the recipes for modern times and bring them to your book club.

4. To read more about Elizabeth Fremantle and to read more about her research, visit her official site at http://www.elizabethfremantle.com/

Author Bio

Elizabeth Fremantle is the acclaimed author of SISTERS OF TREASON, QUEEN'S GAMBIT and WATCH THE LADY and she has contributed to *Vogue*, the *Wall Street Journal*, *Vanity Fair* and the *Sunday Times* (London). She lives in London.

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