

The Devil's Reward

written by Emmanuelle de Villepin, translated by C. Jon Delogu



About the Book

Three generations of women untangle a complex family story that encompasses the First and Second World Wars, revealing unexpected lessons about marriage and fidelity.

Christiane, 86 years old with a vibrant sense of humor, lives alone in a large apartment in the heart of Paris. Her daughter, Catherine, is her total opposite: sullen and uptight, filled with resentment toward her unfaithful Milanese husband. After discovering yet another affair, Catherine takes refuge in Paris at her mother's home, accompanied by her own daughter, Luna. Christiane --- who, in spite of occasional dalliances on both sides, lived a beautiful love story with her late husband --- uses all of her freethinking charm in an effort to change Catherine's rigid, self-pitying attitude.

As the women air their opposing views, Luna discovers by chance that her great-grandfather had met the philosopher Rudolf Steiner, the subject of the thesis she is in the middle of writing. Seeing Luna's avid curiosity, Christiane takes the opportunity to tell the story of her family, which spans the 20th century. Memories resurface, and past events are reconstructed, shedding a new light on the present.

With a keen, lighthearted wit, *THE DEVIL'S REWARD* shows that life is complicated and often painful, but when conventional morals are imperative, it becomes unbearable.

Discussion Guide

1. What is Christiane's storytelling philosophy? Do you agree with it?
2. What is the "devil's reward" of the title?
3. Who is Rudolf Steiner? Had you heard of him before reading *THE DEVIL'S REWARD*? What relationship does he

have with Christiane and her family?

4. A friend of Aunt Bette's explains that "According to Steiner, evil can operate in either of two ways: the way of Lucifer, which turns man exaggeratedly from reality, so that he only takes interest in spiritual matters; or the way of Ahriman, which binds him to matter and turns his attention from all spiritual activities" (p 30). Are there any characters in the novel who display either of these evils?

5. Describe the relationship between Christiane and her daughter. How are they similar? How do they differ? Do you think there's a similarity between their relationship and the one between Christiane and her own mother? Is Catherine more like her mother or her grandmother Marguerite?

6. What do you think of Papyrus? Is he ultimately a sympathetic character, or does your impression of him differ from Christiane's? If Marguerite were the narrator, do you think your impression of him would change?

7. Christiane tells us of her father, "He never let his sad, complicated side show in public" (p 144). How are she and Papyrus similar?

8. How does World War II affect Christiane's family?

9. Describe Christiane's ideal of marriage. Do you agree with her?

10. How does Aunt Bette save Christiane's life? Do you think Christiane saves her daughter's life?

Author Bio

Emmanuelle de Villepin was born in France in 1959. As a child, she moved to Geneva (where she later attended law school) and then to New York. She has lived in Milan with her husband and three daughters since 1988. She is the vice-president of Fondazione Dynamo and has been president of the association Amici di TOG (Together to Go), a center for rehabilitation programs for children suffering from complex neurological diseases, since 2011. De Villepin has written several novels, including *TEMPO DI FUGA* (2006); *LA RAGAZZA CHE NON VOLEVA MORIRE* (2008), which received the Fenice Europa Prize for spreading Italian novels in Europe; *LA NOTTE DI MATTIA* (2010), a tale illustrated by her daughter Neige De Benedetti; and *LA VITA CHE SCORRE* (2013), which received the Rapallo Carige Prize for women writers in 2014. Her most recent novel, *LA PARTE DEL DIAVOLO* (2016), was shortlisted for the Stresa Prize. De Villepin is fluent in French, Italian and English.

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