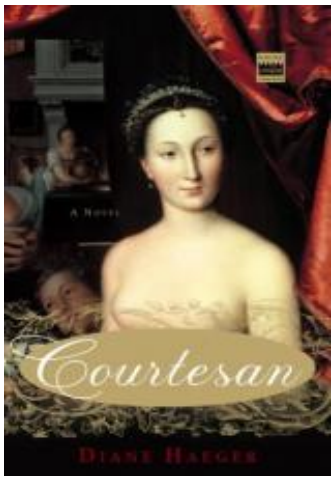
Courtesan

by Diane Haeger



About the Book

Amid the disapproving gossip of the Court, a royal romance defies all obstacles.

The Court of François I is full of lust, intrigue, and bawdy bon temps?a different world from the quiet country life Diane de Poitiers led with her elderly husband. Now a widow, the elegant Diane is called back to Court, where the King?s obvious interest marks her as an enemy to the King?s favourite, Anne d?Heilly. The Court is soon electrified by rumors of their confrontations. As Anne calls on her most venomous tricks to drive Diane away, Diane finds an ally in the one member of Court with no allegiance to the King?s mistress: his teenage second son, Henri.

Neglected by his father and disliked by his brothers, Prince Henri expects little from his life. But as his friendship with Diane deepens into infatuation and then a romance that scandalizes the Court, the Prince begins to discover hope for a future with Diane. But fate and his father have other plans for Henri?including a political marriage with Catherine de Medici. Despite daunting obstacles, Henri?s devotion to Diane never wanes; their passion becomes one of the most legendary romances in the history of France.

Discussion Guide

1. Though Henri seems unswervingly confident in his relationship with Diane, Diane herself admits to herself at the end of his life that she is amazed that his affections have lasted so long. How would you explain how his devotion to Diane remained so strong?

2. What kind of a ruler do you think Henri is for France? What are his leading motivations and interests?

3. What motivations cause Diane to remain with Catherine through her illness? Is this a purely selfless act?

4. After Catherine?s illness, she suggests that the two women could have been friends in different circumstances. Do you think this is true? Why or why not?

5. In what ways did François and Anne?s romance differ from Henri and Diane?s affair? Which do you think was better suited to court life?

6. Discuss Henri?s feelings for Catherine. Could his marriage have been a happy one if Diane had not been in the picture? Why or why not?

7. In her early years at court, what does Diane see in Jacques de Montgommery? Is she sincerely taken in by his offers of friendship, or is she just desperate for an ally?

8. When Diane returns to Court, general rules of behavior and sexual license in particular seem much looser than during her previous visits. What factors do you think are responsible for this shift? What?or who?gives the court its character? Do you think this licentious mood continues under Henri?s reign?

9. What do you think of Anne de Montmorency?s fatherly feelings toward Henri? Does Monty genuinely care for Henri? What do you think he would have wanted for Henri?s life and reign?

10. Why are Henri and Diane so enchanted by Cauterets? Compare the way their romance develops at Court with the way they bond away from it?whether at Cauterets, Chenonceaux, or Anet.

11. Why does Catherine allow Henri to continue his relationship with Diane? Did she have any choice in the matter?

12. Discuss Henri and Anne?s encounters with Protestantism in the book. Between the burnt parish church in Cauterets and the Protestant prisoner brought to Diane?s house in Paris, do they seem to be getting an accurate picture of the Protestant movement? Do you think they understand why the movement is popular and powerful?

13. Do you think there is anything to the rumors that Diane secured her husband?s pardon by sharing sexual favors with King François? Why or why not?

14. Discuss the role of the supernatural in the book. More than one fortune-teller?s forecast is borne out in the course of the story, including the predictions of Diane?s third child and the timing and cause of Henri?s death. What does the author seem to be saying about intuition and fate?

Author Bio

Diane Haeger is the author of five previous historical novels, including **My Dearest Cecelia** and **The Secret Wife of George IV**. She lives in California.

Critical Praise

"Spectacular . . . The story of a remarkable woman and her clash with society . . . Lush in characterization and rich in historical detail."

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