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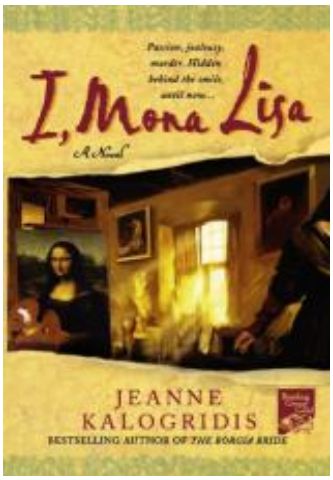
I, Mona Lisa

by Jeanne Kalogridis



About the Book

Florence, April 1478. The handsome Giuliano de' Medici, brother of Lorenzo the Magnificent, is brutally assassinated in Florence's majestic Duomo. The shock of the murder is felt throughout the great city, from the most renowned artists like Leonardo da Vinci to a wealthy wool merchant and his exquisitely elegant wife. The Medici family is the lifeblood of the city, and the death of one of its golden heirs will be felt throughout time, but nowhere more so than in the life of that wool merchant's daughter: the strikingly beautiful Madonna Lisa.

More than a decade later, Florence falls under the dark spell of the preacher Savonarola, a fanatic who burns paintings, books, and scuptures as easily as he sends men to death. Lisa, now grown into an alluring woman, captures the heart of Giuliano's nephew and namesake. When he, too, meets a tragic end, Lisa must show extarodinary courage and gather all of her cunning and charm to untangle the sinister web of illicit love, treachery, and dangerous secrets that threatens her life. For hundreds of years, the intriguing truth remained hidden behind history's most famous smile...until now.

Discussion Guide

1. Few works of art are as romanticized, celebrated, and reproduced as the Mona Lisa. How did reading this book teach you about?or change your impression of?the art world?s most famous face? Has anyone in the group ever seen it in person?

2. Beautiful, enigmatic, sly, foreboding...many adjectives have been used to describe Lisa?s portrait. But what words would you use to describe Lisa?s character? Also, take a moment to talk about her role?as an only daughter, married woman, and member of the upper class?in Florentine society. How was Lisa different from other women of her era? Do you think she was a woman ahead of her time?

3. Lisa is told by her astrologer that she is ?caught in a cycle of violence, of blood, and deceit.? To what extent does Lisa

let fate dictate her actions? Do you believe in fate? Discuss the themes of prophecy in **I, Mona Lisa**.

4. In addition to being religious, many of those we meet in the book become fanatic?and commit acts of violence to justify their beliefs. What was it that led Antonio, Baroncelli, and Savonarola to behave the way they did? Do you condone any of their actions? Do you have any sympathy for them?

5. Who do you think bears the true responsibility for the deaths of Giuliano the Elder and Anna Lucrezia? How do the various characters?from Lisa to Antonio to Lorenzo?deal with the guilt, trauma, and mystery surrounding the deaths of those they love?

6. What is significant about the third man involved in Giuliano?s murder? How does this element of mystery drive the narrative?

7. **I, Mona Lisa** is a novel about truth and beauty, art and artifice. It is also about family?in all its glory and bloodshed. How important is the notion of family to each of the main characters? Which relationships are the most ?real? to you in this book?

8. Do you believe that a picture is worth a thousand words? Can a work of art?a painting, a book?ever truly capture a person?s essence? Did Leonardo?s portrait of Lisa capture hers?

9. When Lisa views her cartoon she remarks that Leonardo?s ?recall of [her] features is astonishing...more sacred, more profound than any image rendered by [a] mirror.? Why do you think she feels this way? Does Leonardo see himself in Lisa? What personality traits do you think they both share?

10. Leonardo is more than just an artist: He doesn?t just view society from a distance; he is a member of a powerful inner circle. What does **I, Mona Lisa** suggest about the role and function of art during the Florentine era? Was it more or less political than it is now?

11. What, do you think, is the meaning of the last sentence of the book?

Author Bio

Jeanne Kalogridis lives with her partner in North Carolina, where they share a house with two dogs. She is the author of the critically acclaimed novels THE BORGIA BRIDE and I, MONA LISA and other numerous dark fantasy and historical novels.

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