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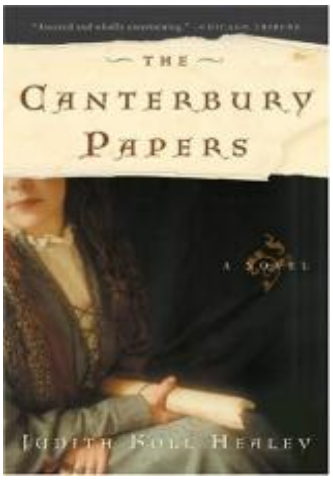
The Canterbury Papers

by Judith Koll Healey



About the Book

The only thing I felt was a strong hand around my neck, another around my waist, and -- before I could cry out -- I smelled the thick, sweet scent of a mandrake-soaked cloth. Unforgiving hands clapped it against my face, and all went dark.

Alais, the king of France's sister, is abducted while on her mission for the wily Eleanor of Aquitaine, the former Queen of England, to retrieve hidden letters that, in the wrong hands, could bring down the English king. In exchange, the French princess was to receive long-heldand dangerous information. Now Alais, along with help from the very intriguing leader of the Knights Templar, must unravel a tangled web of family secrets and lies.

Discussion Guide

1. In the constant battles between England and France in this period, what did each kingdom seek? Did Louis and Henry appear to be sworn enemies? Did they have any common goals?

2. Why was King John, sometimes called Lackland in so much trouble with the church? What do you imagine his goals were? From the perspective of this story, does it appear he will be a successful king? What qualities does he evidence or lack that supports your opinion?

3. What do you make of the affair of Alais and Henry? Was he wrong to express his feelings as he did? What attracted him to Alais? What did she feel or not feel about him?

4. Why does William have access to so many resources? Where does his power come from? What are his gifts, in your opinion? What are his shortcomings?

5. What feeling dominates Alais at the beginning of the novel? Why does she undertake this journey? Is she putting herself in danger with her small party? Why or why not? Do you agree with her uncle's assessment of her when they meet at the Boar's Head Inn? What would you say her most significant asset is?

6. What role does her art play in her habits of thinking and seeing? What role did it play in her various assessments of the situation while she was traveling?

7. Alais had a physical difference about her. How did she treat this difference or think of it at various times? What do you know about what people thought of physical deformities in the middle ages? Where is the evidence of this in the book?

8. What is the major change Alais experienced in the course of this story. What aspects of the final scenes illustrate this change? What specific events in the story have helped to bring about that change?

9. Where in the book does Alais demonstrate courage? Where do you think she is rash? Would you have counseled her to do other than she did in any of the scenes?

10. This story was set in the time that the Grail stories were written. The original Grail stories were written by Chretien de Troyes, whose patron was Marie, Countess of Champagne, daughter of Eleanor and Louis. How could you view The Canterbury Papers as a grail story? What similarities are there between Alais' quest and the grail knights' quest? If Alais found a grail at the end of this story, what would it be? Would it be a person, or a quality, or a state of mind?

Author Bio

Judith Koll Healey is currently the president of a national firm that works with families in their philanthropic efforts. She is a published poet and short-fiction writer and has lectured internationally on the topic of art and the unconscious. She lives in Minneapolis, Minnesota. This is her first novel.

Critical Praise

"Filled with intrigue and peopled with compelling legendary figures, **The Canterbury Papers** is an 'electrifying journey into the past'"

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