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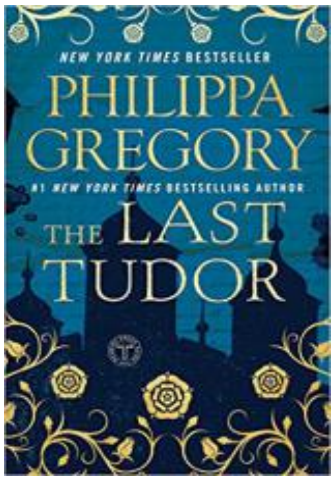
The Last Tudor

by Philippa Gregory



About the Book

The latest novel from #1 *New York Times* bestselling author Philippa Gregory features one of the most famous girls in history, Lady Jane Grey, and her two sisters, each of whom dared to defy her queen.

Seventeen-year-old Jane Grey was queen of England for nine days. Her father and his allies crowned her instead of the dead king?s half-sister Mary Tudor, who quickly mustered an army, claimed her throne, and locked Jane in the Tower of London. When Jane refused to betray her Protestant faith, Mary sent her to the executioner?s block, where Jane transformed her father?s greedy power-grab into tragic martyrdom.

?Learn you to die? was the advice Jane wrote to her younger sister Katherine, who has no intention of dying. She intends to enjoy her beauty and her youth and fall in love. But she is heir to the insecure and infertile Queen Mary and then to her sister Queen Elizabeth, who will never allow Katherine to marry and produce a Tudor son. When Katherine?s pregnancy betrays her secret marriage, she faces imprisonment in the Tower, only yards from her sister?s scaffold.

?Farewell, my sister,? writes Katherine to the youngest Grey sister, Mary. A beautiful dwarf, disregarded by the court, Mary keeps family secrets, especially her own, while avoiding Elizabeth?s suspicious glare. After seeing her sisters defy the queen, Mary is acutely aware of her own danger, but determined to command her own life. What will happen when the last Tudor defies her ruthless and unforgiving cousin, Queen Elizabeth?

Discussion Guide

1. What role do faith and religion play during the time period represented in THE LAST TUDOR? What is the relationship between religion and politics, and how does this relationship affect the cultural climate of England? Is the country mostly united in their faith or divided? What impact does this have on the royals of England?

2. What is ?the true religion? according to Lady Jane Grey? Why does Jane believe that she and her family do not need to earn their place in heaven as others do? Does her faith ultimately serve her well? Discuss.

3. Consider the title of the book. Who are the members of the Tudor family? Which character or characters does the title of the book refer to?

4. Evaluate the roles and the treatment of women as represented in the novel. How are marriage and childbirth depicted? Is the education of women perceived as positive or negative? Would you say that the women of the novel are depicted as powerful or helpless? Do they garner much loyalty from the men in their lives? Discuss.

5. Katherine believes that ?if you are a Tudor you don?t really have parents.? What does she mean? What does her statement reveal about family dynamics and the relationship between parent and child during this time?

6. Why does Elizabeth punish Katherine and Mary for their marriages? Why does she refuse to show the same mercy for the Grey sisters that she shows for some others? Do you believe that her actions are justified or were you surprised by her lack of mercy to her relatives?

7. What does Mary Grey believe is Elizabeth?s greatest fear? What does Mary say that she has come to believe is the greatest sin and what does this reveal about Elizabeth? Do you agree that this ?sin? is Elizabeth?s greatest flaw? How does this same ?sin? or characteristic affect the others in the novel?

8. How does each Grey sister respond to her incarceration? What is the outcome for each? What does Mary wear at the conclusion of the novel and what does she believe this clothing represents? Is her choice to do this surprising? Why or why not?

9. What advice does Jane leave for her sisters after she receives the news of her impending execution? Do Katherine and Mary follow her advice? How does each interpret their sister?s final words?

10. Consider the theme of loyalty. Which of the characters is loyal and to whom? What seems to be at the root of their allegiance? Conversely, who betrays another person and why? Does the novel ultimately suggest to what or whom one should be most loyal? Explain.

Author Bio

Dr. Philippa Gregory is an internationally renowned historian and novelist. She holds a PhD in 18th-century literature at the University of Edinburgh and is a fellow of the Royal Historical Society and the Universities of Sussex and Cardiff, an honorary research fellow at Birkbeck University of London and she was awarded a CBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours for her services to literature and to charity. Her novels have been adapted for stage and screen, and in 2023 she published her groundbreaking history book, NORMAL WOMEN: 900 Years of Making History, which also was released as a podcast, a teen edition and a series for young children.

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