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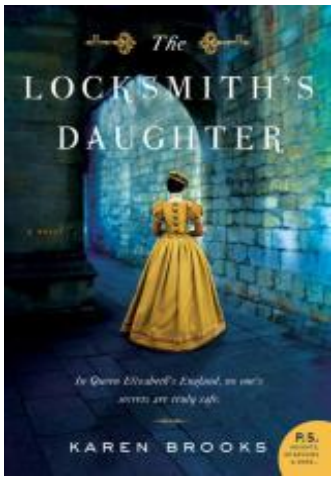
The Locksmith's Daughter

by Karen Brooks



About the Book

From acclaimed author Karen Brooks comes this intriguing novel rich in historical detail and drama as it tells the unforgettable story of Queen Elizabeth's daring, ruthless spymaster and his female protégée.

In Queen Elizabeth's England, where no one can be trusted and secrets are currency, one woman stands without fear.

Mallory Bright is the only daughter of London's most ingenious locksmith. She has apprenticed with her father since childhood, and there is no lock too elaborate for her to crack. After scandal destroys her reputation, Mallory has returned to her father's home and lives almost as a recluse, ignoring the whispers and gossip of their neighbors. But Sir Francis Walsingham, Queen Elizabeth's spymaster and a frequent client of Mallory's father, draws her into his world of danger and deception. For the locksmith's daughter is not only good at cracking locks, she also has a talent for codes, spycraft and intrigue. With Mallory by Sir Francis? side, no scheme in England or abroad is safe from discovery.

But Mallory's loyalty wavers when she witnesses the brutal and bloody public execution of three Jesuit priests and realizes the human cost of her espionage. And later, when she discovers the identity of a Catholic spy and a conspiracy that threatens the kingdom, she is forced to choose between her country and her heart.

Once Sir Francis' greatest asset, Mallory is fast becoming his worst threat --- and there is only one way the Queen?s master spy deals with his enemies.

Discussion Guide

1. When Angela tells Mallory to ignore the man who bullies her, Mallory responds, ?A coward and a bully he may be, but there?s many would argue my actions created him --- Mamma among them.? Why does Mallory believe this? Is it a fair assessment?

2. Mallory has a radically different relationship with her father the locksmith than with her mother. Why is that? Does your view of either relationship change as the story unfolds?

3. Mallory speaks several languages, knows mathematics and can pick any lock. She is unique in an age when women of her class were rarely educated or taught a trade. But in what other ways does Mallory defy traditional gender roles of the time? Are there instances when she does conform to what?s expected of a woman?

4. ?Uncommonly tall, slender as a willow stick but with olive-toned skin and jet-black hair, I was most often described as ungainly and teased as a spawn of a blackamoor or a Romany.? Mallory?s mother uses lemon juice and cosmetics to lighten her daughter?s hair and skin. What does this say about 16th-century beauty standards? Are they similar or different from those of the 21st century?

5. From Mamma remaining a faithful Catholic until the end of her life to Sir Francis? unwavering allegiance to Queen Elizabeth, loyalty drives many characters in the novel. How does their loyalty to various causes --- and each other --- impact the characters? lives, for better or for worse?

6. After witnessing the grisly torture and execution of Catholic priests at Tyburn, Mallory says: ?It was even easier to commit atrocities when they were enacted in the name of justice; when you believed you were working for the good of the realm, for the security of the sovereign and your people. It was easy when you didn?t see the consequences and others performed the retribution for you. It was easy to be ruthless when you ceased to think of those convicted as human, and saw them as enemies. In that way, anything --- any kind of action --- could be justified.? What other examples of this do we see in history? Or in our present time?

7. How does what Mallory sees at Tyburn change her view of her work for Sir Francis? Is it a turning point for her?

8. Nathaniel says to Mallory: ?You are not a fallen woman, Mallory, so much as one who was pushed.? What does he mean by that? Do you agree? How do you view Mallory?s relationship with Raffe and its fallout?

9. What do you make of the complicated relationship between the locksmith and Sir Francis?

10. Why does Sir Francis leave his book containing his life?s work to Mallory? Does the book ?change everything,? as Nathaniel promised?

11. What do you think becomes of Mallory and her family 10 years following the end of the novel? Do you think she?s using Sir Francis?s book in the way that he intended her to use it?

Author Bio

Karen Brooks is the author of 14 books, an academic of more than 20 years' experience, a newspaper columnist and social commentator, and has appeared regularly on national TV and radio. Before turning to academia, she was an army officer for five years, and prior to that dabbled in acting.

She lives in Hobart, Tasmania, in a beautiful stone house with its own marvellous history. When she's not writing, she's helping her husband Stephen in his brewery, Captain Bligh's Ale and Cider, or cooking for family and friends, travelling, cuddling and walking her dogs, stroking her cats, or curled up with a great book and dreaming of more stories.

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