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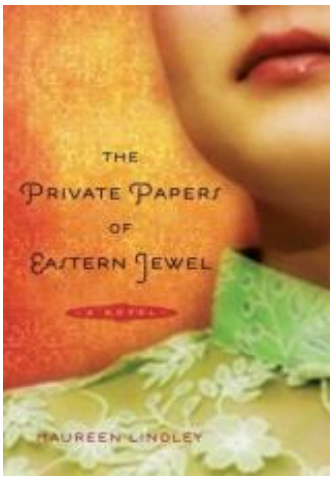
The Private Papers of Eastern Jewel

by Maureen Lindley



About the Book

An electrifying epic page-turner, based on the incredible true story of a princess turned spy.

Discussion Guide

1. The Private Papers of Eastern Jewel opens with a list of items found in Eastern Jewel?s prison cell. What is the significance of each item to Eastern Jewel?s past? What other important artifacts are missing from this list, lost on her long voyage from palace to jail?

2. All the chapters of the novel are named after food and drink. How does this set the tone for each chapter? Eastern Jewel declares, ?In my heart I am Japanese, but I am Chinese in my stomach and love every kind of food.? (116) Do these chapter titles reinforce Eastern Jewel?s Chinese identity? Why or why not?

3. Eastern Jewel?s parting advice from her mother is, ?You must be brave, little daughter, and remember that the stronger the wind, the stronger the tree needs to be.? (7) What do the mother?s words mean? When does Eastern Jewel follow this advice?

4. Leaving her father?s palace, ?It dawned on me then for the first time, but by no means the last, that perhaps I was truly unlovable. I think that unconsciously I chose to live up to that expectation of my nature rather than to change it.? (11) Who falls in love with Eastern Jewel over the course of the novel, and what price do they pay? Is Eastern Jewel truly unlovable? Why or why not?

5. The novel presents itself as a collection of ?private papers,? Eastern Jewel?s recollection of her life story. What might inspire her to write down her life story while in jail? What aspects of the novel feel especially private, like a personal diary?

6. ?And so the legend of Shimako began, according to which she had been a person of infinite kindness, a shining example of purity and selflessness and one who delighted in peacemaking.? (31) Eastern Jewel learns the different between legend and reality from Shimako?s suicide. Imagine the ?legend of Eastern Jewel? after her death. How was Eastern Jewel likely remembered, both in China and in Japan? What are some possible inaccuracies in that legend, as in the legend of Shimako?

7. Consider the complicated relationship between Eastern Jewel and her stepmother Natsuko. What is the source of Eastern Jewel?s love for Natsuko? Why does Eastern Jewel hide her feelings? She wonders, ?If Natsuko had loved me would my nature have been different?? (207) Discuss possible answers to this question.

8. As she switches lovers, Eastern Jewel remarks, ?Tanaka had been blind to my true addiction; it had never been opium.? (242) How does Eastern Jewel?s craving for sexual novelty affect her love life? How does it shape her career?

9. Eastern Jewel declares that Mongolians, ?if you were not careful, would steal your heart and make you captive.? (109) Who nearly steals Eastern Jewel?s heart in Mongolia? Why does she feel affection for a people who are so different in their customs and way of life?

10. Eastern Jewel changes fashions in each new city she visits. In what situations does she seem to enjoy dressing like a man? When does feminine dress suit her better? Which style of dress seems closer to her true personality, and why?

11. ?It took me years to learn, and then only under the most dire of circumstances, that it is people, not country, who are owed loyalty.? (199) How does Eastern Jewel learn this difficult lesson? Which people should she have trusted, instead of pledging blind loyalty to Japan?

12. Discuss the character of Wan Jung, the Chinese Empress. What are her strengths and limitations? Why does she never try to escape from her sad fate in Manchuria?

13. Eastern Jewel falls in love with two men: Yamaga and Jack Stone. Compare these two love affairs. How do they begin? Why do they fail? What attracts each man to Eastern Jewel, and vice versa?

14. Eastern Jewel?s execution was reported in the Peking Daily newspaper. Is this proof that she submitted to her fate, or could she have escaped? Explain.

15. Imagine if Eastern Jewel were a spy today rather than in the 1930?s and 1940?s. What rights and privileges would she enjoy today? What other challenges might Eastern Jewel face in today?s world?

Author Bio

Born in England and raised in Scotland, Maureen Lindley has worked as a photographer, antique dealer, and dress designer, and trained as a psychotherapist. She lives on the Welsh Borders with her husband and daughter. This is her

first novel.

Critical Praise

"Capitalizing on the tremendous success of Asian-centric authors like Amy Tan and Lisa See, Lindley chronicles the life story of a Chinese princess turned Japanese spy?basing this novel on the true-life experiences of Yoshiko Kawashima, the author elevates a fascinating bit player to the main stage by reimagining the twists and turns of her extraordinary life."

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