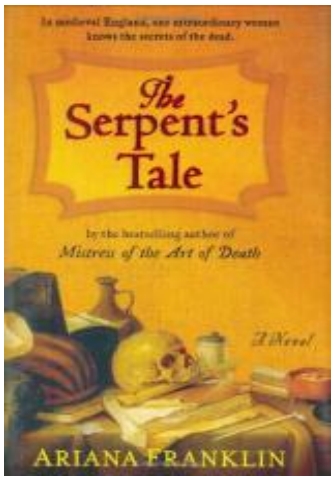
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The Serpent's Tale

by Ariana Franklin



About the Book

Rosamund Clifford, the mistress of King Henry II, has died an agonizing death by poison --- and the king's estranged queen, Eleanor of Aquitaine, is the prime suspect. Henry suspects that Rosamund's murder is the first move in Eleanor's long-simmering plot to overthrow him. If Eleanor is guilty, the result could be civil war. The king must once again summon Adelia Aguilar, mistress of the art of death, to uncover the truth.

Adelia is not happy to be called out of retirement. She has been living contentedly in the countryside caring for her infant daughter. But Henry's summons cannot be ignored, and Adelia must again join forces with the king's trusted fixer, Rowley Picot, the bishop of St. Albans, who is also her baby's father.

Adelia and Rowley travel to the murdered courtesan's home, in a tower within a walled maze --- a strange and sinister place from the outside, but far more so on the inside, where a bizarre and gruesome discovery awaits them. But Adelia's investigation is cut short by the appearance of Rosamund's rival: Queen Eleanor. Adelia, Rowley, and the other members of their small party are taken captive by Eleanor's henchman and held in the nunnery of Godstow, where Eleanor is holed up for the winter with her band of mercenaries, awaiting the right moment to launch their rebellion.

Isolated and trapped by the snow and cold, Adelia and Rowley watch as dead bodies begin piling up. Adelia knows that there may be more than one killer at work, and she must unveil their true identities before England is once again plunged into civil war. . . .

Discussion Guide

1. In what ways has the character of Adelia changed since the events of **Mistress of the Art of Death**? How do her experiences in the earlier novel inform her actions in **The Serpent's Tale**?

2. Were you familiar with the legend of Henry and Eleanor before reading this book? How does Ms. Franklin's portrayal of them compare to others you have read or seen? Did you learn anything about them that surprised you?

3. Sister Havis remarks that the icehouse at Godstow Abbey was built "long before [the abbey's] foundation," quite possibly by the Romans. How do details such as these enrich the storytelling? What other details does the author employ to create a sense of time, place, and history in the novel?

4. Some people's names in the novel are pointedly descriptive, such as the ill-humoured mercenary named Cross. What other character names seem intentionally selected in this way? How does this technique assist or enhance the storytelling?

5. Much as a modern woman might, Adelia rejects many of the commonly held beliefs of medieval England, such as the inferiority of women and the existence of witchcraft. Are there also ways in which Adelia's thinking seems a product of its time? How do you think she would fare in the modern world?

6. In explaining his pious attitude towards his vows, Picot tells Adelia that a bishop is "?a keeper of other people's souls. His own, yours? Adelia, it matters. I thought it would not, but it does." Do you think Adelia is obligated to respect his beliefs? Would you consider it "immoral" if she tried to change his mind?

7. Mother Edyve sees the rise of "courtly love" ? what we would today understand as romance ? as a step towards raising the status of women. Adelia sees it as "a pleasant hypocrisy? Love, honor, respect. When are they ever extended to everyday women?" From today's perspective, whose view do you think has proven more accurate?

8. How has Adelia's role as a mother changed her view of the world? Do you think she would have been as personally invested in the fate of a character like Emma Bloat before the birth of her daughter? Overall, is motherhood an advantage or disadvantage for Adelia?

Author Bio

Ariana Franklin was the award-winning author of MISTRESS OF THE ART OF DEATH and the critically acclaimed, bestselling medieval thriller series of the same name, as well as the 20th-century thriller CITY OF SHADOWS. She died in 2011, while writing THE SIEGE WINTER.

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