

# Unicorn's Blood

by Patricia Finney



## About the Book

So where shall we begin, in this tale of unicorns and virgins? In the head of my usurper, the earthly Queen Elizabeth, I think. She lies peacefully in darkness on a clean linen pillow, the rose-water that took the red cinnabar and white-lead paint from her skin leaving ghosts of gardens about her cheeks. Her hair is cut short and no longer the fair burnished copper that men praised in her youth, but an ugly shade between grey and red, now hidden by an embroidered cap. Her alabaster skin is furrowed and freckled with the footprints of Time. But when she sleeps, the folds relax and the guile and statecraft melt away until it is as if a child peeks from behind a crumpled mask. (p. 2)

In her first novel since the critically acclaimed *Firedrake's Eye*, Patricia Finney has written a masterpiece of voice, of historical detail and of psychological insight that rivals the best of Umberto Eco and Rose Tremain.

England, mid-1580s. Facing an array of international foes and torn internally by religious strife, England finds that its safety depends more than ever on a slight woman of exceptional intellectual brilliance, a master of realpolitik--Queen Elizabeth I, the Virgin Queen, Gloriana. Elizabeth is revered like a goddess, her stature a shrewd political tool designed to hold her people together. And it's about to be destroyed by a dark revelation from a hidden part of her past.

**Unicorn's Blood** is about a dangerous secret, the existence of a private diary kept by the Queen as a young princess. Should this stolen journal, embroidered with a unicorn that has a ruby for an eye, fall into the wrong hands, its intimate revelations would destroy the entire edifice of Tudor government. This guide is designed to help you navigate the twists and turns of Patricia Finney's intricately wrought work.

## Discussion Guide

1. Why did the author chose to narrate this story through the voice of a defrocked nun? What does this have to do with the historical context of the novel?
2. Discuss the relationship between religion and politics in the 16th century. Are there any contemporary examples of parallel power struggles?
3. Discuss the nature of feminine power in the novel. How is it related to the characters? beauty and sexuality, and how does this interplay affect the personal and political lives?
4. Discuss the symbolism of the unicorn. In how many ways is it related to the concept of virginity, and Elizabeth's in particular? What is the significance of the title?
5. Discuss the perils that faced the characters in this novel. What is the relationship between their spiritual and earthly concerns?
6. What is the purpose of having the prologue follow the body of the text? What ramifications does this have for the plot of the novel?
7. Who is the real Elizabeth and why is this important?
8. How would you answer the question at the end of the book, "Now judge if you would have done different?" (p. 363)

## Author Bio

Patricia Finney is Jack's real Pack Lady and his interpreter. She spends a lot of time running around after Jack, The Cats, and her three children. When she can, she writes all kinds of things, including historical novels, scripts, and articles for newspapers. She won the David Higham Award for her first novel, A SHADOW OF GULLS. Ms. Finney lives in Plymouth, England.

## Critical Praise

"Masterfully written and researched? "

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