



The Vatican Princess: A Novel of Lucrezia Borgia

C.W. Gortner

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For fans of Philippa Gregory and Alison Weir, bestselling author C. W. Gortner effortlessly weaves history and drama in this captivating novel about one of the world's most notorious families. Glamorous and predatory, the Borgias fascinated and terrorized fifteenth-century Renaissance Italy, and Lucrezia Borgia, beloved daughter of the pope, was at the center of the dynasty's ambitions. Slandered as a heartless seductress who lured men to their doom, was she in fact the villainess of legend, or was she trapped in a familial web, forced to choose between loyalty and survival?

With the ascension of the Spaniard Rodrigo Borgia as Pope Alexander VI, a new era has dawned in Rome. Benefitting from their father's elevation are the new pope's illegitimate children—his rival sons, Cesare and Juan, and beautiful young daughter Lucrezia—each of whom assumes an exalted position in the papal court. Privileged and adored, Lucrezia yearns to escape her childhood and play a part in her family's fortunes. But Rome is seductive and dangerous: Alliances shift at a moment's notice as Italy's ruling dynasties strive to keep rivals at bay. As Lucrezia's father faces challenges from all sides, the threat of a French invasion forces him to marry her off to a powerful adversary. But when she discovers the brutal truth behind her alliance, Lucrezia is plunged into a perilous gambit that will require all her wits, cunning, and guile. Escaping her marriage offers the chance of happiness with a passionate prince of Naples, yet as scandalous accusations of murder and incest build against her, menacing those she loves, Lucrezia must risk everything to overcome the lethal fate imposed upon her by her Borgia blood.

Beautifully wrought, rich with fascinating historical detail, *The Vatican Princess* is the first novel to describe Lucrezia's coming-of-age in her own voice. What results is a dramatic, vivid tale set in an era of savagery and unparalleled splendor, where enemies and allies can be one and the same, and where loyalty to family can ultimately be a curse.

Advance praise for *The Vatican Princess*

"A tale of passion, political intrigue, and poisonous power. Assiduously researched and expertly crafted, this novel takes readers inside the treacherous world of the Borgias—one of history's most dysfunctional ruling families—and brings to life the sympathetic and freshly imagined character of their leading lady, Lucrezia. This unholy plunge into Rome's darkest dynasty is wholly engrossing."—**Allison Pataki, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Sisi: Empress on Her Own***

"Elegantly written and deeply researched, with a pacy style and a fine eye for contemporary detail . . . The world of Renaissance Italy is vividly brought to life—I'm captivated by this knowledgeable author's take on the controversial Borgias."—**Alison Weir, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Katherine of Aragon, The True Queen***

"A spiderweb of Renaissance intrigue with a cast of legendary characters, *The Vatican Princess* tells Lucrezia Borgia's story in her own words. Impressive research, a lush background, and deft characterization of these turbulent times make for a fascinating read."—**Margaret George, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Elizabeth I***

"Here is a marvelously evocative portrait of a young woman caught in a bewildering web of jealousy, family

rivalry,

The Vatican Princess: A Novel of Lucrezia Borgia Details

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From Reader Review *The Vatican Princess: A Novel of Lucrezia Borgia* for online ebook

Rebecca says

Lucrezia and her family have always been a favorite subject of mine to read; I will never pass up a historical novel about the Borgias. So when I discovered that one of my favorite authors (C. W. Gortner) wrote a Borgia novel, you can imagine my hysterical excitement! Needless to say, I was not at all disappointed. I really and truly loved this novel.

As you know from the synopsis, the story revolves around Lucrezia Borgia. This novel brought to us a poignant look at her life. She was not a villain, as portrayed by most pre-modern historians and perpetuated by the rumors that have survived through the passage of time. She was indeed a puppet used by her father and brother for their familial ambitions.

Gortner has created a strong Lucrezia who was able to stand up to her family and survive the hardships thrown at her: the loss of her beloved Alfonso, the son she had to give up, and being used by her father and brother for political gains. It could not have been easy for a young woman growing up in a family as powerful (and power hungry) and scheming as the Borgias and yet she did it. We will never know what their lives were really like, with there being so many rumors and so few facts, but this story takes a captivating stab at it (pun intended!). But we do know – judging by the rumors about them – that they were nevertheless a close family; while her father and Cesare loved her dearly, her relationship with her brother Juan was deadly.

While most novelists of the Borgia sub-genre tend to overindulge and fantasize with rumors, Gortner has strived for accuracy, setting him apart from the others. His Lucrezia was kind and good, albeit naive. Her trust and faith in her father and brother were always first and foremost. The innocence she displayed when it came to her brother, Juan, and her first husband was also apparent. But having grown up sheltered and pampered, could we expect anything different? All she knew was love; she couldn't know how cruel the world would be. She believed in her family and that was her undoing.

When Lucrezia's eyes are finally opened to the scheming of her father (and Cesare), she ultimately finds the strength to stand up to him and put an end to it all. She starts a new life of her choosing – albeit with a new husband in a new city – and becomes the woman she was meant to be. It wasn't easy in those times when men dominated and women were supposed to idly do their bidding, but Lucrezia came from a family that was powerful, and in the end, that gave her the strength to choose.

Gortner has a wonderful way with words and his thoughts on family were nothing short of beautiful. For a man who doesn't have (human) children he has captured the true feelings of a parent:

“As I pressed my lips to his still-soft and misshapen head, I realized what I felt was not only the joy of unquenchable love but also the awakening of inescapable fear.”

“Papa withdrew his hand, his gaze clouding over. “I am sorry for it. I'd hoped to see you settled as a wife and mother. You cannot know true joy until you hold a child of your own in your arms, seeing it through its first years and watching it grow, planning for its future. Such dreams-“ His voice snagged. “Such dreams we have for those who will follow us.””

These two quotes really moved me, capturing perfectly how I have always felt for my children. I did get a few chuckles in too:

“I had never seen a man erect before. It resembled an overgrown mushroom.”.

I also love the animals Gortner has written into the novel. He is clearly a true animal lover and it is transparent in his writing. It is so very human and down-to-earth of him, and it endears me to his writing even more.

As for the way it was written, the story is in first person. I found this enabled Lucrezia to have a voice and power to convey her thoughts and feelings. The novel could not have thrived in any other format; we needed to know what she was thinking, what made her tick, and what hurt her the most. The pace was perfect, too (though Gortner's novels always are). I loved both the story and the writing style; I was never bored, nor did I find any of the writing stagnant.

The entire work was a beautiful love affair of words and feelings. I do not think anyone else could have written it as well as Gortner has.

The Vatican Princess is set for release on February 19. I absolutely [ABSOLUTELY] recommend that you read it the second it is available, and please, please tell all your friends about it if you love it as much as I do.

[Disclaimer: I received a digital ARC of The Vatican Princess from NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.]

Lori says

History has not been kind to the Borgias, much of which is well deserved. It is very sad, however, that Lucrezia got sucked into the mix. It is difficult remembering that she was only 13-20 yrs old when the events of this novel occurred. This poor girl endured more tragedy in her adolescence than most people experience in a lifetime. Gortner, again, does a brilliant job in personalizing his characters and bringing them to life. 4.5 stars.

Coco says

Tolle spannende Geschichte.

Angie says

The Vatican Princess: A Novel of Lucrezia Borgia by CW Gortner is a roller coaster ride through the often scandalous and always bawdy days of fifteenth century Italian history!

The Borgia name is infamous for many reasons; some real, others embellished. Here Lucrezia is the star as we see things through her eyes, starting when she's 12 years old. She is a true pawn in the political intrigues of her father & brothers and is expected to be happy with their decisions regarding her life. Throughout the

book I underwent a variety of emotions about Lucrezia, starting with annoyed and ending with sympathy (many others in the spectrum between those two). You may know the story, but it's told here vividly and in a way you won't soon forget. At times it was violent, graphic and explicit, specifically regarding intimacy a few times. But, I know it's representative of what the times were like that she lived in. The Borgia Pope, Alexander VI, is Lucrezia's father. That itself speaks for the depravity of the religious leaders at the time. All these things make for an interesting story that at times is hard to believe is based on truth! Is Lucrezia the heartless harlot history tells us she is? Experience life in her shoes while reading this book and decide for yourself!

I've read a few other books about the Borgia's, including 2 by Kate Quinn which are through the eyes of Guilia Farnese, the Pope's mistress. They paint a different picture as they should, coming from different people's perspectives. Both those and this one are great reads.

I would definitely recommend to historical fiction and Borgia fans.

A word of caution, as said by Jean Plaidy to readers of her Borgia fiction, "Only by judging the Borgias against their own times can they arouse our sympathy, and only if they arouse our sympathy can they be understood."

AMEN!!

****Many thanks to NetGalley and Random House Publishing-Ballantine for an advance readers copy****

Lauralee says

Actually 2.5 stars

C.W. Gortner is one of my favorite authors of all time. Ever since he wowed me in *The Last Queen*, on every release day of his novels, I always go to my local Barnes and Nobles right on opening time and purchase his newest selection, often before they even have time to put the book on the shelves. His books have always been a NEED rather than a WANT for me. After I bought *The Queen's Vow* in 2012, I went on his website on the news section, which I check regularly, and saw that he had a novel based on Lucrezia Borgia that will be coming out in 2016. I was elated but at the same time disappointed. Four years was a long wait for me. I wished that the book would have come out immediately. To pacify that time waiting for the novel about Lucrezia Borgia, I read many biographies on the subject. Then, in 2015, when C.W. Gortner released his latest novel, *Mademoiselle Chanel*, I was ecstatic. I devoured the novel on its release day and was satisfied. His latest novel definitely pacified me waiting one more year for his Lucrezia Borgia novel. So when I happened to come across his novel about Lucrezia Borgia, now titled *The Vatican Princess*, on Netgalley, I was super excited! Hooray! The wait was finally almost over! I was happy that I was granted early access to the novel that I had waited four years for, and if I loved it, I would purchase it on release day and add it to my C.W. Gortner collection. I knew that I would instantly fall in love with the book because I loved everything he had written so far. Immediately, when I had the ARC novel on my kindle, I made a cup of coffee, sat down, and began to devour the book, excited to be transported to the Borgia era. After I finished the book, the result was . . . a huge letdown.

The Vatican Princess is about Lucrezia Borgia's early life. She is the bastard daughter of Cardinal Rodrigo Borgia. When the pope Innocent VIII dies, and her father is in the conclave as the cardinals choose the new

pope, Lucrezia feels that her life is about to change. For right now, she is the daughter of a nobody, but if her father becomes pope, she knows that she will be important. Her father does become pope Alexander VI. Yet, to be pope, Alexander made a bargain. He would marry his daughter Lucrezia to Giovanni Sforza. Soon, Lucrezia is thrust into an unhappy marriage. Lucrezia then realizes that there is an animosity between her father and her husband. Lucrezia must choose one over the other. As she makes her decision. Lucrezia fights for her happiness.

I did like how C.W Gortner portrayed Lucrezia Borgia in the book. Lucrezia is a strong female protagonist. She is at first naive and obedient. She can also be judgmental. Over the course of the novel, she grows into a mature woman. She is clever and observant. She can see through other people's deceptions. She is very strong-willed. She is obstinate and is determined to fight for her own happiness.

Now that I have told you what I like about this book here are the things that disappointed me. One of the things I like best about C.W. Gortner's novels is that they are all meticulously researched. I do not think this was the case here. Maybe if I had not read the Lucrezia Borgia's biographies, especially my personal favorites by Sarah Bradford and Maria Bellonci, then I might have enjoyed this novel a bit more. I could not find anything remotely accurate in the novel about Lucrezia. It was like C.W. Gortner only read the basic details about her life and did not explore any deeper. There was no depth to her story.

Over three-quarters of the novel is about Lucrezia's marriage to her first husband, Giovanni. Giovanni is portrayed as a villain in this story. In history, Giovanni was not a villain. While Giovanni and pope Alexander VI were hostile towards each other, he was not a bad husband. With this book being a historical fiction book, I can see why the author would make him a villain if it drove the plot. However, by making Giovanni the villain, it did nothing to enhance the plot. Instead it became boring and repetitive. The second thing I did not like was that the author portrayed the rumors surrounding Lucrezia to be true. One of the things I like about C.W. Gortner's novels is that he take a much-maligned character, and give us a spin on the rumors surrounding her. This novel was not the case. Yes, Lucrezia is a sympathetic character. However, C.W. Gortner took no effort to dissuade the rumors. Instead, he enhanced it to try to make his novel interesting. This did not make his novel enticing. Instead, it made for very uncomfortable reading and did nothing to further the plot.

Overall, this book is a coming-of-age tale. It is about a woman who is searching for happiness. The story was a very unsatisfying read. I could not connect with the story and the characters, for most of them were one-dimensional with little depth. This was not C.W. Gortner's best. Lucrezia Borgia is a hard subject to write about, but C.W. Gortner just could not pull it off. I hate to say this, but I will not purchase *The Vatican Princess* to add it to my C.W. Gortner collection. He is still my favorite author of all time, and I am still going to keep reading every book he writes. I am excited to read his next novel, *Marlene*. For those of you who are not familiar with Lucrezia Borgia's storyline, you might enjoy it. However, for longtime fans of C.W. Gortner and who know what to expect from him, I advise you to skip it and read his other novels instead. *The Vatican Princess* is forgettable and a disappointment.
(Note: I read an ARC copy of this book in courtesy of Netgalley.)

Steven Walle says

This was a very good book. I shall give a full review at a later date.
Be Blessed.
Diamond

Jenny Q says

3.5 Stars. I'm not a big fan of the Borgias, but I love Gortner's books, so I had faith that he would find a way to make Lucrezia's story fresh and vibrant for me. However, it took me a while to get into this one, and I was worried I would not be able to recommend *The Vatican Princess*. I found it to follow the plotline of the first season of Showtime's *The Borgias* pretty closely, and I felt like I was just going over the same old ground. But about halfway through, Lucrezia starts becoming more of an active participant in her life and her story starts to pick up steam, and by the end of the book, I couldn't put it down, and I didn't want it to end.

I think many historical fiction readers know a little bit of Lucrezia's life, so I will not rehash the plot here, rather I'll just sum up what I liked and didn't like about this book. I really had hoped Gortner's portrayal would transcend above the incest speculation and lurid rumors that are always associated with Lucrezia, but I understand that it is a huge part of the Borgias' mystique, and given that these rumors have persisted to the present day, I suppose no novel could get by without making them part of her story. However, I found the portrayal here to be rather disturbing, which I suppose it ought to be, and more on the sensationalistic side. And Lucrezia is really the only likable character, so in a sea of depraved, corrupt, murderous people, the reader is sort of forced to root for her. She is quite young when the novel begins, so I understand why she wasn't as proactive as I like my heroines to be, but by the time she chooses her second husband, she's learning to stand her ground and see her family for what it really is. Though I do wonder if she is perhaps depicted as a little too good to be true here.

There seems to be a bit of a trend developing in historical fiction of just portraying a portion of a historical figure's life in a novel, and I understand why some authors are choosing to focus on years of greater importance or those that lead up to a defining moment in one's life, but Lucrezia has a lot of life to live at the end of this novel, and the ending, while undeniably powerful, left me wanting more.

However, as usual, Gortner's talents shine in bringing the time period to life and in exploring the complicated political alliances of an Italy still divided into so many dukedoms. And the latter half of the book, when the Borgias' enemies are closing in all around them and Lucrezia's brothers descend into paranoid madness, is fraught with tension, suspense, danger, and heartbreak, and I was on the edge of my seat as the story raced to its conclusion. So while this will not be my favorite of Gortner's books--that honor is still held by *Mademoiselle Chanel*--I think *The Vatican Princess* is well worth a read for anyone who wants to escape into the world of fifteenth-century Italy and the drama of one of history's most infamous families.

Alice Poon says

This was an intensely enthralling read that transported me into the psyche of the protagonist. The novel is written from the perspective of Lucrezia Borgia in the first person. I'm usually not a fan of first-person narration, but it works surprisingly well in this novel, not to mention that the narrator is a male speaking in a female voice. There are a few graphic violent scenes that might not appeal to some readers.

The author successfully spins a possible theory and gripping plot about the much-maligned Lucrezia Borgia, daughter of Pope Alexander VI, or Rodrigo Borgia, focusing on her first two political marriages and the

enigmatic childbirth in between. In the narration, she morphs from an innocent adolescent who adores her family, especially her father and her older brother Cesare, to a victimized mature young woman who realizes that all her sufferings emanate from her family's cruel and shadowy machinations. The transformation is fraught with unspeakable shame and pain, both physical and emotional. Her personal vicissitudes are set against a backdrop of political power strife between the Borgias' papal monarchy and other Italian city-states and two European superpowers: Spain and France.

While the novel gives imaginary answers to the two burning questions that have been the subject of debate for centuries (did Lucrezia commit incest re: the enigmatic childbirth, and who murdered Juan Borgia?), in the end, there is no way of knowing what the "truth" really is.

The author says this in the Afterword, "This novel presents one possible theory (about Lucrezia's incest), but I must emphasize that it is fictional, as is my theory about Juan Borgia's murder. The frustrating truth is that we have no reliable documentation about what went on behind the Borgias' closed doors."

I find that many of the historical background details are similar to those found in Sarah Dunant's *Blood & Beauty: The Borgias*, which suggests that the novel is well-researched. While Dunant employs a subtle and even keel approach in her writing, Gortner's style in *The Vatican Princess* is more pungent and action-oriented. In *Blood & Beauty*, the characterization of Rodrigo, Cesare and Lucrezia are given more or less equal weighting, and the battle scenes and political intrigues are given a relatively detailed rendering. In *The Vatican Princess*, the spotlight rivets on the person of Lucrezia and her emotional trajectory.

Gortner's vivid writing style and the tight plot structure appeal to me and I'm giving the novel 4 stars.

Erin says

Find this and other reviews at: <http://flashlightcommentary.blogspot....>

I didn't set out to read C.W. Gortner's *The Vatican Princess* because I love the Borgias. I appreciate their role in politics, but I've never been particularly enamored with their legendary drama. Truth be told, my interest in the novel was inspired by the author who penned it. Gortner's books hold a treasured place in my personal library and I couldn't resist adding another of his volumes to my collection.

Historically speaking, I'm accustomed to seeing Lucretia painted as a cold and calculating temptress, but the vulnerable and vibrant woman Gortner created within these pages bears little resemblance to traditional interpretation. She is introduced as a naïve innocent and I found the development of her personal and political awareness refreshingly thought-provoking. To the outside world she is an integral part of a frighteningly powerful family, but behind the scenes she is considered little more than a pawn to be bought, sold, traded, and used in her family's ambitious and deadly machinations. As a reader, I sympathized with her character, fell in love with her tenacity, and adored the juxtaposition in how she ultimately wielded her own brand Borgia determination and strength against her oppressors.

Speaking of antagonists, I was thoroughly impressed with Gortner's range. Too often authors paint good and evil in simple opposition, but Lucretia's adversaries are a diverse collection of serpents that challenge her both emotionally and physically. Gortner doesn't hold back in his descriptions of Borgia brutality and I felt

the approach, while graphic, created a necessary intensity in the fabric of the narrative. The material is shocking and uncomfortable, but the author's handling of the subject matter produces a tangible tension and unsettling sense of menace in the minds of his audience.

Gortner utilizes the lurid myths surrounding the family to his advantage, but historically speaking, he takes relatively few liberties. There are embellishments here and there, but I've no complaint regarding his deviations. He blend of fact and fiction is seamless and the changes he incorporated into the narrative only enhance the telling.

A sympathetic portrait steeped in passionate political intrigue, *The Vatican Princess* stands as testament to both Gortner's talent and vision. In redefining Lucretia his novel challenges long-standing perceptions and brings new dimension to the life she lived.

Sarah (Presto agitato) says

The Borgias are one of history's most notorious families. Rodrigo Borgia, eventually the corrupt Pope Alexander VI, was the patriarch, father of several illegitimate children including sons Giovanni (Juan) and Cesare, whose sibling rivalry may have turned murderous. His daughter Lucrezia was known for her seductive but toxic beauty. The Borgias inspired their contemporary Niccolò Machiavelli's book, *The Prince*, and have provided ample material to creative artists ever since, to everyone from Victor Hugo to Donizetti to Showtime. They even star in a video game.

Many of the stories told about the Borgias were invented later as their reputations grew, but certainly not all of them. The challenge for a historical novelist is to avoid going over-the-top with wild tales that seem too fantastic to be believed while still preserving the colorful and often outrageous nature of this family. Choosing what to leave out can be as important as deciding what to keep.

Gortner wisely avoids giving an exhaustive catalogue of Borgia offenses. He sticks to what reveals his subjects' temperaments, doing an admirable job of bringing humanity to these larger-than-life characters. (There is a central plot point that is not supported by the historic record, but it is at least plausible and compatible with what we do know.)

The story is told from Lucrezia's perspective, making her a sympathetic and believable character in the midst of all the mayhem. This depiction probably gets fairly close to the truth. Lucrezia was no innocent, but she was also a victim of her circumstances, used as a pawn in political marriages starting at the age of 13. Surviving in that environment would have taken a fair amount of scrappiness and adaptability.

This portrait of St. Catherine of Alexandria in a fresco by Pinturicchio may be Lucrezia Borgia (Photo from paradoxplace.com).

Late 15th century Italy was a vibrant (and violent) place. This book captures the interactions of Italy's power centers without getting bogged down in minutiae at the expense of the story. In Renaissance Italy, several powerful families held sway over different regions and cities. In this novel, we see how the Orsini, della Rovere, Sforza, Medici, d'Este, and other families constantly jockeyed for power, with the upstart Borgias jumping right into the fray.

View from the Castel Sant'Angelo looking towards St. Peter's Basilica. The brick structure running between them is the passetto through which Rodrigo Borgia escaped when the city was invaded by Charles VIII of France in 1494.

The papacy was as much a political and military power as a religious one. Rodrigo Borgia deployed his children strategically to secure his dynasty (a strange concept when acting as a non-hereditary ruler). It was an era of change in art and science, political friends and foes could be swapped as borders were re-drawn, and the Reformation waited just around the corner. The Borgias bent the rules to suit them in uncertain times, but their unscrupulous volatility had devastating consequences to everyone around them.

“Era desso il figlio mio” from the opera *Lucrezia Borgia* by Gaetano Donizetti
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3y_qj...

A copy of this book for review was provided by Random House/NetGalley.

The Lit Bitch says

C.W. Gortner is one of my favorite historical fiction writers! He always picks really unique women in history to write about and he always captures the essence of their story in a unique way.

Being a male author writing about women in history isn't an easy deal especially.....I know when I pick up the first book I read by him, I was skeptical because how can a man understand what a women is going through? But I was completely blown away with how well Gortner connected to the historic figures and created a beautiful fictional story mixed with historic facts about that person.

In this latest book, I was again comforted by Gortner's signature style of interesting, strong women characters and a very engaging story! I am not as up on my Borgia history as I should be so this novel was more or less all new to me. I know a little about the family and Lucrezia, and their basic history but haven't really studied them in depth so this book was a treat for me.....something fresh and new!

This book started a little on the slow side for me I think mostly because of all the politics. A lot of the political happenings were relayed to Lucrezia from messengers because she was in her room for safety....so I felt like the audience had to wait and wait and wait for things to happen/develop or to get the next piece of info. Then when we did get something, I felt like I got a little lost in all the political things that were happening....I wanted to get more into Lucrezia's story rather than focus on what was happening in the 'larger' picture. However, I understood that the political piece was important to the overall story so I tried to process it the best I could but I will admit I was relieved when we started getting more into Lucrezia's story and things started picking up.

I think Gortner did a great job at depicting Lucrezia as a women stuck in a difficult time, I liked that he didn't portray her as helpless or as a victim of her circumstance. I felt like she evolved throughout the story and grew into her character, ultimately ending up a strong woman. I almost felt like the ending was ill timed as I felt like there was still more to tell about her life but in the end I was satisfied with the way the book ended.

I would gladly read any book by Gortner! He has a real gift for storytelling and I always walk away from one

of his books feeling like I learned something about history or a historic figure that I didn't know before. Even if it's historical fiction, there is a wonderful amount of research in his novels and I feel a connection to the characters as well as the historic elements! Another hit for Gortner!

See my full review here

Althea Ann says

Delivered, as expected, a tale of the Borgias, focusing on Lucrezia, following her character from an innocent girl of around age 12 to a mature woman. Lucrezia here is in line with the current idea of the historical character, (rather than the conniving poisoner I grew up with). She'll be somewhat familiar to watchers of TV's 'The Borgias.' Perhaps the book also seemed quite familiar to me as I read this one, which covers much of the same territory, not too long ago: <https://www.goodreads.com/review/show...> But a bit of familiarity is bound to come with historical fiction.

It's true that history indicates that the worst crimes ascribed to Lucrezia Borgia were most likely scurrilous rumors spread by her family's enemies, but the character here is a bit TOO good-hearted and innocent. The author really draws a line, making Lucrezia and her second husband Alfonso the 'good guys' and pretty much everyone else the 'bad guys.' At many points in the book, I really wanted Lucrezia to at least hold her own in Renaissance politics, rather than just being an unwitting pawn who never seems to know what's going on around her. There's also one rather-shocking scene which feels a little out-of-tune with the rest of the book. It made me wish that either the whole book was racier (I like racier), or that it had been toned down.

Still, if this is a time period you're interested in, the book's not bad at all.

Many thanks to NetGalley and Ballantine for the opportunity to read. As always, my opinions are solely my own.

Myrna says

A captivating novel that weaves a coming-of-age story, politics, history, and drama of the puzzling Lucrezia Borgia. The book covers a snapshot of Lucrezia's life. During these 7 years, the author concentrates on the brutal relationships with the men in her life. I think all of the Borgia's scandalous rumors are in the novel: jealousy, revenge, blackmailing, lies, nepotism, drunkenness, murders, rape, incest, spying and more. I've heard this isn't Gortner best but I liked it. Hope to read his other books.

Jennifer says

Lucrezia Borgia was the daughter of Rodrigo Borgia, later known as Pope Alexander VI. The Borgias are a much talked about historical family, mostly due to the political intrigue and corruption surrounding Rodrigo's Papal court. Yet this novel shows the family through Lucrezia's eyes, not Rodrigo's. Therefore we are granted the blunt perspective of a young girl growing to womanhood during turbulent times. I appreciated the honesty that Lucrezia's voice brought to the tale.

I have read novels about the Borgia family before, most recently "Blood and Beauty" by Sarah Dunnant and "The Lion and the Rose" by Kate Quinn. The later of these is one of my favourite novels and was partially told from the viewpoint of Giulia Farnese., Rodrigo's mistress. Consequently it was interesting to see Giulia through Lucrezia's eyes instead of the other way around. I was given a fresh perspective on historical figures that I had previously cataloged and shelved in my mind and it was enjoyable to take them out and dust them off again. I found myself liking Lucrezia more than had previously, mostly due to her honest nature that rebelled against the deceitful ways of her family. Within these pages I found a girl that I both admired and pitied and truly felt a connection to, thanks to the author's talented character development. Lucrezia was a vivid character that jumped to life from the page and I greatly enjoyed reading her story.

We begin with Lucrezia at twelve years old, just as her father gains the Papal throne. Many times it struck me how very apt the title of this novel is, "The Vatican Princess", as that is truly how Lucrezia was treated. Albeit born out of wedlock she was still the Holy Father's daughter and therefore a hot commodity on the marriage market. Just as any Princess from a royal dynasty would be Lucrezia was married for her father's political purposes, not for love. Unfortunately this led to a disastrous first marriage for Lucrezia and although it was eventually annulled it continued to haunt her for many years.

There is much speculation in the historical world about the time that Lucrezia spent at the Convent of San Sisto during her annulment proceedings. It is thought by many that she was pregnant and awaiting the birth at the time, although this has never actually been proven. I wasn't surprised therefore to see this in the novel, however I was surprised by who the author chose to make the father of this child. It did fit into the story and it does (rather shockingly) tie into other things that we know about the family, but nonetheless I was surprised.

The most impressive thing about this novel in my opinion is the character development that the author has been able to achieve. Not just Lucrezia but also her brothers Cesare and Juan were very well-written complex characters that truly felt like living, breathing people and not just two-dimensional figures from long ago. The author gave them real fears, real passions and a whole bunch of flaws, which enabled me to have a good grasp of who they were as people. I did not necessarily like either one of Lucrezia's brothers, but I found them fascinating to read about all the same. Such character development is what was missing from Sarah Dunnant's novel "Blood and Beauty" and therefore this novel was an even better read than that one was.

I would absolutely recommend this novel to anyone with an interest in the Borgia family. I do not think it matters whether you have read a lot about them before or whether your interest is new, I still believe this novel would be an enjoyable read. The author has done a wonderful job of crafting Lucrezia's story, using historical fact where possible and filling in the blanks with skill that shows a keen understanding of the era. Overall, a very entertaining read!

Kate Quinn says

"Infamy is merely an accident of fate . . . [but] infamy is no accident. It is a poison in our blood. It is the price of being a Borgia."

First and last lines of the shiver-inducing prologue in Christopher W. Gortner's sumptuous THE VATICAN PRINCESS, a dark, troubling, sumptuous character dive into one of Gortner's most unique heroines. What struck me about Lucrezia Borgia as opposed to any of his other ladies (Juana la Loca, Catherine de'Medici, Isabella of Castile) is that for the most part, they viewed themselves as moral women doing their best with the circumstances they are given, surprised or despairing or grimly accepting of the evil rumors that end up clinging to their hems. They might do morally questionable things, but they are pushed into it by circumstance and still want to do right. They are for the most part unfairly painted black by rumor, and they

know it.

Lucrezia, by contrast, does not view herself as unstained or slandered. She sees the capacity for violence rooted in her family and in her own nature; a concrete thing, not a product of the scandal machine. Her struggle isn't against revisionist history unfairly painting her as wicked and corrupt; her struggle is not to BECOME wicked and corrupt. This isn't a book about the politics of the day; who the French fought and what the papal rulings were--and it's not a book about a pretty girl wearing pretty dresses to pretty palace parties and looking for love, either. Inside the shell of papal politics and gorgeous Renaissance settings, it's an extremely personal story about a girl fighting to save her own soul. And yet it's done without painting Pope Alexander or Cesare Borgia as one-dimensional baddies, either - both are sympathetic in turn, as they struggle with the same dilemma as Lucrezia. They're just further along the same path. And it's a riveting path, watching to see where they all fetch up.

Incest and poison, murder and rape are all touched on here, though I'll leave the how, who, and why a mystery. They're dealt with unflinchingly, introduced for deep character reasons and not merely thrown in for titillation and shock value. These are violent times and violent people, and the story of one girl's struggle to transcend the violence. Marvelous.
