



# The Queen's Handmaiden

*Jennifer Ashley*

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## **The Queen's Handmaiden** Jennifer Ashley

A novel of the early years of Elizabeth Tudor-as told by the spirited niece of her real-life governess.

*Her name is Eloise Rousell*

. Daughter of a well-bred lady and a strolling player, she lived her early years in peaceful obscurity. But then her father died-and her new stepfather wanted none of her. So she was sent to her aunt, Kat Ashley-governess to the young Elizabeth Tudor.

In the tumultuous household of the princess in exile, Eloise finds her destiny- best friend, confidante, lady-in-waiting, and favored seamstress of the fiery girl who would become the greatest monarch of all time.

Through a decade of plots and counter-plots, tragedies and triumphs, Eloise, like her aunt, is a constant in Elizabeth's life. Risking her heart- and her head-in service to the cause of seeing Elizabeth on the throne, Eloise is a bright, brave, sprightly witness to history. This is her story.

## **The Queen's Handmaiden Details**

Date : Published October 2nd 2007 by Berkley Publishing Group

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Author : Jennifer Ashley

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# From Reader Review The Queen's Handmaiden for online ebook

## Jennifer says

I really enjoyed this book. I picked it up at a book store at an outlet mall because my mom needed one more book to satisfy the sale (4 for \$10 or something) and was worried it would be a romance.

It wasn't. Pretty straight historical fiction: Queen Elizabeth's rise to power as seen by her dressmaker.

Lots of historical details and enough characterization to make Elizabeth believable. Also, a smart protagonist who you grow to care about.

A fun book about a woman who has always fascinated me.

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## Kim says

A decent, entertaining story of Elizabeth's life centered mostly on the years of her brother's and sister's reign, as well as a little into her own.

I enjoyed the story, told from the perspective of Elizabeth's seamstress, who is also the niece of Kat Ashley. The intrigues everyone was jumping into were entertaining, though you could feel Elizabeth's frustration as she was wielded like a pawn for so long.

The story was a bit simplistic, playing on the interpretations that have come down through the centuries (Kat Ashley's supposed inclinations to meddle in things she shouldn't, Jane Grey being a weak, willowy girl who wouldn't say boo to a kitten, etc) without any real attempt to look deeper, to make the characters a bit more real.

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## Barb says

2.5 stars

I am a huge fan of Jennifer Ashley's Regency series featuring Captain Gabriel Lacy written under the nom de plume of Ashley Gardner. I love the characters she created in that series as well as the setting and period and I'm eagerly awaiting the next book which has a tentative title of 'A Death in Norfolk' which is the seventh in the series, due out in the fall 2011.

This novel is set during the reign of Henry VIII, Mary Tudor and Elizabeth I and has a charming heroine at its center. Eloise Rousell is Kat Ashley's niece and is taken under her aunt's wing after her mother remarries. Eloise is the same age as Elizabeth and the girls grow to become very close.

The events in Elizabeth's life are painted in broad strokes as is the history of the Tudor period. Eloise's movements from one place to another so she can narrate from a first person perspective seem slightly far fetched. Though I found the way Ashley connected the fictional Eloise to the historical record clever and

amusing.

I enjoyed the relationships between Eloise, Kat and Elizabeth but beyond them I didn't find myself particularly engrossed in this story. It's a nice story and I liked it, I think it would be a good place for a young reader to start reading about the Tudor period and it's a decent refresher if you've been away from the Tudors for a while.

I don't feel this novel is the author's best work, for that I would recommend *The Hanover Square Affair* and the rest of the novels in the Captain Gabriel Lacy series. For the best on Elizabeth I, I would recommend Susan Kay's *'Legacy: The Acclaimed Novel of Elizabeth, England's Most Passionate Queen -- and the Three Men Who Loved Her'*. I also recently read *'His Last Letter: Elizabeth I and the Earl of Leicester'* by Jeane Westin which I enjoyed very much.

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### **Ashley W says**

This book was okay. That's pretty much it. It wasn't bad, but it wasn't spectacular.

The book follows the tumultuous ten years of Elizabeth I's life from her encounter with Thomas Seymour in 1548 to her ascendancy to the throne in 1558, and is narrated by a fictional neice of Elizabeth's governess, Kat Ashley, named Eloise Rousell. We don't learn anything new in this book and there are some points where Jennifer Ashley even gets information that everyone knows wrong, i.e saying Catherine of Aragon was Queen Isabella of Spain's granddaughter....I almost threw the book at the wall at that point.

Eloise isn't really an interesting character at all. Even though she narrates, she's just simply...there. There are some instances where she is only there to witness things Elizabeth can't, like Jane Grey's hesitancy to take the throne but only because she, a brilliant seamstress, was told to make Jane Grey's coronation dress. If it was known she was so close to Elizabeth, why would they trust her to not reveal their plans? Which of course Eloise does. James Colby, Eloise's lover, is a more interesting character.

I wish Jennifer Ashley had used an existing lady-in-waiting to Elizabeth rather than a fictional one.

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### **Krystyne says**

What I really like about this book is that unlike many Tudor historical fiction books this is not over sexed and glamoured. This book paints a more realistic view of Queen Elizabeth I. This book shows both her charms and flaws magnificently. The narrator of this book comes from Eloise; her skilled seamstress, spy and confidant.

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### **Amy says**

2012: I thought when I moved that I'd give this book away to the library or something, but I dug it out of the box that thankfully never went anywhere when I finished watching *The Tudors* HBO series. I still like it, found it more pleasant than I remembered.

So I watched Elizabeth again after finishing it, and the movie, while still good, A) doesn't pass the Bechdel Test, and B) has Elizabeth relying on MEN to teach her how to be strong. What I like best about this book is that Elizabeth is INHERENTLY strong. She does occasionally have to rely on her friends to remind her of her best interest, but she never waffles, and Ashley paints her as a consistent and consistently strong woman. (Okay, after having written that, I just bumped the stars up one to 4.)

Another side note: I'm super interested in costumes right now, so the premise of this book is fun, too, and I'm going to recommend it to other costume-lovers I know!

Original review 2010: I liked this. It started out rather light and breezed over things in the first chapter, but once it got going it was good. A nice read about a couple of strong women. Not too intellectually heavy, nicely rounded out with history, and satisfying.

Makes me want to go watch Elizabeth again.

On a side note, it passes the Bechdel Test!: <http://bechdeltest.com/> which yes, I do often apply to books.

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### **Laura Bray says**

A nice, easy read, after the intense six-book series for the literary fiction class. Just read for pleasure, no note taking, no paying attention to structure.

Kind of a middle-of-the-road historical fiction book. About a seamstress in Elizabeth's household. Pretty difficult to believe that a lowly seamstress would gain the confidence of the queen like she did, but setting that aside, it was an enjoyable read about a period I enjoy reading about.

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### **Elizabeth says**

This was just...so boring. The author managed to make the most exciting things seem dull and tedious.

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### **Robin says**

An entertaining novel of Elizabeth Tudor as seen through a young woman in her household. A niece of her beloved governess, Eloise became her friend and seamstress. This is the world of princess Elizabeth from a different viewpoint. An enjoyable novel full of historic details.

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### **Kendra says**

I loved this book. I enjoyed the first person narrative and how the author gave me insights to everyone surrounding the main character. Ms. Ashley restored my faith in fiction. I hadn't been able to read anything that hooked me for a couple of months. I was surprised and pleased when I couldn't put it down.

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## **Wen says**

I thought this book was well done. It is a light historical read in that it does not bog down in excessive historical accounts. It Does hold lots of historical content. The view is told from Eloise who in this story is Elizabeths seamstress. I do not know if such a person ever existed but the accounts told through her eyes are pretty correct. There is room for discrepancies too since it is told from the one view point so it covers many of the things that may not have been completely accurate. The descriptions of the clothing and fabrics are very well done. Characters are very easy to like or dislike as they should be. Good read.

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## **Robyn Markow says**

A fairly interesting (though highly fictionalized ) account of Queen Elizabeth the 1st's Seamstress and Hand Maid,Eloise Rousell. Sent by her mother and stepfather to live with her "Aunt"(in reality a 2nd cousin) Katherine(Kat) Ashley,Elizabeth's Governess since her mother,Anne Boleyn's execution; Eloise grows up alongside the Princess Elizabeth,becoming her playmate and later on, dressmaker. Thanks to her proximity to Elizabeth,Eloise becomes Eyewitness to the Princess' trials ;from her Stepmother Catherine Parr's husband's designs on her, to when she's imprisoned in the infamous Tower of London and then under House Arrest when her devoutly Catholic half-sister,Mary comes to power ,then (finally) becoming Queen of England. I've read a lot about Queen Elizabeth and remain continually fascinated by her so while this book wasn't great,it still held some interest for me. Eloise(who narrates the story) seemed more like a reactive character and sort of dull at times,but I still admired her loyalty towards Elizabeth; besides sewing sumptuous gowns for the future Queen and willingly putting up with her infamous temper, she accompanies her during her Imprisonment and even engages in some espionage with a secretive young man named James Colby( we later find why)who,not surprisingly, becomes an important part of her life in another way. For fans of HF and The Tudors, a well as a decent introduction to both genres.

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## **Elizabeth says**

This is fluid, easy reading. The problem comes in the back sixth of the book, which should be the back \*third\* -- we know that Elizabeth ruled for, what was it, forty years? Therefore the tension surrounding the Robert Dudley plot and the revelation of James's identity (which was telegraphed way too early, in my opinion) is just not there. The agony of Eloise's choice between her husband and her queen is never brought to a head, and you know it won't ever be. That said, the romance is well-handled, very subtly, although I would have liked to see Eloise's emotion toward her husband and daughter much more vividly.

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## **Beth Cato says**

This was a good, solidly enjoyable historical fiction read. Most books focusing on Queen Elizabeth focus on her actual reign and the time of Shakespeare; part of the charm of this novel is that we follow Elizabeth from childhood and through the turbulent time of her brother's death, Queen Mary's rule, and finally her own coronation. Very little of the book takes place in her reign. The first-person perspective is from Elizabeth's loyal seamstress, Eloise. As Eloise herself points out, many people do not notice a lone woman sewing in a corner, so she is able to witness and overhear all the drama of court. Some of the historical fiction I've read

during the past year has been afflicted by the dread presence of a Mary Sue, perfection personified, but this book is free of the scourge. The characters come across as very real and well-rounded, and Eloise is a wonderful heroine.[return][return]I bought the book at the Desert Dreams Conference and spoke with the author. Jennifer Ashley was a very nice, pleasant lady. I know she also writes Scottish romances, so I think I'll look up some of her other books. She has a master's degree in Middle Ages and Renaissance lit, and that attention to detail and research shows.

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## **Christine says**

I actually began reading this a long time ago when I was a senior in high school, but I left it on the bus one day and I could never find it. I guess someone had taken it. I bought another copy not too long after that, but I only restarted and finished the book a month ago. So it has been 4-5 years since I picked up this book and I finished it in a day.

This book was an easy read. Historical wise there was some inaccuracy. (If I am wrong at how much inaccuracy there was, I apologize I am not an expert on Tudor history). As I read if I came across an individual I would usually do a quick read up on them online so that way I can test how well they did. Although it would have been nice if the book continue longer after Elizabeth became Queen, since the books is titled The Queen's Handmaiden and not The Princess' Handmaiden. Also the whole affair between Robert Dudley and Elizabeth should have been longer in my opinion. She didn't give all of the characters depth like Jane Grey, just going with a typical description, however I like to think that maybe that is how the characters in the story like Eloise sees Lady Jane, after all people tend to stereotype each other.....

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