



City of Ladies

Sarah Kennedy

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It's midwinter in 1539, and former nun, Catherine Havens Overton, has just given birth to her second child, a daughter. The convent in which she was raised is now part of her husband's lands, lands that once belonged to Catherine's family. With a son, Robert, and her new daughter, Veronica, her life as the mistress of a great household should be complete.

But Henry VIII's England has not been kind to many of the evicted members of religious houses. And in order to protect her old companions from the hostilities, Catherine has gathered about her a group of former nuns in hopes of providing them a chance to serve in the village of Havenston, her City of Ladies.

Catherine's past haunts her. Her husband begins to suspect that Robert is not his child. Then the women of Overton House begin to disappear and one of them is found brutally murdered nearby. Seizing the moment, under the pretense of ensuring her safety, William forces Catherine to enter service at Hatfield House where the young Elizabeth Tudor lives.

Reluctantly, Catherine obeys, only to find herself serving not only the Protestant Elizabeth but also the shamed Catholic Mary Tudor. As the murders in Yorkshire continue to mount and her loyalty to the Tudor sisters grows more complicated, Catherine must uncover the secret of the killer and save her City of Ladies.

City of Ladies Details

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From Reader Review City of Ladies for online ebook

Darlene says

Originally posted at <http://www.peekingbetweenthepages.com...>

City of Ladies by Sarah Kennedy is the second novel in The Cross and The Crown series and it doesn't disappoint and what a fantastic cover! Once again Sarah has outdone herself with a beautifully written novel that transports us back to Tudor England and a story not to be forgotten!

City of Ladies finds Catherine, a former nun, married now to William with a son Robert and a newly born daughter Veronica. The convent where she grew up and the land it occupied once belonged to Catherine's family but is now under the ownership of her husband. While Catherine is happily mistress of her own household, her friends and former nuns, were not so lucky. Henry VIII not only destroyed the only sanctuary they had when he took down their convent he also made sure they had nowhere else to go. Of course Catherine could not allow this to happen so she brought them into her own home. Her dream is to build her own City of Ladies and have the nuns serve the community and belong once again but as long as the people believe them to be witches she will never succeed. When the worst happens and the women of the house begin to disappear and turn up dead everyone is left wondering if they are safe... including Catherine.

William, wanting Catherine safe, puts her into the service of the young and Protestant Elizabeth Tudor. At first Catherine believes she will only be serving Elizabeth but soon enough she learns that she will also serve the Catholic Mary Tudor who has been shamed for her beliefs as the war over religious beliefs still goes on. As the murders continue to plague Overton House and others become ill Catherine struggles to find out who is behind the murders before it's too late.

City of Ladies was a wonderful novel that I had such a hard time putting down. I adored Catherine in the first book The Altarpiece and I still do. She is such a strong, caring, and intelligent woman. Unfortunately it just that intelligence that has people thinking her a witch. In the time of Henry VIII a woman who was talented as a healer and intelligent could easily be thought to have evil dwelling within them and hanged and Catherine had to be very careful not to step on the wrong toes, namely Henry VIII. I am already anxiously looking forward to the third book in the series – The King's Sisters, which is due out in 2015.

Well done Sarah – I loved it! For fans of historical fiction I highly recommend the whole series consisting so far of The Altarpiece and now City of Ladies!

Charlene says

I loved CITY OF LADIES, the second in The Cross and the Crown series by Sarah Kennedy. I read THE ALTARPIECE last year, and was impressed. The second book is even better. Henry VIII has seized most of the monasteries and convents in England, stolen their riches and lands, and turned out the nuns and monks to fend for themselves. Catherine Havens, daughter of a prioress and priest, has managed to survive by marriage. She has two children and a husband whom she genuinely loves, although she married him as a means of survival. She has gathered some of the former nuns into her household. But the religious-political situation is precarious. Most people don't know what is going to be legal from one day to the next, and Catherine is in danger, though she tries to bend with the times.

An absorbing, beautifully written book. I look forward to reading the third in the series.

Maggie Franz says

Tudor England was a dangerous time to be a woman, let alone a former nun whose former home and convent were dissolved when the king made himself the head of the Church of England. Catherine Haven's, conceived and raised in the convent, finds herself cast out of her home and faced with a bleak future until William Overton marries her. With her marriage comes a new home, a title, and children, however it cannot keep those she loves safe. When her former sisters begin disappearing Catherine will stop at nothing to uncover what is happening – only to find that the answer hits painfully close to home. Raising her children, running a household and for a time seeing to the king's own daughters, Catherine is a busy woman who carries a heavy burden; although she carries it as any woman would wish that she could, with strength and grace. Let Sarah Kennedy whisk you away with her new series The Cross and the Crown. Pick up a copy of Altarpiece and City of Ladies before the launch of her third book, The King's Sisters this August!

Read More: <http://www.blackdogspeaks.com/city-of...>

Patty says

I did not read the first book in this series, The Altarpiece – it's on my tablet – but I didn't feel any loss for not having done so. Catherine Overton is a former nun now married to a man of some means who owns the lands where her nunnery was. Her fellow sisters had nowhere to go after Henry VIII took the lands and redistributed them so she gathered them close giving them a place to live and a purpose but the people in the village are suspicious and think their knowledge of ready, writing and healing makes them witches. As they start turning up dead her husband removes her to a place in the service of the young lady Elizabeth – no longer princess as her father has declared her a bastard with the birth of Prince Edward. But Catherine's ladies keep dying – being murdered if truth be told.

This is a rather dark book with a sense of fear and foreboding hanging over the whole of it. Given the time period I can certainly understand why – Henry VIII wasn't generally known as a friendly guy. Showing any belief other than the one he espoused could get you arrested and Catherine still held her Catholic upbringing in her heart. She was a highly intelligent woman in a time that didn't appreciate them.

I found the book to start a bit slowly but by the time I was about a quarter of the way in I was hooked and had a hard time putting it down to go to sleep at night and one night I just didn't until I finished. Catherine is a fascinating character and I hope to find time to be able to read the first book in the series. This tale ends with the promise of the third book and since we all know what Tudor history brings we know that Catherine has a bit of a minefield ahead as a Catholic leaning woman in a changing world. The plot is complex and my only complaints come in the portrayals of the two princesses – the personalities don't seem to ring true to what I've read in other historical novels. Now Elizabeth is but a five year old child so there is not much to do with her but make her a bit of a brat but Mary was portrayed as a bit of a lunatic. I know she did go a bit off the deep end at the end of her life but I've not read much that indicated she was this crazy in the early part of her life.

Overall I enjoyed the mystery and look forward to the third installment.

Annie McDonnell says

I was given a copy of this book in exchange for an honest review.

This was my second book by Sarah Kennedy, and it is book two in the “Cross and The Crown” Series. When I finished I was looking forward to getting to the third book. This is a series that I will never forget and they stand out as originals, as I never read books about this time in history. Sarah Kennedy writes such knowledge of historical facts that you feel like she was right there, walking among the women.

The book “City of Ladies”, is about the women from her first book. It is 1539, and Catherine Havens Overton gathers the women that she lived with in the Convent with her when they were removed by the king’s men. She has them all working at the Overton House, to have them remain together.

But, the women start disappearing. They are being murdered. Catherine is determined to find the killer and save the women in her “City of Ladies”

This book is an amazing tale of mystery and intrigue. You will be spellbound.

Sarah Kennedy says

I hope readers enjoy the continuing journey of Catherine Havens. She's still negotiating the religious and political changes of Henry VIII's England. It's never easy for an intelligent, educated woman!

Nicole Evelina says

No beating around the bush: I really enjoyed City of Ladies. It is one of only a handful of second books in a trilogy that outshines the first. I will admit to approaching it with a bit of trepidation, as I was not a fan of the first book, The Altarpiece, but this one shows how much an author can grow between books.

While The Altarpiece dealt with Catherine Overton’s last days as a nun at Mount Grace priory before it was closed by King Henry VII as part of the dissolution of the monasteries, this book finds her a wife and mother of two, and a lady no less. The down side of her new life is that her shrew of a sister-in-law, Margaret, who was also one of her former fellow sisters, now lives with Catherine and her husband and is determined to see her fail. But she is not the only former nun on the premises. Despite the objections of local townspeople and the reticence of her husband, Catherine has drawn around her many of the convent’s former occupants, determined to build her own City of Ladies, where learning – writing, reading and herb craft – flourishes for the female sex.

But such an idyllic vision cannot last forever, especially during the tumultuous Tudor reign, and soon the women begin disappearing, only to turn up dead. Catherine believes the deaths to be murder, but no one else seems to care, thinking them at best Popish, and at worst, witches. “Good riddance to bad rubbish,” as the saying goes. Catherine’s solo investigation into their deaths is curtailed by her husband’s political ambitions, when he obtains for her a place at Hatfield serving the young Lady Elizabeth. As her days pass and she gains the trust of her new employers, Catherine also finds herself attracted to the House’s other resident, the reclusive Lady Mary. Between the danger posed by such a Catholic alliance and the gruesome deaths of more of her ladies, Catherine finds herself in mortal danger, one whose source may be closer than she

expects.

This book is a strong entry into the crowded market of Tudor fiction. What set it apart for me is that I felt like I was reading a personal story to which most people can relate, rather than an account of famous people of the period. Even when Mary and Elizabeth were in a scene, they behaved like real people: a long suffering, underappreciated daughter seeking solace in a world that shuns her (Mary) and a spoiled child who never had her natural temper reigned in (Elizabeth). Gone are the sniping, overly bitchy nuns who populated the first book; in their place are women struggling to determine their roles and identity in a society that has no place for them because there is no precedent for former nuns.

But the true stars of this book aren't even human. The conflict present within Catherine, over her past, present and future; her mortal needs and spiritual desires; duty to her own heart vs. duty to husband and king; and even her conflict with Margaret are what makes you keep turning pages even when you have a sinking feeling what's coming is anything but pleasant for the characters.

I did find the climax of the book a little confusing, in that it is revealed indirectly in scenes with so many characters it's hard to keep them straight, but Kennedy does eventually come out and tell you clearly what you want to know. Once my theory of "who done it" was confirmed, the book sped to a close with a twist I didn't expect, placing all the characters I'd grown to care about in peril that promises to enrich the final book in the trilogy. I can't wait to see where Kennedy takes this series next.

PS – I obtained an ARC of this book from the Historical Novel Society in exchange for an article on a theme in the book.

Lauralee says

Right after Catherine has given birth to her daughter, a former nun that is under Catherine's protection has been found murdered. Soon, Catherine begins to realize that there are other disappearances of the other nuns, and she begins to fear for the worst. Her husband tries to protect her by being a healer at the Hatfield Place where Henry VIII's children live. However things at home begin to take a turn for the worst, and Catherine must go back to solve the murder of the former nuns.

Catherine is very practical. She thinks before she acts. She has a myriad range of knowledge about healing and poisons. She is kind to her servants, and wants to educate the poor. She is very religious and always puts her faith first. Catherine is also a strong-willed woman. She does things her way. I also like her relationship with the king's daughters. She feels sorry for them both, and she does her best to help them. I did find her constant arguments with her sister-in-law, Margaret to be annoying, and I laughed at how crazy they were. The plot itself is very well-organized. I liked the aftermath of how the nuns lived after their convent was destroyed. I liked how Catherine took them under her protection and made them teachers to educate the villagers' and their children. I also liked how Elizabeth Tudor and Mary Tudor were portrayed in this book. Both of them were lonely, vulnerable, and sad. They were neglected by their father, and they felt unworthy. It was sad that Elizabeth at the age of four realized it, and she was jealous of her younger brother because he had all of her father's attention.

Overall, this book is about friendship, loyalty, and faith. The book is fast-paced and is filled with mystery and suspense. The characters were complex and the setting has a dark atmosphere. While this book is part of a series, it can be read as a standalone. I did not read the first book, but I found that it was not necessary to read it because it gives us a good background to what had happened, and that this book has an entirely new

plot. However, this novel got me interested in the first book, and its sequel which is coming out in September. This book will thrill and delight lovers of historical fiction and mystery alike as well fans of C.W. Gortner and Philippa Gregory.

(Note: This book was given to me by the publisher in exchange for an honest review.)

Kathleen Kelly says

City of Ladies The City of Ladies, second book in The Cross and the Crown series, continues the story of Catherine Havens Overton, a former nun, as the wife of William Overton and now has two children, Robert and baby Veronica. A former nuns and friends of Catherine's turn up murdered or missing, in order to protect her William insists that she become part of Henry VIII's children, Mary and Elizabeth's household. Catherine takes over her duties but is forced to return to Overton House when William becomes ill, plus she is insistent on finding out about the missing women. With William so ill, he starts thinking that Robert is not his son and there are some in town that would call Catherine a witch because of her abilities to heal people with her potions and herbal recipes. Williams sister Margaret is a nasty woman and I really didn't like her at all...always accusing Catherine of one wrongdoing or another. The story takes many twists and turns which makes it a wonderful read. This novel seamlessly carries on the story started in The Altarpiece, suspenseful and a page turner. The author is knowledgeable in the Tudor history and you can tell by the continuity from the first book to this one. There are characters that you have to either love or hate. I found Catherine to be a very strong woman who is ahead of her times on where a woman's place is. I thoroughly enjoyed this second novel and eagerly look forward to reading The King's Sisters, the third book in the trilogy. - See more at: <http://www.celticladysreviews.blogspot.com>

Shannon says

Sarah Kennedy's second novel follows the lives of the former sisters of Mount Grace after the Dissolution of the Monasteries. Catherine returns as the protagonist, but we now find her married to William Overton, making her Lady Catherine Overton, as well as a new mother. She is joined by another familiar character, Ann Smith, who serves in Lady Catherine's large household but remains a close confidant and true friend.

Catherine remains loyal to her former sisters, and her social status allows her to include the former nuns within her household, forming a protective circle for these women that society had cast to the wind. Coming across the book *Le Livre de la Cité des Dames*, which was written by Christine de Pizan in 1405 to demonstrate the important contributions women have made to society, refute the equation of women with sinfulness, and instill self-worth in her female readers, Catherine realizes that she has formed a city of ladies she will fiercely fight to protect.

Catherine's ambitious husband has arranged for her to serve at Hatfield House in service to the Lady Mary and Lady Elizabeth, despite the fact that she has recently given birth and on the eve of their departure a member of her city of ladies, a former nun, is found murdered. After Catherine settles into service at Hatfield, the murders continue to escalate. Catherine finds herself torn between duty to Crown and husband and her loyalty to and love for her friends. She also knows that few will come to their aid if she fails them.

Kennedy has turned out a wonderfully creative follow-up to The Altarpiece. Rather than expound on the story from the first novel, Kennedy populates the second with the strong characters she developed there but

propels them into a murder mystery. A true page-turner.
