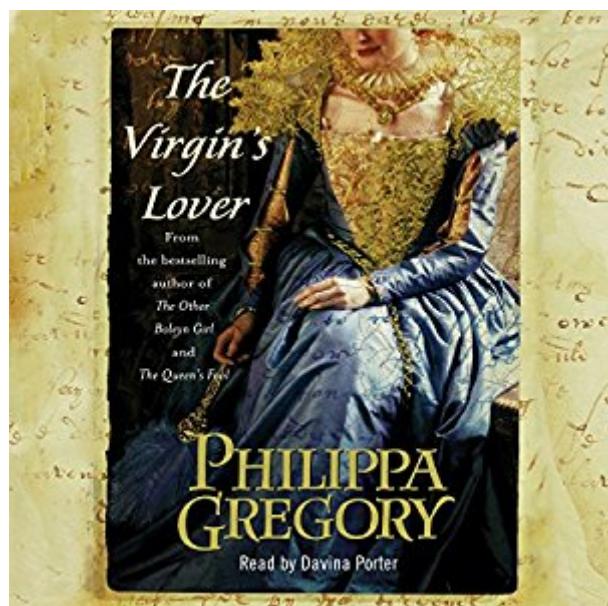


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The Virgin's Lover



Synopsis

In the autumn of 1558, church bells across England ring out the joyous news that Elizabeth I is the new queen. One woman hears the tidings with utter dread. Amy Dudley, wife of Sir Robert, knows that the peal of bells she hears will summon her husband once more to power, intrigue, and a passionate love affair with the young queen. Elizabeth's excited triumph is short-lived. She has inherited a bankrupt country where treason is normal and foreign war a certainty. Her faithful advisor, William Cecil, warns her that she will survive only if she marries a strong prince to govern the rebellious country, but the one man Elizabeth desires is her childhood friend, the irresistible, ambitious Robert Dudley. Only Robert truly revels in the opportunities of the new reign. He knows he can reclaim his destiny at Elizabeth's side. Elizabeth cannot resist his courtship, and as the young couple slowly falls in love, Robert starts to think the impossible: can he set aside his wife and marry the young queen? Philippa Gregory paints a picture of a country on the brink of greatness, a young woman grasping at her power, a young man whose ambition is greater than his means, and the wife who cannot forgive them.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is romantic historical fiction at its finest, replete with an abundance of period detail. The focus of the book is the romantic triangle involving the newly crowned tempestuous Queen, Elizabeth I, her lover and Master of Horse, Sir Robert Dudley, and his long suffering wife, Amy, whose dreams of a simple life with her husband are shattered with Elizabeth's rise to the throne upon the death of

her half-sister, Queen Mary. There is also a cat and mouse game involving Elizabeth, her Secretary of State, the canny and shrewd William Cecil, and Robert Dudley, which develops as it becomes clear that Dudley has his heart on becoming King and ruling alongside Elizabeth as an equal, something that can only be accomplished through marriage to Elizabeth. Unfortunately for Sir Robert Dudley, his wife, Amy, a secret Catholic, has no intention of divorcing him. Moreover, Elizabeth has no intention of letting Dudley rule as King rather than just being King consort, were they to someday wed. Yet, she is in a quandary, as she finds herself unable to resist Dudley's charms and can refuse him nothing. Elizabeth turns to William Cecil for help in saving her from herself. William Cecil knows all too well that marriage to a Dudley would be disastrous for England, as Dudley, being the Queen's favorite, is one of the most unpopular men at court with the other courtiers. Moreover, the Dudley family, though a powerful and ancient lineage, has a treasonous history. What Cecil devises is diabolical but plausible. This twist in the tale is certainly an ingenious way of explaining a mysterious death, a death that has never been satisfactorily explained by historians. It is a death that certainly served to cast a pall upon Dudley's ambitions and ensured that he and Elizabeth would never wed.

Three pages into "The Virgin's Lover" and I suspected that I was onto a winner: I was right! With delicacy and ease, Philippa Gregory has once again penned another enthralling and beguiling tale, this time set during Elizabeth I's first year as queen, ably presenting all the political difficulties that the young queen and her advisors faced (at home and abroad) that first year, the forbidden love affair that developed between Elizabeth and her Master of Horse and childhood friend, Robert Dudley, and presenting us with her own idea as to how Amy Robsart, Robert's wife, died. Robert Dudley always believed that he and his family were destined for greatness. But the past years, following the ill fated attempt to make Lady Jane Grey (the widow of Edward VI) queen and her second husband, Guilford Dudley, king, have been hard ones for the surviving Dudleys -- Robert in particular. For an ambitious man, used to power and court life, being stripped of his titles, land and wealth, has been particularly unbearable. And he is also beginning to realise that his choice of wife, the slightly older, uneducated and totally unambitious Amy Robsart, may have been a disastrous one. And then in 1558, Queen Mary dies without issue, and names her half-sister, Elizabeth as heir to the throne. For Robert, this means only one thing: his star is on the rise again. As he quickly settles into life at court again, he begins to realise that the new queen, his childhood friend, needs guidance in a great many things, guidance he is only too happy to give much to the dismay of Elizabeth's other advisors. William Cecil in particular. Cecil is at his wit's end as to how to thwart

Robert's influence over the queen which seems to grow each day.

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