



## The Firemaster's Mistress

By Christie Dickason  
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### Introduction

The spirited Kate Peach, the only survivor of the plague that wiped out her family, earns a precarious living among whores and con men in London's red-light district as a glove-maker. Although economic need compels her to play the part of mistress to the powerful Hugh Traylor, Kate dreams of Francis Quoynt—her former lover, who abruptly abandoned her when the duties of war obliged him to travel to the Continent.

When Francis, firemaster and gunpowder expert, returns from Flanders, a chance meeting throws them together. But Kate, who has successfully managed to conceal her Catholicism until now from the newly Anglican eyes of London, has begun to shelter fugitive Jesuits.

Recruited by Robert Cecil, the inscrutable and dangerous English Secretary of State, Francis finds himself spying on Guy Fawkes's plot to blow up the King and Parliament. The gaudy, teeming streets of London hum with rumors of conspiracy as the Papist hotheads secretly pursue their plans for apocalyptic destruction, and when the former lovers meet again—this time as enemies—the flame of their passion is dangerously rekindled.

### Questions for Discussion

1. How is Francis Quoynt's intimate knowledge of gunpowder and explosive compounds responsible for drawing him into serving as a secret agent of Robert Cecil?
2. How would you characterize Kate and Francis's feelings for each other? What explains their getting back together after the abrupt end to their relationship?
3. To what extent has Kate's experience of losing her family to the plague made her incapable of trusting others?
4. Why does the religious fervor of the Gunpowder conspirators fuel their hatred of the English crown?
5. How does Kate's willingness to shelter Jesuits make her Hugh Traylor's co-conspirator?
6. What does Meg, the Caledonian bear, represent to Kate, and why?
7. What does Francis's exposing his affiliation with Robert Cecil to Robin Catesby reveal about his sympathy for the conspirators?
8. Why does the violent birth of Robert Stuart continue to agitate Boomer Quoynt?
9. How does the presence of Francis Bacon, Robert Cecil's adversarial cousin, at Pangdean Place thicken the plot considerably?
10. How did you feel about the conclusion of the novel, and Kate's much-altered relationship with Francis Quoynt?

To Readers: If you'd like to see how author Christie Dickason would answer these discussion questions, visit [www.christiedickason.com](http://www.christiedickason.com).

### About the Author

Christie Dickason was born in Indiana and as a child lived in Thailand, Mexico, and Switzerland. Educated at Harvard and Yale, she spent fourteen years as a theater director and choreographer before becoming a writer. She now lives in London with her family.