



The Shadow Queen: A Novel

Sandra Gulland

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From the author of the beloved *Josephine B. Trilogy*, comes a spellbinding novel inspired by the true story of a young woman who rises from poverty to become confidante to the most powerful, provocative and dangerous woman in the 17th century French court: the mistress of the charismatic Sun King.

1660, Paris

Claudette's life is like an ever-revolving stage set. From an impoverished childhood wandering the French countryside with her family's acting troupe, Claudette finally witnesses her mother's astonishing rise to stardom in Parisian theaters. Working with playwrights Corneille, Molière and Racine, Claudette's life is culturally rich, but like all in the theatrical world at the time, she's socially scorned.

A series of chance encounters gradually pull Claudette into the alluring orbit of Athénaïs de Montespan, mistress to Louis XIV and reigning "Shadow Queen." Needing someone to safeguard her secrets, Athénaïs offers to hire Claudette as her personal attendant.

Enticed by the promise of riches and respectability, Claudette leaves the world of the theater only to find that court is very much like a stage, with outward shows of loyalty masking more devious intentions. This parallel is not lost on Athénaïs, who fears political enemies are plotting her ruin as young courtesans angle to take the coveted spot in the king's bed.

Indeed, Claudette's "reputable" new position is marked by spying, illicit trysts and titanic power struggles. As Athénaïs becomes ever more desperate to hold onto the King's favor, innocent love charms move into the realm of deadly Black Magic, and Claudette is forced to consider a move that will put her own life—and the family she loves so dearly—at risk.

Set against the gilded opulence of a newly-constructed Versailles and the War of Theaters, **THE SHADOW QUEEN** is a seductive, gripping novel about the lure of wealth, the illusion of power, and the increasingly uneasy relationship between two strong-willed women whose actions could shape the future of France.

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