



## The King's Mistress

*Emma Campion*

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## **The King's Mistress** Emma Campion

History has not been kind to Alice Perrers, the notorious mistress of King Edward III. Scholars and contemporaries alike have deemed her a manipulative woman who used her great beauty and sensuality to take advantage of an aging and increasingly senile king. But who was the woman behind the scandal? A cold-hearted opportunist or someone fighting for her very survival?

Like most girls of her era Alice is taught obedience in all things. At the age of fourteen she marries the man her father chooses for her, dutifully accepting the cost of being torn from the family she holds so dear and losing the love of her mother forever. Despite these heartbreaks Alice finds that merchant Janyn Perrers is a good and loving husband and the two settle into a happy life together. Their bliss is short-lived, however, unraveled the dark day a messenger appears at Alice's door and notifies her of Janyn's sudden disappearance.

In the wake of this tragedy, Alice learns that her husband kept many dangerous secrets--secrets that result in a price on her own head and that of her beloved daughter. Her only chance to survive lies in the protection of King Edward and Queen Philippa, but she therefore must live at court as a virtual prisoner. When she is singled out by the king for more than just royal patronage, the stakes are raised. Disobeying Edward is not an option, not when her family is at risk, but the court is full of ambitious men and women, many of whom will stop at nothing to see her fall from grace. The whispers and gossip abound, isolating Alice, who finds unexpected solace in her love for the king.

Emma Campion paints a colorful and thrilling portrait of the court of Edward III--with all of its extravagance, scandalous love affairs, political machinations, and murder--and the devastating results of being singled out by the royal family. At the center of the storm is Alice, surviving by her wits in this dangerous world where the choices are not always of her own making. Emma Campion's dazzling novel shows that there is always another side to the story.

*From the Hardcover edition.*

## **The King's Mistress Details**

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## From Reader Review The King's Mistress for online ebook

### Bree T says

Apparently Alice Perrers is some sort of notorious figure of her time but given my lack of knowledge on Yorks and Lancasters and Tudors and whatever, I'd never heard of her. I read a highly praising review of The King's Mistress on a book review blog and given my enjoyment of both The Other Boelyn Girl and The White Queen I ordered this in from my local library.

When the book opens Alice is barely 12 but ready to be paraded in Church in a pretty gown 'emphasizing her body's readiness to bear children' to acquire a husband. As often as I read novels set in this time, I can never really get my head around marrying off 12 and 13yo girls, often to men significantly their senior, as in this novel. Alice's first husband, Janyn Perrers is about 33 and she just 13 when they wed -and consummate that marriage. Luckily for Alice, this is a match that shines well on her. She loves Janyn and he loves her and it seems to be a mostly happy and prudent match, despite the overshadow of the patronage of the Dowager Queen Mother, Isabella. Often referred to as the 'she-fox' due to a plot where her and her lover overthrew her husband the former King, Isabella is a notorious figure of this time and is feared and reviled by much of the population. Mother to the current King, Edward III, she lives in a sort of exile (but seems to mostly move around however she wants) after the King beheaded her lover for treason against his father, King Edward II. Isabella is very generous to Janyn and his family, something that worries Alice, and with good reason. Although the bulk of the reason for the Queen Mother's generosity is mostly hidden from her nearly her whole life, she still feels the weight of it and the fear that it will bring danger.

She's right of course, because what sort of novel would this be if there weren't a few dead husbands and political plots along the way? Widowed at 18 or 19, she is taken into the household of Queen Philippa, the wife of King Edward III as an advisor in her wardrobe. Alice's father was a merchant cloth dealer and he taught her well about fabrics and weaves and cuts and what is suitable. Her husband Janyn, also a merchant, furthered her education and Queen Philippa comes to respect and court her counsel. She works as a servant to Queen Philippa and is taken into her protection, sacrificing her infant daughter to a royal household so that she may be raised safely, and not become a victim of the danger that claimed the life of her husband.

Although in mourning for her husband, Alice soon finds herself drawn to the charismatic King Edward III. Although significantly her senior (somewhere in his late 40s, Alice is about 19 or 20) he apparently possesses a great charm and vitality which draws her eye and excites her. He too seems interested in her, spending time with her. Queen Philippa soon draws her further into her confidence and she becomes one of her favourite ladies in waiting. Alice's relationship with her own mother was tenuous and disintegrated into nothing and Queen Philippa is almost looked upon by Alice as a maternal figure. She praises many times Queen Philippa's class, grace, patience and elegance. She fails to see at first that she is being groomed as a mistress for King Edward III until she is moved into private apartments.

Although wracked with guilt at betraying Queen Philippa, she cannot deny her attraction to the King and the two become lovers. It seems an unconventional relationship, based on more than just a bored King's wanderlust. Queen Philippa had a horse riding accident which injured her pelvis, meaning no more relations (or babies) and although King Edward obviously still loves and respects her, he does the whole 'man with needs' spiel and enjoys the benefits of being a man in charge having both his diplomatic, well liked and respected Queen and his beautiful (very) young lover at his beck and call.

Despite the disappearance of her husband and his eventual death, life is still considered dangerous for Alice and she is considered to be under the King and Queen's protection. Her daughter Bella is removed from her and raised in a royal household for her own protection. The secret that her late husband's family bore for the

former Queen Mother was so big that her safety was still threatened. So she lives out her days accompanying the Queen, choosing her wardrobe, concealing the Queen's growing physical problems with clever cuts and stitching and being the King's mistress. She bears him several children and that goes on for about 15-odd years until the death of the King, which comes several years after the death of the Queen.

From then on life is a while different ball game for Alice. The common people loathe her for being the King's mistress and for rising above her station, usurping their beloved Queen (or so they all believe) and it is alleged that she used her position with the King to obtain huge amounts of property and jewels. She is forced to fight for what is rightfully hers, the legacy she has for her daughters and the way in which she will have to sacrifice herself in order to at least try and have a chance to keep her property is heartbreaking for her.

While this novel was basically quite enjoyable story, my biggest problem with it is that it absolutely crawls along pace-wise. It's called *The King's Mistress* so right away you know that she's going to be exactly that but it doesn't happen until about halfway, perhaps more, throughout the book. You get so bogged down in the details of the dresses, fabrics, cuts, cloths, the social intricacies of the royalty and those beneath them that at times it feels like there is no story. It's just Alice saying 'And I woke up and then I did this and then the Queen summoned me and then we did this and then I went hunting and falconing and then it was time to eat and then I went to the King and then I went to sleep'. And it feels like pages and pages of that, over and over. And the big secret that Alice's husband and his family were keeping for the Queen Mother? Well, I don't know a whole lot about the royal family and the uprisings and overthrowings and the family backstabbing but when the secret all finally came out I found myself thinking Huh? Is that it? Seriously? Which given the whole novel is kind of build around this secret, is probably not a good thing. At all.

For me, this novel is at best a social dictation on the times of 1350-1400. I didn't feel at all invested in the mystery and danger surrounding Alice and most of the time I forgot it was there until Alice moaned about missing her children or someone reminded her that she was in grave danger and had to remain under the protection of the King. But for a portrayal of the times it is set in, I feel it has great strengths. Alice was a gifted social observer and although she mentions many times that she feels a fish out of water at Court and with all its intricacies, she gives a great insight to what life must've been like for any young female plucked from obscurity and given a place to serve in Court at the whim of the Crown. I didn't really -get- the charisma and aura that was made much of regarding King Edward III and his apparent irresistibility to a young and pretty woman such as Alice. Alright, he was the King and he seems to have been portrayed as quite kindly and likable and not at all creepy but I still couldn't see the great attraction for Alice. In contrast, I did see Alice's love for Janyn and I was a bit sorry he died actually because I enjoyed their marriage far more than I enjoyed her liason with the King, which was mostly uninteresting to me. He could've been any older man, the fact that he was the King didn't really add much to the story other than him tossing her a few jewels each time she gave birth to one of his illegitimate children!

A novel that was enjoyable enough so that I kept reading until the finish, but not something that I would read again, nor did I ever really feel like I had to keep turning those pages. So-so.

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## **Jenny Q says**

There are a couple of things that make crafting a believable, romantic fictional account of Alice Perrers's story hard to do. First, the author has her work cut out for her in trying to persuade the reader that Alice is not as bad as her contemporaries made her out to be. History has accused Alice of taking advantage of a senile king for her own financial and political gain, and of usurping the position of a beloved dead queen, taking her place beside the king as the queen would have, even wearing the queen's jewels in public. After Edward's

death she was tried by Parliament for "crimes against the king and kingdom", stripped of her holdings and banished from England.

Second, by the time Alice becomes Edward's mistress he's an old man, and the author has to try really hard to make an old man sexually attractive and to make the reader believe that a woman as young and vibrant and beautiful as Alice would enjoy bedding him. For the most part I think she succeeds here, but there were one or two descriptive phrases that made me cringe a little!

Campion excels at using Alice's story to depict the plight of medieval women, at the mercy of the men in their lives, and Alice's mantra: When had I choice to be other than I was?, pretty much sums it up. And though I think Champion's portrayal of Alice is probably fairly accurate, I think she took Alice too far in the other direction. Alice is a little too perfectly good and selfless, especially in the face of such circumstances. But she's very likeable, and I was really rooting for her.

Be forewarned: some of the plot points in this story are completely fictional. I don't mind that as long as they are believable within the confines of the time period and the author is up front about it, and in this case she is. Overall I enjoyed this book. I thought it was well written and easy to lose myself in, and I enjoyed reading about some of these historical figures from another viewpoint, since *Katherine* by Anya Seton is really the only novel I had previously read about this time period. I look forward to future novels from this author.

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## Jen says

Did you ever think I would like this?

Every once in a while someone suggests that since I like history so much I would like [insert name of recent historical fiction phenom here] and I gently say "it's not really my thing..."

So in the spirit of fictionpalooza, I decided to test "what was my thing."

This isn't my thing.

First off, the cover pictured here is not what is in the book from the library that showed up on my nook. Instead it is every historical fiction book ever. Some chick draped in velvet looking off to the distance no doubt contemplating her woe. Right then I thought, "wow, this is not going to be my thing."

Some truisms about historical fictions featuring women protagonists:

- They talk about clothing...a lot
- Everyone famous in the time period know each other. Alice Perrers totally childhood buddies with Geoffrey Chaucer.
- If they become mistresses, they are deeply disturbed by becoming mistresses and saddened that life has given them so few choices. I mean, I get that some might have felt that way, but I would venture a few felt they were pretty lucky to have a powerful protector. Maybe "mistress" isn't something you'd put on your resume, but it's better than "poor and scavenging for food."
- The protagonist is always omigod completely innocent of any greed, and that stuff she gets for sleeping with the king...she feels horrible...really.

One of my other problems is that the book's stated goal is to rehabilitate Alice Perrers in the eyes of human kind. Lovely goal. And although I will buy that maybe she wasn't completely and utterly awful, it's going to

take more than "but she could have been nice...see, these things still could have happened if she was nice." Like Jane Boleyn (see previous review of a non-fiction book about her), the only way we can get to "but she could be nice" is we have to accept she was completely and almost laughably powerless in her own fate.

So there's our choice. Alice could have gotten wealthy by manipulating the affections of a doddering old man who took a shine to her. Or, she was wanted by the king, who just really really loved her, and her only choice given her undeniable love was to become his mistress and accept a lot of gifts from him. Oh, and that horrible story about Alice ripping the rings off of Edward III's dead hands...yeah, just trying to get the signet ring with their initials off his hand so she could give to her/Ed's son.

It was mildly entertaining, although a bit droning. Alice (in this book) was about as interesting as warm milk, and about as sleep inducing. And she made sure you knew how powerless she was...REPEATEDLY. "But what could I do" (Sed quid ago? in Latin) should be her motto, embroidered on everything. But if you read it, I suppose you could be reading worse things (Twilight, I'm looking at you) and it's not a bad story. Just don't confuse it with fact.

So yeah...not my thing.

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### **Tea Jovanovi? says**

Read it, enjoyed it... but would not recommend it for translation... Something is lacking... Philippa Gregory is much better... But I will follow the author...

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### **Michelle (True Book Addict) Miller says**

This was such a great book. My first real foray into the life of King Edward III and his mistress, Alice Perrers and it was quite enthralling. Champion does an excellent job of portraying the plight of a woman in the 14th century. Women had so very little choice of who they would marry. And then, if the king wants you as his mistress, well then you better bow to his wishes. Alice had no choice in any aspect of her life...everything was decided for her. You could say that she was carried along by fate. But she remained a strong woman in her own right and had many children, who were her life. I really admired her and look forward to reading more about her. Emma Champion is the world's foremost scholar on Alice Perrers. I can see why she was able to write such a wonderful book.

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### **Jessica at Book Sake says**

I'll admit, I don't know much about history. I had never heard of Alice Perrers and was unaware that she was a real person when I began this book. The tale is fictional, but it is written by Emma Champion who "did her graduate work in medieval and Anglo-Saxon literature and is the world's foremost scholar on Alice Perrers." So I can only imagine that Perrers lived an extraordinary life.

The book was very well written and Champion put in such detail, you can tell she truly cared about the subject

and the enormous amount of characters within the story. My only issue was trying to keep so many characters with the same names or similar names straight. Often times I was confused by who someone was or thinking they were someone else because of these name issues. Though the details of Alice's life were amazing, I felt so very sorry for someone ever having been put into the position she had and having no choice in the matter, time and time again. Alice's character was brought alive by Champion's words and linking her to people like Geoffrey Chaucer was a very redeeming quality within the story. I think history buff's and historical fiction lovers will adore this story.

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### **Terra says**

The cover on this book looks fabulous and believe me the story in between is equally captivating. The story is paced perfectly from beginning to end and leaves you wondering how people could actually live like this at any time period.

There is so much that goes on with the story here of Alice Salisbury and it shows you the innocence, kindness, love, anger, hatred and so many more emotions that we as humans take for granted every day without thought as to how it will affect others. I do believe that even though during the reign of King Edward and Queen Philippa things were anything short of quiet and peaceful, the subjects of the King and Queen's knew more how to take care of themselves and use their wits than we do today.

Our story starts off with Alice Salisbury, a merchant's daughter who is only thirteen is betrothed to marry and does indeed marry a rich merchant within six months that is twenty years her senior. Alice's husband is kind, gentle and very caring of her but he is also keeping a secret that will in effect plague Alice for most of her life. Thank goodness she is made of stronger stuff than those that were born with silver spoons in their mouths.

As the story progresses, Alice is summoned to be part of Queen Philippa's household and is groomed by the Queen herself for a very important role that will take Alice down some dark and dangerous avenues. This all takes place without Alice's even recognizing a hint of what the Royals are up to and will test her in every capacity that a woman can indeed be tested.

I found the story to be breath taking in every sense of the word. From the descriptions of horses to houses to castles to the very clothes that the Royals wore kept me entranced and struggling to put the book down. Even now as I write this my mind wanders to the possibilities of what I would've done if caught in the same life shackling situation. A must read for anyone who loves a good book.

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### **Bookish Ally says**

As women of the modern age we often take for granted our rights - to choose who we marry, to own property, to participate in the direction of our lives and in the lives of our children.

While Emma Champion does use a large amount of the artistic license allowed in historical fiction, her telling of the life of Alice Perrers does illustrate the fact that women of this time lacked choice and, therefore, their fates were determined by the men in their lives. They could then be used as a public scapegoat - utilising the vehicles of wanton behavior (or, even more horrifying, witchcraft ) despite the suffocating constraints in their lives bearing witness to their lack of complicity.

While I felt that the story dragged a bit in the middle and included much unnecessary detail, I found myself very interested in the story of Alice Perrers and what may of actually happened behind the political machinations of court life.

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### **Megan says**

3.5\* The handling of the historical events was fine and the book read well. My issues are mainly with the perfection of the main character: I knew going in that the book would be sympathetic to Alice, which is fine, but she was such a Mary Sue. Multiple men in love with her at a time, captures the heart of rakes, knows what to say to everyone, beautiful, beloved by children, loves animals... it just goes on. Hardly anything was ever her fault, and she had excuses or tragic stories if it was. She's also awesome at everything, from mercantile interests to hawking and riding to managing a king/kingdom. I did feel for her, the way she was trapped by society in the end (the court system was horrendous), but that couldn't redeem her character for me.

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### **Brenda says**

Wow! What a book!! Cudo's to this author, she has taken a story of Alice Perrers (known mistress) of King Edward III, and has woven a can't put down book so rich in history and so readable. There are books that you pick up and sort of skim through, not this one. I would have to slow myself down again and read as many of the words as I could, so I wouldn't miss anything.

You'll not find yourself bored with this book. I was just so disappointed when it was over. The story at the end of how the author came to write the book, giving Alice a voice was as interesting.

My thanks to the author, she had me carrying this book every where I went for days so that I could finish it, have it available to pick up and get a few more pages in, when nothing else was going on. I lived the story and it was fascinating!

Here is the information from the back of the book:

When had I choice to be other than I was? From childhood Alice Salisbury has learnt obedience in all things and at fourteen, dutifully marries the man ...more When had I choice to be other than I was? From childhood Alice Salisbury has learnt obedience in all things and at fourteen, dutifully marries the man her father has chosen for her - at the cost of losing the love of her mother forever and the family she holds dear. But merchant Janyn Perrers is a good and loving husband and Alice soon learns to enjoy her marriage. Until a messenger brings news of his disappearance and she discovers that her husband had many secrets, secrets he didn't want her to know - but which have now put a price on her own head and that of her beloved daughter. Brought under the protection of King Edward III and Queen Philippa, she must dutifully embrace her fate once more - as a virtual prisoner at Court. And when the king singles her out for more than just royal patronage, she knows she has little choice but to accept his advances. But obeying the king brings with it many burdens as well as pleasures, as she forfeits her good name to keep her daughter free from hurt. Still a young woman and guided by her intellect and good business sense, she learns to use her gifts as wisely as she can. But as one of the king's favourites, she brings jealousy and hatred in her wake and some will stop at nothing to see her fall from grace....

Do yourself a favor and pick this one up!!!

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### **MBP says**

I had mixed feelings about this one. I enjoyed the writing style, and learning more about Alice Perrers' eventful life. I'm not especially well read on this period of history, but it's clearly a revisionist portrait of Alice, and I think the author sometimes wrote herself into a corner in her attempts to make Alice a sympathetic character. I also think there was too much "telling" and not enough "showing," and there was very little in the book about the historical context and issues of the times. That may be in part due to the first person narration - if Alice didn't see the effects of the Black Death and the unrest of the peasants, there's no way to present it to the reader.

I've read several of the author's mysteries under the name of Candace Robb (the Owen Archer and Margaret Kerr series), and the Owen Archer series is set roughly in the same time period. I felt there was more historical context and character development in that series than in this book. It isn't necessarily fair to compare ongoing developments in a series to what can be done in one book, since the canvas is so much larger, but I had high expectations for this book based on how much I liked the Archer series.

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### **JG (The Introverted Reader) says**

*"When had I a choice to be other than I was?"*

So begins this fictional autobiography of Alice Perrers' life.

And that's about where I stopped caring overly much.

That's harsher than I mean to be, because the book was okay, but I have very, very little tolerance for excuses. And this was a running theme throughout the book. That's where my biggest problem lay.

I have to say that I don't recall ever coming across Alice Perrers before. She was married to a merchant but then became Edward III's consort. Apparently, the people blamed her for a lot of things that the king did and that went wrong in the country, but "what choice had she?"

It's been months since I finished reading this, so all I can say is that, aside from the excuses that turned me off, Alice had an interesting life. She rose higher than any commoner should have been able to. In this book, she didn't ask for any of it. She only wanted a quiet life with her children away from the public eye.

The other thing that I didn't like was the amount of detail. It took me forever to get through this book! It felt like every little possible meeting with the king and/or queen was detailed here. I quickly lose interest if a book is moving too slow.

Historical England is always interesting to me, so the book still gets three stars. Those who don't mind excuses will probably be more interested than I was.

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### **The FountainPenDiva, Old school geek chick and lover of teddy bears says**

There are always two sides to every story. Of course, when considering the story of women in history - especially those women who've been considered scandalous - the only stories we tend to hear are from those who have the proverbial axe to grind.

Such has been the fate of Alice Perrers, the infamous mistress of King Edward III. History hasn't been kind towards her, claiming that her manipulation of an old man, and her greed was nearly bankrupted England. Worse, she was a commoner who flaunted her status as mistress.

In The King's Mistress, Alice Perrers is a young woman who has to learn to live by her wits. Thrust into a world of royal privilege and political machinations, she has to learn to protect herself and her children. Sometimes a pawn in a larger game, sometimes an astute businesswoman. Loyal to the king and her family. So loyal that it becomes dangerous, and she ends up as scapegoat for a dysfunctional royal family. Some choices were out of her hands; other decisions had long term ramifications.

Was she victim or villainess? My take was that she was a woman fending for herself in a world that afforded women few, if any, rights. Even royal women were circumscribed.

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## Misfit says

Daughter of a wealthy London merchant, Alice catches the eye of Janyn Perrers and the two marry despite her mother's rather irrational objections. The marriage is definitely a love match, but Janyn and his mother have a deep dark secret that has something to do with the dowager Queen Isabella and while it has brought them great wealth, it also brings great danger to those who keep the old Queen's secrets. When Janyn mysteriously disappears (no spoiler, that's on the book jacket) Alice seeks protection of Edward III and his queen, Philippa. A commoner, the noblewomen at court shun her, but the Queen loves Alice's knowledge of clothing and fabric, and as for the King? I'm guessing the book's title will indicate to you where the rest of the story goes, no?

If you are familiar with the period you know what happens next and if not you don't want me spoiling it for you. While I appreciated the author's effort to portray one of history's most vilified women in a more favorable light, I think she did herself a disservice by doing a complete 180 and turning Alice into something a wee bit too sugary sweet. Would someone with her business acumen really worry much over a profitable wardship offered by the King because people might think ill of her? The first person narrative (admittedly not my favorite) doesn't help much either and I felt the author painted herself into too many corners trying to justify events so that all the bad things that happened were always someone else's fault. I'd rather see a more well-rounded character, warts and all.

As for the story and pacing itself? IMHO too much time is spent on Alice's marriage with Janyn, along with all those pages upon pages of oohing and aahing over the fabrics. I would have liked to know more about the merchant's role in purchasing and marketing cloth rather than hearing about the next pretty dress and headdress. Better yet, fast forward to Alice entering the royal household and then give us a few flashbacks to flesh out the back story. I also found myself scratching my head when the Big Mystery is finally revealed, why anyone would be so hell-bent on murder because of \*that\* I can't quite fathom.

In the end, this was an OK book, good but certainly not great, with very little character development and far too much telling instead of showing. Since the story is told from Alice's point of view and she's not always in the thick of things some of the more important events in this period are skimmed over a bit too quickly, i.e. the Peasant's Revolt was over and done with in three pages. Kudos to the author for attempting to shed new light on such a heinous woman, but in the end just too much sugar for my tastes. 3/5 stars and I recommend getting it from the library first and then buy it if you love it.

## Moppet says

In this novel Alice Perrers, a merchant's daughter who became mistress to the much older Edward III, tells her own story. I can't argue with Emma Champion's decision to take a revisionist approach to Alice, who has gone down in history as ambitious, grasping and greedy. Mistresses were often demonised and blamed for all the ills of the country: it was, in fact, one of their functions to be a scapegoat and divert criticism which would otherwise fall on the king or queen. And there is evidence that Alice has been maligned. But unfortunately, I felt Emma Champion went too far in her attempt to rehabilitate Alice Perrers. Her version of Alice is so bland I found it hard to take any interest in her. Champion goes to great lengths to exonerate Alice from any wrong-doing: for example, her first marriage to merchant Janyn Perrers is portrayed as a happy union, with Alice completely content with her domestic duties and devoid of ambition (although not business sense). This doesn't square very well with her becoming the king's mistress, so it is made clear both that her husband orders her to join the court against her will and that he is distancing himself from her. But Alice is also shown as feeling some attraction to King Edward – I think because a totally loveless relationship would have seemed distasteful. Then later on even Queen Philippa makes it clear that she approves of Alice becoming Edward's mistress – in fact she all but throws her into his arms. The author makes every effort to put Alice in a good light but I felt it had the effect of leaching colour, conflict and plausibility from the story.

It takes Alice nearly 300 pages to reach the King's bed and up till that point the plot is dominated by some cloak-and-dagger machinations which I didn't find at all convincing. Unfortunately, the pace doesn't pick up once she becomes a royal mistress. There is far more narrative than dramatisation and while I felt a good deal of the accounts of Alice's movements, day-to-day activities, clothes and dreams could have been cut, elsewhere opportunities for dramatisation and character development were missed. With a couple of exceptions (Queen Philippa; King Edward) the characterisation doesn't go very deep.

Why three stars rather than two? The writing felt stilted at first but flowed better as the book went on. A great deal of research obviously went into it and there's lots of luscious detail, especially about clothing. I enjoyed the depiction of Alice's life as a lady-in-waiting to the Queen, which was vivid and realistic. I also liked the way Alice's relationship with King Edward was treated, and this is, after all, the heart of the book. There's a moving account of Edward's slide into dementia, and with his death, Alice's troubles are just beginning. The last section of the book picks up the pace as she is hounded by Parliament and threatened with marriage to a man she loathes and fears.

But overall a frustrating read as I felt it could have been so much better.

Full review and quotes at The Misadventures of Moppet: <http://bit.ly/c1ccy0>