THE DUKE

AUTHOR Q&A

Where did you get the idea for a woman duke?

I knew I wanted to write a lesbian romance, and a character came to me, in the mysterious way characters do. She was the eldest daughter of a duke—confident to the point of arrogance, with an intimidating reputation. I noticed she kept behaving as though she were her father's heir, and I liked the tension that brought to her character.

But she still wasn't quite right. It wasn't until a friend suggested, "Why not just make her the duke's heir?" that the whole thing clicked. I had just needed that little push into a new universe: She wouldn't only be his heir; she herself would be the duke. This was the character in her true form.

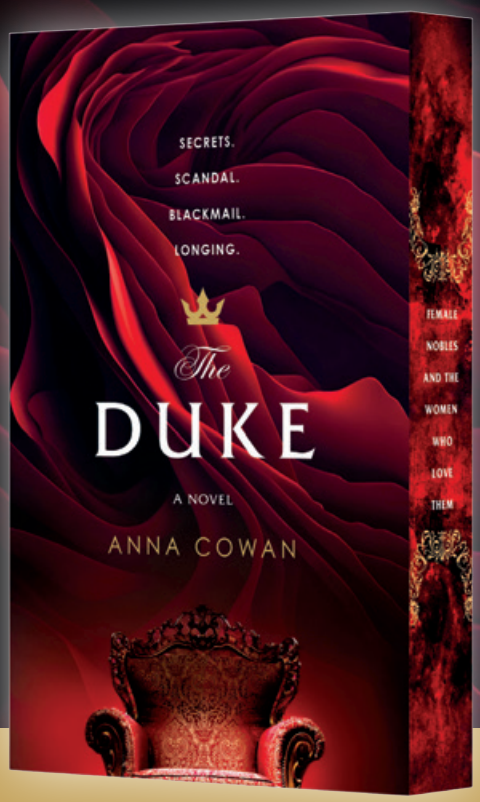
Who would you cast as your leads in the movie adaptation?

This is easy, because I was inspired by these two actresses when I was developing the characters. (While we're dreaming of impossible things, let's go back and cast them as they were in 2005!)

For Kate—the icy, powerful duke—it would have to be Cate Blanchett, no contest. She has exactly the charismatic, frightening, and androgynous quality that would bring Kate to life. For Celine—the brilliant, sultry French courtesan—I would cast Eva Green. She has so much soul and yearning, and is also incredibly beautiful. She looks like she knows much more than she's letting on!

Favorite things you uncovered in research?

In a pivotal scene, Kate and Celine go for a day out on Bond Street, the famous London shopping strip. In my research, I came across a mention of "the Bond Street roll." Young men would walk up and down the street in groups, walking in a specific way. I was so tickled by this example of the human need to distinguish the group to which one belongs—and also the human impulse toward absurd fun.



ST. MARTIN'S GRIFFIN

As the Duke of Howard, Kate sits in the House of Lords, and a number of dramatic scenes take place there. I loved researching Lords as it was before the fire—quite a different place to the Lords we know today. I enjoyed leading Kate and the reader through the old House of Lords, from the ugly, square facade, up through the stairwell with its stained glass dome, through the Painted Chamber, and into the Lords Chamber itself with its high, round windows.

Which recent romance do you wish you'd written?

We Could Be So Good by Cat Sebastian, a romance set in a newspaper room in mid-century New York. Sebastian does an incredible job of evoking a time and place, to the point that I almost felt homesick for it when I was done reading. The romance is slow, meticulous, and swooningly romantic. I don't know if I'm clever enough about people to have been able to write it, but I certainly wish I was.

What does a writing day look like for you?

I have a charming office in a nearby township. I eat at my desk and write on my couch. I usually manage four to six writing sprints in a day, and the rest of my time goes to research, editing, brainstorming, reading, and taking walks to clear my head (and keep me from becoming one with my couch).

Because my office is on the road to and from my kids' school, I often get a phone call around 3:30 in the afternoon letting me know they're nearly at the roundabout. Then I rush out the door in my slippers, pushing my glasses up onto my head, and madly wave as my husband drives the kids past. I get a snapshot of their big grins and waving arms, then return to work.

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