

Royal Escape

By Georgette Heyer

This brilliantly entertaining novel is a fictionalization of the true story of Charles II (May 29, 1630 – February 6, 1685), charting his daring flight to France after the Battle of Worcester, where Cromwell and his Protestant forces defeated the Catholic king.

For six weeks, Charles' life was in danger as he hid in the English countryside, disguised as a servant, unable to find a way across heavily guarded borders. His loyal courtiers were appalled by the ease and glee with which he adopted his new humble identity, insisting on chatting and even drinking with ostlers and houseboys.

Two young women were instrumental in his eventual escape and one of them became a lifelong friend of the exiled king.

About the Author

Georgette Heyer's historical novels have charmed and delighted millions of readers. She wrote over 50 books, including Regency romances, mysteries and historical fiction. She was known as the Queen of Regency romance, and was legendary for her research, historical accuracy and her extraordinary plots and characterizations.

Reading Group Guide

1. It is made clear very early on that the King is not an attractive man. He is referred to as a "Black Boy" and even calls himself ugly. How do you think this affects his interactions with people throughout the story? How do you think this affects his ability to go in disguise?
2. On page 43 the reader learns how the King got into his current predicament. He said that "he had not meant to betray Montrose to Argyll. Argyll had sworn no hurt should befall him, and he himself has written to Montrose, twice, trying to explain his change of policy, and bidding him to lay down his arms, and leave Scotland. It was not his fault the letters had been delayed, not his fault that Argyll had lied to him, and had delivered Montrose to a shameful death. And when the treachery had been accomplished, matters had been in too forward a train for him then to draw back." What does this say about the King's maturity level at the beginning of the book? How would you compare this with his maturity level by the end of the book?
3. On page 49 when the King is told that a man's sister is coming to bring him food he is "a little startled, profoundly mistrusting the ability of a woman to keep a secret." What do you think makes him change his opinion so drastically that he entrusts his life to women such as Jane Lane, Lady Wyndham, and Julianne Cothingsby?
4. Charles seems to be very different from other nobles in that he has an easy sense of humor, he takes his forced disguise and "peasantry" very well, and speaks easily with commoners. Why do you believe he is so different from the other noblemen that surround him? How does this ease his

path on his journey?

5. All throughout the book men claim that though they are poor they would not turn the King in for the 1000 pound reward, saying that they will not take blood money in exchange for the King. Do you think the men would have held the same sentiment had it been any other man or does the person and circumstances involved make a difference?
6. On page 105 Carlis tells the King, "You must escape, if only to cheat your enemies," to which the King replies, "Of all the reasons that have been shown me why my life should be preserved, I never heard one that appealed to me more strongly than that." What does this say about how Charles values his own life? The lives of others?
7. Many of Charles' courtiers think of him and treat him as a son at times in that they talk to him as if to a beloved child. Wilmot says to Thomas Whitgreave, "he is a boy, unused to such hardships, accustomed all his life to be waited upon, cherished, surrounded by friends who love him!" Is this the general opinion of Charles? In what ways does Charles prove Wilmot correct? In what ways does he prove him wrong?
8. Charles and Jane Lane have a very flirtatious, witty relationship during their travels. Charles insists upon calling Jane "My Life" saying that is what she is preserving with her presence. What do you think Charles' true feelings for Jane are? Jane's true feelings for Charles?
9. Jane asks the King, "Shall you punish your enemies, sir, when you come to your throne?" The King replies, "What, to be revenged on every poor devil that had the bad taste not to like me? No, child: if I could do it, which I am very sure I could not, I would not." In what ways is this sentiment kingly? In what ways is it not?
10. When the King and his party arrive at Bridport, they find the inn is full of military men. Charles insists that he shall not be recognized and evens holds conversation with the soldiers there. Why is he so certain that they will not know him or discover his identity? Why does he know so much better than everyone else what is the best way to keep him safe?
11. Throughout the book men who are Royalists or are willing to help the king are referred to as "honest men." Do you think they are labeled this because are actually particularly honest people or because men who are for the King are casting them in a positive light? Do all of the "honest men" prove to be honest?
12. On page 289 the King says, "My dear Frank, custom breeds contempt. It is three weeks now since I fled from Worcester, and I suppose I have never been out of danger once during all that time." Does this fully explain the King's carefree, and sometimes careless, behavior?
13. At what point during his journey do you believe the King was in the most danger? How was that danger averted?
14. Lord Wilmot's manservant, Robert Swan, is more disturbed by the state of his master's clothing than by the near misses the King has had. What does this say about Swan? Would other people in the story consider him an "honest man"? Would you? Swan seems to think very poorly of the

King for his un-courtier-like behavior. What does this suggest about servants and commoners expectations of royalty?

15. Colonel Phelips is the first Royalist to hesitate in his agreement to help the King. He is also the most vehement in his disapproval of the Scots. Compare his point of view with that of the people who helped Charles along the way. Who has been the most and who the least realistic about the situation?
16. Wyndham tells Phelips that he need not fear offending the king because “his is very easy, and uses little ceremony.” Do you believe that this is a positive or a negative trait in a king? Which characters believe it is good? Which characters believe it is bad?
17. There are a number of times that the King does things that seem to be counter-productive to his escape to France. Do you think that he is simply spoiled and used to doing whatever he likes, or does he truly believe in his safety?
18. The merchant Mansel is the person who ultimately has the means to help get the King out of England. Of all the people who have attempted to assist the King, why is Mansel successful? How is he different from everyone else who has helped Charles?
19. The book does not end with the King setting foot on French soil, but rather with Colonel Gounter watching the King’s ship until it is out of sight. Why do you think the author chose to end the book this way? Would another ending have been more or less satisfying?