

Marie Antoinette: The Journey Study Guide

Marie Antoinette: The Journey by Lady Antonia Fraser

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Plot Summary

Antoinette is the fifteenth child of the Austrian King and Queen. Her childhood is filled with instruction based on the probability that she is destined for a royal marriage to cement an alliance between countries and families. This happens to be the case when her older sister, pledged in marriage to the Dauphin of France, dies and leaves Antoinette to fill that role. She is soon married by proxy and makes the wedding trip to France, where she meets her young husband. She soon faces a serious problem in her marriage. For months, the marriage remains unconsummated because her husband, Louis, is apathetic about performing his "duty" to produce an heir to the throne. The marriage is eventually consummated to some degree but Antoinette continues to report to her mother that she isn't yet pregnant. Louis, apparently after a heart-to-heart talk with Antoinette's brother, finally completely performs his duty and Antoinette soon conceives.

The first child is a daughter and though there is some despair, there's also hope because it's now proven that Antoinette and Louis are fertile. They have a son soon after, but he is sickly and the entire country continues to worry about him. Another son is eventually born, this one more healthy and easing the country's worry on this front. When another daughter is born, Sophie, the prognosis is dim and the girl lives less than a year. The older son soon grows more ill with what is later diagnosed as spinal tuberculosis. His body is grossly deformed and he is ashamed to be seen by outsiders and later dies.

Prior to the birth of her first child, Antoinette and Louis learn that his grandfather, the king, has fallen ill with smallpox. The king dies, leaving Louis to take the throne with Antoinette as queen. As queen, Antoinette becomes only vaguely interested in the politics of the time. She complains to her brother that she has little influence over the king. She begins an affair with a military man named Fersen that lasts for the coming years. With little to hold her interest, Antoinette looks for other diversions. Early on, she develops a taste for gambling but later gives that up, devoting most of her time to her children and her passion for interior decorating.

The excesses of the lives of the royal family incite the French people to violence. As the common people face serious deprivations, the royalty buy expensive clothes and jewels and participate in elaborate and costly events. This results in an outright revolt in which Louis, Antoinette and their two children are taken captive. They are held for a time and attempt a single escape but that effort is thwarted. Eventually, Louis is taken to court to answer for his crimes and his execution is ordered.

Antoinette goes into mourning for her loss but spends all her time trying to better the situation for her children. She has limited success though both outlive her. She is soon sentenced to beheading herself and dies at the guillotine. Her surviving son dies at age ten of the same disease that had taken his brother's life. The sole survivor, Antoinette's daughter, lives to age seventy-two and recalls those tumultuous years prior to her mother's death.



Part 1, Madame Antoine

Part 1, Madame Antoine Summary and Analysis

In chapter one, "A Small Archduchess," Maria Antonia Josepha Joanna, daughter of Maria Teresa who is "Queen of Hungary by inheritance and Empress of the Holy Roman Empire by marriage," is born the fifteenth child of the family. Her mother continues running the affairs of the country while she is in labor and is "signing papers from her bed" soon after the birth. The baby's father, Emperor Francis Stephen, announces the arrival of the daughter because Teresa had put a stop to the practice of having visitors in the room during the delivery. The baby would become known as Antoine during her years in her mother's court but becomes known later as Marie Antoinette when she moves to France. By the time Antoinette is six months old, there is political upheaval in Europe with dramatic changes in national alliances. Teresa knows that her children hold the key to creating strong allies through marriage. Though among the youngest of the family, Antoinette will become valuable "as a piece on her mother's chessboard." From birth, her care is taken over by Constance Weber who serves as wet nurse.

In chapter two, "Born to Obey," Antoinette and her siblings are encouraged to befriend "ordinary children in their everyday lives," according to Joseph Weber, the son of Antoinette's wet nurse. Joseph is formally Antoinette's "foster brother" and the two grow up very close. She is soon caught up in music and, along with her siblings, often performs by singing. The author notes that there's a popular rumor that Mozart, a guest at the palace, had declared that he would marry Antoinette. From an early age, Antoinette and her sisters are taught to be graceful, a must for events in later years when they will certainly be in the limelight. The other important lessons are to be "docile and obedient." It's noted that her mother is not exactly the epitome of these traits.

Teresa has a favorite among the large family, the daughter Marie Christine. The mother and daughter share a birthday and this could have been a factor. Antoinette and her older sister by four years, Carolina, are very close. Antoinette's oldest brother, Joseph, marries Isabella of Parma, to create an alliance between Austria and France. Isabella has a daughter but dies in childbirth with her second child, another girl who also dies.

As Teresa and Stephen leave palace for Innsbruck to celebrate the marriage of another son, Leopold, Stephen rushes back and clings to Antoinette. Years later she says that she believes he had a "presentiment" of his death. He suffers a stroke at Innsbruck and dies. Her mother never recovers from the shock and wears mourning clothes for the rest of her life.

In chapter three, Greatness, Teresa catches smallpox but recovers. Antoinette's older sister Josepha also contracts the disease, and she dies. Elizabeth, considered beautiful, survives her case of the disease but is horribly disfigured. It's noted that the scars are so severe that she's effectively "eliminated from the European marriage market." Antoinette had the disease as a small child but escaped scarring and remains immune.



With these dramatic changes in the family's situation, Antoinette is soon destined for marriage to the French heir to the throne.

In chapter four, "Sending an Angel," Antoinette goes through the complicated process of the bridal journey. She's married by proxy before beginning the trip so that she is known as the wife of the heir to the French Throne, the "Dauphine," during the trip. Her brother, Ferdinand, stands in for the bridegroom during the ceremony which is held at the Church of the Augustine Friars. The etiquette is difficult to arrange as dignitaries from the two countries collide. Carolina, now married in Naples, is concerned about her sister and the two correspond.

Antoinette is very popular among her servants and is said to greatly enjoy the company of children. It's noted that she and her brother, Joseph, spent an evening in the company of Joseph's surviving daughter and that the child died three weeks later, leaving Joseph heartbroken. Antoinette is presented a list by her mother of things she is to do and to avoid doing during her trip to France and then as the young princess, or Dauphine. Among these instructions is that she's not to become too close to the servants, or "underlings." She's also reminded that she's being watched by everyone and that she must not do anything that could create a scandal. Finally, Teresa implores her daughter to be so good that the French people will believe that Teresa has "sent them an angel."

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It's noted that the archduchesses - Antoinette and all her sisters - are important in that they could be married off to create allies for their home country. An interesting fact is that their age is important only in the fact that it makes them more suitable for some particular member of foreign nobility. In the words of the author, "one princess is much like another when it came to dynastic alliances." With the exception of those who die young, all Antoinette's older sisters, with two notable exceptions, are bound for this kind of marriage. The oldest daughter, Marianne, is disabled though the extent of this disability is never revealed. Another of her sisters manages to marry for love.

Antoinette is said to look back on her childhood from the perspective of her adult life in France with longing for the idyllic setting and events. It's noted that this could be a sign of the young Antoinette's longing for home and familiar people and places, though her childhood actually lacks in many ways. Her mother is very busy and seldom has time for anything more than merely critiquing her children. Antoinette later tells someone that she'd always feared her mother.

It's noted that Antoinette's education is lacking, partly because of poor efforts on the part of her teachers though some of her contemporaries say that she flits from one conversation to another "like a grasshopper." It seems likely that one tutor has her trace writing and even drawings to show to her mother as examples of her work.

Teresa's interest in Antoinette is motherly and concerned on the surface though she also realizes that there's a great deal of pressure on the young princess to represent her



country well and to produce an heir to the French throne. Teresa will be so involved with her daughter's life in France that she has a spy to make reports and knows each time her daughter has her period. However, this doesn't seem to be only meddling in her daughter's life because the Teresa writes to Antoinette's future grandfather, the King of France, and asks that he "act as a father" to Antoinette.

The members of these royal families have little privacy, though it seems the French court is much more open than Antoinette's childhood home. Almost all aspects of the royal families' lives are open to scrutiny. It's a matter of historical record, for example, that in February of 1770, Antoinette begins her period for the first time. Perhaps in an effort at modesty, the event is referred to by Teresa and her daughters as the arrival of "Generale Krottendorf."



Part 2, The Dauphine

Part 2, The Dauphine Summary and Analysis

In chapter five, "France's Happiness," the trip begins. Her last night on German soil is spent at Schuttern. The following day, in a complicated ritual near Compiègne, made more so by the clash of the dignitaries of the two countries, Antoinette is handed over to the French. She is not allowed to take anything with her, including her beloved pug Mops and her clothing. The stripping of the foreign influence is symbolic. She meets many people, including Prince Luis de Rohan who has a reputation as a womanizer and as a gossip about the sexual failings of others.

The young Dauphin, Louis XVI, is very fond of his aunts who are in attendance as the wedding is being prepared. The meetings are all very formal until just before Antoinette begins preparing for the ceremony and has the opportunity to meet her two young sisters-in-law, Clothilde and Elisabeth. She also has two brothers-in-law: Louis Xavier, who is almost the same age as Antoinette at fourteen; and Charles Artois, who is two years younger. It's noted that Louis XVI, who has not yet taken the throne, is obese and clumsy. This is especially evident when Antoinette dances and exhibits her natural grace and dexterity. However, when the young married couple signs the marriage contract, Louis's handwriting is flowing while Antoinette's is smudged and she hardly has room for the "ette" at the end of her name. At the end of the ceremony, Antoinette and Louis are put to bed by his grandfather and a lady-in-waiting. There is the expectation that they will have sex immediately to produce an heir as soon as possible, but the event doesn't occur.

In chapter six, "In Front of the Whole World," Antoinette soon learns that where access to her mother's court had been limited to nobles, anyone who wants can enter into the French court at Versailles. While there are a few private aspects of life, the people watch a great deal of the activities of the royalty, including meal times. Antoinette finds eating in front of people uncomfortable and eats little. She also hates the use of rouge, which fashion dictates is to be applied in a concise circle on the cheeks, though she gives in to the fashion of the day. It's noted that her brother Joseph, visiting in France, mocks her for the fashion but she continues the practice because it is a French practice. This is one piece of evidence of her loyalty to her new country.

The couple have still not consummated the marriage and it becomes a cause of concern. Antoinette is vigorously opposed to the presence of the king's consort at the palace and refuses to acknowledge her, a point that becomes an issue because it indicates her disapproval of the king's actions. She receives support from the king's daughters, Louis's aunts.

In chapter seven, "Strange Behaviour," Antoinette befriends the Comtesse de Noailles who holds dances in her apartment prior to the dour Catholic Lent. Antoinette refers to her as "Madame Etiquette," and Noailles is destined to become among Antoinette's



closest friends and the author gives little credence to rumors that their friendship was of a sexual nature. Antoinette also makes friends with the Princesse de Lamballe, who is a descendant of King Louis XIV. There is a brief problem with Lamballe but eventually her "respectability" is maintained. Antoinette will later be criticized by the Abbe de Vermond who says that Antoinette's friends are lacking in quality, a criticism she ignores. A year passes and Antoinette's marriage has still not been consummated. She receives a letter from her mother bemoaning the fact that Antoinette, at fifteen, has "lost her bloom" and has little to offer her husband other than her willingness to please. Antoinette's situation grows more desperate when it seems there might be others who produce an heir to the throne before she, but the first child is born dead and none follow though there are boasts on one front of a couple having sex multiple times nightly. Antoinette, who makes it a point to gather information on these events, tells her mother that it's physically impossible for the young man in question to be performing so prolifically.

In chapter eight, "Love of a People," Antoinette finds ways to spend more time with her husband, hoping that they can have a normal social life even though their marriage bed remains virginal. Teresa's spy, a man named Count Mercy, tells Teresa that the people love Antoinette and that in their eyes Louis is little more than "an accessory." As Louis gains confidence and becomes more at ease in his role at court, he consummates the marriage, though it's noted as "some kind of physical union." Teresa is quickly notified by Antoinette herself and Antoinette goes with Louis to tell his grandfather. At one point, Antoinette tells Louis that she fears her young sister-in-law, the Comtesse d'Artois, would become pregnant before Antoinette and Louis's reply is to ask Antoinette if she loves him. She assures him that she both loves and respects him and "tender caresses follow." In fact, Antoinette's position in court is threatened by the fact that the young Comtesse, who is named Therese, is married to Louis's younger brother, Charles Arois.

In 1774, a Swedish nobleman named Count Axe Ferson appears in the Versailles court and writes of meeting Antoinette at a masked ball, though he talks to her for some time before her identity is revealed and she's surrounded by others. At the end of April, Louis's grandfather collapses while on a hunting trip to the Grand Trianon. He is brought back to Versailles but soon develops sores and it's evident that he has smallpox. His daughters nurse him, despite the danger of contracting the disease themselves. There's then the question of what to do with the king's mistress. His spiritual advisers realize that they must urge him to repent or face eternal damnation, and do so. He realizes that he must do as they say and sends his mistress away. On May 10, the king dies and Antoinette and Louis become rulers of France. Both fall to their knees and pray, with Antoinette pleading for guidance, saying that they are too young to rule.

There's no doubt that Antoinette is somewhat naïve upon her arrival in France. The King is grandfather of Antoinette's young husband and Antoinette has been instructed on many of the people she'll meet in the French court. When she sees an unfamiliar woman, she asks about her. She is told only the woman's name and that she "gives pleasure to the king." Antoinette, misunderstanding, says that she believes she will be a rival of the woman because she also wants to "give pleasure to the king." It should be



noted that Antoinette has been forced to learn French in order to communicate in this new country and that she may have misunderstood the words but more likely misunderstood the meaning.

There is a great deal of pomp involved with the everyday activities of the royal families. For example, Antoinette doesn't dress herself. Her clothes are handed to a particular person who then hands them off to a member of the lesser royal class who has the honor of dressing her that day. On one occasion, Antoinette is naked and waiting for her clothing when a higher-ranking woman enters the room and is therefore given the honor of dressing her. While the women are handing the clothing back and forth, Antoinette is shivering and wrapping her arms around herself for warmth, and is said to have laughed and declared the entire situation "ridiculous."

It's noted that Antoinette's life is so public that she probably has little opportunity to develop close friendships after her move to France. However difficult it may be, the human tendency to develop a network of close friends is soon at work in Antoinette's life. Not only is it human nature to need friends, it's necessary that a woman in her position have a support network. This seems especially true in the case of Antoinette who takes the throne at a very early age and realizes her own inadequacies with regard to her ability to rule a country.

Antoinette receives a letter from her mother during the time her marriage is not yet consummated while other marriages are threatening her own standing in the French court. In this letter, Teresa refers to Antoinette's "dangerous situation." Teresa says that Antoinette doesn't understand the danger or that perhaps she doesn't care. This berating by her mother follows other letters in which she's urged to seduce Louis. It seems possible that Louis hasn't consummated the marriage, at least partly because he's intimidated by Antoinette. It's noted that Louis is overweight and has inherited none of his grandfather's good looks. Over time, as the situation garners more attention, Louis and Antoinette are subjected to a visit by a doctor who talks to them about their need to consummate the marriage. It's at one point suggested that Louis may have a condition in which the foreskin is shortened, making an erection painful, but that the solution to this is circumcision and that the solution would be overly traumatic on the young Dauphin. In the end, nothing official is done and the situation apparently resolves itself.



The Queen Consort

The Queen Consort Summary and Analysis

In chapter nine, "In Truth a Goddess," Antoinette takes on the role of Queen of France and many compare her to a goddess or nymph. One child at court later relates the story of seeing Antoinette as a gentle, kind woman who is willing to play with the children until the moment a foreign ambassador arrives, at which time she becomes "strikingly dignified." One of the first acts of Louis as the new king is to eliminate the presence of his grandfather's consort, an act that many attribute to Antoinette though she had no need to try to influence her husband on this front. It's soon clear that Louis prefers the advice of his aunts to that of his wife. There's no official role for Antoinette in the French rule. If she were to give birth to an heir who inherited the throne, she would be more officially recognized than she is as queen. Almost immediately there's a conflict as Antoinette's brother, Joseph, wants Antoinette to exert a German influence in France while Teresa's spy, Count Mercy, urges Antoinette to wait for any time Louis asks her advice.

Antoinette has a huge honeycomb of servants and she takes a controversial step by naming the Princesse de Lamballe "overall Superintendent of the Household," a position of significant power that had been abolished years earlier because of that power. Antoinette soon tires of Lamballe's company but can't take back the position. Antoinette is drawn to Yolande de Polignac who some believe Antoinette feels romantically drawn to though not to the degree of sexual consummation.

In 1775, Antoinette's sister-in-law becomes pregnant. Antoinette's younger brother Max visits and commits a series of blunders that create an unhappy situation for all. Her sister-in-law gives birth to a healthy son, a situation that makes Antoinette's hold on the throne tenuous and prompts outcries from the people who demand that Antoinette produce an heir. At one point, Teresa seems to indicate that Antoinette should take a lover in order to become pregnant.

In chapter ten, "An Unhappy Woman," Antoinette and Louis seem to grow more distant from each other. She develops a tendency toward entertainment that includes gambling, and to spend a great deal of time in the company of people she finds interesting, even men. Despite the rumors of her entertainment being little more than orgies, Antoinette remains chaste, in the words of her brother Joseph. Louis remains outwardly tolerant of her efforts to entertain herself. As lies of Antoinette's exploits circulate, Louis is angry and wants to lash out at those responsible. When Teresa expresses anger, Antoinette urges that her mother remember that the few vocal people of France are not representative of the country's population.

The situation in the country is becoming desperate. There's a large debt owed by the crown and the people are literally starving. Meanwhile, France becomes embroiled in America's quest for independence. About this time, Joseph arrives for a visit. He is



tender toward Antoinette and later claims her as his favorite sister but leaves her with a list of instructions to correct what he sees as shortcomings, including the fact that she seems "cold and bored" toward Louis. In addition, he points out to her that she has to find a role in life and that she's little more than a "companion" to the King of France. He also has private meetings with Louis and learns that Louis's version of sex with Antoinette does not include ejaculation. The extent of their talks is not revealed though Joseph tells his brother some of the details.

There are several family heirs to the throne by now and Louis seems indifferent to the fact that he hasn't produced a child but Antoinette realizes that these nephews will not serve as a continued alliance between Germany and France.

In chapter eleven, "You Shall be Mine," Antoinette realizes the difference in her husband's sexual advances. Mozart arrives in France, hoping to convince someone to provide an introduction to Antoinette in the hopes of gaining her patronage, but finds her inaccessible due to her pregnancy. Fersen reappears on the scene but is soon bound for a military career in America. Antoinette goes into labor and has a difficult time. The child is a girl and she's named Marie Theresa Charlotte in honor of her godparents. The fact that it's a girl is disappointing, though Antoinette says that a son would have immediately become the property of the state. This girl, on the other hand, insignificant in that she can't inherit the throne, is Antoinette's. The labor is difficult, probably owing at least partly to the lack of appropriate care, and Antoinette faints.

In April of 1779, Antoinette falls ill with measles and spends some time confined though during this separation from Louis, he makes his way to her courtyard and the two talk privately, evidence of the fact that he misses her and that the two have grown closer since the birth of their daughter.

In chapter twelve, "Fulfilling Their Wishes," Antoinette takes the lead in a fashion revolution and seldom wears her heavy, ornate gowns, choosing simple white muslin instead. There becomes pressure for Louis to take a mistress - an official position at court that serves as a formal point of contact to the king for some people. He refuses and makes the decision clear and public, saying that he won't repeat the mistakes of some former regimes. In 1780, Teresa falls ill and dies. Louis receives the news and sends it to Antoinette by way of her confidential adviser, a man named Vermond. The death of Teresa ends the spying of County Mercy. When Joseph takes the throne, he and Antoinette become more equal than she and her mother could ever have been. Antoinette is soon pregnant again and delivers a healthy son who is immediately whisked away by the royal governess, Princess du Guemene.

The situation in the country is such that many people are hungry, a fact that effects Antoinette's actions in many situations. When a young orphan boy is nearly trampled by the horse drawing her carriage, Antoinette takes him in to be raised at the palace and provides money for the upkeep of the family. It's noted that this is the kind of action that

keeps Antoinette popular with the people even when the political and social situations are deteriorating.

Antoinette and all the members of the royal household - down to the servants - are extremely liberal in spending habits. It's noted that Antoinette is given a large clothing allowance but overspends that regularly. The extremes are such that a new length of material is used every day for covering a basket used in the morning's clothing selection. While this is a very minor expense, it's used as an example of the fact that even the people serving Antoinette are simply unwilling to change their extravagant habits. This becomes a great source of trouble for the country that will later erupt in civil war.



Queen and Mother

Queen and Mother Summary and Analysis

In chapter thirteen, "The Flowers of the Crown," much of the world rejoices at the news of the arrival of a dauphin. Joseph, who had declared that he was too old for a young man's joy, admits to being overcome by emotion. Louis's brothers are aware that the birth of this son means their own are pushed another step from the possibility of inheriting the throne. Louis is the epitome of a proud father, finding ways to introduce the topic of his son into many conversations.

In chapter fourteen, "Acquisitions," Antoinette reports a new pregnancy. There is some conjecture that her relationship with Fersen is sexual but Louis never questions the parentage of the new pregnancy, indicating that he is also spending time with the queen. Antoinette and Louis realize the necessity of producing another heir, especially considering that the young Dauphin's health continues to deteriorate. The child is born on Easter Sunday, May 27, 1785. Because of the Easter festivities, the relative ease of the birth and the fact that the child is apparently born earlier than expected, there are few to watch the delivery. It's a boy and he seems healthy. He is immediately taken away by the governess.

In chapter fifteen, "Arrest the Cardinal," there's a complicated issue involving an expensive and elaborate diamond necklace that is being hawked by a jeweler. Though Antoinette has purchased lots of jewelry in the past, she is now more focused on her children and has a new passion for interior decorating. She declines to buy the necklace and the jewelers reduce the price but she stands firm. The necklace is eventually purchased on her behalf and there is an immediate uproar over what is apparently a misunderstanding that ends with a trial and a cardinal being stripped of his office.

In 1785, Antoinette celebrates her thirtieth birthday and adopts a more severe mode of dress. She has also gained some weight which can partly be attributed to a new pregnancy. The child is a girl, named Sophie, but it's noted that she seems small and unhealthy. Meanwhile Antoinette and Louis worry about their oldest son, the young Dauphin, who continues to battle illness and who seems likely to die.

In chapter sixteen, "Madame Deficit," Antoinette's popularity continues to wane as Louis tries to find a way out of the country's desperate financial situation. Antoinette's spending is somewhat curtailed but she continues to be berated for her excesses so that she is nicknamed "Madame Excess." The country is in continued upheaval and Antoinette becomes interested in particular aspects of government, finding herself looking for ways to influence policy. As Louis falls into a depression, Antoinette seems to become more important in the government and her priorities change as she focuses more on her family. There is a change in the head of finances and additional changes in the government. The youngest child, Sophie, continues to exhibit a slow development and then, in seizures prompted by the fever of teething, dies. By early in the year 1788,



most of those charged with caring for the young Dauphin accept that he's not going to survive childhood though Antoinette seems to continue to hold to hope that he will live. He probably has tuberculosis of the spine and is moved to the chateau at Meudon. As his spine bends and his shoulders become increasingly irregular, he hates to be seen.

In chapter seventeen, "Close to Shipwreck," Antoinette's health takes a downturn as does her morale. She feels "doomed." She continues to have a relationship with Fersen though it's probably now more romantic in nature without the sexual interludes. The country's situation continues to worsen and Antoinette writes to Mercy, saying that there's no way France can come to Austria's aid in a brewing battle. There's a riot in Paris and just days later Louis and Antoinette present themselves in a governmental meeting with a newly-organized system. The young Dauphine is obviously nearing the end of his life and dies a short time later. Both Louis and Antoinette fall into despair.

In chapter eighteen, the stories about Antoinette flourish and the people seek ways to arm themselves, citing the injustices imposed upon them by the crown. When news of new riots reach the palace, Antoinette and Louis urge many of the nobles to flee. Among those who leave are Louis's younger brother and his children. The initial reason for the attack that occurs on the palace is to find food but that changes and the people decide they want to force Louis to go to Paris. The people demand to see Louis and Antoinette on the balcony and they oblige, though Antoinette fears for her life.

It's noted that Antoinette is raised to be several things and the first of these is obedient to her husband. It's this trait, taught so well in her childhood, that seems to keep Antoinette from trying to play a larger role in the French government. Though women are not recognized as rulers, there were others—including foreign princesses—who exerted significant influence in their governments. It seems that Antoinette is only able to begin her search for this role when her husband the king is less of a driving force.

While Antoinette receives much of the credit for the excessive lifestyle of the royal family, the reader should remember that she has control of only a fraction of the people who are actually doing the spending. Her servants have become accustomed to excesses and are likely doing nothing to try to conserve money. The traditions of the time are such that there are no real options to trim either her spending or the number of servants. More importantly, Louis's brothers, his aunts and his extended family are creating a huge drain on the country's coffers.

The reason Antoinette and Louis don't leave the country when the reports of the attacks arise are complex. Louis doesn't want to be "a fugitive king." It seems that he may really believe that he has the ability to regain his throne. Another point is that Antoinette feels it is her duty to remain with her husband and she can't bring herself to leave him in this desperate situation. Interestingly, it's Antoinette who becomes the target of jealousy by the French people. As the author notes, she is the "scapegoat" for all their hatred of the royal families who are spending in excess while the people starve.



The Austrian Woman

The Austrian Woman Summary and Analysis

In chapter nineteen, "Her Majesty the Prisoner," Antoinette and Louis are held at the palace at Tuileries. She notes that the king who is held prisoner is destined to die but isn't entirely certain in the beginning whether they are actually prisoners. She plans to lead a "secluded life" and to remain as far removed from politics and the social arena as possible. The extended household is also ensconced at Tuileries and life takes on a strange sort of normalcy with Antoinette attending a few quiet gatherings initially. The royal family has several outings and Antoinette admonishes the young Dauphin to remember the foundlings they see at a hospital set aside for the orphans. That summer, the family goes to the traditional summer home to escape the stifling heat of the city. There is some talk of fleeing but the opportunities pass by.

In chapter twenty, "Great Hopes," Louis's two surviving aunts plan to leave for Rome but are delayed for some time as the new government debates whether to allow them to go. As threats against Antoinette mount, she feels increasingly that the royal family has paid its dues for any faults. Her daughter, unable to take the throne in any situation, isn't threatened at all though the young Dauphine's life is as endangered as those of his parents. Foreign powers, including her brother Leopold, decline to intervene, especially when Louis and Antoinette are in danger. Leopold also urges Antoinette to give up any ideas of fleeing. Antoinette and Louis urge many to leave, including her foster brother, Joseph Weber. Plans then evolve for a rescue with Fersen at the heart of the plan.

In chapter twenty-one, "Departure at Midnight," Antoinette and Louis attempt to escape with the Dauphin. They manage to leave Tuileries without incident and their departure isn't discovered until the following morning. Traveling initially with Fersen, they make their way across the country, keeping a reasonable pace but slowed by the problems typical of travel of the day, including a broken harness. They are captured and forced to return to Tuileries and Louis notes that he spends a total of five nights outside Tuileries over the entire course of the year.

In chapter twenty-two, "Up to the Emperor," the new dominating government force seems to work at trying to figure a way to reconcile the presence of a monarch in the vision of the new government. There's then an inauguration in which he is granted limited powers. The country's new constitution doesn't even mention Antoinette. The cries of "Long Live the King" are conditioned by "If he be honest." At this time, Antoinette requests that Princesse de Lamballe return to her side and she complies. Fersen, aided by the Swedish King, works on a new rescue attempt but the two men can't come to an agreement.

In chapter twenty-three, "Violence and Rage," Antoinette writes to her family that Austria must not give any appearance of interfering. She says that the French won't accept foreign intervention. Her brother, Leopold dies and the throne is turned over to his son.



A mob attacks and Antoinette escapes through a secret passage with the children. On an August day there are rumors of another attack and mobs screaming for the elimination of the position of king. Two opposing factions emerge with some offering protection to the royal family and others seeking their demise. The king is then officially suspended from his position.

In chapter twenty-four, "The Tower," there are extensive guards over the royal family. Louis is not longer addressed as king. The nobility are massacred across the country though the royal family doesn't know this at the time. The Princesse de Lamballe is beheaded and the head taken to Antoinette's room though she faints before she is exposed to the full horror. That winter, Louis is taken to the country's convention to answer charges. He is sentenced to death. There is silence the morning of the execution until the cries of approval that the king has died.

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Antoinette becomes the epitome of all the excesses of the royal family and she is absolutely the most hated figure in the country as the new government takes over. The situation is so dire that it's noted that Antoinette would not be safe if she were released because the mobs would kill her. Meanwhile, Louis is being hit with unflattering nicknames that make a point of his own excess. The imprisonment of Antoinette has a detrimental impact on her appearance and her health and her hair turns a shocking shade of white. She seems to realize that she's doomed and spends all her time working at arranging some sort of happy life for the Dauphin.



Widow Capet

Widow Capet Summary and Analysis

In chapter twenty-five, "Unfortunate Princess," the situation for Antoinette and her children becomes more bearable after the death of Louis. The people are faced with an uncomfortable decision. There's no history of a queen being executed, regardless of the crimes of her husband. Some want to see her brought to trial while others seem to want exile. Some offer the chance for escape but Antoinette's only chance is to escape alone and she continues to refuse to leave her children behind. The Pope makes the controversial announcement that Louis was martyred for his religion. The young Dauphin, no longer Dauphin but now referred to as Louis Charles, shows the signs of prolonged captivity. He is soon separated from his mother and cries for her at night, cries that Antoinette can hear from her own room. He is soon beaten by his jailers, given copious amounts of wine and taught the rough language of the common people. Antoinette is then moved to the Concierge where there are many other prisoners, including some held because of their faith. There are rumors of escape attempts though it's noted that no one who could really have managed this is allowed near Antoinette.

In chapter twenty-one, "The Head of Antoinette," Louis Charles is referred to as Louis XVII by the royalists who hold hope that the throne and a kingly ruler will be reinstated. Antoinette is found to be "responsible" for Louis's crimes and is sentenced to death. There is the question of a suitable hostage to ensure continued negotiations between the parties now seeking complete control of the government, but that those holding Antoinette and Louis Charles feel that the boy is sufficient as a hostage.

Antoinette is taken to court, her first "public appearance" since she was taken captive. Though her appearance is greatly changed, she remains dignified. Most of the witnesses against her simply repeat gossip and rumors. At one point she's accused of being involved in an incestuous relationship with her son, the only charge that causes her to lose her temper and to lash out at her captors. Because there is no real precedence for the trial and execution of a queen - or former queen in this case - the case against her necessarily increases in intensity. It seems that her accusers want to ensure that she is seen completely guilty of the crimes in order to overcome the precedent of never trying a queen. Toward this end, the accusers seek to make it seem that Antoinette held great sway over Louis and his actions. In the summation, her crimes are listed only as colluding with foreign governments, including those headed by her own brothers. She is condemned to death. She writes to her children, urging them to care for each other and to remember Louis's admonition prior to being taken to his own execution that they never try to avenge the deaths of their parents.

Her hands are ruthlessly bound behind her back and she's taken to the guillotine in an "everyday" dress of white. At twelve fifteen on October 16, 1793, Antoinette is beheaded. Those who witness the event say she is courageous till the end though some see her manner as "audacious and insolent."



In chapter twenty-seven, the "Epilogue," Antoinette is buried in a common graveyard near Louis. Fersen receives the news and goes into mourning, saying that she had been "the model of queens and of women." Ferson himself will be killed brutally by a mob seventeen years in the future. Antoinette's sister, Carolina, is saddened by the news of her sister's death and takes her children to mass to pray for Antoinette's soul. Carolina eventually has to accept the marriage of one of her daughters to a man who voted for the death penalty for Louis. Carolina's daughter would eventually become another Queen of France. Louis Charles dies a few years later at the age of ten and his sister, Marie Therese, doesn't see him again before his death. At seventeen, she is finally freed but lives an unhappy life with a marriage that apparently remains unconsummated. Years later, Marie Therese is referred to by some as "majesty" because of her role as the last—and very brief—Queen of France. She is eventually exiled and lives to be seventy-two. Over the years there are several who claim to be Louis Charles though the author notes that DNA testing has proved that Louis Charles did die in the tower in France at age ten.

It's noted that the French who decide that Antoinette is to be executed hold her in disregard at least partly because of their attitudes toward women in general. This is interesting because there were women heavily involved in the revolution and those organizations are soon suppressed. It seems that the men who come quickly to power in this new regime are immediately allowing that power to ride rampant over the people, this time over the women.

The accusations against Antoinette are interesting in that there is a huge variety. For examples, she's questioned about her possession of several items, and one of them turns out to be locks of hair from her children and her husband. It's not indicated what crime her accusers believe to have been committed with the possession of these things.

The author notes that Antoinette's tragic death has a great deal to do with her popularity as a historical figure but says that Antoinette was an interesting person without that. Her demeanor was such that she never showed her distress in public. Though she may have been cited for poor behavioral choices, she really did nothing so outwardly horrible to justify the hatred and rumors that surrounded her. Finally, the author notes that she was merely plagued by bad luck and used as a pawn in the goals of many others.



Characters

Antoinette

The fifteenth child of Marie Teresa and Francis Stephen, she is named Marie Antoine at birth and adopts the "ette" upon her move to France. Antoinette is a pretty child but is greatly denied a loving relationship with her mother who takes on most of the duties of running the country. From an early age, she is taught obedience and grace, thought to be essential for a young girl destined to marry well in the royalty of the day. She is good-natured and her soft heart later captures the admiration of the people of France. However, she hasn't a great deal of interest in reading and writing and it's noted that she blots the letters of her name on her marriage certificate.

She is greatly taken with children and seems anxious to have children of her own, though her husband seems completely indifferent to her sexually. It's noted that the as the wife of the young heir to the French throne, Antoinette is virtually put on public display. While she eats little during the times she had extensive audiences, she is quite comfortable in the spotlight which further endears her to those who surround her. She has little in the way of a private life to the extent that her mother is notified each time she begins her period. She is very young when she marries the young heir to the throne but seems confident and graceful in her position. She is eventually hated by the people of France and is beheaded to meet the demands for her death.

Louis

Louis is the grandson of King Louis XV, King of France, and heir to the throne. Louis is obese and somewhat ungainly in both his appearance and his actions. He notes that Antoinette is very graceful when she dances, a trait he seems to admire and probably envies. He is studious and seems to enjoy learning. Though he has been raised to understand the importance of producing an heir to the throne, he chooses not to consummate his marriage on the wedding night as had been expected. This trend continues for some time. When he eventually has intercourse with his wife, he doesn't ejaculate. It takes a heart-to-heart talk from Antoinette's brother before Louis fully performs his full duty.

Though his first child is a daughter, Louis claims not to be disappointed. Louis seems tolerant of Antoinette even when he doesn't want to personally participate in her activities and events. Louis either doesn't know or doesn't object to his wife's affair with a suitor named Fersen, but he makes public his own decision not to take a mistress as is the expected norm of the day. Louis says that he doesn't want to repeat the mistakes of former regimes, apparently referring to his grandfather whose mistress had caused problems among the women of court.



King Louis XV

Grandfather of Louis who marries Antoinette, he is King of France upon Antoinette's marriage to the young Louis. The King is a widower and has a consort who creates problems in the court. Louis dies of smallpox.

Teresa

Queen of Austria and mother of Antoinette, Teresa is a driving force in the lives of her children. It's said that she continues to conduct the affairs of the country while in labor with Antoinette who is her fifteenth child. Teresa sees her children as little more than pawns in the goals of the country and is highly critical of Antoinette.

Joseph

The oldest surviving son of Teresa and Stephen, he takes the throne upon the death of his mother. Joseph sees Antoinette as a potential ally who can further the cause of Austria. Joseph travels to France to talk to Antoinette and Louis and urging them to create an heir.

Terese

The first born daughter of Antoinette and Louis. Terese is born after years of waiting and the fact that she is a girl is bound to be a disappointment. However, Antoinette says that it's a relief because a son would have been immediately borne away and would become the property of the state. Antoinette is able to keep Terese with her for some time and says that the daughter is hers alone.

Louis Charles

The second son born to Antoinette and Louis, he is born early which means that there are few people present at the birth. He is healthy and it's noted that his birth is important in that it creates a backup in case his older brother, the heir to the throne, doesn't live.

Fersen

The young military man who becomes Antoinette's lover after she takes the throne. Fersen is cavalier and obviously enamored with Antoinette. He is said to have gone into mourning when he learns of Antoinette's death.



The Young Dauphin

The oldest son of Antoinette and Louis, it's noted from early on that the young heir to the throne is not likely to survive though his mother continues to hold to hope of his recovery. He hates the fact that people see his deformed appearance. He dies early, leaving his brother to inherit the throne.

Sophia

The youngest daughter of Antoinette and Louis. The girl is born small and is quickly feared to be too unhealthy to survive. She does live until just short of her first birthday but then dies, apparently from seizures caused by teething. Her death hits Antoinette hard, especially considering the tenuous health of her oldest son at the time who also dies young.



Objects/Places

Innsbruck

Where Antoinette's father, Stephen, dies after suffering a massive stroke.

The Church of the Augustine Friars

Where Antoinette is married by proxy to the French heir to the throne prior to beginning her trip to France.

Compiegne

Where Antoinette is handed over to the French.

Dauphin

The male heir to the French throne.

Dauphine

The female heir to the French throne.

Versailles

The French court where the king and queen reside.

The Grand Trianon

Where Louis's grandfather, the King of France, is hunting when he collapses and later dies.

Meudon

Where the young Dauphin is moved after his health continually deteriorates and where he later dies and is held in state.



The Palace at the Tuileries

Where Antoinette and Louis are held after they are captured.

Conciergerie

Where Antoinette is held after Louis's execution.



Themes

The Life of Royalty

From her birth, Antoinette's life is filled with the education necessary to prepare her for a life of royalty. She is taught well to be graceful, obedient and to please those around her. These lessons are learned well and prepare her for her life as the wife of the heir to the throne of France. Antoinette is still little more than a child when she makes her bridal trip to France. On this trip, she is handed over to the French officials in a traditional ceremony. In this, Antoinette is stripped in front of a group of people and is then redressed in clothing provided by the French. It's noted that this might have been traumatic for the young woman except that she'd spent her life with little privacy and has, in fact, been prepared for this very kind of situation.

Much later, Antoinette is being ceremoniously dressed for the day when there erupts some confusion over the person to do the dressing. She's naked with a large audience and reportedly laughs, saying that the situation is "ridiculous." Antoinette is very graceful and dignified and with only a few minor exceptions, she spends her life exhibiting these qualities. Even when facing death and the guillotine, she remains controlled and dignified.

The Importance of Family

Antoinette forges a close relationship with a sister and later with her brother. Though her relationship with her mother is less-than favorable, she seems to desire her mother's love and affection. With this lack in her own childhood, Antoinette seems determined to avoid the same mistakes with her own children. When her first child is born, she keeps that daughter with her for some time, going so far as to nurse the child though it's known to be a contraceptive and is discouraged because it delays the birth of the next child which is a potential heir to the throne.

As is the tradition of the day, there are a number of paintings made of the royal family. A painting is commissioned of the family about the time of Sophie's birth with one of the children pointing to her in her cradle. Sophie dies before her first birthday and she is erased from the picture. The picture remains hanging in Antoinette's quarters until the death of the oldest son. At the point, Antoinette has the picture removed, saying that she can't stand to look at the constant reminder of the children she's lost. While Antoinette is being held prisoner, she admits to being afraid but that is far secondary to her fears for her children. At several points it seems possible that Antoinette could escape but she refuses to leave her children.



Coming of Age

The book follows Antoinette from her birth to her death. She is little more than a child when she is promised to Louis, heir to the throne of France. Antoinette matures physically, as is natural and necessary. This aging is noted in several ways, including the fact that she begins her period and comes of an age to have children. Antoinette is very young upon her marriage and has little interest in either the affairs of the country nor of the political wrangling and intrigues common to the time and place. Her mother wants desperately for Antoinette to exert her influence over the crown but Antoinette has little influence and no personal interest in exerting what little power she has for the good of her own country.

While Antoinette never becomes the driving force her mother had been, she does become more politically aware over the course of time and eventually does use her limited influence for specific causes that are important to her. For the most part, these are related to intervening on behalf of people who implore her for help. It's only years later that Antoinette begins to seek a way to make herself more politically aware and active. It seems likely that Antoinette would have soon become the force that her mother had been.

Style

Perspective

The story is written in third person from an omniscient point of view. The perspective is reasonable and acceptable considering that historical documents and historical research are used in the writing of the book. The reader who picks up the book expecting it to be a historically accurate story of the life of Marie Antoinette may find that the book lacks in the actual story line. While the book presents the life of Antoinette from her birth to her death, the story is about Antoinette's role in this historic time rather than focusing only on her life. For example, as the author tells about Antoinette's bridal trip across the country to the home of her husband, the author includes information about the country at the time and goes into some limited detail about other young brides who made similar bridal trips. These additional details are informative but seem to detract from the story about Antoinette.

The reader who is looking for a historically accurate account of the time period and of Antoinette's role in that time will likely be pleased with the book. Many books of this kind refer to the perspective of one or more of the important people. However, in this book, the author uses a completely unlimited and omniscient perspective. This allows the author to frequently refer to the outcome of a particular aspect of life. For example, when the author introduces Antoinette's siblings, it's pointed out that Josepha is just older than Antoinette with two siblings born between the time of Josepha's birth and Antoinette's. During this introduction, the author writes that Josepha will not live to adulthood. The author later details Josepha's death due to smallpox.

Tone

The book is written in a semi-formal tone. While the book does not hold the stilted formality of technical writing, the details are historically accurate and represent an overall view of the time period and of Antoinette's life during this time. This means that most readers will know before picking up the book that Antoinette is famous for having lost her head on the guillotine. With that somber end in mind, some readers may lose sight of Antoinette's natural tendency to love life. That's not to say that her life is happy because there are many things about her life that are distressing. She is married and sent from her home and family at a young age only to find that her husband cares nothing for sex with her and she remains a virgin and, more importantly, childless.

Her mother realizes the precarious position Antoinette is in and gives her daughter advice, urging her to seduce her husband into her bed. Antoinette is berated by her mother and this is bound to hurt her deeply. Despite these facts, she remains a good-natured young woman and it's noted that she is prone to kind-hearted deeds that require no thought on her part. When she finds a man injured, she is driven to stay with him until medical attention arrives and then to see that he's properly cared for. It's also



noted that she is a favorite with those who serve her and that she's sometimes chastised for becoming too friendly with the lower classes.

All the negative aspects of the story aside, the tone early in the book tends to be positive and filled with hope though the tone turns much darker as the book and Antoinette's life progresses. The language is also somewhat formal so that some parts of the book read more like a history book than a story of Antoinette's life.

Structure

The book is divided into twenty-seven chapters. The chapters are titled A Small Archduchess, Born to Obey, Greatness, Sending an Angel, France's Happiness, In Front of the Whole World, Strange Behavior, Love of a People, In Truth a Goddess, An Unhappy woman, You Shall be Mine, Fulfilling Their Wishes, The Flowers of the Crown, Acquisitions, Arrest the Cardinal, Madame Deficit, Close to Shipwreck, Hated Humbled and Mortified, Her Majesty the Prisoner, Great Hopes, Departure at Midnight, Up to the Emperor, Violence and Rage, The Tower, Unfortunate Princess and the Head of Antoinette.

The final chapter is the epilogue. Each chapter is focused on some aspect of Antoinette's life which is presented basically in chronological order. For example, the first chapter explains the circumstances of Antoinette's birth, including the fact that she was the fifteenth and final daughter of the family and her mother seems to barely be willing to take time out from her business affairs to deliver the child. The book is also divided into six parts. Part one is Madame Antoine which includes the first four chapters. Part two is The Dauphine which includes the next four chapters. Part three is Queen Consort and also includes four chapters. Part four is Queen and Mother and includes six chapters. Part five is The Austrian Woman and includes six chapters. The final part, the Widow Capet, includes the final three chapters.

The book includes many footnotes and these are explained in a separate section at the back of the book. The footnotes offer an array of information, such as the source for a particular statement or detail. There is also an index and a list of sources at the back of the book. The 2001 Random House version of the book includes six sets of pictures. These include historical paintings of Antoinette and her family, several drawings and depictions of important documents such as her wedding certificate and a cartoon of the day.

Quotes

"From the first Madame Antoine had her value, not as an individual, but as a piece on her mother's chessboard." Chapter 1, Page 13

"Once her daughters were married, the Empress greeted with indignation the news of the arrival each month of the 'Generale Krottendorf,' for such was the nickname give by her to her daughters' periods." Chapter 4, Page 45

"Essentially she was a royal package, sealed with the double-headed eagle of the Habsburgs and the fleur-de-lys of the Bourbons." Chapter 5, Page 57

"The nobility married young, their marriages being more or less arranged, and then lapsed gracefully into extramarital relationships, which were generally tolerated provided they were conducted in sufficiently elegant style. The polite expostulation of the Duc de Richelieu on finding his wife in bed with her love, expressed the mood; 'Just think, Madame, of the embarrassment if anyone but myself had discovered you.'" Chapter 6, Page 87

"'All this news,' wrote the Empress, 'which should fill me with contentment, is diminished by reflections on your dangerous situation, all the worse because you either don't understand the danger or don't wish to. You simply will not employ the necessary means to get yourself out of it.'" Chapter 7, Page 98

"Dear God, guide us and protect us. We are too young to reign." Chapter 8, Page 116

"At least the Queen always maintained a 'most submissive' attitude to her husband in public. But she was beginning to incarnate what Maria Teresa angrily called 'the spirit of dissipation' both by night and day; for the new Empress had lost none of the vitriol of her pen with the passing years." Chapter 10, Page 141

"Of course, Marie Antoinette let the public believe that she had more influence than she actually had, 'otherwise I would have still less.'" Chapter 13, Page 198

"In the eyes of Marie Antoinette, Fersen - with his ardour, his celebrated discretion, his foreign birth, which distanced him from court feuds, his charm that made Louis XVI also enjoy his company - was the ideal cavalier." Chapter 13, Page 206

"The boy whose birth had been saluted by his father to his mother with these triumphant words, 'Madame, you have fulfilled my wishes and those of France,' was dead, a 'decayed old man,' covered in sores, at the age of seven and a half." Chapter 17, Page 276

"It would not have been at all difficult to 'rescue' Louis XVI in the early summer 1790 or, indeed, for the King himself to have taken flight." Chapter 19, Page 311

"So the head of Antoinette, desired by Hebert, was cut off cleanly at twelve-fifteen on Wednesday, 16 October 1793, and exhibited to a joyous public." Chapter 26, Page 440

Topics for Discussion

Describe Antoinette's childhood. What are the focuses of her education? What is the role of her mother in the life of Antoinette and her siblings? Compare the role of Antoinette's mother in the governing of her country to Antoinette's role in the governing of France.

How does Antoinette come to be married to Louis? Describe their marriage. What are their lives like prior to taking the throne?

Describe how Antoinette and Louis come to take the throne. What are their reactions? What do Antoinette and Louis do immediately following the king's death? Why? What are their lives like after taking the throne.

How many children does Antoinette produce? List them. What are their fates? What is the significance of the order of the births of the children?

Describe Louis. What are the qualities he admires in Antoinette? Why does he admire these qualities? In what ways is Louis similar to Antoinette? In what ways is he different?

Describe Antoinette's relationship with her brother Joseph. What is Joseph's role in helping Antoinette become pregnant with her first child? What is Joseph's role in Antoinette's life after the death of their mother?

Describe the situation in France that prompts the arrest of Antoinette and Louis. What are their eventual fates? What are the charges lodged against Antoinette? What is unique in the fact that she's charged at all?