

## THE WARDROBE MISTRESS by Meghan Masterson

### Introduction:

It's Giselle Aubry's first time at court in Versailles. At sixteen, she is one of Marie Antoinette's newest undertirewomen, and in awe of the glamorous queen and her opulent palace life. But every few weeks she returns home to visit her family in Paris where rumors of revolution are growing stronger.

From her position working in the royal household, Giselle is poised to see both sides of the revolutionary tensions erupting throughout Paris. When her uncle, a retired member of the *secret du roi*, a spy ring that worked for the old King, Louis XV, suggests that she casually report the Queen's actions back to him as a game, she leaps at the chance. Spying seems like an adventure and an exciting way to privately support the revolution taking the countryside by storm.

But as the revolution continues to gain momentum, and Giselle grows closer to the Queen, becoming one of the few trusted servants, she finds herself dangerously torn. Violence is escalating; she must choose where her loyalty truly lies, or risk losing everything...maybe even her head.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1) Compare Giselle's life at court in Versailles with her life at home in Paris. How does each place influence her character?
- 2) Life at Versailles was filled with ritual. Which parts of courtly life did you enjoy reading about most? Which parts would you have changed if you were queen at the time?
- 3) Fashion plays a huge role in the novel, as it did in real life during the time period. Which scenes displayed this significance most for you?
- 4) Giselle's loyalties are torn as a member of the Third Estate, as well as a member of court in the queen's service. What would you have done in her place? Do you think she was naive to think that spying for her uncle was just a game?
- 5) Marie Antoinette is one of the most famous queens in history, but historians disagree on how culpable she was during the French Revolution for the state of her starving people. Media propaganda portrayed her as selfish and uncaring. Do you think she could have and should have done more? Do you think her status as a woman prevented her from doing more?
- 6) Giselle's relationship with Léon grows more complicated as the revolution gains strength. Do you think he handled Giselle's "betrayal" of helping the queen escape appropriately? Do you think he should have been more understanding?
- 7) Maximilien Robespierre is largely remembered for his role in what is now known as "the Reign of Terror" during the end of the French Revolution. Giselle and Leon feared his wrath. Which scenes demonstrated his growing control for you?

- 8) Giselle's uncle Pierre is an interesting character. It's clear that he used her as a pawn, but his motivations aren't as obvious. Do you think he used his background as a spy for what he thought was the greater good? Why or why not?
- 9) Despite having similar roles, both within Marie Antoinette's household and as spies for Giselle's uncle Pierre, Genevieve and Giselle have very different experiences of the French revolution. Which scenes demonstrated this most for you? Did you sympathize with Genevieve's greater revolutionary fervor?
- 10) Marie Antoinette and her family felt they had to flee Paris to save their lives, but many people saw this as abandoning the country they were meant to lead. Do you think they were right to attempt flight, or do you think they should have remained and tried to resolve the economic and political issues? Do you think they could have been successful?
- 11) Were you surprised by the author's portrayal of life in the tower after Marie Antoinette and her family were imprisoned? Did you expect the royal family to be treated better or worse?
- 12) What did you think of the ending? Which parts of Giselle's character changed the most throughout the years? Which parts stayed the same?