



1. In the Borgias' time, the Italian peninsula was composed of many different nations and city-states, all with different (and often competing) agendas and interests. Did the nature of the relationships between these different countries surprise you? Do you think Cesare was right that uniting the nations of Italy would have discouraged meddling by foreign powers? Was he simply power hungry or ahead of his time, or some combination of the two?
2. How do you think Rodrigo Borgia's manipulations inside the Church and greater Italy may have altered who his children ultimately became as people?
3. Discuss the portrayal of Lucrezia Borgia in this novel. Did you know anything about her going into this book? Did this characterization surprise you? Why or why not?
4. How did you feel about Cesare's decision not to save Juan from the assassins? Did that decision change how you viewed Cesare as a character, and if so, how?
5. How do you think life might have been different for Cesare if he had concentrated on the duties he was given as opposed to his jealousy toward his brother Juan?
6. While Maddalena Moretti is a fictional character in sea of real-life figures, she represents an amalgamation of real women of the time. Why do you think it was important to have her point of view juxtaposed with that of Cesare?
7. Girolamo Savonarola is a complicated historical figure—on the one hand fighting against the explosion of art, education, and innovation that defined the Renaissance, and on the other speaking out against corruption and trying to help the poor. Did you understand how Maddalena was drawn to him and his message? What would you have done in her place?

### *Discussion Questions*



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8. Do you think Maddalena was always this pious? Why do you think someone as religious as Maddalena gave in to her desire for Cesare Borgia?
9. To what degree is Maddalena complicit in Cesare's and the Borgia family's crimes?
10. How did your feelings toward Cesare change from the beginning of the book to the end, if at all?
11. What do you think is the best-case scenario life path from here for Maddalena, given the realities of Renaissance Italy? If you could choose a happily ever after for her, what would it be?
12. Discuss power as a major theme throughout the book. In what ways do you think power dictated key relationships (Maddalena and Cesare, Rodrigo and Cesare, Juan and Cesare, etc.)? Who do you think had the most power ultimately, and why?