



## A Kingdom to Claim

**Sian Ann Bessey**

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A local healer falls in love with a dashing nobleman in *A Kingdom to Claim*, Sian Ann Bessey's romantic epic set in medieval Wessex.

Aisley, who helps out with her sick sister, is upended when she loses her father and finds out that her brother betrayed the king, allying himself with the invading Vikings. Then Aisley meets Brecc, one of King Alfred's most trusted men, before the Saxon nation goes under attack. When Aisley's brother promises her in marriage to the Viking chief, she escapes with the help of a servant. Meanwhile, Brecc balances his loyalty to the crown with his love for Aisley. Their romance is endearing: the two are respectful to one another, matching each other's understated confidence.

Characterized by busy fight scenes and prose directed by morality, the novel focuses on how the God-fearing, mild-mannered king is pitted against his scheming enemies, who are prone to excessive taxation, and the savage "heathens," one of whom threatens Aisley's innocence. Gender role commentary factors in, too, with the fact that women are forced into disadvantaged roles decried, even as Aisley (who does not believe herself to be beautiful) is elevated to exceptional heights, disguising herself as a man to escape the expectations of others. The book's other women are more representative of the strictures of the day: Aisley's mother, though she teaches Aisley the art of herbal healing, is feminine and opportunistic, while Aisley's prettier sister is more into members of the opposite sex and attending dances than she is concerned with politics.

A QR code leads to an audio pronunciation guide and a glossary for clarity in the grand historical novel *A Kingdom to Claim*, in which two young lovers fight to save their kingdom.

STEPHANIE MARRIE (July / August 2024)

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