

THE CHOICE OF THE HOST

By Megan Lovar

A forbidden choice in Elizabethan England is one we must make every day. Lucy Underwood-Healy inspires us to make this choice through her novel, *The Guest of Night*. In it, three teens struggle to choose Christ in a time of persecution. Hugh and Bridget are Catholic, and Stephen is Protestant. Though they are friends with Stephen, Hugh and Bridget know that their faith must come first. Yet Stephen quickly becomes mixed up in Catholic secrets. Hugh, Bridget, and Stephen seek to discover the line between trust and treachery, between faith and friendship, and between courage and fear. *The Guest of Night* gives the reader an intimate perspective on this historical period, a time when prudence, courage, and faith must be practiced at all costs.

Hugh and Stephen's friendship is one of tight-lipped conversations and confusing tension, but it expresses a certain struggle which is not studied in a history class. Hugh is Catholic, fiercely, secretly, and sometimes rashly, as can be expected of a sixteen-year-old. Stephen is the son of the local Protestant magistrate, and is a quiet, curious boy who doesn't yet want to think about choosing a side. Hugh and Stephen's struggle to discern the boundaries of faith and friendship is a recurring theme throughout the novel. Their faith ordains that they should be enemies, yet they find themselves relying on each other. Religious conflicts abound in our time as well, though less severe. While faith must take precedence, even difficult relationships can lead us closer to Christ. *The Guest of Night* teaches the power of an extended hand of friendship.

The dark night of fear abounds in Elizabethan England. For Hugh, Bridget, their families, and other Catholics in that time, fear is the reality of their lives. Hugh looks up to Fr. Richard Lister, who risks his life every day to bring Scripture and Sacraments to English Catholics. "Choose your battles," Richard tells Hugh. "And when you have, fight them through" (274). Hugh takes these words to heart. When he and Bridget undertake the dangerous task of

distributing “seditious” books, it is clear that Hugh has chosen his battle. How can he sit by when other Catholics, like Edmund Campion, are being martyred for their faith? Hugh and Bridget’s refusal to stand by when others are persecuted gives the reader a glimpse of the courage required in that time. Hugh and Bridget serve to inspire courage in the reader, but also warn of the danger of courage becoming rash.

The choice between courage and fear, Catholics and Protestants, friendship and treachery, comes down to a single whisper of a question: will you choose Christ? The Brantons and the Listers are presented this question every day, with the threat of death looming over them. Yet Christ desires to show Himself to all, as exemplified in Stephen’s struggle. Desperate to understand the Eucharist, he says to Hugh: “Suppose it were true...it would be blasphemy Hugh” (80). Hugh’s reply to Stephen reveals his devotion to Christ, and the reason for his courage. He says quietly: “That is the depth of Christ’s humility... it is how much he craves our closeness” (81). Hugh’s words reveal what it means to be Catholic, both in his time and even now. When the world seems upside-down, Hugh reminds us that Christ has already turned the world on its head by becoming Bread for us. *The Guest of Night* is a call to put Christ first in our hearts.

In *The Guest of Night*, Lucy Underwood-Healy shows that choosing Christ means choosing faith *and* friendship, and choosing courage *over* fear. By unveiling the nature of life in Elizabethan England, Underwood-Healy demonstrates the subtle workings of grace even through dark and dangerous times. Dire circumstances in England reveal a bleak path of suffering for Catholics like the Brantons and Listers. Yet through their devotion to Christ in the Eucharist, the source of their strength is revealed. Their unwavering choice to welcome Christ into their homes, a choice which demands courage and virtue in the face of death, should inspire the reader to choose Christ in daily life.