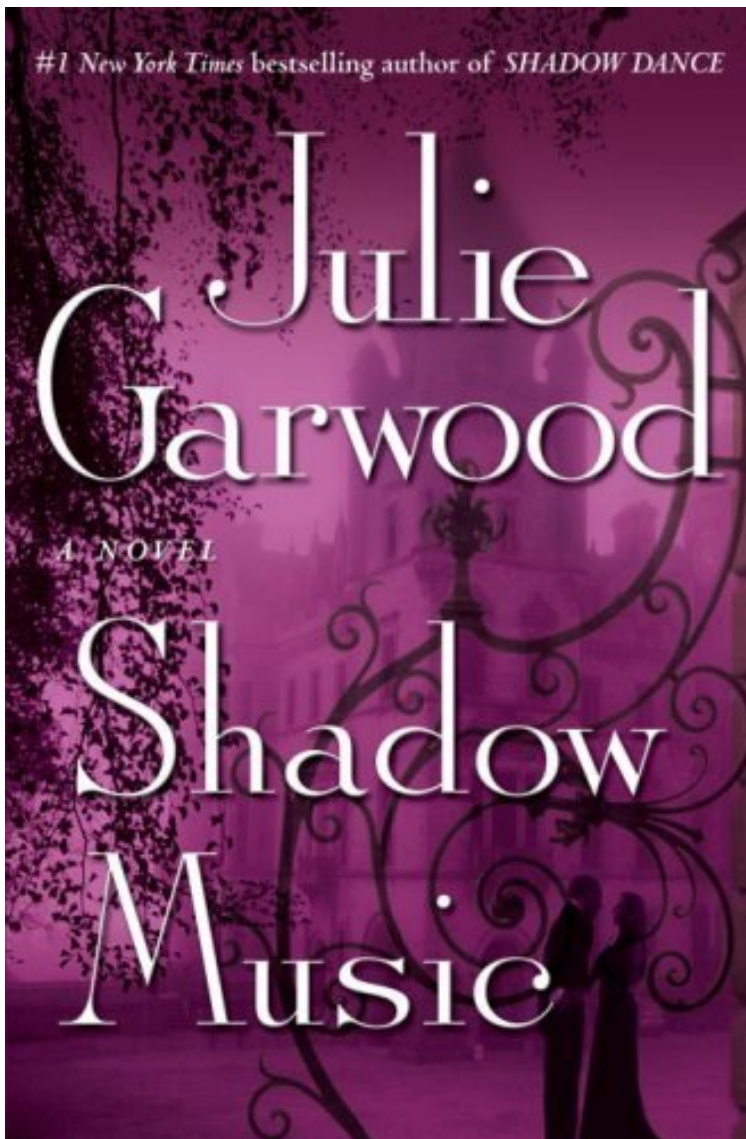


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Shadow Music: A Novel



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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurThroughout her acclaimed writing career, Julie Garwood has captivated readers with characters who are compelling, daring, and bursting with life. Now one of the most popular novelists of our time proudly returns to her beloved historical romance rootsin a thrilling tale of love, murder, adventure, and mystery set against the haunting landscape of medieval Scotland.For Princess Gabrielle of St. Biel, Scotland is a land of stunning vistas, wild chieftains, treacherous glens, and steep shadowsskullduggery, betrayal, and now murder. Prized for her exquisite beauty, the daughter of one of Englands most influential barons, Gabrielle is also a perfect bargaining chip for a king who needs peace in the Highlands: King John has arranged Gabrielles marriage to a good and gentle laird. But this marriage will never take place.For Gabrielle, everything changes in one last burst of freedomwhen she and her guards come upon a scene of

unimaginable cruelty. With one shot from her bow and arrow, Gabrielle takes a life, saves a life, and begins a war. Within days, the Highlands are aflame with passions as a battle royal flares between enemies old and new. Having come to Scotland to be married, Gabrielle is instead entangled in Highland intrigue. For two sadistic noblemen, underestimating Gabrielle's bravery and prowess may prove fatal. But thanks to a secret Gabrielle possesses, Colm MacHugh, the most feared man in Scotland, finds a new cause for courage. Under his penetrating gaze, neither Gabrielle's body nor heart is safe. A gripping novel that delves into the heart of emotions—unyielding passions of love, hate, revenge, and raw desire—Shadow Music is a magnificent gift from Julie Garwood and a crowning achievement in her amazing career. From the Hardcover edition.

Extrait

One Wellingshire, England Princess Gabrielle was barely six years old when she was summoned to her mother's deathbed. Escorting her was her faithful guard, two soldiers on either side, their gait slow so she could keep up with them as they solemnly made their way down the long corridor. The only sound was their boots clicking against the cold stone floor. Gabrielle had been called to her mother's deathbed so many times she'd lost count. As she walked, she kept her head bowed, staring intently at the shiny rock she'd found. Mother was going to love it. It was black with a tiny white streak zigzagging all around it. One side was as smooth as her mother's hand when she stroked the side of Gabrielle's face. The rock on the other side was as rough as her father's whiskers. Every day at sunset Gabrielle brought her mother a different treasure. Two days ago she'd captured a butterfly. It had such pretty wings, gold with purple splotches. Mother declared it was the most beautiful butterfly she'd ever seen. She praised Gabrielle for being so gentle with one of God's creatures as she walked to the window and let it fly away. Yesterday Gabrielle had gathered flowers from the hill outside the castle walls. The scent of heather and honey had surrounded her, and she thought the lovely aroma even more pleasing than her mother's special oils and perfumes. Gabrielle had tied a pretty ribbon around the stems and tried to fashion a nice bow, but she didn't know how and she'd made a mess of it. The ribbon had come undone before she handed the bouquet to her mother. Rocks were Mother's favorite treasures. She kept a basketful that Gabrielle had collected for her on a table next to her bed, and she would love this rock most of all. Gabrielle wasn't worried about today's visit. Her mother had promised that she wouldn't go away to heaven any time soon, and she never broke her promises. The sun cast shadows along the stone walls and floor. If Gabrielle hadn't been on an errand with her rock, she would have liked to chase the shadows and try to capture one. The long corridor was one of her favorite places to play. She loved to hop on one foot from one stone to another and see how far she could get before falling. She hadn't made it to the second arched window yet, and there were five more windows to go. Sometimes she closed her eyes, stretched her arms out wide, and spun and spun until she lost her balance and tumbled to the floor, so dizzy the walls seemed to fly about her head. Most of all, she loved to run down the corridor, especially when her father was home. He was such a big, grand man, taller than any of the pillars in the church. Her father would call to her and wait until she reached him. Then he scooped her up into his arms and lifted her high above his head. If they were in the courtyard, she raised her hands to the sky, certain she could almost touch a cloud. Father always pretended to lose his grip so that she would think he was about to drop her. She knew he never would, but she squealed with delight over the possibility. She wrapped her arms around his neck and held tight as he strode toward her mother's rooms. When he was in an especially happy mood he would sing. Father had a terrible singing voice, and sometimes Gabrielle giggled and covered her ears; it was so awful, but she never really laughed. She didn't want to hurt his tender feelings. Father wasn't at home today. He had left Wellingshire to visit his uncle Morgan in northern England, and he wouldn't be home for several days. Gabrielle wasn't concerned. Mother wouldn't die without him by her side. Stephen, the leader of the guards, opened the door to her mother's chamber and coaxed Gabrielle to enter by giving her a gentle little nudge between her shoulder blades. Go on, Princess, he urged. She turned around with a disgruntled frown. Father says you're to call my mother Princess Genevieve, and you're supposed to call me Lady Gabrielle. Here in England, you are Lady Gabrielle, He tapped the crest emblazoned on his tunic, But in St. Biel, you are our princess. Now go, your mother is waiting. Seeing Gabrielle, her mother called out. Her voice was weak, and she looked terribly pale. For as long as Gabrielle could remember, her mother had stayed in bed. Her legs had forgotten how to walk, she'd explained to Gabrielle, but she was hopeful, praying that they would one day remember. If that miracle were to happen, she promised Gabrielle that she would stand barefoot in the clear stream to gather stones with her daughter. And she would dance with Father, too. The chamber was crowded with people. They made a narrow path for her. The priest, Father Gartner, was chanting his prayer in a low whisper near the alcove, and the royal physician, who always frowned and liked to make her mother bleed with his black, slimy bugs, was also in attendance. Gabrielle was thankful he hadn't put any bugs on her mother's arms today. The maids,

the stewards, and the housekeeper hovered beside the bed. Mother put down her tapestry and needle, shoed the servants away, and motioned to Gabrielle. Come and sit with me, she ordered. Gabrielle ran across the room, climbed up onto the platform, and thrust the rock at her mother. Oh, its beautiful, she whispered as she took the rock and carefully examined it. This is the best one yet, she added with a nod. Mother, you say that every time I bring you a rock. Its always the best one. Her mother patted a spot next to her. Gabrielle scooted closer and said, You cant die today. Remember? You promised. I remember. Papa will be awful angry, too, so you better not. Lean closer, Gabrielle, her mother said. I have need to whisper. The sparkle in her eyes told Gabrielle she was playing her game again. A secret? Are you going to tell me a secret? The crowd moved forward. All were eager to hear what she would say. Gabrielle looked around the room. Mother, why are all these people here? Why? Her mother kissed her cheek. They think that I know where a great treasure is hidden, and they hope that I will tell you where it is. Gabrielle giggled. She liked this game. Are you going to tell me? Not today, she answered. Not today, Gabrielle repeated so that the curious onlookers would hear. Her mother struggled to sit up. The housekeeper rushed forward to place pillows behind her back. A moment later the physician announced that her color was improving. I am feeling much better, she said. Leave us now, she ordered, her voice growing stronger with each word. I would like a moment alone with my daughter. The physician looked as though he wanted to protest, but he kept silent as he ushered the group from the chamber. He motioned for two maids to stay behind. The women waited by the door to do their mistresss bidding. Are you feeling so much better you can tell me a story today? Gabrielle asked. I am, she replied. Which story would you like to hear? The princess story, she eagerly answered. Her mother wasnt surprised. Gabrielle always asked for the same story. There once was a princess who lived in a faraway land called St. Biel, her mother began. Her home was a magnificent white castle high on the top of a mountain. Her uncle was the king. He was very kind to the princess, and she was very happy. When her mother paused, Gabrielle blurted impatiently, Youre the princess. Gabrielle, you know that I am and that this story is about your father and me. I know, but I like to hear you tell it. Her mother continued. When the princess was of age, a bargain was struck with Baron Geoffrey of Wellingshire. The princess was to marry the baron and live with him in England. Because she knew that her daughter loved to hear about the wedding ceremony, the gowns, and the music, she went into great detail. The little girl clapped her hands with delight when she heard about the banquet feast, especially the description of the fruit tarts and honey cakes. By the end of the story, the mothers narrative had become slow and labored. Exhaustion was catching up with her. The little girl took notice and, as was her ritual, she again made her mother promise she wouldnt die today. I promise. Now it is your turn to tell me the story I taught you. Every word just like you taught me, Mother? And just like your mother taught you? She smiled. Every word. And you will remember it and tell your daughters one day so they will know of their family and St. Biel. Gabrielle grew solemn and closed her eyes to concentrate. She knew she must not forget a word of the story. This was her heritage, and her mother assured her that one day she would understand what that meant. She folded her hands in her lap and then opened her eyes again. Focusing on her mothers encouraging smile, she began. 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