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A Curious Beginning



Synopsis

London, 1887. As the city prepares to celebrate Queen Victoria's golden jubilee, Veronica Speedwell is marking a milestone of her own. After burying her spinster aunt, the orphaned Veronica is free to resume her world travels in pursuit of scientific inquiry - and the occasional romantic dalliance. As familiar with hunting butterflies as she is fending off admirers, Veronica wields her butterfly net and a sharpened hatpin with equal aplomb, and with her last connection to England now gone, she intends to embark upon the journey of a lifetime. But fate has other plans, as Veronica discovers when she thwarts her own abduction with the help of an enigmatic German baron with ties to her mysterious past. Promising to reveal in time what he knows of the plot against her, the baron offers her temporary sanctuary in the care of his friend Stoker - a reclusive natural historian as intriguing as he is bad-tempered. But before the baron can deliver on his tantalizing vow to reveal the secrets he has concealed for decades, he is found murdered. Suddenly Veronica and Stoker are forced to go on the run from an elusive assailant, wary partners in search of the villainous truth.

Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 10 hours and 51 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Recorded Books

Audible.com Release Date: September 3, 2015

Whispersync for Voice: Ready

Language: English

ASIN: B014W216ZY

Best Sellers Rank: #85 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Genre Fiction > Historical > Mysteries
#109 in Books > Romance > Historical > Victorian #114 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Romance

Customer Reviews

This comes close to a 2 star rating for me. Perhaps out of fondness for the hours of enjoyment Ms Raybourn's previous works have me feeling a bit generous. I really came close to just closing the cover on this book many times in the reading of it. It has an easy prose and has the typical simplicity Raybourn employs usually to her advantage. It is a straight forward first person narrative that

worked well in the first couple of Julia Gray novels. Here though I found Veronica to be a smug know it all who has the most amazing abilities and perceptions. Not to mention annoyingly modern. Yes Raybourn uses her otherwise impeccable standards of place and time here. The setting feels authentic. But Veronica does not. She is too perfect in a way that just drains the life and charm out of the book for me. Coupled with this cloying perfection and flatness in character comes the predictable love interest that lacks any charm or mystique. Veronica's grand abilities that seem to almost border on the supernatural (she can tell when people lie just by their faces using 'modern' Darwinian logic and other such scientific methods) and often just felt ridiculous. She is always one or more steps ahead of everyone else and as a the narrator of the story, her story, it feels like the book is in the hands of the simpering little irritating person who raises her hand in class at everything and even if someone else answers declares she knew it better. This might be the last straw for an author whose work I have felt is slowly but surely becoming almost a parody of itself. I remember how much fun I thought her first two books were. How enjoyable the next couple were. But more and more I feel that Raybourn is writing almost mythical female characters who simply are way too perfectly modern for the settings she still does an admirable job of crafting. They have become too glib of a vehicle for trying to rewrite the wrongs of the past with a fictional character having all the 'right' convictions and abilities for the wrongs of that time. (For some reason spellcheck wanted Victoria instead of Veronica, I think I fixed all of them but if there is one still hidden above, my apologies)

3.5 stars to the first in a new series featuring Veronica Speedwell. Newly orphaned Veronica Speedwell is not bound by conventional society and is no stranger to adventure. When her spinster caretakers finally die, she is ready to resume hunting for butterflies and engaging in romantic dalliances with mysterious men -- who aren't English (her rule). Instead, she finds herself mixed up in a plot that involves murder and secrets from her own unknown past. Could it be that Veronica will finally have some answers? Against her will, Veronica finds herself paired up with the enigmatic and unrefined Mr. Stoker (who has a checkered past of his own) when she is almost abducted and then accused of murder. Veronica and Stoker are soon on the run as they elude police while seeking to clear her name and figure out why she is in danger. This was lighthearted fare with the typical witty sparring between man and woman who obviously are attracted to each other but pretend otherwise (hate that farce). Not much substance to the mystery and the revelation was a bit of a stretch for my credulity. I didn't really like either the stereo-typically clever and plucky heroine (who just seemed domineering) nor the stoic and "rough" man-with-a-past (who sounded like he needed a good bath).

I may or may not read another one in the series, but it took me so long to plow through this that I don't know for sure. Much of the book seemed an exercise in reciting the genus and species of various butterflies and other creatures (both are sort of naturalists - how nice, they have that in common). I've read all of Deanna Raybourn's other books that are not part of series so the author is not new to me. The personality of her female characters remains about the same in each novel. Thank you to NetGalley and PENGUIN GROUP Berkley, NAL / Signet Romance, DAW for the e-book ARC to review.

As a big fan of Deanna Raybourn's previous novels I was really looking forward to this book. Oh what a disappointment! I completely agree with many other reviewers who found Veronica Speedwell unlikeable. She was smug, arrogant, rude, stupid and so modern as to be ludicrous. She just didn't fit into the late 19th century. True, Deanna's first Victorian heroine Lady Julia had progressive qualities for her time but she still was a fairly common model of what was known then as "the new woman." Veronica, on the other hand, came over as being from another planet. I also found the constant sex talk both out of place for the time and quite tasteless. It also seemed poorly constructed. The first few chapters were interesting, then it just got stuck in the middle for ages. The biggest disappointment was the solution. Has anybody seen a British Sherlock Holmes movie from the late 70s called "Murder By Decree"? Well, there is the solution almost word for word. The only difference was the mysterious character they were looking for was one generation different. Very disappointing and not at all the quality we have come to expect from this author.

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