



Fleshmarket

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Edinburgh, 1822. Young Robbie is just eight years old when he witnesses his mother's agonizing pain and then death from the removal of a breast tumor during public surgery at the hands of one savage surgeon, Dr. Knox. The sounds of his mother's piercing cries haunt Robbie as he and his hapless father and baby sister try to go on.

But life proves bitter when Robbie's father loses his business and disappears. Years of poverty go by as Robbie cares for his sister in the Edinburgh slums. Fueled by anger and grief, the teenaged Robbie seems to be heading for a life on the wrong side of the law when he helps the men providing "the butcher Knox" with dead bodies for his medical research.

For years, Robbie thinks of Knox as his mother's killer and wants revenge. He's convinced that Knox is involved in a murderous trade in bodies for experimentation and plans a confrontation. It will take time to see the motives behind Knox's corrupt methods. Perhaps there will be a way to give some meaning to his mother's tragic death after all.

Fleshmarket Details

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From Reader Review Fleshmarket for online ebook

Ieshia Sharp says

Almost two hundred years ago, in 1822 surgeons in Edinburgh were beginning to perform operations to remove major tumours from their patients. But there were a couple of things that the surgeons did not know about yet. The first thing was anaesthetic. All the operations were performed on patients fully awake and conscious. The second thing was in order to prevent infection operations should be performed in only sterile atmospheres. Dr Robert Knox, the surgeon, operates on Robbie's mother, in these conditions, at the beginning of this story, but she dies five days later from an infection. Robbie and his family are broken. And so Robbie's father ends up abandoning his two children Robbie and Essie. Fourteen year old Robbie and his little sister, Essie, survive the only few ways that they know how they can. It is a desperate time which everything is made worse for Robbie to forgive the surgeon and stop blaming him for killing his mother, his family, and his life. This book is a good book, it's not a favorite but it's definitely interesting. It's filled with the sadness of people in poverty during the nineteenth century in the town of Edinburgh.

Kevin Clancy says

A few weeks ago I was recommended this book by a friend in my AP world history class, because he had heard a rumor that it was about scientists illegally harvesting people's organs after they had died and selling them on a "Fleshmarket". Fairly interested, I went and checked this book out from the local library the next day. After I got into the book, I realized that the rumor I heard was untrue, and that there was actually no blackmarket organ selling. What surprised me after I realized this, is that I still couldn't put the book down! Although the actual story is about a boy selling hanged bodies to a doctor for some extra money, it is the underlying theme of the story that had me entranced and wanting to continue reading this book every free moment I had.

Based on a moderately true story, A boy named Robbie lives in Edinburgh, Scotland in around 1828. He is living a nice, upperclass life, when his mother gets a tumor in her chest. She dies soon after her surgery, and her death is the downfall of his family. His father loses his job, becomes an alcoholic, and Robbie's family is forced into poverty. After a while, his father stops coming home and he is forced to live parentless in a tenement with his younger sister, Essie. Throughout the book there is constant conflict between two forces driving Robbie's life; the love for his sister Essie, and the drive to spend all of his time and money on alcohol and whores at the bar. One night when he is walking home, he sees two shady characters carrying something suspicious in a wheelbarrow, and when he is caught spying on them, they threaten to kill him. After smooth talking his way out of this, Robbie is hired by the men to keep a look out for civilians and cops, so that they can take dead bodies to a doctor. The doctor pays them handsomely for the bodies, because he uses them in his research. The doctor is Dr. Knox. This happens to be the same doctor that gave Robbie's mom surgery. Once he realizes this, Robbie is overcome by the desire for revenge on Dr. Knox, because he blames him for "murdering" his mother and destroying his family's lives. As the book progresses, his hatred for Dr. Knox grows and grows, and sends him into a life of crime and alcohol. The story of the mental struggle of this young boy in choosing between love for his sister, and hate for the doctor, is a compelling story that I recommend for everyone to read.

The only thing that puzzled me throughout this book, is that in the real world, why do people have such a struggle in their lives choosing between love or hatred? Happiness or revenge?

Rachel Verna says

I wrote a review on my blog.

Vanessa says

This was a quick and engaging read. It was easy to get into, although not always an easy read due to the surprising grimness of the novel at points. The prologue in particular was particularly graphic, something I would not normally expect of a novel aimed at children. I feel that this book however can be read and enjoyed by both children and adults alike.

Nicola Morgan has obviously done her research, and the Edinburgh that she paints in her story is both arresting and heartbreaking. The poverty depicted in this novel, and the dire straits that the protagonist Robbie and his sister Essie are left in after their family is torn apart is tough and vivid to read.

The antagonists of Dr Robert Knox and Burke & Hare are also depicted very well, and you find your alliances shifting throughout the book - so much so that sometimes even you don't know whether you are rooting for Robbie or not! This I felt showed how well Morgan has painted this story, it always kept you hanging on.

Sebastian says

Allright! My first review, here we go...

I'm tempted to give this book 3 stars, because I enjoyed the ending and it left me satisfied...

However, I just cannot look past the fact it took me about 80 pages before I actually found the book interesting (when Burke and Hare came in), the only reason I kept reading being that it was a gift from a friend. Considering the book is aimed for young readers, this slow plot is not ideal. The story was quite repetitive and I found quite a few parts unnecessary and boring.

Another thing that devalued the book to me, must've been the main character. I am not that fond of child 'heroes' (Lyra from His Dark Materials was just bearable) and Robbie just comes off as a really ignorant child in the way he blames Knox for everything. It is only towards the end, when his character appears to have some changes, I started to like him.

Nor am I too fond of Nicola Morgan's style, when she uses very short sentences to build up suspense. This is just my opinion, it might work for others...

With all that being said, I really liked the ending. I felt most things were summed up (Where did Robbie and Essie's father go, though?) and Nicola Morgan made some references to the prologue towards the end, with the spider hanging from the roof, a little treat to the attentive reader, I would say. It also pleased me to see how Robbie has left his hatred behind him, when he was informed that a friend of his had died. (Dr. Robert

Knox died in 1862, the epilogue is in 1862 - Go figure.)

All in all, not a bad book. If it wasn't for the big letters, I wouldn't have finished because of the slow plot. I do not think I will read this again, but with such a nice ending, I could close the book with a smile.

Scott Watson says

For the first time ever I gave up on a book...

I struggled to pick it up even on my bus journeys, there was nothing to bring me back and draw me in.

I know I'm not the age demographic for the target reader, but I do like to vary my stuff and have read some greatly enjoyable YA books...sadly this isn't one of them.

I had high hopes for this and looked forward to getting to it... Oh well.

Federica says

I found out about this book while I was in Edinburgh, and as its setting is Edinburgh, I thought "Why Not?". It was a good choice indeed.

I recognized a good part of the streets and places the author talks about, so it was easier for me to picture the events in my head, not to mention exciting too, since as I have been in some of them. It is set in 1828 and I really love historical books, in particular those with characters that really existed, and even though the story itself is not that exciting, N. Morgan can definitely describe places and events in a such realistic way that I was shivering while reading about Robbie's mother operation and about the way they lived in their little house. I believe I would never be able to think about poor people's lives in 1800s in another way than this one.

The realism is what I liked the most in this book. It was not only in the descriptions of the settings, but also in the characters' ones. They were shaped by the social conditions they lived in, but also by their own passions and emotions, and it was really interesting to read how this would affect their behavior. Also, the distinction between good and bad characters was not that clear, I really liked the possibility to see them change according to what the characters found about each others during the novel.

It was really worth reading, I am happy to have bought this novel.

Jamies says

It is 1822, and Robbie is only a young boy. His family is climbing up the social ladder and moving into one of the houses being built in the New Town. All is going well until his mother develops a tumor on her breast. At this time anesthetic was not yet discovered and surgery was still very experimental. She undergoes surgery performed by Dr. Knox to have it removed; but she dies five days later.

Nicola Morgan's *Fleshmarket* is a fictional story based on true events. The story follows Robbie Anderson and his struggle for his and his sister Essie's survival. After their mother's death, their father becomes an alcoholic and eventually vanishes. Robbie and Essie try to make due by living in a one room apartment in the dirtiest part of the city with little money and little to eat. Robbie often wonders why God would let him live like this, and why He took away his mother; but quickly dismisses the thought.

He then finds a new person to blame for his problems: Dr. Knox. After all, it was his fault that his mother was dead which started his long string of problems. He then makes it his goal to seek revenge on the doctor who took his mother's life. Robbie then meets Burke and Hare, who provide Dr. Knox with bodies to study and experiment with. He then begins to work with them in order to get closer to the doctor.

This book is full of suspense and intense imagery. I have never read a book so descriptive. It is a short, easy read that will leave you wanting to learn more. However, I do not recommend it to those with weak stomachs!

Kirsty says

I live in Edinburgh. I found this book in an Edinburgh charity shop (RIP Age Scotland I miss you). Does this book deserve to be in a charity shop is the big question?

Probably not to be honest. It's decent. It's not bad at all.

However, it wasn't as good as it could have been if you ask me. If you asked me what happened about ten minutes after I put it down, all I could really do would be to shrug "eh..." There's moments of quality worldbuilding and admittedly, I enjoyed the historic atmosphere. (Even if I questioned some of the distances between the Royal Mile and Duddingston -- spoiler alert, you wouldn't catch me pushing a bread cart up that route.)

The characters were sort of more wishy washy to me. Kind of archetypey...not exactly embraced and developed. Snippets of relationships were really nice but, never really came to satisfying conclusions. As for plot there seemed to be some kind of build up to a climax that never really hit. There just seemed to be a whole lot of denouement and very little solid action. There's a lot of ideas crammed into this plot and the story barely takes the time to really commit to any of them. Some of these ideas are really interesting but they don't get the time they need. To an extent, I wonder if someone who has no knowledge of Edinburgh and its history would pick up this book and fully appreciate it. It's kind of an identity crisis of a book -- the title and inclusion of Burke and Hare suggests a horror thriller with a historical spin, but this book veered towards almost a Medical crime drama.

Was it bad though? Not really. I don't hate that I have it. I might read it again. It's kind of self indulgent to read when you do know the history. Nicola Morgan writes solidly and it is enjoyable. It just feels like it's lacking oomph.

Jane says

I really liked this book. It is a great historical read going back to the time period where doctors were just

starting to learn anatomy of the human body. That wasn't an easy time period as religion didn't want doctors to be doing any looking into dead bodies even if to learn. Surgeries were in very primitive forms. There were no numbing agents/ opiates of any kind as of yet in this book. The book is well written and interesting and informational as well. The place is Edinburgh, Scotland, 1822. Young Robbie is 8 when his mother tries to be rid of a tumor in her breast and submits to a public surgery where he is haunted forevermore by his mother's piercing screams from the pain. Days later, the mother dies leaving his father alone to raise him and his baby sister. A few years later the father disappears leaving the kids to fend for themselves. They are subjected into severe poverty which is a big change from how they lived before their mother died. He vows to get revenge on the doctor that cut into his mother some day. Very moving and quick to read, great for a reluctant reader.

Yami says

Update... 29/7/2015

4years later I re-read this book...

this time I cant say I liked it as much as the first time, I was fascinated four years ago, but now I kind of the saw the faults,

after visiting Scotland this year, I was ought to re-read the single story in my library that is related to this magical country, and containing one of the very famous dark criminals, Burke and Hare.

so reading and waiting for the magic to take its effect, Alas, something was missing, the story in itself is simple ,and is entertaining enough, but the narrating was not to my appeal this time, there was many repetitive lines and scenes, forcing the facts instead of making it flow easily, the way she made his protagonist Robbie, lost and found was understandable but irritated me.

kind of envying my old self who enjoyed this book so much 4 years ago.

17th Sep 2011

loooooooooooooovvedd the book and to think i just choose it, i wasn't disappointed.

Noni says

i read this in english class with a bunch of lets say... rowdy peers. you know the ones. the ones that don't like english very much.

Anyway, this book is set in edinburgh, 1822. focused on a boy (robbie) and his little sister (essie) first, there's robbie. i mean, the kid went through a lot of stuff, but i just couldn't feel sympathy for him. i dont

know why, maybe that's my problem instead of the authors. he was fairly realistic with how he coped, though.

essie kind of annoyed me. i know she had that 'gleam' in her eye that made people want to give her stuff. okay, i get that. but that's not realistic, especially in those times.

i liked joseph, his logic and reason were very profound. dr.knox was also one of the better characters, but perhaps thats because he's based on a real person.

the book was rather anticlimactic, though. i was expecting something big to happen- but well, it never really did. it came to the point where i was just waiting for it to end. the setting and adding burke & hare did help with the excitement factor.

2/5

Georgia says

This book has been on my tbr for SO LONG, so I'm glad I finally read it. The prologue is what drew me in. I quite liked this book overall, and I read it pretty quickly.

Judie Holliday says

Is it fair to say I struggled with a book that wasn't aimed at me anyway? I picked this up because my daughter will be reading it in school next year and I wanted to be able to talk to her about it. It has a great premise and because it's a piece of YA fiction, I assumed I'd get through it in no time. Instead, I found myself putting it down a lot and not being minded to pick it up again. The plot, such as it is, doesn't really stretch to the length of the book. Not enough happens, and what does happen fails to advance the story in most cases.

Having said that, I can see that it raises all kinds of good 'topics for discussion' about 19th century Edinburgh and early surgery/medicine. Very informative on poverty, religion, social class, morality - just not as interesting as it could have been. I look forward to hearing what the teachers have to say about it.

Marj says

Many of us know that if we had lived 200 years ago, we would not have lived for very long. Chances are that I would not have even survived my birth! 'Fleshmarket' by Nicola Morgan takes us back to life in 1822, providing a rare look at a time when many life conditions, including sanitation and medicine, were far more crude and rudimentary than they are today.

We are introduced to eight year old Robbie, the main character of this novel, in the prologue, where he is bystander at his mother's breast cancer operation. Performed without anaesthetic, the operation which is

intended to save her life leads to her death from infection several days later, and Robbie blames the surgeon, Dr Knox, for her death. When family circumstances change for the worse, Robbie becomes fixated on Knox, trying to get close enough to him to work out how to get revenge. But morality is more complex than that, as Robbie's own values are tested and he comes to understand more of Knox's life mission.

Inspired by the author's tour of Surgeon's Hall in Edinburgh, this is a horrifying glimpse of life in the not-too-distant past. Both Robbie's mother and Dr Knox are based on true characters, which intensifies the chilling reality and brutality of some parts of the story, including the prologue. For me, the accounts of surgery and post-mortems were almost unbearable, yet this is a true representation of life in that era. Morgan has captured early surgery so well that we quiver at the prospect of living in that era.

Although written with a teenage audience in mind, this novel could be read by adults. Morgan's writing is powerful, the content definitely thought-provoking, lingering long after the novel is finished. It provides valuable reading to supplement studies of science and medicine in the early 19th century. It is definitely not a read for the faint-hearted!
