



The Young Clementina

D.E. Stevenson

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Charlotte, the determined heroine of beloved author D.E. Stevenson's The Young Clementina, has her future all planned out. But when Garth, the man Charlotte loves, marries her sister instead, Charlotte is heartbroken and moves to London to escape her pain. After the two divorce, Garth's tragic death forces Charlotte to care for her young niece, Clementina, who gives Charlotte a new perspective on life.

The Young Clementina Details

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Author : D.E. Stevenson

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From Reader Review The Young Clementina for online ebook

Carolyn says

Another favorite Stevenson book. Charlotte and Garth have been inseparable friends all their young lives. After the war Garth comes back a changed man and marries Charlotte's selfish, but charming, sister to Charlotte's surprised dismay. She leaves her home to become a clerk in a book store in London.

Charlotte gives truthful testimony at her sister's divorce hearing and realizes that her sister has purposely misled her, resulting in their estrangement.

Garth (a writer) asks Charlotte to take care of his daughter Clementina while he is researching Africa for a travel book. She wrestles with herself and finally decides to sacrifice her safe, but mundane life, for her niece's benefit.

She copes with an embittered, non-responsive niece and Garth's untimely death to discover that life can be worthwhile despite hardships and broken dreams, especially when she can make a difference in her niece's life.

SarahC says

This is a novel of Dorothy Emily Stevenson, originally written in 1938 and republished in 2013. Early 20th century literature featuring a female protagonist has a value beyond the interesting period story it tells. Stories like the Stevenson novels show us a picture of women in society before women truly had a recognized voice in literature or in life itself. For many decades, too many interesting women's novels were overlooked and taken out of print, so the resurgence of these books is a treasure to appreciate.

The central character of this novel, Englishwoman Charlotte Dean, is a woman who is able to cope with life. Stevenson does not create Charlotte as a pitiful shadow who must rise to the top somewhere during the story to become fully herself. When we meet Charlotte, she has lost family and connections and has lived a life for many years in which she has had mainly herself to depend upon -- a situation that, even now, women are scared into believing they don't have the innate skills for. Stevenson gives the reader a chance to see a woman of the 1930's, who, even with her quiet, unexciting life, shines above the rest of the characters here. She makes a choice to return into the circle of her family and her home town because she has been asked for help in caring for her niece Clementina during a time of family hardship. She rises to the occasion and does her duty to her family, using the maturity and strength she has cultivated through time of war and romantic disappointment.

This is a strong-woman story. Additionally, it mixes a touch of magical realism and the affirms the importance of an individual's imagination. Charlotte's quiet life in her small flat "high among the chimney pots" has a Sara Crewe (Frances Burnett's famous creation) flavor, especially as Charlotte imagines the warmth and companionship of an imaginary friend. There are just the right touches of unexpected elements to this, which could have been a very typical "woman's story" otherwise. I certainly recommend D.E. Stevenson's The Young Clementina to readers of early to mid-century rediscovered novels.

Mim says

I enjoyed reading this book. It was easy to read and the character's voice was easy to inhabit. However there are several things that really bugged me and makes me hesitate to read anymore of her books.

Spoilers ahead:

1. The heroine is a doormat. She is not very pro-active in her life, things just happen to her and she reacts. Her sister is terrible to her and she just accepts it. The hero is terrible to her and she just accepts it. There's a fine line between being the bigger person and being a Mary Sue doormat and the heroine is the latter.
2. The hero is a self-centered and possessive jerk. The heroine is a toy he does not want to share. He believes a lie and never even confronts the heroine about whether or not it is true. He instead marries the shallow younger sister. They deserve each other and all the unhappiness they get. After he learns the truth and divorces his wife he has the temerity to ask the heroine to take care of his daughter while he gallivants in Africa. Seriously, he did that.
3. And the most ick thing of all in this book. The daughter starts off at about 11-12 years old when we meet her. During one of the rides/hunts the heroine meets an old university friend of the hero. He was at the party where the hero and heroine fall in love. It is stated that he is old enough to be the daughter's father. She is about 13 years old when the heroine decides that she needs to spend time with other girls her own age. The friend of the family is upset because he is in love with the daughter and doesn't want to be separated from her. The heroine is okay with this and tells him to come back in four years. What the ever loving fuck. Dear heroine, you are wrong in the head.

So yeah.

Sarah says

Delightful, charming and old-fashioned are the words that spring to mind to describe this book. One really has to try to place oneself in the social context of the early 20th century to appreciate the story (OMG! A divorce! How absolutely scandalous!), and I found myself thinking of old plays and black and white films. Yes, Charlotte is a bit of a self-sacrificing doormat, Kitty is the universal bitch and Garth, well, what can I say? As stiff and righteous as Soames Forstye (John Galsworthy)! But this is pure tragicomedy at its lightest, and I loved it! Perhaps not quite as much as the Miss Buncle series though.

I really appreciated the minor country characters (Lady Vera, Nanny, Clem etc), probably even more than the main protagonists, and the descriptions of foxhunting and the point-to-point were excellent. OK, I admit to

having a peek at the last pages because I just couldn't believe one of the characters was dead!

Kelly says

Maybe 3.5 stars.

Sara says

May not be the most "amazing" read, but I do love these early-/mid-twentieth century adventure romances, especially with the reliable quality of D.E. Stevenson's writing. Light and easy to digest, and still the focus is on plot and character development. Her books so often feel like time spent with a solid and trustworthy friend, with a few surprises along the way.

The Young Clementina practically screams romance, old-fashioned romance. All wrapped up in a story of infidelity, divorce, loneliness, lies, and then coming to a satisfying ending. It doesn't hurt that the setting is an old country estate in England where fox hunting, tea, and an array of servants are everyday fare.

It all depends on your expectations, and this one meets mine!

Mo says

Even though I was expecting a lighthearted and amusing read, The Young Clementina did not disappoint. But the content certainly was a surprise!

I am not quite sure who the publishers are trying to market this book to. The cover is totally misleading, as is the name of the book. Look at it! The cover leads one to believe that this will be a light, frothy romp, (in the vein of her Miss Buncle series) and it absolutely is NOT. Someone looking for a more mature, thoughtful story is not going to pick up this book. And there will be many disappointed readers when they don't get the fun, perky book they are expecting. Why in the world do publishers do this? (Big sigh!)

[NOTE: My copy had the cover with the young lady holding an umbrella.]

This poor book must suffer from an identity disorder. It was formerly published as 'Divorced From Reality'; then 'Miss Dean's Dilemma'; until lastly, it was reprinted as 'The Young Clementina'. Hmmmm... I don't think this novel has much to do with the young Clementina at all. It is all about the aging spinster Miss Dean! A spinster who is bereft of happiness, living in penury, denied of love, and fading away into nothingness. (Sound "perky" enough for you?)

The book opens with Miss Dean pondering her life, and the twists and turns which have occurred along the way. She needs to make a life altering decision, and decides to revisit some key times in her life to try and make sense of everything that has happened, and has brought her to where she is today. (It is not nearly as

depressing as I am making it out to be. I just needed to make my point contrasting book cover with content.)

This author obviously has a wide range, as she writes both comedy and drama with ease. This was one of her more mature, dramatic books. It was beautifully written, and I enjoyed it very much. I wonder what the next D.E. Stevenson book will be like. And believe me, there WILL be a next one! I'm hooked on this author.

Catie says

This is the 7th(?) D.E. Stevenson novel I've read. And like the others, it does not disappoint!! (well, except Vittoria Cottage--that one wasn't amazing.) One thing I've noticed, unlike many authors, is that all of her books have a different feel to them. If I didn't know I was reading a book written by the same woman who wrote Miss Buncle's Book, I wouldn't know it!

(wait. what?!)

Anyway...

This is a beautiful story of a woman who's life doesn't end up the way she planned.

I love how Stevenson can write characters in a way that you feel like you really know them; something that is lacking in a lot of contemporary fiction, in my opinion.

For the record, my favorite by Stevenson is Miss Buncle's Book. :)

Patty says

I own nearly all of the novels by D.E. Stevenson. I read them over and over, whenever I'm in the mood for an old-fashioned but suspenseful story set in the British Isles. The Young Clementina is one of my favorites. Every single time, I get a lump in my throat when I read the last page, and she writes "but it wasn't too late for that, either."

Alice says

Mlle Alice, pouvez-vous nous raconter votre rencontre avec The Young Clementina?

"J'ai commencé ma découverte de l'univers et de la plume de D.E. Stevenson avec la série des Miss Buncle qui m'avait déjà charmée et j'avais envie d'explorer une autre de ses histoires. Comme Sourcebooks est justement en train de rééditer son oeuvre avec un choix de couvertures sublimes, je n'ai pas hésité beaucoup plus longtemps à me laisser convaincre (par moi-même d'ailleurs).

Dites-nous en un peu plus sur son histoire...

"L'histoire se déroule autour des années 30. Charlotte Dean, vit une vie sans intérêt ni saveur, seule dans un petit appartement de Londres et se rendant chaque jour au travail consciencieusement. Mais ne croyez pas qu'il en a toujours été ainsi, cette vie d'ermite est un choix et petit à petit, nous allons découvrir pourquoi et quels sont les évènements qui aujourd'hui la pousse à changer de nouveau cela."

Mais que s'est-il exactement passé entre vous?

"Ce livre est poignant. Comme toujours, D.E. Stevenson nous dépeint des personnages extrêmement attachants et dès les premières pages, on se prend d'une grande affection pour Charlotte. Le début de son récit est quelque peu pathétique, elle est si seule qu'elle s'invente une amie imaginaire d'une femme croisée une fois dans le bus. Puis on découvre son histoire si triste et sa résignation courageuse et c'est un vrai crève cœur. Impossible alors de se détacher de ces pages qui vont tour à tour nous redonner un peu d'espoir et nous le ravir aussi vite et réservé encore bien des surprises et des découvertes à cette pauvre Charlotte Dean. C'est vraiment une réussite en ce qui concerne les personnages et la palette des émotions que l'on traverse, le tout sur fond de campagne anglaise. Que demander de plus?"

Et comment cela s'est-il fini?

"C'est quand même le genre de livres on l'on s'énerve un peu tout le long contre les uns et les autres et leur manque de communication, sur toutes ces souffrances qui auraient pu être évitées sans la fierté mal placée de certains et la naïveté des autres alors bien sûr, pour rétablir l'équilibre, on a besoin d'une fin vraiment heureuse, de sentir que les personnages n'ont pas traversé tout cela pour rien. Et de ce côté-là, j'ai été un peu déçu par la rapidité du dénouement. Un peu plus de scènes de bonheur, voire un épilogue, n'auraient pas été de trop à mon goût."

<http://booksaremywonderland.hautetfort.com>

Sally says

I really enjoy D.E. Stevenson's books and writing style. I love the time period and locations that she writes about, and I find her characters to be believable and endearing. Some favorites quotes from this particular book:

"Prayer did not come easily to me for I always feel that prayer is a silent thing, an opening of the heart. To ask for earthly benefits, to reel out a list of requirements and expect them to be supplied is not prayer. It is putting God in the same category as an intelligent grocer. But that day at Hinkleton Church I felt that something was listening to the speaking of my heart. The spirit of my earthly father and the Spirit of my Heavenly Father blessed me in my new life. I was sure that the road I had chosen was the right road, and I went on my way strengthened."

"Death is not the saddest way to lose somebody you love."

Claude says

Quite different from the Miss Buncle related books. But a book that grew on me. I think I would have liked it better if Char, the narrator, had not occasionally behaved like a doormat.

Still a very pleasant read.

Emma Rose Ribbons says

That was unexpectedly wonderful. I didn't know at all what the plot was about and the misleading title combined with the fact that this read so much like two stories with their own separate endings just made this a real page-turner. Great detail, characterization and I loved the mystery-like plot. Very underrated novel.

Jane says

Oh, this is lovely!

A good, old fashioned romance, nicely plotted and smartly executed. It was published in the thirties and as I would love to think that my grandmother, then the young mother of three children, read this book. She loved a good romance, and she would have so enjoyed meeting Miss Charlotte Dean and learning her story.

Charlotte was an impoverished gentlewoman, living a solitary life in a small London flat, working in a small private library and losing herself in her books. And she was at a turning point in her life. She had been asked to do something, something that she knew she ought to do, but something that she didn't want to do, something that she knew would cause her heartache. She decided to write, addressing an imaginary friend, in the hope that the act of writing would lead her to a firm decision.

She wrote the story of her life.

Charlotte was a vicar's daughter, and she had grown up in a lovely country parish. She had an idyllic childhood, and it was illuminated by her friendship with Garth, the son and heir of the manor. It was a friendship that grew into love. But then the Great War came: Garth went and Charlotte stayed. He survived, but when he came home something quite inexplicable happened. Garth married someone else. Charlotte's younger sister, Kitty.

Charlotte was bewildered she was heartbroken, and so was I. she had pulled me right into her story, and my heart rose and fell with hers, I saw the world as she did.

When her beloved parents died Charlotte decided that she had to move away, that she couldn't bear to watch her sister living the life that she had thought would be hers, with the man she still loved. And once she had left she stayed away, because she knew that the pain of going back would be too great. She visited just once, because she knew that she couldn't refuse the invitation to be the godmother of her niece, Clementina.

It was the collapse of Kitty and Garth's marriage that inspired Charlotte to begin to write to her imaginary friend. Kitty pulled her in, but she didn't tell her everything. I'd love to explain exactly what happened, but I mustn't because you need to experience it first hand, as I did alongside Charlotte.

When the dust had settled, and when she finished telling her story to her imaginary friend, Charlotte accepted that she that she had to go home, that she had to help raise Clementina.

It wasn't easy. She had to manage the house and the staff. She had to build a relationship with a reserved, troubled child. And she had to deal with neighbours shocked at what had happened at the manor. No it wasn't easy but Charlotte had a good heart, a wise head, and she had been raised by good people with Christian values. It wasn't plain sailing, not by any means, but I think it's fair to say that Charlotte succeeded.

Then she had to become the keeper of the flame, and it seemed her future was settled. She had found her place in the world, and her role in life.

But there was a final twist in the tail – the ending was absolutely perfect!

I was so sorry to have to say goodbye to Charlotte and her world, after being caught up in her life and her world from start to finish. That points to very clever writing and plotting. Charlotte's world, the people in it, all of the things she lived through were painted richly and beautifully. Her story lived and breathed.

There were a few little niggles, but nothing really jarred. Except the imaginary friend – she was given rather too much substance and it really didn't work; I do wish she had remained completely imaginary.

But this isn't a book I can analyse and pick apart, because I responded to it with my heart and not my head. It came along just when I needed it, and it was a very fine romance ...

I'm so glad that *The Young Clementina* is coming back into print, and I hope that more of D E Stevenson's books are following along behind.

Jeanette says

I thought the vehicle for the narration was a little odd. A grown woman is writing her life story to what is essentially an imaginary friend. Despite that it did not take me long to get pulled into the story and in the end could not stop reading until I finished it. I still found the parts where "Clare" was being addressed a bit jarring and odd but was for the most part able to look past it and keep reading.

A bit different than the other D.E. Stevenson books I've read but still immensely enjoyable. As is usual when I finish a novel by D.E. Stevenson I can not wipe the happy contented smile of my face.

Gail Kittleson says

This women's fiction connected me with a strong heroine reflecting women in another era. The author makes her very real. If I could talk to both author and heroine, I'd discuss the title with them--really interesting choice. First published in 1938, then in the 70's, and again now, I'd say this story has staying power.

Cricket Muse says

I am ever so happy that D.E. Stevenson's book are being reissued in snappy attractive paperbacks. Her writing still holds true fifty plus years from original publication.

The Young Clementina originally published in 1938 weaves in the change England saw in its people from WWI without dwelling on particulars. The heart of this plot is the damage of lies and secrets. Her hallmark style of wonderfully portraying her characters richly and fully is evident. Marked with intrigue, as well as romance without being unduly dramatic, it is an immensely satisfying read.

Bree (AnotherLookBook) says

A novel about a woman who is heartbroken when the love of her life unexpectedly marries her sister; years later, when they divorce, she's asked to look after their daughter. 1935.

Full review (and other recommendations!) at Another look book

So far, my favorite DES is still *The Blue Sapphire*, but this is a close second. I loved the use of the 1st person narration and really connected with the main character. I think the quality of writing is a level higher than the other DES books I've read--and those are already very well-written! It's a captivating, beautiful story.

Reminded me a lot of James Hilton's *Random Harvest*: similar time period, setting, tone, an ongoing sense of mystery, and the memory/reflection theme. Absolutely, beyond any doubt recommended.

Theresa says

I admit, I've been on a D.E. Stevenson track lately! Once I pick one up, I enjoy it so much (and they are, by and large, light and easy reads... perfect for the ending to a busy day), that I start another one.

"The Young Clementina" is another re-read for me. This used to be my favorite D.E. S. novel of all. For some reason though, it didn't quite hit me the same this time (one good reason to re-read our old favorites!)

Charlotte is a librarian in London. She doesn't earn a lot, and has to scrape to make ends meet. Her life is vastly different than what she initially expected and so part of the book is addressing Char's concerns about her life and the decisions she has to make.

"From nine-thirty in the morning until six o'clock at night I work in a library, docketing the books, reading them through and recommending them to those people I think they will suit... I make a point of reading all the books that come into the library - or at least glancing through them - and because this is my job and I have been at it for twelve years. Twelve years is a long time to spend amongst books about Borneo and Canada and the Antarctic... Twelve years I have been there, with kind little Mr. Wentworth and his books. I was twenty-three when I went, and now I am thirty-five. The twelve best years of my womanhood have been given to Wentworth's."

Like most (if not all) of us, Char has a protagonist, and in this book, it just happens to be someone from her own family; her sister, Kitty. Kitty and Charlotte; two sisters from the same family, and as different as night and day! Kitty is beautiful, selfish, and self-seeking. She is always out for her own comforts and interests.

Charlotte seems to be cut from a different cloth; she is unassuming, modest, and gracious (even when wronged).

The book is written in a form similar to a diary, and the reader's sympathies are immediately caught up as Char falls in love with their neighbor's son, Garth Wisdon. Marriage bells are ringing... but then all of a sudden, Char is pushed aside and Garth marries Kitty!

"People always hate those they have wronged." Did Kitty hate me? Had she wronged me? I could find no answer to the questions. Kitty had married Garth, but he was lost to me before that. He was lost to me when he came home from the war. Kitty had not taken him from me any more than any other woman who might have married him. I always felt - perhaps not unreasonably - that Kitty was in the place which really belonged to me, but it was not Kitty's fault."

The marriage however, is a very unhappy one, and Char finds herself called upon when help is needed. Now, put yourself in her shoes; if you were the wronged party, would you answer the call to help? It is a testament to Char's character that she actually is able to put her own feelings aside and give the help that is needed.

I am going to stop here as the plot is much more involved, and a lot more happens! One very intriguing twist is when Char is sent Garth's diaries... and she begins to understand his motivations and choices better.

"I read until the light grew too dim to see any more, and then I sat on, beside the little window, with the books piled round me. The light lingered for a while amongst the trees; the tops of them were still bright when there was nothing but darkness and shadow on the ground. Then the light faded swiftly, and only the sky was faintly grey.

Nanny came up and found me sitting there.

'Miss Char!' she said, coming over and touching me in the darkness. 'I've been looking for you everywhere, and then I remembered about the diaries. Miss Char, are you ill? You are all wet, my dear!'

'Tears, Nanny. Just tears.'

I hope I have piqued your interest. For a while, I have to admit, I didn't have the same admiration for this book that I used to. I read it at a difficult time, when I was dealing with some health issues, and it almost depressed me. I began to wonder if Charlotte was too irritating, too 'wimpy-washy' of a character! Why doesn't she stand up for herself? Why doesn't she question Garth's choice, and confront him? Is in fact, Charlotte Dean actually an 'enabler' (in today's vernacular)?

And Garth himself seems so rude and tramples on everyone's feelings... why isn't anyone keeping him in check?

But as the days passed I found myself thinking more and more about the book and the characters, and realized that Char's character is what makes her so loveable.

There are good things in this book also... Charlotte does find some solace in her circumstances, and she eventually finds peace on the road to forgiveness.

As I thought more and more on this novel, I realized that that is actually what it is... a story about forgiveness within the hardest of circumstances.

"At first I felt very bitter against Kitty. I told myself that she had always wanted Hinkleton Manor and the position and luxury that would be the portion of Garth's wife. It was not Garth she wanted, just to be Lady of the Manor....

I could forgive her now, and I wanted to forgive her... I wanted to sweep all the bitterness away and go forward feeling free and clean. It was easier to forgive Kitty when I remembered that she had ruined her own life, too."

Peggy Stuart says

I adore this author. This is a bittersweet novel about love, lies and misunderstandings. Clementina is not really the main character, but she is vital to the story.
