



Birdcage Walk

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A London Murder Mystery Based on a True Historical Crime

George Woolfe is a young working class East London printmaker in the early 1900's. Frustrated by the constraints of his class and station, he sees an opportunity to escape when he by chance meets Charles Booth, author of one of the most comprehensive social surveys of London ever undertaken. But this auspicious encounter has tragic consequences for George who, within six months, is charged with the murder of a young woman. But did he do it?

Set at the dawning of a new century, when the rigid class and gender boundaries of the Victorian age were soon to shift and realign, Birdcage Walk is a historical novel that vividly brings to life a real-life Edwardian murder and the possible miscarriage of justice that followed it.

Birdcage Walk Details

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Author : Kate Riordan

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From Reader Review Birdcage Walk for online ebook

Mitch McCrimmon says

I started this book a few months ago but couldn't get into it. Second try, finished it and enjoyed it. Very atmospheric and authentic tone of 1901 London, rough, poor part of town. Excellent character study and engaging plot, especially well written. Based on a true murder story of the time. Totally convincing psychological/emotional portrayal of the struggles of main participants. My only minor negative was the trial at the end which I found to be a bit overly detailed and drawn out. So, I skim read this part but would definitely recommend this book and look forward to reading more by Kate Riordan. I can't get enough of authentic sounding historical fiction set in Britain.

Brandy says

Emotional!!!!

Had me on the edge of my seat. What a ride..... I think it's worth the read! This author is becoming one of my favorites.

Elizabeth says

Setting, atmosphere, and characters of Edwardian England well-drawn. Good examination of class differences and relations between classes as the world was changing around the turn of the 20th century. Somewhat suspenseful, although the end is not surprising. It's apparently based on a true story. I would've liked an author's note to let me know about the research she did and the actual facts known.

Elisabeth says

The year is 1901 and young George is living with his father, a birdcage maker and his sister. A chance encounter with a well to do gentleman and the sale of a birdcage to him will change his life forever. A friendship develops between George and the gentleman's niece and as this friendship blossoms it will set in chain events that will alter his life and the lives of those around him forever.

In an atmospheric murder/thriller, the author transports the reader back to turn of the century London. This book kept me hooked until the very end. A super book which I really recommend. I am looking forward to reading her latest book 'The girl in the photograph' very soon.

Katherine Sunderland says

First and foremost I must say how vividly Riordan is able to bring Edwardian London to life. I slipped into

the era easily, completely transported there without even having to think about it, enjoying the attention to detail and her evocative descriptions, for example:

"Only in the darkest corners of the tenement street, where the sun never quite penetrated, did the silt of muck, canal slop and coal rake shine wetly between the uneven cobbles. Elsewhere all was as dry as dust, baked by a late summer sun that shone relentlessly.."

We meet George who lives with his father, a birdcage maker. I loved the description of the birdcages - I felt I could almost touch them from the beautiful images Riordan created. The sense of passion and love the owner felt for them immediately made them feel special and as significant as the characters in the book. Riordan conjures up the artistic skill and patience that creates something so arresting with phrases like "....gently as though it were wrought from glass, he lifted down the cage. Though unpainted, it was delicately crafted, with fine tendrils of metal wound into the likeness of roses at its tapering top and ivy leaves threaded around the base.....he could manipulate and shape the bands of metal into miniature aviaries as if he was twisting ribbons... though the finished cages were as sturdy as they appeared delicate..." I was left hankering after one for myself!

This particular Birdcage was "the grandest cage he had ever made" which subtly implies the significance that it will have in the novel - not only is it special to George's father, it also becomes more symbolic. It is the sale of this birdcage to a wealthy gentleman which changes the course of George's life forever. George also uses it as a metaphor for marriage and to explain how he feels about the character of Charlotte. In fact, the more I reflect upon it, the more I realise just how significant the birdcage imagery (and then implicitly the connotations of birds, flight and freedom) is to many aspects of the novel's plot and characters.

George is an interesting character. I felt sympathy towards him. He is an honest, hardworking young man who hankers after a better life - it is not necessarily the wealth of Clemmie's family (the daughter for whom the gentleman bought the cage) that he envies but more the intellectual potential and promise that her life holds; the opportunities he cannot access. His interest and budding friendship with Clemmie is genuine and innocent. It is his integrity that actually becomes his downfall.

His sense of class and place is palpable and reminds us firmly of the era in which the story takes place and therefore the consequences this will have on the future for George when his character is called into question. I loved the Booth's maid whose disdain for having to serve George - someone of her own class- is captured through the following description: "looking openly disgusted the maid withdrew and soon returned with a white enamelled plate and a large mug of stewed tea". She will put him firmly in his place even if the family won't. Similarly George's painful awareness of his position is agonisingly captured through the "strain to behave in the correct way, to not betray himself".

Similarly, Charlotte, George's best friend, and Cissy, his sister, are well drawn characters. Charlotte's vivaciousness compliments George's cautiousness and her jealousy is deftly portrayed. I love the way Riordan is able (in all her novels) to convey so much through such understated phrases, for example Charlotte's reaction to George's fondness for Clemmie is actually more significant as it unsettles all she thought she was sure of - "as if her knack of carelessness had been stolen when her back was turned". I guess this also shows how "dangerous" perhaps George's attempts to transcend class barriers are and the risks of imagining himself to be worthy of a place in Clemmie's parlour.

I also related to Cissy who at every turn just tries to do what she thinks is for the best even when unwittingly affecting the dramatic turn of events.

Riordan's novel is captivating and atmospheric. Her moments of thoughtful observation are as compelling as the events in the story itself. In his short life, George undergoes a huge journey of self discovery through his interaction with Charlotte. His revaluation of his father was particularly moving as he realised "the gentleness George had always loved and prized had warped into passivity; the quietness that once seemed like self assurance, now seemed to reveal itself as weakness."

I really do love Riordan's writing. It is atmospheric and haunting. Her use of George's letters to break up the chapters added real intrigue and gave the story some additional suspense. The historic detail is so well intertwined that the book reads with an assured authenticity. The dialogue is convincing and the characters are all very three dimensional and well drawn. Each of them leaves a mark on the reader.

What is more captivating is that this is actually based on a true story. For me, this made the ending so much more poignant and powerful. I was gripped and I could have highlighted pages and pages of exquisite description and imagery that appealed to me.

With only one more of her books to go on my To Be Read pile, I am almost delaying reading it. A sense that I will be left rather bereft once I have finished it already puts me off starting it!!

If you like Katherine Webb, Kate Morton, Sarah Waters, Emily Organ, Kate Mosse or Kate Summerscale, then you should definitely give this book a go. And as it was published in 2012, it is available on Amazon for an exceptionally reasonable price!

Bloss ? says

I really do feel that so much is lost when reading eBooks. I vastly prefer print; in books like this, where there are a few time hops, it's confusing and print books make it so much easier to flip back and re-read or refresh your memory. However, if I wanted to read this, it was eBook or bust (which is an alarming trend I've noticed lately but never mind...)

This was an interesting story about a spineless git and a manipulative, insane cow. Charlotte was terrible. The very idea that some crazy loon can ruin another person's life with manipulation, lies and slander really frightened me. I couldn't think of any reason George kept going back to her other than perhaps Stockholm Syndrome. George was a bit more likeable overall but he made some questionable choices and didn't seem quite right in the head to me. I adored Cissy and Mr. Booth. Even Clemmie was charming, albeit naïve.

The events in this story were chilling and scary. Not in a spooky or ghost type of way but a very real problem that still exists today: this guilty until proven innocent nonsense. This story reminded me a lot of the Steven Truscott case.

The ending made the book all the more chilling. I applaud Kate Riordan for the ending she chose as it was unsettling and probably accurate.

I do recommend giving this a go. It's fast, it's interesting and it makes you think. It does lose points for being unavailable in print, though.

Robyn says

I was lucky to be able to listen to this audio book during my daily commute, and I couldn't wait to get into the car each day to continue with the story. Kate Riordan brilliantly captures the Edwardian period in London at the turn of the century and disparity between social classes. Vivid characters emerge as the story unfolds. The compelling tale of a true crime murder, depth of historical detail, Kate's clever use of dialogue and beautiful descriptive writing makes this a 5 star book. My only disappointment is that I now want my own hard copy, but it only seems to be available as kindle or e-book.

My Book Addiction and More MBA says

BIRDCAGE WALK by Kate Riordan is an interesting historical fiction based on a true crime story set in 1900 Victorian London. Wonderful and exciting story based on a true London crime. When lines are drawn between social classes, trouble begins, murder occurs, tragedy and a true miscarriage of justice. Well written where detail research is obvious. Engaging characters and vivid descriptions. If you enjoy true crime, historical events, London's criminal courts, and a compelling read than "Birdcage Walk" is for you. Received for an honest review from the publisher.

RATING: 4

HEAT RATING: MILD

REVIEWED BY: AprilR, My Book Addiction and More/My Book Addiction Reviews

Katherine Dunn-Mines says

[to make victims almost seem less sympathetic and probable criminals more endearing - albeit in the

Jane says

Beautifully written and captivating tale, made all the more poignant as it is based on actual events that took place.

The author has taken some liberties but I understand why. Her style really drew me in and made me want to find out what happened next.

The descriptions of life and the difference between classes of people are very well written too; no glossing over!

If you like Victorian crime reads, this is for you... But remember, this really happened...

Julie says

Terrible ending.

Maria says

Great story! I enjoyed the characters, location and accuracy. Hopefully this author will be writing more soon!

Linda Hardy says

George is 21 years old and lives in Hoxton, London, he does not have much, but he has a job, goes out to the pub sometimes and is dating a local girl, he is asked to deliver a birdcage to a house in Highbury and there he meets the lady of the house and her daughter, and starts to do odd jobs for them each week, his girlfriend Charlotte soon gets jealous thinking her George is seeing someone else, this eventually leads to George and Charlotte parting ways but then on Christmas Eve they meet up and go out for the evening but only George would return home alone, Charlotte is found murdered the next day and George in a panic makes a run for it. This story is all about If Only he did not run, if only he did this instead, or did that instead. The story is set in the early 1900's when through circumstantial evidence it was far easier to pin a murder on a innocent person, very sad at the end.

El says

My friend told me to read Birdcage Walk and, by the time I'd taken this out of the Library, I realised that he'd meant the Helen Dunmore! However, I carried on with this one and was glad I did. It took a good while to get into the actual plot and the two main characters were a bit lacking in reader compatibility, but the story itself was interesting (though I'd not known it was based on a true story) and the detailed description of 1900s London was fascinating. One let-down was the typos and errors in the Kindle version and the odd lapse in Victorian/Edwardian English. Would a Victorian have said, I'm bored OF? I'd be surprised. Tighter proofreading would have sorted these errors out. However, it was a good read and I learned a great deal about the social history of the period and would recommend it as a good read.

Lanny says

Lamo. For starters, this is NOT a mystery book. Don't let them fool you. The first 1/2 of the book (according to kindle it was exactly 55%) is about two horrible people and their messed up relationship. You kind of hope that at least one of them gets murdered and fast cause you can't handle all the drama. The second part of the book is the detectives finding the suspect and his trial. The third part is about whether or not the suspected person will actually hang. That is it. There I just saved you the trouble of ever reading this book yourself.

