



Arsenic and Old Paint

Hailey Lind (Pseudonym), Juliet Blackwell

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Former art forger Annie Kincaid has been operating a legitimate decorative painting business for quite a while, but memories are long in the art world. Now, with the blessing of the FBI Art Squad, Annie's using her underworld connections to boost her new art investigation business, where she's partnered with none other than ex-art thief/ love interest Michael X. Johnson. At first it's strictly business, but when she stumbles across a body in an exclusive Nob Hill men's club, and an insurance adjuster asks her to find a stolen (and forged) erotic painting, and then her Uncle Anton is attacked, Annie's on the trail of more than just art. This time, she's looking for justice. Annie is a strong woman protagonist. She has reinvented herself from a checkered past as an art forger to a legitimate businesswoman/artist. She moves easily between high and low social circles. as she makes the rounds of San Francisco and Bay Area locales, including tunnels beneath the pavements of Nob Hill and Chinatown; the homes and hideouts-even a downtown sex club-of the rich and famous; and the artists' studios South of Market. The Art Lover's series has an entertaining light touch, especially when either of Annie Kincaid's two romantic interests appear. But Arsenic and Old Paint also deals with serious social issues- some history of slave trading in Chinatown, and its connection with San Francisco powers-that-were; and the male exploitation of the female and immigrant powerless, an issue that continues to this day.

Arsenic and Old Paint Details

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Author : Hailey Lind (Pseudonym) , Juliet Blackwell

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From Reader Review Arsenic and Old Paint for online ebook

Ariel says

Series: 4th in Art Lover's Mysteries

Sensuality: Adult references and situations

Main Character: Former art forger Annie Kincaid, now owns a decorative "faux" painting business

Setting: Modern day, San Francisco California

Annie is on a faux finish job at the exclusive (meaning wealthy men only) Fleming Mansion when she and her workers follow a scream to find a dead man...in a tub...with a sword in his chest. Is it just Annie's imagination or does the scene really look like a recreation of the famous painting "The Death of Marat." This reunited Annie with the local police detective Annette Crawford who knows Annie a little too well from the prior books. Annie is convinced something shady is going on in the Fleming Mansion.

Annie had become business partners with a "former" art thief when the FBI Art Squad asked them to run an online art appraisal website in hopes of snagging some stolen art. Through this Annie gets a job offer from an insurance adjuster asking for help in finding a supposedly stolen-but maybe insurance fraud surrounding a Gauguin painting. Naturally the preconceived idea is that she maintains her connections to the art world's criminal element. Then Annie's influential and attractive landlord Frank (a mutual attraction but seemingly oil-and-water relationship) asks for her help in finding a stolen life-size bronze statue of Hermes stolen from a lesser social club. Just to make it interesting, the super hot "former" art thief Michael picks now to re-enter her life.

Annie is a fun and snarky sleuth who learned determination from a pit bull. She ends up running down the three story lines and delivers some laughs too. I will warn readers, her investigations take her into tunnels under San Francisco and even into a "Sex Club" running down clues and leads - there is never anything explicit though. There are laughs even in the most unlikely scenes, so don't let this scare you away. Her dilemma between wealthy Frank and unpredictable Michael comes across as plausible. You end up cheering for Annie, the underdog who is remaking her life and doing her best to be on the lawful path and be respectable.

The surprise breakout stars of the book are a pair of homeless guys who try to help Annie with information on the stolen statue of Hermes and keep popping up in the book. These guys were great and funny. And a close second was the character of Wesley Fleming of the original Fleming Mansion. He gets honorary membership to the club but is somewhat an outcast, probably because he is socially backwards and fascinated with bats. He becomes part of Annie's merry band aiding her to solve these cases.

The multiple cases all have some relationship to one another and the plot is solid. The mystery itself has a few twists and I didn't see the killer coming. The tense confrontation with the killer is great and the short wrap answers the remaining questions and even a few surprises. The ending seems to point to Annie being given a clear shot with one of her two beaus.

It was a long wait for this fourth book, but well worth it. I am already looking forward to the next book in the series. If you have not yet tried this series, I certainly recommend it.

Please join me at my mystery book blog:

<http://mysterysuspence.blogspot.com>

Kristen says

I love this series! I enjoyed book 4, but the ending left me a little down-hearted and unsatisfied, I have to be honest.

More than anything else, I absolutely adore the humour in this series. Annie is hilariously sarcastic and I connect to her on every level. I love the way she responds to the crazy stuff that happens to her, with sarcasm and gallows-humour, rather than crying or hysterics. She tickles me and I love her to pieces.

I also love the entire cast of supporting characters in the series, from Annie's larcenous grandfather Georges [who mostly appears in this book as quoted from his new blog to begin each chapter], to Annie's duelling beaus Frank and Michael, to Mary, her tough-as-nails assistant, to the many minor characters specific to each book's situation, the authors of this series know how to write engaging characters, and then give them interesting things to do, and super-clever lines to say.

I find the writing in this series a step up from the typical cozy [which I would classify this series as] because it's writing and the characters are so intelligent and clever. That is always a plus for me as I write for a living too, and dull or stupid characters always annoy me. There aren't any of those in this series. Even the bad guys are reasonably intelligent.

The pace of these books is always spot on! Fast enough to keep me from getting bored, but with enough "resting" sections that I don't feel constantly breathless and at least half the chapters end with a big enough cliff-hanger to get me to go on even when I planned to put down my eReader and go to bed.

Annie's tendency to get herself into ludicrous situations and have to figure out how to deal with them is unabated in this installment, and offers just as much entertainment as in past books. It's lots of fun to follow along as Annie gets herself into one fix after another.

The only downer this time was that the ending really leaves the reading hanging big-time, especially as I don't see any next book planned or underway, which means we'll be waiting at least a couple of years before any resolution for where Annie is at the end of this book to be forthcoming, and that's a drag. But otherwise, there was nothing about this I didn't enjoy, and I recommend this series highly if you like a cozy with an attitude.

Sue Brown says

Enjoyed this book. Snappy dialog, San Francisco, and knowledgeable authors.

Jane Ellithorpe says

Another cliff hanger!

I thoroughly enjoyed yet another Hailey Lind book! Could she please whitewater! I love the subject matter.

Being an artist I'm stunned with the subject!

IslandRiverScribe says

This is the fourth and presumably final book in the Art Lover's Mystery series. This book has a copyright date of 2010 and, as I write this review, it is 2014. The writing team of Hailey Lind, two sisters, has apparently disbanded. The only member of the duo seemingly still in the writing business is Juliet Blackwell, and she is actively involved in two other series.

I make note of these facts because of the manner in which the novel ends. But before the book can end, it has to begin. At the end of the previous novel, "Brush with Death," Annie Kincaid went into the art appraisal business with Michael Johnson. It is actually a front for an ongoing FBI sting operation with Annie and Michael sharing in the rewards associated with recovering stolen art. As we begin this novel, Michael is on probation with the Feds but has been AWOL for the past week. Frank DeBenton has disassociated himself from Annie even though the FBI stopped him from following through on the threats he made in the previous novel. And Annie is repairing and duplicating the wall covering in a Nob Hill mansion that has become a misogynistic males-only private club for the uber-wealthy.

And by the second page of the first chapter, Annie has followed screams to a bedroom in that males-only club. There, in a bathtub, she finds the body of a man, a sword in his chest and posed in a tableau of Jacques Louis David's painting, "Death of Marat." Later that day, Annie is hired by an insurance investigator to locate an original Gauguin that had been stolen from a member of that same club where she had found the body that morning. Then, that same day, Frank breaks his silence and asks Annie to locate a century-old bronze statue called "Resting Hermes," stolen from Frank's club, which is located in the same area as the males-only club. Coincidence anyone?

As the reader can imagine, the "coincidences" are anything but and the remainder of the book, scene by scene, brings the relationship between the murder, the Gauguin and the Hermes into focus. But that is not all the author team brings into focus. Hailey Lind finally and pointedly focuses on the romantic relationship between Annie and Frank as well as the personal relationship between Annie and Michael – at the very end of the book.

Every rope, whether it is a plot thread or a clothesline, is composed of a minimum of three threads, braided together and meshed to form an entity greater than and stronger than any of its individual threads. The Rule of Three always applies.

By the last page of the book, Annie is left hanging by only one thread of her rope. The author duo has dramatically frayed the other two threads within millimeters of their existence. And then the series just ends, with the main character suspended in mid-air, the edge of the cliff above her and the hard surface of the ground below.

Perhaps the author team did not know that they would disband when this book was published. Maybe they were just succumbing to the trend of that time when cliffhangers seemed to be all the rage. Perhaps the writing team had not yet experienced the actual rage and the financial backlash that a significant cliffhanger ending engendered. Nevertheless, the writing team did end, the series did end and the book got thrown across the room.

I felt absolutely cheated and insulted by an author who would not only end a series with a cliffhanger but would end it with two cliffhangers. But after a few hours and in a much calmer state, I went back and read the last 30 pages again – slowly. And that's when I realized that the novel didn't really end with two cliffhangers. It didn't even end in one cliffhanger. The author duo may not blatantly spell out the culminations of those two storylines – Frank and Michael – but we know how they end. We really do know.

VMercuri says

I didn't want to put this one down, but how could you end it that way!
I can't wait for the next installment :)

Rachel says

I really love this series, and while this was a great book, it was maybe the weakest of the four. Also disappointing is that the book is left open ended, like they were planning on another book, but this seems to be the last one published in the series. I figure 7 years without a new book is enough of a sign that there won't be any more.

At least we get to see Detective Annette Crawford in Juliet Blackwell's Haunted Home Renovation Mystery series. BTW, Juliet Blackwell is half of the sister team that makes up the pen name "Hailey Lind."

Dharia Scarab says

Warning This Review contains my thoughts on the series as a whole, and spoilers on this book specifically.

Over all I have to say I was disappointed with this series. I really wanted to like it because I love the two series written one of the sisters as Juliet Blackwell.

Unfortunately Annie Kincaid just couldn't cut it as a main character for me. Constantly getting herself into stupid situations, dragging her friends into danger, constantly lying to people and avoiding the truth in even simple situations, and lets not even get into her police phobia... All though, in this series apparently the police are morons and not interest in what she has to say when she does bother to tell them the truth.

And then of course there is her disaster of a love life...

Half her problems with Frank during the series she brings on herself with her lying and her crazy angry attitude. But by the third and forth books, Frank is suddenly keeping things from her left and right. Talk about reverse character development.

And Michael, bah! The fact that she could even entertain romantic thoughts about a guy who abandoned her in more than one bad situation in the first book, and who lied and stole paintings and gets away with it in the first and second books, and who couldn't go straight to save his life is just nuts. All this lip service is given to Annie being scared straight at 17, and how she wants to be on the straight and narrow, that alone should be

enough to keep her hormones in check around Michael.

As far as the 4th and final book in this series... Well after reading it, I can see why they never wrote a 5th. IMHO they wrote themselves into a corner with this one and instead of cleaning up the mess at the end of the book, they just give this cliff hanger ending.

1. The fact that Annie was specifically sought out by the club to be on the scene, presumably to be the fall guy, but for what? The dead guy? The allegedly stolen paintings? This is never really resolved but its used as the excuse for Michael leaving at the end of the book. No offense, but the way the dead guy was found was never going to lead the police to think that he was killed so the paintings could be stolen... So why even include it? As a way to get Annie off the job because of the wallpaper? To give the cops a red herring to chase? That seems a little extreme to me. What did Annie and/or Frank do to these people to make them want to ruin there reputations by blaming the alleged art theft on Annie.
2. Frank is married to Michael's sister... But no one thought to mention it until after they sleep together? WTF is that. Sorry, Michael is a conniving jerk, there is no way he would have kept that secret. He'd have dropped that bomb a long time ago. And upstanding Frank, who was warning Annie away from contact with Michael, to be married and stay married an art theif's sister makes no sense... It just comes across as an artificial plot device to keep the drama and love triangle alive.
3. The brother's murder is really never fully solved. Was it the crazed wife (an ending that's disappointingly similar to book three's crazed husband).
4. Leaving the series with a love triangle unresolved. Not cool. Even with the wife thing to work out, I'm a firm believer that when you have your main character pick a guy, it needs to be a final decision, not the wishy washy ending we got.
5. And we're back to Michael going on the lamb because of some allegedly stolen paintings... Really? At this point that should be a none issue. In reality after the explosive ending, the sensible resolution would have been that now that crazy wife has been revealed as the main villain, our club of misogynist men would want as much of the affair hushed up as possible including the alleged art theft piece and would find a way to blame the wife, the original dead guy, or anyone who might have conveniently died in the shoot out in that room. Unless of course Michael just wants an excuse to return to his life of crime, and if so good bye to bad rubbish.

Over all, really disappoint that this book is how they chose to leave the series. I hate cliff hangers in general, and find it specially annoying to leave a series on one.

Since I don't normally write reviews unless I have something specific to say, here's the break down of how I rate my books...

1 star... This book was bad, so bad I may have given up and skipped to the end. I will avoid this author like the plague in the future.

2 stars... This book was not very good, and I won't be reading any more from the author.

3 stars... This book was ok, but I won't go out of my way to read more, But if I find another book by the author for under a dollar I'd pick it up.

4 stars... I really enjoyed this book and will definitely be on the look out to pick up more from the series/author.

5 stars... I loved this book! It had earned a permanent home in my collection and I'll be picking up the rest of the series and other books from the author ASAP.

Susan says

Such a good series. It's too bad it just ended (as opposed to being finished).

Amy M. Putnam says

Horrible book! I couldn't even finish it! I was getting tired of the love triangle and wished something happened by the 4th book!

Lacey says

OMG... I am so upset that this is the last novel in this series! It took me absolutely forever to find this book in the first place too! Months of combing ebay just for a decent copy and now it's all over! I was late to this series, so I ended up having to buy all my copies on ebay since I couldn't find anybody still publishing them. But man was it worth it. Annie is such a great main character and her profession is so fascinating to read about. A totally unique cozy mystery series is incredibly hard to find and this series fits that bill perfectly. If you want different you got it right here. It took me absolutely forever to figure out the "who done it" in this book. Which just goes to show you what an amazing author (or author's considering Hailey Lind is a pseudonym for two sisters) Ms. Lind really is. My only complaint is that since this is the last foreseeable novel in this series I would really have enjoyed a more neatly tied up ending. Mostly I just wanted Annie to choose between Frank or Michael. And I have to say I was very much rooting for Frank. They made it SEEM like she was choosing Frank but they weren't very clear about it. I do wish there was at least one more novel in this series to tie that up nicely but you know what they say about wishes... *Sigh*.

Marlyn says

Annie Kincaid is back!

Last seen in 2007's Brush with Death, Annie runs the home decorating business she calls True/Faux Studios, as well as an art investigation business partnered with ex?-art-thief Michael X. Johnson.

When she stumbles across a dead body while doing a renovation in the Fleming Mansion, home of an exclusive men's club in San Francisco's Nob Hill, just before her Uncle Anton is hospitalized for arsenic poisoning, she thinks the two events might be related.

At the same time, a man claiming to be an insurance investigator asks her to find a bronze statue that's been stolen from another exclusive San Francisco men's club. Unfortunately, Michael has been incommunicado for days, and she has no choice but to accept the case in his absence.

All the old gang is back: jewelry-maker Samantha Jagger, stained-glass artist Pete Ibrahimbegovics, landlord Frank DeBenton, SFPD detective Annette Crawford, and the aforementioned Michael X. Johnson.

In the course of her investigations into the Fleming Union murder (for despite being warned off by the the FU management and the police, Annie is determined to find out who poisoned Anton), she visits several other old Nob Hill mansions, including an S&M club. She discovers that in the early 20th Century there were tunnels under the houses on the Hill, that had been used for various purposes including hiding runaway prostitutes.

She also chooses between the two incredibly magnetic men in her life: Frank and Michael, or does she? Complicating the issue are secrets that she learns about both of them.

Absorbing, fun and full of information about art and history, Arsenic and Old Paint was worth the wait!

*Many thanks to Perseverance Press for the Advance Reading Copy!

Judy says

This is the forth book in the Art Lover's Mystery series by Hailey Lind. In this installment, we meet Annie Kincaid as she is working at an exclusive all men's club on Nob Hill called the Fleming-Union. The club so exclusive, no women are allowed in except by special invitation, and even then they must use the rear service entrance. Even the membership list is a very closely guarded secret. But Annie was specially requested to do a repair job on some old wallpaper in the attic while most of the club members of off on a special retreat. Unfortunately Annie stumbles across a dead body, made up to look like a painting, called the Death of Marat. Strangely enough this same day, Annie's new business venture with former art thief Michael X. Johnson, is asked to look into 2 stolen pieces of art. The first by a New Zealand investigator about a painting that was reported stolen several years ago, and whose forgery has recently turned up on a local auction house. And the second, a bronze sculptor, by her landlord and security expert Frank DeBenton.

Annie begins the investigation into these art thefts and is bumbling along until her honorary Uncle Anton is found nearly dead from Arsenic gas poisoning. This sets Annie off and as she fights to uncover the mystery, things heat up. Annie is attacked once again in this book, and it looks like we just might get the love triangle between her, Michael and Frank resolved. The mystery remained tight and kept me guessing right up to the very end. I never figured out the bad guy until the very end.

This book was very good. I like the growth I see in Annie and how she is forging (no pun intended) her own path, trying to use her art forging connections and knowledge for the right side of the law. Annie's grandfather is very much still a large part of this book, as each chapter begins with a post from his new blog "Craquelure". I gave it 5 stars on Goodreads, because the ending simply rocked and I am salivating waiting for the next book.

Tori says

I finally got a hold of this last book in the series! Kasey got me started on the first two books, as her former professor was one of the authors. I found the third book at Powell's a few years ago. And I've been looking for this last one ever since. I finally tracked it down using the Link system at the library, from another library in San Jose! Whew! what a lot of work! Was it worth it? Probably not.....but I've got to say, these books have been really enjoyable!

Lind does a great job making Annie Kincaid a fun detective! Well, I guess she's not actually a detective, although dead bodies seem to be attracted to her. (Kind of like *Murder She Wrote*). Annie is a former art forger/current faux finisher. She has a partner named Michael, a landlord named Frank, and seems attracted to both. In this story, she is redoing a room at the Fleming Union Mansion (the F-U) and a body is found in the bathtub, resembling a famous picture. Stolen art, forgeries, secret tunnels under Chinatown all figure into the plot. It's always fun to read stories that take place in a familiar area like San Francisco. I enjoyed the humor in the book, as well as the storyline. Yes, there are a few too many coincidences, but oh well. Still a fun quick read.

Cristi DiGenova says

Maybe the most convoluted plot yet of the series. There is no real romantic resolution for the heroine, either, and probably no more books in the series.

Feels like it got a little too complicated and the writers didn't really bring all the plot threads to a satisfying end, but still a fun read.
