



# London Lies Beneath

*Stella Duffy*

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## **London Lies Beneath** Stella Duffy

In August 1912, three friends set out on an adventure. Two of them come home.

Tom, Jimmy and Itzhak have grown up together in the crowded slums of Walworth. They are used to narrow streets, the bustle of East Lane market, extended families weaving in and out of each other's lives. All three boys are expected to follow their father's trades and stay close to home. But Tom has wider dreams. So when he hears of a scouting trip, sailing from Waterloo to Sheppey and the mouth of the Thames - he is determined to go. And Itzhak and Jimmy go with him.

Inspired by real events, this is the story of three friends, and a tragedy that will change them for ever. It is also a song of south London, of working class families with hidden histories, of a bright and complex world long neglected. *London Lies Beneath* is a powerful and compelling novel, rich with life and full of wisdom.

## **London Lies Beneath Details**

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Author : Stella Duffy

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# From Reader Review London Lies Beneath for online ebook

## Angelique Simonsen says

loved the fact that it was based on a true story. written well but it lacked excitement

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## Star Crowned Book Throne says

**I received this book from Hachette publishers in exchange for an honest review. This has in no way affected my opinion on the book.**

I really wanted to love this book getting into it. I had imaginations of wild adventures that were dashing and fun and characters that I were ready to love and hold close in my heart. Unfortunately, my expectations were not fulfilled and I found myself vastly disappointed with the result.

While I didn't find myself hating this book, I didn't find anything that I quite loved either. The characters, firstly, had me feeling borderline bored at my first meeting and they progressively went downhill from there. It wasn't that they were horrible but they more so felt underdeveloped for me. In the midst of getting introduced to so many characters and stories I just couldn't make out a edged distinction between them all.

That's not to say that I didn't enjoy them at all. I think the beginning was really where my attention was held when it was just a few characters in focus. After that the characters and stories just blurred together I couldn't really connect with them all too much after that.

The whole landscape was probably my favourite part of the book. I'm a huge fan of the historical feel and tone of things and its beautiful the way parts of it were described. I loved the descriptions (although sometimes a little dense) and I loved the way that it was so much there, woven into the story.

The writing, lastly, has me feeling a little iffy. Its fantastic in its way of telling the story and describing the way the scenes play out, it has a great aspect to it that is interesting but on the whole, making my way through it, it felt very dense and it made it difficult to get really engrossed into the story. I found myself feeling really detached and hence finding myself often bored with the book.

Overall, I was really disappointed with how this book turned out. Its not a bad book in the sense and I know a lot of people would enjoy this book, I just found this book very dense and hard to get through.

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## Karen says

It's a simple, sad story, made even more poignant when you realise it's based on true events. I found it a little slow and repetitive in parts, but I like Stella Duffy as an author and this was a good easy read. It is very sad though. Not one to read of you're suffering from a bereavement.

I have to admit to not really connecting with it until I knew it was based in real events. Something was lacking, possibly sketchy characters, or an overly romantic view of working class lives in South London...I'm

not really sure. I found myself skimming over sections. There was a hurried review of what had happened to the main characters towards the end, and this seemed to introduce a range of new and important issues which didn't seem to round up the story so much as open up strands that could have been explored earlier.

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### **cydell says**

Poignant, interesting, although it is very obvious from the off where the story is heading, so you read on knowing that death and heartbreak loom, just not knowing for whom. There is a sweet theme running through the story about superstition and relics or curios to ward off evil. This theme introduces us to the most interesting character in the story, Edward Lovett. The depiction of raw grief is gripping, but parts of the book are too fast-paced and out of sync with the emotions being described. As always Duffy is very readable though, and it's worth a read.

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### **Sheena says**

A well written, accessible and engaging book with a lot of atmosphere and characters the reader cares about. The London of the early 20th Century is conjured up with its apparently well-established pearly king cockneys, who in fact we discover were until recently country people or refugees. We get the interactions and background stories of these families living cheek by jowl and from hand to mouth dealing with life and death and everything in between some further up the pecking order than others. The last third of the book was very powerful and affecting when the young friends led by Tom try to break out of their environment and in a small way start to see the rest of the world. The author had done a lot of research and perhaps wanted to include too much of it at times and it became a little forced although I was reading a proof edition. Lovely idea when the memorial disappears and Tom is allowed to soar at last roaming the world which was his dearest wish.

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### **Jessica says**

A quick disclaimer – I won an arc of this in a Goodreads giveaway, but that has no influence on my review and all opinions are my own!

Weirdly, I ended up enjoying this book about as much as I expected, although for different reasons than anticipated. I expected this to be quite an adventurous tale set against a gritty historical backdrop. Instead I got a rather simple yet tender story, without much action at all (to the point that it did lose me for a little while about a third of the way through), but full of heart, grief and humanity.

Characters are something Duffy does well and I enjoyed most of them. However, there is a vast array of characters in this and I didn't feel they all needed to be there. Duffy tries to nuance each of them, and there just isn't enough room for this, despite the sparse narrative. I would have much preferred less characters, and for her to really shape a few rather than brush over many. The character of Ida specifically called out to me and I feel she could have been explored more to better connect me to her story as a whole. Without giving any spoilers, there is a spiritual quality to her character that was barely touched on, and I would have loved more of that.

Weaving atmosphere into the setting is also another thing that I felt was done well. I really got a feel of a London gone by and the strength and resolve of the working class community. A couple of times crass language was used and it felt unnecessary to me, just added in to make a point and this took me out of the story a bit. However, the tone really did change for the better as the tragedy unfolded, and that pulled me back into the story after the lull I felt a little way in. Knowing this was inspired by real events makes me even more curious about the story, and I'm not sure I got quite enough from what the synopsis promised.

All in all, I really did enjoy this book but I still have mixed feelings about it because I feel that too much was attempted and that hindered my overall connection to it. Maybe more of a 3 and a half star rating, but I definitely want to check out more from Stella Duffy.

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## Cat says

Inspired by real events, this is the story of three friends, and a tragedy that will change them forever. Set in the working class streets of Walworth South London in the early 1900s the book concentrates on Tom, Jimmy, Itzhak and their families.

If you're familiar with London and in particular the Walworth area this book is so much more than a story of friendship, it is a story of south London, a history of the streets and the families that made it such a complex place. Despite progression over the last 100 years or so this book is an echo of life now, families crammed into small houses, parents working all hours to provide for their families, children with dreams of doing something different, not following the same path as their parents, making more of their life, seeing more, doing more, having adventures beyond the streets of Walworth. Aspirations every child should have and be encouraged to have.

This is the first book I've read by Stella Duffy and I'll certainly be looking up some of her older work. She is a beautiful writer, crafting the world her characters live in and opening each of them up to us so that we connect with their inner soul. This book is nothing without the people, although there is one major tragedy towards the end of the book within the rest of it very little happens and yet Duffy keeps you entranced. The depth and history given to her characters is fantastic and slowly throughout the book she opens up them up to us, sharing their insecurities with us, allowing us to see the last troubling worries before they sleep and the hope and optimism for the future that wakes them each morning.

Life for the families of Walworth was hard, working 6 days a week most of the time, always wondering if they had earned enough to put food on the table, clothe the children, educate them. The struggles of the families contrasting with the dreams of the boys is an important part of this story which is handled very well by Duffy. It would have been easy to over dramatize the poverty but she successfully paints a realistic picture whilst also showing us the wealth held within the families. Close-knit communities where children are cherished and raised by all, where no one goes without in a time of tragedy, where there is always a chair by a warm fire and someone to share the burden.

At the heart of the book are Tom, Jimmy and Itzhak, best friends and partners in crime. When not in school or helping with work and household chores the boys are found exploring south London. From Clapham to Nunhead every street, park and waterside path offers them a new world to explore. Always looking for the next adventure the boys are over the moon when a new Scout troop is established in Walworth and they're given permission to join. Each boy finds his own strength through the scouts, knot tying, map making, swimming, and leadership and together they prepare to embark on the biggest adventure of their young life a boat trip along the Thames to a summer scout camp in Sheppey. A Thames boat trip might not seem like much of an adventure to a reader today but when you picture the river of the time, a bustling waterway filled with cargo ships and passenger ships taking people to unimaginable lands, a vast stretch of water which the

boys would have rarely crossed never mind travelled upon then you can begin to understand the caution and worry of their parents and the sheer excitement of the boys.

The lives of the people of Walworth were forever changed after the boat trip. In today's age we are touched, more often than we'd like, by tragedies that impact entire communities and Duffy details wonderfully the conflict between a families private grief and a community's need to mourn and commemorate.

This a slow moving book with wonderful stories within the story and it is an absolute pleasure to spend time amongst the families of Walworth.

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### **Mary Lou says**

I have been meaning to read a Stella Duffy for a while, and as this was the only one I could find at the library, I embarked upon it. I wasn't sure about the subject matter and was rather put off by the opening chapter. Once these issues were behind me I was delighted by this book.

Based on a true story and set in London in 1912, this is more than an interesting and touching chronicle of a tragedy which happened just before World War I. Stella Duffy has created an authentic feel for the setting, using the background relationships and conditions of the families of the central characters. Her descriptions of grief are sincere, and amongst the most moving I have read.

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### **Linda Semple says**

On my bookshelves, amongst the traditionally-sorted-by-author rows, there have always been any number of 'virtual classifications, unknown to anyone but me.

There's 'quite good mysteries set in all-female closed communities'; 'lesbian coming-of-age novels'; 'pretty awful novels that have a residual sentimental value'. And, of course, the beauty of virtual shelving is any book can, simultaneously, sit on any number of shelves...

There's a large, virtual shelf called 'London Novels'. Inclusion on this shelf requires a specific qualification, namely that London itself should be a character. Background, foreground, major player, less important subtext, all of them have my home town as a tangible element of their plot and colour. Josephine Bell's 'The Port of London Murders'; Maureen Duffy's 'Londoners'; Margery Allingham's 'The Tiger in the Smoke'; Sara Water's 'The Night Watch' all have a place. And there's a little corner all to itself for Stella Duffy's books, many of which fit the bill.

Added bonus points for being based on a real episode, 'London Lies Beneath' is another tour de force from an author with the most astonishing ability to write characters and believable dialogue for them.

You will care terribly about the people in this book. And Stella Duffy will break your heart.

It will have been worth it.

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## **Heather says**

Wow. This was a truly beautiful book and I enjoyed every word.

The story is set in 1912 and tells of three young boys living in the slums in South London. They join a local Scout troop and beg their parents to allow them to go on a Scout camp which leads to tragedy. The book is based on a true story which makes it all the more powerful.

A brilliant read which tells of adventure, friendship, maternal love and loss with a historical background of London just before the First World War. I would highly recommend

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## **Jonathan says**

This is one of those novels that grows on you as you read it. At first I found it almost run of the mill, but as I carried on it became a book that 20 or 30 pages at a sitting weren't quite enough.

The story is mostly set in east London, the year is 1912, and concerns several families who are linked by the friendship of their young sons. The mothers, fathers and the sons are the main focus of the book, carrying on with their lives, for the most part scraping by for a living. One of the boys, Tom, is desperate for adventure, his imagination carrying him beyond the confines of the local area, which is all the world he really knows. So when he hears of places in a local scout troop, he encourages his friends Jimmy and Itzhak to join up with him. We know from the beginning (or the book cover in my case), that a trip on a boat down the Thames to a summer camp for the scouts ends in disaster, and there is a general sense of unease which builds up to this point in the book. Then it deals with the aftermath of what happens.

There is a focus on charms and amulets, stories and magic. Sometimes they are heeded, sometimes ignored or disbelieved. They are a part of all the families lives though, no matter their background. The 'Beneath' of the title refers to many things - the thoughts and feelings of the people, their origins, the presence of the river, leading to the sea, and what is hidden, and lost beneath its surface. There is also a queer sensibility woven into the story, another layer to the lives of all the characters really.

Whether it is the tragic outcome (based on a real event), or the daily lives of the characters, it is easy to connect with them, and this ultimately makes it an engaging and moving book.

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## **Ellen says**

Wavering between a 3 and a 4 star for this book. I found the first third heavy going, trying to work out which boy was which in their individual story. But from the moment they joined the scouts and started planning the trip down the Thames - ouch! As the mother of a young boy who tends to let her child roam, this story hit hard. And that was before I realised it was based on a true story, which I only picked up after reading about the memorial at the end. Tragic, and the anticipation of waiting to find out which was the child who died - heartrending.

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## **Kirsty says**

I read around a third of this, but it simply failed to grip me. I felt as though Duffy was trying to do too much with too many characters, rather than focusing upon the three boys who should be the pivotal point of this true story. Not for me.

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## **Nicolas Chinardet says**

A lovely poetic and evocative novel bringing to life a forgotten tragedy, with the added charm of being mostly set very near where I live.

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## **Ruth Dipple says**

This book is a fictional account of the lives and deaths of boys who drowned whilst sailing a 30 foot cutter to a summer camp in Kent (not the Arethusa, a navy training ship, as stated in the book - there seems to have been some confusion about that), and their families, so not an easy or happy read. From my observations of families who have experienced this (sadly these days, teenage lads killed in car crashes) I would say it is an accurate description of the trauma, one that anyone with children can scarcely bring themselves to think about.

Having said this, the first two thirds of the book is about three of the boys and their families (all fictional) which gives some perspective on what the adventure of joining the Scouts and going on the expedition meant to them.

If you don't mind a very sad story, you may well enjoy this book.

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