



The Guardian of Secrets

Jana Petken

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After fleeing from an abusive husband accused of murder, Celia Merrill becomes embroiled in a Spanish Civil War.

Celia's two sons march under opposing banners, whilst her twin daughters take different paths; one to the Catholic Church and the other to the battlefields. And in the shadow of war, a sinister villain from the past resurfaces with the sole purpose of destroying the entire family.

"Four generations struggle in a suspenseful family saga, which begins in 1912, in Kent, England, and ends in 1939 in Spain, during the Civil War."

The Guardian of Secrets Details

Date : Published November 7th 2014 by JCP Publishing (first published September 6th 2013)

ISBN :

Author : Jana Petken

Format : Kindle Edition 681 pages

Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Adventure, War, Drama, Fiction, Epic

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From Reader Review The Guardian of Secrets for online ebook

Gale Stanley says

The Guardian of Secrets sent me on a journey into the early 20th Century with characters I grew to love or hate. The descriptive, captive way, in which the author, Jana Petken wrote, left me feeling as though I were in the story.

The well researched and harrowing account of a civil war where family members fought against each other was brilliantly portrayed. Add that to the decisions these characters made, the way , in which they grew from these decisions, the evil of Joseph Dobbs, and the passion of Maria and Carlos, and you have a well rounded, excellent piece of historical fiction. If you love historical books, you won't find better than this.

Rosina Lippi says

Historical fiction is my first love. I read widely and I'm always looking for new authors. I would like to say that The Guardian of Secrets has won me over, but I can't. My first problem with it was that it could have been set in the present day. To write historical fiction you have to evoke the past, but I got not one bit of that here. Even the war struck me as off key.

I don't know if this novel was self published, but I'm guessing it was. A good editor would have worked with Petken to carve this novel down to a reasonable size and that would have helped enormously with what I can only call a terribly plodding, overwrought plot.

It's really important in a novel of this length to generate some tension -- and repeatedly-- but here everything is laid out in painful detail when telling less would have engaged the reader more. The characterizations are shallow; the terrible abusive husband is all bad, black as sin, murderous. The wife is blindly in love, frustrating in her extreme naive view of the world, and truly -- the only word I can come up with -- boring.

Generally I just don't review novels that don't work for me, because often I recognize that a particular novel is well put together, but not my cup of tea. That's not the case here. I suppose I felt compelled to write a review because of the absolutely glowing reviews. I'm at a loss, I confess. I just don't get it.

Jana Petken says

BlueInk Red Star review

Debut novelist Jana Petken delivers a powerful family epic that chronicles the travails of a British woman and her family during the Spanish Civil War. Recently wedded, Celia Merrill Dobbs' initial expectations of marital bliss quickly dissolve in 1912, when her husband Joseph reveals he has married her only to inherit her wealthy father's prosperous farm in the English countryside. After Celia discovers that Joseph is her

father's killer, she and their newborn son Peter escape to Spain.

In Spain, she lives with the Martínez family, aristocratic landholders in Valencia. Celia becomes enamoured with widower Ernesto Martínez. They soon marry and raise their four children amid rising political tensions gripping the country.

Petken masterfully moves the gripping action along by creating credible characters and suspenseful plot twists. Writing in a straightforward manner and infusing scenes with details that inform but don't overwhelm, she portrays each of the characters' efforts to survive while coming to terms both with the horrors of wartime and personal bouts with excessive pride and passion.

Though the action is grounded in a particular time and place, the novel's concerns are universal, as typified when Celia's daughter ruminates on whether Spain would eventually "look back and feel proud of a war that had killed hundreds of thousands...or would it feel as she did now, betrayed by men with selfish political ambitions and lust for power." Despite its length, the captivating story succeeds brilliantly and becomes an unforgettable page-turner.

This is a must-read for historical fiction fans.(less)

KIRKUS

REVIEWS

TITLE INFORMATION

THE GUARDIAN OF SECRETS

Petken, Jana

AuthorHouse (714 pp.)

ISBN: 978-1481775748; September 11, 2013

BOOK REVIEW

A suspenseful, compelling historical novel.

A dark debut novel about a woman's escape from a life of abuse and her ensuing struggle

By all appearances, Celia Dobbs has everything a young Englishwoman in 1912 could want. She's newly married to Joseph Dobbs, a handsome man with whom she's besotted, and is the daughter of Peter Merrill, a wealthy man whose ownership of a vast farm ensures that Celia and Joseph will live well.

But all is not as it seems: Joseph soon shows his true colours as a violent drunk with gambling debts, and he proves to be a severely abusive husband, flinging expletives and punches as swiftly as he once cast promises of love. His dark side takes on added horror when Celia learns that he's responsible for the murder of her father.

With the help of her aunt Marie, Celia and her new born son escape from Kent to Spain, and Marie promises that she will see justice served while Celia's away. Once in Spain, Celia meets a man named Ernesto and begins the next chapter of her life.

After Joseph's trial ends with a guilty verdict and order of execution, Marie decides to give Celia the dignity of being a widow instead of a divorcee, by destroying the divorce papers that would have freed Celia from her marriage.

Back in Spain, the novel details Celia's recovery and her children's developing lives, and they become key

players in a tense, fast-paced story.

The writing is often captivating, with a consistently engaging tone throughout, although the violent scenes are somewhat graphic and disturbing. Celia's growth as a character truly sets this novel apart as more than a simple drama: It's also a commentary on how strong a woman can become when facing adversity.

Reader's Favorite 5 Stars

The rich, vivid descriptions of each scene and surroundings, from England to Spain, are excellently portrayed and easy to visualize. All in all, *The Guardians of Secrets* is a thrilling and engaging read. It will definitely please historical fiction fans.

Marcel Spenkelink says

I realised today that I have a problem. I finished reading *The Guardian of Secrets* last night and now I find myself longing to learn more about what happened to the Martinez family. But alas, with the demise of Maria the book has come to an end.

And what a book it is. I can well believe it took this long to write it because there is clear evidence all the way through that a lot of research went into it. From early 20th century country life in Kent to life in Valencia before and during the war, it was all written in such a way that for me as the reader it was easy to understand what happened and what the consequences were of these events.

Whether it was about Spain or the characters in the story, I never got lost. What struck me as well was the way the author kept track of Pedro, Miguel and Maria who all three experienced the war from completely different angles. Added to that was Carlos and the ongoings of the Martinez-Merrill clan and as a final ingredient for this melange of varying personalities the miserable life of Joseph Dobbs. Brilliant plotting on Jana Petken's part and a exhilarating read on mine.

One of the things I particularly like when reading accomplished writer's novels is their capacity in writing to finish every chapter in such a way that there is no chance you're going to put the book down when you finish it. In a review of a book a Philadelphia newspaper book reviewer classified the book therefore as "unputdownable", thus adding a new word to the language that has the most words since centuries anyway. Personally I would have no hesitation qualifying "*The Guardian*" in the same way. I really did want to continue reading because I was interested in either learning more about the character, about what happened to him or her or how the events would develop.

The way people and situations are described deserves another mentioning as far as I am concerned. Jana has described countrysides in a way that brings the corresponding pictures straight to my mind's eye. You have described the political and military ongoings in a most understandable way and all of it of course verifiably correct. She described the most horrible scenes associated with warfare in a way that leaves little or nothing to anyones imagination without ever becoming offending. I enjoyed all of the characters in the book, the goodies and the baddies alike, because they were so well placed and fitted perfectly in with the rest of them. One of the characters that makes an appearance refers strongly to Jana's personal background and turns out to be a wee bit of a surprise himself at the very end. A very nice one, Jana, it really did make me finish the book with a smile on my face.

Thank you very much for all the comfortable hours in our living room reading your debut novel. I wish you and all of us that many more may follow.

Glenn Tullett says

What a great book.

I thoroughly enjoyed the storyline, and the interacting of the characters is intriguing and enjoyable. Not many books that I can't put down, but this was definitely one. Well worth the read.

James Chalk says

A Beautiful Story, Masterfully Told!

Through her epic saga, novelist Jana Petken, transports the reader back in time. Her vivid imagery and impeccable language immerses you in the historical period leaving you breathless and wiser. The perspective of the characters is completely consistent with their situation and time period. I am very impressed with the reality of this story. It is a story of love, abuse, and passion, in which Ms. Petken touches on universal commonalities between all people. The characters are rich, the emotions are raw and heartfelt, at times you may cry. You definitely won't put it down and you'll be thankful it is so long. For the record: These have been my truthful opinions after thoroughly enjoying the book, but you should know that I did receive a free copy of this book from the author in exchange for my fair and honest review.

Scarlett Morrison says

this is the best newest author I have read for many year's. From the moment I started reading it, I could not put it down. It covered a large expanse of very interesting history that had been very well research. All my friends that also read it agreed, that it was a very powerful moving story, which we did not want to end. Can't wait for the next one.

D.K. Cassidy says

I don't want to give away any part of this novel, but I will say I thought the character Celia Dobbs was superbly written. The author's writing style is clear and uncluttered, yet conveys the feel of the settings and characters very well. You will find yourself caring about the various characters and wanting to know what happens to them. The storylines are very compelling.

I haven't read historical fiction for a long time and find myself drawn once again to this genre because of this book.

Aaron Saylor says

The Guardian of Secrets is 600+ pages long but I managed to read it all in just a couple of sittings. The story kept moving forward and didn't drag, and I found the period details (early 20th century) really brought the characters and their world to life. Enjoyable and easily recommended!

Jan Raymond says

This has been one of the best books that I have read in a long time! I am not exaggerating when I say that my life came to a standstill till I finished the book. I can only marvel at the amount of research the author must have done. It is a long book, but so well written that I found myself racing through it to find out what would happen next.

Her characters are brilliant, each one so well thought out, and beautifully developed. The story itself is in turns romantic, horrific, enchanting and as a whole, sublime. It had me close to tears very often and don't get me started on the goose bumps.

I have to say Jana Petken, you are truly a brilliant writer! Please write more! This was a marvelous experience!

Adam Simmons says

I read this book and thoroughly enjoyed it, even though it is not the sort of book I usually read. I found myself rooting for the success or demise of many of the book's characters, which I take as a sign that the characters are well developed and brought to life.

The Good Fairy Nicci says

There's many things to say about this epic tale of historical fiction written by Jana Petken. It was heartbreaking. Every single page made me feel for the character Celia, and I ground my teeth in anger that she could be so dim and so stupid. As the story progressed my hatred of Joseph developed further. I was made to feel for the characters and taken on an entertaining ride. For fear of providing spoilers, I will end my commentary there...but boy was I satisfied with the next development.

Does this novel have flaws? A few minor things that were in no way substantial to me. It was long, much in the way novels once were in the past before the popularity of shorter romances. Read this if you want to watch a story develop over a long span, you want a wide cast of characters, and you want to see secrets unfold. As a lover of detail, I was thoroughly entertained. Jana makes you feel for her characters and worry for them as if they're real people. I can see that she believes in 'show, not tell' by providing descriptive imagery that is above the bar. My emotions were a rollercoaster throughout this novel until the very end.

When this author publishes her next story, I will be reading it, for I am quite intrigued to see how Miss Petken grows with her experience.

Christoph Fischer says

"The Guardian of Secrets and Her Deathly Pact" by Jana Petken is an excellent historical read. It follows a woman and her misfortune in Kent in 1912 and her subsequent life in Spain that is brought into turmoil again through the civil war.

Celia is a powerful and impressive protagonist whose thoughtful and deeply feeling character instantly made me like and feel for her. Her dreadful marriage and the murder of her father would have been enough drama for one book, but Petken moves beyond the time in England and brings Celia to beautiful Spain where she meets her husband Ernesto, a man with his own past.

It was fascinating to read about such an eventful life and heart breaking to see how a woman, who only tries to find some peace for herself, is drawn from one drama into the next.

The historical details and descriptions for both periods were clearly well researched and showed a warm love for both countries.

I knew little about the Spanish War and was very impressed how much I learned and how well Petken presented the complexities of this Civil War.

This is a powerful story told with great authority, warmth and reflection.

Jim Goforth says

Jana Petken's 'The Guardian of Secrets: And Her Deadly Pact' is a massive sprawling piece of historical fiction that is a stunning and thoroughly epic achievement.

From the opening prologue where a laborious and painstaking final journal entry is scrawled in the present day by a character recounting a life of secrets, sorrows, trials and tribulations, we then launch back to where this gargantuan saga of a now vastly prosperous family begins, way back to 1912 in Kent, England.

Downtrodden heroine Celia Merrill Dobbs should be living her dream, she is born of privilege with fortune at her disposal and is only relatively recently married to the good-looking Joseph, but of course, scratch beneath the surface of this apparently perfect facade, and one will find that the boorish drunken Joseph is but a monster wearing a man's face. The love that may have drawn them blissfully together and been apparent on their wedding day has long since shrivelled up and died, and Joseph reveals what lurks inside him instead. Thus begins this gripping dramatic literary accomplishment, one that stretches from these beginnings in England in the early 1900's all the way to Spain and the Civil war which occurs some twenty odd years later, carrying right through to the present day which both initiates and culminates the lengthy tale.

Petken writes with a fluid and captivating style, and intricately fills scenes with impeccable detail, so while 'The Guardian of Secrets: And Her Deadly Pact' is a remarkably long book it never feels like it, it is populated by a host of entirely involving characters, though the reasons for them being so engrossing are not always pleasant. A prime example of this is Joseph Dobbs himself, a man riddled with hatred and despicable

habits, and his villainous attributes and actions set him apart from some of the more gentle souls of the piece. Considering the enormous scope of the book and the protracted timeline of it, naturally there are a great rollercoaster ride of moments throughout, the soaring highs tempered by the devastating lows, and from tragedy to triumph, despair and desolation to touching romances set to a backdrop of war it sweeps, managing to retain interest throughout the duration. It is neither solely a drama, nor a straightforward historical saga, a romance story or a tragic tale, it is all of the above, in a successful melange combining elements from each component to create an opus that will remain with you long after you have finished reading.

Brenda Perlin says

This story really blew me away. It's a great period piece that I found to be suspenseful and intriguing. It's the kind of story that you can really get attached to. The writing was clear, crisp, and natural with a gripping story that kept me guessing all the way through. Before reading this book I had very little knowledge of the Spanish Civil war. This story was a real eye opener for me and I was absorbed in the history that was shared in an entertaining way.

This was the kind of book that was hard to walk away from. I ended up reading much longer than expected because I really wanted to know what was coming next. This emotional story touched me. The author has a real gift of telling a story that grabs you and pulls you in from start to finish.

I was emotionally absorbed into this saga that somehow felt real. It was easy to connect to the life-like characters, realistic dialog and ongoing drama. I would highly recommend "The Guardian of Secrets: And Her Deathly Pact."
