



Misfortune

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Victorian dandy Lord Geoffroy Loveall is faced with a dilemma. As heir apparent to Love Hall, he must produce an heir of his own; but his obsessive love for his long-dead sister has rendered him a paralytic in matters of the heart. Adding to Geoffroy's troubles is his difficult mother, Lady Loveall, who mercilessly castigates her effeminate son, and a circling mob of greedy relatives anxious to wrest Love Hall from his grasp.

Then, a miracle occurs. As his carriage passes a trash dump, Geoffroy spies an abandoned baby in the jaws of a cur. He saves the child, names her Rose, and declares her his rightful heir. The shock fells Lady Loveall on the spot, and Rose becomes the pampered daughter of Lord Loveall and his bride of convenience, the resident librarian Anonyma. This joyful period lasts until Rose's adolescence, when it becomes increasingly difficult to hide the one great secret of Love Hall: namely, that Rose, now in the position of fending off suitors for her titled hand, is in fact a boy.

Rose's whiskers, deepening voice, and affection for the daughter of a courtier have not gone unnoticed. Armed with the new revelation, the Loveall's unscrupulous relatives launch a coup, and a desperately confused Rose is cast adrift -- until he finds the renewed vitality that comes from the love of true family and realizes that he can and must go home.

Misfortune Details

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From Reader Review Misfortune for online ebook

Emily Graves says

I'm reviewing this book mainly because it's one of my favorite books of all time and I think it's horribly underrated.

Disclaimer: I'm a sucker for Victorian and pseudo-Victorian foundling stories. This is that. But it's so much more. It's a story of love of literature, research, lost and found identities, and friendship and love.

The elements of body-horror and gender discovery may be too much for some, but it's all very tastefully done. The prose alone is gorgeous and the plot structure is impeccable. Rose's journey from coddled and manipulated to being himself is something I'd recommend to anyone who's ever felt betrayed by someone who was supposed to care for them--I've reread it several times and parts still make me tear up. The story is beautiful, while venturing into both the buttoned-up veneer of the Victorian period as well as the seediest underbellies of London at the time. Stace draws from a lot of mythology as well.

Most of all, this is a book about books and how they can help us find ourselves, and I love that.

Andrea says

Confused gender identity, English humor; sometimes very clever and sometimes quite slow paced... While I enjoyed the writing style and the overall plot, the latter portion of the book isn't constructed as well as the first. Oh, but I did enjoy it, and was disturbed by it.

Sena Zimmer says

I loved it and I became very frustrated with this book. The detail was mind boggling, and some parts of the book could have been left out, and the story could have been told. Maybe if I had listened to it on CD in the car, I would have been more patient, then I probably would have given it 4 stars. I am glad I finished the book, and LOVED the ending, and that made it worth the journey.

EMM says

I was looking forward to reading this book, thinking of it as a kind of treat. For the most part, it wasn't. How dare this book not be fun? For starters, take that title at its word. Then don't be taken in by the first chapter. It's not in keeping with the rest of the book. There is a point of view switch and a shift in storytelling style, and it's all downhill from there. Often the book wallows in the dreary and the boring and that makes for some tedious reading. The protagonist spends big chunks of the book in a depression. I did not enjoy joining him there for so long. For some reason the book rushes through the good stuff so it can get to the boring stuff that much quicker. Then there is the mystery of Rose's parentage which takes up the last part of the book. First, I didn't care about it, and when the resolution came, I cared even less. What's good about Misfortune? The

happy ending a long time in coming. And Rose finally getting his s&%t together - way overdue. Though I didn't like the torturous getting there, I did like the appearance Rose chose for himself in the end. The writing is often really good, but this book just isn't as much fun as it should be.

Lora says

I am so conflicted by this book. On one hand, I found the exploration of gender absolutely fascinating, and the character's eventual resting place (no spoilers) extremely satisfying. I loved the discussion of nature vs. nurture, and the assertion that it's not as clear cut as advocates of EITHER side would have us believe. I loved the ambiguity of it all.

Unfortunately, I found the plot and pacing a little bit lacking. Other readers have noted that the middle bit is rather ponderous, weighed down by introspection that goes nowhere (the jump from normal narration to what's essentially stream-of-consciousness is extremely jarring), and it's true. I also found a few word choices questionable in their effectiveness.

Exposition was also handled poorly, in my opinion, in unabridged dialogue bursts where one character spoke for pages upon pages. This is not unusual -- look at Sir Arthur Conan Doyle -- but Stace has his characters speak as though they were, actually, speaking; plenty of digressions, repetitions, lost threads, and pointless interruptions, with the character taking forever to get to the point. I am not an impatient reader, but I still think it could have been done better.

My three star review is not about the subject matter or the issues at hand -- I wasn't disturbed by the sexuality presented or wanting Rose to "pick a side", but was distracted by problems of craft.

(In due candor, I will admit that I wrinkled my nose at a few explicit scenes and questioned whether they really needed to be there in all detail, but I am squeamish about sex scenes in books and recognize this about myself.)

Kaitlyn Raich says

I never expected someone who I could confidently call nonbinary to be a protagonist of a period novel. That was one of the many surprises I found in this book.

Rose Loveall (that is how I'll call the protagonist, because that's what they were called first) is one of the most realistic depictions of nonbinary-ness that I've read. That utter pain at feeling wrong no matter how they present, the awkwardness of puberty and the awakening of sexuality, the feeling of betrayal at the world for being such a strict binary of male and female, for there to be so many double standards and expectations...it feels so real. I commend the author for actually being brave enough to write a character like that.

However, I couldn't give this book five stars for one reason:

There were some very explicit and uncomfortable sexual situations, including Rose and their uncle, Rose and their cousin, etc.. Not that I'm for censorship of sexuality, but that stuff (incest in particular) just frankly makes me very uncomfortable. Not to mention, a lot of scenes seemed to have dubious or non-consent (which also makes me very uncomfortable).

It is refreshing to read a book where someone who is queer gets to be theirself at the end - surrounded by loved ones, without dying a horrible death, without losing the people they love, especially in a period novel. I wish I could be more eloquent here, but the only way to truly understand what I mean is to read the book yourself. I enjoyed this book and I'm sure it will stick in my mind for a long time.

Mark says

British singer-songwriter John Wesley Harding is a master at cramming verbose stories into fun three-minute pop songs. British novelist Wesley Stace doesn't have the benefit of a bouncy beat, so it takes him 544 pages to tell his story in *Misfortune*. Even so, Stace's debut novel moves along quickly thanks to his engaging storytelling. This isn't surprising since John Wesley Harding is the musical alias of one Welsey Stace.

A little identity crisis? Maybe, but it's nothing compared to what Rose, the protagonist of *Misfortune*, suffers. Rescued from abandonment as a newborn and raised as a girl by an English lord who longs for a replacement for his long-deceased little sister, Rose understandably has some issues.

Rose grows up a happy girl in one of the richest household in England, only discovering the truth as he approaches adolescence. Rose decides to run away from both his home and the truth, before deciding to come home and face that truth, on his own terms.

Throughout this Victorian-era story, Stace weaves tales of greedy relatives plotting to overthrow the estate, the inter-workings of the mansion, and the balladeer that found the abandoned baby Rose. Of all these stories, Stace, perhaps slipping into his John Welsey Harding songwriter role, seems most interested in the ballads and he wisely uses them to move the book through it's third act.

Probably because of the English estate setting, Stace's storytelling reminded me a bit of Ian McEwan's in *Atonement*, though it wasn't quite as strong. *Misfortune* may have lacked *Atonement*'s big surprise ending, but its finale was still gratifying - especially with a remarkably realistic appendix tacked on. And while I do think that Stace could have used a few less words in his debut, the story still seemed move along as quickly as a John Welsey Harding song.

Noa says

1.5*

It's not it, it's me. But it's also partly it.

I didn't like it because I wasn't in the mood for it, and maybe I didn't pay enough attention, but to be fair, if it had been amazing time and stress wouldn't have mattered. Mostly, I was bored, and that's coming from someone who adores slow historical fiction (mostly, *cough *Atonement* *cough). Half of the characters I couldn't keep track of, and the other half I could not connect with at all. Also, everyone was constantly assaulting each other, which was unpleasant.

What I did like; the absolute devotion that went into this book as a product, the cover, the illustrations, all that stuff, and the first one hundred pages, which were absolutely stunning and intriguing.

Maybe I'll give it another try at some point. Maybe I couldn't connect because of timing, maybe I missed the reasoning behind all the assault, maybe it was too clever for me. For now, I was just bored sometimes, and appalled all of the other times. Except for the start and the premise. Dammit.

Jady says

I like reading debut novels in a slightly different way from how I enjoy novels and books in general. There's a freshness to them, and a bit of risktaking as well, on my part as well as the writers'...the potentiality for discovery. Of course, I enjoy reading works by established and acclaimed writers too, but with them there's sometimes a shadow of prior readers' opinions and judgments hovering at the edge of my consciousness. "What did they think here? Were they right? Do I agree with them? Why or why not?" This doesn't bother me or deter me from reading well-known books, but it is nice to read something with no notion or curiosity about what Others thought of it. My opinions can rest on their own laurels for once.

However, I became abundantly aware midway through *Misfortune* that it was not a great find of a novel, even excusing the author's inexperience. Set in England, it is about a orphan boy who was adopted by an eccentric nobleman and raised as a girl, which conspired to wreak havoc with his/her inheritance. The premise sounded intriguing at first, and perhaps with a better/more experienced writer it might have actually been intriguing. But the plot was unnecessarily complicated by superfluous detail, unclear prose, and a subplot and shifts in point of view that were neither needed nor carried out well. On top of this, the main character's entire being seemed totally centered on his/her gender confusion - which would understandably be an important thing to any adolescent girl who is learning that she is actually a boy, but the focus on it seemed excessive. And what really sent the book across the line into not-goodness was the "twist" at the ending. I won't reveal it, but I will say that I saw it coming a mile away and groaned in disgust because not only was it predictable, it was also trite, unimaginative, and so lame that even romance novels usually avoid that device (or at least execute it better). From the premise, I couldn't help but compare *Misfortune* to Jeffrey Eugenides' Pulitzer-winning *Middlesex*, which was published a few years earlier and is stunningly good. The comparison definitely finds *Misfortune* lacking.

Note: This is a review I wrote five years ago, when I read this book. Being lazy and not having reread, I opted to copy and paste rather than write something new.

Jaindoh says

Well constructed and great genderbending topic but ultimately way too predictable.

Elizabeth (Miss Eliza) says

A young baby boy is being thrown out with the trash. Unwanted and alone a chance of fate has him picked up by the richest Lord in the land, Lord Loveall. Lord Loveall has been mourning all his life for his dear departed sister and when he sees this baby he assumes it to be female and a chance to have his sister back.

But Lord Loveall can't just miraculously have an heir, a quick marriage is arranged with his sister's old governess, Anonyma, who has stayed on as librarian at Love Hall to catalog the works of her icon, the poetess Mary Day. Anonyma agrees to raising "Rose" female because the poetess had some interesting theories on gender and Anonyma sees it as an experiment. For many years they are able to keep up this farce, until one day the world crashes down on them and Rose can no longer hide who he is.

The familial vultures swoop in to claim what they have always lusted after. A scandal would be so unbecoming, so Anonyma withdraws... what does she have now that Rose has fled? Rose left in the night without a trace, unable to face what he is. Through awkward sexual awakenings, near death fever dreams, chance encounters, and a twist that you hopefully won't see coming, Rose embraces the odd life that he has been given in this strange world and the companions in his journey who truly love him.

Misfortune is a Dickensian tale with an LGBTQ mindset. Full of interesting incestuous characters I felt that it never quite lived up to its full potential due to the shifting narrative that, in the end, opted for a shorter, sleeker, story with annoying time jumps, instead of becoming a book of true Dickensian girth. Now I'm not saying that I wanted every detail on Rose's debauched journey to Turkey, but covering such an expanse of time as a fever dream seemed indulgent of the author. In fact, that might be the crux of my problem, the modern sensibilities thrust into this Victorian age by Stace's whim alienates me from the story. Stace says in an interview in the back of the book that he didn't want to be drawn into the trappings of the time period, a carriage is a carriage, not a barouche, not a gig. By having *Misfortune* be a modern book set in the past he seems to be wanting to make the book more of a post modern statement piece than a quality read.

By breaking convention he is writing a book that will appeal more to those who have never read Dickens or historical fiction while leaving those of us who love 19th century literature and period pieces cold. Coupled with the fact that he pulls a complete Dickensian HEA that was obvious from page one, his tendency to use some literary tropes and abandon others just goes to show that he was gratifying himself instead of his audience, plus exactly HOW was Rose to inherit... she being a she? Many such little questions bothered me throughout. Though my biggest problem with the book that has nothing to do with Stace might just be a side effect of this lack of interest in the historical details. This problem being that the cover illustration shows clothes incorrect to 1820. Yes, I know I should let this go, but the thing is, I remember the day I picked up this book on a table in Barnes and Noble and it was those lovely Regency clothes that sold me on it...

Yet in the end, Rose is problematical to me. Firstly, the sheer self centered delusions indulged by her parents scares the shit out of me. That two adults could contrive to raise a boy as a girl is just wrong to me. I know in this day and age there are a lot of people who talk about wanting to raise their children gender neutral so that they can come into their sexuality on their own. Personally, I think this is bullshit. It takes awhile for children to become aware of things, just look to Rose for an example, and by at least not setting down for them the basics, well, you are going to get one f'd up kid, again, look to Rose. Children need to understand the world around them in order to find their place, wherever that may be. By taking away Rose's knowledge of the world around her with regard to her body, that's just so many levels of wrong. At least her father Geoffroy has some excuse, obviously being insane, but Anonyma, the cold calculated way she sees changing her child's sex as an experiment just makes me want to slap her so hard. While yes, this does lead to some amusing situations, in the end, I felt such sorrow and pity for Rose that at times the book became hard to read.

But the collusion to keep this lie up. Gaw, the rage in me. Personally, the fact that they were able to pull it off for so long makes me a little awestruck. I personally don't see how they did it. I liked that they mentioned that all paintings with genitals shown were hidden, because that was a problem I really had. How, in an English Country House, with the great artwork that is usually in said houses, were they able to keep Rose in

the dark? The secluded environment helped, but still, how? Recent studies have shown that people in the 19th century weren't so repressed sexually as we like to imagine. Yes the book has Anonyma lecturing a young Rose on what is private and what is public, and never stripping or lifting of skirts... but still... how? Rose was raised with two other children and they never once lifted a skirt or whipped it out of their pants? That is giving those kids some amazing, I would say unbelievable restraint. Were they sewn into their clothes? Because that's the only way I see this happening, otherwise, I just don't buy it. And if I can't buy this, well, then the book has a major flaw... or shall I just say, it's a flawed book?

The Last Word: "Manmade"

Lucy says

This was a very interesting book to say the least. About a very, very odd, wealthy man who finds a baby boy in a garbage heap and raises him as a girl in remembrance of his dead sister who he never quite got over (I think this was in the mid-1800s). Unfortunately the boy, named Rose, doesn't realize that he is a girl until he is 17 years old, and can't understand why he needs to shave, amongst other things, that his girl friends don't have to do. Really though, the way they explain everything it seems kind of logical why he didn't know he was a boy. He then becomes very confused about who he is, and whether or not he should continue to live as a he or a she, and whether or not he really is the true heir to the home and money of his ancestors. The beginning and end were pretty entertaining and well-written. Parts of the middle focused a bit too much on how he discovered he was a man, and it was really more than I cared to know or wanted to think about. But the characters were really well thought out- especially his greedy relatives. Good book.

Joshua says

I am completely blown away by Mr. Stace's ability to completely envelop a character and make the character LIVE! Now I am eagerly looking forward to reading more of his work.

Misfortune is a truly engaging and titillating story! A boy raised as a girl by an asexual man and his literary wife? What will happen when puberty rears its ugly head? What indeed!!! The awakening of Rose Old is monumental, especially to his extended family. An uncle accidentally sent to his final reward, a cousin aroused and self-exiled and the ultimate banning of the Loveall from Love Hall are just a few juicy reactions to the revelation. Banned until, that is, a truth is exposed and the Loveall are re-instated in the home that is rightfully theirs.

A wonderful tale and a fun read!

Greg says

Did you ever wonder what Dickens would be like if there was more gender confusion and hand jobs? Well if you did then this novel could put your mind at rest. If you didn't ever wonder about those things then maybe you'll just read this book and enjoy the story as being a fun English novel with villainous villains, wronged innocents, creepy family secrets and an almost magical country estate.

Clair Belmonte says

This is one of the best contemporary novels that I have read in a long time, and I would recommend it to anyone. It certainly possesses that 19th century classic novel feel, with the woven complications and the aristocratic concerns. However, this book is just strange enough to keep itself from falling into a classic remake.

This isn't a parody; this is taking familiar Victorian ideals and settings while discussing contemporary issues. This is a wonderful book to add to the mix of LGBTQ discussions, as well as more basic identity discussions. I found it absolutely enchanting, and the mystery element was beautifully done as well.

I believe it was volume three, a little more than halfway through the book, where I felt myself begin to falter a bit. The dramatic change in initial tone and setting has a modernist plunge that I was not a huge fan of. However, once I felt reoriented in the story, I liked the twist that volume three had to offer. Even if it seems confusing, it is absolutely worth pushing through.

Additionally, the illustrations at the beginning of each chapter are absolutely beautiful. It really adds to the classic appeal and improves the reading experience.

I highly recommend this book to all sorts of readers: mystery, Victorian, romance, adventure, YA/New Adult.
