



Renting Silence

Mary Miley

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Can 1920's script girl Jessie do Mary Pickford's bidding and uncover a real killer?

When Jessie is asked by her idol, the famous actress Mary Pickford, if she can do some private investigating for her, Jessie reluctantly accepts. A girl was found stabbed in her bedroom with another woman lying unconscious on the floor next to her, a bloody knife in her hand. With no police investigation into the murder, it's up to Jessie to hone her amateur detective skills and prove the girl's innocence before she hangs for murder.

But as Jessie travels through the roaring twenties world of Hollywood and movies, surreptitiously interviewing fellow travelling performers, she struggles to find the connection she needs. And with her love interest David seemingly involved in seedy dealings, can she uncover the killer's identity before she too is endangered?

Renting Silence Details

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From Reader Review Renting Silence for online ebook

Kirsten says

Unfortunately rating on print, book quality, not the actual story. I quite enjoyed the other two books, it it looks like the publisher changed or something. The book is much lower quality. So much so that I can't read it, you can see through the pages, and that's really bugging my eyes. Sad, I wanted to read it.

Mary Garrett says

RENTING SILENCE by Mary Miley

Jessie gets to be a stand-in for Mary Pickford in a scene of giving blood to save lover's life, an excellent metaphor for love and loyalty and sacrifice. She is called upon to attempt an investigation of the murder of a minor actress and the conviction of another, mostly to help a cameraman who had been pressured to vote guilty. This book was hard to put down, and the gives insights into vaudeville, Prohibition, KKK, women's "place" and wisdom about life —

when dealing with a blackmailer "you don't buy silence, merely rent it."

I don't want to spoil secrets, so stopping here . . . and heading off to get the next in the series.

Rita says

The third in the Roaring Twenties mystery series brings us back to our intrepid heroine Jessie Beckett, still working as an assistant Script Girl for Douglas Fairbanks in Hollywood, California. She is asked by Mary Pickford to investigate a murder of an aspiring actress, Lila Walker. Another actress, Ruby Glynn, has been convicted of the murder and has been sentenced to death, but a cameraman at Pickford-Fairbanks Studio who was on the jury is sure she is innocent. Jessie has her work cut out for her since Ruby was found passed out in the room holding the bloody knife in her hand. It's no wonder the police did not investigate the case any further. Following the few leads that she has uncovered takes Jessie back to her old vaudeville days as she works the circuit to find performers who might be linked to Lila Walker. She is desperate to uncover clues that would lead her to the murderer before time runs out for Ruby.

What I appreciate is that the historian in Mary Miley shows through in the authenticity of people, place, and time in these books. Among the many things that you will learn is that public transportation did exist in Los Angeles and that Bob Hope's name was really Leslie Hope and a Brit to boot. What makes this book a more mature work is that Ms. Miley does not shy away from the less glamorous issues of the times such as sexism and racism. The fact that you will get a taste as to what it might have been like if you were an unmarried woman in the 1920s attempting to purchase your own home or what it was like to play Southern cities if you were a black entertainer steeps these books in the reality of the times.

This book shows that Ms. Miley has hit her stride in writing mystery novels. The pacing of the book keeps the readers engaged and eager to see what happens in the next chapter. Though it is nice to revisit characters from her two previous books, anyone would still enjoy this book as a standalone novel. As Jessie is running out of time to save Ruby, she uncovers powerful motives for the death of Lily along with the murderer and you will want to make sure you are there when the mystery is solved.

Cindy Burnett says

I absolutely adore the Roaring Twenties mystery series by Mary Miley, and *Renting Silence* is an entertaining addition. The silent film era fascinates me, and Miley has clearly done her research. The main character Jessie Beckett, a former vaudeville performer, works for Douglas Fairbanks at Pickford-Douglas Studios (which will eventually become United Artists). At the behest of Mary Pickford, Jessie investigates the murder of a small-time actress, Lila Walker. The police charged another actress with the crime immediately following the murder and accordingly never did any further investigating. Mary Pickford and several others believe that the actress charged, Ruby Glynn, is innocent and want to clear her name. Jessie's inquiries lead back into the world of vaudeville as she attempts to figure out who really murdered Lila Walker.

My favorite parts of the book by far were those relating to the silent movie business in the 1920's, particularly all of the fascinating details about Mary Pickford. The book takes place as Pickford is filming *Little Annie Rooney* in which she plays a twelve-year-old girl (Pickford was 33 at the time). When playing young characters, Pickford would only work with tall actors and altered her on-set furniture to make it larger so she would appear smaller on set and onscreen. I spent as much time reading the novel as I did looking up the various real life actors and studio details because I found it all so intriguing. I also plan to track down *Little Annie Rooney* and watch it after reading so much about the filming of the movie. As Jessie heads out on the vaudeville circuit, she encounters a young Bob Hope, before he has even adopted that stage name – he is still going by Les Hope. One more fun addition that Miley includes is having Myrna Loy as one of Jessie's roommates before Loy becomes a famous actress. She has also references Jack Warner, Rin Tin Tin, the KKK, and Rudolph Valentino.

The resolution of the mystery is a bit drawn out, and there is a train scene that lasts way too long. Also, the inclusion of Jessie's potential love interest David seems forced and does not really fit well into the rest of the story. Other than those small details, Miley has crafted an engaging tale weaving the historical details seamlessly into Jessie's world.

Mary Miley maintains a Roaring Twenties blog where she periodically posts interesting articles on various aspects of that era such as how to make a phone call in the 1920's and popular poisons of the time period. The blog can be found at <http://marymiley.wordpress.com>. After reading *Renting Silence*, I really enjoyed perusing her various blog posts.

I definitely recommend *Renting Silence*, and her two prior installments in the series. The first book, *The Impersonator*, remains my favorite, but the next two are great reads too. Thanks to Severn House and NetGalley for the chance to read this ARC in exchange for an honest review.

Richard Becker says

This a great historical mystery. I love how the author blends in the famous Hollywood personas with a unique and colorful lady sleuth. We once again encounter Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks and Myrna Loy and we meet Bob Hope, known as Leslie at the time of the story. AS Jessie tries to race against the clock to save a condemned woman, we follow her across the country as a temporary vaudeville performer who tries

to find out the secrets in the victim's past life. There is a wonderful train sequence in which Jessie has to save herself and other passengers. You've gotta love her spunk and her quick thinking as she navigates the seamier side of Hollywood and the roaring twenties.

Eleanor Kuhns says

This series just gets better and better. In this latest, Jessie Beckett investigates the death of a young starlet and tries to prove the innocence of the accused woman. A wonderful snapshot of the times with Prohibition, the KKK, the film industry and a great story to boot. I did not see the end coming. I hope Miley continues writing these!

Rachel says

I received a free copy of this book from the publisher in exchange for an honest review.

I really enjoy Mary Miley's writing. She is excellent at period fiction, often including real historical figures in her stories, and always does her research to throw in the little details - product brands, clothing, advertising of the day - that fully immerse the reader in the setting.

I'm a big fan of her character in this series, Jesse. Jesse is sassy and street-smart. She's been in the vaudeville business longer than most, having grown up on the stage. She's also recently discovered a talent of investigating, and this latest book follows Jesse as she takes a second look at a closed case to find the truth behind a murder before an innocent woman swings for it.

For any fans of the golden age of film, fans of 1920s fiction, this series is a must-read.

Susan says

Jessie's vaudeville background helps her clear a young actress convicted of murder.

S.J. Higbee says

While I was aware that I'd once more crashed midway into a series, this isn't a major deal as Miley is far too adept for keep her readers floundering. Instead I quickly bonded with Jessie, a sparky character with plenty of spirit who is embracing the opportunities Hollywood has presented for her. It is also the perfect setting for all sorts of mayhem and murder.

As with all the best historical whodunits, Miley uses the adventure to present us with a slice of Jessie's life. While I cared about seeing the mystery solved, I was every bit as involved with Jessie's ongoing concerns, such as her wardrobe choices, her problematic romance and interest in the Hollywood gossip. Miley vividly recreates the 1920s world for us, from the clothes and the Hollywood glamour and the thrill of drinking forbidden alcoholic drinks.

However what makes this stand out for me is her clear depiction of the darker side of the era – the edgy

lawlessness as crime gangs, emboldened and funded by the massive sales of moonshine, battle amongst each other for territory and the casual, everyday racism that condemns anyone of colour to a second-rate existence. That, coupled with the sexism that also downgrades women's prospects makes me very glad that I'm alive now, rather than back then. One quibble – when she spends a couple of nights with her lover, there is no mention of any contraception. I'm sure someone as worldly wise as Jessie would have insisted on her partner using a condom to prevent pregnancy in an era when a baby out of wedlock brought shame and disgrace to women, but there is no mention of it.

That doesn't prevent me thoroughly enjoying this engrossing and well written mystery, which twists off into all sorts of directions and I certainly didn't see exactly who the perpetrator was until Miley wanted me to. All in all, while I was in bed with a heavy cold, this was the perfect book to get lost in. Highly recommended.

While I obtained the arc of Renting Silence from the publisher via NetGalley, this has in no way influenced my unbiased review.

9/10

Nann says

[I received the e-galley to review.]

Former child vaudeville star-turned-investigator Jessie Randall takes on her third case. It begins in Hollywood where Jessie works for Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford, the movies' most famous couple. Aspiring starlet Lila Walker is found dead in her boarding house. Ruby Glynn has been arrested and accused of the murder. She is sentenced to die. Fairbanks and Pickford think Ruby is innocent and ask Jessie to find the real killer and Jessie discovers that Lila was a blackmailer, as evidenced by a list of payments and initials. But whose initials are they? Will they lead to the discovery of the killer? One clue leads to another and Jessie travels from Hollywood to Chicago, Ohio, and Mississippi to track down each of Lila's victims and learn the motives for blackmail.

Mary Miley is an historian whose meticulous research adds authenticity to the story. Jessie's breezy use of slang is great fun. (So that's the origin of phrases my parents used!) How would a white woman be able to interview a black family in segregated Hattiesburg, MS? What was it like to travel on the train (without air conditioning) through one of the Great Plains dust storms? How blatantly did people disregard Prohibition?

This is a crackerjack tale, as Jessie herself would say!

Diane S ? says

3.5 Fun, fun, fun is what I consider this series. Just an enjoyable romp through the roaring twenties, the last days of vaudeville and silent pictures. Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks, Jr. A young soon to be Bob hope, still in vaudeville and other notables of this era. Jessie herself, raised in vaudeville, now a script girl for Fairbanks is a fearless young woman, not afraid to seek the truth, attracts danger and generally is able to get

herself out of scrapes, though this time her narrow escape from the KKK is almost her undoing.

A young woman blackmailer, another dead starlet and a wrongfully accused woman is what Jessie is charged by Mary Pickford to find out the truth of this tangled mess. It will send her taking a train to the South in search of vaudeville acts that performed twenty years before. Well written, humorous, light this series manages to combine history, well known characters, action and a time long past. At times the action seems a bit much but like silent pictures sometimes exaggeration works.

ARC from Netgalley.

Tara Chevestt says

I read the first book in this series and loved it. Due to the high price, I never did get around to book two. However, I didn't feel as if I'd missed a beat as I happily engrossed myself in book three.

Our heroine, former vaudeville star, is now working for Mary Pickford and husband. When Mary asks her to investigate a possible false arrest and prove a fellow actress's innocence, this gal is on the case, funded by the suspect's lover.

Everything points to the suspect having done it, despite what gut instinct says. The heroine hits vaudeville again to find some answers, therefore the story gives us a view of life on the road as the circuit tours town to town, even having a run-in with the KKK in Indiana. The author very skillfully brought real-life historical problems into the tale.

I became somewhat bored with the vaudeville. It got a tad repetitive. The train incident felt out of place and somewhat frustrating too. It didn't tie in enough with the rest of the tale. Those are my only quibbles. I enjoyed the heroine, her humor, the mystery and trying to guess whodunit as clues slowly unfolded.

All in all, a good addition to the series. I'm sorry I missed book two.

Susan says

When Lila Walker lies dying in her boarding house room and the onlookers ask who killed her, she points directly at Ruby Glynn. With such incriminating evidence, the police do not bother to look any further for the murderer. However, when Ruby is sentenced to be hung, Mary Pickford asks script girl Jessie Beckett to investigate to lay to rest any doubts about her guilt. The only clue Jessie can find is an old vaudeville playbill. For lack of any other plausible course of action, Jesse rejoins the vaudeville circuit where she grew up to find anything she can about the acts on the bill. The investigation leads her to some of the darkest shadows of the era of the 1920s. A powerful story in a very well-researched setting.

Celia Yost says

I have mixed feelings about this series and this installment in particular. For one thing, Miley is super into her research, to the point that characters will occasionally just come out with whole paragraphs of historical context or the book will take us on a grand tour of historical context, nevermind concerns like plot/pacing. However, I'm also into Miley's research (why yes, I DO want to know what was going on with vaudeville in Ohio circa 1925!), so I don't really mind.

A bigger quibble I have is how racism is handled. I think Miley is trying for matter-of-fact but sympathetic, but it didn't quite work for me. The books are in first person from the POV of an apolitical white woman and that just wasn't a good choice for a plot that features issues of segregation and the evils of the KKK.

Lynx says

When Jessie's asked to dig around into the murder of small-time starlet Lila Walker, she wasn't expecting to find much. After all, fellow starlet Ruby Glenn was identified at the scene, arrested and found guilty in court. But it turns out Lila had secrets. Not her own, but others. Collecting monthly from a list of initials, Lila kept raking in both money and enemies. The more Jessie learns of Lila's victims the more certain she is of Ruby's innocence. To put the true guilty party behind bars Jessie follows the clues, all the way back into Vaudeville. But the clock is ticking, Ruby has been sentenced to death and Jessie will need to put all her expertise to use before one death turns into two.

Once again Mary Miley has done her research and does a great job showcasing all aspects of the era, this time focusing more on race relations. I found, as with the first in the series, that the mystery itself was easily solved pretty early on however, these books are so well written, Jessie is such a wonderful heroine and the atmosphere Miley creates make these an absolute delight to read. I've gotten such enjoyment this past week reading these, I only hope Miley types fast so we can find out what Jessie gets caught up in next.

*Thank you Severn House Publishers and Netgalley for this review copy.
