



Winterblaze

Kristen Callihan

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Once blissfully in love . . .

Poppy Lane is keeping secrets. Her powerful gift has earned her membership in the Society for the Suppression of Supernaturals, but she must keep both her ability and her alliance with the Society from her husband, Winston. Yet when Winston is brutally attacked by a werewolf, Poppy's secrets are revealed, leaving Winston's trust in her as broken as his body. Now Poppy will do anything to win back his affections . . .

Their relationship is now put to the ultimate test.

Winston Lane soon regains his physical strength but his face and heart still bear the scars of the vicious attack. Drawn into the darkest depths of London, Winston must fight an evil demon that wants to take away the last hope of reconciliation with his wife. As a former police inspector, Winston has intelligence and logic on his side. But it will take the strength of Poppy's love for him to defeat the forces that threaten to tear them apart.

Winterblaze Details

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Author : Kristen Callihan

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From Reader Review Winterblaze for online ebook

Crista says

4.5 stars!!!

The Darkest London historical paranormal series just keeps getting better and better. I am completely hooked on these books, and am EAGERLY awaiting the next installment Shadowdance which will be out sometime later this year.

This is Poppy and Winston's book, and their story is a unique one. Poppy and Win are married yet estranged. Winston learned in the previous book that Poppy had been keeping a very important part of herself secret from him for the entirety of their marriage. Win has recently separated from Poppy and their marriage is on extremely rocky ground when this story opens. There is much anger and hostility between them, but also a love, passion, and attraction that can not be denied. This book showcases the gradual rebuilding of trust and the forgiveness that is necessary to rebuild a crumbling relationship. I loved this book because this marriage endures through much pain and withstands great obstacles.

Flashbacks bring us back to how Win and Poppy met, their courtship, and early moments in their marriage. I loved this technique as it provided the backstory for this couple without overshadowing the many things happening in present day. Important facts are revealed in Winterblaze that pertain to this world and Poppy's role in it, however, those facts bring more questions and an eagerness to return to this world as quickly as possible!

Miranda, Archer, Daisy, and Ian all play important roles in this story and I definitely recommend that this series be read in order to fully capture the brilliance of this author's storytelling and world building ability.

Jack Talent and Mary Chase, the characters who will be featured in the next book are given major roles in this book, and I am waiting very impatiently for what is sure to be an awesome addition to an already outstanding series.

If you haven't started this series yet, do yourself a favor and move it to the top of your reading list. I can think of nothing else remotely like it, and that is a refreshing statement to make.

Here are the books in order:

Ember (prequel)

Firelight (Miranda and Archer)

Moonglow (Daisy and Ian)

Winterblaze (Poppy and Win)

Shadowdance (Jack and Mary)

A huge thanks to Grand Central Publishing via Netgalley for providing this ARC for review

Shari Kay says

3.5 ★ Would round up for Win but Poppy...no!

Conflicted with the rating here. I liked it but didn't love it.

Poppy & Winston. Their marriage is in a bit of trouble and they are separated. Not for lack of love...but for secrets that have been revealed. Poppy kept a lot of them and when they came to light in the previous book in the most viscous way...trust was destroyed.

I *get* and appreciate where the author wanted to go with this one. The whole "what would you give up for love?" thing. Would you pretend to be someone you're not or be yourself and let the chips fall where they may? Even if that means losing the love of your life or endangering them.

As a romance novel I had some issues. Poppy was not always likable, (view spoiler) though there are complicated circumstances and outside influences that played a large role in the way she acted...but still. Something was missing for me here and the emphasis on the physical longing (by both of them) didn't make up for the emotional need I wanted from her, though of course she did miss him and want him back, but it seemed as if only under her rules. I just felt Win's *devotion* more so than hers and that bothered me.

There is so much mis/noncommunication/push-pull in this book it was maddening. And it went on for a very, very long time. They'd say something--think something--and then it didn't mean anything and we were back at square one again.

The story and trials the two faced outside the relationship were entertaining...if you could believe Win would do what he did pre-marriage that is. I have to admit, knowing Win from previous books, it was hard to swallow with his sense of honor and I felt it was put there to *even the scales* of culpability between the couple.

Callihan or the publishing format has the habit of ending one scene with no break between the following scene. It literally goes from one paragraph to the next. It's jarring and takes a bit of getting used to, but once you do, it's easy to overlook.

What happened to Jack... I will read his book just to make sure he gets his HEA after what he suffered in this one. It was...awful. Truly awful. Too much awful.

By the end, I *did* warm up to Poppy. She suffered from the mistakes she made (though I felt her sisters forgave her pretty quickly), was remorseful and the proverbial light bulb seemed to go off..finally. (Even though she would have lost Win before ever giving up the dangerous part of her job up to the very end here people. I'm not saying she should have..I'm just saying I wanted her be **willing** to for love. And Win...he really became what he was always meant to be and their marriage ended up stronger in the end.

Good book...just not a great one.

Isabella - Madly in Love with Books says

Buddy read with Bubu, Joanna and Sam from Romance Book Buddy Reading.

This book floored me. Very high in my favorites list. This is exactly why I read.

I am a sucker for married couples in romance books. I have no idea why, since I am not married and don't plan to, since I find the whole idea useless and confining in real life. But well, the book heart wants, what the book heart wants.

This series catapulted itself in my top five in a very short time - while the first book was great, but had some

flaws, the second book already had me dancing in my chair. The third book had me in book heaven.

Poppy and Win are such a great couple. They have been married for 14 years and now due to the recent attack on Win and the realization that his wife didn't tell him the whole truth about her, they are facing some obstacles on their way to finding each other again.

Kristen Callihan's speciality for me is writing great, strong and complex characters. And she has outdone herself on these two. While I am sure, that some people will have their problems with Poppys straightforward, distanced and aloof personality - I frigging loved her. She is unbelievable badass in her own way. She carries her mask very carefully and is always controlled, always thinking and planning ahead. She even controls herself up to a point, where there is a part of her, that she can't show even to her husband. When Winston realizes this, of course he starts to question their whole marriage.

Winston was a real gem. While I have the feeling, that authors who tend to write great female leads, often lack on the H part - Winston was the perfect match for my icy and whip-like Poppy. With the attack he suffered also came his development into the man he always should have been.

But it was simply his strength unfettered by civilization. He'd been torn apart and reformed into something more. Strange as it was, Poppy could not shake the feeling that part of him had been found rather than lost. That Winston Lane had finally become wholly what he was meant to be.

And while from the beginning on, he was one of my favourite characters, simply because he adored and loved his wife despite her unladylike behaviour, he loved her for her brains, her spine of steel, her mind and self dependence - it is only now, that I have the feeling he is her equal, he has grown into the man that can stand by her side and be strong enough to support her.

The journey in this book is not only about a couple overcoming the obstacles in their path, but also a journey of two grown adults becoming the best version of themselves. They go this path not only for each other, but also for themselves. they grow as individual beings to finally form an alliance no other can break. Apart they are strong, but together they are a forced to be reckoned with - and that is such a beautiful thing. Their path was never an easy one and Kristen Callihan throws them one hurdle after another. But they finally realize that they are not only more than they ever thought they could be - they complement each other in a way, that surprises them both.

Poppy could not fault his methods, but while Win was a man of of planning and precision, she was a woman of action. Like two parts of the same weapon, she thought bemusedly.

The thing about Kristen Callihan's writing is - it doesn't stop here. While I am perfectly fine with a great character development and a well done love story, KC gives us even more. She also presents a greatly built plot and story line, with some twists I couldn't see coming - not for the life of me. And as a well reversed romance reader I noticed this with quite an amount of shock and exhilaration.

From page one till the end, this was simply a joy for me - and I am not one that doles out five stars like candy. Five star reads are rare and I treasure them, because they were perfect for me in every single way. They gripped my emotions, impressed me with the writing style and world building and had so few flaws, I can't even strip them of one star.

Ferdy says

The third book in the Darkest London series... And Poppy and Winston take centre stage. I was both excited and uncertain about reading *Winterblaze*.

Why I had some doubts?

1. I disliked Poppy in *Firelight* and *Moonglow* and wasn't particularly keen on reading her POV. I hated that she lied to her sisters about their powers, her own powers and their mother. Poor Miranda (*Firelight*) thought she was a freak because of her fire powers and Daisy (*Moonglow*) was just as confused and shocked when she discovered her affinity to earth. As the elder sister, Poppy should have supported and educated them on their heritage and the supernatural world, instead she left them ignorant. It was unforgivable.
2. Poppy and Winston's relationship — for the most part they came across as really boring until the very last few pages of *Moonglow*. I wasn't invested in them at all up until then as they were dull and passionless... And I was worried they would be like that in their own book.

Why I was desperate to read it?

1. One of the main reasons I was eager to read this was because Poppy and Winston had been married for fourteen years - I can't ever recall reading a paranormal romance novel with a couple that were already husband and wife. I was curious to see the dynamics of a hero and heroine that were already an established couple.
2. At the very end of *Moonglow* I became very very interested in Poppy and Winston's story. They were no longer a loving, trusting and boring couple... Nope, their relationship changed into one full of angst, secret, lies and betrayal... And I was extremely enthusiastic about their angsty reunion.
3. Finding out more about the supernatural world, the SOS and Poppy's role as 'Mother'.

Things I liked:

-The flashbacks. I liked the idea of reading about a couple that were married... however, I was disappointed that I wouldn't get to read about their first meeting, first kiss and them falling in love - I mean, those aspects are usually the best part of a romance novel. Thankfully, with the use of flashbacks we get to see the early stages of Winston and Poppy's courtship.

-Poppy. I didn't think I'd like her at all. However, I was more than pleasantly surprised with her character — she was strong, ruthless, intelligent and passionate. I have to say, she was a better heroine than her sisters. I actually started to dislike Miranda and Daisy after reading Poppy's POV - they were awful to her. I could understand them being angry with her after all the lies she told but I wasn't impressed with how they handled it. She was already going through a rough time with her husband, not to mention her life was in danger — she didn't need to be moaned and shouted at. She needed their help and support, instead she was alone, even Winston wasn't there for her.

The one thing that bugged me about Poppy was her constantly chasing after Winston and begging for his forgiveness — she was doing all the work in the relationship and it was depressing to read about.

-The expansion of the supernatural world. *Winterblaze* added more layers and complexity to the series. The

world building in the previous books were pretty average but became more developed and richer in this one. The introduction of the SOS was a definite positive for the series — it's a great way to tie all the different supernaturals together and also give the future books in the Darkest London world a focal point other than the sisters.

-Jack and Mary. Their interactions were fun - I love Mary's character, she was likeable, ambitious and loyal. I'm not a fan of Jack though, he's a hypocrite and also self righteous but I'm hoping he gets over himself and proves himself worthy of Mary.

Things I wasn't impressed with;

-The plot was kind of average. Winston and Poppy are thrown back together after a demon makes threats against them — it wasn't very engrossing or original... Although, I did find it fast paced and somewhat diverting.

-Winston. He was definitely the worst of all the Darkest London heroes. I was immensely disappointed in him — he ran away and blanked Poppy for three whole months. I could forgive him that, it was understandable after finding out about the supernatural world and all the lies Poppy told. However, he was angry at Poppy for way too long — she apologised, she was sincere, she explained everything but he still wouldn't forgive her. Even after it was revealed that he did something ten times worse, he still gave Poppy a hard time. She forgave him instantly but he refused to give her the same courtesy. I wasn't convinced of his feeling for her — he kept rejecting Poppy over and over again, even towards the end he was bitter about everything. I didn't believe in his love for her - how could he have loved her when he kept punishing her, knowing full well that she was already contending with so much stress and heartache?? Even at the end, I felt Winston was only with Poppy more out of obligation and lust rather than true love.

-The dialogue/narration was a bit iffy. It didn't read as authentically British - it came across as very forced and as someone non-British trying to write about Brits. It wasn't bad but it wasn't very good either.

All in all, an entertaining read but would have been better if the hero wasn't so lame.

**ARC by Netgalley and Grand Central Publishing

Joanna Loves Reading says

There was no other option than 5 Stars for this one. Seriously, seriously loved it. Loved Win. Loved Poppy. Loved Win&Poppy together. And the story was compelling and interesting.

Thanks for the buddy read Sam, Bubu & Isabella!

Sam (AMNReader) says

3/2018 reread with Bubu, Isabella, and Joanna. I am always thinking I'll be able to do better on review on rereads. I can't. Sigh

I could barely read this book it was so perfect. How am I supposed to write a review? This couple is so beautifully balanced and I couldn't decide who I liked more. A romance about married people of 14 years that fills your soul and makes you swoon? I believe I'm near speechless.

This is straight up romantic. Will add more when I find words.

Melanie says

5+++ stars

It's a toss-up, but 'Winterblaze' may just top 'Firelight' as my favorite in this awesome series!

... which really means I think I love Winston even more than Archer!

Callihan has once again crafted a superb story set in a dark and gloomy 19th century London. In the aftermath of events from the last book a ravaged Winston has left Poppy, his indomitable wife of 14 years, after learning that who and **what** he believed her to be was a mere facade. But an evil force from both of their pasts has re-emerged and Poppy and Winston must swallow their pride to defeat it... or risk losing everything, including the only thing they've always wanted.

I loved how Callihan intertwined the story of Poppy and Winston's past with the events of their present. They both seemed such cold and detached individuals in previous books, but their passion for each other really shone through and the sexual tension was off the charts.

To find that Winston was such a dominating force in the bedroom was beyond a pleasant surprise and really underscored how perfect he was for Poppy - a woman who want and *needs* to feel feminine.

'Winterblaze' was action-packed and filled with surprises both neat and jaw dropping and I can't wait to read the next in this series. Mary and Jack's story promises to be just as exhilarating if their chemistry to date is anything to go by....

Annie (Under the Covers Book Blog) says

5+++ stars!

The gloomy streets of London are the backdrop to WINTERBLAZE, the third book in Kristen Callihan's Darkest London series. It is the perfect setting for an action- filled romance and I get giddy just thinking about returning to this world!

Kristen Callihan is a master storyteller. She displays her unique talent for plotting and pacing with absolute ease, yet I cannot fathom the amount of planning it takes to pull off what she has accomplished in WINTERBLAZE. The resolution is perfectly executed and will be sure to cause some jaws to drop with its cleverness.

WINTERBLAZE reminds me of a supernatural Mr. & Mrs. Smith -- a sexy, no-holds-barred, action-packed, zombie-slaying, well-done reconciliation story that readers do not want to miss! I am going out on a limb here and saying that it will be one of my favorites of 2013. WINTERBLAZE is simply perfection!

Read this review in its entirety at Fresh Fiction

WINTERBLAZE is at Top Pick at Under the Covers

-y.a says

Oh well, I am clearly hooked on this series. It was action-packed and filled with mystery and passion. What I liked in this series so far:

Each installment was unique.

None of MCs bugged me.

No BS. (Fingers crossed it will stay this way:/)

Excellent pace.

Even though the world building lacked complexity, bits of surprises and new information added layers to the story.

Caz says

I had to restrain myself from picking up this book as soon as I'd finished the previous one, *Moonglow*. I've become a big fan of this series, but as there are only six books in it so far, I'm trying to ration myself! Clearly, however I'm not doing very well at that, as I only managed to hold out for about two weeks before I gave in and started **Winterblaze**.

The storyline actually begins in **Moonglow** when Inspector Winston Lane of Scotland Yard CID is brutally attacked by a werewolf, and would have been killed were it not for the timely intervention of a mysterious, winged figure who saved him in the nick of time. Between the events of books two and three, Winston has recovered, but has also made a number of alarming discoveries, not the least of which is that his wife of fourteen years – Poppy, the eldest of the three Ellis sisters – has been living a double life for the entirety of the time they have known each other. Thanks to his brothers-in-law, Ian Ranulf, Marquis of Northrop and Lord Benjamin Archer, Winston has learned about the existence of the SOS – the Society for the Suppression of Supernaturals (an organisation dedicated to preventing humans from finding out about the existence of demons, werewolves, shape-shifters and the other supernatural beings in their midst), and also, thanks to them, has learned how to fight and otherwise defend himself from attack.

Dreadfully scarred and considerably bulked-up, Winston has left England – and Poppy – deeply wounded by her betrayal, and, having left his job, is angry, bereft and aimless.

Poppy is devastated by Winston's abandonment, but her work at the SOS is important and she tries to focus on that exclusively to block out the hurt she is feeling. In fact, that's more or less been the pattern of her life – secrets she was charged with keeping after her mother's death have weighed heavily on her, but she has to carry them alone and her dedication to her work has led her to deceive not only her husband, but her sisters, too.

Winston has been away for three months when Poppy receives an anonymous note threatening his life. He might not want to be around her, but she is not prepared to see him come to harm, so she boards the ship on which he is due to travel from Calais, determined to keep him safe. Their reunion is filled with angry words and bitterness. Yet there is worse to come, a betrayal years in the making which threatens not just their happiness, but their very lives.

I'm not going to say much more about the plot other than that it's gripping and superbly executed, with plenty of action and "OMGNOOOOOOOOOOOOO!" moments along the way. But as with the other books in the series I've read so far, what turns a well-plotted, exciting story into a fantastic all-round read is the strong characterisation and the depth Ms Callihan gives to the central relationship between Winston and Poppy. We get to see their life together unfold in a series of flashbacks – from their first meeting up until their marriage – and the strength of their attraction and love for each other just leaps off the page. In their present, when it seems their marriage is in tatters, that attraction and love is still there, burning even more brightly if that is possible, yet they are both going to have to come to terms with the lies and the betrayals if they are going to have a chance of a future at all, let alone a future together.

In the earlier books, Poppy and Winston are presented as the epitome of a happy – albeit rather staid – marriage, but as **Winterblaze** progresses, we are shown that both of them have fooled themselves to an extent, and that while their love for each other has never been in doubt, their marriage has perhaps not been all they had believed it to be. Over the course of this story, we see them rediscovering each other – sometimes it's two steps forward and one step back, as these are two proud people who have an intense dislike of showing weakness or vulnerability – and coming to a new understanding and appreciation of each other. It's not easy, and there are moments of recrimination and many harsh words, but when push comes to shove, these are two people who mean the world to each other and who will do what they must to ensure the happiness and well-being of the other, no matter the cost to themselves.

I love the way we see both characters start to adjust to the newly revealed realities they are discovering about each other. Winston has to admit that his wife is more than capable of kicking his arse without lifting a finger – not an especially pleasant thought for a man who has been brought up to believe women are to be protected at all costs. Wonderfully, however, while Winston's protective instincts may be screaming at him to pull her out of danger, he is also completely turned-on by his warrior-queen of a wife (he's always dubbed her "Boadicea") and finds an unexpected delight in knowing what she's capable of. And while Poppy has always known that her husband had a very keen mind, she now comes to truly value his methodical approach and his ability to see the bigger picture. (All the newly acquired muscle and his way with a swordstick don't hurt either!) Together, they're a force to be reckoned with, something which is showcased brilliantly in a fight scene which had me thinking of them as a Victorian "Mr & Mrs Smith"!

Which brings me to once again admire this author's ability to create the most incredibly scorching sexual tension between her protagonists. Winston and Poppy might have been regarded as staid by others, yet they were clearly anything BUT staid in the bedroom, as it seems the methodical, upright Lane of the Yard was a bit of a devil between the sheets! Lucky for Poppy, he still is ;-)

Winterblaze is a superb read, and one I'm sure I'll return to. The balance between the romance and the action is just about perfect, the storytelling is wonderful and the plot is exciting and well-paced; but the biggest draw for me is the way in which Ms Callihan so clearly shows the depth of the love between Winston

and Poppy and how they have forged a new partnership from the ashes of the old one.

The set up for the next book, Shadowdance is very intriguing - I love an adversarial couple falling for each other, and Mary Chase and Jack Talent appear to hate each others' guts. But what happens to Jack in **Winterblaze** is clearly going to change him, and I can't wait to see where the story is going to go.

Jo says

“Winston Lane was born when he met Poppy Ellis.” His raspy voice grew stronger. “My life began with you. And it will end with you. That much I know.”

It's been three months since Winston Lane, or Win as his wife likes to call him, was viciously attacked by a werewolf and found out that his beloved wife of fourteen years has been lying to him. She's part of The Society for the Suppression of Supernaturals, also known as the SOS, she's an Elemental who has the power to control ice, and all of this she has kept secret.

It's been three months since Poppy had last seen her husband, and she is barely keeping herself together. The pain of losing Win is almost unbearable, but a demon from her past is set on revenge and Poppy needs to keep Win safe and find a way to make things right.

This instalment was a lot more emotional than the previous books. And I loved it. I especially liked the flashbacks of how Win and Poppy met, fell in love and married. Their love was a beautiful thing, and it was very romantic to see how much Win loved his wife, how relentlessly he pursued her, and how he did everything he could to make her his wife. And I loved that his nickname for her was Boadicea.

“‘Through the dancing poppies stole, a breeze, most softly lulling to my soul.’ ” His teeth grazed her. “You are the spark that lights my soul, Boadicea.”

There was a lot of growth in their relationship in this book. Both of them had been keeping a part of themselves separate from each other, not truly revealing all that they were, and here they struggled with laying themselves open, with realising that after everything that had happened their love was the one constant, the one truth. And Win especially became the person he was always meant to be.

I loved Poppy and Win's characters. Both were very strong-willed, and loved the danger that came with their jobs. And wow, Win was very dominant in the bedroom, something that Poppy, and I, loved ;-) And I adored that both of them were virgins when they met, they were very young, and neither had been with anyone else ever, and never wanted to be. To me that was very special. Their romance just made me very happy!

The plot of the series got a lot more interesting with this book. We learned a lot more about the SOS, and it's members. Also about Poppy and her sisters' past. Then there's the Nex, a resistance group who seeks to expose supernaturals to the world.

And next is Jack Talent and Mary Chase's book, and I cannot wait to see what happens with these two.

This truly is a great series, and one that gets better with each instalment. Highly recommended.

Blacky *Romance Addict* says

These books have the best freaking covers EVER!!!

But! I'm sorry to say the cover here is so much better than the actual book :(The two MC-s were extremely irritating, I basically wanted to bitch-slap them both throughout the book. The constant flashbacks did not help.

Though one good thing, I'm dying to read Jack and Mary now <3

Kathleen says

Loved the first two books in this series. Was so looking forward to this one. It started off beautifully, and I was almost giddy. Callihan is a superb writer; her narrative is tight, her dialogue flows.

And the cover is simply gorgeous.

Unfortunately, the story structure did not work for me. I found it more than a little frustrating. The setting jumped from the present to 14 years in the past. It seemed that every time the tension in 1881 grew tight -- bam! -- I'd be back in 1867. And that peaceful visit to the past bugged me, because in the present, Poppy and Winston have only four days to find something, or else! Four days. So I'm feeling urgent, but the text takes me into the past. But there are no clues there, and I wasn't all that interested in their life back then (but I loved the prologue -- when they first met at Victoria Station).

Moreover, the POV shifted at irritating times. I'd be reading an emotional scene with Poppy and Win, and -- bam -- I'd be elsewhere, in Jack's head, for example.

On top of that, whenever Winston and Poppy were about to make love -- bam! -- an interruption: a knock at the door, a terrified scream, a cough, etc. Please!

So, on many levels the leapfrogging structure of the narrative was irritating. I felt like the author was yanking at my chain. The pacing began to drag for me. Gradually I lost interest in this couple.

Too often the characters were stupid. They know the strongest demon is after them, and they do not take appropriate safety measures or preventions (especially the scenes on the ship). I questioned Winston's intelligence -- signing that contract?? Not the first time, under the influence. The second time, on the ship. He didn't read the fine print. Oops. And the stupidity of wrestling with a demon when (view spoiler).

Positives: All that said, some action scenes had me on the edge of my seat. The spiders. And some erotic scenes were lovely. The heartbreak that Poppy displayed at the beginning was authentic and moving. I chuckled at how Poppy stopped the ship from sailing, so she could board it. It was also good to see Daisy again, from book 2, because I had been unsure how strong she would be in her new state of existence, as a GIM. (Miranda did nothing for me in this book. Seemed immature.) Archer and Ian are always favorites. Glad they got a part. Plus, I enjoyed touring the headquarters of the SOS.

Finally, I don't like the way things played out. We learn something about the three sisters that, along with

other things that happened back in book 1, make me question the connected storyline across all three books. Plus, the reason given for what happened to poor ____ lacked credibility, given the collaborative relationship that exists between SOS and Lycans. It was just like, "Oh, my minions went too far..." when in fact, there was never any reason for ____ to sic the bloody buggers on him in the first place. He was making no headway -- was no more a threat than Mary. A plot contrivance, devised mostly for book 4. The epilogue is nothing but a pitch for book 4. It doesn't even involve Poppy and Winston.

I will probably read book 4.

Content: explicit sex, cussing and profanity, violence, some gory parts

Bubu says

Update 03/18: b-r with Joanna, Sam and Isabella.

There are no additional words for the perfection this book is.

Original review 05/16

It was only when I read *The Hook Up* that I noticed that Kristen Callihan was also the author of the *Darkest London* series of which I had read *Firelight*. It was an enjoyable story and judging by my GR friends, I knew that the series would get better. Oh dear, getting better doesn't really come anywhere close to describing *Winterblaze*.

Whilst *Firelight* was too much into world building and two main characters who kept their secrets hidden for too long, and *Moonglow*, although an absolutely lovely book, had a paranormal creature I've seen done to death, both in literature as well as in film/tv (Lycans/Werewolves), *Winterblaze* took me by surprise. We see Poppy and Winston already in the first book, with the second book revealing the secret that she's hidden from Winston ever since they've known each other, and Winston's shock that Poppy is anything but the sweet wife of 14 years who apparently runs a book store.

The book picks up three months after this revelation. Winston, feeling betrayed, has not returned to his wife after suffering a vicious attack by a supposed werewolf. He can't believe that the woman he's loved from the moment he set eyes on, the woman he trusted the most, the only person whom he assumed never lied, would deceive him so. Now, faced with a new threat to Winston's life, Poppy needs to use her supernatural powers as well as her position as head of the SOS (The Society for the Suppression of Supernaturals) to save Winston, which obviously throws them together, with a lot of hurt on both sides. Winston, because he's been lied to for 14 years; Poppy, because Winston never gave her a chance to explain and up and left.

It's rather rare to see a book written about a couple that has already been married for 14 years in the romance genre. Their appearances in the previous two books showed a happily married couple, staid and rather unassuming. By the end of *Moonglow* though the reader knows that their story will be a battle of wills. The question is: How is Ms Callihan going to pull it off?

And she pulled it off with verve. There are quite a few things Ms Callihan does extremely well. For one, she can tell one hell of a story. The writing, the characterisation, the atmosphere are compelling. Victorian London never felt dirtier and darker, never more menacing and the paranormal aspect is, with *Firelight*

setting the groundworks, gripping but never overwhelming. The supernaturals and their abilities are explained in detail, giving the necessary background, but introducing them slowly and in small doses.

Another thing the author does very, very well is creating intimacy, showing intimacy, in small flashbacks, gestures, dialogues. Things that couples develop over the course of their relationship, making them more relatable, leaving a sense of 'I know what that's like'. Very often romance novels fail to show these quirks that couples develop or already have and that are unique in their own right, but that can bring a smile on your face, like this one where Winston muses about their routine in the bathroom:

Half the time, she left tooth powder all over the sink, and he had to clean up after her.

But this is only the smallest portion of intimacy that Ms Callihan shows.

When Winston and Poppy meet again after a three months' separation, they feel the familiarity between them. They do know each other's quirks inside out, after all. And yet, with the new revelations of Poppy's background and abilities, it's two people who have to redefine their relationship. A lot of mistrust, especially from Winston, builds walls that seem insurmountable; Poppy's betrayal almost irredeemable. And yet, Ms Callihan shows these two people who are deeply connected to each other; the loving, yearning, wanting, laughing, needing, hurting. The touching of each other's pinkies in a carriage. And it's utter beauty. *Winterblaze* is very steamy without stringing one sex scene after another. Poppy and Winston's first sexual encounter comes very early in the book. Well, they have been married for 14 years, and to be clear here, it's angry sex. And then....over 200 pages of sexual tension with no sex. But with an intimacy that is rarely to be found in romance novels.

Anyway, what happens when your life has been turned upside down; when everything you believed in, trusted in was based on a lie?

Let me talk about Poppy and Winston.

Poppy is a unique heroine. Not likeable at first sight, not even in the first two books, she's too stand-offish, too reserved, almost cold. But with an inner strength that defies her age and the expectations of society toward women. Pragmatic, almost stoic, she is unbowed in the face of events that life throws at her.

She preferred simple feelings. Anger, sadness, joy; they could run their course through her system. She could shout, cry, laugh, and it'd be done.

In *Winterblaze* we see her passion for life, the will to take what makes her happy, although life itself wouldn't have her happy. And make no mistake, she will rip anyone apart who threatens her loved ones. She's confident without being TSTL. Her worth is not measured by a man's appreciation. She knows what she's capable of (by the way, this is a declaration of love to my mum) and takes pride in the work she does for SOS. She is the kind of heroine I love and the kind of woman I'd love to have as a friend.

As for Winston. Sigh! Is there anything sexier in a romance novel than a Hero who truly loves the woman for her strength and her confidence and who isn't being intimidated? That said, mind you, Winston's perspective of Poppy undergoes a monumental shift. Not that he didn't appreciate her before knowing who she really is. But seeing her as the head of an organisation that deals with all kinds of supernatural creatures and the way she deals with danger, comes as a shock which is only natural after 14 years. He is a man of his time, after all, and the need to protect his wife is overwhelming. After a short period of resistance on his part however, Winston is in awe of his wife, quickly reaching a point where he fully accepts and supports her. The best thing is, he doesn't feel intimidated by his wife. He wants to protect her, yes, but who wouldn't want to protect the person she/he loves? And how beautifully done is that! He admires her and calls her Boudicea and his warrior woman with a Machiavellian mind without being derogatory. Winston is a hero to die for.

Utterly devoted to his wife, witty, intelligent and so, so, so yummy!

Nonetheless, the trust issues both have are not being glossed over. Both feel the hurt and the despair at what's happened to them. And however much they may love each other, the fact remains that their marriage was based on lies, and, as I said before, Winston struggles the most

“It isn’t real. What we had was never real. It was an illusion. Our life. Our love.”

But Callihan wouldn't be such a good writer if she didn't come up with a twist that leaves them both shattered, and me quite devastated.

But never fear, we're reading a romance novel, right?

This is not an angsty book at all. It's powerfully emotional, adventurous and entertaining with a lead couple I rooted for right from the beginning. It could probably be read as a stand alone, though I'd say you'd miss out on the intriguing world Callihan created, apart from the insights the reader gets from Poppy and Winston's story. Additionally, the new couple for the next book *Shadowdance* is setup and my fingers are already itching and I have to be careful not to go into a binge-reading-fest of the *Darkest London* series. Nope, I think it's time to read some really crappy books again.

And to those who are not into PNR: I'm not into PNR either, I've tried here and there but this one is worth a go! Who said Mystery/PNR could not have strong character driven elements? Well, Ms Callihan does prove otherwise!

And, for whatever reason, shoot me, I have no clue, I kept on thinking of Walnut ice cream throughout the book. So here's to Walnut ice cream:

On that note, I really, really should invite Winston to some Walnut ice cream. All innocent, of course. Just a little chat...you know...

Jill says

Poppy and Winstone have been married for fourteen years. And for fourteen years Poppy has been keeping secrets. As a member of *The Society for the Suppression of Supernaturals (SOS)*, she and others like her, keep the human world ignorant *and safe* from the supernatural world. When Winstone, a police inspector, is attacked by a werewolf, he finds out that Poppy is not who she appears to be, his wife the bookseller. When Poppy receives a message that a demon is out to get Winstone, Poppy will do everything in her considerable power to protect her estranged husband.

This is the third book in the *Darkest London* series where Poppy, the eldest of the three Ellis sisters gets her story. Told in flashbacks throughout the book from when Poppy and Win first meet at Victoria Station, their courtship and marriage and into present time in 1883.

At the end of book #2 *Moonglow*, Winstone was viciously attacked and Poppy's other life revealed. Now separated for three months, Winstone is taking leave from the CID and is on holiday in France, which is where Poppy catches up with him. Accompanying Win is Jack Talent, Ian's valet. And accompanying Poppy is Mary Chase. Some of the best scenes involve Jack and Mary who are the protagonists in the next title

Shadowdance.

Though not strictly necessary to read the first two books to understand the plot of this one, you will be missing out on important background and history of the sisters and their respective partners.

Some major secrets about the Ellis family and Win's background are revealed. With plenty of action and adventure, some steamy love scenes and a reconciliation of Poppy and Win's relationship, this is another wonderful instalment in this historical paranormal romance series.

Steam: 3.5

ARC courtesy Grand Central Publishing (Forever) via NetGalley
