



Dark Shadows

Jana Petken

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A fast-paced, action-packed historical romance set during the last days of the Old South

When unimaginable calamities strike, Mercy Carver, a poor London woman, wonders what she has done to deserve such immeasurable suffering. It is only when she faces imminent death in the snow and ice-encrusted Virginia wilderness that she finally understands the power of destiny.

Mercy is passionate. She loves and hates in equal measure. Can love and hatred give her the strength she needs now to reach a Northern state, and free a runaway slave wanted for murders, she committed?

America and her people are strangled in an uncompromising political stalemate. Southern states have seceded from the Union, and a civil war is imminent.

Mercy Carver: her journey is just beginning.

Dark Shadows Details

Date : Published November 7th 2014 by JCP Publishing (first published July 29th 2014)

ISBN :

Author : Jana Petken

Format : Kindle Edition 500 pages

Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Romance, Drama

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From Reader Review Dark Shadows for online ebook

Karl Wiggins says

What an absolutely superb book. I say this should be a TV series, not because there are so many cliffhanging moments, but because there are so many “Oh Nooooooo! That’s not what you should be doing” moments.

Mercy Carver is a chick from the Elephant & Castle in South-East London. By the mid-19th century parts of the Elephant and the surrounding areas, especially along the riverside, had become notorious slums and these were immortalised by Charles Dickens in *Oliver Twist*, with Bill Sikes meeting a violent end hanging above the mud of Folly Ditch. By the time Mercy Carver was born it had been nicknamed “The Capital of Cholera,” with pollution spreading by drains that discharged themselves straight down the walls of houses into the street and overflowing over the swollen carcasses of dead animals, ready to burst with the gases of putrefaction.

No surprise then that a vigorous and violent street culture lay at the heart of life for people living in the area, and Jana Petken grabs the reader by the scruff of his neck and drags him/her straight into the action. She pulls no punches in her writing, you’d better believe that!

I’ve no intention of spoiling the story for anyone but just watch how Petken handles situations of shocking violence in the book. She literally leaves the reader breathless.

But you get back into the story again, and everything’s flowing along nicely when without warning the author throws another spanner in the works, leaving the reader with no choice but to hang on tight as she bounces you from pillar to post, from safe streets to brothels, from England to America and from promises to betrayal.

If I had to pick a fault – and I honestly don’t – but I guess I’d have liked Mercy Carver to be a little more street-wise, coming from the Elephant & Castle, as she does. Growing up on those cobbles she’d have developed a resilience, toughness and fortitude, which she certainly has, but comin’ from saarf of the ‘shake and shiver’ as she does, I’d have expected a little more in-yer-face ‘street’

That’s not a criticism, and don’t let it spoil the story, for Jana Petken is a master story-teller, and I truly cannot recommend this book highly enough. This is one of those rare can’t-wait-to-get-back-to-my-book books that you find yourself thinking about at rare moments of the day.

I can’t leave this review without mentioning one last thing. A large part of the book concerns slavery issues. Now normally the plantation owner is described or portrayed as a tyrant; whipping the male slaves, raping the females. But in this book the plantation owner is a handsome, thoroughly decent fellow who’s also a hero. His morals are tight whichever way you look at it. And then without warning he goes into an explanation as to why keeping slaves is the honourable and just thing to do. Industry (cotton etc.) would break down if people weren’t allowed to keep slaves. He feeds them, clothes them, only whips them when he needs to make an example and only sells on their children when they’ve reached a certain age.

This is very clever writing by Jana, and one example of what I mean when I say she’s throws a spanner in the works. You see, this bloke is obviously so wrong in everything he’s saying, yet a) the reader likes him and b) as a decent bloke believes he believes his argument to be well founded. Just because of a person’s skin colour he or she is viewed as a lesser human being.

But there’s a deeper question here is; do we still view certain people as lesser human beings because of their

status in life? Because they're homeless, for instance?

Do we, say, walk past them on the way to a restaurant, leave a big tip for the waitress because she's assisted us in the enjoyment of a big meal, and walk past the homeless guy on the way home?

Just a thought. And I only mention that to show how very clever Jana Petken is.

I cannot wait to read more from this extremely talented mistress of the adventure narrative. PLEASE somebody make this into a TV series. It truly deserves it.

A great, great book!

Susan Samuelson says

Awesome book.

This book is fantastic! She takes you from the plagues in London, an illegal whore house to the deep South with slaves. How in the world can the author do this so smoothly? Got to get on to the sequel!

Brenda Perlin says

Mercy Carver: Dark Shadows by Jana Petken is a wow book. I was definitely moved by Mercy and her compelling story. This well-written smart piece of historical fiction pulled on my heartstrings. There are so many moments that I felt myself totally attached and invested. It's an emotional story that is beautifully written. I needed to know where it all would lead. My heart was pumping while I read with vigor..

The author weaves an intricate tale. Emotional, devastating ,and fascinating. This story is an epic. One I could see played out on the big screen. I was captivated from the start and I practically ate this story up. Mercy Carver: Dark Shadows is a powerful coming of age story that takes you right in and pulls on your heartstrings.

Quote ~

"Jacob looked at Mercy's tired face and saw fear written across it. She had tried to hide it from him and from Julia, but as she sat there like an innocent, lost child, wide-eyed and apprehensive, he knew instinctively that with nowhere to go, no one to help her, and no funds, she would be doomed to an early death- or, worse, forced to become the very thing he had just rescued her from."

David Cook says

Mercy Carver sounded like a great story.

I have read Jana Petken's other book, The Guardian of Secrets and found her writing style compelling. Mercy Carver was all that and more. It was an unusual story, told with the author's wonderful storytelling abilities. The young woman Mercy struggled at birth, only to struggle against poverty and cruelty when going into womanhood.

The uplifting moral of the story here was not just that love can conquer but that the human spirit can triumph against all the odds.

This was another great piece of writing from Petken and deserves 5 stars.

P.J. Fiala says

Can't wait to read.

Fay D says

Wow

I knew nothing about the southern wars in america so this was a real eye opener. Again the author uses very atmospheric writing to bring you deeper into the story. Looking forward to following mercy further in her story

C.N. says

Mercy Carver: Dark Shadows is a powerful story and a compelling page-turner. Right from the beginning the heroine is set to have a hard life. Losing her parents at her birth, she is given the name Mercy, but her grandparents and accorded anything but that quality. To them, she is nothing more than a commodity to by them a better life by selling her to a much older shopkeeper as his very young bride. Mercy is not given the chance of another life and is well guarded, except on that last day when a spirit of desperate independence causes her to have one innocent outing. Only things go wrong and she ends up with a different life and horrific circumstances.

I love the details and realism in this story. It is very clear a lot of research has gone into the book. Some of the things I didn't know included the stink of London's poorer quarters during this time. It is details like this that elevate this book head and shoulders above the usual historical fiction books.

Mercy is a very compelling character as she has learned to be strong and resilient to hardship. There is in her a capacity to feel things very deeply, as was the case with her parents. She is protective of others weaker than herself and will fight for what is right in any way she can. What happens to her is disturbing, while being grounded in the realism of the time portrayed. Life was not easy for a woman on her own in an age where men invariably had the upper hand. One did rise to the top by appalling means and it is her who threatens Mercy the most. Who will win, for it will be a battle for Mercy's life? You will have to read this gripping book to find out. I am delighted to hear there is a sequel coming out as I want to continue with this story.

Karen Turner says

i loved the book, will continue on in the next book of the series.

Susan Tarr says

I devoured this wonderful book in three sittings. Quite simply, it is an accomplished literary masterpiece written by a wordsmith of note, who is surely going places.

Kudos to Jana Petken for this stellar composition.

The pace never lets up and the characters portrayed are totally addictive.

Petken's style is eloquent and her descriptions are superb; I was completely transported. At times I was near tears for Mercy and the other innocent girls, kidnapped by sadistic criminals, sexually and emotionally abused (some were brutally murdered by the mistress in front of their new friends to set an example) and thrust into a life of enforced prostitution. And if I thought Mercy's future ever looked rosy, I was wrong. There's a tangible richness and sumptuous descriptions right through so that I could feel the strength and courage rise in our heroine.

There's a deeply haunting and profound history scaling two different continents: the underbelly of squalid London, UK, and the slavery-entrenched deep south of USA. From horse-drawn carriages to ships and ocean crossings, from Colts to rifles, from trudging along on foot to riding atop a horse - all immediately imaginable.

The roles and plots are intricately researched so the reader experiences no disconnect in this work. It takes a skilful author to transport the reader from cover to cover without losing them at some point along the way.

Mercy Carver takes me back to the 'Angelique' series. 'Mercy Carver' is exactly the type of historic novel I lose myself completely in and as I turned the last page, I realised I was holding my breath.

Again, kudos, Jana Petken. Another glowing work under your belt.

Christoph Fischer says

"Mercy Carver: Dark Shadows" by Jana Petken, is the second book I have read by this author and I found it an even more engaging and compelling historical novel than the first book, "The Guardian of Secrets: And Her Deathly Pact."

I used to live in the Elephant & Castle area in South London and am familiar with its architecture and know a little about its history, which of course helped me to make an instant connection when the story begins right there.

In the dramatic prologue set in the 1840s Mercy Carver survives her difficult birth, circumstances that are hoped to set the tone of mercy for her life.

However, 18 years on in the 1860s we witness her life as somewhat different. An arranged marriage, an abduction and her later life in America, full of struggle and misfortunes.

Mercy is a great character whose life serves well to teach us about the times in general and the times as they were for women, inner power and determination and history. The America of the times with slave trade at its full bloom, love and destiny are further themes that the author skilfully weaved into her well written and accomplished novel.

This is a powerful and captivating read that serves well as historical novel and romance, giving plenty of

room to emotional development of her characters, the coming of age of our heroine and enough conflict to keep the interest going.

Recommended to fans of historical romance and other historical fiction.

Karl Wiggins says

WOW!! This truly MUST be turned into a TV series!

What an absolutely superb book. I say this should be a TV series, not because there are so many cliffhanging moments, but because there are so many “Oh Nooooooo! That’s not what you should be doing” moments.

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A great, great book!

Lisa Hall says

Born on a night that took both her parents, Mercy Carver is raised and sheltered by her grandparents. On the eve of her eighteenth birthday she finds out she's been promised to the local butcher for four years. Mercy's stomach turns. She tries to think of a way out, but coming up with nothing, plans a single day of freedom over the bridge in London - a town she's never seen. If she'd only known what that day would bring.

This story starts off like a gothic, but quickly turns to an historical romance reminiscent of the old 600 page 'bodice rippers' full of kidnappings, damsels in distress, thwarted lovers, and a trip to a new country. It's not 600 pages, thank goodness, and while the author doesn't spare the details of our heroines trials, the story doesn't get as dark as some others I've read in the past. It isn't full of happy coincidences either, staying true to a reality I may not have always liked as I read, but understood.

Set in the American pre-civil war era, there is a great deal of attention to history delivered in a very conversational manner. Again, the author stayed true to the period. When you're introduced to a slave owner, he talks and thinks like a slave owner. It's a tad bit bracing, but honest.

I no longer read a great deal of romance, but this one took me back. Glad I picked it up.

May Sage says

Getting into the story took me a while, I found it rather bland to start with, because it starts slow, and not much happens past the startcross lover thing.

The writing is pleasing, in an unorthodox, old-fashion way, but it sometimes makes the scene quite confusing.

When the story quicker in at "chapter one" I was quite shocked, it felt like it was ready to end soon; no one has done such a long intro since Tolkien's "concerning hobbits."

From there, the style got less confusing and also more entertaining; I enjoyed it tremendously; I just think the intro doesn't do justice to the rest.

Jim Goforth says

Anybody who follows any of my reviews might be aware that historical fiction is not exactly my normal genre of choice, though I do like to make a habit of reading a wide array of things aside from just my favourite genres.

With that said, I decided to check out 'Dark Shadows (The Mercy Carver Series Book 1)' by Jana Petken, on the strength of her earlier novel 'The Guardian of Secrets' and discovered, that much like that book, this one is a grand achievement in historical fiction.

Spanning well over five hundred pages Dark Shadows is a big book with a hell of a lot of story contained within those pages.

It starts off in dramatic fashion, with a prologue section dealing with the birth of the tales eventual protagonist, Mercy Carver herself, and it is pretty obvious to see from the word go and this harrowing childbirth, that Mercy's existence is not going to be a straightforward blissful one of tranquillity and simplicity. Death and suicide are on the agenda immediately, and the eventual name bestowed upon baby Mercy doesn't even come from her parents.

From this point we move on to 1860 in London, where doomed to be married off to the affluent local grocer

Mister Black, more commonly referred to as Big Joe; a slovenly balding fellow, more than double her age, Mercy Carver is about to embark on a story which runs the gamut from fascinating to disturbing, thought provoking to deeply poignant.

The author writes with a smooth, easy reading flow and uses engaging narration to relay the tale of Mercy's abundant tribulations, and these are indeed many, starting from what is meant to be her wedding day.

From London, England to Virginia, North America the tale unfolds with measures of sheer darkness lacing it, scenes of sex and violence and some truly memorable (as well as some truly depraved) characters make their presences felt. The likes of Jacob Stone, Mrs Mallory aka Madame du Pont, Big Joe himself and an entire supporting cast all add weight to the tale, drifting into the central characters orbit and dramatically altering her existence.

The imagery is strong, the storytelling is splendid, and over the course of the lengthy tale, a wide range of emotions are going to be unleashed in the reader and it's fair to say, one does not have to be an avid fanatic of historical fiction to become thoroughly immersed in Dark Shadows.

As this is book one in a series, stay tuned for a follow up. I'll be keeping an eye out for it.

Angie Martin says

Jana Petken is one of those authors who just has a way of beautifully telling a story while wrapping the reader up in the characters and locations. This is my second book I've read by her, and you can be sure it will not be my last. I hung on every word of Mercy Carver: Dark Shadows, much as I did with her debut novel. She has made me a believer in historical romance. Her research is impeccable and whisked me back in time in the book to places I couldn't even dream of. I was caught up in the story itself, and my heart went out to Mercy as she went through troubling times and good times. The twists and turns were phenomenal, but more than that, the supporting cast really held its own. That's one mark of an excellent writer - one who can write supporting characters that are just as real and full of depth as the main character. You absolutely cannot go wrong with Mercy Carver: Dark Shadows! I'm on to the second book in the series!
