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A Beautiful Blue Death: Charles Lenox Mysteries Series #1

A BEAUTIFUL
BLUE DEATH

Charles Finch



Synopsis

Charles Lenox, Victorian gentleman and armchair explorer, likes nothing more than to relax in his private study with a cup of tea, a roaring fire and a good book. But when his lifelong friend Lady Jane asks for his help, Lenox cannot resist the chance to unravel a mystery. Prudence Smith, one of Jane's former servants, is dead of an apparent suicide. But Lenox suspects something far more sinister: murder, by a rare and deadly poison. The grand house where the girl worked is full of suspects, and though Prue had dabbled with the hearts of more than a few men, Lenox is baffled by the motive for the girl's death. When another body turns up during the London season's most fashionable ball, Lenox must untangle a web of loyalties and animosities. Was it jealousy that killed Prudence Smith? Or was it something else entirely? And can Lenox find the answer before the killer strikes again---this time, disturbingly close to home?

Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 8 hours and 58 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Tantor Audio

Audible.com Release Date: September 30, 2011

Whispersync for Voice: Ready

Language: English

ASIN: B005QURMLE

Best Sellers Rank: #13 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Mysteries & Thrillers > British

Detectives #130 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Genre Fiction > Historical > Mysteries #143 in Books > Mystery, Thriller & Suspense > Mystery > British Detectives

Customer Reviews

Victorian gentleman Charles Lenox recently assisted Scotland Yard in solving the Isabel Lewes case; a simple case the Yard should have easily solved despite their appalling lack of imagination. Now, on a bitterly cold late afternoon, all Lenox wants to do is sit in his library and enjoy the bliss of a warm fire. So when he receives an urgent message from Lady Jan Grey, his closest friend and next door neighbor, he ventures forth to brave the cold, despite his inadequate boots. Lady Grey's former servant, Prue Smith, has apparently committed suicide-by-poisoning at the home of her new employer, George Barnard, the current director of the Royal Mint. At Lady Grey's request, Lenox

visits the crime scene and is quickly convinced that Prue's death is murder, despite assurances from the Yard and Barnard that it is suicide. Thomas McConnell, a surgeon and close associate of Lenox, determines the cause of death to be a rare poison called bella indigo (beautiful blue). The Yard does not welcome Lenox's assistance, and that leaves him little access to the Barnard household, forcing him to investigate discreetly and utilize the services of Graham, his butler and friend. It is not until a second death occurs that Lenox begins to piece together the puzzling crime. *A Beautiful Blue Death* is Charles Finch's delightful debut novel. The pairing of Lenox and Graham brings to mind Lord Peter Wimsey and his valet Bunter. Similar to Dorothy Sayer's creations, Lenox and Graham share more than a purely professional relationship. Despite the friendship and amity they feel for each other, the barriers of class keep them separated. What elevates *A Beautiful Blue Death* is the relationships Lenox has with the people around him. While the central mystery is fascinating, what captivates readers is the exploration of Lenox's relationship with Lady Jane and the glimpse it provides of a gentleman of leisure's life. Their habit of taking tea together illustrates the depth of their relationship, unusual for a time when men and women's lives had little intersection. *Armchair Interviews* says: It is the man these relationships illuminate which will draw readers to future volumes about Charles Lenox.

I am a huge fan of Victorian murder mysteries and finding a new author is like winning the lottery. I absolutely loved *A Beautiful Blue Death*. Charles Finch's writing is rich, descriptive, and engaging. The mystery itself is fascinating and draws you right in. You'll find yourself rooting not only for Charles Lenox - the brilliant yet reluctant detective - but for his friend, Lady Jane, and his loyal butler, Graham. Finch does not get bogged down in everyday details of Victorian life, so if you're not a big fan of Victorian era books, don't worry. I highly recommend this book not only to Victorian mystery fans, but to all history fans.

If Charles Lenox were to have his way, all he'd wish for are warm boots, a blazing fireplace, some tea and sandwiches, and an hour or two spent with his maps. But the aristocratic amateur sleuth is always in demand in Victorian London. His childhood friend, Lady Jane, appeals to his innate curiosity and investigative skills. Her upstairs maid, Prudence Smith, who'd moved to the household of Royal Mint director, George Barnard, died under suspicious circumstances. Believed by Barnard and Scotland Yard to be a suicide, Lenox isn't much convinced, and neither is Lady Jane. With the help of his friend, Dr. Tom McConnell, they conclude that she'd been poisoned by the rare and expensive potion called bella indigo, the titular "beautiful blue." Suspects abound, from Prue's lovers

to Barnard's houseguests to Barnard himself, but motives are scarce and flimsy. What to make of this motley crew and their secrets? Soon, Lenox discovers that there's more to this poisoning than meets the eye, and when a second murder is committed, he realizes he'd been looking at this puzzle quite the wrong way. "A Beautiful Blue Death" is the first of the new Charles Lenox Mysteries. Much of its appeal is Lenox himself, an affable, debonair intellectual very much like Dorothy L. Sayers' creation, Lord Peter Wimsey. He even has his own Bunt--Graham, his butler-cum-spy--who's every bit as smart. Mr. Finch's pleasure in bringing 1865 London to life is evident, and it really does come to life, from the fashionable abodes of his upper crust sleuth and associates to the shady apothecaries, sinister alleys, and stuffy anterooms of posh clubs. There's even a tease that Lenox and Lady Jane, both proper in their platonic dealings, may find in each other more than the cordiality of friendship, much like Wimsey and Vane. His characters may seem like a rehash of Golden Age mysteries, but I found it refreshing to start a new series. I daresay many mystery buffs such as myself have long ago exhausted books by Christie, Sayers, Stout, Marsh, Carr, etc. For now, Finch can be forgiven the occasional rudimentary writing and a timeline error here and there; after all it's his debut mystery and if the clever mystery here is any indication of what's to come, it'll be a delightful series. In all likelihood, many of the affable characters we are introduced to here will reprise their roles in future installments and maybe Lenox's deductive prowess will be honed to Holmes perfection. For now, the bottom-line for me, really, is how good was the mystery? And here, it's pretty darn good.

The author, Charles Finch, has a winner with this new cozy mystery set in Victorian England. The characterization is superb. Lenox is a very likable well rounded amateur sleuth who lives comfortably in London next door to his childhood friend, a widow, with whom there is just a hint of romantic interest. He has a brother who is a parliamentary figure and a loyal, intelligent butler who helps with the "leg-work" of solving the mystery. Finch has included domestic scenes that make the story comfortable and keep the characters grounded. He adds historical detail about the current political events of the era without detracting from the plot. The plot is intriguing and believable. He doesn't rely on ghoulish forensics or psychotic killers - the reader has to actually think about motive! One of the best mysteries to come along in quite awhile. I highly recommend this book!!

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