



Whispers in the Reading Room

Shelley Gray

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Lydia's job at the library is her world—until a mysterious patron catches her eye . . . and perhaps her heart.

Just months after the closure of the Chicago World's Fair, librarian Lydia Bancroft finds herself fascinated by a mysterious dark-haired and dark-eyed patron. He has never given her his name; he actually never speaks to a single person. All she knows about him is that he loves books as much as she does.

Only when he rescues her in the lobby of the Hartman Hotel does she discover that his name is Sebastian Marks. She also discovers that he lives at the top of the prestigious hotel and that most everyone in Chicago is intrigued by him.

Lydia and Sebastian form a fragile friendship, but when she discovers that Mr. Marks isn't merely a very wealthy gentleman, but also the proprietor of an infamous saloon and gambling club, she is shocked.

Lydia insists on visiting the club one fateful night and suddenly is a suspect to a murder. She must determine who she can trust, who is innocent, and if Sebastian Marks—the man so many people fear—is actually everything her heart believes him to be.

Whispers in the Reading Room Details

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From Reader Review Whispers in the Reading Room for online ebook

Amy says

Whispers in the Reading Room was quite a pleasant surprise for me. I have to admit. I have read a few books by this author that I did not care for, but this book quickly has become one of my favorites of 2015. I want to go back to reading others of the series and even find more by this author. Apparently, I have been missing something.

Awesome read!

5 stars.

Courtney Clark says

If you are intrigued by the Gilded age, the World's fair in Chicago, or just a good old suspense with a bit of wit, this book might be for you!

My thoughts: This book was quite entertaining with a swift-moving plot and vivid characters, though not quite a favorite in the genre. The witty dialogue was fun, and I really enjoyed the bit of dry humor thrown in (especially concerning Sebastian's logical/analytical personality vs. some very emotional women). It also had a good cast of secondary characters that added perspective.

Sebastian was interestingly portrayed as a nontypical hero - what with his unfortunate upbringing and choice of business. This was unexpected and a nice departure from the norm. While he was still likable and properly effected by circumstances in the story, I would have liked just a little more of a transformation from his character arc. This would be my only complaint with the story.

I think my favorite things about this book were the setting and bookish elements. It was neat to see a lesser-known side of Gilded-age Chicago. And, the glimpses of a library and comparisons of life to literature were fun --especially for a book lover! It was interesting to see how Lydia's love of books was portrayed in a way that encouraged her character to come out of her shell.

Thank you to Zondervan, BookLook, and the Fiction Guild for a complimentary review copy of this book.

Paige Bookdragon says

Da fuck. What a let down.

I was so disappointed with this book. It started as something really great, you know. Two people with nothing in common except being a book lover. The hombre is a rich dude who owns a gambling club, the girl is a librarian, the epitome of goodness and light.

Cliche as it may sound, I love the first 30% of the story. The hero has dry wit and there's a chemistry

between the characters before they even talk. It's just like, you can feel something in the air every time their gazes lock together.

I was giddy. I thought it would be good all the way.

Lydia became annoying the moment she and Sebastian became "friends". The cry-baby, easily spooked and wimpy type of annoying character.

Girl, get a hold of yourself. True, someone gets killed in a building you were in, but good God. You didn't even see the body.

I feel like she needs a good slap. Overall, this book is disappointing.

Kav says

Oh mercy -- if you are looking for a hero to swoon over, Sebastian Marks is your man. I melted into a puddle of goo a number of times while reading *Whispers in the Reading Room*. I mean who can resist a man who loves books and libraries? And the kicker is that Sebastian isn't your classic hero material. He runs a gambling hall for goodness sakes! And while his ability to drag himself up from the dregs of society is commendable, his methods of success are questionable.

But Gray makes it work -- largely because of the insights we glean from Sebastian's visits to the reading room. The contrast between the literary man who finds solace in the company of books and the rough and exacting taskmaster at his club is absolutely intriguing.

Is it any wonder that he catches Lydia's eye? He's not the usual run-of-the-mill library patron, that's for sure. Without ever saying a word to one another they manage to create an alluring intimacy of awareness from the very first page. Delicious toe-curling stuff. An unlikely friendship slowly develops. Sebastian is intrigued by Lydia's unusual mix of wide-eyed innocence and striking intelligence. She's lived most of her life in the pages of books and he suddenly appears offering her abundant real-life adventures.

Once again, Gray throws her characters into Chicago's darker underbelly. Something sinister is going on, there's mystery and murder afoot and Sebastian finds himself in the role of protector, Lydia the damsel in distress that needs rescuing. But soon lines become blurred and it's no longer clear who is rescuing whom. Because Lydia grabs hold of his heart and challenges him to believe in the kind of future he never dared dream of.

The third and final book in A Chicago's World Fair Mystery series. Reads wonderfully well as a standalone, but if you have read Sloane House and Deception on Sable Hill, you'll be thrilled to meet up with police detectives Sean Ryan and Owen Howard.

My thanks to Litfuse Publicity Group and Zondervan for providing me with a copy of this book.

Bonnie says

This book is certainly not what I expected! I really enjoyed it and was sorry when it ended. Books with libraries and librarians and bibliophiles in them? Yes, please! Can't ever get enough of them! Mix in a sweet love story and I'm hooked. I found myself reading this in one day and didn't want to put it down. Lydia and Sebastian were fun, and interesting, to read about! Lydia, a librarian in her own lonely world, meeting a man like Sebastian, a man who owns such an establishment...it really made me wonder how their story would work out. And Sebastian was just such a mysterious character to me. Not because the author didn't adequately tell his story, but because he was such a mix of rough and sweet. This is not a book where the two falling-in-love main characters get all the attention and are the only ones who matter though! No, Sebastian's two assistants had stories all their own that greatly added to the enjoyment of the book and I am glad the author told each of their stories as well! Now off to see what other books by this author I need to pick up!

Jamie says

(3.5)

I have really enjoyed this series by Shelley Gray. The setting in and around the Chicago World's Fair is always so interesting, there's always mystery and suspense and of course Gray's ability to keep you intrigued.

Overall I enjoyed this story. Unlike her last two there was a different vibe with the characters. They weren't exactly what I was expecting, especially Sebastian. He was a character that wasn't your normal lead. Yeesh, I really want to give specifics, but I'm not a book hater or story ruiner (Microsoft is telling me that's not a word, but I like to live on the edge), so I'll just say he wasn't like most "heroes" I read in CBA. Right after finishing the book, I wasn't sure what I thought, but as I type this I've decided I like what Gray did. It's different and realistic (especially as you find out more of his background). Also, can we get a novella of 10 years later? I'd love a "where are they now" for all the characters. Thanks!

I liked Lydia too (although sidenote about the cover design: she wore glasses and I really wish the model on the cover had spectacles. I felt they were an important piece to her character). How can you not like a character who loves books as much as we do? I felt for her circumstances and Gray did a good job showing why she was so intrigued by someone like Sebastian.

While this wasn't my favorite in the series, I liked seeing two unlikely people form a friendship through circumstances they never planned on. Oh and I also liked seeing a familiar face from the second novel in his role as a cop.

If you've read this, I'd love to hear what you think about it, especially Sebastian! What was the last book you read where characters turned out much different than you expected?

(Thank you to BookLook Bloggers for a copy of the book in exchange for my honest review)

Originally posted at: <http://booksandbeverages.org/2015/11/...>

Loraine says

SUMMARY: Just months after the closure of the Chicago World's Fair, librarian Lydia Bancroft finds herself fascinated by a mysterious dark-haired and dark-eyed patron. He has never given her his name; he actually never speaks to a single person. All she knows about him is that he loves books as much as she does. Only when he rescues her in the lobby of the Hartman Hotel does she discover that his name is Sebastian Marks. She also discovers that he lives at the top of the prestigious hotel and that most everyone in Chicago is intrigued by him.

Lydia and Sebastian form a fragile friendship, but when she discovers that Mr. Marks isn't merely a very wealthy gentleman, but also the proprietor of an infamous saloon and gambling club, she is shocked. Lydia insists on visiting the club one fateful night and suddenly is a suspect to a murder. She must determine who she can trust, who is innocent, and if Sebastian Marks—the man so many people fear—is actually everything her heart believes him to be.

REVIEW: This last book in The Chicago World's Fair series was probably my favorite. I loved both of the main characters. Lydia reminds me a lot of myself. I wore glasses, never had much self-confidence as a young woman, and was very much a bookworm and loved words. I loved how she learned to stand up for herself to her ex-fiance, Sebastian and to her mother. Both she and Sebastian were very realistic characters. Sebastian was full of flaws but was trying to improve himself. His love for Lydia made him want to be a better person.

This book is uniquely different from many of the Christian fiction romances I have read with its very flawed characters of Sebastian, Victor, Jason. I liked how each of these characters grew throughout the story and evolved into more loving and caring people.

I felt the faith thread was very light in this book which kept me from giving it a 5. But I still liked it very much and would recommend it to those who like historical romances.

FAVORITE QUOTES: "I want to be your friend, Miss Bancroft. Friends don't judge on appearances."

"You need to learn to accept help when it is offered. And try to accept it with graciousness."

"I'm afraid I must point out that reading about something is never the same as experiencing it. Some things cannot be adequately described. "

"I learned long ago that life is full of peaks and valleys. It takes both to build character. And, if the Lord is good, one has years to experience both."

Galaxy Adventurer says

[Another one of my favorite parts was when Jason was hurting Lydia and Sebastian came and helped her :) (hide spoiler)]

Magdalena aka A Bookaholic Swede says

DNF at 45%.

I fell for the cover but realized while I read that this just wasn't a book for me. I usually like historical fiction, and this book looked to be an interesting mix of romance and mystery, but frankly it's just too much romance and not even a romantic story that appeals to me. I have read (well skimmed towards the end) almost half the book and not much has happened and the romance between the main characters just doesn't work for me. So I will stop reading and find something else instead...

Thanks to Zondervan Fiction and NetGalley for providing me with a free copy of this book in exchange for an honest review!

Carole Jarvis says

Reviewed at The Power of Words: <http://bit.ly/1I76iqU>

Every once in a while, a book that is uniquely different appears in the Christian market, and *Whispers in the Reading Room* is one of those. Lead characters are realistically flawed and complex, the writing sparkles in places, and the historical setting is vividly conveyed. Sebastian, a charismatic leading man, has a questionable career, much of the action takes place in a seedy section of Chicago, there's a formal style of communicating, and Lydia and Sebastian are total opposites on the surface. Yet friendship is a beautiful theme woven throughout, and while spiritual elements are subtle, they are clearly communicated.

The setting is Chicago during the Gilded Age, 1894, and a major theme revolves around literature. With Chicago's Lincoln Lending Library as a backdrop, this story holds a natural appeal for readers and I found it fascinating. Nothing about this novel makes it a typical historical romance, and I see it as more of a relationship-driven story with a historical setting – and therein lies its strength. An air of melancholy surrounds Sebastian and I was immediately drawn to this vulnerable leading man who struggles to find his place in society and life. These quotes convey that longing and the gateway he discovered through works of literature . . .

“He went to the library to read for pleasure, to lose himself in the allure of printed pages without anyone in his world taking note.”

“Austen and Bronte and Wilde taught him to speak. Dickens taught him about ills . . . and about what he had a hope of being.”

“ . . . all of his learning had come from a poor boy’s desire to become something he’d only witnessed in printed pages.”

Lydia was lonely and anxious, weighed down by the responsibility of obtaining a wealthy husband in order to meet her mother’s needs. I loved the growing friendship between this unlikely pair, and the way Lydia made Sebastian desire to be a better man. Self-worth and sacrifice enter into this narrative, as well as how deceptive appearances can be . . . “Just as she feared Sebastian might bolt if he knew her exact address, he feared Lydia would run if she knew how disreputable he actually was.”

Much richness comes through the supporting characters of Vincent, Sebastian’s assistant, and Bridget, his maid. It was great to see not one, but two romances! Although this third story in the series stands alone, readers will enjoy seeing the return of previous characters Sean Ryan and Owen Howard.

The only thing that I found lacking in this otherwise excellent story was the rushed ending. In the last two short chapters, the timeframe jumps ahead by nine days, followed by another week, and storylines are wrapped up with little foundation or development. An excellent story overall, though, one that I have no hesitancy in recommending.

Thank you to Litfuse Publicity for providing a copy of this book in exchange for my honest review.

Natacha Ramos says

I totally judged this book by its cover. I liked it very much and decided to give it a chance. I had no idea it belonged to a series.

Then, I read some bad reviews and held very low expectations but I began anyway.

I’m glad I did. I was not disappointed.

Great story!

Beautifully written! Well-developed characters.

If a book talks about books, words or reading, you are half the way with me.

I enjoyed the setting and the very polite manners. I hadn’t read dialogues this formal before and It was interesting to see some customs of that period of time again, but all of it is so detailed that makes the story go a little bit slow.

I didn’t like Lydia very much, I wish she could be more confident, but I know that’s her personality, it just that she was afraid and insecure most the time; thankfully, she was brave enough in the important moments so her voice could be heard.

Sebastian was great. I liked his willingness to protect Lydia no matter what and to make her happy. His background and personality were complex but treated properly.

The story has some twists I didn't see coming, which was good.

When there were like 20 pages left, I was worried. Really. I considered the unresolved issues and thought "oh no, maybe this has a second part I'll have to wait for".

Nevertheless, everything fall in place at the right time, without rush.

Very good book!

I received a copy of this book from Zondervan and Netgalley in exchange for my honest review. All opinions expressed are my own

Beth says

Lydia Bancroft is a very unconventional lady - not only is she yet to be married, but she also works as a librarian and relishes her work there. Despite finding satisfaction in the lending library, she can't help but be drawn to a mysterious library patron. After an alarming incident between her and her fiancé takes place, witnessed by this mysterious patron, her life takes a strange, exciting turn.

The unique premise of this novel and the unusual circumstance of Lydia being a librarian drew me into this story. Lydia is reserved, but has a strong intellect. I really loved the moments that she stuck up for herself and proved that there was more to her than just being a shy librarian. Sebastian Marks is a self-made man, and though his chosen profession may not be entirely genteel, he has built himself into a better person through his own temerity. I love how the intrigue starts off and doesn't let up for basically the entire story; the romance is fairly light but still heartfelt, with the mystery taking center stage for the majority of the story.

Although I found all of the characters to have intriguing personal stories, my preference is for the story to focus on just one or two main characters, so bear that in mind when reading my review. Secondary characters are wonderful, of course, but I didn't feel a deep connection with the other main characters. I'm not exactly sure what it was, but for the majority of the story, I was only a passive observer rather than really inside the characters' heads. I also felt that some scenes unfolded a bit unrealistically; some of the more dangerous, tense scenes felt a bit flat for me.

Despite feeling like it didn't completely come through in all of the character interactions, I did appreciate the focus on friendship and loyalty that the other main characters portrayed. It was nice to not have the plot focus so much on romance, but rather friend relationships. The story portrays how people from different backgrounds and experiences can still inspire one another to be better.

Random side-thought, but yay for a character that wears spectacles! Since I'm bespectacled, I liked that a lot. Although, I have to say, I wish that the cover model was either wearing them or holding them or something. And be still my heart that Sebastian thought to carry them in his pocket so they wouldn't be damaged - loved that sweet moment.

Even though *Whispers in the Reading Room* didn't make it onto my favorites list, I did enjoy it, and I do want to eventually go back and read the first two books in the series.

Heidi Robbins (Heidi Reads...) says

Loved it! This book is so well-written with its subtle peeling back of the layers of the plot. There is a sense of mystery from the beginning that kept me fully engaged. The setting is wonderful- I absolutely love libraries! The depiction of Chicago at the turn of the century is also subtle, the author avoids making it a cliché or caricature of the city. Lydia feels that she is plain and on the fringes of society, but accepts who she is as a person and embraces her interests. One of the things that is so appealing about Sebastian as a hero is that he saw beauty in her where others did not. I was enthralled with the contrasts of Lydia and Sebastian's worlds and how they overlap. Themes of self-worth and self-sacrifice are ones found in several characters as they learn to reevaluate their standing in society and see themselves through God's eyes. Highly recommend!

(Thank you to Litfuse Publicity and Zondervan Publishing for a copy of the book in exchange for my honest review)

Carrie Schmidt (Reading is My SuperPower) says

This book was a bit different from the other two books in the series. It had less of a mystery, though still plenty of suspenseful moments to be had, and focused more on the relationships of the characters. It also didn't focus as much on the division of the classes, following instead two people who were "almost a lady" and "almost a gentleman". (Along those lines, Lydia's indignant reply of, "I am not a lady, Lieutenant Howard. I am a librarian," made me laugh out loud!)

Though *Whispers in the Reading Room* may have indeed (and not necessarily to its detriment) been the odd man out of the trilogy, poignantly enough so are its characters to society. Sebastian and Lydia are both virtually friendless and claim no real rung on the ladder that climbs the social classes. Nor do they belong below it. They are two drifting souls who form an unlikely friendship based on their love of books. Fellow bookworms, this is our book!! In fact, it reminded me in so many ways of that great love story for bookworms, *Beauty & The Beast*. Sebastian, being of course the Beast. Who loves books. And can talk about Bronte and Austen along with Wilde and Stevenson. Are you swooning a little yet? Because I totally did.

I loved this book just as much as I did the first books in the series, maybe even more so when I started to see the hints toward *Beauty & The Beast*. And readers of *Deception on Sable Hill* will want to pay close attention to the byline of the article snippet in the last chapter.

Bottom Line for the entire Chicago World's Fair series: Shelley Gray's brilliantly crafted mystery trilogy is perfect for romantic suspense fans, especially those that lean toward the historical. (Not the hysterical, mind you. Let's save our swooning for the kisses!) The recurring theme of people being more than what they appear resonates through all 3 books and is most perfectly illustrated in the comparison to the buildings constructed for the World's Fair. Characters whose lives seem "outwardly impressive" are proven to be "structurally unsound" while the reverse is also true just as frequently. An entertaining and compelling reminder that, while we so often look no further than the outside, God sees our hearts.

(I received a copy of this book in exchange for only my honest review.)

Hilary says

[(like Lydia's many bruises from one
