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Determined to avenge the killing of her father, Francesca Giordano, defying all convention becomes the official poisoner of the head of the most notorious and dangerous family in Italy, Cardinal Rodrigo Borgia, the confidante of Lucrezia and the lover of Cesare while pursuing her father's murderer.

Poison Details

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Author : Sara Poole

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From Reader Review Poison for online ebook

Molly Klodor says

It seems as if author Sara Poole wanted to incorporate every word in her thesaurus into this series. I have read the first and second, and I can't bring myself to read the third. As interested as I am in historical fiction, particularly from the Borgia papacy, this book couldn't hold my interest. I don't recommend this book.

Kate Quinn says

A debut novel, and what an accomplished one. Sara Poole's "Poison" tells the story of Francesca, a young woman of Renaissance Rome who wants to take over her father's job and find his murderers. His job? Poisoner in the household of the wily, intelligent, and sensual Cardinal Rodrigo Borgia. Francesca wins the job by poisoning her father's successor, and calmly explaining to the bemused Cardinal how she did it - and I knew this was no ordinary heroine. There is plenty of excitement as Francesca looks for her father's killer and gets wrapped up in Cardinal Borgia's plot to become Pope, but the novel's real fascination is Francesca's inner turmoil as she comes to grips with the darker parts of her own nature. The book is also worth reading for the descriptions alone - the city's blood-soaked streets leap off the page, and historical figures like Cesare and Lucrezia Borgia are woven meticulously into the story. A great read, sometimes bloody, sometimes funny, always fascinating. The first of a series, and I will be first in line to continue Francesca's adventures.

Misfit says

This plot is a bit complicated so I will try to keep this summary short and sweet. Francesca Giordano is daughter to the official poisoner for Rodrigo Borgia (what a job). Her father is mysteriously bumped off, and with her eye on taking over pop's job she shows off her poisoning skills to Borgia and like that she's got the gig - and that includes finding a way to bump off Pope Innocent before he can sign an edict expelling the Jewish refugees flooding Rome after being expelled from Spain during the Inquisition.

About halfway through the story switches gears as the Pope finally dies (no spoiler, that's known history) and the story changes focus to a fight between the forces of good (Borgia who wants to protect the Jews so they can continue to bribe him) and bad (the rabid churchmen who want to incite Rome into slaughtering the Jews) and Francesca finds herself in the thick of things in a nail-biting race to save a child from becoming an unwilling sacrifice at the hands of a madman.

The first person narrative used in this book (admittedly not my favorite), comes off at times as overly chatty, it feels like she's retelling it to an audience and sometimes the attempts at humor fall a bit flat - at least for me. I really didn't care much for Francesca, nor could I pick up on why she's so attractive to all the men lusting after her. In the end, this was an OK book, not bad but certainly not great either. If you like historical mystery/thrillers on occasion with a OTT credulity stretching heroine who can leap tall buildings in a single bound (let alone diagnose someone with "influenza" years before the word came into use), you might want to give this a whirl. If you're like me and expecting a serious novel with new insights into the Borgias I'd recommend you keep searching as you won't find that here. From the ending as well as the jacket blurbs I am guessing this is going to be an ongoing series - Francesca and the Borgias will return to fight the evil priests

of Renaissance Italy. Nicely timed now that Showtime is switching gears, hmmm? 3/5 stars.

Susan (aka Just My Op) says

Francesca is the fictitious “poisoner” to the very real, ruthless Borgia family, having killed to obtain the position so that she could avenge her father's death and assume his former position. The corrupt Pope Innocent VIII is ill and Cardinal Borgia intends on being his replacement. Poison might be a handy way to accomplish the goal, but it must be done without raising any suspicion against Borgia. In addition, the Jews have been run out of Spain and are being persecuted in Rome. The Pope is rumored to have an edict ready for his signature that will eliminate all Jews. Lucrezia, who was to become famous later in the Borgia story, was still a girl of only twelve.

“He does not fear you,” the priest said. “Not as he did your father. You are only a woman.”

God help me, I smiled. Innocent would have all of eternity to contemplate his error.

This fast-moving historical fiction is well written. While it could have evolved into more historical romance than historical fiction, it did not, leaving the intrigue as the main part of the tale. The language gave the flavor of the period but did not become arcane. Told in the first person, Francesca occasionally addressed the readers directly, advising us that we already knew or did not need more information about this or that. She also alluded to happenings in years beyond the story. The copy I read was an Advance Readers' Copy, and had fewer mistakes than I expect in an ARC. This is a novel I think readers of historical fiction, especially those interested in the days of the Renaissance and the Inquisition, would enjoy.

Jessica says

I like historical fiction pretty well, but this wasn't the greatest. There were so many adjectives and descriptive paragraphs and I didn't particularly care for it. I found it kinda interesting that she killed for the poisoner position. I didn't care for the fact that we didn't get to know Francesca either. Overall this got 3.5 stars.

Katherine ??? says

Francesca Giordano bertekad mencari siapa pembunuh ayahnya. Dlm perjalanannya, dia menemukan banyak hal-hal menarik di seputar Roma, yg selalu rumit dan penuh intrik.

Setting dimulai pada masa Paus Innosensius sedang sekarat di Vatikan, Roma thn 1492. Dikisahkan Francesca bekerja pd Rodrigo Borgia (yg kelak menjadi Paus Alexander VI) menggantikan ayahnya sbg ahli racun di kediamannya. Saat dia mengetahui bhw ayahnya dibunuh karena berusaha mencegah pembasmian orang-orang Yahudi, Francesca bertekad utk mencegah ditandatanganinya dekrit genocide tsb, tapi tanpa dinyana Francesca terkena jebakan perangkap Morozzi, pendeta yg anti Yahudi.

Francesca berhasil meracuni Paus Innosensius tanpa ketahuan. Dgn kematian Innosensius, pekerjaan Francesca tidak menjadi lebih mudah, apalagi dgn peluang racun-racun yg bertebaran di kediaman majikannya. Francesca terus berpacu dgn waktu utk menggagalkan semua rencana jahat Morozzi hingga

kulminasinya pd saat pemilihan Paus baru. Berhasilkah Francesca menunaikan tugas beratnya ini?

Novel ini memuaskan tapi sekaligus sedikit mengecewakan saya. Saya puas karena unsur suspense nya mengena dan endingnya di luar perkiraan. Gambaran sejarahnya juga luar biasa walaupun tidak persis sama. Saya hanya heran kenapa tokoh Juan (Giovanni = adik Cesare & kakak Lucrezia) tidak ditampilkan sama sekali. Mungkin dua tokoh kakak beradik yg sama-sama villain akan menjadi terlalu banyak. Tokoh Cesare di novel ini belum terlihat sekali kebangsatannya, justru lebih terkesan heroik.

Author dgn piawainya menggambarkan sisi Borgia yg kecerdasan dan kebijaksanaannya lebih "ditajamkan" walau dia adalah seorang korup dan duniawi yg tidak segan-segan menimbun kekayaannya dan kesukaannya terhadap sensualitas scr terang-terangan. Saya jadi bisa meleak dgn persepsi baru ttg Borgia bhw sejahat-jahatnya Borgia, justru dia jauh lebih baik drpd pendahulunya, Innosensius. Setidaknya Borgia menerima uang dari para Yahudi tsb dan tidak mengkhianati mereka.

Yang membuat saya kecewa, di novel ini tidak ada secuil pun keterangan/cara Francesca meramu racun. Sangat tidak lazim jika seorang ahli racun tidak meramu racunnya. Deskripsi yg banyak digambarkan justru Francesca selalu menginspeksi makanan dan minuman, sehingga terkesan Francesca itu adalah bodyguard Borgia.

Karena masih ada lanjutannya, saya sangat berharap karakter Francesca di novel lanjutannya akan makin berkembang dan ketrampilan racunnya lebih memuaskan saya.

Galleane says

Ce premier tome lance remarquablement bien la série. Au-delà des personnages forts, l'héroïne est un bon exemple parmi tant d'autres, l'histoire nous embarque au cœur d'intrigues dangereuses et passionnantes qui rythment parfaitement le récit. Nombre d'informations intéressantes nous sont communiquées, un côté que j'apprécie beaucoup dans ce genre de roman, même si en néophyte il est difficile de démêler le vrai du faux, mais j'avoue ne pas accorder d'importance à ce détail. Dans tout ça, Francesca tient un rôle de choix, son aventure va l'entraîner dans un milieu dangereux et la jeune fille devra faire plus que de son mieux pour ne pas se faire avoir. J'ai beaucoup aimé et il est certain que la suite rejoindra ma pile à lire très bientôt.

Ma chronique complète : <http://bloggalleane.blogspot.fr/2015/...>

Knjigoholi?arka says

Veoma dobro za ubijanje vremena... ?itala sam je u autobusu dok bih se vra?ala s posla, dok doru?kujem, ili kad sam bila pre?iše umorna da bih razmišljala o ne?emu komplikovanijem... fino mi je legla u stresnom periodu. Bila sam skepti?na, ali zaista nije loše.

Kam says

I've said many a time before that I am thoroughly enamored of the Italian Renaissance. It's one of my

favorite periods in history - among many, to be sure, but this is one particular time period in which my interest borders on the obsessive. I will read as much about it as I can get my hands on; I will watch movies, TV shows, and documentaries set in the period; I will even look for traces of it in the fiction I read. However, while my interest in the period is broad enough to span almost its entirety, most of my interest lies in one rather narrow point in time of that era: the time from the 1490s to the early 1500s, when the Borgias rose to the pinnacle of power, and then fell from it so spectacularly.

There has been quite a bit of fictional and non-fictional material on that (in)famous family generated over the years, but in recent times there's been a shift in the way they're portrayed in non-fiction and, as a consequence, in fiction. Careful and more unbiased research has led to many historians taking a different perspective on the numerous accusations that have been leveled against the Borgias through the years (some of which have grown to outright fantastical proportions), though they're also careful to point out that the Borgias were not innocent of everything they've been accused of, either. It is this grayer, less clear-cut portrayal of the Borgias that Sara Poole subscribes to in her novel *Poison: A Novel of the Renaissance*, the first in *The Poisoner Mysteries* series.

Poison opens with a dead man: a man poisoned by the novel's narrator and protagonist, Francesca Giordano. She did so in order to prove to the man's employer, Rodrigo Borgia, that she was more than capable of becoming Borgia's poisoner, which had been her father's position before he'd been murdered. Almost immediately after being appointed to her father's position in the Borgia household, she finds herself tangled up in a conspiracy involving her father's murderer; a mysterious association called Lux; and the Jews of Rome, who are flooding into Italy after being expelled from Spain by King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella. Aside from all of these very complicated things, Francesca must protect the interests and ambitions of Rodrigo and La Famiglia, as he makes a gamble for the pinnacle of power in the Christian world: the Throne of St. Peter itself.

Since *Poison* is narrated from the first-person perspective, it was pretty much essential to my enjoyment of it that Francesca be a character I could like, whose voice I could listen to with as little irritation as she told her story - and fortunately, she is exactly that. The fact that she dispatched her primary competition for the position of poisoner/food taster of the Borgia household the way she did pretty much ensured my interest in her, and the rest of the novel ensured that I would be hooked. She's depicted as a woman of means, financially independent and capable of making her own way in the world with little help from those around her. While this is typical of the female characters I enjoy reading about, one of the best things Poole has done in this novel is to actually frame Francesca's power according to her position in the world during that time period. While it's true that many women (particularly those of the merchant class or similar) were capable of having a certain amount of independence, it's still true that that period of history is very patriarchal, and so any amount of power a woman might have would be severely limited by the social structure of the time. The fact that many people find Francesca's position as Borgia's poisoner unusual, and that some call her *strega*, or witch, is accurate to the time period - and are details I greatly appreciate.

Another thing I like about Francesca is the tone of her voice: there's a certain coolness to it that I thoroughly enjoy. She has more passionate emotions, of course - she's got something of a temper, and a tendency towards impulsiveness - but she's always careful to make sure that such emotions are never put on display. If they do surface, she's quick to pull them back in and put on her veneer of calm. Equally interesting is how she's aware of a certain "darkness" inside herself: a willingness (though certainly not eagerness) to kill people if she thinks they have wronged her or those she cares for, a certain inability to feel sympathy or have any attacks of conscience when she takes a life. This makes it sound as if Francesca is a bit of a sociopath, which really wouldn't surprise me in the least. What I find intriguing, though, is that she recognizes her darkness, and she has an uneasy relationship with it.

Given how interesting Francesca is, I'd rather hoped that the characters around her would be just as interesting, but some of them don't quite hold my interest through to the end of the novel. Rocco Moroni, a glassmaker who was a friend of Francesca's father, and now a friend of Francesca herself, initially struck me as quite interesting, given his past and his present existence, but after a while he'd lost something of his shine, remaining static in a particular, given role. The same can be said of the primary villain, (view spoiler). Of course, this is just the first book in a series, so I suppose such characters will become more complex further down the line.

As for the Borgias themselves, Poole's take on them falls in line with what most historians today tend to say about them. There's no denying that Rodrigo Borgia had immense ambitions for his family, and that he himself was an extremely intelligent man, and Poole writes him precisely as that. Cesare is also written closer to the vein of current historical knowledge regarding the Borgias, though Poole adds an intriguing little twist to his character when it comes to Cesare's piety - not that it's straightforward piety as Christians understood it during the time period, but an interesting variation of that. As for Lucrezia, she is every bit as charming and sweet as history claims her to be at the time that this takes place (1492, to be precise), but possessing a great deal of intelligence and insight - one that, Francesca states, is often underestimated.

While it's safe to say that the reader will likely find Poole's portrayal of the Borgias to be more interesting than her portrayal of the other characters save Francesca, her portrayal of Cesare may have some people raising their eyebrows - especially because of the nature of his relationship with Francesca herself. (view spoiler).

And here, I think, is the primary problem I have with this novel: the structure. While I have absolutely no problems with Francesca's voice as narrator, I do have some issue with the way the story itself is organized. It could be argued that the choppy structure is the result of the first-person perspective, but I've read novels told in the first-person that read much more smoothly than this. The structure, as it stands, serves well enough to support the plot twists and reveals that are central to this novel, but it doesn't make for a completely smooth read. There were moments when I wished that Poole had taken the time to smooth the structure out, because the book would have been an even more enjoyable read.

Overall, *Poison* was a no-brainer for me to read: it fits into the very precise, narrow time period that I really like reading about, and features historical figures I'm already intrigued with. Even better, it featured a protagonist I could really get behind, who also happened to be a pretty good narrator with a voice that didn't irritate me in the least. This made up somewhat for the weaker portrayal of some of the other characters, but it couldn't quite fix some issues with the structure of the narration itself. Despite that, though, the novel itself is readable, with some interesting plot twists that will likely keep the reader on his or her toes, if they're willing to put up with the weaknesses of the structure.

Kelly says

This book is probably a 2.5 star for me. I enjoyed the overall story, and the main character is very likable, but the author's writing style made it very hard for me to get through this book. I felt the flow of the story was disjointed, like one scene didn't always flow into the next. I often found myself rereading the same passage to try and figure out what was happening, only to see the author explaining what was going on a few paragraphs down. She would often make references to things that will happen in the future of the story that are not contained in this book. *Poison* is the first of a series (only the first 2 books of the series are written), and the author is often alluding to things that I would assume will be happening in future books. It was

distracting.

There was also too much Catholicism in it for me. There is no way to get around that, since the story is about a girl who works for one of the Cardinals of the Catholic church in Rome, in the late 1400s. It just made me dislike the Catholic church and made me think that there is nothing religious about the church. I'm not sure if Ms. Poole could have gotten away with leaving out some of the details about the church, but I think I would have enjoyed it more than I did if she had.

I'm not sure I will read the rest of the books in this series, even though I am very interested to find out what happens between the main character and her love interest. I'll just wait for the movie version to come out and tell me what happens. :)

JG (The Introverted Reader) says

"The Spaniard died in agony. That much was evident from the contortions of his once handsome face and limbs and the black foam caking his lips. A horrible death to be sure, one only possible from that most feared of weapons.

Poison."*

What an opening to a page-turner of a book! Especially when the protagonist, Francesca Giordano, immediately admits that she's the one who killed him.

Francesca's father was Cardinal Rodrigo Borgia's poisoner. When he dies, Francesca vows to have her revenge, and the best way to do that is to take over his position. One death later, she does. The role of poisoner isn't just about poisoning others; it's also about keeping your charge safe. There's a power-play for the papacy going on, and Borgia is in the thick of it. Can Francesca protect him and avenge her father?

I loved this book! Francesca was a great character. She's so very earnest in her narration. Her tone actually reminded me a little of Mary Russell, Sherlock Holmes' protegee. She's very confident in her abilities as a poisoner, but she soon realizes that she's up against a very clever opponent. She could have remained over-confident, but she adjusts her thinking. She's also living in a time when anyone outside the "norm" is a heretic and only fit for poverty and starvation at best. She's open-minded enough to learn the lessons that she needs to. She likes to kill and that disturbs her a little. She thinks of herself as a creature of the darkness. She doesn't realize that she's working for the light in a roundabout way. She can only think of her actions and her theological questions and assume that she's probably doomed. But she still continues to do her best.

Francesca's narrative irritated me a little when the author just couldn't let some little bits of trivia go. She'd obviously done a lot of research, and she'd found some interesting things. They didn't have anything to do with the story, but Francesca would all of a sudden bust out with a tidbit about the papacy or something. I've already mailed the book on, so I can't find an example. You'll have to take my word for it. And then there were the times when she'd be all, "Well, to kill a person like that you would mix this with.... Oh, wait. I don't want to teach you how to kill. Moving on." Yes, I'm paraphrasing, but that was the essence of it. Luckily, it didn't happen often enough to ruin the book, but I hope those kinds of things are edited out in the rest of the series.

One thing that was nice, if a little, um, unrealistic, is that every man in Francesca's circle is drop-dead

gorgeous. I didn't mind the mental eye-candy, but it did get to the point where I kind of rolled my eyes every time a new hottie entered the scene. Romance was not the focus of the book at all, or else that might have fit in a little better.

Speaking of eye candy...

I have a new book crush! Rocco Moroni is the hottest single dad I've met on the page. He's an ex-priest and currently a well-muscled glass blower, but he's also a thoughtful, intelligent, caring man with hidden depths. How often do all those adjectives go together? I'm looking forward to seeing more of Rocco.

The mystery and the action kept me turning pages. I didn't know who was responsible until Francesca did, and after that I was concerned that he just might get away with it. Everything fit together well, except for an unlikely escape that I had to brush aside, and I was very pleased with how everything worked out.

When I finished this book, I was left wanting to read more about Francesca and Rocco. I was delighted to see that this is the first in a series! Considering that this book was just published, I'll have to wait a while for the next book, but I will be eagerly awaiting it.

Fans of strong female protagonists in historical fiction will eat this one up. Historical mystery fans will love it too. I highly recommend it.

*Quote is taken from an ARC and may differ from the final version of the book.

Ms.pegasus says

Poison ... ivy? ...oak? Poisoner Add the word 'Renaissance', and it could only be the Borgias! But there's a twist. The poisoner is not one of the Borgias. Her name is Francesca Giordano. She is the daughter of Rodrigo Borgias' late servant, whose job it was to protect the household from would-be poisoners, as well as to effect, on command, the poisoning of Rodrigo's enemies. The year is 1492 and Francesca has surprised not only Rodrigo Borgia, but the reader as well. She is introduced to us as someone who is sickened by the blood sport of a bull's sacrifice. Turn the page, and she reveals she is the unrepentant poisoner of her father's successor. The story is told in the first person, past tense. The viewpoint allows Francesca to expose her most intimate and conflicted thoughts, and allows the reader to sympathize and even admire her. Substituting a 3rd person narrative, and the cold scrutiny of some of the acts she must contemplate might be less likely to elicit that sympathy. Even as we experience ambivalence about liking her, we are forced to admit that Francesca is interesting. Her apprenticeship to her father's trade was so complete that she is able to create new poisons; her mind runs in relentless rational progression; and, she is patient. She also has a mordant sense of humor. When Lucrezia insists that her brother Cesare has "a good heart," Francesca thinks to herself, *"If she meant a heart that beat strongly and gave its possessor no trouble, she was certainly correct. Apart from that --"*

The plot suggests innumerable popular references (the Sopranos and Dexter have been mentioned by other reviewers). I will add that for my part, I could not avoid visualizing Jeremy Irons as the Cardinal during my reading of this book. The supporting characters, likewise, felt quite alive: Impulsive, lascivious, and yet, charismatic, Cesare, gruff, discrete, and pragmatic Vittoro, and the stalwart glassblower and close friend of Francesca's late father, Rocco. Far from being an impediment, the derivative elements lend a modern sensibility to the characters. Their actions, ruled by fear, vengeance, avarice, and ambition, are all too familiar and bridge the gaps of time and place. At the same time, Poole never resorts to over-simplification.

To merely dismiss these characters, particularly the Borgias, as hypocrites would be to miss their ambivalent perceptions of a world on the brink of convulsing change.

Poole touches on historic events such as the Inquisition, the expulsion of the Jews from Spain, and the conditions of the Jewish ghetto in Rome. She gives us a unique view of Rome, ancient layer piled upon ancient layer. She also gives us a look at the Vatican politics that elected Pope Innocent the VIII. She even finds occasion to mention the word play of *Domini canes* (the Dominicans as the Hounds of the Lord). Short chapters, suspenseful situations, frantic races against a ticking clock and vivid writing propel this story. When Francesca and Cesare fall into a sewer-like moat, the slime and stench are visceral sensations. When the fetid summer air is described, it's almost enough to make the reader gasp for air. Much to my surprise, Poole has created a fast-paced historical thriller.

NOTE: The publisher has done the book a disservice by featuring a buxom beauty on the cover. I was expecting a romantic pot-boiler. This book is far more interesting than that, and well-written. For those interested in botanical poisons, monkshood is in the section on "Aconite" in Amy Stewart's *WICKED PLANTS*. The paternoster pea is called the rosary pea in *WICKED PLANTS*. The Star of Bethlehem is part of the family described in the "dreadful bouquet" section. I mention *WICKED PLANTS* because of the entertaining anecdotal treatment it gives to various poisonous plants.

Brianna Rabe says

I went into this book expecting a duller version of Philippa Gregory. I have little fascination with Rome and am a little disilluminated by the Catholic church. However, I was pleasantly surprised! The action packed plot and adult language were very interesting (although not usually my style.) The best part of Sara Poole's novel was her portrayal of the main character, Francesca. Rarely, even in current-day fiction, do you see independently courageous and feminist characters. Francesca held a position of authority, was financially independent... but beyond that was her attitude. She asked no one for help, slept around, was driven by revenge. It was not just the character the Poole created, but also how she portrayed her. Poole did not give any occasion where Francesca would need help. There is no "damsel in distress" here, but also no "I'm super woman" attitude. Instead, she is real. Poole does not go out of her way to make her a feminist creature, but also doesn't portray her as weak in any sense of the word. Cheers for that!

Brittany says

[Morozzi, who came out of nowhere (hide spoiler)]

L.E. Fidler says

this is exactly the type of book i needed - total smut disguised as genuine historical fiction.

poole creates an interesting depiction of 15th century rome here - all the borgias are here, natch - but while the history is authentic enough the characters all feel a bit too modern.

didn't bother me, but it might bother some.

delicious death:

1. while poole honors the history surrounding her fiction, she never becomes a slave to it. it's a fine line to dance and she does it well.
2. francesca is just bad ass enough to like but also vulnerable enough to relate to. no one wants to get in the mind of a cold-hearted killer for 400 pages. or at least, not in their historical "romance"
3. smutty and informative - i can get my jollies and learn something! woot!!
4. cesare - never before has a borgia seemed attractive to me. good on you, poole!

the emetic:

1. there's a lot of barfing in here. i mean A LOT of barfing.
2. i feel like rome is full of men for francesca to flirt with. or, they call her a whore. or a witch. that's it. oh, except oddly rodrigo borgia who seems to look at her like a granddaughter he'd kill if he had to. i don't know. it's sort of like it twilight when all the boys at forks jr. high all stare at bella and think she super-pretty-awesome-kissy-face. eh.
3. i wish there were more poison involved. for a book called "poison" i'm never entirely convinced that the protagon knows what she's doing. of her two kills, one happens before the book begins and the other could be accidental or not even her own work. for a mistress of death, she spends considerable effort keeping people alive. that seems to be a job crisis of some kind.

overall, i really enjoyed this light and trashy summer read. i mean that in the best way possible.
