



The Street of Seven Stars

Mary Roberts Rinehart

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The old stucco house sat back in a garden, or what must once have been a garden, when that part of the Austrian city had been a royal game preserve. Tradition had it that the Empress Maria Theresa had used the building as a hunting-lodge, and undoubtedly t

The Street of Seven Stars Details

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From Reader Review *The Street of Seven Stars* for online ebook

Angie Fehl says

Very sweet story (with some tearkjerker parts too) about 3 people in pre WW1 Austria that are brought together under tough circumstances, they all decide to share an apartment to save money. The apt is on a street called The Street of 7 Stars. This book tells the story of each of the three characters with other characters thrown into the mix here and there.

Eileen says

Well written, and beautiful description! The characters were unique and interesting, and the choice between a career and love was an interesting problem for them to face. The romance was sweet, and there was an interesting foil relationship that was completely opposite the main characters'.

The pace was a little slow. The cover promised "a novel of romance and intrigue," but the story was a little light on intrigue. There was a subplot about a spy/war, but it didn't come into the story much.

The plot was a little stressful due to their lack of funds, which put them in danger of starving and destitution. I understand the pressure of trying to build a career with only a little funds to fall back on, so that may be why it cut so close.

Overall, a story I would read again someday, but not necessarily one I need to own.

Perry Whitford says

Harmony Wells is a struggling American studying music all alone in pre-WWI Vienna, Peter Byrne a young doctor in similar circumstances. He vows to look after her, out of which an awkward relationship and romance begins to blossom.

This novel was far from what I expected from the 'American Agatha Christie'. The cover promises a 'novel of romance and suspense', but I'm not sure it was much of either. I know that Christie wrote a few (unheralded) romances too, but I doubt they were quite like this one.

Not that Harmony and Peter don't have a romance of sorts, they do, with all that ultimately entails, it's just that there wasn't anything particularly romantic about the pair of them. She's nice but dull, he's saintly yet shabby.

There are some typically melodramatic trimmings included with which to bring them together - their desperate poverty, a seriously ill boy named Jimmy who they both care for - but, like Peter's appearance, theirs is a rather shabby affair.

As for the suspense, I couldn't detect any. Don't be fooled into thinking that, despite the author, *The Street of Seven Stars* is in any way a mystery story. If it was supposed to be, rather, a gothic romance, then it's an

unusually lukewarm one.

And yet it's not badly written, the overall tone never quite degenerated into a mushy melodrama and there were some unexpectedly gritty insights into the underside of a Vienna preparing for war. The writer certainly knew her location intimately.

But in the end, hampered with uninteresting leads and being neither really one thing nor the other, it became merely meandering.

Susan says

This is a romance novel, not a mystery. It is set in Vienna just before the first World War. The main characters are a man who is studying to be a doctor and a girl who is studying violin. They are both determined to focus on their careers but find many distractions and obstructions in their paths. It is a beautiful little period piece.

J. Boo says

Rinehart, a nurse who married a doctor, does like to set her romances around medical professionals, doesn't she?

Anyway, this is one of her non-mysteries, here in pre-World War I Vienna. The main plot/romance between a budding violinist and a student doctor is OK, at best, but there are all sorts of supporting characters that make this worth reading - a dying boy, a guard, a student's mistress, a Bulgarian spy, a female doctor beginning her spinsterhood...

There is one distinctly false step at the end (view spoiler), and, as said previously, the main plot isn't much, but I'm still rounding this up. Blame the guard.(*)

3.5/5. Available on Gutenberg.

(*) And my current hormonal balance, which is making me wallow in the sentimental. I'm much more hard-edged when away from newborns.

hannah says

It is a story of growing love between a poor music student Harmony and doctor Peter Byrne. Since her friends have left Vienna to return to America, Scatch to marry her sweathart, and the big soprano because she isn't good enough, Harmony has a home problem. She has to leave their apartment and search for a cheap room. Finally she finds an affordable room in pension Schwarz, where she meets Peter and dr Anna Gates. Together they decide to take an apartment and all is well to the moment Anna has to go back to America.

It's an easy read and I liked the story.

Jane says

The only Rinehart to disappoint me. The pivot in the story is a dying boy named Jimmy, abandoned by his mother who preferred a career in show biz to the responsibility of being a mother. A talented young violinist is advised by the mother, after Jimmy dies, that being a wife and mother is the only truly fulfilling career for a woman. And this comes from Mary Roberts Rinehart who had a fabulous career as a nurse and writer, and was also a wife and mother! Many of her books are 5 stars - but NOT this one!

Mark Dewey says

There is certainly a lot of character development here.

The book seems to be about an American girl named Harmony who seeks to make her fortune as a musician, in Germany. She meets a guy (Peter) who takes it upon himself to protect her (whether or not she wants it). However, she wishes to be independent and to continue in her career efforts rather than marry.

Harmony seems to be well-established (brought up) in the blooming culture of women being strong, self-sufficient, equal, etc. (as well as liberally minded) and seems to take it for granted that anyone else might think otherwise. I hadn't realized that such a culture existed during that time period—so much so that she could take it for granted, anyhow, without even realizing the opposition.

The characters are confronted with some moral issues, but if they offend you, the end part of the book probably won't. I mean, Harmony and Peter end up both living in the same place, along with a doctor lady and an orphan child in Peter's care. This is not an abnormal living arrangement in Harmony's culture, but it is offensive in the culture of those who would be her references (and Peter understands this), and so she has a lot of trouble because of this, even though she and Peter don't seem to think they love each other much of the time (and even though the doctor is there with them). Ultimately, Harmony leaves and goes out on her own (without telling Peter where she is going). She comes back just before the sick orphan child dies.

It gets to where Harmony feels that Peter proposes to her every time things go wrong, as if it will make everything better. (Actually, that starts very early on).

Anyway, Harmony doesn't want to marry Peter since she wants to pursue her career *and* because she doesn't think she loves him (she thinks he just wants to protect her out of pity or something)—and she wants him to pursue his career instead. However, through their character development they finally learn some things and decide to marry (at the very end is when they come to this conclusion).

Anyway, if they were that set on their careers, I don't see why they shouldn't have just gotten married and both continued as they were, without being miserable about each other (except with more romance after), unless they were expecting to have children immediately—but they never even mentioned children (so I'm guessing they just were brought up in a culture where you had to do certain things when you got married, no questions asked). It seemed like they thought they had to be comfortably settled to get married—like all married people were well off and had leisure to sit around idly on expensive furniture all day or something. Did one exist?

One thing I didn't quite understand was why they thought of themselves as lonely even when they were with each other all the time. I don't equate desire for sex (or even desire for romance) with loneliness, personally, although it can certainly coincide in a powerful way. It's not at all the same thing, although both are quite severe, even apart. Sure there might be immensely strong desire for it, but that's hardly the same thing as loneliness. I'm guessing the characters hardly knew what true loneliness was, separate from sexual longings—either that, or it just wasn't something they considered or experienced much.

Anyway, it's a wild book. The writing style is nice—not the easiest to follow, but fairly relaxing. The narration was great.

Patricia says

A novel by Mary Roberts Rinehart. Peter Bryne, a young doctor, finds Harmony Wells, a young musician, living alone in Austria and tries to make her life better for her. What starts out as altruism quickly turns into something deeper. He proposes to Harmony twice, but each time is rejected because Harmony feels he is only doing so out of compassion, and because she thinks marriage would be the end of her career as a musician. Eventually, Harmony leaves Peter and disappears into the city hoping to find her career and be less dependent on Peter. Over a series of events, she finally realizes that Peter loves her and that it would be stupid to throw a good man's love away for the sake of her career. By the end of the book, it was about time.

Ryan says

By now, you probably already know that I'm obsessed with her work. She is quickly taking a seat right next to Agatha Christie in my love of a good mystery. There is something so wonderfully lush about her narrative style that I get transfixed by what is taking place on the page. The plots and characters are so cleverly written and thought out, that I can't help but fall in love every time I crack open the pages.

When I first picked this one up, I assumed that it was another one of her mysteries. After I got past the half way point, I realized I had been duped by the synopsis and the cover. This wasn't a mystery at all, it was a gothic romance. I will admit that I was a bit miffed at first. I felt cheated somehow, as if I was offered a gourmet, seven course meal, only to find out I would only get to enjoy the first three courses. I actually put the book down for a few hours, stewing in my disappointment.

Soon after, I had a strange nagging sensation that would not leave me alone. There was a voice in my head screaming at me to finish the story of Harmony and her young doctor Peter Byrne. Every time I glance at the page, I felt Harmony's eyes boring into my brain, demanding that I pick her up and find out how everything ends. Once I relented and dug back in, I was hooked. I had to know if Harmony and Peter would be able to work past all the obstacles thrown in their way. I had to know if Dr. Anna Gates would continue to live with them or be forced to go back to the U.S. to take care of her dying father. I had to know if Jimmy, the young boy dying of myocarditis, would live or succumb to his illness. I even had to know if Stewart would keep treating Marie so shabbily, and if he did, what she would be driven to do.

As you can tell, there are some wonderful side story lines going on in this one. Each of which is just as well crafted and detailed down to the smallest emotional nuance. I also enjoyed how the author used the characters to explore societal morals and standards. There is a small American colony in Vienna, most of

them know to each other, so when our heroes don't quite match up to what is "morally" acceptable living, the ramifications are used to further muck things up for both Harmony and Peter, though Harmony seems to take the brunt of it.

Rinehart did not let me down on the suspense part either, though it did take a backseat to the overall story. There is still a international spy who not only has a crush on Harmony, but is eventually arrested and condemned to death. There is also an attempted murder via a branch thrown in the way of a fast moving, down hill sleigh. The attempt is born out of jealousy and despair, instead of malice or evil. The suspense nuggets weren't much, but they were enough, especially considering the overall tone of the book. I don't think I ever understood the term gothic romance until I read this book. I love the atmosphere she creates for the characters to envelop themselves in. Other than the lack of someone being murdered, I felt as if I was on the tip of my toes the entire time. I was tense while I was reading this, but it was that wonderful tension that forced me to continue until the end.

Amanda says

A Romance, Not a Mystery

Maybe I should've known this, but this book is not a mystery! I didn't know Rinehart wrote non-mystery books so I kept waiting for what never came. This is a romance - and a clean one (no sex scenes, hallelujah!) ... even a slightly realistic one as it shows how choices can have positive and negative impact. I also liked the message at the end of the novel. ... but the book itself was kindof tedious and painful. I honestly wouldn't have finished the book if I had realized it was a romance & not a mystery before getting halfway in. It just wasn't a gripping story.

Jennie says

Of course it's odd to keep filing these books as "historical," since they were contemporary when they were written -- at least for the most part -- but I think that's part of their appeal for me now.

This is a sweet romance; while there are plenty of the typical plot twists to keep the characters apart, somehow they don't seem nearly so contrived as they often do in modern stories. Maybe because, at the time, they weren't?

A nice little story to read at bedtime and while in the bath, if you'd like to think of days gone by and so on and so forth.

Marci says

This is one of Mary Roberts Rinehart's pre-World War I romance novels. I've come to the conclusion that she could write anything she put her mind to--she wrote great mysteries, hysterically funny screwball comedies, dramas, social commentary, romances, an amazing book of war correspondent observations, novels, plays, short stories--I think she practically singlehandedly started her sons' publishing business by providing them with so much material to publish.

This novel is set in Vienna, Austria, a winter or two before the First World War broke out. It was published in September 1914, just as the war started, so dating it to the winter before is pretty reasonable. There are background indications throughout the novel that war is coming--troops everywhere, sentries, mentions of different European governments engaging in arming for conflict, a Bulgarian spy with carrier pigeons--and these flavor the setting.

By this time Vienna had been THE destination for serious medical students and had hosted art and music students for over 100 years. Two such students are Americans Harmony Wells, studying violin, and Peter Byrne, a doctor wanting to do advanced surgical training. Their story forms the central plot of the novel, but there are numerous interesting subplots, and the complications are about as daunting as the Alps Peter goes to visit.

The social mores at the heart of the conflict are clearly outlined. At that time, the double standard of sexual behavior was in full force, in that men were relatively free to behave as they wanted, but women could and did lose their reputation for virtue for as little an action as being seen in the wrong place, however innocent in reality.

This novel uses foils to show the changing attitudes of people toward sexual freedom or constraint. On one end of the scale are the very proper Boyers who ironically rent the apartment of the couple on the opposite end of the scale: an American man, Wallace Stewart, living with a young Austrian woman, Marie, who is described in pejorative terms. In the middle are Peter Byrnes and Harmony Wells.

(view spoiler)

The ending image is military--a soldier uncovers his head as other soldiers take their prisoner to his execution, an interesting choice for a romance novel, but it is perhaps a subtle symbol of the central theme.

Karen Chung says

Another fortuitous find on Librivox of an engaging early 20th-century novel whose author I hadn't heard of before. The plot is more tightly woven and focused than you may realize in the early chapters. I didn't catch on to one of the main points of where it was going till about 2/3 of the way through, but I was entertained throughout, so it was worth waiting for. Beautiful reading by Librivox volunteer "MaryAnn," whose voice and rendering seem to fit the story just right.

I Read says

I can only blame myself for not particularly enjoying this book. Having read Rinehart's 'The Circular Staircase' and knowing her to be called the American Agatha Christie, I assume all her novels were the same detective/mystery genre. Wrong! I managed to pick one an anomaly of the bunch and only took the time to glance at blurb rather than read it, doing so may have caused me to realise beforehand and avoid disappointment! Simply put, this story wasn't for me, I found it quite boring. The irony is that I chose it because I felt I hadn't read a truly decent book recently and could rely on this author to provide one!

I didn't warm to the characters, finding the first of the main ones feeble and the second saintly to the point it became sickly.

The ending was inevitable the whole way through, however (being perhaps half asleep!) I didn't see the way in which it would come to be encouraged, so that at least was something.

I will definitely be reading another Mary Roberts Rinehart, but this time I will make sure it's of the right genre!
