



Hester Roon

Norah Lofts

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The Fleece Inn stood where the three roads joined - the roads to London, to Norwich and to the sea. Its trade was prosperous, its hospitality famous and the host was jolly and generous. To his servants he was cruel and menacing, and to Ellie Roon, the most menial servant at the Fleece, he was a figure of terror. Ellie was used to being bullied, but when her illegitimate daughter was born - in a rat-ridden attic of the Fleece - she decided that Hester must have a different kind of life. And so, Hester Roon began her eventful progress in the harsh world of 18th century England. After fleeing from the inn, and the attentions of the owner, she became involved in the London underworld. From there she found herself in a world far beyond her imaginings..

Hester Roon Details

Date : Published October 1st 1969 by Corgi (first published 1940)

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Author : Norah Lofts

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From Reader Review Hester Roon for online ebook

Sharon says

I recently re-read this one to see if it was as good as I remembered from reading it in the 70's! It was! I think that I like to get a little more into the head of the heroine, than this book did when Hester lost her mother. But then I think that maybe that showed the character depth...she didn't think much about what motivated her to do things, just followed gut instinct to what her basic survival needs were. Recommend this read!

Erica Caldwell says

Slow Going.

I gave Hester Roon two stars because it was slow going and a bit boring. This book needed more sustenance. It was, however, an easy read. Not difficult to understand at all.

Wynne says

The Wayside Tavern is a follow-up to this

Dorothy Bush says

Great story line and well-written. It wasn't a time period I usually read but stories about life are timeless.

Lyn Stapleton says

Another great read from this fabulous author.

E Wilson says

I was so happy to find a Norah Lofts book that I had not yet read. I kept thinking I might discover that I had read it and just forgotten, but it was all new to me. As usual, I enjoyed all the historical details and interesting cast of characters. Hester started out rather selfish and unlikable, but as the story went on she became more sympathetic. I was a little disappointed in the ending. Not with what transpired or how things ended up, but the last few chapters seemed

as if they were cobbled together without as much thought or solidity as the rest of the book. The character of Bruce was especially thin and one dimensional.

Kelly says

I'm pretty sure I read this a long time ago. My aunt had loaned it to me. I THINK this is the one I'm thinking of, but I guess I'm not really sure. I remember servants, a dark old inn/house/mansion whatever, I vaguely recall the name Hester, and that's about it.

Werner says

Note, Jan. 3, 2018: I edited this review just now to make a minor, one-word correction in the text.

Although Norah Lofts is a writer I first encountered back in the 60s, and I count her as a favorite, I've still only scratched the surface of her work, which includes voluminous historical fiction. This novel, set in the 18th century (a date, 1775, is given only late in the book; but her reference, in a note preceding the book text, to Bayne-Powell's *English Life in the 18th Century* clues us to the general setting, and the period details are consistent with that) is one of her best that I've yet read; there was no way I could rate it at less than five stars! It's also one of her earlier works --her sixth novel, penned when she'd only been a published author for about four years. It already exhibits a marked maturity of style and literary vision. In particular, while it has similarities to her fourth novel, *Out of This Nettle* (1938), in that both have a protagonist who goes from the British Isles in the 1700s to the West Indies (that would be a spoiler, if not for the fact that the front cover copy of the edition in the above description, which isn't the one I read, already announces the fact!), this one is far more readable, IMO, than the earlier book, better paced, and has a much more likeable protagonist.

That isn't to say that Hester is a plaster saint without foibles; she's a very realistically drawn, imperfect human being. The same can be said for most of the supporting characters; even the great majority of the sympathetic characters have shortcomings. But the deep human sympathy for her characters that shines through Loft's mature work is already present here; even her genuine villains usually have some good qualities, and we can always understand what motivates and shapes the characters' social and moral choices. Hester, however, transcends the circumstances of her rearing; she grows into a strong, courageous woman with a solid moral compass, whom readers can like and respect.

There's a sustained note of social concern here, sympathy for the downtrodden and hatred for cruelty and injustice. Related to this is a definite feminist subtext (written in a social milieu that was much less equalitarian than today's). Lofts does not, however, fall into the trap of portraying oppressed people as themselves invariably saintly and benevolent, or suggesting that every way that they respond to oppression is blameless. Parts of the novel are dark and tragic, fully illustrating the human capacity for treating other humans inhumanly. But the tone isn't as hopeless as the dark, unrelenting grimness I found in *Out of This Nettle* (in fairness, I didn't read the whole of the latter novel), and a livelier plot; indeed, this book is compulsively readable, abounding in genuinely suspenseful situations. Lofts' treatment of evangelical characters elsewhere in her work is often colored by apparent "high-church" prejudice, but that's not the case here; she has two of the latter who come across as very admirable and sympathetic (and an Anglican vicar who does not!).

My only regret is that I waited so long to read this one!

Claude says

A very interesting book by Norah Lofts, with the main character being sent to the West Indies after a lot of adventures. Unfortunately, the version I have is missing some ten minutes at the end. So I will try and get my hands on a physical book to read the final chapter.

How frustrating! But this novel is certainly well worth reading.

Leslie Knox says

Norah Lofts is an old-fashioned author whom I read when young, but am once again picking up her books. This is one I missed when young and so far I am enjoying the story. It is very rich in historical detail as she always does and spans many years in the life of Hester Roon from her birth. Norah Lofts was always a great writer to me and this one is no exception. The audio version is great with the different accents well done by the reader. Helps to enjoy the book much more.

Korri says

I got bored. It just kept dragging so I ended up flipping through pages until I got the jist of it.

Linda says

A scullery maid in 18th century England.

Liz Haigney Lynch says

Intriguing, suspenseful

What makes Norah Lofts' work special is her refusal to ingratiate her key characters with an audience -- she puts them out there warts and all, and you can't be sure a heroine is going to be nice just because she's a heroine. Hester Roon is a classic Lofts heroine in that regard, a mix of good (smart, good-looking, resourceful) and not-so-good (impulsive, sometimes self-absorbed). Poverty and rotten luck cause her to grow up fast, so it's a good thing she's a champion at thinking on her feet. Set in the mid-18th century, the book takes Hester from a rural English inn to wicked London and eventually to a Caribbean sugar plantation, where even cynical Hester finds life can still throw surprises her way. It's written with Lofts' customary flair, marred a bit by an extremely dated take on race politics and an overly abrupt ending. But it remains a compelling read, definitely worth spending time with, especially for those interested in this period of British history.

Meredith says

A slightly more likeable and less immoral Moll Flanders.

Donna says

Another romantic historical fiction by Norah Lofts that is so much more than that genre implies. Yes, it is, ultimately, a romance. But it is also a deftly told story of class differences and conflict, the effects of slavery on both owner and slave, and the system of indentured servitude that laws and values established and maintained. The fiction, while always masterfully created by Lofts, is rooted in her deep knowledge and understanding of history. The title character is not to be forgotten--a vividly memorable heroine.
