



The Miracle Inspector

Helen Smith

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A darkly comic literary novel set in the near future. England has been partitioned and London is an oppressive place where poetry has been forced underground, theatres and schools are shut, and women are not allowed to work outside the home. A young couple, Lucas and Angela, try to escape from London - with disastrous consequences.

The Miracle Inspector Details

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From Reader Review The Miracle Inspector for online ebook

Alice Yeh says

The tale begins with Lucas, a man whose job is to inspect whether or not reported "miracles" were indeed miraculous. As many might expect, his days are spent researching hoaxes, and while the occupation itself might seem a bit far-fetched, it makes complete sense in a society where people with a lot of passion and little logic took over the government. They have restricted women and children to their homes, limited transportation, and inserted civilian spies in true Orwellian fashion. The book is almost a sardonic commentary on the results of unchecked paranoia over pedophiles, rapists, and the dangers of free thought: we are safest when children, women, and philosophers are invisible or nonexistent in society at large.

As with any story that begins with confinement, the protagonists plot to escape. The result is a journey as bleak as those through the Underground Railroad or North Korean refugees — one aiming towards some glorified location and solely dependent upon a combination of luck and the trustworthiness of strangers. Smith is thorough in capturing the seeming hopelessness of it all without belaboring the point, referencing instead the weariness of the walkers and the meagerness of their rations. Instead of evoking pity, she elicits the reader's sympathy for the predicament of these refugees.

In her usual style, Smith starts with multiple story lines, linking them together loosely before tightening the connections. With fewer subplots than usual, however, *The Miracle Inspector* proves relatively easy to follow, and each of the seemingly disconnected tales is given the richness that they deserve. One is able to immerse oneself in each scene fully, instead of dabbling a bit before jumping to another part of London and another set of characters.

For the record, there was more explicit sexual content and violence than there were in either *Alison Wonderland* or *Being Light*. They bordered upon the limits of what I will willingly read at times but were just vague or brief enough to avoid overstepping my bounds. Given the content of magazines, comic books, and movies nowadays, the material might seem borderline tame, but the sensitive or conservative reader might still want to keep this in mind.

As with *Being Light*, there are deeper messages to be drawn from *The Miracle Inspector* if one is open to them. The philosophical arguments, ethical conflicts, and open-ended conclusion might just leave you wondering what exactly constitutes a "miracle" and if indeed one was finally found.

Jennifer (JC-S) says

‘Remember: you can’t make a difference when you’re dead.’

This novel is set in a dystopian near future: England has been partitioned and London is a walled and suspicious place. Theatres, libraries and schools have been closed and women are no longer allowed to work outside their homes. The older generation have mostly disappeared, as does anyone who speaks out about the government.

Lucas, who lives in London with his wife Angela, is the miracle inspector. It’s his job to investigate and report on claimed miracles. And, in an oppressive environment with few creative outlets many miracles are

claimed. Angela is lonely and unhappy. They dream of escaping to Cornwall where, they believe, people are free to live as they choose.

A woman named Maureen requests a miracle inspection in respect of her daughter Christina. Lucas investigates, and finds himself taking Angela to meet Maureen and Christina. This is forbidden: women are only allowed to visit other women to whom they are related.

‘Men made the laws. Women set out to exploit the loopholes in them.’

This is an unsettling and bleak world: Angela dreams of escape, fuelled by reading letters dropped off at her home by Lucas’s uncle Jesmond – an outlawed poet. Lucas sees himself as largely invisible as he operates outside the law. Plans are made to leave London, but nothing goes according to plan. The wisdom of elders is needed, but missing. The consequences of choices are not anticipated, the outcomes are never comforting.

In fewer than 250 pages, Ms Smith creates an unsettling and incomplete world. Aspects are disconcertingly recognisable, others are alien. Many parts of the world have harsh restrictions on citizens – the cause is not always clear, even if the immediate effect is. And what of the long-term? Beyond the memories of the past?

I found this novel unsettling, disturbing, and worth reading.

Note: I was offered, and accepted, a copy of this book for review purposes.

Jennifer Cameron-Smith

Howard McEwen says

England has been partitioned. London is now under a totalitarian regime. It now has a written constitution.* Codicils of the constitution give rise to petty bureaucrats charged with micro-managing the lives of its citizens. One such petty bureaucrat is the Miracle Inspector and his pretty wife. The Miracle Inspector is, of course, charged with inspecting miracles.

I hate mixing art forms but reading this book kept bringing to mind the powerful German film *The Lives of Others*. Not so much in that film’s politics or thriller quality but in its human quality. The love story. I think Smith demonstrates in this novel, like that film does, how an oppressive government can warp our basic human behavior and emotions. How a government can twist even the best in us - love, caring, compassion - toward fear and paranoia and self-preservation.

The Miracle Inspector is the story of a husband and wife in love with each other but dealing with how their government has twisted the two of them into people they don’t want to be.

Smith is a comedic writer. That sensibility comes through repeatedly and throughout. A cellmate is described:

“He could have been any age from twenty-five to forty-five and he looked like a desert island companion - not in the sense of being an ideal choice, like when people say for example that their ‘desert island’ ice cream would be chocolate and cherry, or mango sorbet. Rather, he looked as though he had been living on a

desert island for some time. But there was no hushing sound of waves, no coconut trees, no hot sun or salty breeze, no warm sand to wiggle bare toes in, where they were being held.”

We’re talking prison here, right? And Smith’s mind goes to ice cream? She charms me with that.

As you can see, there’s no leadened-phrased Orwell “a boot stamping on a human face” in *The Miracle Inspector*. No, the prose is light and airy and thus when the inevitable happens, it strikes with a brute force that makes it that much more tragic. I thought it similar to what it must be in several of these regimes. I picture a ‘light and airy’ Cuba with beautiful people, beaches, water, air and forest...alongside the darkness of Castro’s thugs murdering and imprisoning people; smashing printing presses and clubbing opposition heads.

Helen’s Smith’s words walk across the page like little cat’s feet. She’s not hectoring or lecturing or imposing her ego into the narrative. The prose is soft and hardly felt...until it is.

“A heavy instrument, a cricket bat or something like that, was brought down on the back of his head very hard. More blows on his arms and his shoulders. Thwack. Thwack. Thwack. The sound of willow hitting leather (even if it was only Jesmond’s old leather jacket) was redolent of a quaint old England that had long since disappeared, so it was quite a fitting sound to be coming from the author of *This Faerie England*, as if Jesmond had finally found his perfect moment as a performer; a human instrument, which when played would summon up reminders of the lost England he lamented in his poetry. Leather boots connected with the yellowing piano keys of his teeth, but this was less successful, instrumentally speaking. There was no melodic tinkle, no thundering crescendo of keys and chords. But then it takes a very skilled artist to play the piano with his boots, and Jesmond’s attackers were thugs. Although it was impossible to say for sure, just by looking at them, whether or not any of the attackers could play an instrument, it was reasonable to assume that if they had attended more dutifully to music lessons as children, they might have had something more interesting to do to fill their time than beating up an old gentleman. But most of the schools in the state education system had closed down for fear of paedophiles. Music lessons likewise. These thugs were perhaps a product of their time.”

George W. Bush said, “I believe that God has planted in every heart the desire to live in freedom.” It’s nonsense, of course. People yearn for what they call ‘freedom’ really just want is licentiousness. They eschew any responsibility. They want the doughnut without the weight gain, the sex without disease or pregnancy, the stable government without the messy, raucous elections. They’d rather be swaddled in third rate state-care as long as they are allowed some form of ‘freedom’ than have the true freedom to provide themselves first-rate lives.

People yearn for the security of totalitarian regimes. That’s why most of the world is made up of them to some extent or another. In *The Miracle Inspector*, there’s no mention of how this tyranny came down on England. However, women are not allowed outside the home. They are covered from head-to-toe. They are veiled. It is noted that pedophilia scares have shut down most of the schools and keep men from interacting with government.

Is this England a form of theocracy married to suburban paranoia? It’s not said. Early on in the novel, I decided to not try to figure out the nature or cause of the oppression. It’s like those time-travel TV shows. Don’t try to figure out the time travel rules. Pay attention to what the time travel reveals about the characters. Don’t try to figure out who has imposed a totalitarian government. Just know that it’s been imposed and this is how the characters reacted.

I say not to fixate on it but I did to a degree. I feared Smith was pulling a major punch and thus lessening the effect her work could have had.

Mohamed is the most popular name now given to boys in England. Was the cause of this oppression Islam exerting its influence over that new English Constitution? It seems not only plausible but likely. Yet religion, even in the title characters work, is barely mentioned. Did Smith pull that punch for fear of becoming the next Salman Rushdie or Lars Vilks or Fleming Rose or, worse yet, Theo Van Gogh.

I don't know. I won't fault her if that's the case. However, artist pulling that punch out of fear would only presage the nightmare England Smith describes in *The Miracle Inspector*.

*an English friend once told me, "The U.K. has a constitution. It's just not written down."

Alice Stuart says

This book surprised me.

I'm not sure what I was expecting, but it wasn't this. Dystopian is right, this future London is dark and oppressive and horrifying.

Women are confined to their homes and not allowed to leave except with their spouses or to approved family members houses. They cannot work, and when they do leave the home they must be fully covered.

Men disappear in middle age, never to be seen again.

Everyone watches everyone else. The fear of terrorism has taken over the entire city. Outside London, things are different. Not necessarily better, but different.

A couple decides to escape. He's going to leave his high-ranking job with the government and smuggle them to safety. Things don't work out as smoothly as planned.

This book is less action and more drama. The focus is on the personal development of the characters. Even still, I'd have perhaps wanted more depth in that, but that is not a criticism. The book is intense as it is. Recommended.

Scott Collins says

Another wonderful book by Helen Smith. It's a bit darker than the other two, but just as good, if not better. Once again her sense of humor kept me chuckling throughout the book, even though the plot is about a futuristic England under some kind of martial law. Not something one would normally see as a humorous topic, but Helen's style and dialogue helped keep the mood a little lighter than it otherwise would have been. Again, I look forward to additional works, though I think I'll have to wait now instead of just buying another one immediately.

Ruth says

This story is set in London in the near future; it's a London that in some ways feels very familiar, but in some ways is scarily different from the London of today. Counties have been partitioned off, and Londoners are effectively trapped in their city. To escape, they have to literally go underground, and risk their lives. Women are not allowed to work – indeed, are not even allowed outside their house unless they are covered with a veil. The fear of paedophilia is so immense that men are frightened of spending time with any child who is not their own, and even then, only with their wife present. Theatre and books are banned, and any kind of culture is considered anarchic.

Living in the middle of all this are young couple Lucas and Angela. Lucas works for the sinister Ministry, as a Miracle Inspector – his days are spent visiting people who claim to have discovered a genuine miracle, but so far every 'miracle' has been a fraud, or the wishful thinking of the claimant. Lucas and Angela make plans to leave London, but it turns out to be much harder than anyone could imagine.

I thoroughly enjoyed this book. Dystopia is one of my favourite genres, and fans of such books as Nineteen Eighty-Four and The Handmaid's Tale, would almost certainly enjoy this novel. I found it scarily believable; a world that was all too easy to imagine, where fear of paedophilia and terrorism has curtailed people's freedom to an extreme level.

It is not spoilerish to say that at one part, Angela finds herself outside London, as a refugee, and the story drew parallels with how asylum seekers are treated in the real world, with mistrust and fear.

The writing is very 'clean' – no words are wasted here – and it flows beautifully. The different subplots tie together nicely and despite the subject, there is genuine humour here as well.

Overall, I definitely enjoyed this book, and will be seeking out Helen Smith's other books. Definitely recommended, especially to fans of dystopian fiction.

Steve Anderson says

If Patricia Highsmith wrote dystopian fiction but had more of a sense of humor, it might be something like The Miracle Inspector. The book opens in an England of the near future that's been partitioned and in decay. London proper seems to have the worst of it, walled off and Taliban-like in its social clampdown. Women can't leave the home. The Arts are off-limits. Men work meaningless bureaucratic jobs that only serve the faceless authority that keeps them all locked in, both socially and interpersonally. The book focuses on one couple, Lucas and Angela, who think they once loved each other but are really just strangers passing each other constantly. An aging and legendary underground poet, Jesmond, fuels their secret needs to escape to that sought-after heaven, Cornwall. They're all not especially likable, but they're always a little more so than those around them, chipping away at them. It works.

The saddest part might not be that they can't have what they want, but rather that they don't truly know what they'd want if they could have it.

I mention Patricia Highsmith because Smith deftly works in the dark urges and fears of Lucas, Angela and others in a way that only psychological mystery and espionage writers like Highsmith and Graham Greene

do well. The story manages to remind of 1984, Brazil, Children of Men, The Road and other noirish dystopian tales yet manages to be original, partially through the dark and often subtle humor. Yes, I'm mixing films with books here, because I think this would make a good film script.

If I could give this 4.5 stars I would, but as we know we have to choose between 4s and 5s. I would have liked to have had more setup and background about how England became this way, but that's also a product of me liking the story enough.

I'll be reading more from this author.

Val says

This is what you get for believing the Daily ****.

I shouldn't mention the name of my least favourite paranoia-inducing newspaper; insert your own.

Helen Smith has taken some of the fears and obsessions of today's society, then twisted and exaggerated them to create a dystopian vision of the future.

Fear of terrorists has closed the borders and grounded the planes, not just keeping the terrorists and tourists out, but shutting in the citizens and any hapless foreigners caught in the net.

Fear of paedophiles has closed the schools and most of the churches.

Fear of rapists has confined women to their homes, apart from visits to 'relatives' during the hours of daylight while dressed in a burqa (or something very similar).

Paranoia is irrational or exaggerated fear, out of proportion to the true level of threat. This is what we have in "The Miracle Inspector". Added to that is a government and bureaucracy which are, to various extents, pointless, inefficient and random, while also chillingly repressive. Few people survive beyond fifty: most have been arrested as potential terrorists, paedophiles or rapists. Next door to the Head of Security (who is more interested in spying on his wife in the shower than state security) is a government department for monitoring cat ownership. Then there is Lucas, the Miracle Inspector, who spends his days looking at pictures of the Virgin Mary in home-baked goods. He hasn't found a miracle yet. The society is a mixture of sharia law as practised in Saudi Arabia, religious superstition from somewhere with a lot of faith and not a lot of education like rural Bolivia, surveillance and disappearances from any totalitarian state you care to name and satirical silliness from Bulgakov, Kafka or Zemyatin, plus a bit of the 1950s as depicted in washing powder advertisements. That is how I saw it. Helen Smith describes it obliquely, with glimpses of parts of the picture, never the whole at once.

Does it work as a portrait of a fractured future Britain?

It does for me.

The main characters in the story are Lucas, the Miracle Inspector, and his wife Angela. They are fairly sure they still love each other, but they do not understand each other or communicate. They decide that everything will be perfect if they can just get away from London and go to Cornwall or Wales or Australia, places they know nothing about. You just know that it is not going to work. They need a miracle, and we have already discovered they are in short supply.

Lucas does something very risky. He goes to meet Joanna Jones, the wife of the Head of Security, who he has seen naked on Jones's computer. When Jones calls at his house and meets Angela he is enraged. This incident contains the least gratuitous use of a very rude word I have seen in fiction.

Another character in the story is Jesmond, a drunken poet and friend of Lucas's parents when they were alive. Jesmond doesn't do much these days, apart from drink a lot and occasionally turn up and scrounge a free meal from Angela, but he is the focus of resistance and young dissidents gather at illegal assemblies to

hear him read his old poems. Is any association with Jesmond dangerous for Angela and Lucas? Jesmond leaves a journal and some letters with Angela. What is Jesmond's story?

Lucas goes to investigate a possible miracle. Maureen has a disabled child called Christina who, Maureen says, can cure people and save lives. Instead of dismissing the claim as usual, Lucas takes Angela to meet Maureen and Christina. Christina does become a live saver in a way.

A.B.R. says

In *The Miracle Inspector* totalitarian London is walled off from a Britain partitioned into sovereign and more or less free regional districts. In London, people disappear mysteriously. People over the age of 50 are rarely seen, and nearly everyone's parents are among the missing. All art is suppressed, and London is governed by an overarching, and excessive, fear of rapists and pedophiles. Bleak as it sounds, author Helen Smith treats these subjects with a light touch that enlivens the dystopian genre, without trivializing the repressive effects and human cost of authoritarian governments.

For much of the novel one hopes Lucas will stumble on a way to improve his relationship with Angela, and later, that they can escape and find a better life outside London, or that Angela does. Successive plot developments chip away at hope until it is overwhelmed by sadness and feelings of helplessness and despair, in last two chapters and epilogue.

Lucas is an uptight civil servant, and one gets the feeling he would be in any bureaucracy. His fear of not conforming is heightened by his position in a repressive government, and his secret family connection to a rebellious outlaw poet, who is his godfather and occasionally visits their home. The government has an inspector for everything from cats to security, and Lucas is the inspector of miracles. He hasn't found any. His wife Angela is an intelligent, repressed woman who longs for a life outside the home. They love each other but Lucas can't communicate and Angela doesn't; their only real connection is having sex. Both characters are hard to relate to, perhaps because of the way their society has distorted their personalities. But as the novel progressed I grew increasing sympathetic to them, and their plight.

The form of government is left mysteriously undefined; all we know about it is that it's exclusively male, bureaucratic, arbitrary, and uses fear for social control. A repressive government exploiting the fear of sexual crimes for political control is easy to believe, and Smith makes good use of it. Women are forced to remain in their homes and pursue traditional domestic roles. They can leave their residences only to visit relatives, and must wear something like a Muslim burqa.

Helen Smith's flowing prose style is clear and readable, and she is a literary writer in the sense that she makes the reader feel for her characters. She also has a knack for turning a comedic phrase, and some of her similes seem way out there at first, but they work.

I always have trouble rating books and rarely give 5 stars. I give *The Miracle Inspector* 4 stars and recommend it.

Georgia says

The Miracle Inspector by Helen Smith takes place 30 years in the future. London is no longer a democracy, but run by dictators. This future is misogynistic and patriarchal. Women are not allowed to leave their homes (unless visiting female relatives), must wear a burqa when opening the door (or at any other point where they can be seen by people other than their husbands), are not allowed to work, have no rights or education and must ask their husbands for permission for anything they do. A woman is not allowed to use contraception or have a drink without her husband's permission.

There are no schools, children must always be kept inside, men are the only ones who venture past their front doors with any frequency. Once they reach a certain age, men are taken away and never seen again, while women are left to slowly fade away behind closed doors. All these changes were put into effect as men believed it would keep women and children safe from pedophiles, rapists and terrorists. Those three things pushed the city into ruin. There are no planes and the only transport is by car, ship or train. The only people who have cars work for the government- who also police all other means of travelling. Some try to leave, but the possibility of escape is infinitesimal and no one is ever heard of again. The best way to survive is to keep your head down and not ask questions. Create safety out of anonymity.

Lucas works for the Ministry. After the change, divisions were set up for everything, some vital, some pointless. This way they hope to monitor everything. So there are Inspectors of Cats, of Women, of Flowers and then there's Lucas- who is the Inspector of Miracles. Miracles in this future are just as unlikely as in our world, perhaps even more so, but in the new legislation it was decided that "the right to believe in miracles was enshrined in the constitution. And if a miracle is to be believed in collectively, then first it has to be found." So now Lucas spends his days being called out to various "miracles", whether they be claims of the new Messiah or the Virgin Mary in a piece of toast.

Every night he comes home to his young wife, Angela, and they sit in silence. Occasionally, words will pass between them, but for the most part, their marriage is just as bleak as the world they live in. They love each other, but their communication skills are almost non-existent. Lucas claims, "their relationship was also about the silences." He believes they reach each other on a deeper level. This may be true, but there's a constant tension between them. Words go unspoken. As Lucas puts it, "he was too preoccupied with keeping his thoughts hidden, to worry about hers." He constantly fears he'll say the wrong thing, so ends up never saying anything at all.

Lucas' thoughts are written in an odd, almost disjointed style, that perfectly emulates how thoughts occur in the mind. Some don't make sense, are completely irrelevant and utterly nonsensical. We basically get every thought that pops into his head, which is more realistic than the edited thoughts we normally read. It's a hard thing to make work, but it matches the humour and tone of the story very well. There's this odd mix of a very dark world and plot, combined with light and sometimes very British humour. A lot of the lines have very dead-span delivery. For instance, there's a situation where three men are drinking Ribena. Apparently, Ribena has been found to increase a man's life span and his libido. Lucas decides the men must do it for the latter reason, as men don't survive long enough to have to worry about the former.

Meanwhile, Angela is a very lonely and bored woman (for understandable reasons). She spends all day at home and sees and speaks to almost no one, except Lucas- who barely speaks to her at all. Then one day an old poet by the name of Jesmond drops off his life story in her hands. He's famous for his rebellious poems and songs and was close to Lucas' father. But, Lucas doesn't want to see him, so Angela is the one he always visits. When he drops off letters and poems from his past, she can't resist reading them.

But Angela wants to get away. When she brings it up with Lucas, he suggests Cornwall (because he thinks he should say something, but doesn't really expect her to say yes). She agrees and begs him to get them out,

take them to Cornwall to start a family and live a free life. The situation in London may be dire, but the rest of the world is as it is now. For the most part, it is a free world (depending on where you are) and a utopia to Londoners. This is the basic plot of the story. Getting to Cornwall. Why Cornwall, because all Londoners want to go on holiday to Cornwall.

Lucas, on the other hand, begins fantasising about other men's wives. Almost every other thought is about sex, almost to a distracting level. There's no point to it and it doesn't go anywhere. After a while, it gets a little irritating, but the story constantly switches between him, Angela and Jesmond. At least for a little while. So it's bearable. As we see more of his character, there is also this uneasy quality about it. He has such a desperate existence, that he feels very much like a man who could go over the edge at any moment. He cares for very little, but then that keeps you safe in this future. He is too young to know what freedom was like, he grew up with this oppressive regime, so I wouldn't be surprised if everyone was the same. Perhaps it's more noticeable with him because we're seeing his thoughts.

Jesmond gets small sections in the book, but for the most part he's unrelated to the plot. He is rallying up a rebellion with his underground poetry- where the androgynous look is all the rage. It's more than a fashion statement, it's a way for women to stay safe and men to show solidarity with them. Baggy clothes hide figures, women keep themselves thin to create a flatter silhouette. They keep their hair short, while men grow it long and keep themselves clean-shaven. This way women can pass as men in the right circles.

Half-way through the book, the situation changes. The story is told more and more through increasingly fractured thoughts. There's a good reason for it, but saying more would spoil it. The effect it gives is great. It creates the atmosphere, builds the tension and causes a growing sense of fear to develop.

The pace quickens exponentially. What starts out as quite a slow book, suddenly becomes a race to the finish line. It's hard not to give anything away, but if you read it you'll understand. So much happens in the second-half. Everything starts falling together and then falling apart.

I would almost say that the second-half of the book is an entirely different story than the first. They are connected through the main characters, but everything else changes. The book really comes into its own in the second-half. The first-half is almost irrelevant. The characters become more real and more important to the reader. In the first-half I was almost apathetic towards the characters, but when they reach the second-half, suddenly I was on the edge of my seat willing them on. Somewhere between the first and second-half, a switch is flipped and everything changes. The second-half will be what I remember of this book, it will be the reason I tell people to read it, it will be what makes me read it again. I will go through the slow, irrelevant first-half time and time again to reach the wonderful second-half.

Like I said before, the pace changes unbelievably quickly and the ending hits you before you know it. I loved the ending. It's very ambiguous, but brilliant. There are so many questions that appear throughout the story and you don't really get answers to any of them. That may annoy some readers, but I found it all the more gripping and all the more realistic. Life doesn't have all the answers. There are some things we will never know. The ending can be interpreted in a multitude of ways. There's no clarity and we don't really know what happened. I didn't know whether to feel happy or sad, empty or complete. Those unanswered questions, will keep the story and its characters with you, long after the final word.

Disclaimer: This book was sent to me by the author. This is not a sponsored review. All opinions are 100% my own.

Donna Fasano says

This story is described as "A darkly comic literary novel set in the near future".

Dark? Surely. Comic? Absolutely. Enjoyable? Thoroughly! However, I do have to confess that I hope this author's reflection of the future is off--way off! I wouldn't want to live in such a world, but unfortunately, in this 'terroristic' day and age, such a society is all too easy to imagine. It's frightening, actually, how realistic Ms. Smith's musings are; she paves a path for the reader to envision a clear view of what could turn into a very scary destiny for us all.

I would recommend this book to anyone and everyone. Helen Smith is a talented author and I will be buying more of her work.

Anagha Uppal says

3.5 stars

I'm finding it near impossible to figure out exactly what my feelings are at the end of this book. There's been some good parts and some not-so-fun parts.... but the complicatedness should be expected. It's such a unique combination of genres - it's a dystopian novel, which as you know I read as much of as I can. Yet I've never, *ever* read anything quite like it. Which makes me wonder if the parts I didn't love is just because it's so different. First off, just how many dystopian books have you read in the past two years that were adult books? Still thinking? I thought so. If you have read some, how many were literary tales that reminded you of Hemingway? Mhmm, I told you it was unique.

The scary thing about this novel is the world is so absolutely believable. The author took some of our actual fears today and envisioned a future where the government (that stays very much in the shadows) uses these fears against its people to control them. People were afraid of terrorists—that was used to enforce border controls and walls and barriers to keep out (or keep in?). Fear of rapists and pedophiles are hugely exaggerated and in this future London, women are forced to sit at home and cook and clean for their husbands, and can only meet approved relatives. Lucas doesn't abuse his wife, but it is a common enough practice that no one blinks an eye when the Head of Security uses his cameras to spy on his wife in the shower.

The Miracle Inspector isn't something you read for entertainment. It's something you read when you are in the contemplative mood, when you can handle the depth of despair and fear of this book. There is no sassy young protagonist to provide the proverbial light at the end of the tunnel. There are no outright explanations as to why the world is in such a state of desrepair. You aren't given the explanations on a platter, instead, the author wants you to puzzle it out for yourself. And there isn't a sequel to elaborate on any of this. The author leaves me with more questions than answers, which for once I can appreciate - think about the classics. You aren't told all the hows and whys - you're supposed to fill in the blanks yourself, which might vary greatly. Is the couple going to survive? Was that finally a miracle at the end or some sort of 1984-esque ending?

This is a very adult book, not in its content (though there are plenty of explicit references to sex) but in the

level of intelligence needed to approach this book, an amount that I admittedly don't have yet.

TMI (hee hee) is not your typical rebel-against-evil-government read. There is very little action, instead concentrating on character development. It's more realistic - sort of like a combination of 1984 (especially the last few chapters) and Lord of the Flies. There was no plague or famine or epic war (that I know of), but that doesn't mean you shouldn't give it a try.

Shawn says

This was a smart well written book. I loved the dry witty humor of it and the dialogue between characters kept the story moving. The descriptive passages the author used filled my mind with images of a bleak future in London. Lucas and Angela on the same journey with much different paths to get there. I had no expectations going into this book, I thoroughly enjoyed it though.

Heather Boustead says

The Miracle Inspector
By Helen Smith

In the near future, London has become an oppressive society, one in which women are not allowed out of the home to work or even socialize with other women. Lucas and Angela is a young couple who have become restless in this society, Angela is tired of being a captive in her own home while Lucas is tired of working as the miracle inspector and facing day in and day out of women fabricating miracles just so they can have some company. Soon they decide they will try to escape London throwing them into more conflicts than they had imagined.

Helen Smith writes novels with a wicked sense of humor; anywhere from dark humor to crude nothing is safe when Helen Smith begins a novel. This novel is a little different with a lot less of the absurd content, though it is not what I expected from the author I found myself falling in love with this story. Now granted, I am a sucker for a dystopian novel, but this novel is so realistic it is scary. The women are sheltered from the cruel world and the dangerous men who live in it they are not beaten or abused just sheltered to the point they are not allowed to leave the house. Unlike many dystopian novels this one does not lean towards the extreme or the science fiction making it unique and definitely an interesting read.

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<http://reflections of a bookworm.wordpress.com/>
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Stephanie says

I thought this book was one of the strangest, far out, and mind boggling books I have ever read. Not only

that, it was the one of the best books I have ever read. It's set in the near-future London where things like art and theater and poetry are a big no no. I wasn't sure what to think at first when I started reading because you are soon tossed in a world where women are not allowed to work outside the house and the only time they can leave the house is when they are visiting relatives. They have to wear veils to cover their faces and bodies, and never allowed out at night. Or where people are taken away from their homes for having certain beliefs and never heard from again.

You meet Lucas, a ministry man who's job is Miracle Inspector. His job is to answer claims of miracles from the Virgin Mary's face in flan or Jesus' face in toast. Lucas comes and investigates and makes it known that no such thing has occurred, and deduces that it was usually done on purpose.

I felt myself having a lot of mixed feeling towards Lucas. I found myself disliking him because he believes the views as far as thinking a woman having a job outside of the house is ludicrous. On the other hand, I realize that it's the life that he was born and raised in. It's something that has been instilled in him since his parents are gone. He holds a prominent place in the ministry and must live by the rules in order to keep him and his wife safe.

Another view point of the story is from the point of view of his wife, Angela, whom I loved and admired since I first "met" her in the book. She dreams of getting away from London and living with Lucas in a place where woman and men are treated equal and they can have and raise a family with better views than where they are now. Instead of being home all day trying to keep herself occupied while Lucas is making a living outside of their home.

Compared to the other couples that you meet in the book I love the relationship between Lucas and Angela. I believe it's apparent from the first time we meet them that they are deeply in love, but also have conflict with each other. She wants a life outside of the home and Lucas above all wants to give that to her at whatever cost.

Their story has ups and too many downs, and at the end I was left wondering what is to come of these two. I like to draw my own conclusions, as many readers do and envision they have the life they each wanted for each other, just the way a miracle should be. Be prepared for British humor at it's best, and a story that will have you believing in miracles even when life isn't so kind.
