



A Rustle of Silk

Alys Clare

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Introducing physician-sleuth Dr Gabriel Taverner in the first of an intriguing series of mysteries set in early 17th century Devon.

1603. Former ship's surgeon Gabriel Taverner is attempting to re-establish himself as a country physician in rural Devon. But it's not easy to gain the locals' trust, and a series of disturbing incidents, increasing in menace and intensity, convinces him that at least one person does not welcome his presence.

Called out to examine a partially decomposed body found beside the river, Gabriel discovers that he has a personal connection to the dead man. Teaming up with Coroner Theophilus Davey to find out how the man died, Gabriel uncovers some darker aspects of the lucrative silk trade which operates from nearby Plymouth. The more he finds out, the more frighteningly apparent it becomes that the people closest to him have been keeping dangerous secrets.

A Rustle of Silk Details

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Author : Alys Clare

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From Reader Review A Rustle of Silk for online ebook

Tracey says

For some reason, I've found that often when a novel is set in the 1600's the characters bear about the same resemblance to lifelike human beings as characters in an unenthusiastic high school play. By the time the author has stamped them with the mold of "Elizabethan Character" – thee and ye and dost and old by forty and doublets and stomachers – most of the personality has been stamped out, and it becomes rather hard going to get through the book.

Alys Clare overcame that obstacle beautifully. First person narrator Gabriel Taverner is a wonderful character, a life-long ship's surgeon who would still be mending sailors if not for the accident that destroyed his equilibrium. He's full of life, and feels contemporary. "Very slowly and quietly, I bent forward and banged my head several times on the gleaming surface of my oak table." I have my doubts about his abilities and commitment as a physician; he has picked up a great deal of unorthodox knowledge from the natives of a great many far-flung places, some of which runs counter to the current trends. Still, he seems to keep picking up books to hone his knowledge of "civilized" medicine, and keeps getting distracted – and when he needs to hie him off to investigate this or that or the other, he never seems to have any concern about his patients' care during his absence.

One thing that's rather wonderful about him is a lovely obtuseness. He is the first-person narrator of the story, and his realizations and brainstorms are realistically handled in such a way to clue the reader in. He's a very good character; I hope he has better surroundings in another book.

Something I kept wondering about, which I know very little more about than that it existed, is the code of sumptuary laws. I first discovered them when I was getting into Renaissance Faires, when it surprised me that if I wanted to be historically accurate I had to decide where in society my persona fell and dress accordingly, avoiding certain fabrics and certain colors. (From 1562: No Englishman other than the son and heir apparent of a knight, or he that hath yearly revenues of £20 or is worth in goods £200, shall wear silk in or upon his hat, cap, night cap, girdles, scabbard, hose, shoes, or spur-leathers, upon forfeiture of £10 for every day, and imprisonment by three months.) Yet Gabriel's sister wears the finest silk day in and day out.

There were a handful of *off* words sprinkled throughout – I don't, for example, think that someone would refer to a man as being "broke", meaning penniless. (Then again, maybe they would – the adjective has a surprisingly long history. I wouldn't have thought it, and I think I'd avoid it because it doesn't sound right.) "Frenchie"; "get over it" – these were the ones I made note of. Borderline – and as such, enough to take me out of the story just a bit.

There were moments when the author revealed a bit or a piece which seemed like they ought to have been mentioned earlier. It was sort of the opposite of Chekhov's gun, with a shot going off suddenly leaving me wondering how. The origin of the murder weapon, for example – which I won't spoil here – seemed frankly kind of stupid and, till then, not even hinted at, not something the reader could remotely guess at.

It was a quick and easy and enjoyable read, but somewhat weak in areas. I enjoyed the writer's writing, but wish it had been more even and cohesive. There were excellent elements, but they were like beads on a long string, with thin bits in between. I'd like to try more of the series, in hopes of a stronger plot.

The usual disclaimer: I received this book via Netgalley for review.

Susan says

I am always looking for a new historical mystery series and, having read previous books by Alys Clare, I was looking forward to this new series. It didn't disappoint me. 1600's, England - I was hooked. Dr. Taverner has had to give up his life at sea and settles down to start his medical practice. The death of his sister's husband and his pairing with the coroner, Theophilis Davey give this story a great start and it continues to engage the reader. I hope that many of the central characters reappear in future mysteries as they are very well drawn - Black Carlotta, the healer, Judyth the midwife, and Davy, the coroner, I want to read more about them. My hope is that this is just the start of a long running series.

My thanks to Severn House and to NetGalley for giving me a review copy in exchange for my honest review.

Jamie Gogocha says

A Rustle of Silk was a fun historical fiction mystery. It had a couple of subplots that did but didn't tie in with the main plot of the story. It did have an icky description here and there, but it might be suitable for the cozy mystery lovers.

This book started out kind of slow, but I suppose the writer wanted to get as much of the background information about the main character out of the way. Once the book got to the main premise of the story (within the first couple of chapters), things really picked up.

I enjoyed this book quite a bit. The main characters had interesting personalities and operate in that gray area of things as opposed to being just the good guys. The unveiling of the killer came as a bit of a surprise, and the way that part of the story was handled was intriguing for sure.

It doesn't look like there's another book in this series yet, but I wouldn't mind seeing with Dr. Taverner and his buddies get up to in the future!

eyes.2c says

... silk doesn't maketh the man!

An exciting new protagonist for solving murders and mysteries set in early Stuart England times of the 17th century! Dr Gabriel Taverner is a navy surgeon now turned doctor who hails from Devon. He is endeavouring to set up practice back near his childhood neighbourhood.

The people we meet are fascinating. These are not surface figures. That these characters have a depth that will add to this and future stories is obvious from the get go. Black Carlotta, a wise woman and healer, midwife Judyth Penwarden, the coroner Theophilus Davey, and the local vicar Jonathan Carew are my special likes.

A man has killed himself and the coroner Theophilus, fetches Gabriel to assist him. Something about the unknown dead man troubles Gabriel, but it's only sometime later that it becomes apparent that Gabriel was

right to be troubled.

The dead man is his brother-in-law Jeromy Palfrey married to his sister Celia. And this is where everything turns on its tail and we find that Jeromy was a shallow supercilious man, agent for a wealthy silk merchant, one Nicolaus Quinlie. Although he supplies silk to the highest in the land, Quinlie is a vicious man of devious character and very few morals, up to his neck in all sorts of underhanded deals. Jeromy it seems was in thrall to Quinlie and complicit in some of Quinlie's more dubious dealings.

The tale goes on with believable intertwining coincidences, stretching from Plymouth to Venice and back, before coming to its quite complex conclusion, with some threads tied up tightly and more than a few left somewhat tantalizingly hanging. Relationships are forged with a nice easy touch by Clare. I definitely want to read more about this erstwhile, forward thinking doctor, Gabriel Taverner and his friends.

A NetGalley ARC

Margaret Sholders says

I have seen books of Alys Clare but this is the first one I read. I found that I really liked this story line. Be prepared for lots of Spoilers. This is set in England shortly after Queen Bess died. There are still rifts between Catholic and Protestant. Gabriel is a doctor. His sister Celia is waiting for her husband to come home. Gabe and Theo, the coroner, find a corpse and come to the conclusion it is Jeromy. She then finds he is deep in debt. Now his employer is found dead in his office. This story is full of ups and downs. I needed to reread some places. I know one thing is I am glad I didn't live way back there. I got pulled into this book. I really liked reading this story. I hope you will take a chance and fall into the story too. Plots pop up all over the story. Please enjoy reading this book! I volunteered to read and review this book.

Fran says

The year is 1603. Gabriel Taverner, a ship's surgeon has left seafaring and the life he loves behind. An accident at sea has affected his equilibrium causing constant seasickness. After studying in London, he has become a physician ready to open a practice in his new home, Rosewyke. Is he poaching on another doctor's territory? Several gruesome "little gifts" are deposited on his doorstep shocking his housekeeper, Sallie.

Gabriel receives an unexpected visit from Theophilus Davey, the coroner. Gabriel is the closest doctor and Theo needs a doctor's expertise in examining a body found in a sordid locale. The body is that of Jeromy Palfrey, husband of Celia, Gabriel's sister. It appears to look like suicide but why didn't Jeromy collect the silk shipment for his employer Nicholaus Quinlie who subsequently met his own demise?

Many questions are raised as Gabriel and Theo work with a cast of nefarious secondary characters to uncover the truth.

"A Rustle of Silk" by Alys Clare is the first book in a new series involving Gabriel Taverner. A good read.

Thank you Severn House Publishing and Net Galley for the opportunity to read and review "A Rustle of Silk".

Jen says

A Rustle of Silk by Alys Clare introduces a new historic mystery series featuring Gabriel Taverner, whose life as a ship's surgeon is no longer possible after a head injury results in irremediable sea sickness.

He settles in rural Devon near his family and begins life as a country physician. Asked to accompany the local coroner and give his opinion on a decomposed body, Gabriel discovers a connection that could have a serious impact on the sister he loves.

Overall, a quick read of a new series that may improve as it develops. I hope to see more weight given to several of the secondary characters in the next one.

I've only read a couple of books by Alys Clare, each one a part of two separate medieval mystery series she writes. I was glad to be reminded that I'd enjoyed those books.

read 9/8/16; review scheduled for Dec. 16

NetGalley/Severn House

Historic Mystery. Jan. 1, 2017. Print length: 256 pages.

Susanna - Censored by GoodReads says

Eh, it was OK.

There were some word choices that struck me as very non-period (particularly "opportunist," used in dialogue - a word that wouldn't be used for a good 200 or 250 years after this novel is set). On a related note, the attempt to avoid info dumping led to our hero having to have explained to him some things (for example, that suicides could not receive Christian burial) that you would think he would already have known, whether he had been at sea for 15 years or not.

On the other hand, the prose style and characterization were generally solid. I'd probably read another, but not go looking for it purposely.

Jeanette says

2.5 stars rounded up to 3 star for the beginning focus of the characterizations.

I'll be brief. This is the series start -Gabriel Taverner Mystery #1 which I think, on the whole, does introductions more than it entertains. The plot of crime and aftermath was especially weak to core an entire novel, IMHO.

Because I've read #2 which was much better, it's hard to be fair to so much copy length that is basically redundant even to the hum-drum (for the period) events depicted. His sister's "mood" especially I found puzzling and too submissive. Even for that period's connotation of submissive. And that Gabriel would be so

"female sensitive" to his sister in this type of conversational "sense"? No, it would never have been worded or acted upon in this length then.

But the prime negative here is also phrasing and English words' uses that were absolutely impossible for the period of this tale. It's within the last years of Elizabeth I and the first years of King James. They are forgiven but they also took me completely "out of" the period and some of them made me snicker.

It's cozy level for sure. And I liked #2 far more than I did this one. I couldn't keep my interest for the second half, to be honest. Plodded on. Much more accurately- it's exactly a 2.5 star for my read.

Cynthia says

This is my first book by Alys Clare and I simply adored it. Very intriguing plot - taking place in the 1600s, involving a doctor and his sister and her abusive husband. Well plotted, exquisitely written, researched, ect. Alys Clare has two other series (I hope this is the first book of a new series) that I am interested in reading. Highly recommend this book.

Tara (Spinatale Reviews) says

I received a free copy of this book from the publisher through Netgalley in exchange for an honest review

When I first started reading this book, I thought I had started on a very dark, gruesome medical mystery. Imagine my relief when the book did a 180 turn a few chapters in and became an incredibly engrossing character-driven mystery.

Gabriel Taverner has just established a medical practice in small town England after an unfortunate accident put an end to his days as a ships physician. However, somebody in the area has decided that they don't need the competition of a second medical practitioner. This storyline did become the secondary story (although it did provide some key clues toward the primary mystery) but it really set the scene well for future books in this series. You see how Dr. Taverner interacts with the locals as a doctor, a friend, and a co-physician.

As one of his duties as a local physician, Dr. Taverner is interrupted by the local coroner, who needed a doctor with him to examine a partially decomposed body. The mystery kicks into high gear when Theophilus Davey, the coroner, determines that the missing man is the husband of Dr. Taverner's sister. The plot slowly builds to its conclusion and the detective work done by both Dr. Taverner and Theophilus is interesting to follow. As the death count mounts and secrets are revealed, the mystery deepens. The ending was unexpected and extremely well-written.

Even the secondary characters are well-written and fully developed in this book. The author has planted the seeds for what will hopefully be a long series as I cannot wait to read more about all of the characters, particularly Celia and Jonathan Carew.

This is a wonderful historical mystery that is truly a blending of the two genres. It's a brilliant mix of medicine, mystery, and just a touch of the macabre. I will be eagerly awaiting all further installments in this series.

Jess (Primrose) says

First time Alys Clare reader here. This intro was an interesting one. For starters, the time period isn't one I normally read historical mysteries. I'm rather unfamiliar with England during the early 1600's. I think this sets this book apart from others in the historical fiction genre as many are set during 1800s-whether it be England or America.

Brief Synopsis (it's in the book description after all): Dr. Gabriel Taverner, seafarer turned ship's surgeon finds he must leave a life at sea after a tragic head injury that left with the inability to sail. He finds himself in Devon with ambitions to treat the locals. Someone doesn't want him there and is leaving him chilling messages in the form of graphic "gifts" on his doorstep. He plans on discovering whether it is a local prankster or the devious workings of a rival physician, when he is diverted by the murder of his brother in law. He thought his sister's marriage was a content one until he begins to learn more details of their intimate life and the sordid life his brother in law led. As he works to solve the case with coroner, Theophilus Davey, Gabriel is led to make choices that may take him on the wrong side of the law. As a string of corpses begin to pile up, it is evident that the murderer has personal vendetta. When Gabriel receives threats, it becomes evident that the murderer is caught before he finds himself in the body count.

What Did I Think: I will definitely read Book 2. I enjoyed the story though, in all honesty, I had guessed at the ending. Certain pieces of the plot were evident to a lover of mystery fiction. Overall, it was a pleasant read and I appreciated the time period it was set in. The writing is candid and flows along at a steady pace. If you enjoy historical mysteries as a genre, you would like this one. There is a brief flirtation at a love interest but the theme is always the mystery.

Thank you Netgalley and Severn House Publishers for allowing me to read this novel in exchange for my honest review.

Melissa says

I received a free copy of this book in exchange for an honest review. Thank you, Severn House Publishing and NetGalley.

It's 1603 and King James is recently to the throne of England. Gabriel Taverner, after an exciting career as a surgeon in the Queen's Navy, has become land-bound following a head injury. Pursuing life as a country doctor near his family, the most excitement in his life now is trying to calm his frantic maid after someone begins leaving "little gifts" on his stoop to scare away the competition.

When Theophilus Davey, the local coroner, appears on Gabriel's doorstep and asks Gabriel to accompany him to examine the body of a viciously murdered man, Gabriel becomes consumed with unraveling the mystery. Will the dark secrets of someone he loves bring tragedy down upon his own family?

A Rustle of Silk is a very worthy beginning to a new Alys Clare series and I look forward to seeing where she takes it next. It kept me engaged, intrigued, and I found myself reluctant to set it aside. It will appeal equally to readers of historical fiction and mystery. If you've never experienced the unique style of Alys

Clare, this is a good place to begin.

Susan in NC says

3.5-4 stars really, as I really enjoyed this first in a new series by a favorite historical mystery author; the slow start that almost had me giving up at about page 60 accounts for the 3.5 stars. Once we got the first murder out of the way, things picked up considerably!

Gabriel Taverner, former ship's surgeon trying to build a practice as a physician in rural Devon, is a very appealing hero. Clare has furnished this budding series with several wonderful characters, from Gabe's housekeeper Sallie to his sister Celia to Coroner Theophilus Davey to his vicar Jonathan Carew to local midwives Judyth and Black Carlotta - I look forward to hopefully several more outings with this delightful and interesting cast of characters.

The murder mystery - mysteries, really - were very well done with enough red herrings and twists to satisfy a hardened mystery buff, and terrible but justifiable motives rooted in the tragic pasts of the characters. No spoilers, but very well done, I felt. Highly recommended to historical mystery fans, as are Clare's Aelf Fen and Hawkenlye series.

Elaine Tomasso says

I would like to thank Netgalley and Severn House for a review copy of *A Rustle Of Silk*, a murder investigation set in 1603 Devon.

After an accident gives him vertigo Gabriel Taverner is forced to retire from his career as a naval surgeon. He goes to London to study to become a physician and once qualified sets up a practice in rural Devon close to his family. He has an uneventful life filled with his job, further study and his family when an old acquaintance, Theophilus Davey, now the local coroner, asks him to look at a body. They are both in agreement that it was suicide until the body's identity forces them to take a closer look and they realise the man was murdered. When more deaths occur the hunt for the killer becomes more urgent.

The Rustle Of Silk is a good mystery. I had no idea of the perpetrator until the reveal so it kept me glued to the pages. The twists are good and unexpected and the red herrings had me fooled so all in all a good page turner. It is told mostly in the first person by Gabriel Taverner which helps obfuscate the plot as it is his thought processes and ideas we follow, rather than hard logic and calculation (always easier in a third person narrative).

The historical detail is interesting but not overwhelming as I was aware of much of it. The only thing missing is a definition of the difference between a surgeon and a doctor (apart from qualifications).

I enjoyed *A Rustle Of Silk*. It is a fairly light read but an engrossing mystery so I have no hesitation in recommending it as a good read.
