



The Lady in the Loch

Elizabeth Ann Scarborough

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As sheriff of Edinburgh, budding author Walter Scott must investigate a grisly discovery. Bones and bodies have been found on the banks of the loch. At first, Scott assumes it to be the work of grave robbers. But more potent and evil forces are at work -- and it will take the courage of a young gypsy woman to help him find the answer...

The Lady in the Loch Details

Date : Published September 1st 1999 by Ace (first published 1998)

ISBN : 9780441006663

Author : Elizabeth Ann Scarborough

Format : Paperback 400 pages

Genre : Fantasy, Mystery, Fiction, Historical, Historical Fiction, Cultural, Scotland, Book Club

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From Reader Review The Lady in the Loch for online ebook

Chris says

An enchanting book set in Scotland. Scarborough draws both the city of Edinburgh and characters well. If you like Sir Walter Scott, it's a good book.

Anie says

I figured out the end to this "mystery" approximately 35 pages in. Add in the ridiculously-spelled Scottish dialect and a healthy dose of "perky inspirational disabled person" (a trope that pisses me off), and I'm done. This was formulaic in a bad way, and it's not worth my time when there are so many books out there that are excellent from the first page.

Jacqie says

This is a quick read and a well-written book. While I did enjoy it, and also enjoyed the foray into Scottish folklore and the exploration of "tinkler" culture, the solution to the mystery of the plot was not so much telegraphed as semaphored with giant flags right in my face. I think that the author was more interested in an atmospheric ghost story than in a complicated plot, but I ended up skimming the book because after about 50 pages I knew what would happen and today I wasn't in the mood for the journey when I already had seen the destination.

I don't know a ton about Sir Walter Scott or about Edinburgh history, but the author seems to have done her research and excelled at describing the setting of an icy cold winter in a city that is trying to modernize but is still suffering from medieval sewage disposal procedures and early industrial pollution. The very first chapter shows the reader that this is a world where there are indeed spirits, which have desires and opinions and who can have an effect on the mortal realm. This lets the reader know that any hints at the supernatural aren't necessarily superstition but could be a very real option. Having this knowledge ahead of the plot resolution makes the wizardly trespasses of the villain oddly prosaic, because he did have a chance at success and wasn't unhinged. It's almost too solid of a ghost story, because there is never any doubt that there are ghosts. However, it's still fun if you want a quick getaway.

Rusty says

This is the first novel I have read by this author and I thoroughly enjoyed it. The book could be classified as historical fantasy. Based roughly on the character of Sir Walter Scott, the author admits to taking liberties in creating the story. With ghosts and people who are blessed with the ability to see and converse with them, the tale begins with the discovery of bones in the loch. No one knows who that woman might have been but the mystery is solved through magic in the final pages of the book. The story is imaginative, full of delightful characters and flows quickly to a climax that is surprising. Very good read indeed.

Kate McDougall Sackler says

Dreary boring novel with underdeveloped characters and a completely underwhelming climax. Extremely irritating dialect used throughout. Not a mystery as the author shows the reader what is going on in the first chapter. Not really historical fiction either as many liberties are taken with history. Slightly supernatural, but not enough description of what could be the most intriguing part of the novel. Why, just why?

Kathy Crow says

What a brilliant way to bring the past to life. I learned much about British gypsies, and I love it when a I learn from a book. Plus the dialogue, characters, and story line were compelling.

Werner says

Back in 1998, when this book was first published, the reviews of it aimed at the library market immediately put it on my radar. Blending supernatural with historical fiction melds two of my favorite genres; the early 1800s is one of favorite time periods for the latter, and I can get into a Scots setting; I've enjoyed what I've read of Scott's writing, and was intrigued by the idea of him as a fictional character; and the description promised a Gothic atmosphere of mystery and suspense that appeals to me. Also, I was curious to sample Scarborough's work for the first time. Having now finally read the book, it delivered well enough on these factors to earn four stars from me --probably actually three and a half, but I rounded up rather than down, which says something.

Our first two chapters here are set in the border country of southern Scotland in the 1790s (Scarborough doesn't give exact dates --more about that below); the rest of the book in and around Edinburgh ten years later. The plot involves murderous skulduggery with its roots in evil sorcery (but a sorcerer may find that his opposition can come from beyond the grave, as well as from the living....). Scarborough's style doesn't resemble Scott's complex 19th-century prose, but her tale has elements he would have appreciated: ghosts, pretty damsels in distress, danger and intrigue, a lively evocation of Edinburgh itself with its forbidding Tolbooth (which appears in *The Heart of Mid-Lothian*). Midge Margret is a wonderfully-drawn character, who would have fit quite naturally into a Scott novel; she has the guts and moral fiber of his best heroines. In many respects, the portrait of Scott himself is probably pretty true to life (as is that of his friend, and fellow author and Borderer, James Hogg). I was very intrigued with the Tinklers (called Tinkers in Ireland) and their culture, and would like to study it more. The author makes good use of Scots dialect (though, unlike Stevenson, she doesn't use it so thickly as to be sometimes unintelligible) and fascinating elements of Scottish folklore. Most readers will guess the villain's identity early on, but the tale still had, for me, an intense suspense factor.

The major weakness of the book is its historical inaccuracies, some of which the author admits in her short note at the end. "Scott," she writes, "was never one to let chronology or reality stand in the way of a good yarn, so I like to think he wouldn't mind if I am similarly careless with the truth when fictionalizing Sir Walter himself in this book." *He* might not mind, but I do; when a fictional hero is a real person, I think it's important not to contradict the facts, and too many historical inaccuracies take me out of a historical fiction

story. To be sure, I didn't know enough about the details of Scott's life to catch most of the liberties the author took (though I did know he was an Anglican, not a Presbyterian), until I consulted Hesketh Pearson's *Sir Walter Scott: His Life & Personality*. As Scarborough admits, he was never Sheriff of Edinburgh (though he was appointed a deputy sheriff of Selkirk, a sinecure post). The main part of the story is said to take place just after the publication of Vol. 1 of his *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Borders*; that would put it in January of 1802, by which time he'd been married just over four years, not a bachelor as he's depicted here. (And the lady he married was named Charlotte Charpentier, not Williamina Stuart --though he did once court a Williamina Belsches.) Scarborough notes some inaccuracies in her portrait of Edinburgh in the note, but one she's apparently not aware of is that streetlamps in 1802 would not have been lit by gas, but by candles. And a Scots physician in that era would never have considered putting bones on a standing stone to evoke magical revelations about their provenance; their medical science was, by our standards, primitive, but they were by that time passionately rationalist in their attitudes and contemptuous of any form of superstition. (Dr. MacRae's comments in Chapter 3, indeed, seem to presage a scientific examination of the bones, a point Scarborough apparently forgot after she wrote it.) There are also some breaches of etiquette here that would never have been passed over so lightly in Regency society, even in a pub. We also have some clumsy handling of a flintlock pistol (not by the person wielding it, but by the author!), a killing with a motive that doesn't really jibe with the rest of the story, as well as a couple of other actions that don't make sense in terms of motive, and a character who's given two different names at different points in the story. All these factors add up to a novel that could have been more carefully crafted --and would have earned five stars if it had been.

This didn't keep me from really liking the book, however. And it's whetted my appetite for reading more of Scott's own work --hopefully soon after I hack down some of the piles of unread books I already own!

Sharon says

Part historical fiction and part paranormal thriller, "The Lady in the Loch" drops us into Walter Scott's Edinburgh for a look at the legal system, the medical system and the life of the "traveling people."

The beginning of the book has Scott assisting his friend in a most unusual murder investigation, which results in him meeting Midge Margret and Geordie -- two of the traveling people -- when they are youngsters.

Imagine his surprise when the two turn up in Edinburgh, at the heart of a number of disappearances among the traveling people.

I want to avoid spoilers where possible here, but suffice it to say that some of the plot would not be out of place in Mary Shelley's early work. Scott deals with the "resurrectionists" (grave robbers who provide cadavers to medical school anatomists) and more in this story.

Recommended for those who like a historical thriller.

Andria says

I really enjoyed this! Sir Walter Scott (who wrote *Ivanhoe* amongst other stories and novels) is a writer who

became a detective searching for a missing woman, the first amongst many. Ghosts can communicate, telling the detectives and others who killed them, and it's all very fascinating-a perfect halloween read! Elizabeth Ann is now one of my new favorite authors, though I have read her stories before when she collaborated with Mercedes Lackey and/or Andre Norton, amongst others. Looking forward to more of this author, I rate this a four and a half stars!

Jane says

Talking corpse, scandal, detective looking for the murderer...With an opening like this it's hard to admit that this book still started out very slow for me. I was unsure if I would finish it at all...but I stuck with it and found it to be somewhat interesting after all. The ending sort of saved it for me but I would not recommend it to a friend.

Bev says

Soooo, once upon a time I put *The Lady in the Loch* by Elizabeth Ann Scarborough on my long TBR list. I'm thinking I probably did that because it was billed as a historical/literary mystery. 'Cause, you know it's set in the late 18th century and stars Walter Scott before he became a "Sir" and before he had written/published most of his best known work. And I do love me a good historical mystery. I'm sure the basic synopsis grabbed my attention too.

Because Walter Scott has just recently been appointed as a sheriff of Edinburgh. He expects the job to be a pretty simple one--giving him a nice steady income and time to work on his writing. But shortly after taking office he is called to the banks of the half-frozen loch where workers who have been draining off the water have found the bones of some poor soul who was disposed there. Before he has time to really investigate this find, a young gypsy woman named Midge Margaret comes to him with a story of missing women from the gypsy camp. One young girl disappeared while gathering wood for the fire and another was snatched from her very bed during the night.

Midge Margaret gets more attention from Scott than most townsfolk are willing to give the "tinklers" as the gypsies are called--in part because their paths had crossed years earlier in one of Scott's first encounters with sheriff duties (more as a bystander than a law-enforcer). At first it is thought that body snatchers or "nobbins" as the gypsies call them are responsible for the disappearances. Because after all, nobody will miss a few gypsies here and there and the university can always use extra bodies to learn medicine and anatomy from. Scott promises to look into the matter, but before he can make many inquiries Midge Margaret and her brother are attacked in town and her pregnant sister-in-law is taken as well. Now the race is on...for the attacker is working to a schedule and for a design of his own and Scott and Midge Margaret will have to be quick if they are going to prevent Jeannie (the sister-in-law) from becoming another body in the loch.

All that sounds like the basis for a pretty good mystery story, don't you think? But nobody told me in the various synopses that I read that we'd be dealing with ghosts and dead people sitting up and talking. Nobody told me that a sheriff would have the mystical power to call upon a murdered girl and ask her who her murderer is--and that she'd answer. Nobody told me that we had the belief (and reality) that if murdered people are touched by their attacker then their wounds will bleed afresh and proclaim the guilt of the killer. Nobody told me that we'd be dealing with spirit possession of living people. And nobody, after getting me to

suspend my disbelief long enough to swallow a historical mystery that contains such things, can tell me why a murdered man later in the book doesn't jump up and proclaim the murderer when he's examined by him/her. Oh....but that would end the book about two chapters too soon and we can't have that, so that whole murdered people can identify their murderers thing only works when it's convenient for the plot.

So, that's my major quibble with this book. After getting me to travel back in time and making me believe in the Walter Scott (and the gypsies and the other characters...) of the time period and making me believe that all this mystical stuff is true, Scarborough does not use the paranormal trappings consistently. Or at least doesn't give a very good reason why it only works part of the time. If it works, then it works. Period. Not just when the author needs it to.

The characters are great. I don't know Sir Walter Scott's work and I don't know much about him, so I can't say whether Scarborough's Scott is true to life. But I like her portrayal of him. And I like Midge Margaret a lot. She's a very intelligent and brave young woman--and the reader is rooting for her and her companions. The plot itself is an interesting one. All pluses. I'm not sure if Scarborough meant the identity of the killer to be a big secret and the reveal to be a surprise--but it wasn't. It didn't take me long to figure out who was behind the disappearances and deaths. Overall, a fairly decent story--not quite what I expected and not as consistent within its own world as I would like. Two and a half stars--mostly for character development.

This review is mine and was first posted on my blog My Reader's Block. Please request permission before reposting any portion. Thanks.

Rebecca says

This book left me with mixed feelings. The story was fun and engaging, I wasn't absolutely certain who the villain was until the last half of the book, and the characters were interesting. HOWEVER, the book takes place in Edinburgh, Scotland, and the accents were rendered so very broadly that I had to stop on several occasions to try and work out what was being said. I found this distracting.

Sheree Ross says

A really good mystery. I enjoyed the humor,,,perhaps unintended in the book,,,,,but all in all a good read.

Patty says

A disappointment in the writing, when we finally got to the bones from the loch, I had forgotten all about them. I do love historical fiction but the story did not pull together for me.
