



# The Invention of Sarah Cummings

*Olivia Newport*

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## **The Invention of Sarah Cummings** Olivia Newport

Sarah Cummings has one goal in life--to break into Chicago's high society. Desperate to stop serving dinner to members of the wealthy Banning family and to start eating at society tables, Sarah spends her meager free time altering cast-off gowns to create the perfect wardrobe for her future life.

When opportunity knocks at a chance meeting, she presents herself as Serena Cuthbert, weaving a fictitious past to go with her fictitious name. But as she gets closer to her goal--and closer to Simon Tewell, the director of St. Andrew's Orphanage--Sarah finds that she must choose between the life she has and the life she dreams of.

Can she piece together the perfect life from scraps? Or will it all come unraveled in the face of true love?

## **The Invention of Sarah Cummings Details**

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Author : Olivia Newport

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# From Reader Review *The Invention of Sarah Cummings* for online ebook

## Mary - *Buried Under Romance* says

This is a very interesting story of a heroine who is absolutely imperfect; she is vain and desires for social ladder-climbing more than to live a fruitful and honest life. But in that, she is incredibly human. Her fears, desires, are real in that they make her more emphasizing to the readers in an ironic way. It was always a story about Sarah Cummings (note: the title) rather than her love, her navigation through her own deceits and lies, amidst a glittering world that she soon learns, is but vapid and empty. The hero is a nice counterpart to her; his wish to remain in his own world, not step above himself, while she strives to be in a better position than as a maid. But, by the end, will Sarah abandon her dreams of being with the rich and famous and settle for a life of tranquility? And more importantly, can she be allowed to once her new friends realize she's not who she says she is?

That's a question for readers to find out. :)

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## Lindsey (*Books for Christian Girls*) says

**This is a mini '*Books For Christian Girls*' review. It is not a full content review and will not receive one. These mini-reviews are years old and just for clarity on the rating the book received on Goodreads.**

8/3/2015-

“Stopped at page 60. I found Sarah to be a selfish and lying character. I frankly don’t care to see how she works herself out of the trouble she got herself in.”

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## Andi says

Olivia makes Sarah a character you want to care about. Her parents have died and she became an orphan living in the St. Andrews Orphanage, she then becomes a parlor maid with Banning family as a very talented seamstress. What she does with clothes is amazing, which reminded me of Scarlett O'Hara in *Gone With the Wind*.

Because of her status, she has not had any friends or a social life. On her day off she walks into a store and meets Lillie, someone way above her status. Sarah is dressed in a dress she has created that grabs Lillie's attention, and she is determined to have Sarah buy this hat.

When Lillie asks Sarah's name, she spits out Serena Cuthbert, she has no idea why she said that name. This begins the *Invention of Sarah*.

Lucy and Charlotte make their appearance in this final installment of this series and it is always fun to have returning characters.

This was a fun book that kept me up late reading. I recommend it!

## **Melanie says**

Review on Amazon: <http://www.amazon.com/review/RFUFZH3N...>

The Invention of Sarah Cummings was a good read. I loved all the history and facts about Chicago that were in the story. I also loved how the main characters from the first two books were in this one - I loved getting updates on their lives.

I didn't like Sarah all that much for the majority of this book. I just didn't care for some of her actions and it wasn't until the end that I started to like her character more. I didn't know what to think about Simon at first, but I really liked him in the end.

I thought it was neat how Sarah remade cast-off gowns into new, beautiful creations. I really liked one of the messages in The Invention of Sarah Cummings (about gaining the world, but losing your soul).

Overall, while not my favorite in the Avenue of Dreams series, The Invention of Sarah Cummings was a good book and I enjoyed reading it. If you like historical fiction, I think you'll enjoy this book too.

\*I received this book for free for my honest review. I was not required to give a positive review, only my honest opinion - which I've done. All thoughts and opinions expressed are my own.\*

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## **Jane says**

Where I got the book: review copy provided by the Historical Novel Society. This review first appeared on the HNS website.

This engaging, lively inspirational tells the story of Sarah Cummings, obliged to work as a maid after being orphaned in her teens but determined to climb higher in Chicago society. The path she chooses is deception; she uses her dressmaking skills and her mistress's castoffs to recreate herself as Serena Cuthbert, society beauty.

Part of a series set on Chicago's wealthy Prairie Avenue in the late 1800s, this novel has elements of romance and spiritual growth but does not over-emphasize either. Newport sketches the tale of a young woman who takes a wrong turn in using her gifts to advance herself with subtlety and wry humor, leaving the reader to draw conclusions without preaching. Despite moments when the characters appear to be speaking 21st-century English rather than 19th-century, the Chicago setting, although lightly drawn, is believable and the characters interesting.

Altogether a pleasant, fast read that will delight readers looking for an uplifting story, even if they do not usually read Christian fiction.

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## Megan says

After reading so many bloggers' reviews saying that they didn't like Sarah at all and couldn't connect with her, I was apprehensive about reading this book - though it ended up being completely unnecessary, as I greatly enjoyed this book and actually loved Sarah.

A lot of people may have found Sarah annoying, I agree at times she was very annoying, and hard to like. I thought this added to the story, as I don't think we were supposed to love everything she was doing since she was lying and deceiving so many people by living two lives. And though I personally liked her, I so wish she never would have started with her "invention" but that didn't make her any less likeable, to me.

The description and details in this book, just like the first two books in this series, are fantastic. You can tell the author did a lot of research.

My only complaint, which is minor, is that Sarah never seemed to get any penalties for her wrong doing. I don't think

*The Invention of Sarah Cummings* was a great read and a wonderful conclusion to this fabulous series. Each book could easily be read by themselves and enjoyed, as each is about a different person. Of course, if you hate for things to be spoiled you may want to read them in order since the characters from the previous books make appearances in each of the following books.

I would recommend *The Invention of Sarah Cummings* or the *Avenue of Dreams* series to anyone who loves historical fiction.

\*\*\*I received a complimentary copy of this book to review. I was asked to give my honest opinion of the book - which I have done.\*\*\*

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## Larik says

Foolish foolish girl. But then I shouldn't say that since I've never walked in her shoes. One thing I learned from this captivating tale is the truth has a way of coming out, whether it was a shameful sin or just a poor girl's innocent dream. Sarah, out of desperation of her situation, had created a new fascinating young lady who had amazing rich family, beautiful dresses, went to the balls and parties on a hand of a tall rich and handsome man. It was like living a dream for a few hours only to come back to the reality and work twice harder to keep her dream going. Not until Simon has convinced her to give him the time of her day and started telling her about his non-fiction life did she realize she was not living but dreaming.. And then only did she start to pay attention to everything that was going on with Brad, Lillie, even Jane and others. I can say this -Sarah was lucky because there were so many people who trully cared and unnoticeably tried to keep her safe even in this saga. I still think it was Kenny who had revealed Brads secret. I think it was a payback for Sarah.

Amazing real characters with true emotions. The clear difference between society and everyone else. Captivating and not overly too much political going-ons. And of course detailed description on the aftermath of the Fair and the fire. Ever since April when I read DeeAnn's Gist book - It Happened at the Fair, I was wondering what has become of the city after all the fun left the grounds. This book was an amazing sort of follow up.

If you love history and a great saga about finding your true worth and true love this book is for you. I regret to say I didn't want to read it at first but once I started I couldn't stop. I am so going to read the other two in this series.

Disclaimer: I received a free copy of this book from publisher, through NetGalley, in exchange for my honest opinion.

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## **Rachel Brand says**

Sarah Cummings never intended to enter service, but her life changed drastically when her parents were killed in an accident when she was ten years old. With no family to claim her, Sarah found herself at the mercy of St Andrew's Orphanage. She should be grateful to have found a place in service to the Banning family, but after three years working as a maid, Sarah longs for something more. She knows she doesn't belong to the world of service. Over the past few years, she's been working on cast-off dresses from her employer and turning them into stunning designs. Her only chance to wear these outfits is on her day off, where she frequently visits boutiques and shops, gazing longingly at one-of-a-kind outfits and accessories. On one such visit, she runs into Lillie Wagner, a newcomer to Prairie Avenue who is desperately in need of a friend. Knowing that Lillie would never look at her twice if she knew Sarah were a maid, Sarah invents a new persona—Serena Cuthbert. Soon Serena Cuthbert is attending society balls and functions on the arm of Lillie's friend Bradley Townsend. She's sure this is the route to finding her true place in life, and ultimate happiness. But as her relationship with Brad progresses, it becomes harder to keep up her facade—especially when she runs into the director of her old orphanage at a charity event. Simon Tewell may be a kind man who recognises Sarah's skill with a needle, but he can't provide the sort of life Sarah longs for. But is the life she longs for truly the one that will bring her the most happiness?

Although it's been nearly a year since I'd read the second instalment in the Avenue of Dreams series, it didn't take me long to feel comfortable again in the Banning household on Prairie Avenue. The time frame may have moved forward three years, but the Chicago setting was the same, and I enjoyed revisiting characters from previous books and seeing where their lives had taken them. In particular, I was intrigued to see how Olivia Newport intended to transform Sarah Cummings from grumpy kitchen maid to a romantic heroine. She certainly had her work cut out for her, given how unlikable Sarah had been in previous books, but I thoroughly enjoyed learning about Sarah's backstory and how she came to the Banning household.

My sewing skills are strictly limited to darning socks and patching up my husband's jeans, but my mother is a successful seamstress and I've always admired handmade clothes. Sarah's skill with a needle appealed to me, and I loved reading the descriptions of the dresses and suits she created out of Flora Banning's cast-offs. Sarah may see her clothing as a gateway into the world of the upper classes, but most readers will be able to tell that she truly has a practical gift. Although Sarah teaches sewing classes at the orphanage and helps Lillie make dresses for the younger orphan girls, it takes her a while to realise how useful her skills are, especially since it's not a craft the upper classes usually partake in. I'm sure I'm not the only person who doesn't always recognise my own skills just because they aren't conventionally praised.

Sarah's attempts to integrate herself into Lillie's circle and snag a rich husband are certainly fun to read, so even if you aren't particularly interested in Sarah's sewing, this section of the novel is bound to be intriguing. There are even some moments of suspense as Sarah attempts to avoid bumping into someone she's served in the Banning household, and tries to pass messages to Brad through a local hotel. I often found myself holding my breath as I wondered if someone would figure out what Sarah was doing, or if the butler or housekeeper would forbid her to go out on an evening when she's meant to be meeting Brad or Lillie. I've

read plenty of historical romance novels in which the heroine pretends to be someone else, but Sarah's double life as a maid and a socialite is probably one of the more unique situations I've come across, and the most compelling.

Sarah's story isn't just a fun, compelling read—it also contains a great message about finding happiness and being true to yourself. Sarah has worked in service long enough to believe that the life her employers have is the only one that can guarantee happiness. She can't understand why Lucy doesn't want a live-in maid and uses public transport when she can afford far better luxuries, and she sneers at Charlotte for being happy being a day-maid and the wife of a clerk. She struggles to see that what makes these women happy isn't money or lack thereof, but the love of those who surround them. Sarah buys into a very common lie, and one that hasn't disappeared in the present day—that happiness comes from having enough money to buy anything you want. Much like we might watch a television advertisement telling us that X or Y product or lifestyle will make us happy, Sarah watches people coming and going in the Banning household, dripping in jewellery and expensive fabrics, dining on the finest food and wine, and believes that she will be happy if she can only achieve what they have. It's not until she sees Bradley Townsend for who he really is that Sarah realises that she can't settle for a life of luxury if it's devoid of love.

There's also a really touching sub-plot in which Sarah meets a girl at the orphanage who details her daydreams in her journal, making an interesting parallel to Sarah's fictional life as Serena. Sarah spends much of the novel moulding herself into someone Lillie would want as a friend and Brad would want as a wife, creating backstories she thinks will appeal to her new friends, never truly revealing her own thoughts and feelings to them. Again, I think this situation has great modern parallels—how many times do we profess an interest in something to make a connection with someone, or dress in a way we think will garner a certain type of attention?

The romantic element of this novel is very light. Personally, I didn't mind this as Sarah's character development and the journey she undertakes to realise who she really wants to be is compelling in itself. But if you've come to this novel looking for a romantic love story, you'll probably be disappointed. Sarah spends much of the novel courting Brad and attempting to arrange meetings to gain his affections. Although Simon features in the novel fairly early on, he and Sarah don't cross paths a lot in the first half of the novel, and it's not until near the end of the book that Sarah seems to consider seeing Simon as a potential love interest. The romance moves quite fast, considering how long it took for Sarah and Simon to actually begin courting.

While the novel is full of fantastic historical details and contains a much needed message about being true to yourself, the spiritual element felt very tacked on. There are a few scenes where Sarah attends church, but she doesn't appear to have much of an understanding of God or any personal faith. Then, suddenly, at the end of the novel she has a revelation about how she's been looking for worldly riches instead of God's love. Although this is a great message and it does make sense considering Sarah's prior actions, it didn't seem entirely believable for Sarah to make this connection when she didn't seem to have any sort of faith until that point in the novel. I wished this aspect of the novel had been better integrated.

Although this novel wasn't quite as romantic as I expected, I didn't find myself longing for more romance once I became engrossed in the novel. *The Invention of Sarah Cummings* is a great novel about embracing your God-given talents and becoming the person he intended you to be. It contains a message that's just as relevant today as it was in the nineteenth century.

Review title provided by Revell.

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## **Cheryl says**

I really liked this book even though Sarah is not a likable character. She does change throughout the book and by the end she realizes what is really important in life.

Newport is a great author and is quickly becoming one of my must read authors.

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## **Tish says**

So we have an unlikable liar who, even though she's had virtually no interaction with the leading man, decides she's going to marry him and he'll be her ticket out of poverty. Enter the second leading man, who seems to be lots of years older than leading lady, hasn't spend time with her in three years since she moved out, but now is in love with her. Boring conversations, nothing to make you care about any character in this book, and as predictable as can be.

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## **Mackenzie says**

3.4 stars because I cannot justify rounding it up to 4. Sarah was so awful during Charlotte's book and the first two-thirds of this one. However, Olivia Newport knows how to keep my attention. I was even excited over her happy ending. I just wish we got to see more of her love with Simon. Perhaps an epilogue about their happiness.

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## **Becky says**

I liked the ending of the story. It was very slow moving and not a topic I can relate to until the ending. Honestly, I skipped several chapters but didn't feel I missed anything I would have wanted to read. The other book I read in this series was much better. I am reading another now, so will see what happens with that one.

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## **Veronica says**

This is an engrossing story about Sarah Cummings, a parlor maid to the wealthy Banning family in Chicago. After losing her parents when she was young, she lived in an orphanage until going to work at sixteen for the Bannings. She dreams of the day when she'll no longer be a maid and can live the life she deserves, as part of high society. She uses her talent for sewing to not only remake gowns for herself, but to start teaching a sewing class for the older girls at the orphanage. She never wanted to go back there, but is pushed into it by the orphanage director, who not only wants to help the girls, but has a personal interest in Sarah, as well. When she meets a new young woman to town, she introduces herself as Serena Cuthbert, a high society woman, and makes up a fake back story for her fake name. She's finally able to move in the circles she's always wanted to and when she meets a wealthy young man who seems interested, she finally sees a way out. Will she be able to juggle all of the lies, or will the truth finally come out? Will she discover true love and contentment?



I have read book two in this series and remembered Sarah as selfish, which she still is for most of the book. However, I feel as though I understand her better and can see why she did what she did. I did have a hard time understanding why the director would like her when he didn't seem to see her good qualities very much, but I guess love is blind. I kept wondering when she would get found out, so that lent some suspense to the story. The day-to-day glimpse of what life would have been like for a maid in this time period and also some of what was happening politically and financially during that time gave a sense of reality to the story. This series has a Downton Abbey feel to it, which I enjoyed. Check it out if you like historical fiction!

I received this book free from Revell in exchange for an honest review.

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## **Rissi says**

### **Rating: 3.5 out of 5**

Sarah Cummings is likely a name we all remember or those of us who have, now read all three of Newport's Avenue of Dreams series will. She made quite the impression on us as a bratty maid at the Banning home and now, has earned her own story in this, the final book of the trilogy. Early on, the story starts out lovely. There was more depth and interest to Sarah – she seemed to have matured and grown into a “better” person, despite her desire for something more. Being too harsh on the dream behind Sarah's deception seems contradictory as all of us have some kind of aspiration we dream of making come true. It's the way that Sarah goes about inventing her fate that is wrong – and walks a fine line between truth and deception. About three-fourths the way through the book, there was a 180 switch in her personality and suddenly, the little brat was back. That was an unexpected occurrence that I confess not to have seen coming.

Carried through the entire threads of the book is Sarah's love of reinventing the gowns that she is gifted. It's an interesting part of the novel, which of course, is paralleling the transformation Sarah wants to inflict on her own life. Reading through passages of Sarah re-patterning her gowns or picturing new work to an otherwise outdated design was a lovely part of the book because a.) it gave more detail to the costuming in literary form and b.) while lovingly recreating these gowns as an accomplished seamstress, Sarah is herself rather than a put-on imitation of what she thought she wanted.

Not unlike its predecessors, I have to be honest in saying that the real flaw of the series is how underplayed the men are. I recognize that this is about three women coming-of-age and in most instances, living ahead of their time through their dreams, however, I think had there been stronger male leads, the romance aspects would have seemed more interesting if not more prominent. Had the male lead been better developed – in this instance, it's Simon Tewell, the rush to end the book happily wouldn't read so far-reaching. Minor in complaint, there was also a lot of uses of character's first names – not necessarily in conversation, but certainly in the second person prose. Despite the squabbles I've had with this series, they're sweet one-time, good weekend reads. There is some great historical detail and Sarah ended up making a more complex character that I'd have expected. Because of that, 'Invention' just may have been the best of the entire series. It was unique even if it was through subtle transitions and seemed a solid way to conclude the stories in the lives of those who live on the Avenue of Dreams.

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Sincere thanks to the publisher for providing a complimentary copy of this book for reviewing purposes.

Available September 2013 at your favorite bookseller from Revell, a division of Baker Publishing Group.

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## **Dawn says**

Sarah Cummings is a parlor maid in the household of the wealthy Bannings on Prairie Avenue. She longs to better herself and break out of service and into the wealthy society. She's become quite talented at remaking the discarded gowns of her employer into something new and fashionable. When she's out window shopping one afternoon on her day off, a young woman of means assumes that Sarah is also wealthy. On the spur of the moment, Sarah invents a new identity for herself, Serena Cuthbert. So begins her double life. As Serena, Sarah is able to go and do things that a domestic servant could not. Yet, all the lies she's told are bound to catch up with her. What will she do when the girl she's befriended insists on attending the sewing class that Sarah has been teaching at the orphanage she once lived at? And when two men, one of wealth and privilege the other a simple orphanage director, both start to show an interest in her, who will Sarah choose? Will she follow her heart or her dreams?

This is the third and final book in Olivia Newport's Avenue of Dreams series. This series follows three young women who want something bigger for themselves - Lucy Banning - a college education in a time where women were not encouraged to seek higher learning, Charlotte Farrow - a chance to raise her son without his father finding him, and Sarah Cummings - the dream of a better life outside of servitude. It is highly recommended to read the series in order, though it is not completely necessary. This book brings back both Lucy and Charlotte, though neither plays a large role in the story.

I have to say that Sarah annoyed me from the moment that I met her in the Pursuit of Lucy Banning. I'd hoped that by this story, I'd have grown to like Sarah more. Sadly, for me, that was not the case. I struggled to find redeeming qualities in her for the majority of the book. I didn't like the choices she was making and the fact that she had no qualms at all about deceiving her friend and other people really bugged me. I found her to be very selfish. It wasn't until well over halfway into the book, that Sarah seemed to develop a conscience. And that was in part due to the orphans she was working with.

Redeeming qualities of this book for me were the rich historical detail. I loved that. I also loved Simon. I thought he was very good to see in Sarah something she didn't see in herself. I also loved Jane and Lillie (Sarah's friend). I found those characters to be very real and in some instances very forgiving. I also loved reconnecting with the characters from the first two books.

Overall, the book was intriguing and very rich in history. The fact that Sarah herself became more likable towards the end of the story definitely caused my rating to increase.

I received the Kindle version of this book for free from Revell Books via NetGalley for the purpose of reviewing. I was not required to write a positive review. My thoughts and opinions are my own.

Recommended to fans of the Gilded Age, historical fiction, Olivia Newport, Laura Frantz, Lisa Tawn Bergren, Elizabeth Camden

Rating - 3.5 stars, which will be 3 stars on Amazon.

