



The Scarlet Wench

M.K. Graff

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In this third Nora Tierney Mystery, American writer Nora awaits the arrival of a traveling theatre groups who will stage Noel Coward's play "Blithe Spirit" at her temporary home, Ramsey Lodge in England's Lake District.

Her son now six months old, Nora must juggle parenting with helping her friend Simon Ramsey run the lodge. She's also hoping to further her relationship with the only lodge guest not in the cast: Detective Inspector Declan Barnes, ostensibly there from Oxford for a hiking trip.

When a series of pranks and accidents escalate to murder during a horrendous flood, Nora realizes her child is in jeopardy and determines to help Declan unmask a killer.

Contemporary but written in traditional English mystery style, the book contains chapter epigrams that are lines from the play. A copy of the book has been requested for Noel Coward's archives by his estate.

The Scarlet Wench Details

Date : Published May 28th 2014 by Bridle Path Press (first published May 12th 2014)

ISBN : 9780985233174

Author : M.K. Graff

Format : Paperback 314 pages

Genre : Mystery



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From Reader Review The Scarlet Wench for online ebook

Babus Ahmed says

The Scarlet Wench is a classy whodunit mystery set in Cumbria at the struggling but charming Ramsey Hall. Nora Tierney, an American children's author and amateur sleuth, now residing in the UK, is drawn into a web of dangerous pranks when a touring theatre troupe plan to put on a play at Ramsey Hall. From the outset malicious pranks set the suspicion on all the unusual characters that form the cast of the play. The personal stakes for Nora are higher in this book as she has to think of her baby son, Sean.

A truly spellbinding read reminiscent of Agatha Christie but with a modern twist. I could see this book being televised. I loved the way the emphasis was on the characters as the plot unfolded and was deeply drawn into suspecting everyone. The book is well written but I was aware the author was not British when at one point following a car accident a few characters had to go to accident and emergency and there was mention of insurance details required, which of course we don't require here in the UK as we are privileged to have the NHS. This was the only slip I found in the book and despite not reading the previous two in the series I still enjoyed learning about Nora and co without hindrance.

A very promising series but also a great stand alone read for quaint mystery fans.

Kimberly Hicks says

I received an advanced copy of this book from the author.

This is a cute story set in England with a flare for Murder She Wrote or your Agatha Christie novels, but unfortunately, it was a little too slow for me to get into. It's not a bad story, it just wasn't my kind of mystery.

When a group of actors come to stay at Ramsey Lodge for their upcoming play, one may wonder whether the actual story lies within their arrival or perhaps their shenanigans while trying to learn the story. Nora Tierney is juggling her writing career and cute little baby boy, Sean. She receives a call from Sean's grandparents' solicitor asking to meet with her in a week or so.

Meanwhile, strange occurrences keep happening at the Lodge, and no one has a clue as to what may be happening, except Nora has an idea. Once all the pieces to the puzzle fit together, you have the perfect whodunit, but unfortunately, it took too long for me to get there. I found the story boring for the first half of the book; however, when I got to about 52% was when the story took off, and that, to me, is too long to wait for things to really heat up.

Again, the story was well written and the plot was put together well, it just felt as though the author used entirely too many words for the reader to arrive at our destination--finding the murderer! Overall, this is a pretty good book, but if you're looking for things to start popping off quickly, you may have to wait a bit.

Suraya Dewing says

Review by Suraya Dewing

The Scarlet Wench

By M.K. Graff

Sometimes a story lingers after you have read it. The Scarlet Wench did that for me. I thoroughly enjoyed the way M.K. Graff crafted her characters, especially Nora Tierney, the heroine of the novel and of the series. She struggles against an impulse to get involved with investigating the unfolding mystery around a murder and other gruesome events that appear to target a cast of second-rate actors staying at Ramsey Lodge. Her friend Simon owns Ramsey Lodge and hopes to improve ailing finances by holding a performance of Blithe Spirit by Noel Coward.

She eventually gets her opportunity when the investigating officer Declan, with whom she is in love, agrees, somewhat reluctantly to her taking the role of Elvira in place of Gemma. Nora argues the only way to find out who is committing the crimes is to infiltrate the group.

Nora is thoroughly believable with her insecurities over Declan, her detective lover and concerns for the safety of Sean, her son.

The scenery descriptions were wonderful and I felt as though I walked around Lake Windermere with the characters as they pondered the mystery of who was murdering cast members and why.

The juxtaposition of events in the story with Blithe Spirit was an interesting technique in that it added colour and texture to what was essentially a mystery novel. It was also fun to rediscover one of my favourite plays. Graff cleverly weaves the two plots right down to the falling chandelier.

This is an excellent and thoroughly enjoyable read.

Kay Wilson says

The Scarlet Wench, the third in the Nora Tierney Mystery series has just been released (May 12, 2014).

I've just received mine and have already finished and loved it.

There are two other books in this series (The Blue Virgin & The Green Remains) and all have continued to keep me intrigued and firmly in my chair until the end. Loving a good mystery, I have devoured them all, and loved every minute.

The Scarlet Wench has lots of twists and turns, and keeps you engaged, right to the end.

I highly recommend it.

The Scarlet Wench is a must read for those of you who love a good mystery.

I can't wait for the fourth in this series to come out. Yes, it's that good.

Katiedid

Lynn says

The Scarlet Wench is the third book in the Nora Tierney Series. I have been eagerly waiting for this book to be published after reading The Blue Virgin and The Green Remains. It is one of my favorite series.

Nora is an American who lives in England. She was a journalist but now writes children books. The series has been atmospheric. The first book took place in Oxford and the next two in Bowness-on-Windermere, Cumbria which is England's Lake District.

The book is a well written mystery. It held my interest and was a fast read for me. Some books are strong in

character development, location or plot/storyline. This book is strong in all three areas. I always enjoy the atmospheric locations in the Nora Tierney Series. I can visualize the scenery and atmosphere of the area without having traveled to it..

It has a strong and well developed cast of characters that one starts to care for as the series progresses. Nora is a new single mom after the accidental death of her fiancé and the recent birth of their baby. She has wonderful friends. Val Rogan who lives in Oxford and Simon Ramsey who is the illustrator of her children's book and co-owns Ramsey Lodge. This is where Nora is currently living and writing her book. DI Declan Barnes is the romantic interest from Oxford. Nora met him in the first book.

The storyline and plot was well developed. A traveling acting troupe arrives at Ramsey Lodge to put on a play. Harmful pranks and eventual murder ensue. There were a lot of suspects in the group. There, also, was the element of the Ramsey Lodge being shut off from the rest of the world due to flooding of roads and a bridge going out.

This book could be read as a stand alone but one would miss some of the backstory and character development. However, felt like one wouldn't be lost in knowing what was going on if The Scarlet Wench was the first book read in the series.

Now I have to wait for the next Nora Tierney book to be written and published. People who like British cozy mysteries should enjoy this book. I, also, think Elly Griffith readers might enjoy this book. It is a well written mystery series.

Andrea says

I am delighted to have been introduced to this series by the author Marni Graff. All I can say is bravo, bravo dear friend! I will be sure to read the first two books in the series and hope there will soon be a 4th one. This is a top drawer mystery with plenty of romance, intrigue, theatrical talent and so much more. It is surely not a wonder that the writer has been compared to Agatha Christie!

Ellis Vidler says

The Scarlet WenchThis is a good, solid mystery, reminiscent of the Golden Age. Graff takes the reader on a stroll through a Cumbrian country lodge, giving us a little time to become acquainted with the characters and setting. Nora Tierney, the main character and a resident of Ramsey Lodge, handles her new role of motherhood well and looks forward to spending time with the Oxford police detective who's coming for a vacation. Declan Barnes arrives, hoping for some relaxing downtime away from police work and a chance to be with Nora and get to know her baby.

A visiting theater troupe descends on the lodge to perform Noel Coward's *Blithe Spirit*. Each cast member is easily distinguishable; the author did an excellent job of showing their personalities and keeping my interest. I found it helpful to have some understanding of their eccentricities and backgrounds before the action began.

However, as in all good mysteries, nothing goes as planned, and mysterious "accidents" begin happening. Much to Declan's chagrin, Nora manages to poke her nose in everywhere there's a hint of intrigue. Ms. Graff is a talented writer and the prose flows smoothly. The plot has twists and surprises and skillful

misdirection. I recommend The Scarlet Wench to anyone who enjoys a good, traditional mystery. I thoroughly enjoyed it.

Jessica Wren-Wilson says

Since William Shakespeare first published Hamlet, the story-within-a-story literary device has always been interesting, and is one of the few remaining ones that has not been overused to the point of being clichéd. I read the third of the Nora Tierney series first. However, The Scarlet Wench does well as a standalone novel, and now, I want to go back and read Books 1 and 2. The title refers to both a local pub and a character in the play that the plot revolves around.

Single mother Nora Tierney is staying at the Ramsey Lodge, run by her friends Simon and his sister Kate, both to have a place to stay while she gets back on her feet and to help Simon run the lodge while his sister is on her honeymoon. The lodge is booked for a theatre group set to perform Blithe Spirits, and Nora soon learns that stage actors can be a prickly bunch. She is also happy to see that Declan, an attractive homicide detective she met in one of the previous series, is also staying at the lodge. As her romance with Declan heats up, a series of pranks aimed at some of the cast members (that mimic scenes from Blithe Spirits) turn more and more malicious and eventually escalates into the murder of one of the cast members. Furthermore, it seems that everyone in the cast had a motive for the murder. Horrified that a murder had taken place at the Ramsey Lodge and that she (and her infant son) are staying under the same roof as a killer, Nora begins her own investigation, much to Declan's consternation. He does, however, approve of her creative plan to identify the killer. When she does, Nora acts in the nick of time to save the lives of several people.

Meanwhile, Nora is anxious because she has been contacted by an attorney for the estate of her late fiancé Paul (her son's father), and has not yet informed Paul's parents that they have a grandchild.

The plot is highly suspenseful. It is a murder mystery without the blood and gore that goes into a typical crime thriller. It is evenly paced so that the reader can see the day-to-day interactions between the staff at the Ramsey Lodge, the almost comical bickering amongst the cast members, and (one of my favorite parts) Nora's bonding and caring for her son. The intensifying romance between Nora and Declan will also appeal to fans of romance. There is never a dull moment in this plot.

As for the characters in the theatre troupe, bunch of divas they are, but Ms. Graff makes some of the most difficult ones likeable by putting them in situations where their more favorable attributes come out (such as when Fiona volunteers to help in the kitchen). Overall, the character development in this book is fantastic. Highly recommended! (Note: I received a signed paperback copy from the author. A review was not a condition of the gift)

BookLoversLife says

Book 3 sees Nora once again involved in a murder mystery. This time the bodies are found in the lodge that Simon and his sister run and Nora lives in. After Simon was accused of murder in the last book, the lodge is suffering and Simon has had to invite a travelling Theater group to come and perform. The group arrive in a flurry but when some pranks and accidents escalate to murder, Nora finds herself having to go undercover, as such, in order to catch a killer.

So Nora is again, deep in the middle of trouble, but this time she also has her son to look after and this time it's in her home. She has to use every available advantage to help her this time, including Detective Declan Barnes whom is at the lodge on a hiking holiday.

I loved seeing Nora and Declan back together and this time involved! Those two work really well together and I loved seeing their relationship evolve. Then we have Simon and while he still has feelings for Nora, it's become more of friendship than anything and I was delighted to see him happy. We also get a bit of Val in this one too. It was so good to see all of them together again.

The mystery is, again, well written and developed. There is a load more suspects because of the group and you don't know for sure who is the culprit.

I love the feelings of these books. It reminds me of the old detective tv series that my parents used to watch. It's a simple murder mystery and an enjoyable series. I really hope we see more of these characters in the future.

What can I say about the narrator that I haven't said already. She still seems to take a breath at the wrong times but I think I'm finally getting used to it!! I didn't find it as annoying as I did the first 2. She has a great tone for Nora and has plenty for the rest of the characters and I can always tell who's talking, it's just the breaks in the sentence that she needs to get right! Also, there was still some glaring mistakes during the book. She stumbled badly at some stage and I heard a dog barking!! Little things like that make or break a narrator!

Jeannie and Louis Rigid says

Cumbria, England, U.K. What a simply delightful setting for any novel, however, the beauty in this novel is used to cloak a murderous heart at play. Ramsay Lodge has been hired to host a rendition of Noel Coward's play 'Blithe Spirit.' The play is being performed by a traveling theatre troupe.

For Nora Tierney, a author residing at the Lodge, the play brings back her college days and also the promise of romance as her love, Detective Inspector Declan Barnes, arrives to take a hiking holiday and renew their relationship.

What an assortment of cast members arrive, however, and the hostility among them is not hidden. The feeling of menace begins to weave throughout this setting and passions grow.

Evidence of danger appears in one of the guest bedrooms, then the stairs, then...well, let me say, Declan will be called off vacation to deal with unexpected, or were they/ Sinister goings on.

This book was a terrific read. I had read the first two years ago and wasn't aware the 3rd and now, to my delight, fourth novel has been published. I was able to pick up this novel and all the main characters, their personalities, quirks, and goals flooded back to my memory. I was greeting old friends. The murder mystery? Was superbly plotted and kept my interest going from page to page. Treat yourselves to a fine British cozy and police procedural mystery in one. Excellent reading!

Anna del C. Dye says

I had the chance to hear the third book of Nora Tierney Mystery series. Once again I was transported to England and the pretty sites there. The novel is written in classic English style which I enjoy a lot and I

actually understand it all. Usually when I watched a British comedy I only understand half of it, but I was able to follow along just fine. I found myself forgetting to do other things just to see what other clue is Nora going to find. The cast of characters is diverse and interesting. I like the different personalities and quirk of each one of them. It does have insinuation of sex but nothing risqué.

Ramsey Lodge, is the host of a traveling stage performers. The bunch of actors and actresses are a weird bunch and seems no to get alone at all. When pranks star happening everyone blames someone else and Nora's detective hat goes on. When one of the actresses is found murder during a dark stormy night, her friend Declan has to come out of his vacation at the lodge and take statement of all the people that expended the night there.

I like the slower pace of the story because it gives the reader more time to savor the drama and have a chance to immerse themselves in the mystery.

books are love says

We are six months after the Green room and dynamics have changed. Declan and Nora are now together, Simon and Nora are best friends and he is with Mayve, Kate and Ian are married and off to France and Nora's little boy is now in the picture.

To help keep Ramsey Lodge afloat, Simon has a theatre troupe in the lodge. This is my favorite so far because of the perky personalities and the troupe itself. They are so quirky and fun to listen chatter and yank each other's chains.

Nora has some more problems coming into play as the troupe practices their play and jabs at each other. Nora has her son's grandparents coming into her world and they don't know about him. She feels guilty about everything that happened when her son's father died. On top of this Declan is coming for a visit and she isn't sure where their relationship will go and how Simon will be about it although Simon seems to be happy with Mayve. Now let's add some issues with the troupe, strange happenings with the troupe happening such as the rabbit on the pillow, a violent rainstorm that when it ends leaves us with a murder of a troupe member. Now Declan needs to act as inspector and lover while trying to keep Nora in line even though she can't help not getting involved. Watching these two work together and navigate through their relationship was fun.

Grayson to me was the selfish attention hog that all this is about but not saying if that is how it turns out. Lots of secrets are revealed as they try to figure out who killed Jemma and why. We see jealousy, revenge desires, love unrequited, anger and the secrets wow the secrets will really have you mouth open. We get the twists and turns just like all the past mysteries and seeing Declan and Nora working on their relationship and seeing it grow. Simon is dealing with how to keep Ramsey Lodge some sense of normalcy and keeping the Lodge open and the aftereffects of the storm and trying to keep everything running smoothly.

I am loving the Simon Mayve story and watching the troupe dynamics. Another fun, twisty mystery that keeps you in the moment and in a game of clue as the secrets are revealed and the murderer is fleshed out and why. The narrator once again captures the feelings of the characters and the emotions of the moments perfectly.

Evgeny says

I need to mention I received this book from Goodreads giveaways in exchange for an **honest** review.

This is the third book of Nora Tierney mystery, an American living in Great Britain. She lives in Ramsey Lodge which belongs to her friend Simon Ramsey. The later has troubles with not enough income coming from the Lodge, so he invites a traveling theater group to stage a play in his place as a publicity stunt. Not surprisingly, the actors are a very colorful bunch with their personal friction between each other magnified by them trying to play their theatrical roles in real life. What started as fairly harmless pranks developed into some very serious incidents which finally culminated in a crime. Nora just could not stay away from the investigation.

I really like the settings of a classic English mystery which reminded me of such genre classics as Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers. The book even includes maps of the Lodge and immediate surroundings; it actually helps visualizing the place. The crime, then it finally happened was of a classic limited-number-of-suspects type which once again worked out great.

Now for not-so-good parts. It took way to long for the crime to finally happen (I keep calling this just a crime to avoid spoilers). One of the main reasons for this was a big romance subplot with all of the tropes of the genre. Nora - a single new mother whose husband recently dead (but that is fine as they were about to get a divorce) - has a lot of men falling for her head over heels; all of them are tall, dark, and handsome.

I have not read the first two books of the series, but in this one Nora comes up somewhat two-dimensional. She thinks she tries to help Simon with all the preparations, but she actually ends up leaving her baby with the people who actually do useful things (like the cook) to entertain him while she pursues her romantic interests. It was also mentioned in the book several times she is a good mother. Well, a good mother would never leave her baby alone in a room with a culprit on the loose on the premises - something Nora does with alarming regularity.

The identity of the culprit was obvious fairly early in the book - at least to me. Nora and her boyfriend Declan (who happens to be a cop) invented a completely harebrained explanation of the events and were trying to get the get the facts fit - which facts refused to do. For the life of mine I could not figure out what made them lose common sense during the investigation and go with the simplest and most obvious explanation; have not they heard about Occam's razor? Knowing the methods of modern police I can imagine Declan would be satisfied with the first suspect in sight no matter how unlikely he/she was, but what about Nora? What clouded her judgment? This brain-dead moment was the major reason for the book not to be rated higher.

My criticism probably came out somewhat harsh, but it is a reflection of my frustration with it book. It has such promising beginning and was good overall, but its shortcomings are impossible to overlook. **3.5 stars** is the final rating.

This review is a copy/paste of my BookLikes one: <http://gene.booklikes.com/post/962527...>

Gem BookEater says

The Scarlet Wench is the third of the modern day “cosy crime” mysteries starring Nora Tierney. Nora is a young American writer and single mother living in England. She has recently moved to the Lake District and is helping out at her illustrator and friend Simon Ramsey’s small hotel. When a traveling theatre troupe arrives to stage Noel Coward’s play “Blithe Spirit” a series of pranks raises nosy Nora’s suspicions. Particularly as they seem to mirror the murderous actions in the play.

But she’s not the only one trying to solve the mystery, the only lodge guest not in the cast: Detective Inspector Declan Barnes, gets dragged in too. Although he’s ostensibly there for a hiking trip he’s really there to see if the sparks he and Nora felt on there last meeting could be fanned into the flames of love.

I usually enjoy an occasional ‘cozy’ but I have to admit I only got half way through this before giving up on it. Although the setting is modern the book is written in traditional English mystery style with a cast of characters and room layouts. That’s fine with me but sadly this seemed to be extended to the characters, or more accurately caricatures. Nora seemed more like a woman from a cheap romance novel and none of the other characters were any better. The author jumped about from one perspective so as to tell us all their inner thoughts, but failed to endear them to me.

Graff won an award for Best British Cozy with the book that introduces Nora, THE BLUE Virgin, so maybe I’m missing something. Or maybe she’s resting on her laurels since then and just churning them out.

Definitely not my cup of tea!

NB This review first appeared on TheBookEaters Blog - www.thebookeaters.co.uk

Melissa says

Not only was this a delightful extension of the Nora series, I loved the cast of new characters brought to life from a classic play (Blithe Spirit by Noel Coward). This brought drama, humor and a bit of romance to every chapter.

Ramsay Lodge has become such a real place that I honestly think I’d be surprised to go to the Lake District and NOT find it ready to take my reservation! I honestly did not know until very late in the book whodunit and Graff paced the relationships very nicely between various players.
