



## The Unseeing

*Anna Mazzola*

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# The Unseeing

Anna Mazzola

**The Unseeing** Anna Mazzola

**Set in London in 1837, Anna Mazzola's THE UNSEEING is the story of Sarah Gale, a seamstress and mother, sentenced to hang for her role in the murder of Hannah Brown on the eve of her wedding. Perfect for any reader of Sarah Waters or Antonia Hodgson.**

*'With this intricately woven tale of trust, self-trust and deceit, Anna Mazzola brings a gritty realism to Victorian London. Beautifully written and cleverly plotted, this is a stunning debut, ranked amongst the best'* **MANDA SCOTT**

After Sarah petitions for mercy, Edmund Fleetwood is appointed to investigate and consider whether justice has been done. Idealistic, but struggling with his own demons, Edmund is determined to seek out the truth. Yet Sarah refuses to help him, neither lying nor adding anything to the evidence gathered in court. Edmund knows she's hiding something, but needs to discover just why she's maintaining her silence. For how can it be that someone would willingly go to their own death?

## The Unseeing Details

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Author : Anna Mazzola

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# From Reader Review The Unseeing for online ebook

## Meredith says

### 4.5 stars

*The Unseeing* is a finely crafted neo-Victorian mystery based on real life events. It drew me in and left me wanting more!

The gruesome nature of Hannah Brown's murder created a public uproar. Condemned to death for aiding and abetting, Sarah Gale is brought to Newgate prison to spend her final days before hanging. When a petition of mercy is filed, Edmund Fleetwood is hired to investigate whether or not the court made the correct recommendation in ordering Sarah to death.

While Edmund approaches the case objectively, he finds himself being drawn in more and more by Sarah, to the point where one wonders how much she is telling the truth and how much she is simply manipulating Edmund. It is clear that Sarah is hiding a secret and as the events that led to Hannah's death are gradually revealed, Sarah's fate is left in Edmund's hands.

*The Unseeing* is a well-written debut novel packed with tension and some surprising twists and turns. I highly recommend!

I received a copy of this book from NetGalley and the publisher in exchange for an honest review.

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## Debra says

### 4.5 stars

"Remember that, while women are often very good liars, they are generally less capable of independent and complex thought. It will therefore be necessary to subject her account to rigorous scrutiny- test her on each point; push her; catch her out."

This book is a work of fiction based on the real murder of Hannah Brown which became known as the "Edgware Road murder" due to where the first body part was found. Subsequent body parts were found in various locations and the writing on one of the bags led the investigators back to James Greenacre and Sarah Gale. Upon their arrest, Sarah Gale stated that she knew nothing of the murder and dismemberment of Hannah Brown.

I love books based on real events especially on historical events/crimes. The author did take some liberty with some characters - she describes which ones and why in her "Historical Note" The newspaper clippings used in this book were from the real case. Don't read the Historical Note until you finish this book!

I knew nothing of this case when I started this book and I think that is the best way to read this book. Go in not knowing the facts except for those given in the synopsis of this book. Set in 1837, Sarah Gale has been

sentenced to Hang for being an accomplice in the Murder of Hannah Brown. No one believed her when she stated that she did not know about the murder or the hiding of the body parts. In Mazzola's book, the reader is shown Sarah's plight as she is in a women's prison, her petition for mercy and her meetings with Edmond Fleetwood, her appointed attorney. The reader is shown the harsh conditions of the women's prison, the treatment received from the guards and imprisoned women's interactions with each other.

"Criminal Women, as a class, are found to be more uncivilised (his spelling) than the savage, more degraded than the slave, less true to all womanly instincts than the untutored squaw of a native American Indian tribe."  
- "Criminal Women" by M.E. Owen, Churchill Magazine 1866

I loved how the Author had me guessing the entire book as to Sarah's innocence or guilt, was she knowledgeable or was she a victim herself? In the book she really does not do much to help herself, she is mainly quiet. She does always maintain that she knew nothing. Her attorney struggles with whether Sarah Gale is protecting someone, is she telling the truth or is she to blame?

Plus, the viewpoints on women at the time are also on display in this book:

"No, indeed, she was convicted of something far worse. You see, once a woman has begun to descend the slippery slope of immorality, there is no limit as to what she is capable of. Falsum in uno, falsum in omnibus. Remember that Edmund. Once a woman has lost her sexual scruples then she will stop at nothing."

This book stops at nothing in bringing this case alive. I was sucked in from the very first sentence and desperately wanted to know the truth. This book is a mystery and I felt that I, along with Sarah Gale's attorney, was on a quest to determine Sarah's innocence or guilt. Although this book does deal with a brutal murder and dismemberment - these scenes are NOT shown whatsoever in this book. This book is not graphic in the blood and guts/gore sense. It is a mystery that deals with a real case and historical facts. This book shows how people are judged on appearances, on group mentality, and by those with hidden agendas. Investigators in the 1800's did not have the forensic tools that we have today, they had eye witness accounts, bias, and the forensics of that time to investigate their cases. One was not innocent until proven guilty in those days - they were guilty until proven innocent.

I found this book to be riveting, well-written and captivating. Was she innocent? Was she guilty? I went back and forth while reading this book with regards to her involvement or lack of involvement. I thought this book was extremely well done and loved the real newspaper clippings added to the book.

\*\*\*This book is an EDGAR Award Winner.

Thank you to Edelweiss and Sourcebooks Landmark who provided me with a copy of this book in exchange for an honest review.

Read more of my reviews at [www.openbookpost.com](http://www.openbookpost.com)

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**Emma says**

**3.5 stars**

Overall, it was the feeling of the novel that was the most appealing. Well, as much as the dank, fetid cells of

Newgate can be considered so. The sense of place is done well, supporting and enhancing the plot without overwhelming it. Even better were the quotes from contemporary sources which began each chapter and illuminated the thematic nature of the subsequent scenes. In many cases, they added another layer of meaning to the events through only a few lines. Cleverly done. They were also an excellent way of illustrating ways of thinking of the period, especially that of the female mind. What immoral creatures we all are.

What lets the novel down is the pacing and lack of any real character development save perhaps that of Edmund Fleetwood, the investigator. Mazzola clearly had few details with which to flesh out Sarah Gale and her equivocal nature is utilised as a means of making the reader unsure as to her guilt/innocence, but it results in a rather changeable main character whose reticence is irritatingly slow to disappear. At times portrayed as intelligent, even sly, at others uncertain and fearful, she offers little opportunity for reader sympathy. I didn't care whether she killed Hannah Brown or not, I just wanted to hear her spit out whatever it was she was hiding so we could all move forward. As a result of this ongoing fluctuation, the plot plodded then raced, it was entirely uneven and towards the end felt rather stretched, the revelations appearing as new information to keep the story going rather than building on evidence from the first parts of the novel. The parts didn't quite feel like they made a whole.

ARC via Netgalley.

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## **Mary Beth \*Traveling Sister\* says**

4.5 stars!

This is a historical crime page turner set in the Victorian time period. It is a work of fiction but based on a true murder case called The Edgeware Road Murder of 1837. It is set in London.

Sarah Gale is sentenced to hang as she was convicted of aiding and abetting, James Greenacre in the murder of Hannah Brown. Sarah was his mistress and lover.

During the trial Sarah has done nothing to protest her innocence and even changes her statement. Hannah Brown's body was found dismembered. Edmund Fleetwood is her attorney who is assigned to review Sarah's conviction and decide if the death penalty should apply. Sarah has a four year old son and he finds her life at stake. He feels she is very uncooperative and reluctant to open up to him. Edmund is sure Sarah is hiding something but what could she be hiding. He becomes very emotionally involved.

Anna Mazzola's debut novel sets the facts of the case within a web of secrets.

The book is suspenseful with a few twists. I loved the book straight from the beginning to the end. I do feel though that the author could have done a little bit better with the character development but other than that I felt the book was done outstandingly well.

I want to thank Netgalley, Anna Mazzola and the publisher for a copy of this book in exchange for an honest review.

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## Pat says

4 stars

Historical fiction book pertaining to the Edgeware Road Murder case. On Christmas Eve 1836, Hannah Brown was murdered and dismembered the day before her wedding. James Greenacre, Hannah Brown's fiancé, and his former mistress, Sarah Gale, are arrested and accused of the murder. This novel covers the trial of Sarah Gale, her incarceration in Newgate prison during Victorian times, and a further investigation into Sarah Gale's case as she petitions for mercy/clemency.

Edmund Fleetwood is the lawyer charged with further investigation into Sarah Gale's role in the murder, a charge Sarah denies knowing anything about. As Fleetwood digs deeper into the case, more questions begin and some of the answers will change Fleetwood's life dramatically.

A very good historical fiction novel as the murder case and main characters are real and the chapters begin with quotes from newspaper articles, parts of the trial transcripts, etc. The ending of the novel is also based on fact and Anna Mazzola provides an afterword letting readers know the outcomes of the main characters. The case was investigated for clemency but the character of Fleetwood is fiction. Anna Mazzola does an excellent job in making this novel a page-turner, especially with the setting of Victorian times, poverty, conditions at Newgate prison and being a woman with no civil rights.

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## Bandit says

Believing is unseeing. This is a semi fictional story based on a very real crime that apparently shook up the Victorian England, the delicate bunch that they were. Actually this takes place right around the time of Victoria's ascension to the throne. England is filthy, violent and brutal for anyone who hasn't got the funds to raise above the poverty levels. A young woman stands convicted of aiding and abetting in murder when an ambitious lawyer (or barrister, really) with much to prove to his domineering father takes up her case to try to prove her innocence and spare her life. Slowly, ever so slowly secrets rise up from the murky waters, emotions enter the scene, muddling the case, obscuring and obfuscating the truth. And whatever's found out is nothing comparing to what is left unseen. Willingly or otherwise. The reader is along for the ride, much like the lawyer, Edmund Fleetwood, relying much too much on trust, empathy, compassion (all those non legal things)...willfully blinding himself to reality. Of course, the readers have the benefit of perspective and distance, so it's easier to figure out the plot, yet this is still a very enjoyable read. Mazzola did a great job fictionizing this story, staying true to the facts, but infusing the bare knucleness of them with details, colors, sounds. She invents characters and motivations, it's really a very impressive dramatization. This is historical fiction at its finest and I was indeed very impressed. Not to mention this is a debut. Very auspicious one at that. Would have loved for it to be more mysterious, but it is what it is. For what a story like that can be, for an absolutely awesome spin on this prisoner/defender/guilty/not guilty Victorian mystery drama, check out Sarah Waters' Affinity. Something about Victorians and their repressions and secrets. Thanks Netgalley.

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## **Susan says**

This historical novel takes, as its basis, real events which took place in 1836 and 1837. It begins with the murder of Hannah Brown and the arrest, for the crime, of James Greenacre and Sarah Gale. When we first meet Sarah, she is in Newgate, charged with aiding and abetting the Edgware Road murder. Sarah has been convicted, found guilty and has been given the death penalty. Separated from her sister, Rosina, and young son, George, she has one chance of having the verdict overturned.

After the jury only took fifteen minutes to convict her, a petition has been sent to the Home Secretary, alleging she is innocent. Edmund Fleetwood, a struggling young lawyer, has been recommended by his father to look into the case and is given a few weeks to investigate and present his findings. However, from the first, Edmund is sure that Sarah is holding back important information. In the grim surroundings of Newgate, he attempts to get Sarah to open up about the events surrounding the crime. What evolves is a game of cat and mouse; during which Edmund reveals much about himself in order to try to convince Sarah to trust him. Why did she refuse to speak out at the trial and how can he help her, if she refuses to tell the truth?

I really enjoyed this debut novel and I hope that Edmund Fleetwood appears in future books. There is a hint at the end of this novel that he might and I would certainly enjoy reading more about him. I thought the author did a wonderful job of recreating the times and the limited opportunities that women like Sarah had. An excellent historical crime novel, with good characters and an interesting plot.

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## **Linda says**

Wisdom Eyes are said to see in all directions at the same time.

And someone saw what happened to Hannah Brown on that fateful night. A gruesome crime was committed on Christmas Eve in 1836 in the small home of Hannah's betrothed, James Greenacre. Hannah and James were to be married the following day. Hannah would never be able to slip on the fancy red wedding gown laid out for her to wear.

But a trail of uncertainty leads to both James and Sarah Gale who had lived with him prior to his involvement with Hannah. Both James and Sarah are arrested and taken to Newgate Prison in London. Although James swears that Sarah knew nothing about the murder of Hannah, the court sees otherwise.

Sarah anxiously writes a letter to the court for a Petition for Clemency even though the court has found her guilty. She has a four year old son and fears for him. Edmund Fleetwood, a criminal barrister, is assigned to her appeal. Edmund visits Sarah daily in prison hearing small segments of her story. He begs her to state the explicit truth in order to save herself from hanging in the gallows. Sarah guards her story and for some reason continually hesitates. What actually happened on that ill-fated night?

Anna Mazzola lays out a story that will make your toes curl. Please know that the crime is indeed gruesome and based on an actual murder of that time period. But she adds a superb fictional twist to the well-thought-

out details presented. Mazzola has a crafty way of keeping all the cards in play. It is a wondrous debut novel told in three parts with clever insets from the actual London Standard, excerpts from Demonstrations of Anatomy, nursery rhymes, and the like that tease at the beginning of all the chapters.

The Unseeing is filled with the driving energy of plundering towards the truth. And that truth lies behind whose eyes, indeed?

I received a copy of The Unseeing through NetGalley for an honest review. My thanks to Sourcebooks and to Anna Mazzola for the opportunity.

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## **Raven says**

Despite my patchy reading of historical crime fiction, I heard Anna Mazzola talk about her debut at this year's CrimeFest convention in Bristol, and was suitably intrigued by this fictionalisation of a true murder case from the Victorian period. The Edgeware Road Murder of 1837 which led to many a lurid story in the popular press, resulted in Sarah Gale being convicted of aiding and abetting James Greenacre in the murder of his fiancée Hannah Brown. Gale refused to give a full testimony, simply stating that she knew nothing. Frankly, having been bored witless by other non-fiction accounts of Victorian murder cases e.g. The Suspicions of Mr Whicher, hopes were high that the story of Sarah Gale would draw me in...

From the very beginning I found this an intelligent, detailed and emotionally engaging read. Mazzola's characterisation of Sarah in particular was incredibly powerful, showing a woman struggling with the secrets that she chooses not to expose in open court, and thus willingly forfeiting her right to a fair trial. As the plot unfolds, and Edmund Fleetwood investigates her case further to commute her sentence, it becomes abundantly clear why she has adopted such a closed and taciturn demeanour during her trial. Mazzola controls the pace of Fleetwood's uncovering of Sarah's motivations and actions beautifully, and the characterisation of both is perfectly drawn throughout. Sarah exudes a natural dignity that makes her appear rather closed down from natural emotion, and I liked the way that layers of her character are revealed gradually, with her fierce loyalty to both her sister Rosina, and her young son George, shaping her reluctance to reveal her suspected involvement in the murder of Hannah Brown. Mazzola neatly swings our own perception of her back and forth, with us constantly questioning her innocence or guilt in this heinous crime, and cleverly uses the, at times, witless Fleetwood to echo the doubts of the reader as he tries to unpick the mystery that is Sarah Gale, and in the process exposing some of his own family's unsavoury secrets...

Mazzola's depth of research is constantly in evidence, but never to the detriment of her ability for natural storytelling. You can positively taste, smell and feel the fear that inhabits Newgate prison, where Sarah is incarcerated. The utter despair or false bravado of her fellow prisoners is portrayed wonderfully, and the rundown and unhygienic confines of this disease-riddled gaol enfolds the reader in a foul miasma. A particular enjoyment of this book is the way that Mazzola incorporates the less politically correct attitudes exhibited in relation to women from the press, the courts and in wider society itself, neatly summed up by one quote from Fleetwood's father; "Remember that, while women are often very good liars, they are generally less capable of independent and complex thought" and that women are generally more susceptible to loose morality and scurrilous crime. The book is peppered with references to the unfairness of the legal



system when women are in the dock, and how the punishments meted out to them are more harsh in relation to the crimes committed, and more often than not leading to convictions on the flimsiest of evidence.

So all in all, a brilliantly researched, emotional, perceptive, and utterly engaging slice of Victorian crime fiction. It skilfully manipulates the reader's responses to the accused, Sarah Gale, by using the reactions of Edmund Fleetwood who is emotionally drawn to both her, and the seeming travesty of justice against her, as well as painting a visceral and realistic picture of the period itself. Highly recommended.

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## **Cathrine ?? says**

### **3.5★**

This immediately followed a mystery/crime novel that was much more interesting and compelling for me even though this one was based on, and included details from, an actual murder. The pacing was too slow making the almost 400 pages too long. I did not connect with the characters and even though body parts were found in various places, eventually I did not care how they came to be there or who was responsible. The historical aspects of the time and place came across well, some sections better than others. A not too hot, not too cold read.

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## **Karen Mace says**

I received a copy of this via BookBridgr in return for a fair and honest review.

This is one of those books that I happily lost sleep over as I was unable to read 'just one chapter more' before bed as I just wanted to know what was going to happen next!

Set in 1837 and beautifully captures the sights and sounds of London of the time, unpleasant times that they were! Sarah Gale is the main character and we are introduced to her as she arrives at Newgate prison, accused of being complicit in the murder of Hannah Brown. Sarah has remained almost silent as she was quizzed over the details of what happened on the night that her lover, James Greenacre, is alleged to have murdered his fiancée Hannah Brown. And when Edward Fleetwood is given the task of further investigating exactly what happened then you are drawn into a story of lies, abuse and you often find yourself wondering just who to trust.

This story is a work of fiction based on fact, and this adds so much depth to the storyline as it features newspaper snippets and court notes - there is even the link to the real trial transcript online which I will definitely be looking into further.

As the story unfolds you cannot help but be drawn in by the complex characters and bleakness of the situation that Sarah finds herself in and she begins to creep under the skin of Edward Fleetwood who seems perplexed as to why she is staying so silent on many details that could clear her name, and help her avoid the death penalty.

Highly recommended as a perfect piece of historical crime fiction! Astonishing debut!!

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## Christine says

If there is one book to shout about this year, it must be *The Unseeing*.

*The Unseeing* by debut author Anna Mazzola is quite simply a masterpiece in storytelling. It is based on a real life murder from 1837, that shocked Victorian Britain. This was the Edgware Road Murder of 1837. Mazzola has used dramatic license to bring this story to life.

It is 1837 and Queen Victoria is ascending to the throne. The papers are full of the death of Hannah Brown, a case that has disgusted and shaken the nation. Hannah Brown has been found mutilated. Her body cut up and disposed of across the capital, in a gruesome and brutal manner. James Greenacre has been accused of murdering Hannah, together with his lover, Sarah Gale. Greenacre and Gale have been given the death sentence. We meet Sarah Gale, as she is left to await the results of her appeal for mercy. She is stuck in a damp, squalid cell at Newgate prison. To make matters worse, Sarah Gale has said very little at the trial or to explain what took place. She has been judged accordingly, especially as a fallen woman. Fallen women are capable of anything, apparently.

The story follows Gale, as she meets lawyer, Edmund Fleetwood. Fleetwood has charged with looking into this high profile murder by the Home Secretary and reinvestigating what took place. He interviews Sarah Gale, views the evidence and tries to piece together the circumstances behind the death of Hannah Brown. Is Gale guilty? Is she just the victim of James Greenacre, her sometime common law husband? Will Gale finally spill her secrets?

The beauty of *The Unseeing* is in the exquisite writing. Mazzola brings Victorian Britain to life; with its poverty, its brutal criminal justice system and the bleak choices for women. No one can read this book without being profoundly moved and fascinated. This is a dark tale, intelligently and creatively told. At its heart, a terrible event and a woman waiting to hear whether she will be publicly hung. England abolished the death penalty back in 1965. 1837 was a time, when watching the hanging of a celebrity murderer was a kind of perverse entertainment.

Do not miss *The Unseeing*! It is perfection in a historical crime novel. You will reluctantly return to the present day, on the last page. You will find yourself Googling the 1837 Edgware Road murder, checking out the recorded courtroom transcripts and reflecting on the death penalty.

Highly recommended to all!

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## Dem says

**A gripping Murder Mystery wonderfully vivid, dark and disturbing and based on true events.**

image:

This is one of those novels that had me reading way past my bed time and sneaking off for a half hour read when I should have been doing other things but I just couldn't put this stunning debut novel down as it is extremely well written and relates a wonderful sense of time and place.

Based on actual events in 1837 Sarah Gale a Seamstress has been sentenced to hang for her role in the murder of Hannah Brown on the eve of her wedding. Much of the Novel is set in Newgate which was one of the most notorious prisons in England and the author really convinces the reader of the hell the prisoners endured during their time there. The murder of Hannah Brown caused a sensation at the time and Anna Mazzola creates a wonderful and convincing historical fiction story around the events of the time. Great characters and plot make this such a compelling read and I she had me captivated with her wonderful storytelling.

The author includes an Historical Note at the end of her novel where she explains that *The Unseeing* is a work of fiction, based on fact. All of the newspaper extracts used in the *Unseeing* are real, as are many of the details of the crime itself and the subsequent investigation and trial. She also explained that she has twisted the truth in order to make a better story and this worked extremely well in the story.

I was amazed to learn that this was Mazzola debut novel and look forward to further books by this author. A gripping murder story that many readers of historical fiction will really enjoy.

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### **Diane S ? says**

1837, during the course of this book, the Victorian age will be ushered in, and a young woman and mother would be sentenced to hang. When body parts of a murdered woman are found in various areas, a Christmas Eve murder would be uncovered. The body traced back to James Greenacre, his live in mistress, Sarah deemed culpable and sentenced to Newgate to await her execution date. But was she guilty. She refuses to say much of anything, claiming not to know what happened. Edmund, a young barrister is charged with uncovering her story, a charge which will uncover many secrets and have a profound effect on his own life.

Darkly atmospheric, richly described, this story based on a real life case, quickly drew me in and kept me turning the pages wanting to uncover the heart of this mystery. Using actual newspaper headlines from the time, court transcripts, the author add a few characters of her own invention to enrich and define this addictive story. The descriptions of the treatment and conditions of Bedlam were appalling. Justice back then was not exactly fitting to the crime, much, much, harsher than today. Our legal system has come a long way, thank goodness.

Reminds me a little of the atmosphere in *Burial rites*, another book about a convicted murderess. An debut novel by a very capable author.

ARC from Netgalley.

Release date, February 7th by Sourcebooks Landmark.

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### **Book of Secrets says**

3.5 Stars → Ripped from the headlines of 1837! Based on the infamous Edgware Road Murder and the trial that followed in London, *THE UNSEEING* blends facts and fiction to bring to life this disturbing historical mystery.

Who killed Hannah Brown and why? Sarah Gale, poor seamstress and single mother of a small boy, sits in

dismal Newgate Prison, waiting to hang for her part in the grizzly murder. But was Sarah unfairly convicted? Lawyer Edmund Fleetwood is sent to investigate. Edmund suspects she is not telling the whole truth about Hannah's murder, which makes his job of saving her from the gallows very difficult.

This book was well researched and also gave readers an imaginative spin on the Edgware Road Murder. The author did a fantastic job conveying what life was like around the eve of the Victorian Era. It was difficult, to say the least, especially for a poor woman like Sarah. The pacing was slow in spots, and I was kind of annoyed that Sarah kept her secret from Edmund for so long. Clearly, he could be trusted, and Sarah had a child to consider too. I liked how the author had the crime and punishment play out in the end. It was fitting with the the actual events that took place.

Audiobook • 11 hrs, 26 mins • Liz Pearce, Narrator

I enjoyed Liz Pearce's narration very much! There were several different characters from different classes, and her many accents were spot on and entertaining. I especially liked her voice for the awful prison guard Miss Sowerton. Her character was just as horrible as Newgate Prison itself!

Disclosure: I received a copy of this audiobook from the publisher in exchange for an honest review.

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