



A Flaw in the Blood

Stephanie Barron

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The acclaimed author of the bestselling Jane Austen mysteries brings rich historical immediacy to an enthralling new suspense novel centered around Queen Victoria's troubled court...and a secret so dangerous, it could topple thrones.

Windsor Castle, 1861. For the second time in over twenty years, Irish barrister Patrick Fitzgerald has been summoned by the Queen. The first time, he'd been a zealous young legal clerk, investigating what appeared to be a murderous conspiracy against her. Now he is a distinguished gentleman at the top of his profession. And the Queen is a woman in the grip of fear. For on this chilly night, her beloved husband, Prince Albert, lies dying.

With her future clouded by grief, Fitzgerald can't help but notice the Queen is curiously preoccupied with the past. Yet why, and how he can help, is unclear. His bewilderment deepens when the royal coach is violently overturned, nearly killing him and his brilliant young ward, Dr. Georgiana Armistead, niece of the late Dr. Snow, a famed physician who'd attended none other than Her Majesty.

Fitzgerald is sure of one thing: the Queen's carriage was not attacked at random—it was a carefully chosen target. But was it because *he* rode in it? Fitzgerald won't risk dying in order to find out. He'll leave London and take Georgiana with him—if they can get out alive. For soon the pair find themselves hunted. Little do they know they each carry within their past hidden clues to a devastating royal secret...one they must untangle if they are to survive.

From the streets of London to the lush hills of Cannes, from the slums of St. Giles to the gilded halls of Windsor Castle, **A Flaw in the Blood** delivers a fascinating tale of pursuit, and the artful blend of period detail and electrifying intrigue that only the remarkable Stephanie Barron can devise.

From the Hardcover edition.

A Flaw in the Blood Details

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From Reader Review A Flaw in the Blood for online ebook

Lucy says

I haven't read much of Stephanie Barron's work, but can say that of the few Jane Austen mysteries I've read, I've enjoyed her mixture of mystery, suspense and historical detail. A Flaw In The Blood has all three of the above ingredients without Jane Austen being the sleuth.

I always feel like such a snob when a book I enjoyed reading, and finished quickly, gets a poor review. It's as if I'm denying my own entertaining experience. While this was a definite page turner, mostly due to the romantic tension between Georgiana Armistead, a controversial female physician, and Patrick Fitzgerald, an Irish attorney who is being hunted by Queen Victoria's henchman, Wolfgang von Stuhlen, for reasons unknown.

Georgie, as she is called by Patrick, is past the age of needing a guardian, but Fitzgerald considers her safety his responsibility. When Queen Victoria's husband, Prince Albert, dies, a trail of destruction and murder that points to von Stuhlen indicates that both Georgiana and Patrick have become his targets. They flee to Europe and there, begin to unravel the reason why von Stuhlen and Queen Victoria might want them both eliminated.

The chase and suspense might make the book exciting to read, but, unfortunately, the plot and motive explaining it all is quite disappointing - silly even. von Stuhlen is practically a caricature of the classic bad guy (he even has an eye patch!) and Victoria is portrayed as a narcissistic queen prone to hysterics, which may or may not be true. Barron's attempt at including actual history, and unfortunately a documented genetic mystery, doesn't work. She tried to do too much with what should have been a light-weight Victorian mystery - a formula she has already proven can be successful. While I can't fault her for attempting to break away from a series, I hope she returns to the Jane Austen mysteries she writes so well.

Lady Knight says

I had very high hopes for this one. A historical mystery about hemophilia (I probably spelt that wrong...) and how it came to be evident in Queen Victoria and Prince Albert's children sounded intriguing, but Stephanie Barron made the subject fall flat. I usually take two or three days to read a novel, this one took me close to a week and a half. Too, I really wasn't motivated to overly care about any of the characters. Victoria makes you want to slap her, Fitzgerald you want to throw a bucket of water at, and you just want to shake Georgie until she opens her eyes! Add to that the weird juxtaposition of "Victorian prudishness" shown by Fitzgerald with the incredibly explicit explanations of arousal given by Victoria, and you have a book that is boring and startling in one! Not a favorite, and one I won't be re-reading.

Christine says

It hurts my heart to give this book one star, but there was simply no avoiding it. I have been singing the praises of Ms. Barron's Austen mysteries for ages and will continue to do so, but this book was a

monumental disappointment. Every plot point somehow managed to be either a trope or annoyingly absurd. I had very high hopes when I began as I wanted to see how Ms. Barron used her myriad talents in a new setting (Victorian, which I love) and was left wishing I had not gone down this road. I was intrigued at the start, though I should have seen warnings early on (Miss/Dr Armistead is the sort of character I loathe because all we hear about is how undeniably beautiful and irresistible she is, while at the same time being unlike any other woman of her era), and there was even a small bit where I enjoyed it (there are some very *Jane Eyre* moments), but once I got deep into the book I knew I was going to ultimately be incredibly upset, and sadly I was. It is back to the Austen mysteries for me, because those are far superior.

And, just for the record, there appears to be a rather massive error in the blurb on the back cover. It states that the protagonist, Patrick Fitzgerald, "...helped defend Her Majesty from a would-be assassin..." when in the very first chapter (and repeatedly throughout) we are told that in fact Fitzgerald did not do so, but actually *defended the would-be assassin* which is the antithesis of what the back cover asserts.

Cathy Cole says

First Line: When the agony of the state dinner was over and his wife was preoccupied with the other women, he ceased to talk quite so feverishly before the crowd of people who'd come to the Rosenau to see them.

As Prince Albert lies dying in Windsor Castle, his wife, Queen Victoria, summons barrister Patrick Fitzgerald, who helped defend the Queen against an assassination attempt twenty years before. Victoria makes no effort to hide her contempt for the Irishman, especially when he refuses her demand. Within hours he and his ward are almost killed in a carriage accident, his chambers at the Inns of Court are ransacked, and a girl is dead. It takes no great stretch of Fitzgerald's imagination to think that all this is somehow connected to his command appearance at Windsor Castle. What will strain his credulity is why it's all connected.

I had the pleasure of meeting Stephanie Barron earlier this year, and she mentioned this book. She loves to find small historical nuggets of information that just don't add up and then create a story that incorporates them. That's what she's done-- very elegantly-- in *A Flaw in the Blood*.

What little historical nuggets did she come across? It is widely believed that Prince Albert died of typhoid due to the bad drains at Windsor Castle. The truth is that he did not. So... what killed him? It's also well known that Victoria passed hemophilia along to her children-- but what geneticists and genealogists want to know is how did she come to be a carrier of the disease in the first place? These are the historical facts upon which Barron based her novel.

Barron's story paints quite a different portrait of Victoria than the one we're used to, and it's a delicious portrait indeed. Here is a woman of passions and appetites, a woman who thinks nothing of showing contempt for her own children, a woman who will stop at nothing to keep her secrets, a woman who is more like her hated mother than she'd ever admit. Part of the novel is told by Victoria through entries in her secret diary. Much of what she tells of herself fits historical record very closely, but Barron has added that delicious twist of evil that made me smile. (Although I doubt that Victoria herself would be amused.)

Patrick Fitzgerald and his ward, Dr. Georgiana Armistead, tell their part of the story as does Count Wolfgang von Stülen, a ruthless German who's chasing the pair. These multiple viewpoints mean that the action hops around from place to place, and although I didn't find it confusing, I did find that those three characters weren't as finely drawn as Victoria.

There were a couple of other points that didn't sit well with me: Prince Albert consulting Armistead (a woman!) about disease and sewage, and a crucial character in the plot being both a hemophiliac and a military officer, but on the whole, I loved the fiction that Barron wove around the facts. If you don't like fact and fiction blended in this manner, and if you don't like seeing royalty portrayed in a less than flattering light, I would suggest that you stay miles away from this book. However, if you do like the occasional well written and imagined blend of fact and fantasy, by all means get a copy of *A Flaw in the Blood* and read it. If, like me, you want to know more after you turn the last page, Barron has supplied the titles of several non-fiction books to read.

Melanie says

Because I have loved all of Stephanie Barron's Jane Austen mysteries, I was eager to pick up this novel set in the Victorian era. The story was good, as was the mystery, but the characters were not nearly as engaging as Jane, the Austen family, and the usual cast of assorted characters. (Patrick Fitzgerald is no Harold Trowbridge.)

I was disappointed in comparison to her other books, but as a stand alone novel, I enjoyed it.

Benjamin Thomas says

This novel was a bit of a surprise for me. I've read Stephanie Barron before and I always have the same experience: the novels start out a bit slow and I have a difficult time getting into them. This, I feel, is partly due to the style of the narrative, a little more "literary" than I usually read. But then, I keep at it and the plot starts to develop and the characters start to come to life and by the end, I sit back and feel the need to take some time to reflect on what I've just read. The same thing happened with this novel.

There are two levels of mystery here. The story takes place in 1861, during the early years of Queen Victoria's reign. The street level mystery revolves around a series of deaths, potentially murders that seem to be tied to the Irish barrister, Patrick Fitzgerald, whom Queen Victoria has summoned to deal with the after effects of the death of her consort, Prince Albert. All paths seem to lead to Fitzgerald in one way or another. At the same time, a much larger mystery, grander in scope, is occurring. This involves the Queen herself and the genetic flaw of hemophilia she passed to three of her children. This leads to questions on how the flaw has genetically transferred from one generation to another and how she herself is involved with its transmission...and ultimately to major questions on her parentage and right to rule.

Most chapters are told from Fitzgerald's point of view but we do have quite a few from Victoria's herself. There are quite a few characters sprinkled throughout and I found it confusing from time to time, trying to keep them all sorted. The ending really saved the book for me (5 stars there) but my struggles through the first three quarters will not permit me to grant more than three and a half stars for the whole.

Victoria says

I enjoyed the mystery of this story very much. It was wonderfully drawn out. What I wasn't a fan of was the type of violence in this story (a bit too graphic for my taste), and the relationship between Fitzgerald and Georgiana. Don't put a romance in if it's almost like everyone is confused about what you mean to each other. I can't even call it a romance really.

Ann McReynolds says

Though I own and have read all the Jane Austen series by Stephanie Barron, as well as her spy stories written as Francine Matthews, this little book I consider her finest. With the same attention she brings to each of her works, Matthews creates the familiar yet secret world of England's most famous and long-lived Empress. Victoria becomes, through Matthews' skill as a story teller, a completely believable and passionate woman, as do the events which follow the secrets Victoria is determined to hide.

Sarah Collier says

The implications in this work of fiction angered and disgusted me. I'm so disappointed in this author whom I've previously enjoyed reading and whom I assumed had a love and respect for British history. It seems her purpose here was to defame the memory of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert and she did so ruthlessly.

Don't get me wrong, everything I've ever heard or read about Queen Victoria does not cast her in a good light. She seemed to be a self-centered, controlling woman and didn't appear to be very sentimental or compassionate toward her children. However, an older English friend of mine says differently and, being how it's her actual history in question, I try to give her the benefit of the doubt.

****Spoilers ahead****

The idea that Victoria being an illegitimate child offers the best reason for her son's hemophilia is a 19th century rumor that has long been dispelled by those who have thought it through logically and scientifically. A quote from Wikipedia states:

"Although an individual's haemophilia can usually be traced in the ancestry, in about 30% of cases there is no family history of the disorder, and the condition is speculated to be the result of spontaneous mutation in an ancestor.[2] Victoria's appears to have been a spontaneous or de novo mutation and she is usually considered the source of the disease in modern cases of haemophilia among her descendants. Queen Victoria's father, Prince Edward, Duke of Kent, was not a haemophiliac, and the probability of her mother having had a lover who suffered from haemophilia is minuscule given the low life expectancy of 19th-century haemophiliacs. Her mother, Victoria, Duchess of Kent, was not known to have a family history of the disease, although it is possible that she was a carrier but among her children only Victoria received the mutated copy. The rate of spontaneous mutation is known to increase with paternal age, and Victoria's father was 51 at her birth."

Furthermore, to suggest that Albert was suicidal is preposterous. There's nothing in history to legitimately suggest this, and the author has skewed history in an even more disgusting way by further "revealing" whom was actually (fictionally) to blame for his death. I just couldn't believe it when I read this one implicating line: "I had to put him down like a sick dog."

I'm all for a great historical mystery but to besmirch the names of respected people from history is low. How much greater it would have been to write a story line in which these characters shine brighter than history records. That would have been a story worth reading.

Robert says

I own all 13 of the "Jane &" novels published to date and have thoroughly enjoyed every one. This book, however, was a big disappointment. To take a trivial example, an Irish character keeps saying "look you". I know a lot of Irish people, but I've never heard that - it is more associated with the Welsh, although mainly music hall Welsh or perhaps Shakespeare - I've never heard it from a real Welshman either.

As for the plot, unlike the Jane stories, this is totally unbelievable. True, Albert's death is unlikely to have been caused by typhoid. I believe modern thinking leans towards a cancer, perhaps bowel cancer. Also, as far as I can make out, haemophilia usually begins spontaneously - often coming from an elderly father, which certainly fits Victoria's case. I also felt uncomfortable with the way the fugitives sold everything they had including their clothes, but were then able to buy new ones whilst always having enough for inns and trains.

Alethea says

I am a huge fan of Barron's JANE AUSTEN mystery series, and, consequently, I was very excited to see her first foray into non-JA historical thriller fiction had come out. Sadly, though, I found this novel to be lacking in a number of ways. It took longer than usual for me to get into the story. When I did, I found bits of it far-fetched and wandering. Ultimately, though I appreciate the effort, I feel like Barron went for a huge story with a grand feel and scope, which falls flat for lack of plausibility. Georgiana Armistead was a strong female character and enjoyable to follow, but, again, the overall reach of the story takes away from her significance.

Robin says

****spoiler alert****

Pretty well-written, and the characters are not flat. But the tone of the mystery feels too similar to The Da Vinci Code to thoroughly enjoy. I say this because, in both books, by the end solving the mystery just doesn't matter. After 150 years, it is now immaterial whether or not Queen Victoria was perhaps illegitimate and thereby *not* the rightful heir to the throne of England.

Which -- okay, this is just fiction; we're just having fun; and we're only reading a bunch of what-ifs.

But.

Starting at page 270, the plot-holes and out-of character actions in this book begin to pile up. For instance, after being chased over Central Europe in a very few weeks, after being kidnapped and almost raped, would Dr. Georgiana Armistead arrive to a hiding place back in London and just send a maid to her residence for some clothes? Would Davey, a cowering guttersnipe, who is bodily hauled into a court of law to give evidence, just stand up and willingly shout it out? Would the Lady Maude Fitzgerald, said to be dying of syphilis and slow opium poisoning, who 100 or some odd pages earlier was described as blind and almost wholly mad -- would she be able to read, and understand a letter, then acquire a gun, dress herself and make her way across London to shoot and kill Count vonStuhlen?

And -- what I found most unbelievable of all -- would Queen Victoria, the model of Grieving Widows everywhere, do away with, actually kill her Beloved husband Prince Albert?

I dunno

The ending just felt too coincidental, like it wasn't set it up well, as if the author tweaked the story just once too often.

I admit, the plot does include some really cool ideas, and in her Jane Austen Mysteries, Stephanie Barron usually does a decent job in setting aside the truth of history for a work of fiction, but this time I just don't think it works.

Brenda Hill says

Liked it, but prefer the Jane Austen series

I really like most of Stephanie Barron's (aka Francine Mathews) books, especially the Jane Austen series. I liked the story line of this book, but the writing in first person (and consequently changing the first person each chapter) made it confusing. If each chapter had a heading stating who was speaking, it would have been helpful. Sometimes I would have to read a page or more before I could make out who was supposed to be relaying that part of the story. I have not noticed this in any of the author's other works, so I found it puzzling and also annoying.

I did enjoy the story and will continue to read more from this author.

Emma says

This is by the author of the Jane Austen mysteries, although entirely different. Not at all the light romp through London society that we get in Pink or Tasha Alexander. (Monica I don't think you would like it!) It is very DARK and deals with a much less pleasant side of the Victorian age. It is interesting, dealing with the hemophilia that Queen Victoria passed to three of her children, with the Queen as narrator at places. The writing and structure are masterful, however. It is a great example of "Trust the reader" in that she jumps from narrator to narrator with no warning. It works though. I also thought her method of disposing of the bad guy was a work of genius. Good, just dark and depressing.

Niki says

I would have preferred to be able to give it 3.5 - it's a great suspense, and by god, do I hate royalty !
