



The Sirens of Surrentum

Caroline Lawrence

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It's June A.D. 80. Everyone is thinking about love at the lavish Villa Limona, where friends Flavia, Jonathan, Lupus, and Nubia have come to visit for the summer. But their host suspects that there's a poisoner among the houseguests, and the friends are asked to investigate. Faced with many distractions, including the arrival of Flavia's betrothed, can they set a trap to catch the culprit?

The Sirens of Surrentum Details

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Guo says

The Roman Mysteries was one of my favourite book series when I was young. I consider this book to have done the best job depicting the emotional development of protagonist Flavia Gemina, as well as linking it with romance, mythology, history and poison in Roman times. In a nutshell, our four friends lodges at Felix's house, where he and daughter Pulchra (we met them in Pirates of Pompeii) wants them to investigate who is trying to poison her mother. Three bachelors and three widows were also lodging in the house at the same time, and the poisoner was thought to be one amongst them. It is commendable that the author manages to mix together so many different topics in one short book. As can be seen, these are a lot of topics to put together. Religion, philosophies and fashion were also touched upon.

Flavia's emotional development forms a significant part of the book, as she initially has a crush on an older man and dislikes the boy she was betrothed to upon meeting him and they both find faults with each other. Gradually as the story unfolds, we see her realizing the faults of the man she had the crush on, and coming to like her husband-to-be more. The older man's behaviour also contrasts to what he claims to believe - his daughter tells Flavia that he believes one should free oneself from passion... During the course of the book, she also has several conversations with other women who present their perspectives on what matters in marriage. Pulchra presents pretty much the picture one expects in ancient Rome – wealth and status are of greater importance than how much love couples feel towards each other. A female guest reveals a dark story of how she fell in love at Flavia's age only to be abused by her lover. Pulchra's mother, who has been through more than one marriage, contends that one has to strike a balance between passion and boringness – too much of the former will make you suffer in the long run. As the book progresses we see Flavia not only piecing together the puzzle of the poisoning, but also that of what counts as a wholesome relationship.

The book also contains a lot of sex (by children's book standards), especially through one particular character who seems to very much enjoy attention from the ladies, and does several things someone like him should definitely not be doing... There were a few scenes in which these not appropriate things occurs. Being a children's book, therefore, this book is probably not suited towards the younger end of that spectrum. (The author's website suggests a reading age of 10+.)

One part of the book I did not get was when Nubia got scared during the beach banquet, when the men were riding their horses through a bonfire. If I understood correctly, she suddenly thought she was a horse being made to run through the flames...and then she – or the horse – resisted, and the rider fell and broke his rib? There was also a pretty hilarious line from her where she repeats what Suetonius says about a certain person being ithyphallic and should be tied to the mast of his own ship...

Overall, the reader learns several facts and anecdotes from ancient Rome and Flavia leaves Surrentum sadder and wiser than she was when she came.

Leah says

I found this one a bit too ridiculous. The whole romance part was childish, making me dislike Flavia's character again. Plus all the suicide attempts were stupid, with people over-reacting. Overall, it just felt too dramatic.

I loved the pre-tense of the children finding out the murderer who was trying to poison Pulchra's mother, and the mystery surrounding that was indeed exciting.

Yet, the whole thing was a bit childish. Her mother trying to poison herself for not feeling loved by her husband, their daughter trying to drown herself because of her parents relationship and Flavia running away from the romantic moment she's been dreaming about, because she's nervous. The whole romance stuff was childish, and I know Flavia is meant to be younger, but the way he reacts is more like a child than a young teen who is fairly mature for her age.

On to number 12...

Δ?μαρχος Τρελο?πολης says

I'm reading this book and I hate it even more as I'm reading. First of all, Flavia, an 11 year old girl, who is assigned to marry a boy at her age loves her friend's father, Felix, who is 45 years old and is already married. Meanwhile, Felix is flirting with some guests and his wife's female slaves. At one point, Felix gives one of his female slaves a cake. She bites some of the cake, licks her lips SLOWLY and then gives it back to Felix and then Felix gives the same cake TO HIS WIFE!!! Also, the book is referred to love more than mystery although the title of the series is "The Roman Mysteries". There is also one scene where the characters are discussing about an event in which Nero's mother wanted to marry Nero and there is another scene in which boys go to spy on naked women. Kids could be influenced by all these and grow up differently than they should. I say that because I'm a thirteen year old kid too.

P.S: Parents and teachers, don't give this to kids.

sabisteb aka callisto says

Dieses Buch behandelt ein Thema, das man bei einem Kinderbuch nicht erwarten würde.

Flavia verbringt mit ihren Freunden den Sommer in der Villa Limona von Publius Pollius Felix, in welchen sie immer noch verliebt ist. Pulchra hat sie gebeten herauszufinden, wer versucht ihre Mutter zu vergiften. Schon bald müssen die Kinder lernen, wie dekadent und verdorben das Leben in der Villa Limona ist.

Publius Pollius Felix ist hinter allem her, was eine Palla trägt, er schlafst mit fast jedem weiblichen Gast und hat ein Kind mit so ziemlich jeder (hübschen) weiblichen Sklavin. Flavia erwischt ihn sogar ein Mal beim Beischlaf mit einer der Gäste im Eiskeller. Das Alter der Sklavinnen ist Felix ergal, er schwängert auch die 14 jährige Parthenope und letztendlich versucht er sogar Flavia (11 Jahre alt) zu verführen. Heutzutage würde man ihn wohl als Kinderschänder bezeichnen.

Lupus und Jonathan fangen an zu pubertieren. Jonathan macht seine ersten Erfahrungen im Küssen mit Pulchra und er findet es toll.

Man lernt viel über Nero und wie er versucht hat seine Mutter umzubringen.

Des weiteren lernt man, dass die Römer sich nicht nur die Handgelenke aufschnitten, wenn sie sich umbrachten, sondern auch in den Kniekehlen die Adern durchtrennten und man lernt auch vieles natürlich vorkommende, sehr tödliche Gifte.

Insgesamt viele Themen, die man in einem Kinderbuch nicht unbedingt erwarten würde. Teils erschien mir das Buch eher wie ein Buch für Erwachsene mit Kindern als Protagonisten.

Auch in diesem Band entwickeln sich die Protagonisten weiter und es kann in Spannung und Qualität mit seinen Vorgängern absolut mithalten. Definitiv kein Einsteigerbuch in diese Serie.

Zeitpunkt der Geschichte:

ca. 15. - 26 Juni 80 n. Chr., ca. 1 Monat nach Band 10

ChroniclesofTania says

This book is mistitled. It should have been 'Satyr of Surrentum' or 'Lecher of Surrentum' or 'Nymphomaniac of Surrentum' since it's about a man who sleeps with most women in Naples and is so respected and above the law that no one can say or do anything (least of all the women). An abuse of power over women leads Flavia, the lead character to reassess that her infatuation is not a nice man. The pedophile fascination is disturbing. But I guess this is a good way of teaching appropriate boundaries to children and that they can say 'no' to adults. This book has adult themes and it's interesting to see what passes as childrens literature these days. Makes the childrens books in my time seem so innocent and tame!

Lori says

I might give this book one and a half stars - really hated most of it until the very end. Last two scrolls finally had a good message. I would not recommend this one, but we may read the next couple (because we already have them) and see if the series ever goes back to being as good as the first several books.

Paula says

This book clarified the difference between Epicureans and Stoics in a dramatic and memorable way.

I felt a great deal of the content was much too adult for a middle grade book.

Erin says

What a fun book! Historical fiction plus a mystery...add in a coming-of-age story, and you've got a winner in my eyes. The Sirens of Surrentum also has enough intrigue and allusions to steamy romance (a number of couples participate in offstage "very kissing") that my seventh graders are interested in reading it (though the main characters are only 11 or 12, and my students' ages range between 12 and 15). In ancient Greece, girls were marriageable at 12, and their fathers usually strategically arranged the match for monetary reasons or influential gain, with no consideration of their daughters' love lives. The history lessons that are woven into this tale provide a great first introduction to the social norms and customs of this time period, and I think it is important for students in grades 5-8 to envision what it might have been like to be growing up in ancient Greece. I especially loved the descriptions of the different lifestyle philosophies (the beliefs of the Stoics and the Epicureans) and the hints at what was going on in the Middle East, with the rise of Christianity out of Judaism. While I would consider Lawrence's writing a little heavy-handed on the visual descriptions (for example, you will always know what color robe everyone is wearing), I still look forward to reading more of

The Roman Mysteries, and sharing them with my students.

Vicki Cline says

Back in Ostia, Flavia receives a letter from her friend Pulchra, of the Villa Limona, where they all stayed after the eruption of Vesuvius. Pulchra thinks her mother is being poisoned and begs Flavia and the others to find out who is doing it. At the villa, Flavia meets Tranquillus, the boy to whom her father intends to betroth her. A surprising ending, in more ways than one.

Matilda Rose says

In the Bay of Naples in the summer, Flavia and her friends visit their rich friend Pulchra at the luxurious Villa Limona. Beneath all the loveliness of the situation, a poisoner lies hidden amongst the guests, attempting murder on Pulchra's mother, Polla.

With help from Tranquillus, Flavia's future husband, and Pulchra, Flavia and her friends discover that no one is trying to poison Polla - apart from..

..Polla.

As confusing as it sounds, Flavia, Jonathan, Nubia, Lupus, Tranquillus and Pulchra solve the mystery. During the book, Flavia learns Miriam is to have a baby soon (at 14 year old(!)). She also learns that even though she is now eleven and legally she can marry in a year, it's not time for love and romance with Tranquillus. He delivers yucky eel-like kisses, and Flavia doesn't like them!

Diana Sandberg says

Still holding up excellently. I am admiring Lawrence's ability to touch on serious subjects – in this case, a very young girl's infatuation with a predatory older man and the danger arising therefrom – without compromising the story or the characters.

Mia says

I think this is my least favourite of the Roman Mysteries books so far.

Before now the four heroes had been young children who had a tendency of getting caught up in mystery after mystery. But in this book it all changed. Suddenly they are grown up, talking about lovers and having children and getting married. They have lost their innocence and I found it quite uncomfortable.

This theme continues throughout the book, with various people disappearing into the woods. One of the main characters, Felix, has several lovers and sleeps with basically everyone we see in the book. Honestly he is a

horrid man, and I'm glad he got what was coming for him.

Another main theme is suicide, which definitely brings the mood of the book down. We have to deal with a character trying to poison herself and telling Flavia stories of famous women who killed themselves.

This book isn't like the light-hearted stories that came before it. Obviously Roman Mysteries has never been completely innocent, but this is the most mature book I've read. I would recommend being older to read this, maybe waiting until 12 or 13.

Phair says

I still have a hard time picturing Lawrence's intended readership. The themes she touches on are often more mature than the age-appeal implied by the packaging of the US versions. Here the major themes were love and infidelity with a lot of hanky-panky being indulged in by one adult married character. I know an 11 year old in Roman times was close to marriageable age but do parents of today's 10-12 year olds want them reading about this? Older kids usually don't like reading books with "little kids" as the main characters. As an adult, I find almost all of this series WONDERFUL! I also like the way the author includes maps, floor plans and an informative glossary in each book. Can't say enough good about The Roman Mysteries.

Ujwals says

This was an average book. There was good mystery and action, but a lot of love and unacceptable stuff. As the name suggests, there was something to do with Sirens (singing women who attract men), but the author created her own "Siren". Even though there was romance, the book was tolerable because it had a good plot and a satisfying ending and answer. A good book, but a bit of a letdown compare to the rest of the series.

Emma Wallace says

I am actually finding it hard to articulate my experience of this- having to reconsider how transitional gladiators from Capua was, I never realised the beauty of Lawrence's Narnian depiction of childhood was until she positioned them within this corruptible, licentious environment while the Freudian sexual undercurrents was uncomfortable even for an 18 year old I am glad she retained the platonic affections of the central 4 and actually enjoyed the Austian semantics of foreshadowing their romantic futures and their awareness of the proclivity for this to turn into lust. As always Larwnce pushes the margins of middle grade decorum and never fails to deliver a clandestine plot universally enjoyable and wonderfully never delves into condescension ie the discussion of the relative merits of Stoicism and Epicureanism! Was such a classics geek enjoying the references to Seneca, Lucan, Suetonius, and Flaccus (FLACCIA FOR THE WIN!!!!) and took away such wisdom concerning arête and the enduring notion unfortunately of sexual grooming and unconsensual relationships! So yeah basically my favourite book so far!!!!
