



## A Beautiful Poison

*Lydia Kang*

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Just beyond the Gilded Age, in the mist-covered streets of New York, the deadly Spanish influenza ripples through the city. But with so many victims in her close circle, young socialite Allene questions if the flu is really to blame. All appear to have been poisoned—and every death was accompanied by a mysterious note.

Desperate for answers and dreading her own engagement to a wealthy gentleman, Allene returns to her passion for scientific discovery and recruits her long-lost friends, Jasper and Birdie, for help. The investigation brings her closer to Jasper, an apprentice medical examiner at Bellevue Hospital who still holds her heart, and offers the delicate Birdie a last-ditch chance to find a safe haven before her fragile health fails.

As more of their friends and family die, alliances shift, lives become entangled, and the three begin to suspect everyone—even each other. As they race to find the culprit, Allene, Birdie, and Jasper must once again trust each other, before one of them becomes the next victim.

## A Beautiful Poison Details

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Author : Lydia Kang

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## From Reader Review A Beautiful Poison for online ebook

### Claire says

This is a beautifully written book that makes no sense. I'm not quite sure how to rate it. I really enjoyed my first read-through. I liked the author's writing style and found her imagery very lovely. The story takes place in an interesting era, and as a historical fiction, I think it's quite an enjoyable read. And when I got to the twist at the end, my first reaction was positive. It was interesting and dramatic and not an outcome I had been anticipating. So then I reread the whole book (it's a pretty quick read). And the reason I hadn't anticipated the twist was because it really does not make sense with the way the story is told.

SPOILERS (I won't give character names, but you could probably narrow it down significantly from the rest of this review.)

I don't think we can blame an unreliable narrator here. The story is not told in first-person; it's a third-person limited that shifts to the thoughts of different characters with each chapter. There are times when the author tells us something about the private thoughts of a character (not the character's direct words), that just don't make sense if you know who's behind it all and what their overall plan is. On several occasions, the author describes the thoughts and emotions of the murderer reacting to the events unfolding around them that make no sense if you know that character is behind it all. If the story were told from just one character's perspective, it would be more believable, but we actually get a lot of insight into the murderer's private thoughts and feelings, and there were moments that contradicted the eventual twist. It's not one character lying to another; it's the author lying to the reader. The motivations for one or two of the murders in particular are also rather thin, in my opinion. I just didn't buy the character's supposed reasons. There were a few inconsistencies that I think you could probably think up a way to explain away, but I'd rather the author provided better explanations in the first place. My second read-through was very disappointing, because I was hoping to find some little hints woven into the story, but they just weren't there. The twist essentially just rewrites the story.

Overall, it was an enjoyable read, but the plot fell apart pretty quickly once I started really thinking about it.

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### Brooke — brooklynnnnereads says

I'm rounding this book up from a 3.5 star rating to a 4 because it's definitely better than my standard 3 star rating but not quite a 4.

Overall, I did really enjoy this book. I felt like it was more than the routine mass market murder mystery and I definitely was kept in suspense and didn't guess the murderer at all. In fact, I probably suspected every other character but I'm not giving anything away!

Also, I liked how although the story is focused around these murders there is more going on within the lives of each of the characters. The reader is exposed to more information of their lives as well as what has happened in the past. It added to the story and kept it more entertaining to know more background information.

A positive aspect about this novel that I appreciated is that you could definitely tell that this book was written by someone in the medical profession with a scientific background. For me, that added an extra element to the story that I'm not used to because although it's fiction it appeared well researched and that the author knew what she was writing about.

I definitely would recommend this one to those who love mysteries, especially murder mysteries. I'm interested to know how many people guessed the murderer correctly as well as some of the major surprises that were revealed in the end.

\*\*Thank you to the publisher for supplying me with a copy of this book via NetGalley in exchange for an honest review\*\*

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### **Taryn Pierson says**

I kept waiting for the pace of *A Beautiful Poison* to slow down and get boring, and it never did oblige me. I have this (unreasonable) (unsubstantiated) expectation that historical fiction = slow and quiet, but this book was NOT that. Mayhap I should rethink my assumptions?

Lydia Kang has plucked from history the perfect setting for a murder mystery: 1918 New York City, during the influenza pandemic. Because what better way to cover up the fact that you're poisoning a bunch of people than to do it when people are dropping like flies already? Allene, a wealthy socialite, notices that people connected to her and her two childhood friends, Jasper and Birdie, keep turning up dead under mysterious circumstances. They decide to investigate the crimes in hopes of unmasking the killer, but they're going to unmask a bunch of drama and secrets from their own pasts in the process.

That's what made this story so appealing to me—the character development when it came to the three main players. Allene is a spoiled, entitled princess who can be remarkably obtuse in the face of her friends' poverty and desperation. The three friends had a falling out and didn't speak for several years, and though they're reunited in the opening scene, the reasons behind their estrangement are murky, though sure to be juicy when finally revealed. Birdie is ethereally beautiful but constantly ill due to her job painting radium onto watch faces. (Knowing what we know now, the scenes of Birdie working away at the factory and putting radioactive paintbrushes in her mouth are cringe-inducing indeed.) And Jasper is the boy in between the two girls—half in love with both of them, it seems, which is a dynamic so tense it's like a boulder teetering on the edge of a cliff.

Come for the murder mystery, stay for the well-drawn setting and fascinating characters.

More book recommendations by me at [www.readingwithhippos.com](http://www.readingwithhippos.com)

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### **Linda says**

Lies come so easily whether you are rich or you are poor. Not even a penny for your thoughts. But, eventually, you may pay with your life.....

Manhattan seems to dazzle at the elegant Cutter mansion here in 1918. Allene Cutter and her fiance, Andrew

Smythe Biddle, are celebrating their engagement in New York style. Long time friends Birdie Dreyer, Jasper Jones, and Ernie Fielding surround the young couple and champagne glasses are held high. But the laughter is quickly drowned out by a tumble and a crash as debutant, Florence Waxworth, is found dead at the bottom of the winding staircase. Her shattered glass will resemble the broken lives yet to come.

The ugly head of scandal can never rear up at the Cutter residence. A palmed hand containing a bit of green passes from Mr. Cutter to the officer in charge. His idea is to make all of this go away. Mr. Cutter never realizes that this is just the beginning of the body tally.

Lydia Kang presents a story lined with layers of forensic medicine, chemistry components, and the budding science of pathology. Jasper Jones works at Bellevue as a custodian even though he has completed two years of college. It is his desire to attend medical school eventually. The family fortune has been lost and money is beyond tight. Dr. Gettler, chief forensics chemist, takes him under his wing and Jasper will have access to the morgue. Jasper's suspicion grows as bodies spin through with telltale signs of poisoning. Who and why?

Kang sets a panoramic stage with headline grabbing events of the time period. The Spanish flu surfaces on American shores with the young being taken at an outrageous rate. Young men must register for the draft as World War I overshadows lives. Death can tap you on the shoulder no matter the social status.

Surely the bloodhounds out there may figure this one out early on. There appears to be a few holes here and there out on the dance floor. Given that, this turns out to be a fun romp with jazzy dialogue and characters who have traded in their dance cards several times over. Kang leans in and makes you change your dance partner just when you think you know. A clever read, indeed.

I received a copy of *A Beautiful Poison* through NetGalley for an honest review. My thanks to Lake Union Publishing and to Lydia Kang for the opportunity.

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## **Obsidian says**

I think that this book was a bit all over the place for me to get a very good handle on. We have a lot of characters whose motivations we are not too sure of throughout the book. I think that Kang was trying for some tension to build about who was the murderer, but it was telegraphed at least to me pretty early about who was doing what. I will say that I was surprised by the ending. I thought for sure that two of the characters were being set up to run away together, so that was a pleasant surprise.

Taking place during the Spanish Influenza in New York, we have a series of murders that revolves around three childhood friends: Allene, Jasper, and Birdie. At one time Jasper and Birdie were extremely close with Allene. But one day, Allene's parents sent Birdie and her mother away (they were companions to Allene's mother's family for generations) and then Jasper was "not our kind dear" when his family left him in financial ruins. When a member of their circle is poisoned, the three friends band together to find out who murdered this person and why. Pretty soon the body count starts to rise and you are left wondering if these three people really know each other at all.

I didn't have a favorite character to root for while reading this. Kang really does not try to develop any of the

characters until almost the very end. Maybe it would have worked if she had given us a prologue to them as children all playing together. Instead we start in the middle of a story and we are left to just get that the three characters are friends and know each other so well.

Also I have to say that Kang doesn't paint any of them very well. When you get to the end and get to the final reveal about a lot of people I ended up feeling very sympathetic to Birdie's mother of all people.

The writing was okay, I just wish that there had been more there, there you know. I just found a lot of the bits about chemistry, cyanide, the Spanish flu to be boring. And that should have been the most interesting part of the story.

The flow wasn't great. We kind of shuffle around to Allene, Jasper, and Birdie and back and forth again and again until the end.

Even though the book takes place during the early 1900s, I didn't get a very good sense of New York during this time period. The author mentions clothes, how the young women behave, etc. But I really didn't get a true sense of the time period which was a shame.

As I already said the ending was a surprise so that was nice.

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### **Suze says**

#### **A BEAUTIFUL POISON**

My Kindle First pick for July, I normally do not read historical fiction- but the other choices did not interest me at all. This book was interesting and entertaining.

There is an odd trio of friends trying to solve some suspicious deaths of friends and relatives, this is all occurring during the great flu epidemic. The book reflects the time period, where women were discouraged from scientific pursuits - but Allene forges ahead. The ending was quite surprising. Overall, a very satisfying read.

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### **Euge Fontana says**

Abandonado al 6% de la lectura. La forma de escribir de la autora me resultó demasiado pretenciosa y los personajes hablaban y pensaban como si estuvieran en el Siglo XXI a pesar de que el libro está ambientado a finales del 1800. Tiene una premisa interesante, pero sólo dos capítulos fueron suficientes para confirmar que esta historia no es para mí.

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### **Tammie says**

**Just beyond the Gilded Age, in the mist-covered streets of New York, the deadly Spanish influenza ripples through the city. But with so many victims in her close circle, young socialite Allene questions if the flu is really to blame. All appear to have been poisoned—and every death was accompanied by a**

### **mysterious note.**

A Beautiful Poison is set during WWI amidst the Spanish Influenza outbreak of 1918. For a good portion of the book I didn't like the three characters that this novel follows, and at one point I almost quit reading, however I stuck it out and I'm really glad I did. In the end, thanks to some growth on their part, I actually came to like a couple of them quite a bit.

It seems to be a rare thing of late for a mystery to keep me guessing so hats off to the author. She kept me guessing throughout most of the book. There finally came a point where things clicked into place and I wondered why I didn't see it sooner. This along with the character growth are the reasons I decided to give this book 4 stars. It's always a good thing when an author can take unsavory characters and turn them into likeable ones in the end.

There were a couple of things in this book that were revealed near the end that my mind had touched on as possibilities but then dismissed, mainly because the author was pretty clever. One thing I did guess from the beginning and I thought was pretty obvious was what was poisoning the character Birdie. There are quite a few different poisons used in this book and it made me wonder which poison to title referred to, or if it wasn't one of those poisons at all, but the poisoning of a life and a mind instead.

Review also posted at Writings of a Reader

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### **Emma says**

All the poisons!

This was interesting. I felt the book wasn't quite sure what it wanted to be- a mystery? A convoluted love story? A story of friendship?

I did not find the main trio of characters likeable- a trio once friends in childhood and reunited at an engagement party. There follow a string of deaths which unite the three in trying to solve the murders. I was scared at this point that it was going to turn into an Enid Blyton "three solve a murder", but the story takes a darker turn as we get to see parts of their lives, or where their motivations are revealed.

I loved the historical context of this novel- no wheat, no meat days and liberty gardens to save resources during the wartime effort, the outbreak of Spanish flu, the Bellevue and the beginnings of forensic medicine: not a period of American history I'm too familiar with.

An enjoyable read.

Many thanks to Netgalley for an ARC of this book. All opinions are my own.

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### **Melisa says**

This was a slow building murder mystery with a heavy theme in the sciences.

With a count of about seven or eight characters introduced within the first few pages of the book, I had to put this one down and pick it up at another point when I could really concentrate. A fellow reviewer recommended taking notes, which I definitely think would have helped, however reading shouldn't really be this confusing!

I enjoyed the references to chemistry and medicine, the book was well written, and I definitely didn't figure out whodunnit, however this story lacked a certain bit of suspense and pacing that I enjoy with my mysteries.

Thank you to Netgalley, Lydia Kang, and Lake Union Publishing for a copy of this book in exchange for an honest review.

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### **Katherine says**

This. Book.

I've just finished it and am really in a bit of awe over it.

The writing was impeccable. A tight plot with just the right amount of red herrings, solid writing, distinct characters with fascinating relationships, and some of the best historical anchoring I've come across in all my years of reading.

There were two things that I had figured out/correctly predicted, but neither of them were related to the core plot of the murder mystery, which left me feeling wholly satisfied with this novel.

As a historical fiction novel, it was set during my favorite period of American history, with a backdrop of setting and place in time that's rich with events that I'm familiar with maybe a bit more than a non-history buff or someone who did not grow up in the New York metropolitan area would be. Ms. Kang chose several bits and pieces, but the book never felt crowded, nor drowned in detail. Everything was done pitch-perfectly, and her author's note at the end was a delight to read.

The novel is told in alternating chapters that follow our three leads: Allene, Birdie, and Jasper. While written in third person each POV still had a distinct flavor, while maintaining the same even voice throughout. I enjoyed all characters equally, which was another joy.

Everyone, do yourself a favor and read this book. You won't regret it.

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### **Chelsea says**

**Mini Review:** A well plotted murder mystery set in the underutilized time period of the Gilded Age, the first book I've read from that period. While I thought the writing was pretty good and the mystery intriguing, so much of this book revolves around a love triangle. The characters obsess over each other constantly, but they also seemed so bitter towards each other. If a historical murder mystery sounds interesting to you and you're okay with love triangles, I do think this book has a lot to offer.

*"It always came back to the three of them. Together, the girls gave him direction, like the triangular point of an arrow telling him where to be."* A bit on the nose...

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### **Diane S ? says**

3.5 The Gilded Age, Manhattan 191, the night of Allene's engagement party, and things have taken a horrible turn. A young woman is found dead, at the bottom of the stairs, a woman many did not like. Was it an accident as it appears or murder? The police think accident, a decision aided by Allene's father, who wants only to avoid a scandal.

When they were younger Jasper, Birdie and Allene had been inseparable, great friends who shared in all kinds of adventures. Now at eighteen things are very different, their lives taking different paths. They will however, join together to solve this mystery, convinced there is poison involved in the death. Allene has a fierce love of chemistry, Birdie working at a radium dial painting factory (this is years before it was known just how dangerous this was) and Jasper is working in the mortuary.

I enjoyed the tone of this novel, reminded me a little of a Nancy Drew story for grownups, this was both fun and serious at the same time. The horrible deaths from influenza also plays an important part as more bodies are found, each close to one of the three friends. Thought the author did a very good job combining real history with made up events. Secrets, well yes there are always secrets, are exposed, things you don't expect happen, and all in all I found this a very entertaining read.

ARC from Netgalley.

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### **BookishStitcher says**

3.5 stars

A murder mystery set in New York during the Gilded Age. When three childhood friends meet again (after several years separation) to celebrate the engagement of one of the friends a dark plot begins to emerge around them. Their loved ones fall victims to poisoning, and each time the deaths are accompanied by a note stating "You're welcome." The three friends take on the position of amateur sleuths to solve the crimes, but as tensions rise can their newly rekindled friendship survive the complex world they find themselves in?

This was an interesting book. I enjoyed the time period it was set in and the characters were okay. It gets 3.5 stars because at times certain aspects of the characters became too cliché and tedious.

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### **Diana says**

I do love a good mystery!

Lydia Kang's *A Beautiful Poison* takes place in 1918. Incorporated into the story are interesting historical

elements such as the beginnings of forensic medicine, the 1918 influenza pandemic, and factories employing women to paint dials with radium.

With the first page opening immediately with a murder, this book grabbed my attention right away - and didn't let go. Perfect for mystery/historical fans.

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