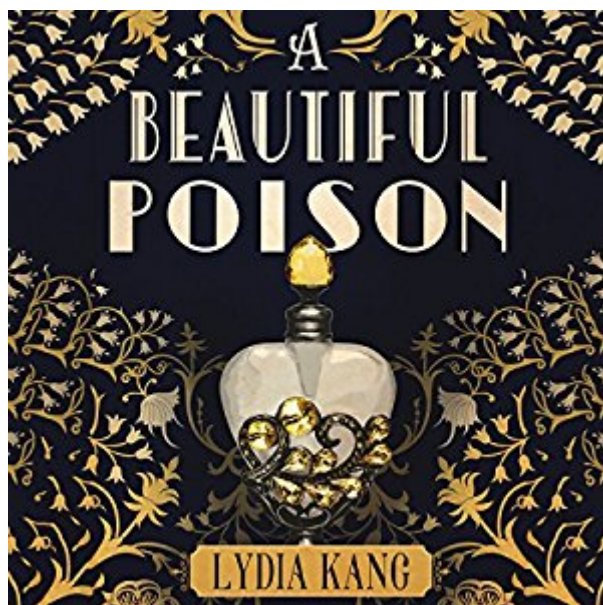


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# A Beautiful Poison



## Synopsis

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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This is the finest book I have read in some time. Ms. Kang is a physician who studied and trained in New York City and she sets her story there in 1918 when two historical events were occurring simultaneously: WWI, the so-called Great War "to end all wars", and the terrifying Spanish Influenza outbreak in NYC and other American cities and towns, both of which caused deaths numbering in the thousands. Bellevue Hospital in Manhattan, the oldest public hospital in the US and still one of its greatest, is also a "character" at a time before it became known (inaccurately) only as a place of

treatment for the mentally ill. Through her meticulous descriptions of people, houses, clothes, attitudes, manners and events and her skillful dialog the author brings to life people and a time almost exactly 100 years ago. I quickly felt as if I were there, completely immersed in that world. Each character is richly drawn and real. She shows the worlds and lives of the rich, the formerly rich, as well as those of the poor. We also learn how the impending draft of young men of all stations into the War hung like a pall over their heads. Here at home forensic medicine was in its infancy and physicians were helpless against the rapidly-spreading and relentless influenza outbreak. What few drugs they had at their disposal at the time couldn't arrest the disease and it killed so very fast - strangely, mainly the young more than the old. (In a personal note an ancestor of mine, my late father's brother, died from the flu in 1918 as a young boy.) In the field of medicine, 100 years ago might as well have been the Dark Ages in comparison to today. Indeed, the Spanish Influenza pandemic is reminiscent of the Black Plague that destroyed 2/3 of the population of Europe hundreds of years ago. This is however not just a historical but first and foremost a mystery novel. There are several murders of persons close to some young friends, mainly 18 year-olds, and they are driven to try to solve them partly through forensic investigation and partly through deduction, but this is no Nancy Drew "let's go solve a mystery" book. These are intelligent young men and women from "both sides of the tracks". In fact one female and one male are budding scientist/physicians and in the case of the young woman she is in a world where women didn't yet have the vote, lived lives controlled by males and had to fight to have a career. Their investigation is made up as they go along but is none the less fascinating because although they are amateurs two of them possess a relevant knowledge of chemistry - the deaths were caused by poisoning - and one has access to the morgue, plus they have a personal stake in solving these crimes. I suspect very few readers will deduce the murderer and their motive before the stunning end. I certainly didn't! Most of all I was impressed with Ms. Kang's simple and economical yet beautiful, smooth and evocative prose. There were a number of sentences so lyrically expressed and often containing a profound idea that I had to stop and reread them for their sheer beauty of expression. Her dialog is natural and suited to the era. Her exposition is seamless and naturally conveyed. I want to read more novels by this author and I hope that she will pick up the threads at the end of the story and write a sequel. As a native New Yorker I love historical novels set in earlier NYC and as a female I want to read about the strong women who went before me and sowed the seeds that flowered into a garden where I as a female was able to enjoy a free and productive life of my choice without having to fight quite as hard as they did against society's stifling conventions to accomplish what I wanted as a person and as a woman. I cannot recommend this book more highly to readers with any of the

varying interests I have stated above.

I was drawn by the many characters and their roles and I guessed wrong all the way through to the end of the book. And as in all good books, there was a mystery that unfolded near the end of the book. I read it from beginning to end without even sleeping. I also admire that the author was discreet with serial implications leaving the conclusion obvious without making it trashy. I find it refreshing that an author found no profanity necessary for the characters to display their personalities.

Beautifully written and extremely well researched. A beauty of a historical murder mystery with a surprise ending that ties all of the pieces together. Characters are well-drawn and likeable. Plot is so well-constructed. A real gem.

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.

A moody, twisty historical mystery where science and medicine play interesting supporting roles. The relationship between the three central characters isn't easily defined and I loved that unpredictability. (Contrary to what one reviewer has written, there is some sexual content but it is NOT graphic and NOT erotica.) I got completely lost in this book and the world the author created. Well done! Note: I received a copy of this book from the publisher in exchange for an honest review.

Wow! I did NOT see that coming! Loved the history and shout outs to the pioneers of forensic science, most of all I loved being surprised at the end! Pleasantly surprised.

This book is a wonderful read, the characters are endearing, the story filled with gorgeous description. It didn't have the traditional feel of a mystery, but used medicine and science to peak curiosity. I highly recommend checking it out.

This story, of 3 long time friends who work together to discover the causes of some deaths arranged

by a murderer is one that has many twists and turns. An avid reader of mysteries, I did not determine the answers to the mysteries until they were revealed in the story. The author folds in the backgrounds and personalities of the main characters while telling the story in such a way that the reader is distracted by the characters and so does not make all of the connections to the final result. I love that I was made to follow the clues with the characters and I allowed myself to witness the events as they did. I look forward. To reading more from this talented author.

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