



Of Summer and Winter

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A dynastic shift in the Imperial line of Rome shakes up the life of Anna, a lady of the high court and princess by marriage. On her return to the capital a year after the murder of her husband, court intrigue takes little time to set in, and Anna finds herself a prisoner within the palace walls. There she meets Ragnvaldr, a Varangian guardsman assigned to ensure she does not attempt to escape. What happens next is a series of events that spiral out of control, until the chance to finally break free is presented.

This isn't just a tale of romance, it's one of political strife, loyalties, and the vast cultural diversities of medieval Europe on the brink of the First Crusade. Proving that Constantinople was the very crossroads of East, West, North, and South.

Of Summer and Winter Details

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From Reader Review Of Summer and Winter for online ebook

Nae says

I would have given this one 4 stars, but simply did not like the way it ended, just sort of leaves the reader dangling there in mid sentence wondering if the author forgot to keep writing or what...

J. says

I received this book through the Goodreads First-Reads Program.

3.5 Stars

I'm a newbie to the "anachronistic historical fiction romance" genre, but this book seemed worth a shot at exploring something new, outside of my comfort zone. I can say that it wasn't what I expected without any negative connotations, because I had no expectations and let the book take me along for the ride. It's relatively short and a quick read if you can set aside the time - perfect for a whimsical weekend getaway on the sofa.

I probably would have done myself a favor by familiarizing myself with the time period through a little Wikipedia surfing, but the description, while not the most lavish or detailed, illustrated just the right amount of atmosphere without bogging the novel down. There is nothing more mind-numbing to me than pages and pages of descriptive text of inanimate objects, as if the author did so much research that they refused to waste a word of what they'd learned, pacing be damned. *Of Summer and Winter* is refreshingly light on purple prose and it keeps the pace hopping from intrigue-to-intrigue, tense situation to unpleasant revelation.

The protagonists do leave something to be desired when it comes to likeability. There are some interesting issues on classism that are raised several times, but always dropped one way or another. I suppose that it's a circumstance of historical fiction itself - characters are backwards and offensive, because people were. However, by the end of the book (say the last 50 pages or so) the main characters were rendered nearly unsympathetic. The way that the lead female treated her social and political lessors was unpalatable throughout the novel, but she is ultimately selfish and the sacrifices of the people with less privilege for her sake are rendered moot because of it. The male lead is portrayed as a blue-collar warrior of simple tastes, until it is revealed how he thinks of the women of his own culture and treats his wife. The male half of the love story turned out to be much more careless and awful than I expected, though there were signs at the very beginning of his introduction. Hmm.

The exoticism that the leads, the princess and the "barbarian," direct at each other is pretty off-putting, most especially when the main male character's wife is revealed, and reviled, by everyone in the novel. I was disturbed that she was seemingly so horrible, as apparently all Norse women were, whereas the lead female was the epitome of beauty because she'd never had to work for anything her whole life. The altercation with the Norseman's wife was the turning point for me as a reader, and all of the minor irritations at the princess' entitled behavior, and the Norseman's sexist disparaging monologue about the women of his homeland came to a head and made me realize that I kind of hated them both. They are flawed characters, for sure, and perhaps that's the sort of realism that I should expect in historical fiction. So while I can't honestly say that I finished the book rooting for them, I respect that Angela L. Costello was so bold about allowing the reader to see the broccoli in her protagonists' teeth.

Overall, it was a journey that I'm glad I went along for. The class and cultural issues made me think, and the kind of book that has plot-twists that feel like a punch to the gut is one worth reading. I'm interested in where the characters will end up in the next installment, because since this is only the first novel in a series, there's plenty of room for them to grow. It was a nice adventure into an unfamiliar world, a colorful cast, some well-timed humor, and plenty of fantastically affecting tension-building. I look forward to another, even more epic chance to Defy the Purple in the sequel.

Ryan Bracy says

At first I found it difficult to get into this book, but as I continued, it grew on me. Tells a good story, and Ang was generous enough to provide a glossary of terms for those of us not obsessed with the Byzantines...

All in all, it didn't suck. Go read it.

Angela says

I wrote this. No review.
