

Allison's Book Corner June 2023

The Last Heir to Blackwood Library by Hester Fox
(Graydon House 2023)

“Heaven truly was an untouched stash of books, just waiting to be opened and read.”

- Lady Hayworth, heiress of Blackwood Abbey

Happy summer, everyone. I cannot begin to describe how delightful it was to read this book. It was quite a nice little summer surprise, a real page-turner. A reader can finish this book in almost one sitting. You will discover that it is very hard to put down.

However, this intriguing novel is not for everyone. Have you dreamt of visiting the English countryside? Can you imagine yourself running along the damp and misty moors with Heathcliff and Catherine? If you like your tea and crumpets with a bit of suspense that may include a ghost or two, this book is for you. Before you decide not to read any further, I will tell the reader that this is *not* a horror story.

At the heart of this novel is a majestic library of the sort often found on the grand estates of wealthy families. The year is 1925 when we meet our heroine Ivy Radcliffe, 23, down on her luck and living in London with her best friend after the First World War. Ivy's parents have died and she has lost her dear older brother in the war. On a typical rainy London day, Ivy learns that she is the sole heir to an estate on the Yorkshire moors, Blackwood Abbey. As a lover of books and old manuscripts, Ivy is mystified to discover that the somewhat rundown abbey contains a beautiful library.



Without giving too much away, I will say that all is not as it appears. There is something evil and mystical lurking in the abbey -- or dare I say, within the library itself?

Hidden passages, cryptic codes, visitations from friendly and not-so-friendly spirits: all entwine to make this a refreshingly original and wonderful read. Dear readers, that would be enough to keep our interest and the pages turning, but the author also manages to include a tender love story. The first thing Ivy notices about the tall chauffeur from Blackwood Abbey is that Ralph smelled like coal smoke and leather and windswept moors. And there you have the makings of an old English romance. But Ralph has competition in the deliciously handsome Sir Arthur Mabry. As you can see, this book has depth. To my great delight, in the midst of fear and uncovering secrets, the characters always find time for tea. Now truly, what more could you ask of a novel set in the brooding Yorkshire moors? While this is not your typical beach read, it somehow seems perfect for that setting. Pass the sunscreen and the scones, please.