



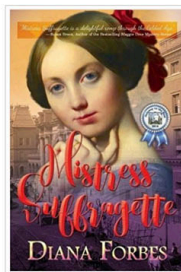
Home / Books / Book Reviews / Book Review: 'Mistress Suffragette,' by Diana Forbes

BOOK REVIEW: 'MISTRESS SUFFRAGETTE,' BY DIANA FORBES

Posted by: Patricia Gale 8 days ago in Book Reviews, Books, Editor Pick: Books, Editor Picks, Fiction, Historical Fiction 0 Comments

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Diana Forbes's debut novel for Penmore Press (March 2017), *Mistress Suffragette*, is set in the Gilded Age of late nineteenth-century New England, when women were bound by strict rules of conduct and conformity. As the book's charming, willful protagonist becomes involved in the budding Suffrage Movement, modern readers gain insight into the early fight for women's rights.

Penelope Stanton attends a Memorial Day Ball in Newport, Rhode Island with a figurative gun pointing at her head. She has recently been jilted by her gold-digging fiancée after her family's reversal of fortune during the Panic of 1893. Penelope is driven by her scheming mother to attract a wealthy suitor to keep the family financially afloat.

But while Penelope attracts the advances of a wealthy banker — the notorious womanizer Edgar Daggars — she is reluctant to play the pawn in others' games. Instead, she follows a friend intent on joining the Women's Suffrage Movement in Boston, and discovers her own voice. But these are anything but modern times, particularly for women: lonely and nearly destitute, she wavers in her resolve to let go of family ties — and escape the forceful, and married, Mr. Daggars. Beckoned by the call of an independent life, she must struggle to find the courage to pursue it.



Forbes is adept at recreating this pivotal time period, with all of its social mores and rich detail. Witnessing the ordeal of getting dressed in confining corsets, bustles and voluminous yards of fabric of the day, we get a visceral sense of just how imprisoned women felt. When bicycles come on the scene, they represent yet another maddening limitation: they're impossible for appropriately attired women to ride. Enter the New England Dress Reform Committee, a fringe group within the suffragists who condemn women's style of dress as a form of bondage.

Penelope's spunk and wit keep readers intrigued, even when she forsakes her principles for sexual attraction, or the lure of monetary comfort — certainly understandable to many a modern woman. Her ingenuity and sense of justice help her realize when it's time to wrest control of that gun she feels pointing at her head — and turn it around for her own purposes — just in time.

When Penelope finally manages to break from the many traitorous schemes to rein her in, and seizes her own power, we're thrilled and gratified. It's impossible not to root for her, or get lost in the texture and spirit of her inspiring tale. In *Mistress Suffragette*, Forbes brings history deliciously to life.

Learn more about *Mistress Suffragette* and the author at [Diana Forbes Novels](#).

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ABOUT PATRICIA GALE



Patricia Gale has written and ghostwritten hundreds of blogs and articles that have appeared on sites such as Psychology Today, Forbes, and Huffington Post, and in countless national newspapers and magazines. Her "beat" is health, business, career, self-help, parenting, and relationships.