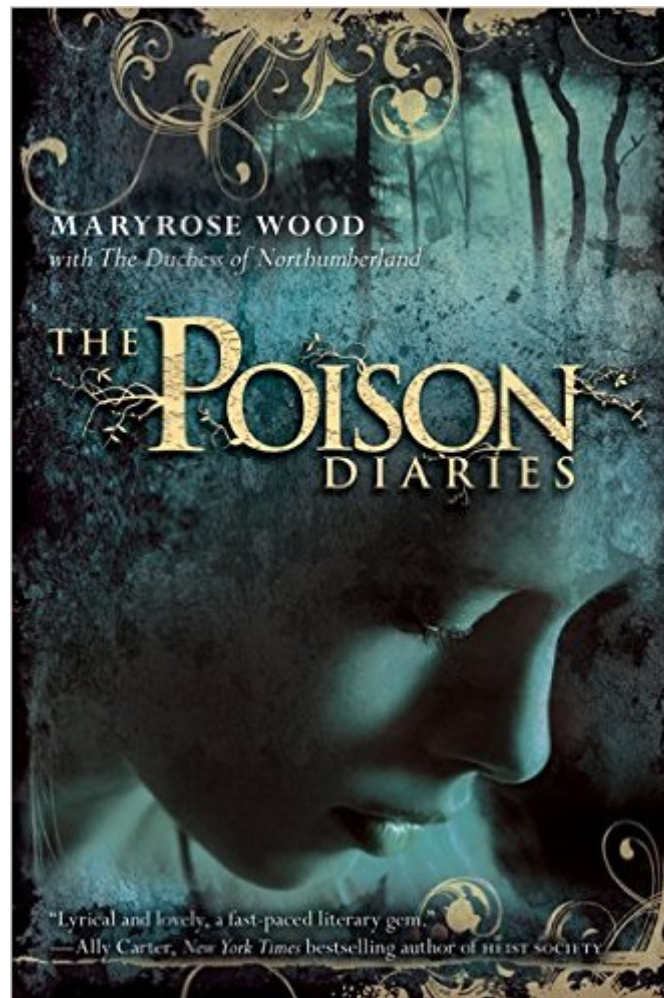


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The Poison Diaries



Synopsis

In the right dose, everything is a poison . . . even love. Jessamine Luxton has lived all her sixteen years in an isolated cottage near Alnwick Castle with her father, Thomas, a feared and respected apothecary. His pride and obsession, a poison garden, contains exotic and local specimens of the most dangerous plants in the world. But Jessamine is absolutely forbidden to enter. Her life changes forever the day a traveler brings a stranger to their cottage, claiming that the young man has special gifts that Thomas might value. Jessamine is intrigued by the young man, who goes by the name of Weed. He has an intense sensitivity to growing things, and an even rarer and more specialized knowledge about plants than Thomas does. As Jessamine falls in love with Weed, she learns his extraordinary secret and is drawn into the dangerous world of the poison garden in a way she never could have imagined. . . .

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The Poison Diaries tells the story of young Jessamine, an innocent young woman who has spent her entire life isolated from the world in her father's cottage with little else beside her garden to keep her company. Jessamine's father is the local healer, a master of herbal cures and poisons concocted from plants. When Weed, a mysterious young man who claims he can talk to plants, comes to live with Jessamine and her father, an expected romance blooms between the two. However, after Jessamine falls ill, it's up to Weed to use his knowledge of poisons, and his supernatural skills, to save her. This novel is pretty much summed in the above paragraph -it's

incredibly simple and well, certainly not too original. The basic plot is a romance turned into a "save the girl" scenario, which I found to be boring and well, not quite what I expected after I read the summary. I guess I was hoping for a heroine who is not quite such a damsel in distress, but instead Jessamine is very passive and fairly uninteresting. Plus, near the end of the novel the story shifts to focus more on Weed than on Jessamine. That brings me to another issue I had with this novel. The action is incredibly uneven and there is virtually no conflict for the majority of the story. For about the first 200 pages readers learn about the growing romance between Jessamine and Weed with virtually no conflict until there is one tiny blurb of concern with the father -which is quickly waved away barely 10 pages later. The last seventy-ish pages of the book is where things finally start to get interesting. The point of view, which had been first-person through the eyes of Jessamine to this point, suddenly shifts to first-person through the eyes of Weed, which is confusing and jarring to the reader. However, this change fuels an interesting and unexpected twist at the end that nearly saves the novel. Obviously written as the first installment in a series, *The Poison Diaries* is ideal for young adult paranormal romance readers, and particularly for fans of *Twilight*, but it just didn't work for me with its overdone cliché concepts and overly simple plot.

Sixteen-year-old Jessamine Luxton lost her mother when she was only four and has lived her entire life with her distant, cold father in a "cottage" on the estate of the Duke of Northumberland. Her home is, in fact, an ancient stone chapel that sits next to the ruins of an abbey destroyed presumably during the era of Cromwell when Catholics were hunted down or driven out of England. Her father, Thomas Luxton, works for the Duke as an apothecary. He cares for the Duke's sick family and employees and in his spare time obsessively studies the properties of medicinal herbs, particularly plants that are known to be deadly poison. Thomas keeps an exotic collection of these plants in a walled, padlocked area Jessamine calls his poison garden. Jessamine begs her father to let her help him with either his healing work or his poison garden, but he insists the former is too gruesome and the latter too dangerous. Instead, he relegates her to being his housekeeper, which involves maintaining three gardens of her own, for vegetables, herbs and dye plants, as well as sewing, cooking, cleaning, and caring for their small collection of farm animals. Her father is often gone for days at a time treating sick people, and when he is home he rarely talks to her, to the point that Jessamine worries that she has forgotten how to speak. Then one day Tobias Pratt, the owner of the local madhouse, shows up and insists Thomas take charge of an odd orphan named Weed who appears to be about Jessamine's age. Pratt claims Weed has cured so many of the mentally ill in his keeping with herbal teas that his asylum is almost empty. He says that while Weed is putting

him out of business, he'd be a welcome help to a healer like Thomas. Greedy for Weed's botanical knowledge, Jessamine's father agrees to take him in, and Jessamine is delighted to at last have some companionship. But Weed is almost as withdrawn as her father. For days Weed hides in their cellar, and it is hard for Jessamine to get him to eat or talk to her. But she is determined to win his confidence, in much the same way she has earned the trust of feral cats in the woods near her home. She talks and talks to Weed, gradually growing very attached to him as he opens up to her little by little. And she can't help being drawn to the startling beauty of his unruly, dark hair, pale skin and "emerald green eyes...like twin jewels." Pratt believes Weed is a witch and Jessamine's father thinks he has an enviable genius with herbs. But as Jessamine gets to know Weed more and more deeply, she learns the actual truth is far more shocking than either of those guesses. Previous to writing this YA historical, fantasy novel, Maryrose Wood's YA novels have been light and humorous with contemporary settings, so the dark tone and historical setting of this novel may surprise her fans. The first 40 pages of the book is almost entirely made up of the musings of the heroine about her lonely life, both as first-person narrative and entries in her journal. Jessamine longs to be of use to other people rather than hidden away from the world at the mercy of her disinterested father, and this is shown as well as told through the author's atmospheric and poetic prose. The second part of the book explores Jessamine's relationship with Weed. The writing here is lovely, too, but the mood is more hopeful because Jessamine is no longer painfully alone. I thoroughly enjoyed experiencing with Jessamine the conflict between her growing attachment to Weed and her concerns about who he is, what his life has been like up until now, and what exactly his mysterious talent is. I also appreciated the subtle way the author handles the sexual attraction between the two innocent teenagers. In part three of the book, the mood of the story shifts drastically, getting extremely dark as the villains of the story begin to blatantly make life extremely difficult for the young lovers. This is clearly the first book of what is probably at least a trilogy, and that probably explains why the ending of the book is not at all satisfying. In fact, it is downright depressing. I assume this is because, in the larger picture of the trilogy, this is only Act 1. According to the information on the Advanced Reading Copy I received from the publisher through Vine, they are going all out to promote this book and are very likely hoping that Weed and Jessamine might become as beloved to teenage girls as Edward and Bella. If so, it won't be because Weed is anything like Edward in personality or the particular magic that is his gift. The romantic conflict keeping the lovers apart is also very different than in *Twilight*. In order to avoid creating any spoilers, I will only say this: Weed makes some ethical choices that Jessamine has big problems with, and many readers might as well. In addition, the way that the author sets up the actions of the two villains makes Jessamine far too helpless and

passive--to the point that in the latter part of the book Weed takes over as the first-person voice of the novel. And ultimately, Weed, too, is forced into a position of hopeless helplessness by the structure of the plot. But again, this may all be on purpose because the story of Weed and Jessamine is a three-part epic, and this is only part one. In addition, the story contains an intriguing love triangle, which is a very popular feature of YA fantasy romances, and has been even before Twilight.

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