



In the Shadow of Blackbirds

By Cat Winters



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In 1918, the world seems on the verge of apocalypse. Americans roam the streets in gauze masks to ward off the deadly Spanish influenza, and the government ships young men to the front lines of a brutal war, creating an atmosphere of fear and confusion. Sixteen-year-old Mary Shelley Black watches as desperate mourners flock to stances and spirit photographers for comfort, but she herself has never believed in ghosts. During her bleakest moment, however, she's forced to rethink her entire way of looking at life and death, for her first love—a boy who died in battle—returns in spirit form. But what does he want from her? Featuring haunting archival early-twentieth-century photographs, this is a tense, romantic story set in a past that is eerily like our own time.

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Editorial Review

From School Library Journal

Gr 8 Up—The year is 1918. World War I is killing millions of boys abroad, and the flu pandemic is killing millions of Americans at home. People are increasingly desperate, looking to Spiritualism and folk remedies to help them speak to dead loved ones and survive the flu. After her father is jailed for anti-Americanism, Mary Shelley Black, 16, must go live with her aunt in San Diego. There she is confronted with memories of her first love, Stephen, who is away at war. She is also forced to face Julius, Stephen's bully of an older brother who is making a fortune as a "Spiritualist Photographer," a photographer who can capture ghosts in images. She also meets Mr. Darning, a man with a broken heart who is trying to prove that Julius is a fake. After Mary Shelley learns of Stephen's "heroic" death, she is visited by his suffering ghost. His spirit is delusional and scared, and Mary Shelley suspects there is a terrible reason he's not at rest. Did Stephen really die on the frontline? How are Julius and Mr. Darning involved? Winters deftly combines mystery, ghost story, historical fiction, and romance. The character development is not deep, but the excellent pacing and deliciously creepy descriptions of Spiritualism more than make up for it; the story and setting are atmospheric and eerie. Black-and-white photos are scattered throughout the book, giving context to the time period.—Laura Lutz, Pratt Institute, New York City©(c) Copyright 2013. Library Journals LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Media Source, Inc. No redistribution permitted.

From [Booklist](#)

Starred Review Winters' debut ropes in the Spanish flu pandemic of 1918, WWI shell shock, national prejudice, and spirit photography, and yet never loses focus from its primary thesis: desperation will make people believe—and do—almost anything. Mary Shelley Black, 16, has been sent to live with her aunt in San Diego, a city crawling with gauze mask-wearing citizens fearful of catching the deadly virus. Loss is everywhere, which means booming business for spirit photographer Julius, the older brother of Mary's true love, Stephen, who is off fighting in the trenches. Stephen's death coincides with Mary suffering electrocution, an event with strange aftereffects: Mary sends compass needles spinning, can taste emotions, and begins to see and hear Stephen's ghost, in torment over the maniacal "birdmen" that tortured and killed him. Mary believes his spirit will rest when she uncovers the truth about his death—a truth more horrifying than most readers will expect. A scattering of period photos, including eerie examples of spirit photography, further the sense of time and place, but the main event here is Winters' unconventional and unflinching look at one of the darkest patches of American history. More than anything, this is a story of the breaking point between sanity and madness, delivered in a straightforward and welcoming teen voice. Grades 9-12. --Daniel Kraus

About the Author

Cat Winters was born and raised near Disneyland in Southern California. She is the creator of [suburbanvampire.blogspot.com](#), and she runs [corsetsandcutlasses.wordpress.com](#), a group blog featuring authors of YA historical fiction. She lives in Portland, Oregon, with her family.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Daniel Buch:

Book is to be different for every grade. Book for children until adult are different content. As it is known to

us that book is very important for all of us. The book In the Shadow of Blackbirds ended up being making you to know about other know-how and of course you can take more information. It is quite advantages for you. The book In the Shadow of Blackbirds is not only giving you a lot more new information but also being your friend when you feel bored. You can spend your spend time to read your reserve. Try to make relationship with the book In the Shadow of Blackbirds. You never experience lose out for everything when you read some books.

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