

A Spell of Rowans

Byrd Nash

Rook and Castle (Oct 26, 2021)

Softcover \$4.99 (306pp)

978-1-954811-01-0

The fantastical novel A Spell of Rowans combines murder mystery, magic, and mayhem for an exciting tour of a family's history and trauma.

Byrd Nash's novel *A Spell of Rowans* revolves around a family with esoteric gifts and dark secrets that transcend death.

Vic Rowan, a successful artist who restores old paintings, leaves her city life to return home to small-town Grimsby to help settle affairs after her mother's death. Her two Rowan siblings, Phillipa and Liam, share with Vic an uncanny set of gifts: charm and empathy, and in Liam's case even the ability to touch objects and learn their past. Vic's former boyfriend-turned-FBI-agent, Reed, also descends on the town as its death toll rises; there are mysteries that demand explanations.

Among other revelations, it appears that the Rowan siblings' mother did not die of old age, but was murdered, along with her antique shop assistant. The Grimsby police regard this case suspiciously, along with the unsolved case of the Rowan siblings' father's death over a decade ago. Dodging the doubts of Grimsby residents who view them with distrust, Vic and her siblings scramble to decide which secrets to disclose and which to unearth.

Forced into solitary habits by her intense powers as an empath, powerful, complex Vic finds herself relying on others for more and more support. She relives past traumas and struggles with the guilt of abandoning her little brother for college. Facing escalating violence as their investigation in Grimsby continues, Vic confronts the need to trust and grow in order to avoid becoming the same unfeeling monster her mother was. It is a compelling struggle.

From arson and blackmail to a spell to raise the dead, challenges and attacks dot Vic's path, making the story spiral out in a series of complex fractals. This fast-paced plot builds, just as the mysteries and secrets within Grimsby build, until the final confrontation with at least one of the killers.

Wry and prickly, Vic dodges danger to make peace with her past. Her ability to send and even influence the emotions of others is described in colorful, vivid ways, with feelings having flavors such as fresh-baked bread and bitter molasses. The language that captures Vic's magical world, which is populated by both sweet and bitter people, is tangible and evocative. And as Vic gets closer to her mother's killer, using her power becomes a double-edged sword: the whirlwind of truths and lies threatens to entrap and drown her, even as her special abilities help her get to the bottom of the various unsolved mysteries.

Swathed in small-town gossip and values, the fantastical novel *A Spell of Rowans* combines murder mystery, magic, and mayhem for an exciting tour of a family's history and trauma.

JEANA JORGENSEN (October 7, 2021)

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