

★ **The Art of Love and Lies: Proper Romance Victorian Series****Rebecca Anderson**

Shadow Mountain Publishing (Aug 8, 2023)

Softcover \$16.99 (288pp)

978-1-63993-108-8

An artist and inspector are on a mission to recover a stolen painting in Rebecca Anderson's Victorian romance novel *The Art of Love and Lies*.

Rosanna is a masterful forger—though she prefers calling her paintings reproductions. They're sold as parlor versions of great works by her agent, Anton, a rakish but severe man. Still, she aspires to create original work of her own. She attends an artistic exhibition, hoping to improve her skills.

The exhibition is a vibrant microcosm of society, representing splendor, royal interests, and mercantile greed. There, Michelangelo's *Manchester Madonna* is the centerpiece—though Rosanna is also sent into thrills by Inspector Martin, the head of security.

In the story's fun interplay of rare treasures with easy attractions, Rosanna and Martin are a winsome pair. Their exchanges across several encounters reveal each other's charms: she's inventive; he has a checkered family history and is a neophyte when it comes to understanding the value of art. Tension arises because of their differences in opinion regarding artistic replicas and criminal acts, even as Rosanna becomes unsure of the ethics of her work. She learns that paintings have been stolen and replaced with her copies; she hopes to apprehend the culprit—with Martin's help.

The novel's pursuit scenes are thrilling, as is its intrigue around how Rosanna and Martin will get past his misconceptions about her. They learn to see the world anew through one another, even as they ask provocative questions about facts, truth, and forgiveness. And ebullient news clippings are included throughout the novel; in them, a gossip-prone journalist opines, critiques, and waxes poetic about the exhibition, informing and teasing out the story's developments.

In the enchanting romance novel *The Art of Love and Lies*, an art thief can't prevent love from blooming.

KAREN RIGBY (July / August 2023)

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