FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

The Ruffian on the Stair
Gary Newman
Soho Constable
978-1-56947-543-0
(October 31, 2008)

Sebastian Rolvenden is gifted with the written remains of his namesake grandfather's life: a journal of sorts, a map, and letters which reveal that his vicar ancestor was much more than a religious man in his earlier days; he was a bohemian, a carouser, and—perhaps—a murderer.

Sebastian's own life is a fragmented puzzle. Recently divorced and now estranged from his son, he has his own demons to contend with. As Sebastian's curiosity impels him to investigate the enticing clues distributed throughout his grandfather's effects, more and more of the man's secret life is revealed, not to mention a possible treasure. Sebastian is not alone in the quest for his grandfather's truth, and the other parties are none too scrupulous or altruistically motivated.

Gary Newman, once a teacher of languages in the UK and elsewhere, now works as a translator and resides in northeast England. The author tends to repeat the intricate details of the puzzle he's created overmuch, perhaps nervous that they would be forgotten. However, the dialogue is snappy, witty, natural, and adds to the appeal of this highly entertaining book. Written in the author's thick authentic English accent, it is heavily idiomatic, which seems to conjure the period and the setting more artfully. For instance:

> *…I turned my head slightly and took a sly dekko through the glasses…*
>
> *…I asked, biting a wodge off my salami baguette…*
>
> *…I lay doggo on the other side of the privet shield.*

Using such colorful language, Newman is adept at stringing out the clues and revelations while maintaining a constant sense of forward motion. *The Ruffian on the Stair* is a story of family secrets, but not just one family. It is filled with "ah-ha" moments of revelation, but not just one revelation. It is a race to see who will cheat death and who *is* the ruffian on the stair.

Donna Russo Morin