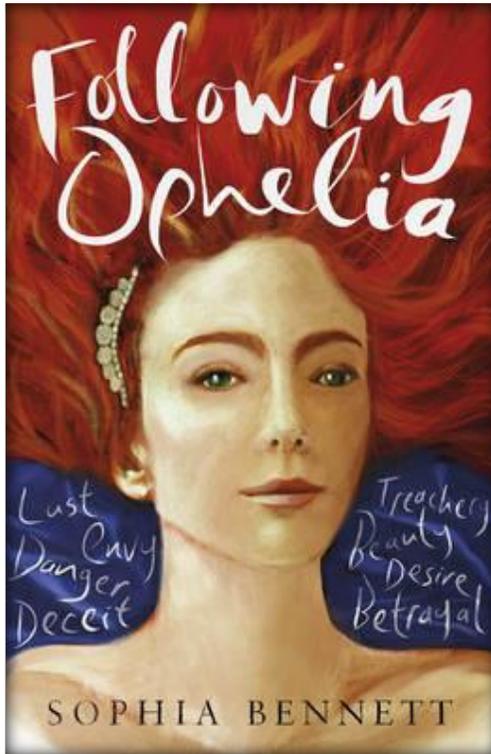


LoveReading4kids Reader reviews of **Following Ophelia** by Sophia Bennett

Below are the complete reviews, written by the LoveReading4kids members.



Georgie Rowe, age 19

*As a first year English Literature student, it's been far too long since I read a book for fun, rather than as a part of my course. But what a book to get me back into the habit! **I consumed it in a few hours, and enjoyed every minute.***

The synopsis piqued my interest as I've studied Christina Rossetti's poetry and am somewhat familiar with the Pre-Raphaelites, and the setting for this novel proved to be wonderful. I haven't read any YA fiction set in this particular period of history before, and it made for a fascinating read.

Mary, our protagonist, has a fiery personality and barbed wit which make her a joy to follow as we experience the wonders of the pre-Raphaelite painting scene alongside her. But unlike some teen fiction, Sophia Bennett didn't feel the need to gloss over the less-than-perfect details of Victorian London, and I was pleased to see that the novel didn't have a simple happily ever after. This book has bite, and isn't afraid to show it. Though there's a sequel in the works if the book's teaser is anything to go by, it could easily act as a standalone novel, which is wonderful to see in an age of trilogies where the first novel merely acts as setup.

*I'd recommend this novel based solely on the strength of its resilient, feminist protagonist, who stands up for the women around her and, importantly, herself. But in addition to this, I would recommend the book due to the vivid nature of Bennett's prose, which springs to life before the reader's eyes and paints a clear picture of the scenery around Mary's life. **It's a fantastic book***

and one that everyone with even a passing interest in historical YA fiction should check out.

Laura Solomon

'Following Ophelia' is a thrilling read, exploring feelings of love, adventure and lust. As Mary discovers an exciting new city, she finds herself caught up in a whirlwind of money, beauty and men. Bennet uncovers an exciting new world as she paints. The reader follows Mary on her journey through thick and thin. We soon learn that this tasteful new hierarchy isn't all that it seems; it has an evil side too. The story line is original, unique and magical as we uncover the truth about the mysterious elite upper class. Intriguing and captivating, this book follows twists and turns down backstreets, alleyways, and ballrooms. It will leave you speechless, dizzy, and gasping for breath.

Amy Laws, age 15

Beautiful descriptions and wonderfully paced- I loved this novel from the very first line.

I have enjoyed many of Sophia's Bennett's stories in the past but this one was on another level. The amazingly detailed descriptions brought Victorian London to life and the characters were so easy to empathise with. I flew through the pages and was hooked from the very beginning to the last word. I am so happy that there is a sequel planned as I can't wait to learn more about the story.

Overall, I would recommend this book to anyone, especially someone who likes romantic or historical novels.

Grace Spear, age 14

This book was super mysterious where you felt every situation the characters went through. It had me hooked. I'd recommend this book to anyone and everyone, I loved it!

'Following Ophelia' is set just after the war, and is about a girl called Mary who's moving to London, looking for a fresh start. She goes into service and through it she's introduced to a Millas' painting of Ophelia and it changes her life. She hears the story of Lizzie Siddal [the girl posing in the painting] and strives to be like her. She changes her personality and becomes Persephone

Lavelle making a whole new group of friends and falling for a young artist called Felix. Her whole worlds been spun upside down and Persephone becomes the opposite of Mary.

I really loved this book and it had me hooked. Mary's feelings are so strong and every situation she goes through hits you hard. The mystery of Persephone is addictive with wonder of what she'll do next. The relationship between her and Felix is unusual in a cute way and always leaves you wanting more. Marys such a good natured character and is so loving to the people she cares about, putting others first even though she has to make some difficult decisions along the way. I'd recommend this book to anyone and everyone I loved it!

Izzy Read, age 16

It is perfect for those that adored the high society of Jane Austen and the thrill of a forbidden romance.

Mary Adams is a scullery maid in Victorian London; she works dawn till dusk, lighting fires and cleaning the Aitkens house from top to toe. But when she meets an artist who is enticed by her, she becomes Persephone Lavelle- a sensational muse that mixes with the high society of London. Juggling these polar opposite identities are not easy though, and no secret can stay secret forever....

Following Ophelia encapsulates everything I look for in a YA novel: hot guys, beautiful girls, life changing opportunities and a little bit of forbidden romance! It is perfect for those that adored the high society of Jane Austen and the thrill of a love that cannot be. Mary starts off being kicked out of her house and beaten by her dad, after losing her job. Her job is unfulfilling to her and she is not very good at it in the first place. The themes of class are very clear throughout the story; the servants and their bosses may as well be a different species to most characters. This makes Mary's façade as Persephone seem deceitful and scandalous to even us the reader. Thankfully, as the plot develops, Mary develops into a more thoughtful character and becomes aware of the ridiculous unwritten rules of Victorian society, which makes the ending all the sadder!!

www.fromcovertocoverr.tumblr.com

Rachel Ilsley, age 13

This is an amazing page turner. I really enjoyed reading it and I believe this will appeal to a wide range of readers.

'Following Ophelia' begins with a maid, Mary Adams who is doing all she can to survive in London. When invited to serve guests at a party she meets two artists who both ask her whether they can paint her. Her first answer is no, but when she meets one of the artists again she changes her mind. Mary soon becomes famous for her modelling under her pretend name 'Persephone Lavelle'- but juggling two lives is extremely tricky and people begin to find out she isn't who they think she is. Nearer the end of the book her priorities change from being famous to helping her cousin.

Mary Adams is a loveable girl who falls in love with the artist, Felix Dawson, she is very beautiful with a great personality. This book is all about her and her many thoughts, feelings and daily struggles.

Harriet is Mary's cousin who also works as a maid, only a few houses away from Mary. I really like Harriet as she is kind. However she has a secret which we only find out later in the book.

I really enjoyed reading this book but I think the ending was a bit confused. I really like this author and I have read her previous book, and if there is second book after this one I will definitely read it. I loved the plot and the mystery in this brilliant book.

Emily Kirby, age 12

I really enjoyed it and I have already recommended it to my friends. I especially liked it because it was different and not the kind of book I usually read. Nevertheless it was really good.

'Following Ophelia' is about a young girl in Victorian times travelling to a new place where she only knows one person, her cousin Harriet. Harriet works in a different household so Mary only gets to see her on her days off. Until as a maid she is invited to help out at a party where she sneaks off to look at the paintings. She is fascinated by them, soon enough she is asked to be a muse by many different artists. One day she goes to an artist's house to be painted it goes well but her next day off is in four weeks and he just can't wait to see her again. Soon she begins a second life but is it all just too good to be true?

Jess Anderson, age 14

All in all I really enjoyed the book and would recommend it to my friends. The story was good and there were a few unexpected plot twists, which created a variety in the book.

I found this book a really nice and relaxing read, as I love historical fiction novels. The book is written in a flowing manner and the plot is also clever and original. I found the characters strong, and the book also made me sad in some places, especially towards the end.

In some places I thought the book was slightly too far-fetched, but then it is a novel, and anything can happen in a book!

Another thing that I felt didn't quite fit was the title of the book as I didn't think that when Ophelia was mentioned it wasn't a crucial, or a very important point. When I received the book, I did feel slightly put off by the title.

All in all I really enjoyed the book and would recommend it to my friends. The story was good and there were a few unexpected plot twists, which created a variety in the book.

Humaira, age 18

*I don't know where to begin with *Following Ophelia*. I knew I was going to love it the very moment I knew it was a Sophia Bennett book. I've only read *Love Song* but that was enough. *Following Ophelia* is such a amazingly beautiful book that you don't want to end. I don't think I can wait that long for the sequel. I have made it my mission now to collect and read all of Sophia Bennett books. Read this book because **it is addictive, has characters that you fall in love with (I'm wagging my eyes at Felix) and an ingenious plot. One of my Favourite books of the year** and it's only the beginning of February.*

Celeste Phelan, age 15

A fantastic novel giving the reader an interesting two sided perspective of the Victorian era.

Mary Adams is an ordinary girl who becomes a servant in a wealthy household in London. But after seeing the beautiful painting of Ophelia in an art gallery, her life is changed forever. The young Pre-Raphaelite painter Felix takes an interest in her beauty and portrays her as the infamous Persephone in his painting. But living a double life begins to take its toll and her secret is slowly unraveling. With everything going wrong around her Mary must make the decision between family and future...

Mary's most recognizable trait is her beauty which throughout the novel she is constantly being

praised for. However, she proves she is 'not just a pretty face' through her loyalty to her cousin who is in a terrible situation. Felix is presented as being good looking and charming. But with money tight, he is forced to be the 'lap dog' of the wealthy Mrs Lisle who despises Mary and Felix's relationship.

My favourite part of the novel is when Mary does everything she can to help her young pregnant cousin in the harsh Victorian society where she is judged and demoralized. I think this shows fantastic loyalty and reminds the reader of the significant bond between them.

The structure of the novel was also very interesting because due to it being narrated it really allowed the reader to reflect on the negative impact and patriarchal society during the Victorian period.

I would recommend this book to girls 11+ as it is an interesting novel which she makes the reader reflect on the progression in society and how small things could have a very negative impact during the Victorian era.

Sidney Greenslade, age 13

Sophia Bennett Following Ophelia is a touching and vivid story about Mary Adams, a downtrodden young servant who wishes to live life on the edge, but is terrified of what might happen if she tries. Following Ophelia is the first fabulous story centred around Mary Adams, a humble young woman leaving her country home and entering servitude to a rich family in the city of London. Mary has always lived on a farm in Kent, with the open air and fields and wide empty sky. But Victorian London is different altogether. Mary finds herself lost in a world of swishing skirts and tall buildings and noise and bustle. After her cousin Harriet, who helped her settle in, leaves her to her new job, Mary feels more alone than ever, with a selfish mistress and a work partner who hates her.

But after she goes to the home of a carriage-maker to help the other servants cope with the busyness of an expensive party, she meets a group of artists who seem desperate to paint her. Mary finds herself torn. Should she remain a maid, a safe, yet invisible nobody? Or should she live daringly and pose for paintings, and risk losing everything altogether?

'Following Ophelia' is an entrancing and heartbreaking tale, with a gripping plot and vivid and delightful characters. *I loved every turn, and although I suspected some events were going happen, others made me gasp in shock as I discovered them. The vivid imagery enchanted me, and I could*

*imagine every fold of satin, every glittering jewel and rattling carriage as I read onwards. **A really inspiring story and most certainly a book to recommend!***

Edel Waugh

*The story is set around the life of Mary Addams, a servant, new to life in London. Mary comes from a poor family not unfamiliar with hardship and cruelty, but she dreams of making huge changes to her life and future by leaving home. I love a story about someone moving to the big city to change their life in terrific ways, gaining life experiences, meeting exotic people and that's exactly what I got from this story, a girl from nowhere special, experiencing so many wonderful cultural enrichments to her life, in this case art and artists, who she would never have met otherwise was thrilling and Mary herself was engaging, a little innocent perhaps, but it only made her more likeable. **I loved this book and recommend it to anyone especially if you liked Upstairs/Downstairs or Downton Abbey.***

Jodi Coffman

*Mary Adams moves to London to get away from her father and becomes a maid for the Aitkens. She isn't very good at her job and works long hours. One day the mysterious Lady Emmeline requests Mary to come and read to her and Mary gets a big shock. Plain Mary Adams becomes the mysterious Persephone Lavelle, in high demand to model for all the aspiring artists. But Persephone and Mary can't be associated together and all secrets have a way of unravelling in Victorian London. Will Mary and Persephone be able to co-exist? **I really enjoyed this book as it was very different to everything I usually read and I found it hard to put down.** I recommend it to all teenagers especially those interested in the Victorian times and I can't wait for the next book!*