

What People Say About Dora Benley's Novels

Salisbury Plot

This is a pacy thriller written in the style of the period in which it is set, creating an authentic atmosphere of the political intrigue of the nineteen thirties, which underpinned spying and espionage right across Europe. The heroine, Dora and her fiance, now husband, Sir Edward Ware, battle against blood curdling spooks determined to wrest the vital Lawrence Maps, which hold the key to military domination of the Middle East. In the background Churchill and Lawrence of Arabia are drivers of the need to protect these documents and add a useful historical backcloth. The new bride finds her love and loyalty tested by her husband's unexpected connections with one of the apparent villains. Their grit and determination carries them through all the trials, yet the ending leaves the door tantalizingly open to another adventure to come . . . a ripping yarn, well worth an entertaining read.

— Gordon Williams

I loved the first 24 pages- it had lot's of detail and gave me goosebumps while reading it.

— Raegan Ralls aka Bianca Di Angelo

Latin Lessons

Scary, puzzling. Couldn't put it down!

— Michael Parker

Salisbury Plot

Second Book of the Edward Ware
Thrillers At War Series



Dora Benley

Cheops Books, LLC
Edward Ware Thrillers At War

Salisbury Plot
By Dora Benley

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To Duncan, who opened my eyes to the
south of England

“To all those who lead monotonous
lives in the hope that they may
experience at second hand the delights
and dangers of adventure.”

Agatha Christie

Chapter 1: *Morro Castle* off the Coast of New Jersey, September 7, 1934

Wearing a stylish Canton crepe evening frock with velvet shoulder bows, Dora sat all alone. Sipping an after-dinner coffee on the upper level of the first-class lounge, she peered out a porthole. She wondered if the ship was going to sink.

At six in the evening it looked like night. Wind stirred the waves into gray, frothy peaks. Lightning streaked across the sky. Thunder shook the ship, making the coffee spill all over its saucer. Rain pelted down over the whitecaps. Big swells lifted the *Morro Castle* and put her down on the return trip from Havana to New York.

“Mrs. Byrne, I have an urgent message for you.” A Cuban waiter appeared at Dora’s table. A white envelope lay on top of his silver tray.

She handed the man a generous tip and opened the envelope. The handwriting on the enclosed note looked entirely unfamiliar. Bold characters leaped off the paper and smacked her in the face.

September 7, 1934

Dear Mrs. Michael Byrne:

Leave what my handlers and I must have on the table — the newest of those Lawrence maps! I will retrieve them before the waiter does. I’m nothing if not nimble and quick. To prove my point, glance to your right. I’m seated only three tables away.

Your Doom

She turned to the right. A very young man, twenty at most, dressed impeccably in black tie evening wear with a white carnation in his lapel, raised his hand and waved. He was about five foot six with midnight black hair that curled around his

milky white cheeks. His clear blue eyes stared back at her. He picked up his champagne glass, winked at her, and smiled.

Dora leaped from her seat. Her handbag slammed into her side as she dashed down the grand staircase to the main level. Despite the plush carpeting, she had to hold onto the railing as the ship pitched and rolled. She nearly ran headlong into a waiter carrying a silver tray with crystal glasses. Gin sloshed over the white linen tray mat.

She wasn't involved in hiding those Lawrence maps, at least not for many years, not since 1921 to be exact. Why this stranger was coming after her about them, she couldn't imagine. But that spelled danger. She would have to tell Edward all about it.

When she reached the dance floor, the room was thick with passengers and musicians. Dora could not see the exit. Everyone around her was doing the jitterbug, though they were being thrown against each other by the rough seas. Being married to Michael — the dour, serious, and overworked Vice President of her father's company, Benley Tire and Rubber, who came on this cruise to sell tires in Havana — did not exactly provide her an opportunity to try it. Methodists — and Michael was always a very devout one — did not approve of dancing.

Someone grabbed her around the waist. She found herself gazing into the startlingly blue eyes of the mysterious stranger from the balcony section of the first class lounge.

"I wondered when we would meet, Mrs. Byrne," he spoke with a high-toned British accent even though he didn't quite look British. That intense black hair made him seem foreign, even exotic.

They could not stand still in the midst of the surging dance crowd. They were forced to do the jitterbug.

"So you are Edward Ware's *sweetheart*!" the young man said with emphasis.

She hoped this young man did not notice her blush under the glaring yellow, overhead lights. She never discussed Edward with strangers. It wasn't safe with her husband on the same ship.

“Colonel Sir Edward Ware writes to me like an old family friend. We knew each other during the war some years ago,” she prevaricated.

That much was true. But there was much more to it, of course.

“You have in fact received many, many packages from him by Royal Mail — in big, fat boxes,” he told her what he discovered.

How did this stranger find out about those Royal Mail packages? From spies hiding out in the New Forest near Ware Hall in the South of England? Did they camp behind the barrows and grave mounds from long ago or sleep among the giant rocks at Stonehenge which wasn’t all that faraway from where Edward and his mother lived? Did they observe all those packages and all their correspondence being sent off to the States from the harbor at Southampton? Or were they undercover in the South Hills of Pittsburgh watching them as they were delivered to her house in Bethel Boro? Maybe all of the above?

She repressed a blush. What would this young man think if he found out that inside some of those packages were canvases of her painted in the nude in both watercolors and oils? She posed for them in New York when she and Edward trysted at the Waldorf Astoria during his leaves from the British army. He came to New York five or six times a year when he wasn’t busy at Mid-East Headquarters in Cairo.

“We are in a big hurry, my handlers and I. We have no time to waste. We want all of the very valuable maps Edward Ware must be giving to you — and all very recently,” the young man hissed.

“Only business contracts were in those boxes. I — I am helping Lady Ware with the management of Adolphus Motors while Edward is away at Mid-East Headquarters. His mother is a widow, you know. She’s trying to carry on her late husband’s auto business, Adolphus Motors.” Dora came up with an explanation right off the top of her head.

“Likely story!” he guffawed.

“If you’ll excuse me, I’m busy!” Dora said frostily. She turned to go. She probably revealed too much already.

She broke away, throwing herself between two other couples, and then ran smack into a third. She finally caught sight of the open doorway to the outside deck.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Women screamed. The music stopped as a man cried out as if in pain. Hisses, whispers, and shouts erupted behind her. Dora kept pushing through the crowd towards the exit.

“What happened?” one of the dancers yelled.

“That man over there . . . Look, he’s been shot!” screamed another.

“Somebody get a doctor! Is he dead?” cried a third.

Dora speeded up. She wanted no part of this.

A lady stepped out of the crowd right in front of Dora, practically colliding with her. “It’s Captain Willmott!” she pointed.

Someone grabbed Dora’s arm. The young man with the carnation whispered in her ear, “Oops! I missed the wall above your head. I was supposed to scare you. You’re supposed to give me the maps that you no doubt are carrying in your very fashionable handbag. That’s what my handlers told me. I don’t know how the Captain got in the way.”

He shrugged. The black-haired young man stuffed a handgun into his suit pocket while exiting the room in a big hurry.

The ships’ officers pushed their way into the crowd. “Make way!” they called out. They grabbed hold of Captain Willmott. Blood was oozing from his shoulder. They slung him between them and let the captain limp out on his own toward the boat deck.

Dora entered her husband’s cabin — they always occupied separate ones while traveling and separate bedrooms back at the house, too. Michael eyed her from his writing desk as if to say, *Where have you been?* The wind coming through the cabin door

blew his papers around. He scrambled to catch them.

Her husband of fifteen years was scribbling in his leather-bound notebook that he always carried with him on business trips. He put on more than a few pounds in the last few years. Not that he was ever thin. Having arrived at a portly middle age, Michael's paunch pushed against the edge of the dark mahogany, wooden table as he leaned over it. The buttons on his suit jacket seemed ready to burst. Dora had an unenviable view of his bald spot.

He glared at her accusingly, "Dora, I've found you out!"

"Doing what? Being forced to dance the jitterbug with a stranger who told me to hand over something I know nothing about?" She pretended she didn't have a clue what Michael had discovered, though she had a pretty good idea. She and Edward were dreading this moment for years.

"You miss your fool, don't you, Dora?" Michael taunted her. "The one you could lead around by the nose and force to do tricks? Well, I'm not going to be your pet monkey anymore while you and that Colonel Sir Edward Ware of yours laugh at me."

Dora assumed an expressionless look. She wondered what he found out, just how bad it was.

He confronted her with letter after letter in her handwriting or Edward's. "So you write to that English lover of yours about what the grounds for divorce should be? He says no one would believe our marriage was never consummated. Of course not! Edward's lawyer advises that fifteen years is too long to wait to annul a marriage. That's especially true in your case. If you submitted to an exam they would discover that *you* are no virgin. Nothing to do with your husband, mind you. Just that rotten English lord of yours from back during the Great War and all the way up until now."

"How dare you spy on me!" Dora cringed to see her private love letters paraded in front of her. This was far worse than she expected. "I never question what you do. I never follow you around."

She didn't like him to look at Edward's letters for other reasons, too. Edward would be livid if anyone else found out about the secret Lawrence maps that he and Churchill were hiding for their old friend Lawrence of Arabia. Edward referred to them from time to time in his letters to her.

"Sorry, Dora, I found your treasure trove of Edward's love letters in your dresser drawer long ago — under your lingerie, of course. It just took me awhile to act on it. For one thing, I had to get the report from my paid detective."

"*Paid detective?*" she gasped, putting her hands to her cheeks.

Edward wouldn't like that. The well-connected Colonel had his career in the military to consider. He didn't want any scandals. That was part of the reason they never considered pressing for a divorce — until now.

"Yes, Dora, *paid detective*," Michael spat.

He got out a leather packet and unzipped it. He thrust in her face photo after photo of her and Edward. The first showed her racing into Edward's arms just last month in the lobby at the Waldorf-Astoria in New York. He might be wearing a business suit instead of his Colonel's uniform, but he was still recognizable with his thinning blondish-brown hair with hints of silver here and there.

The next photo showed them sneaking into their room on the fifth floor. The third revealed them having dinner together in the swanky hotel restaurant with white linen tablecloths, candles, roses, and a silver table service with a waiter in white tails serving them Bordeaux wine. They were caught on film toasting with beaming smiles. The remaining pictures showed her and Edward trying on gold and diamond rings down the street at Tiffany's the very next day, strolling through the Met and Central Park together, and then returning to their hotel early that afternoon. They again disappeared into their suite where they enjoyed a very elegant and very private room service — and Edward filled her in on the latest about the map intrigue that consumed his life and touched hers every time she met with him.

He told her all about how the maps were the key to world domination and how everyone wanted to get hold of them.

“I never concealed from you that I loved Edward when you and I got married. I thought he was gone for good on some secret army mission. You told me you didn’t care if you and I were only friends,” Dora confronted him. “Remember, you said you needed a wife *for business purposes only*?”

There was no sense playing this game of subterfuge any longer now that the last tryst in New York left her pregnant at age thirty-nine. Scandal or no scandal she was going to demand a divorce anyway before the end of this cruise.

“I hoped you would forget Edward,” he confessed.

“How could I forget the man you and I went to Paris to find in 1919? The man I waited four long years to marry during the Great War? You know very well after I found him I would have married my fiance in an instant if it wasn’t for that saboteur, “H”. That agent threatened us with death. Lawrence and Edward went underground to hide.” She reminded him of all the details which were as fresh in her mind as if it were yesterday and not fifteen years ago.

She never confided in Michael everything she knew about the saboteur H — how H was really that evil creature who followed Edward and Lawrence around the Syrian Desert trying to steal the earliest Lawrence maps from him during the Great War. The Kaiser wanted the maps then.

Michael leaped up and smacked her across the face. “I’ll give you your damned divorce. Only *I’m* going to divorce *you*. That’s why I hired a detective — to find the evidence. He flew to Cuba and boarded the *Morro Castle* in Havana. Tonight, just now, he presented me with it — *all of it*. And believe me I’ve got more — *lots more*.”

He shoved his nose into her face just like the bulldog he was.

Dora wished she never married Michael. She was fooled into it. She mistakenly assumed Edward was dead when he went into hiding after the war and she didn’t hear from him for two

years.

“I’m going to drag your precious name through the newspapers until you can’t show your face at the Waldorf-Astoria or anywhere else in public anymore,” he threatened. “The gossip will appear in the London papers, too. Your precious Colonel Ware will get cashiered from the army. All his connections will turn their backs on him. Then he’ll need all your money just to live on. He won’t have anything else. He can be your gigolo.”

Dora and Edward waited for years, seeking just the right moment to get a divorce and avoid a scandal. They rendezvoused in secret in Manhattan as early as 1921. At first Edward came to retrieve the original Great War Lawrence maps. Lawrence entrusted her with them in Paris in 1919 during the Paris Peace Conference. After that Edward visited every time he could get leave. She pretended to be staying with her New York theater friend, Rita Jolivet. That was enough of an excuse to be away for a week at a time about six times a year.

A scandal could be fatal to Edward’s army career. In Britain the military was much more political than in America. It was something Dora wanted to avoid for the sake of her parents, too. Benley Tire and Rubber — soon to become Benley Tire and Auto when she married Edward and her father took over Adolphus Motors — had many notable, fashionable customers.

“If you are willing to be discreet and not talk to the newspapers, my father will make holding your tongue worth your while,” Dora promised very low.

He exploded, “Why, you spoiled rich bitch! *Daddy will take care of everything, will he?*”

Michael ran into the bathroom, grabbed his belt, and walloped Dora across the shoulder with it.

She fled outside onto the rain-swept deck buffeted by high winds. She reached back in to grab her elephant tapestry bag that she dropped on the floor. She slammed the door behind her barely in time to avoid another blow.