



Vanished

Sheela Chari

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Eleven-year-old Neela dreams of being a famous musician, performing for admiring crowds on her traditional Indian stringed instrument. Her particular instrument was a gift from her grandmother-intricately carved with a mysterious-looking dragon.

When this special family heirloom vanishes from a local church, strange clues surface: a tea kettle ornamented with a familiar pointy-faced dragon, a threatening note, a connection to a famous dead musician, and even a legendary curse. The clues point all the way to India, where it seems that Neela's instrument has a long history of vanishing and reappearing. Even if Neela does track it down, will she be able to stop it from disappearing again?

Sheela Chari's debut novel is a finely tuned story of coincidence and fate, trust and deceit, music and mystery.

Vanished Details

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Author : Sheela Chari
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From Reader Review Vanished for online ebook

Claire Legrand says

VANISHED is a unique, smart, lovely book and a worthy addition to any middle grade bookshelf. Think THE RED VIOLIN for middle grade readers, but with more charm, heart, and spunk. Combining music, Indian culture, and an utterly engrossing mystery, VANISHED tells the story of 11-year-old Neela Krishnan and her grandmother's supposedly cursed veena, a traditional Indian stringed instrument. And oh, the veena! It took on such a rich personality of its own as the mystery wove on that by the end I felt like it was a character itself. And after researching more about this instrument, I discovered that it really is as beautiful as Chari's loving descriptions suggest!

I loved learning about not just the veena but also Indian culture in general; it was refreshing to read a children's book focusing on a culture other than my own. Most interesting of all was seeing how Neela and her family treasure and respect both sides of their Indian-American heritage. And speaking of sensitive, stubborn, courageous, awkward, hilariously potato chips-fixated Neela, I'll have to agree with other reviewers that Neela's own journey was as engrossing as the mystery of the missing veena. I loved watching her grow up and gain an entirely new perspective of the world around her.

Chari's prose is elegant yet familiar, intelligent yet approachable. A truly outstanding, timeless debut full of heart, mystery, magic, the power of music, the power (and danger) of wanting, and the power of doing the right thing even when -- especially when -- it hurts.

Christine Cowen says

Rarely do I find a book that both entertains and teaches me something new. Vanished is the story of a young girl named Neela who has received a musical instrument as a gift from her grandmother. The musical instrument is an Indian instrument known as the veena. When the instrument disappears, Neela begins an investigation to get it back. What she doesn't know is that the veena may not only be cursed, but might also be more valuable than she thinks.

One of the things I liked the most about this book is the characterization of Neela. She is very realistic, wanting both to please her parents and also struggling against their ideals. She has complicated friendships and rivalries at school. Most of all she is struggling to learn about herself and where she fits in the world.

Layered throughout the book is the Indian/American culture that makes up Neela's world. While her grandmother still lives in India, her parents encourage her to embrace her American upbringing. While Neela's school friends are mainly American, she also has close friend who shares her Indian/American descent. The author uses these relationships to mix in the Indian culture that colors Neela's world. Neela is still learning which parts of which culture she wants to embrace. This makes for some of the best parts of the book.

All in all, this book is a satisfying journey. While you may feel like you know where it is headed and how it will turn out, the book has its share of twists and turns. Where this book really shines is the portrayal of Neela. Her journey from unsure, nervous girl to self confident musician makes this book a great read.

Tiffany says

Neela is a young musician who has lost her veena, and stringed, Indian instrument. Not only is the veena missing, but it is also cursed, which only adds to the intrigue. I liked the element of mystery added with the cultural ties of the veena. I felt like the two worked well together and were never in competition. With the long list of children's mysteries about missing painting and instruments, this will fit right in. Give this to fans of the Red Blazer Girls and Chasing Vermeer.

Karissa says

I have had this book to read for a couple years and was eager to finally sit down and read it. It ended up being an okay middle grade mystery.

Neela dreams of being a professional veena (traditional Indian stringed instrument) player. Her dreams are one step closer to reality when she receives a beautiful veena (a famous Gudo original) from her Aunt in India. When this famous veena goes missing it is up to Neela to unravel the strange past behind this veena, which may involve a curse.

I enjoyed some of the Indian culture in here, but thought the pacing of the story was pretty slow. This is a neat history and story behind the veena Neela receives, but to be honest I just didn't find it all that interesting or engaging.

I honestly don't have a ton to say about this book. It wasn't a bad book, but it was also completely forgettable. It's decently written and the subject matter is unique. However I never really engaged with the story or the characters all that much.

There are some good messages in here about not judging people by their appearance and about how playing music has to be for you before it can be for the audience.

Overall an okay middle grade mystery. The book is decently written, it was just kind of boring. While not a bad book I also found it to be a forgettable one.

Tess Hilmo says

This was such a smart, fun read. I enjoyed following Neela on a chase that involved international intrigue, ancient curses, well defined characters. It taught so much but was seamlessly entertaining at the same time. Very clever! A perfect addition to any classroom library.

Jenna says

Vanished, by Sheela Chari is a fabulous mystery that grabs you from the first page. The story follows a sixth grade student Neela as she searches for her missing instrument, a veena. Neela had no idea that the instrument that she inherited from her grandmother was cursed. She also had no idea that bringing her instrument to school one day would set in motion a chain of events where she would lose her instrument,

investigate mysteries, make new friends, and travel half way around the world all in an attempt to discover the truth behind an ancient curse.

Chari's mystery had me from the opening lines. From there I was hooked on solving this mystery with Neela. The author keeps the mystery moving with clues and red herrings all throughout the story, giving just enough information to encourage the reader to reason it out themselves. In addition to the smartly plotted art mystery though, is a rare kind of hero in children's literature. The smart girl who isn't necessarily the most popular or gorgeous. In fact, Neela is an Indian American girl, who sometimes feels like she is torn between her two cultures. It was great to read a story that gave a window in to a modern Indian family dealing with issues that were not related to stereotypes. Instead it was a regular family, dealing with life's events. This is a culture that is growing in United States and it is great to see that beginning to be reflected in children's literature. I liked getting to know Neela, and I'd love to know more about her story. This author's debut is a must read for mystery lovers, and kids who love school stories.

Doret says

Review to come but for now I will say it's very good and an excellent debut. My fingers are crossed that this will be the first adventure for Neela.

Merged review:

Neela brings her instrument, a veena to her sixth grade class for the around the world unit. On the way home there's a very bad rainstorm. Neela is offered shelter from the rain by an old man in a church. She's very uneasy about not being able to take her valuable veena straight home. Also the old man is a little strange. The two have an odd conversation in the kitchen. When Neela goes to leave her veena is missing and the man has disappeared.

The veena is very special and rare it was a gift from Neela's grandmother in India. Neela is determined to find her instrument even after her parents tell her to stop.

I enjoyed Vanished a lot and loved Neela's voice. It was also nice to see Neela's parents and younger brother, Seri were a part in the story.

"Like strep throat or the chicken pox, or the Great Plague which Neela read about in social studies, bad luck was one of those things are one of those things are mother tried at great length to avoid. She was training to be a pharmacist, and it was her belief that all human experience was the result of chemistry and luck, good and bad. But mostly bad. Neela's father would always exclaim that's so unscientific. But there was no changing her mother's opinion. Bad luck was an impenetrable force working against them all. Worst of all it was contagious."

Since the suspect list is small, I liked that the other doesn't throw in too many red herrings. The mystery lies more in the how and why the veena was stolen. The story moves along at a great clip. There's a nice hint of creepy and unexplained darkness. The age old curse on the missing veena adds to this feeling. Neela slowly connects the clues and everything comes together in India.

Neela reminded me of Glida Joyce. Both characters have a certain similar quality that I love. Vanished was a well layered story that was simply a lot of fun. An excellent debut and one of my favorites of the year. I hope this is the first of many books starring Neela Krishnan. 3.5 out of 5.

Liz Overberg says

This mystery in this story was enjoyable and was less predictable than many middle grade mysteries, but the book still lacked any real suspense. The characters were underdeveloped and some conclusions and relationships between clues were a little too convenient. And there were far too many extraneous characters who we only knew were important because the author told us they were important. The main character, Neela, had 5 friends where she could have had just 2 and the story would have been cleaner. I think kids will enjoy trying to solve the mystery as they read along, but I'm surprised that this book has been touted as one of the best middle grade books of 2011. I didn't feel any magic here. The writing was made up of a lot of telling, not showing. All in all I was underwhelmed.

Reading Vacation says

Neela has a talent for playing the veena. What is a veena you may ask? It is a famous Indian instrument that has been around for centuries, and is often used in traditional Indian ceremonies. Neela's particular veena has been passed down for generations, and has a mysterious history of disappearing from its owners, including Neela. Neela needs to crack the code of her missing veena if she ever wants to see it again.

In addition to her veena problems, Neela is facing fierce pressure to be a normal American tween from both of her parents. They want her to give up the Indian culture that she so dearly loves and embrace America. The problem is, Neela feels connected to both her Indian and American roots, despite her parents' wishes. I felt bad for Neela, having to choose who she really was at such a young age. I felt that she was equally American and Indian, and it made her unique and special.

The mystery of Neela's veena was intriguing, with plenty of clues and hints along the way to keep the reader interested. I was caught up in the history of the veena, and how it played into Neela's current problem. It was so interesting how the veena would disappear, only to reappear later. Did I mention there is a dragon too? I loved how the dragon's story fits in with that of the veena.

I enjoyed this mystery complete with Indian culture and American tween issues.

RATING

4 Liked

COVER COMMENTS

I really like this cover and its simplicity. I am drawn to the pretty starry sky.

Jen Petro-Roy says

A wonderful debut novel. A well crafted mystery that simultaneously gives fascinating insight into other cultures. I really loved how real Neela was--exactly how a girl her age would behave.

Diana Renn says

If you've ever lost a prized possession, you will instantly sympathize with eleven-year-old Neela, who loses a valuable musical instrument in the mystery novel *VANISHED*. The instrument -- an intricately carved wooden veena, a gift from her grandmother in India -- goes missing in a church outside of Boston, despite its large size and unwieldy carrying case. Strange clues begin to appear, and a fascinating history emerges. The veena, with its history of disappearing from all its owners, may have had a curse placed on it. From Boston to India, this expertly plotted mystery will keep readers guessing as they follow its twists and turns.

There's just so much to love about this mystery, including its precise details about veenas, about Indian culture, about dragons and wyverns. The novel certainly stands in good company with *CHASING VERMEER* and other great middle grade art mysteries. It is also exceptionally rich in characters, portraying people and situations that feel real and age-appropriate. Sometimes the biggest mysteries are the people in our day to day lives, and this is absolutely the case in *VANISHED*. Neela's family dynamic is shifting, as she ventures out into the world in search of the veena, pushing boundaries and causing her parents worry. She realizes that adults, including parents, are capable of deception. Her childhood friendships are also shifting and evolving. In addition, Neela is trying to gain confidence as a young musician and to overcome her stage fright. While I invested in Neela's search for the veena and wanted to see it found, I was equally invested in her personal journey.

A very satisfying read. Intricate and sophisticated, but never inaccessible. Highly recommend!

Karen says

Neela searches for her grandmother's stolen veena - an heirloom Indian instrument- and stumbles upon quite a mystery, and maybe even a curse. I wanted to like this one. I really wanted to be able to recommend it to my students as a smart middle-grade mystery along the lines of *Chasing Vermeer*. I was interested to read more about the Indian-American culture, as well. The intro was interesting and promised a great story, but it didn't deliver. The writing is so muddled that I highly doubt any of my kids would bother to finish it. I struggled to finish myself, but I kept hoping it would get better. There are entirely too many characters and too many veenas to keep up with! There was nothing intriguing about the "mystery" and the writing just fell flat for me. I read this as an e-galley with plans to purchase it for our library if it was good, but I don't know that I'll bother, because I don't know if I can find an audience for it. If kids are looking for a smart mystery, I would recommend *Chasing Vermeer* instead. If they are looking for magical realism, I'd recommend *Savvy* instead. Both are much better bets.

Heather says

Review of an advance copy:

I really enjoyed reading this one. I had never heard of a veena before, so it didn't take me long before I was online looking at photos. I am also interested in listening to some recordings, now that I have been introduced to this fascinating instrument. The mystery and the actions of various perpetrators may strain credibility at times, but this doesn't really get in the way of enjoying the story. I liked that the mystery and the chase spanned two different countries and that the book dealt with the cultures of India and of Indian

Americans. Neela shows rather than tells about her culture through her music, her family, and her friendship with Matt. I especially liked her growing relationship with her young brother, as well. I would definitely enjoy reading further stories featuring Neela, Pavi, Lynne, and Matt, and I would recommend this story for all 4th-6th grade readers.

Stephanie says

I loved this book so, so much! Music and mystery, international adventure and a touch of magic...kids are going to eat this up. I read it as an e-galley but cannot wait to buy my own copy for lots of re-readings.

Eleven-year-old Neela, who lives near Boston and dreams of becoming a professional musician one day, loves playing the beautiful old veena (a traditional Indian instrument) that her grandmother has sent her from India. But there's a story behind that veena that the adults in her life have hidden from her, and when it's stolen from Neela, she discovers rumors of a curse laid upon the instrument. As she works to find her stolen veena, she makes new friendships, struggles with her changing relationship with her mother, and discovers the strength and confidence that had been hidden inside herself all along.

The story of VANISHED is fabulous and fun, but what I really loved most were all the little details of Neela's family life. All of her family members were real and believable, from four-year-old Sree to their parents and grandmother, and I recognized so many little details of family dynamics from when I was eleven - Neela's shifting relationship with her much-younger brother, her struggles to define herself against her mother and find a new balance in their relationship...one of my favorite bits was this little moment between the two of them:

"Mrs. Krishnan reached over to stroke the ends of Neela's hair. Neela had always loved this since she was small, but lately it had begun to annoy her, too, because it felt like her mother was secretly trying to arrange her hair at the same time."

It's such a perfect encapsulation of the shifting mother-daughter relationship near the teenage years, where even the most loving relationships can run into so much conflict and strain without anyone being a "bad guy". And that's true of the adventure in this book, too, which I admired so much - it's exciting, there's danger, there's deception and real menace - but it's all believably done by real people who think they're in the right.

Despite the fact that this isn't a fantasy novel, VANISHED felt truly magical to me, and it also had the classic tone of a children's novel that could last a long, long time. I absolutely loved it.

Terry Johnson says

Mystery, culture, and adventure. Complex and realistic characters. And veenas. I do love to learn as I read.
