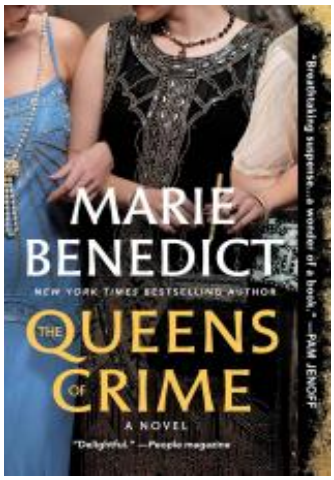
The Queens of Crime

by Marie Benedict



About the Book

The *New York Times* bestselling author of THE MYSTERY OF MRS. CHRISTIE returns with a thrilling story of Agatha Christie?s legendary rival, Dorothy Sayers; the race to solve a murder; and the power of friendship among women.

London, 1930. The five greatest women crime writers have banded together to form a secret society with a single goal: to show they are no longer willing to be treated as second-class citizens by their male counterparts in the legendary Detection Club. Led by the formidable Dorothy L. Sayers, the group includes Agatha Christie, Ngaio Marsh, Margery Allingham and Baroness Emma Orczy. They call themselves the Queens of Crime. Their plan? Solve an actual murder, that of a young woman found strangled in a park in France who may have connections leading to the highest levels of the British establishment.

May Daniels, a young English nurse on an excursion to France with her friend, seemed to vanish into thin air as they prepared to board a ferry home. Months later, her body is found in the nearby woods. The murder has all the hallmarks of a locked-room mystery for which these authors are famous. How did her killer manage to sneak her body out of a crowded train station without anyone noticing? If, as the police believe, the cause of death is manual strangulation, why is there an extraordinary amount of blood at the crime scene? What is the meaning of a heartbreaking secret letter seeming to implicate an unnamed paramour?

Determined to solve the highly publicized murder, the Queens of Crime embark on their own investigation, discovering they?re stronger together. But soon the killer targets Dorothy Sayers herself, threatening to expose a dark secret in her past that she would do anything to keep hidden.

Inspired by a true story in Sayers? own life, *New York Times* bestselling author Marie Benedict brings to life the lengths to which five talented women writers will go to be taken seriously in the male-dominated world of letters as they

unpuzzle a mystery torn from the pages of their own novels.

Discussion Guide

1. The novel opens with the main character and narrator, mystery writer Dorothy L. Sayers, speculating that ?None of us is as we appear.? How does this notion permeate the novel? Does the dichotomy between perception and reality manifest in the characters and the events in the story?

2. Had you heard of Dorothy before reading THE QUEENS OF CRIME? Aside from the famous Agatha Christie, were you familiar with the three other successful authors of detective fiction who play significant roles: Baroness Emma Orczy, Ngaio Marsh and Margery Allingham? Which of the women, if any, did you find to be the most relatable?

3. The book offers a glimpse into the writerly existence, the mundane details like deadlines, as well as the nature of inspiration. Did real life provide a spark for Dorothy?s novels? Were you surprised at the interplay between fact and fiction, and does it make you wonder about the origin behind other novels you?ve read?

4. The women at the heart of THE QUEENS OF CRIME were successful writers, which was unusual for their time. What was the nature of each woman?s journey to writing, and who had to overcome the most in order to do so? How did their desire to receive just recognition for their accomplishments shape the course of the story?

5. In an homage to the great detective fiction of the sort penned by these women, THE QUEENS OF CRIME is structured like a classic mystery novel. What did you learn as you unlocked each layer of the mysteries --- from the puzzle of May?s murder to the nature of Dorothy?s secret?

6. The five ?Queens of Crime? hailed from different social strata, economic backgrounds and countries, and even their ages varied by decades. In light of these disparities, did you anticipate that they?d form a sisterhood? What, if anything, did they have to address in order to band together? Did their differences ultimately serve as a hindrance or a help?

7. During their investigation into May Daniels? murder, Dorothy, Agatha, Ngaio and Margery encounter widespread prejudicial attitudes toward certain groups of women, particularly ?surplus women.? Did this perspective fuel either the murder or its resolution? How did you feel about this point of view?

8. How successful were the women as detectives? Did they find writing about detectives very different from playing the part? Did the identity of the murderer --- and what it says about society at that time --- surprise you?

9. Many of the characters in the novel harbor secrets, especially Dorothy and May. How do those hidden truths affect the trajectory of the story? Would these secrets hold the same power today?

10. Consider the legacy of Dorothy and the other ?Queens of Crime.? While Agatha Christie?s fame continues to this day, the others? renown does not. Is it possible to leave behind an important legacy, even if your name and narrative have disappeared into the past? Why might some of the women have been forgotten, despite their popularity during their lifetimes?

11. How did you feel about the end of THE QUEENS OF CRIME? Was justice done for May Daniels? Did Dorothy,

Agatha, Ngaio, Margery and Emma receive the appreciation from the Detection Club that they sought? Would such measures have been necessary today?

Author Bio

Marie Benedict is the *New York Times* and *USA Today* bestselling author of DAUGHTER OF EGYPT, THE QUEENS OF CRIME, THE MITFORD AFFAIR, HER HIDDEN GENIUS, THE MYSTERY OF MRS. CHRISTIE, THE ONLY WOMAN IN THE ROOM, LADY CLEMENTINE, CARNEGIE'S MAID, THE OTHER EINSTEIN. She also has coauthored with Victoria Christopher Murray the *New York Times* bestselling THE PERSONAL LIBRARIAN, a ?Good Morning America? Book Club pick; THE FIRST LADIES, Target?s 2023 Book of the Year; and A PAIR OF ACES. All have been translated into multiple languages, and many have been selected for the Barnes & Noble Book Club, the Target Book Club, the Costco Book Club, the Indie Next List and the LibraryReads List. She lives in Pittsburgh with her family.

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