



A Murder of Magpies

Judith Flanders

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A whip-smart, impeccably crafted debut mystery, *A Murder of Magpies* takes readers on a whirlwind tour of London and Paris with an unforgettably original new heroine

It's just another day at the office for London book editor Samantha "Sam" Clair. Checking jacket copy for howlers, wondering how to break it to her star novelist that her latest effort is utterly unpublishable, lunch scheduled with gossipy author Kit Lowell, whose new book will dish the juicy dirt on a recent fashion industry scandal. Little does she know the trouble Kit's book will cause-before it even goes to print. When police Inspector Field turns up at the venerable offices of Timmins & Ross, asking questions about a package addressed to Sam, she knows something is wrong. Now Sam's nine-to-five life is turned upside down as she finds herself propelled into a criminal investigation. Someone doesn't want Kit's manuscript published and unless Sam can put the pieces together in time, they'll do anything to stop it.

With this deliciously funny debut novel, acclaimed author Judith Flanders introduces readers to an enormously enjoyable, too-clever-for-her-own-good new amateur sleuth, as well Sam's Goth assistant, her effortlessly glamorous mother, and the handsome Inspector Field. A tremendously entertaining read, this page-turning novel from a bright new crime fiction talent is impossible to put down.

A Murder of Magpies Details

Date : Published February 24th 2015 by Minotaur Books (first published March 20th 2014)

ISBN : 9781250056450

Author : Judith Flanders

Format : Hardcover 277 pages

Genre : Mystery, Fiction, Humor, Cozy Mystery, European Literature, British Literature

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From Reader Review A Murder of Magpies for online ebook

Susan says

Judith Flanders is a well known author of history books about the Victorian period but, with this novel, she has changed direction completely, writing a contemporary crime story. Having enjoyed her previous works, I was interested to see whether this change would be a success and, I am happy to say, that she is obviously as talented as a novelist as she is as a historian.

Samantha Clair is a “middle aged middling-ly successful” editor at Timms & Ross. She is, in fact, the kind of woman who run successful publishing offices. Her authors are not generally the kind of literary successes who win awards, but those who write ‘women’s fiction’ or gossipy books. In other words, the kinds of books which pay for all those respected literary works to be published, usually at a loss. When we meet Sam, she is having problems with two of her most popular authors and their new books. Her bestselling and star author, Breda McManon, has changed direction and she hates her new novel . She also has concerns about the legal implications of Kit Lovell’s (fashion journalist, author and friend) highly contentious new manuscript about a Spanish fashion designer; including financial irregularities and the possible cover up of his murder.

Sam likes a quiet life. She has recently broken up with her partner and enjoys living in her North London apartment, the company of her neighbours and her work. She muses that, “I only feel great when I’m lying on the sofa reading a book, possibly while simultaneously eating biscuits,” which is a point of view I can sympathise with totally. In fact, Sam is an extremely likeable heroine who, despite her unwillingness to enter into an adventure is a loyal friend. When Kit goes missing, she is determined to discover his whereabouts, along with her intelligent and super efficient mother, Helena, and Inspector Jake Field.

This is a fun, intelligent and witty crime novel. It has a great plot, excellent characters and a setting which will appeal to all readers, with a sharp and satirical look at the publishing industry. I sincerely hope that Judith Flanders will make this a series , as I would love to see Sam involved in some more crime solving.

Eyehavenofilter says

I'd really have to give this 3 and 3/4 stars. I grabbed this off the library shelf in hopes of an entertaining quick read, and it was just that and more.

It is not just another daily grind for book editor Samantha Clair, who seems to not know what's going on. She totally misses the boat in her judgement of the latest book by her " cash cow" author who for the last 2 decades has pumped out a best seller, and second guesses a tell all fashion book by good friend Kit, that might just involve espionage and money theft. But when police inspector Field shows up, asking questions about the untimely death of a courier that was on his way to her offices, things really heat up for " Sam". Her upstairs neighbor hasn't left his apartment for almost 40 years, her downstairs neighbors only invite her over once a year at most, Kit disappears, someone breaks into Sam's apartment, but nothing seems to be missing, and now that inspector wants to sleep over.Her usual bookish life has gone into overdrive, and she finds herself thrown into a criminal investigation of gigantic proportions. It seems that more than one person doesn't want Kit's manuscript published, and is willing to do anything to stop it, including kidnapping. This hilariously funny amateur sleuth with a continuous inner dialogue was just what I needed to bring my out of my reading slump.

(However...The ending was a bit too neatly tied up with a big red bow.)

Cathy Cole says

Reading *A Murder of Magpies* will make you feel as though you've just been dished some of the juiciest dirt on the publishing business, and author Judith Flanders has found the perfect character to tell us all about it. Sam Clair has an infectious snarky wit that's almost impossible to resist. She is a very self-contained character who, for some reason, has chosen to live her life on the outside. It can't have everything to do with her annoyingly perfect lawyer mother Helena, and I'd love to know more. (Yes, that means I hope we'll be hearing more from Sam.)

As clever as she is, she doesn't always get it right, and one of the funniest threads in the book concerns the trials and tribulations she has with her bestselling author and the author's latest book, which Sam believes is a total disaster. This editor thinks she has an inside edge on almost everything-- like when she goes to question someone because she thinks she-- as a middle-aged woman-- will get more out of the person than the police ever would. (She just may have something there.)

Flanders really ups the ante on readers' sleuthing skills because what is originally thought to be a missing persons case morphs into something much larger and complex. Something that the police are going to have difficulty in handling but is perfect for the sharp eyes and minds of Sam and her mother. Watching these two women dig for the truth is worth the price of admission, and as I've already said, I'm definitely looking forward to reading more about Samantha Clair.

Olga Godim says

I received this ARC from the publisher through Netgalley.

An average cozy mystery, this book features an unusual protagonist—a book editor. Sam's main concern at the beginning of the novel is the latest manuscript of her star writer. Then another of her writers, a fashion journalist with a penchant of digging dirt on high couture, goes missing, and she decides to investigate. Or rather to ask questions in places the police wouldn't go.

Despite the engaging premise, the story was slow and a bit dull, without the absorbing qualities of the best books in the genre. Every bit of praise I can give this book is tempered by a 'but.'

The mystery was interesting, with an unconventional and unexpected solution, but the narration leading up to the unmasking of the villain(s) was too full of mind-numbing legalese and corporate finances, and the main proof of guilt too flimsy to be real. The author used to write non-fiction; her attention to details is scrupulous, but it made the text vaguely boring.

The protagonist Sam was a fascinating character, a bit grumpy, forty-year-old publishing professional, with no illusions about life and literature and a sardonic attitude, but the rest of the characters were placeholders. The author introduced a romance in her plot, which should've spiced up the tale, but there was no built-up, no attraction, no improper urges of Sam's part. No spice. One day she meets a guy. A few days later, she jumps in bed with him. After that, they seem to become a couple.

The writing was reasonably clean. A few glitches in spelling and grammar could be explained by its being an uncorrected proof. On the other hand, humor sparkling in Sam's sarcastic musings and witty dialogs was what saved this book from being totally blah.

A few quotes below demonstrate Sam's saucy side.

~~~~~  
*In all the books I'd ever read, Our Hero is brutally assaulted, tied up for seventy-two hours, frequently being hung by his ankles in the process. When he frees himself by gnawing through the ropes, he stops only for a quick drink and then charges straight off after the villains.*

*Another cherished illusion gone. It was plain to me now that what Our Hero would really do was lie in bed and moan gently.*

~~~~~  
In the real world, no one kidnaps academics or journalists because no one wants them. It's hard enough to get rid of them after dinner.

~~~~~  
*The last refuge of the intelligentsia: when real life gets too difficult, go find something to read.*

~~~~~  
I was going to burgle someone's office because my mother told me to. I wondered if the judge would consider that a mitigating circumstance.

On the whole, it was a solid cozy with a blunt but kind-hearted heroine.

Jody McGrath says

Samantha "Sam" Clair is a middle aged editor who specializes in women's fiction, except for 1 client who does exposes, Kit Lovell. Kit is also one of her good friends. When he submits his next manuscript, it is a whopper. It talks about murder and money laundering. When Kit disappears and Sam gets burgled, suddenly, Sam's life isn't so predictable anymore. With the help of Inspector Jake Field and her solicitor mother, Helena, Sam is determined to find her friend and get this book published.

I really enjoyed this book. It had me laughing so many times, that my family started to look at me strangely. Sam is a fantastic character. She is smart, sarcastic, down-to-earth, and very real. She isn't some TSTL type of heroine. In fact, she doesn't even really want to be a heroine. Sam's mother, Helena, was so funny. Sam is convinced she is a Martian, because she seems to be perfect and know everything. Their relationship is awkward but endearing. Jake, the Inspector, fell a little flat for me. He seemed a little one dimensional. I hope in the sequel he perks up some.

The mystery has multiple layers, and it is fun to watch them try to separate all of the crimes. I think it was very well written. There was a lot of financial gobbledegook in parts, that went over my head, but I caught on when they dumbed it down for Sam. Lol!

I recommend cozy readers and British mystery lovers to give this book a shot. I really enjoyed it a lot.

Nancy says

Am I the only person that hopes that this will become a series?

Other than the complete confusion I had with the money-laundering scheme, I really enjoyed Samantha Clair as a lead character. There was something refreshing and endearing when a character in an “almost” cozy mystery uses her brain and not just her love interest to help her solve a mystery.

Book editor Samantha Clair is in a difficult position when her bestselling author submits a book that is almost too awful to print. She will have to put that on the proverbial back burner when she plans a meeting with another author whose new book proposal offers tantalizing gossip within the fashion industry. There are people that do not want this scandalous book published so when both the manuscript and author disappear Police Inspector Jake Field shows up at the publishing house wanting Sam to answer a couple of questions. Of course, the inspector is handsome and Samantha is curious, but that is not going to get in the way of Sam finding her friend and answering quite a few questions of her own. Most pressing of which is - who exactly is that man living in the apartment above her.

There are many great characters in this book – namely her mother Helena that Samantha is convinced is a Martian or other life form since the woman seems to have supernatural powers and survives on very little sleep. Helena is hysterical throughout the book and most definitely keeps Sam on her toes.

I would not say that the plot was “un-put-down-able” but I would say that the characters kept me coming back and I hope that Ms. Flanders has more shenanigans with this group in the works.

Carol says

Think there was too much build up about the humor in this mystery. My expectations were high. But *A Murder of Magpies* by Judith Flanders did not come through for me.

The beginning introduced Sam or Samantha Clair, a middle aged book editor whose usual days are filled with meetings. A police inspector comes to her office and asks her questions about a missing manuscript. She meets with Kit Lowell, a gossipy, fashion journalist who has written an unusual rich and famous book that points to a family and police cover up of a murder. Kit thinks that organized crime might be involved. Kit is gay and obsessive compulsive with every couch pillow in its place. I thought he was far more interesting than the main character.

Kit goes missing and Sam reluctantly has to invite her mother’s help. Her mother is a dynamic attorney in a big firm and she always seems to be perfectly put together and has a wealth of knowledge including how to pick a lock, any lock. I was able to imagine her very quickly and felt more comfortable with her than her insecure daughter, Sam. Sam’s romance seemed very shallow to me.

The story moves quickly but I had a hard time keeping my interest in it. I got excited whenever Kit or her mother appeared. I think some of the humor was just too obvious for me to enjoy. I would be interested if the author wrote a mystery centering about the two characters that I really liked.

I received this Advanced Reading Edition as a win from FirstRead but that in no way influenced my thoughts or feelings in this review.

Mona says

I received a copy of this book from NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

The story is set in the London publishing world. Samantha "Sam" Clair, the protagonist, is a book editor and the narrator. Her client, Kit Lovell, goes missing. Kit is a fashion journalist at the Sunday News whose dishy manuscript on the fashion industry has also disappeared. Inspector Jake Field shows up at Sam's office to investigate.

I enjoyed Sam's voice. I was immediately drawn in by both her humor and by the vivid descriptions she provides of everything and everyone. The supporting characters are also introduced in a timely fashion as the plot progresses. We meet Sam's colleagues and clients, her neighbors, and, especially, her flamboyant and charismatic mother, Helena.

On the downside, I feel there was undue emphasis on the legal sub-plots. It was difficult to keep track of the companies and/or characters involved. The story dragged and I lost interest. I was glad that I was nearly finished and only hoped for a satisfying ending.

Overall, the book was a disjointed disappointment. Although it started well, the story became bogged down by a complex legal maze that I found hard to follow. The conclusion seemed rushed and far-fetched.

Merril Anil says

Talkative Magpie

I will admit that the book had some killer funny bone but then towards the end that very bone was killing me and not at all in a fun way.

The central character was a pleasure to be around as her wit and sharp tongue would make you rolling on the floors but after sometime you feel like stuffing her mouth and yelling "SHUT UP" because she is making your ears bleed with constant chatter. Its like she has to have a say in everything. Even in life or death situations, she can't stop putting out sarcastic taunts and weapons and thereupon muffling the intensity of the situations

I think with a murder mystery set against a publishing house background, the book definitely stands apart and is even impressive with a very strong and sharp character but then in the treatment of the book, somewhere around shaping the character became the priority rather than the story and the plot itself which is what actually brought the downfall for the book in my eyes

Language as I mentioned is sharp, witty and humorous but after a while it is just plain chitter chatter than an actual story. I never got the wind of the activities that was happening in the book being caught up in all the things the central character had to say. Even for a plot I felt it had so much layers to it and since no proper mention or treatment was done to it, the intricacies and nuisances of what happened went amiss with me. The character was perfect but the setting was not in my opinion.

But in spite of all that it is pure chick lit fun nothing too serious or brainiac or atleast not portrays itself to be one

The book can be picked up by whodunnit fans but only those who does not like too much complicated stuffs in their story. Everything in this book is about its central character and her sharp tongue, the plot kind of takes a backseat failing at the sharp end of central character's tongue and sarcasms but otherwise the book is a good fun read.

Jaylia3 says

Witty publishing world mystery with intelligent, independent (only occasionally grumpy) midlife female main character

Since Samantha (Sam) Clair is a non-flashy middle-aged woman who works as a book editor and lives a quiet somewhat solitary life with just a few close friends, people tend to seriously underestimate her intellect, her powers of observation, her pointed sarcastic wit, and her won't be brushed off or appeased determination. When one of her authors goes missing and police seem more interested in his yet to be published tell-all exposé than finding him Sam starts her own investigation.

Readers who enjoy the challenge of puzzles may feel differently, but while I loved this smart, funny book and its good-hearted but sometimes grumpy main character, the solving of the mystery was the least interesting part of the story for me, especially when characters were systematically analyzing the meaning of clues. What I did like was following Sam around to see what she'd say and do next. One moment she'd be flattering an egotistical bigwig, lulling him into thinking this frumpy older woman respects and reveres him, but when that bigwig was dismissive or not forthcoming with information she was hoping to sweet-talk out of him she'd turn on a dime and dish out a devastating faux-innocent put down that would silence the room and then walk out without looking back, no longer interested, with me running along behind her.

I also enjoyed being there for Sam's interactions with her high-style gossipy author, her whip-sharp ultra-competent lawyer mother, her willing to innovate outside the box editorial assistant, and her reclusive never leaves his apartment neighbor. Sam has a somewhat skeptical attitude toward the nascent romance developing between her and the lead detective that's refreshing because it's so non-starry-eyed, and this book's inside look at the world of publishing can't help but be entertaining for bibliophiles. A fun book, especially if you'd like a slightly older, intelligent, independent woman as your main character.

I read an advanced review copy of this book given to me at no cost by the publisher. Review opinions are mine.

Debbie says

First off, I want to say I'm giving this book 4 1/2 stars, but this site doesn't allow it. Okay, now with the review.

Don't let the title or cover fool you. This is not a lighthearted cozy romantic mystery. I just loved that the Sam wasn't totally agonizing about whether he loved her or not. She is a more professional and mature person which for me means less agony as a reader. Not that That is a bad thing, it just sometimes gets in the way for me.

This was a very well written book, so much so that I can't believe it's a debut novel. The characters were rich and very likable. There was a good story involved, read the blurbs, you'll see what it's about. And plenty of suspects so that you will never figure it out.

I commend Judith Flanders for a job well done and than her for the entertainment, because it was definitely entertaining!

Thank you St. Martin's Press and Net Galley for providing me with a free e-galley in exchange for an honest review

Jonathan says

A Murder of Magpies was a very well-written and gripping start to a series that I know I'll keep up with.

I really liked Sam, she was smart and bold, but unlike many MCs I've read she didn't think that she knew everything and she was not perfect. Her sarcastic sense of humor and her hilarious comebacks had me laughing out loud throughout numerous portions of the book. I also loved Jake and Sam's mother, both were also funny in their own way, and I absolutely loved the way Sam's mom knew everything about everybody without being nosy. She simply had connections and knew how to use them.

The mystery was stellar. I did not see the ending coming and I was shocked by how the author steered you the completely wrong direction, but at the same tile left clues throughout the story. Same investigates without being overly brash about it and yet she put it together in a completely logical way.

Overall a very good book that I really enjoyed. I'll read the next book when it comes out. *A Murder of Magpies* gets 5/5 stars.

Allie says

I had such high hopes for this book.

A smart and funny crime caper set in the publishing world, it should have been right up my street, in reality though, it was one big snooze - several hours of my life that i won't get back. I lost interest in the poor plot

early on and although I really wanted to love the protagonist, Sam, she ended up getting on my nerves.

The dialogue was clunky, the story rambled on without going anywhere and a bit of unnecessary romance was thrown in to the mix. Some of the publishing info was interesting and I did like Sam's mother but the book was boring. Think I'll stick to the authors non-fiction in future.

Mark Bruce says

Pet peeve: when the title of the book has nothing to do with the content. It is never explained why this slight mystery refers to magpies in the title, as there are no references to magpies in the book, not one.

You will say, this is a quibble. I respond: it is indicative of the general confusion of the book.

The first person narrator is an editor at an English publishing house. She tries to charm you with a world weary humorous tone but it never really convinces you. The mystery is some confused thing about embezzlement and the killing of a fashion designer, but there's so much thrashing around--and endless talking--that you lose interest very early.

The narrator, halfway through the book, falls into bed with the main detective. It's never quite explained how this came about, and their relationship has as much heat as a bowl of ice cream.

This book does not pass the "unknown author" test. As in, if an unknown author sent this to an agent, would she have received representation? You can write the rejection letter yourself.

Esil says

Thank you to the publisher and Netgalley for an opportunity to read an advance copy of *A Murder of Magpies*. I really enjoyed it. It's a light literary mystery set in contemporary London. Sam -- the protagonist -- works for a publishing company, and through one of her authors and his manuscript she gets too close to a potential murder, disappearance and money laundering. The story is fine, but what makes this book worth reading are the characters and excellent writing. As a single, late thirties, smart --but self-deprecating -- protagonist, Sam is not an unfamiliar character, but she is engaging and fun. And her mother -- a corporate lawyer who Sam describes as an "alien" because of her boundless energy and gumption -- is a great character. And of course London is always a good setting for a mystery as is the author's depiction of the publishing world. I hope this turns into a series and would be happy to read the next one.
