



## Swan for the Money

*Donna Andrews*

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## **Swan for the Money** Donna Andrews

The brilliantly funny and talented Donna Andrews delivers another winner in the acclaimed avian-themed mystery series readers have come to love.

Meg Langslow's eccentric parents have a new hobby: growing roses and entering them in highly competitive shows. Dad's gardening skill and Mother's gift for selecting and arranging the blossoms should make them an unbeatable team---and Meg is relieved they've taken up such a safe, gentle hobby. She even volunteers to help when the Caerphilly Garden Club sponsors its first annual rose show. But after a few hours of dealing with her parents' competitors, Meg is worried. Rose growers are so eccentric that they make Meg's family seem almost normal, and so competitive that they will do nearly anything to take home the show's grand prize---making them prime suspects when Meg discovers that someone is attempting to kill the wealthy woman on whose estate the competition is being held. Of course, the intended victim had other enemies---her treatment of her farm animals had aroused the interest of several animal welfare activists, including Meg's zoologist grandfather. Meg tries to leave the detecting to the local police and focus on protecting her parents' chances to win the coveted Black Swan trophy, but she soon finds herself compelled to solve the crime before any more rose growers die.

It's *Swan for the Money*, two for the show, three to get ready... now go, Meg, go!

## **Swan for the Money Details**

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# From Reader Review Swan for the Money for online ebook

## Kaitlyn Dunnett says

It took me a little longer to get into this one than with other entries in the series, but once the momentum got going it kept me turning pages right to the end. Love the swans!

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## Sandy says

Meg is up to her eyes in alligators or is it animals again in this 11th addition to the series. Meg has been asked to organize a rose competition and show in her town of Caerphilly. This mystery takes place over the course of the couple days before and including the actual competition.

Competition is fierce, but would someone stoop to murder to win the competition for best rose among their friends and neighbors? You bet they would.

The competition is held at Mrs. Winkleman's farm - a woman that is obsessed with black and white - all of her farm is black and white including her animals. Any animal that doesn't match her ideal of perfection from her swans, goats, cows and horses is immediately sold off.

Her treatment of her staff and her competition is no better. She is a woman you will love to dislike. Plenty of suspects would like her to be gone - permanently including her estranged nephews so when a victim of foul play is found in the pasture - no one is surprised...but just a minute - I guess they are...

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## Jan says

There's a rose competition in Caerphilly and all the usual suspects are involved, especially Meg who always gets roped in by her mother. Because of the incredibly wet weather and the predations of deer, the competition is being held at the estate of a real pip. There's enough craziness to go around even before Meg finds the first victim but then there's the goats, the cows, and especially the attack swans. Of course I loved it!

Bernadette Dunne continues to ace the narration!

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## Sue says

Time for a madcap bird mystery to chuckle and enjoy. Meg has been roped into organizing the local rose show and there's all sorts of foul play going on when the competition turns hot. Michael was absent for most of the book, unfortunately, as he was in NYC for a grad student's off-off-Broadway premiere of the 6-hour "Millard! The Musical!", all about Millard Fillmore. I like Meg and Michael together so when he's out of the

picture it's not quite as fun, but most of the zany relatives are here to keep things interesting.

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### **Wanda says**

Meg is organizing the rose show for the local garden club and it is being held at the farm of a rather obnoxious, cantankerous woman. The woman wants everything to be black and white including her animals..She is very rude and sabotages everything. Meg is trying to be nice but it is hard. Her grandfather and his friend are snooping around as there are accusations of animal abuse. Meg's parents are involved with the rose show and are entering some roses in the competition but they have had some problems in their rose garden and suspect foul play.

After Meg finds a woman who has been murdered she tries not to get involved in the case but can't help it. Her husband is away in NYC and she ends up helping out the police and her parents.

A fun mystery with lots of discussion about animal breeding and roses.

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### **FangirlNation says**

Meg Langslow has been dragooned by her parents into organizing the rose show for the Caerphilly Garden Club in Donna Andrews's **Swan for the Money**. The show is scheduled to take place at the estate of Mrs. Philomena Winkleson, an eccentric and extremely harsh resident who detests all colors, insisting on keeping everything in black and white. One entrant even shows anger upon learning that the competition will allow colored roses because Mrs. Winkleson told her that only black and white roses would be allowed in the show. The owner of the estate told the woman this despite the fact that every other member of the committee voted against such a requirement.

Read the rest of this review and other fun, geeky articles at Fangirl Nation

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### **Mary Ann says**

Swan for the Money Meg has been drafted by her mother and the ladies of the garden society to organize a Rose Show. It is the Friday before the show and she has to go and get the barns set up on the property of an eccentric woman, known as Wrinkleston as she is called behind her back. She likes the colors of black, white and gray and only those colors are allowed on her property. Anyone on her property has to be shorter than her or stand below her and they have to wear the approved colors. In fact, she tries to sabotage the Show by calling all the competitors and telling them only Black and White roses are being shown, no other colors are allowed!

On the Friday that she is setting up, Meg finds a woman stabbed in a field with goats. The weapon is the garden shears she made for her mother. Many things happen during the investigation of the woman's death, including a dognapping, a poisoning and what appears to be a cattle rustling.

Again this book is part of a series and can be read out of order or in order as the reader is able to do so. I also borrowed this book in two formats, Kindle and Audio, so that I could listen while I drove to Kentucky and back again. The stories are just fun and there are some things that you can learn along the way, including another word for garden shears (I forget how to spell it).

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## Rebecca says

Swan for the money

Meg's parents have essentially moved into their country house near Meg and Michael's place in Caerphilly County, VA, and their current obsession is roses. They're obsessed to the point at which they convinced Meg to organize a huge rose show for local growers, even though Meg knows little about roses. She learns quickly that it's extremely competitive, and that growers are not above a little sabotage. The most difficult part of the job, though, is dealing with Mrs. Winkelman, who owns a large farm where the show will be held. The eccentric and unpleasant woman maintains a strict color scheme at her farm and enormous manor house—no colors other than black, white, and gray. Even her livestock follows the color scheme, with bad-tempered black swans, black and white fainting goats, and white banded black Galloway cattle. It's really no surprise to anyone that someone is trying to murder the irascible, rude, wealthy woman; they're just sorry that whoever it was got the wrong person. Hopefully they'll try again?

Another winner in the series! This series is so wonderfully ridiculous, with fainting goats and territorial swans and Meg trying and trying to ask Michael—who's on a trip to NYC—to pick up a pregnancy test for her but she keeps getting interrupted and asking him to bring back NYC-specific food. There is tons of detail about the rose competition world—I didn't know any of that—which shows how much effort the writer went to in researching this. She's excellent at world building, character, and just writing delightful romps in which you never worry if Meg will really get hurt because you know she won't. Even with all the murders, I wish I could live in Caerphilly!

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## Stacy says

Another fun Meg adventure. This time she's helping out by organizing the Rose show. The event is taking place at the estate of one of the contestants, Mrs Philomena Winkleson. Winkleson is universally loathed as she is rude, mean, and devious. Not to mention she is totally wackadoo. She insists that everything be in black or white, to the point where even her livestock must be black and white (not to mention her roses). Her horses can only go out at night because she's afraid the sun will turn their coats red.

We find out at the beginning that Winkleson's dog had been stolen. And Meg's parents are frantically trying to find out who let deer into their property as their prize roses appeared to have been devoured by the deer. Meg spends the next two days at Winkleson's estate preparing for the show, looking into the missing dog, and of course stumbles across a murder. At first she thought it was Winkleson but instead it was a woman who looked (and dressed) like her. She was found stabbed in the back with shears Meg had made for her mother (and were stolen). Then later on that night at the cocktail party, Winkleson was poisoned with cyanide.

By the end of the book, we learn that Winkleson killed Mrs Sechrest because Sechrest found out Winkleson stole Meg's families rose bush (Matilda) and threatened to tell people. Sechrest had been helping Winkleson with her roses but this was too far for Sechrest. Then Winkleson poisoned herself to make people think she was still a target.

While all this is going on, Meg is trying to find a way to ask Michael to buy a pregnancy test while he's out

of town (she didn't want another rumor in town) but instead she kept getting interrupted so she'd ask for food. Then there were fainting goats, attacking black swans, cow thieves, and other crazy antics. Actually, compared to other books, the people antics were pretty mild. Still another fun Meg read and it seems that in the next book Meg and Michael will for sure be having a baby on the way.

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## Jamie says

I've been waiting for the chance to review a couple of specific books in this series mostly because of the necessity of rereading them, and *Swans* is one of them. I must have read this book a dozen times; it's just so picturesque a setting and activity, and one ideal for the image of Mother as a true Southern lady.

Meg's Dad and Mother are getting into rose growing and have entered the annual Caerphilly Garden Club's rose show. There's a bit of bad blood between competitors as Dad's found someone's stolen his masterpiece, a nearly true black Black Magic rose. The Black Magic (the strain, not Dad's specific rose) plays a big part in the book because the woman in charge of this year's competition is obsessed with keeping a monochromatic color scheme, to the point of calling the competitors behind the backs of the club leaders to announce that the Show would be restricted to only black or white roses that year. Several people fall for it before her trick is discovered and either have no roses in showing condition or only have white roses ready. To keep her at least marginally appeased, a special trophy for black roses had been created: a giant, glass, black swan statuette. Which brings us back to the Black Magic rose.

There is no such thing, at least as of the writing of this novel, as a true black rose. The Black Magic strain can be bred the closest, but even at its blackest it's actually a dark red, and the award goes home with whoever gets the closest to true black. Before the theft, this could easily have been Dad, who's been putting all his energy in roses ever since Mother first got into the swing of rose showing. But the theft of his rose isn't the only trouble the growers have been experiencing, or even the only theft.

The calamities all have an obvious suspect. Mrs. Winkleson, she of the monochromatic mania, is determined to take home the Black Swan trophy, but she frankly has plenty of other things to be hated for without poor sportsmanship being thrown in. Her black-and-white obsession is reflected in her hobby farm animals, and her nitpicky and mean-spirited behavior toward them puts her square in the crosshairs of Dr. Blake and his counterpart Caroline Willner. They've been receiving reports of her harassing her fainting goats and selling the ones that don't drop fast enough, and selling her Belted Galloways when they're born with a band that's not exactly centered (a Belted Galloway is a black beef cow with a large white 'belt' around its torso). This doesn't physically harm the goats and the cows are left alone otherwise, but no one seems to know where all her livestock is going and the local vet is concerned, as Mrs. Winkleson doesn't care what happens to them as long as they're out of her sight. Not that she much cared for them either way, as they, her other farm animals, and her lapdog are clearly only kept around for decoration.

So it's not a huge surprise when she turns out to be the victim of this murder mystery, but it does give you a turn when Mrs. Winkleson herself shows up at the crime scene to complain about the commotion.

Thank the heavens above for Caroline Willner! After *Swans* her purpose seems to be to show up anytime Dr. Blake (*Monty*) is around to act as his common sense. He'll get up on his high horse, his ego puffing up so much he starts to take flight, and you can be guaranteed Caroline will be beside him in a moment go grab his pant leg before he floats away and pull him back down to earth. She's also replacing Dad on Dr. Blake's excursions now, since it was causing he and Meg such stress in the last book, though he still joins in when he

can as animal welfare will always be a beloved subject.

*"[...] Frankly, I've been a bit worried about how much time and energy Dad has been spending on Dr. Blake's projects."*

*"Worthwhile projects, all of them."*

*"Yes, but I'm getting tired of having to bail them out of jails all over the East Coast when their protests tick off local law enforcement," I said. "Not to mention how dangerous some of their schemes can be. Did you hear Dr. Blake's plan for infiltrating a dogfighting ring?"*

*"Considering how familiar his face is from all the Animal Planet shows and National Geographic specials, I doubt if even he could pull that off."*

*"And even he realizes it. That's why he wants Dad to do the actual infiltrating, while he stands by with a camera crew."*

(Donna Andrews, *Swan for the Money*, p.14)

The rose show was an incredibly lovely event for a book, and the Winkleson property made for an interesting setting. The spirit of competition runs strong and gives us plenty of suspects and distractions, and Donna Andrews manages to make you feel a part of the action.

The verdict? A great book with a lively story, engaging plot, and an interesting and picturesque setting/event. The introduction of Caroline who, as paired with Dr. Blake, both takes him off my least favorite character list (sorry Dr. Smoot, it's just you now) and puts her squarely among my favorites. *Swans* is one of my favorite books of the series and the second most-read in my collection.

I went over *Cockatiels* (no.9) last Friday, but the previous book was actually *Six Geese A-Slaying* (no.10). The Winkleson property makes another appearance in book 19, *Lord of the Wings* .

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### **Peter Barr says**

*Swan for the Money* is the 11th in the series of Meg Langslow mysteries. Meg is a blacksmith in Virginia. In this book, she is organizing a rose show/competition for her mother's garden club. There is a delightful story here with a lot of humor. It is easy to visualize this particular Meg Langslow story.

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### **Nancy H says**

I like this series and this book is a good entry. That being said, there are some times when I am reading the series that I feel like the characters are just going on their merry ways and the murder in their vicinity doesn't really affect them. However, in any murder mystery there is often an element of having to suspend your disbelief to make the story work, and I have no problem with that. Other than that personal observation, this book is good and the plot works. I am eager to read the next one to see what Meg is up to.

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### **Sharon says**

Although there are enjoyable moments in this cozy mystery I have to say that overall it is too wacky for my

taste - a coroner who dresses in a "dracula" style cape, a hostess who demands that all of her guests dress to match the black and white (mostly black) decor of her house and a herd of fainting goats! In the interests of fairness I must reveal that I looked up fainting goats and they actually do exist although they fall over when stressed instead of actually fainting!

So if you like a mystery studded with this kind of weirdness, read this book.

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## **Richard Derus says**

Rating: 3.5\* of five

I love this most recent entry in the Meg Langslow mystery series, set in fictional Caerphilly County, Virginia, and featuring the indefatigable Meg and her motley crew of relatives and neighbors in crime-solving antics reminiscent of the glory days of Harold Lloyd.

What fun, of course, and as expected, the action doesn't stop for a minute around Meg. But this time, her case is set amid the bizarre and highly competitive world of rose-show trophy hounding. How completely weird, I thought as I looked at the book...rose shows? Who cares?

Well, I still don't care about rose shows, but I'll never look at a rose the same way again. I had no idea (admittedly, even less interest) that there were literally hundreds of categories a rose could fit into for showing purposes, and the virulence of the passions of rose-growers came as a surprise as well.

Meg's mysterious task this time is determining who, among the hundred or so people exhibiting and competing in this bloom-binge murdered a sweet, kindly old lady who just happened to bear a strong resemblance to the world's nastiest battle-ax, whose huge color-themed estate is the site of the show. Her usual good temper is sorely tried at every turn by the battle-ax, a complete nutball whose fetish is making everything in her world black or white. She has black swans. Black and white Belted Gloucester cattle. Black fainting goats, including a very aggressive one named Algie whose passion for butting humans is completely understandable...wouldn't YOU need to take a swing at a creature who meddled with your DNA to make sure you fainted dead away at danger, making you a perfect victim for predators?

But since she's been drafted to run this beano (one guess by whom...oh good, all who said "her mama" win!), she's coping. That is, barely coping since husband Michael is in New York attending a former student's play (a musical about Millard Fillmore and the Compromise of 1850, with a catchy little ditty about the Wilmot Proviso...Wikipedia has the whole story, never fear) in its death throes. Every time Meg tries to talk to Michael, asking him to bring back a pregnancy test, she's interrupted...so she asks him to bring back 1) bagels, lox, and cream cheese 2) cheesecake 3) real New York pastrami and rye sandwiches...you get the picture.

So add that to the list of problems Meg has, trying to figure out how to ascertain if she's pregnant in a place crawling with people who know her, her mama, her grandparents and cousins and aunties and all, each and every one, glad to gossip their lungs out.

Well, the murder is solved, the wicked are punished, the unappealing are redeemed (somewhat) and the pregnancy test arrives via the hopeful Michael, who interpreted all the food requests as wicked-bad cravings and arrived at the main question: A new little Waterston-Langslow?

Stay tuned. I certainly plan to.

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## **Teri-K says**

Another solid entry in the cozy series that depends on unique settings and crazy characters for its charm. The setting here is a competitive rose show held on the grounds of a controlling woman who insists everything - even her livestock - stick to her black and white color scheme. Meg, of course, is organizing the show. It is nice to see her at least recognizing that she should learn to say no more often, but if she gets too good at it the author will lack reasons for her to be involved in everything that happens in this mythical rural Virginia town. So we must suspend our disbelief to enjoy this book.

I wouldn't start here, as this volume isn't particularly clever or witty, but it fits nicely into the series and helps move along some relationships in Meg's family, too. At this point the murder becomes almost incidental to the unfolding story line.

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