



Best-Laid Plants

Marty Wingate

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A trip to the English countryside turns into a brush with death for Pru Parke, the only gardener whose holiday wouldn't be complete without a murder to solve.

Pru and her husband, former Detective Chief Inspector Christopher Pearse, are long overdue for a getaway. So when Pru is invited to redesign an Arts and Crafts garden in the picturesque Cotswolds, she and Christopher jump at the chance. Unfortunately, their B&B is more ramshackle than charming, and the once thriving garden, with its lovely Thyme Walk, has fallen into heartbreakingly neglect. With the garden's owner and designer, Batsford Bede, under the weather, Pru tackles the renovation alone. But just as she's starting to make headway, she stumbles upon Batsford's body in the garden—dead and pinned beneath one of his limestone statues.

With such a small police force in the area, Christopher is called upon to lead the investigation. Pru can't imagine anyone murdering Batsford Bede, a gentle man who preferred to spend his time in quiet contemplation, surrounded by nature. But as her work on the garden turns up one ominous clue after another, Pru discovers that the scenery is more dangerous than she or Christopher could have anticipated.

Pru Parke digs up buried secrets in this charming series from an author who “plants clever clues with a dash of romantic spice to satisfy any hungry mystery reader” (Mary Daheim).

Best-Laid Plants Details

Date : Published October 17th 2017 by Alibi

ISBN :

Author : Marty Wingate

Format : Kindle Edition 281 pages

Genre : Mystery, Cozy Mystery, Fiction

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From Reader Review Best-Laid Plants for online ebook

Betty says

I have read all of this series except the first book, it is on my TBR shelf. This is one of the best in the series as Pru Parke is offered a chance to consult on a restoring an Arts and Craft Garden in Cotswold. Pru and her husband have friends there and one host the village annual fete. They decided to take a vacation at the same time. Pru accepted the consulting job and they head for Cotswold. At arrival the owner of the gardens is too ill to see her and she is given 3 of his gardening books to study. The B&B is unique and the weather is unusually warm for the time of year. Pru finds Batsford Bede, the owner dead in one of the gardens. His death is suspicious and Chief Inspector Christopher Pease is asked to head the inquiry. A fitting end to the tale as the weather breaks at the end of the fete and the storm is cruel. I highly recommend this book and series.

Disclosure: I received a free copy from Alibi through NetGalley for an honest review. I would like to thank them for this opportunity to read and review the book. The opinions expressed are my own.

Barb says

Pru is asked to come to the Cotswolds to help restore a historic garden that has fallen into disrepair. She and Christopher look forward to the getaway – until Pru discovers a body in the garden. Because the local police force is seriously understaffed, Christopher is called on to lead the investigation, but this time, he welcomes Pru's assistance.

One of the things I like most about this series is that, despite their 'newlywed' status, Pru and Michael aren't 20-somethings just starting out in life. They're decades past that, and their life experience and maturity show in the way they go about their daily lives and their investigations. Despite all of the plant-specific gardening talk in the story, I enjoyed this book as much as the previous entries in the series. I liked the characters and the way they interacted with one another, although some of them were hard to figure out, as was the identity of the killer. I look forward to the next book in this series.

Thank you to NetGalley and the publisher for the opportunity to read and review this book.

Marlene says

Originally published at Reading Reality

Another garden, another dead body. If one didn't know better one could easily wonder if master gardener Pru Parke was somehow planting "corpse seeds" wherever she went. Because no matter where Pru travels to consult on gardens, whether in her beloved England or her native Texas, she seems to have a knack for finding a body, and getting herself involved in a murder investigation.

This particular case is a return trip to the Cotswolds for Pru, with the intent of helping to bring back a famous

Arts and Crafts style garden, visit friends and reminisce about her first trip (The Garden Plot) where she spent much of her time interfering in DCI Christopher Pearse's murder investigation. Now Christopher is her husband, and this is supposed to be a bit of a vacation.

Until she trips over a body. As Pru so often does.

As Pru's cases go (and they are all Pru's cases, in spite of Christopher being a police detective) this one is a bit of a hodge-podge. A fact which is fitting for the garden she has come to restore, which began as rather a beautiful hodge-podge of the early 20th century Arts and Crafts Movement, but has descended into a neglected mess, albeit one with "good bones".

And, as Pru inevitably discovers, real bones. Pru finds her erstwhile employer dead in the garden, under a fallen statue. But what should have looked like a clear case of accidental death is, of course, anything but.

The statue is all too obviously not the cause of death. It may be trapping the old man's body, but it isn't actually touching it. And Pru heard the sound of hammering, which is what drew her to the scene in the first place. The poor statue was quite securely on its plinth until someone viciously attacked it with a sledgehammer – someone who Pru obviously interrupted.

And there's no blood at the scene. Anyone who has ever watched murder mysteries on TV knows that there's blood at the actual murder site – especially if falling statuary is involved!

Poor old Batsford Bede was definitely murdered. And while he may have been in a physical decline, and he's definitely very dead – he was far, far from poor. And wherever there's a will, there's a list of people who may have wanted to collect on their inheritance sooner rather than later, and another list of people who are at the very least unhappy that they are not one of the favored few.

This case positively sprouts with potential murderers with heaps of motive, and red herring clues that are so obviously planted that they stink like three day old fish.

It's up to Pru and Christopher to figure out whodunnit and whydunnit before the wrong person gets convicted of a murder they certainly did not commit.

And, as usual for Pru, she figures it all out, but almost too late to save herself.

Escape Rating B: I love this series, and will cheerfully scoop up any mystery that Marty Wingate writes. (She also writes actual gardening books, and that's just not my jam)

As much as I also enjoy her other series, Birds of a Feather, the Potting Shed mysteries have a special place in my heart because of, well, Pru's heart. And Pru herself. It is not often, and not nearly often enough, that our heroine is a woman of a certain age who has found realistically portrayed romance, a new career in a new place, and becomes an amateur detective. Miss Marple falling in love with one of her oh-so-helpful detectives and continuing to solve mysteries – just with more respect.

But I said that this case was a bit of a hodge-podge. Part of that hodge-podge is the way that the story opens. Pru arrives in the Cotswolds with Christopher, and nothing is as it was purported to be – except the state of the garden. It's not just that their B&B is a throwback to the 1970s disaster. That part of the story eventually becomes surprisingly heartwarming.

The crazy-making bit is the person who hired Pru, and her extremely evasive answers about the nature of the job and the state of the person who owns the estate. Coral Summersun is both there and not-there in a way that drove this reader a bit batty.

And one of Christopher's exes lives in town. At the beginning of the story, there's a bit too much melodrama. Once the body falls down, the story heats up. From that point onwards, everything runs at a very fast clip as Christopher finds himself back in harness and, for once, officially enlists Pru's help with the investigation.

The killer hides in plain sight and keeps the police and Pru distracted, both by arranging for a series of minor disturbances to happen elsewhere, and by throwing false clues everywhere, all pointing to very plausible suspects.

There's also more than a bit of heartbreak attached to this case. As Pru dives into the weeds of the garden, she learns the story of just how it came to be, and the ultimately tragic romance between Batsford Bede and Coral's mother. It's a shared loss that at first united the unlikely pair, and then suddenly divided them. It's only as her "Uncle Batty" needed her again that he and Coral finally had a chance to regain their lovely father-daughter relationship. That their reconciliation was cut short by such a venal murder is an even bigger tragedy than the death itself.

I left the book satisfied that, if good had not exactly triumphed because a good man was dead before his time, that evil certainly got its just desserts. I look forward, as always, to Pru's next adventure. In the meantime I have *Farewell, My Cuckoo*, the next book in her Birds of a Feather series, to look forward to in the spring, appropriately right along with the return of the migrating birds.

Deb says

Probably 3.5-3.75 stars--not my favorite in this series but still a solid offering, so rounding up to 4.

The sixth book in this cozy mystery about an American gardening expert who has settled in England, restoring historic gardens and solving mysteries she comes across. I like Pru, she is a 50-ish, mostly strong female character and I also enjoy Christopher, her husband who is a former Detective Chief Inspector. In this book, Pru is asked to go to the Cotswolds (where she and Christopher's romantic relationship began) to advise on the restoration of an Arts and Crafts style garden. When Pru finds the estate owner and famous garden designer's body one morning and Christopher is asked to lead the investigation, they are both soon embroiled in the mystery.

I do enjoy when Pru and Christopher work together, as they do in this book but found the mystery a bit too easily solved--even for a cozy. Also Pru was more scattered than normal. That being said, as usual the supporting characters are fun and make me want to move to a village in the English countryside and I always end up learning a few interesting facts about plants and gardening from Pru. Looking forward to Book #7.

Rebecca says

American Pru and her British husband, DI Chris (already forgot his last name), are in the countryside for Pru to assess a once-famous garden fallen into disrepair. The garden designer, Batsford Beede, was once famous for his designs (I think), but after the death of his lover many years ago he let it go; now he's ill, and his heir presumptive Coral wants to see if the gardens can be saved. What can't be saved is Batsford, who gets creatively murdered fairly soon, with Pru finding the body and Chris having to assume the investigation. There are lots of lines of inquiry, from Coral to the woman whose name I've also forgotten (this is pathetic--I just finished the book this morning) who had an affair with Chris many many years ago and had insinuated herself into Batsford's life thereafter, to people possibly after the house or lands. But never fear; Pru and Chris will sort everything out.

There's a lot going on here, which is probably because it's the 6th in a series with recurring characters whom I don't know, so there are lots of storylines that seemed a little random but are probably relevant to the series. The descriptions are wonderful, and the world is really well-built; perfect if you love the Cotswolds and old houses, including rambling b&bs that are inconvenient and not too comfortable and have terrible food but a charming and elderly landlady. I enjoyed the characters, though sometimes had trouble keeping track of them. As for the mystery, I found it a bit frustrating and contrived, along with the clues. The reader knows the murderer long before Pru, but there's really no excuse for that--I can't believe she's so forgetful and dense that she doesn't see all the clues, and I really don't believe that EVERY SINGLE TIME she's about to remember something key or read something key, she gets interrupted and forgets and you have to sit there fuming with frustration because YOU KNOW the answer already and it's just irritating that Pru doesn't. So...better than some I've read, not as good as others.

JoAnne McMaster (Any Good Book) says

When Pru Parke, master gardener, and her husband Christopher Pearse, are invited to the Cotswolds for a working vacation (for her), it seems like an easy job. She is there to help out with the renovation of the decaying gardens of Glebe House and is looking forward to it. But she's more than surprised at the condition of the B&B she's been booked into - soon after arriving she finds the body of Batsford Bede, owner and designer of the once-lovely place.

Although it looks like an accident at first sight, Pru knows better - especially since the heavy statue that was set to look like it fell over on him hasn't touched his body. And with the local police force short-handed, Christopher is dragooned into Chief Inspector once again, taking over the investigation.

But who would want to kill an old man who was already ailing? At first the signs point to Coral Summersun, who grew up there and whose mother Batsford was in love with; but then others begin to enter the picture - others who might have had a better reason to want him dead. What reason? Who would want a decaying garden badly in need of renovation? Christopher and Pru have more than enough suspects, and with a killer still on the loose, it's up to them to dig deep and weed out a killer...

I can't tell you how much I enjoyed reading this book. Each chapter is headed with a fictional entry into Batsford's gardening journals, which Pru has borrowed to read. We are given information on numerous plants, which I always find interesting, and a glimpse of life into an English garden.

We begin with Pru and Christopher thinking they're going to have a nice getaway at a local B&B only to find it's rather a nightmare, but since the proprietor is an elderly woman and very nice, stay, rather than feel guilty about going somewhere else. They're also there to help out at an autumn fete at the home of old friends who also live in the area.

I enjoy watching the relationship between Pru and Christopher. Their affection for each other is apparent, but never over the top. There's a nice scene or two where Pru is having to deal with a tad bit of jealousy, but it's done more with humor than anything else; and there's also humor in the fact that the B&B owner is a horrible cook.

But the murder definitely changes things, and the renovation is put on hold as Christopher brings Pru into the investigation as an assistant, knowing her keen eye for detail will be invaluable. While there weren't tons of red herrings thrown about, there were still quite a few suspects, even though the reason for someone wanting Batsford dead wasn't immediately apparent.

When we come to the end and the murderer is revealed, it's a reason as old as time itself. I'm never surprised what a twisted mind is capable of. The story is well written, the characters believable, and the journey to the end was quite fun and interesting as well.

This is the sixth book in the series and can be read as a stand alone, but I enjoy the series more having read them from the beginning. A delightful book that can be read in one sitting, and I look forward to the next in the series. Highly recommended.

Jeanie says

When I began to read the first Potting Shed Mystery, I wasn't sure whether I would enjoy it. In this 6th in series, Pru is an old friend, especially as she and Christopher walk memory lane. It has been three years since they met. They are now newlyweds, having met at a crime scene and got to know each other at a fete, of which this year's is ready to take place. They are in the Cotswolds for a short job Pru accepted. They will attend this year's fete while visiting friends Pru met that first year she was in England.

Coral Summersun contacted Pru to review the plans and journals of Batsford Bede, current owner of Glebe House, per his request, and advise regarding restoration of the gardens at Glebe House. Coral refers to the owner as Uncle Batty; she grew up on the property because of her late mother's friendship with Batsford. Constance had helped him put the gardens in during her years there. The gardens are in the Arts and Crafts style, which Pru was very excited about seeing and sounds fascinating.

Coral left when she was an adult, returning when her mother was dying. She left about a year later, not returning again until hearing of Batsford's illness. She returns to take care of him and mend fences. Dr. Cherrystone, aka Cherry, comes to check on Batsford every day and he seemed to be improving. Pru began to look at the gardens and reading Batsford's detailed journals.

Pru arrived one morning and Coral's car was gone. She knocked on the door and out of concern for an ill man, heard terrible crashing noises, went indoors, found nobody in the house, and followed the din to the gardens. She found Mr. Bede under a huge, heavy statue. She called Christopher, who contacted the local police station. One thing Pru noted when verifying if the man had a pulse is that the statue did not land on Batsford. There was a small gap between the statue and Batsford. It looks like someone bashed over the

statue to cover up a murder or make sure it was successful.

Each character is defined as petals unfurl from a rosebud. Pru is very well defined and as the mystery progresses, so is Coral. Dialog flows naturally, and even when Pru isn't sure how to handle a situation, she does very well. I admire her tact when talking with someone she doesn't really doesn't want to, her comfort to Coral after breaking the news about Uncle Batty, and trying to stall for time to get away from the culprit(s) who tries hard to kill her.

There is humor even in unlikely events, and multiple, seemingly unrelated crimes. Each chapter begins with a quote from Mr. Bede's journals. There are plot twists and turns that keep the mystery as fascinating as the unique gardens designed by Batsford and Constance. There was one tiny clue that showed me who the killer was but I wasn't 100% clear of the motive until later; I had also guessed the location of a very important document. There are sufficient red herrings I was tempted to follow, but they didn't stand up to the one in the back of my mind. I was surprised at the resolution of the other mysteries, was overall satisfied with the end, and enjoyed watching the newlyweds celebrating a special memory. I highly recommend Best Laid Plants as an extremely well-written cozy mystery, especially if one has an interest in England, preparing gardens, and a bit of English history.

From a grateful heart: I received this eBook from the publisher and NetGalley, and this is my honest review.

Jill says

Pru Parke is a well-known gardener in England. Although she was born in Texas, it was the British gardens that stole her heart and helped her make a home for herself on the other side of the world. And now the celebrated gardens of Batsford Bede in the Cotswolds are badly in need of repair, and Pru has been called in to consult on how to refurbish the garden by the closest person Bede has to family, his ersatz neice, Coral Summersun.

Coral first meets with Pru in the garden office, and Pru is completely distracted by everything around her. She sees the library of books on flowers, herbs, and garden design. She sees the blueprints that Bede and his gardening partner Constance (Coral's late mother) used to plan. And she sees the gardening journals that Bede himself wrote while planting and creating the gardens. While Coral seems uninterested in everything around them, Pru understands the wealth of information in the office and can't help herself from grabbing the journals off the shelf once Coral says she doesn't mind. After all, Bede's gardens were a sort of national treasure in their heyday. His use of Arts and Crafts style, modeled on the designs of William Morris, was innovative and ingenious.

But when Pru discovers Bede's lifeless body under one of the garden statues, clearly not by accident, it's going to take all of Pru's cleverness to help find and catch the killer. Fortunately for her, her policeman husband has come to the Cotswolds with her and can lend a much-needed hand to the strapped local force. With a quirky inkeeper taking care of them and a village filled with fascinating potential suspects, Pru and her husband Christopher will have to dig deep to unearth the answers they need.

Marty Wingate's Best-Laid Plants is the latest in the Potting Shed Mysteries, and it's a lovely trip to the gardens of England and all their charms. Pru and her husband are fun and smart, and the villagers add more than a little humor and delight to the pages of this mystery. This is the gardening cozy series that I have been looking for, and I can't wait for another trip to the gardens of England with all their majesty and loveliness.

Galley copies for Best-Laid Plants were provided by Random House Publishing Group - Alibi through NetGalley.com, with many thanks.

Carla Johnson-Hicks says

The sixth book in this cozy mystery continues with the story of Pru Parke, an American gardening expert who has settled in England, restoring historic gardens and solving mysteries she comes across. In this book, Pru is asked to go to the Cotswolds (where she and Christopher's relationship began) to consult on the restoration of an Arts and Crafts style garden. Pru and her husband have friends there so they decided to take a vacation at the same time. When they arrive at the estate, they find out that the owner is very ill, but he wants Pru to read his journals that he recorded in as he originally designed the gardens. Within the first couple of days there, Pru finds the estate owner, Batsford Bede, dead in the garden. His death is suspicious and Chief Inspector Christopher Pearse is asked to head the inquiry.

I do enjoy when Pru and Christopher work together. I like Pru, she is a 50ish, usually strong and smart female character. Christopher, her husband, is a former Detective Chief Inspector who often works with other police forces. He trusts Pru's instincts and takes her concerns and feelings seriously. Pru was somewhat more scattered than normal in this story, almost like she was in the first book. The secondary characters were quite interesting and just a bit quirky. They all had an opinion of who the murderer was and who it wasn't. Once again, there are a lot of gardening facts told in a journal format at the beginning of each paragraph. An interesting cozy that I enjoyed. I am looking forward to the next book in this series.

Hilary (A Wytch's Book Review) says

Another outing for Pru and her husband, Pru has been asked to come and quote for reviving an Arts and Crafts style garden by the person who will inherit (although the current owner and designer of the garden is still alive, albeit unwell, but he also would like to see it renewed). Although they could have stayed with friends Carol (the heiress) has booked them into a local Bed and Breakfast which seems to be on its last legs! However that is the least of their problems when a couple of days after arriving Pru goes earlyish to walk around more of the garden and make notes and finds the owner of the house dead under a statue! The local force is short staffed and so Christopher is asked to step in and run the investigation which seems to have more than one loose end to tie up!

Constance says

I came, and stayed, for the title. Brilliant, right?

Agatha Christie-esque in that there are a lot of random adult characters within a community who are hiding various things, and then there's the big reveal at the end. But nobody executes quite like Dame Agatha. It was alright, or maybe slightly better than alright. I think I'm not a huge fan of the cozy mystery.

Linda Baker says

I am always happy to get my hands on a new Potting Shed Mystery with its mystery, gardening tips and lore, quirky characters and a touch of grown-up romance. Pru Parke is a transplanted Texan whose life dream was to relocate to her mother's native England. Her first year in England was a challenge, but now she has a good reputation and a steady flow of jobs. Not only is she established professionally, but she has married semi-retired Chief Inspector, Christopher Pearse. All her success comes at the age of fifty-something. Both Christopher and she are feeling the need for a getaway when she receives a request to consult on restoring an Arts and Crafts garden in the Cotswolds. The creator of the garden, Batsford Bede, has let it slide in recent years and needs help. Christopher and Pru have friends in the area and decide to take a working holiday. But, just as Pru makes a start she discovers Bede, dead, under a piece of garden statuary. What was the ailing, elderly man doing out in the garden alone? It also appears that the inheritance of the property is disputed and a codicil to the will is missing. Since the local police force is small, Christopher takes over the investigation.

The Potting Shed Mysteries are a pleasure to read. I am not a gardener, but this series might even inspire me to become one. I highly recommend Best Laid Plants, which can be read as a stand-alone, but why not enjoy it from the beginning, The Garden Plot? Thanks to NetGalley and Random House Alibi for an advance digital copy. The opinions are my own.

RATING- 4 Stars

Kathleen says

“Best Laid Plants” earns 5+/5 Gardens of Flowers, Herbs, and...Fun!

Although Marty Wingate’s Potting Shed Mystery series has received well-deserved rave reviews, I am a newbie starting with book six, cleverly titled “Best Laid Plants,” and after only a few pages, I am now a big ‘fan.’ Marty Wingate has penned a well-written mystery with descriptions creating delightful mental pictures, intriguing dialog, and lots of possible conclusions that I couldn’t put down. Don’t overlook the way she begins each chapter with a poignant phrase from what was suspected and turned out to be the victim’s journals that were more a memoir than gardening diary of tips and plant descriptions. Right off Marty illustrates the wonderful relationship between ex-pat, Texas native Prunella “Pru” Parke and her husband former Detective Chief Inspector Christopher Pearse revisiting in passing the fact that the two met over a murder investigation, calls attention to Pru’s limited cooking skills, and introduces the new gardening project that would be combined with a bit of a ‘getaway.’ Wrap all that into an informative myriad of gardening ideas and details of the local flora, descriptions of local homes and stately manors, setting in my favorite Cotswolds along a few hiccups like a woman from Christopher’s past, quirky villagers, and a dead body in the garden? Just the right recipe for the most engaging ‘cozy’ story for fans and newbies alike.

“Disclosure: A review copy of this book was selected by me from NetGalley. All of the above opinions are my own.”

Kathy Martin says

Pru is hired to assess an Arts and Crafts garden in the Cotswolds and jumps at the chance. She thinks it

would be a great vacation for her and her husband Christopher. She isn't there long before the builder of the garden, Batsford Bede, is found dead in his garden and Christopher is drafted to solve the crime.

There are all sorts of suspects including the daughter of his long-time love and a life coach who has been helping him and who had a previous relationship with Christopher after his divorce and before he met and married Pru. Or is it the young woman who wants to start her own farm by leasing some of Batty's land or maybe the man-of-all work who is helping her start her farm?

Pru and Christopher are staying in a ramshackle bed and breakfast run by an elderly widow whose husband did some odd electrical work in the house. The shabby interior, eccentric hallways, and low ceilings add some interesting atmosphere to the story.

The first thing Pru receives when she arrives are the garden journals that Bede wrote which are filled with the plants he and his love Constance chose and some personal insights about their lives too. Each chapter begins with a quotation from Batty's journal. Even though my knowledge of plants is pretty much limited to recognizing dandelions and roses, I enjoyed both the journal entries and Pru's descriptions of the gardens.

I did figure out who the murderer was about two-thirds into the story which made me feel quite accomplished. It was a suspenseful story with lots of great characters.

Melodie Langston says

Best-Laid Plants by Marty Wingate is a thoroughly entertaining and enjoyable entry into her Potting Shed Mystery series, which features professional gardener Pru Parke. Marty Wingate calls on her own expertise in the gardening field to add depth and color to the book with each chapter prefaced by an excerpt from the journals of the fictional Batsford Bede, whose expansive gardens at Glebe House Pru has been hired to restore to their former glory. These excerpts not only foreshadow some part of the chapter but offer enlightenment to the art of building a garden or information about a particular plant. I enjoyed and appreciated these snippets very much.

After a long absence, Coral Summersun has returned to Glebe House, located in the Cotswolds, to care for the aging and ailing Batsford Bede and it is she who hires Pru to restore the gardens. Bede is murdered before Pru is able to confer with him, but fortunately Pru has been given full access to his writings, including the three logs he kept during the garden's creation. These journals feature insights not only into garden design and plant selection but into life at Glebe House during those years when he lived there with Constance Summersun (long deceased) and her daughter, Coral.

This book is a throwback to the classic cozy, filled with often eccentric or colorful characters, some of whom are clearly suspects, others filling different roles. Coral is both annoying (sometimes too much so) and sympathetic. . While I was greatly entertained by the book, I did feel that some of the "color" was a bit overdone. Mrs. Draycott and her unusual bed and breakfast being cases in point. I appreciate the warm relationship between Pru and her husband Christopher Pearse.

There are plenty of red herrings to keep the reader guessing and to muddy the waters. I strongly and accurately suspected who the murderer was, though couldn't say why. That didn't matter in the least when it came to my enjoyment of the book.

I highly recommend this entertaining read, especially for those who enjoy cozy mysteries. Four stars for mystery lovers, four and a half stars for gardeners who love mysteries.

I was given a free copy of this book by NetGalley and the publisher in exchange for an honest review. I was not compensated nor was I required to write a positive review. The opinions stated are solely my own.
