

DEAR READER,

What if five of the brightest and best female mystery writers banded together in 1930 to ensure their places among the male authors of the Golden Era of detective fiction? And what if these women set out to solve a real-life mystery in an effort to prove their mettle? This is the premise of *The Queens of Crime*.

I first came across this irresistible scenario while knee-deep in the research for my other historical novels. When I learned that the mystery writers I'd grown up reading—Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers—whose books had been given to me by a beloved aunt who was also an English professor, poet, and rebellious nun, had befriended other female literary lights such as Baroness Emma Orczy, Ngaio Marsh, and Margery Allingham, I became intrigued. And when I learned that their sisterhood served not only to surmount barriers erected against female writers but also to solve crimes against women, I became obsessed.

In the novel and in real life, the inimitable Dorothy Sayers, bestselling author of the Lord Peter Wimsey mysteries, discovered that a young English nurse had vanished into thin air in a locked-room scenario that seemed torn from the pages of a classic mystery novel. When the girl's body was found in the French countryside, and the authorities showed limited interest in finding her murderer, Dorothy and her fellow writers set out to solve the crime, utilizing skills they'd heretofore only imagined. Relying on their formidable talents and each other, they discovered the capacity of female friendship to solve this puzzle. But first, Dorothy had to make a personal choice: either reveal the secret at the center of her own life and secure justice, or protect her hidden truth and find another way to do right by the victim. This is the double mystery—and the conundrum—at the heart of *The Queens of Crime*.

An ode to strong women, the writerly life, the power of collaboration, and the importance of truth and inspiration, *The Queens of Crime* is in keeping with my earlier novels and yet, at the same time, something entirely new. I hope you join Dorothy, Agatha, Emma, Ngaio, Margery, and me in *The Queens of Crime*.

Marie Benedict

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