

THE QUEENS OF CRIME

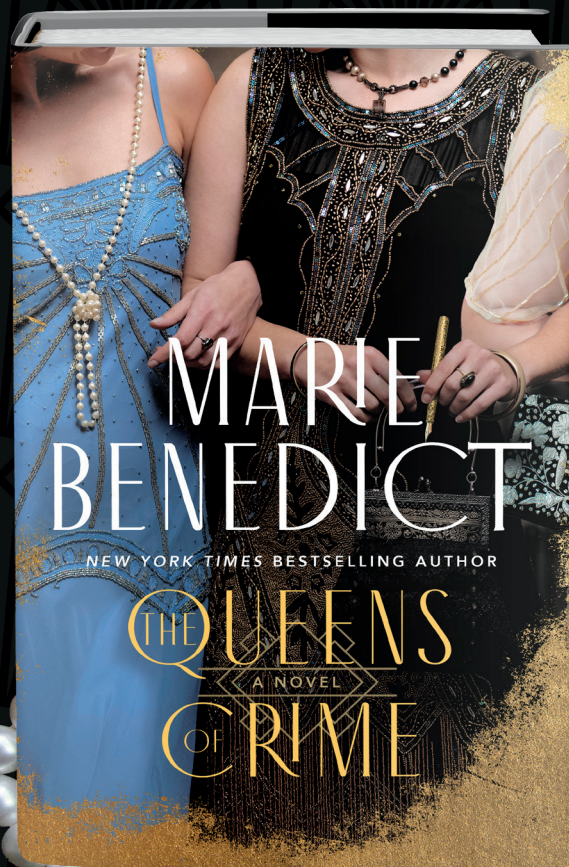
Q&A

The Queens of Crime is inspired by the true story of five women crime writers coming together to form a secret society with the goal of earning the respect of their male counterparts. How did you first learn about the Detection Club and why did it interest you?

I first learned about the Detection Club, the group of pre-eminent British mystery novelists of the Golden Age of Detective Fiction, while I was researching another novel, *The Mystery of Mrs. Christie*. In writing that book, I delved into the very real, eleven-day disappearance of Agatha Christie when she was a novelist on the rise, a mystery that has never been solved except through fiction. As I researched the life and legacy of the most successful novelist of all time, I immersed myself in Agatha's world in the years before, during, and after her vanishing, in the hopes of piecing together her narrative. There, deep in the rabbit hole of research, I stumbled across her membership in the Detection Club and her friendship with many of its members, especially Dorothy Sayers. I became entranced with the idea of these brilliant minds—capable of crafting nearly-unsolvable puzzles—coming together in this organization, and when I discovered that the club contained a few other stellar female writers, I grew obsessed. I wondered how these women—dubbed the “Queens of Crime” by the press (I took some liberties imagining the women fashioned the name)—who'd overcome all odds to succeed might have banded together within the Detection Club to support one another. It was then that the idea of these five ingenious mystery writers solving actual crimes took hold.

What made you decide to tell the story from Dorothy Sayers' perspective? Was your approach similar or different from writing your previous heroines, particularly Agatha Christie?

From my earlier research, I had been aware of the friendship between Agatha and Dorothy; after all, Dorothy had been involved in the nationwide search for Agatha when she disappeared. When I learned that their relationship continued after Agatha suddenly reemerged—and that they were part of the Detection Club together—I began to investigate Dorothy. I found this whip-smart, tenacious, bold, witty woman very appealing, and her books both cleverly suspenseful and ahead of their time, particularly *Gaudy Night* which is widely considered the first feminist mystery novel. And when I discovered that Dorothy had indeed been part of a murder investigation—focused on the killing of the young English nurse May Daniels—my own plotting started. What if a mystery novelist became a detective, like the character in one of her own books? Might it give readers a look into



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the life and legacy of an extraordinary woman—as with my other novels—while using the woman’s preferred genre as a device to reveal the secrets of her own rise? Dorothy L. Sayers was perfect. When I proceeded using Dorothy’s perspective and layered in the other women into the mystery format, the book really took flight—transforming into something entirely new for me and, I hope, for readers. Not to mention, it gave me the wonderful opportunity to explore the importance of female friendships, so crucial then and now.

How did you approach the research for the novel? Did anything you learned surprise you?

Regardless of the time period or woman I choose, I take a similar approach to my research, gathering original source material pertaining to the woman first and then casting my net wider into broader aspects of the time and place she inhabits. For *The Queens of Crime*, I returned to the research I originally assembled, but then very quickly zeroed in on additional source material related to Dorothy, her novels (where I think I got a good sense of her thought processes), and that of the Detection Club and other women. Because the book also involved the actual murder of May Daniels, I examined everything I could find about the crime and that investigation, finding archived newspaper accounts especially helpful in putting together both the facts and the salacious coverage from the time period. If anything surprised me about what I uncovered, it is how public perception of women has not radically changed in the hundred or so years between the era of the novel and our own time. In this way, unfortunately, this story is both historic and modern.

Which of the Queens do you most identify with?

This is such a hard question! Every one of the Queens is brilliant, formidable, strong, and fascinating in their own way, and I admire each one of them, albeit for different reasons. If I had to select one woman, I’d probably pick Dorothy. But that may also be true because I’ve spent so many months with her that I feel like we are old friends. Perhaps if I were to tackle another mystery through the lens of a different Queen, she might become my new favorite!

