

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*.

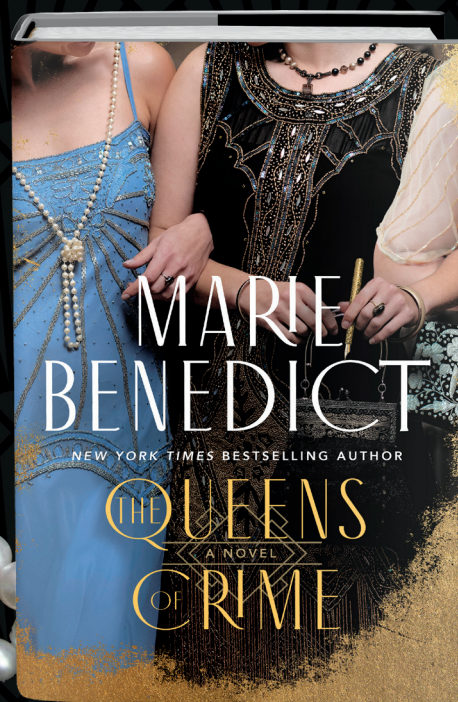
An ode to strong women, the writerly life, the power of collaboration, and the importance of truth and inspiration, *The Queens of Crime* is in keeping with my earlier novels and yet, at the same time, something entirely new. I hope you join Dorothy, Agatha, Emma, Ngaio, Margery, and me in *The Queens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

Marie Benedict

MARIE BENEDICT



Photo Credit: Anthony Museranno



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THE QUEENS OF CRIME

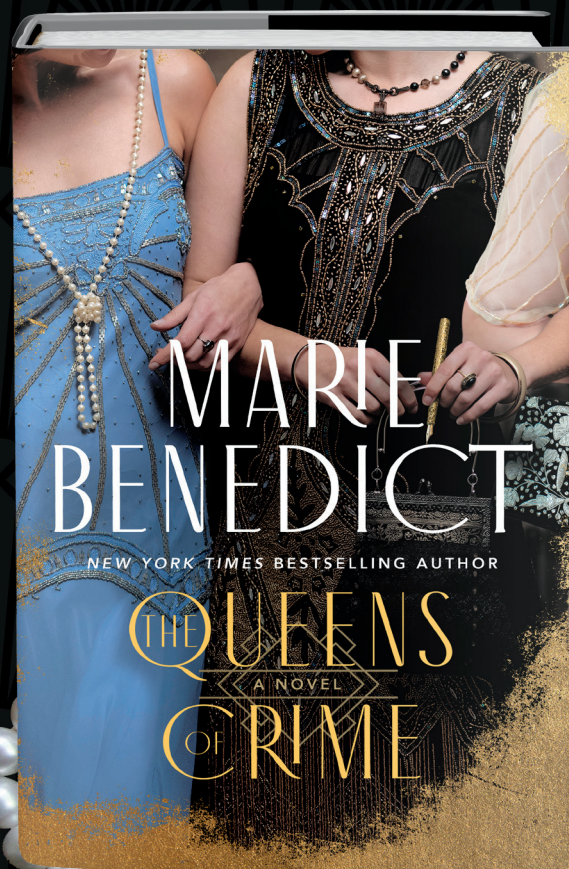
Q&A

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?

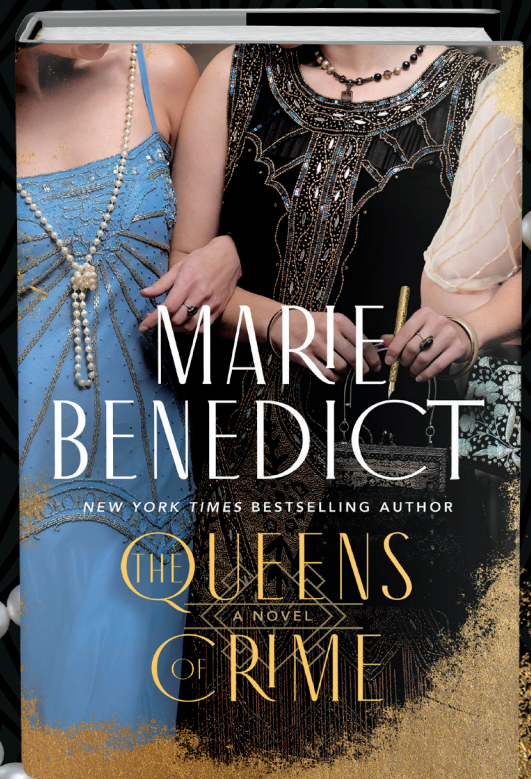
This is such a hard question! Every one of the Queens is brilliant, formidable, strong, and fascinating in their own way, and I admire each one of them, albeit for different reasons. If I had to select one woman, I’d probably pick Dorothy. But that may also be true because I’ve spent so many months with 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!



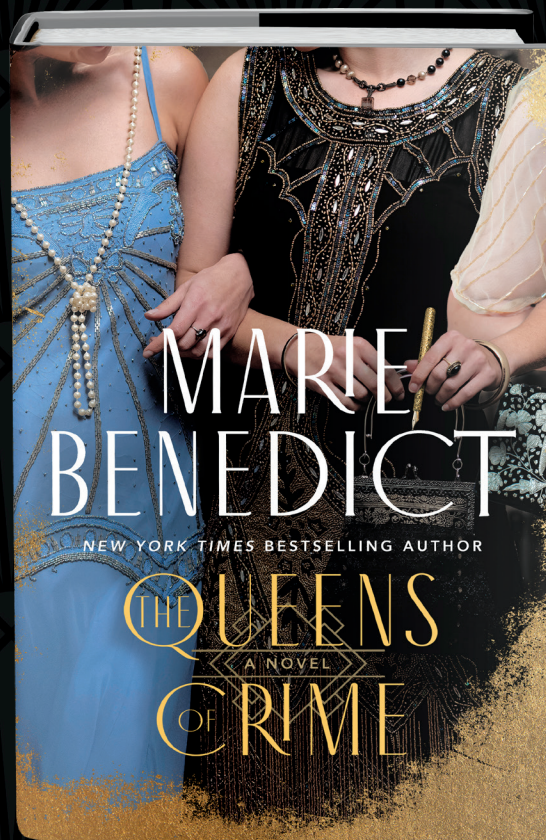
THE QUEENS OF CRIME

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The novel opens with the main character and narrator, mystery writer Dorothy L. Sayers, speculating that “None of us is as we appear.” How does this notion permeate the novel? Does the dichotomy between perception and reality manifest in the characters and the events in the story?
2. Had you heard of Dorothy before reading *The Queens of Crime*? Aside from the famous Agatha Christie, were you familiar with the three other successful authors of detective fiction who play significant roles: Baroness Emma Orczy, Ngaio Marsh, and Margery Allingham? Which of the women, if any, did you find to be the most relatable?
3. The book offers a glimpse into the writerly existence, the mundane details like deadlines as well as the nature of inspiration. Did real life provide a spark for Dorothy’s novels? Were you surprised at the interplay between fact and fiction, and does it make you wonder about the origin behind other novels you’ve read?
4. The women at the heart of *The Queens of Crime* were successful writers, which was unusual for their time. What was the nature of each woman’s journey to writing, and who had to overcome the most in order to do so? How did their desire to receive just recognition for their accomplishments shape the course of the story?
5. In an homage to the great detective fiction of the sort penned by these women, *The Queens of Crime* is structured like a classic mystery novel. What did you learn as you unlocked each layer of the mysteries—from the puzzle of May’s murder to the nature of Dorothy’s secret?
6. The five “Queens of Crime” hailed from different social strata, economic backgrounds, and countries, and even their ages varied by decades. In light of these disparities, did you anticipate that they’d form a sisterhood? What, if anything, did they have to address in order to band together? Did their differences ultimately serve as a hindrance or a help?



7. During their investigation into May Daniels's murder, Dorothy, Agatha, Ngaio, and Margery encounter widespread prejudicial attitudes toward certain groups of women, particularly "surplus women." Did this perspective fuel either the murder or its resolution? How did you feel about this point of view?
8. How successful were the women as detectives? Did they find writing about detectives very different from playing the part? Did the identity of the murderer—and what it says about society at that time—surprise you?
9. Many of the characters in the novel harbor secrets, especially Dorothy and May. How do those hidden truths affect the trajectory of the story? Would these secrets hold the same power today?
10. Consider the legacy of Dorothy and the other "Queens of Crime." While Agatha Christie's fame continues to this day, the others' renown does not. Is it possible to leave behind an important legacy, even if your name and narrative have disappeared into the past? Why might certain of the women have been forgotten, despite their popularity during their lifetimes?
11. How did you feel about the end of *The Queens of Crime*? Was justice done for May Daniels? Did Dorothy, Agatha, Ngaio, Margery, and Emma receive the appreciation from the Detection Club that they sought? Would such measures have been necessary today?

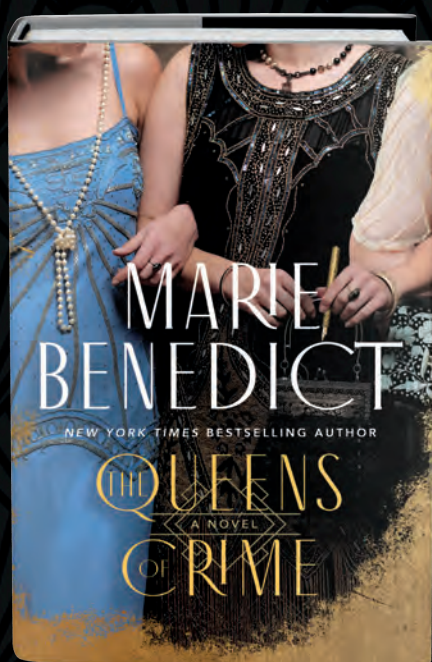


WHICH QUEEN OF CRIME ARE YOU?

In the world of 1930s detective fiction, five legendary female crime writers dominated the literary scene with their cunning plots and unforgettable characters, paving the way for future generations of storytellers. This group, known as the Queens of Crime, included Agatha Christie, Baroness Emma Orczy, Ngaio Marsh, Dorothy L. Sayers, and Margery Allingham.

Our meticulously crafted puzzle awaits to reveal which grand dame of crime writing best reflects your inner sleuth or master storyteller. Each question presents a selection of answers tailored to reflect the preferences, traits, and worlds created by our Queens. Go with the choice that resonates with you the most.

Let's begin!



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What country would you most like to visit?

- A. Belgium: You're attracted to Belgium, a country rich in history and culture where every cobblestone and historic city tells a story, inviting you to unravel its mysteries firsthand.
- B. Hungary: With an appreciation for the nobility and a flair for dramatic storytelling, you find yourself intrigued by the history and elegance of Hungary.
- C. New Zealand: Your adventurous spirit and love for lush, dramatic landscapes pull you towards the captivating shores of New Zealand.
- D. France: Your sophisticated taste and appreciation for culture draw you to the romance and mystery of France.
- E. England: A classic choice, your love for traditional mysteries and quintessential English settings guide you to the heart of England.

What's your favorite weekend activity?

- A. Gardening: Like a story slowly revealing its secrets, you find joy and relaxation in nurturing plants and watching them grow.
- B. Painting: Expressing yourself through colors and shapes, you enjoy the creativity and solitude found in painting.
- C. Going to the theater: Immersing yourself in the dramatic arts, you have a deep appreciation for performances that convey complex narratives.
- D. Reading: Losing yourself in a good book, you relish the intrigue and suspense that comes from unraveling a well-crafted mystery.
- E. Impromptu Adventures: You appreciate diverse experiences that enrich your understanding and bring excitement to your life.

How would you describe your ideal mystery to solve?

- A. A puzzling case involving a locked room
- B. A mystery that challenges societal norms
- C. An intriguing crime with a theatrical flair
- D. A complex plot that requires deciphering cryptic clues
- E. An adventure involving high society's secrets

What's your preferred mode of transportation when on an investigation?

- A. An elegant yet unassuming classic car
- B. A horse-drawn carriage through scenic routes
- C. A flight to an exotic location
- D. A train journey across the countryside
- E. A leisurely cruise on a luxury liner



Choose a pet to accompany you on your adventures.

- A. A dignified Siamese cat
- B. A loyal and intelligent dog
- C. A curious parrot with a knack for eavesdropping
- D. A clever fox that is always one step ahead
- E. A discreet and watchful raven

What's your choice of refreshment while pondering over clues?

- A. A cup of tea, the perfect companion for any deliberation
- B. A glass of fine Hungarian wine, savored slowly
- C. A refreshing New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc, to clear the mind
- D. A strong coffee, to keep the senses sharp
- E. A classic gin and tonic, for a touch of sophistication

During a dinner party, you find a clue for your investigation. What's your next step?

- A. Discreetly inform the host and suggest a private discussion
- B. Intrigue the guests with a story that subtly probes for information
- C. Organize an impromptu performance to observe reactions
- D. Announce your findings and challenge the guests to a game of wits
- E. Slip away to investigate further, leaving no trace behind

After answering all the questions, tally the number of questions you answered for each letter. The letter with the highest total represents the author whose characteristics and preferences most closely match yours. Turn the page over to find out which Queen of Crime is your literary alter ego!

__ A / __ B / __ C / __ D / __ E



Mostly A's: Agatha Christie

The "Queen of Mystery" herself, Agatha Christie is unrivaled in her ability to craft intricate plots and unforgettable characters like Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple. If Christie is your match, you likely possess a sharp intellect, a keen eye for detail, and an appreciation for the complexities of human nature. Your stories, much like Christie's, are meticulously plotted, leaving readers in suspense until the final reveal.

Mostly B's: Baroness Emma Orczy

Best known for creating the Scarlet Pimpernel, Baroness Orczy was a master of swashbuckling adventure and historical intrigue. A match with Emma Orczy suggests you have a flair for the dramatic and a passion for history and romance. You are imaginative, valuing courage, disguise, and daring escapades. Your narratives are likely to be bold, with a strong sense of justice.

Mostly C's: Ngaio Marsh

As one of the "Queens of Crime," Ngaio Marsh's work is renowned for its elegant prose, complex characters, and vivid settings, often incorporating her love for the theatre. A match with Marsh suggests you have a sophisticated taste, an artistic streak, and a knack for creating deeply immersive worlds. Your stories probably combine classic mystery elements with a rich, descriptive style.

Mostly D's: Dorothy L. Sayers

Dorothy L. Sayers is celebrated for her literary approach to detective fiction, particularly her novels featuring the aristocratic sleuth Lord Peter Wimsey. If Sayers is your match, you likely have a sharp wit, a love for literary allusions, and a fondness for intellectual puzzles. You appreciate character development as much as plot, creating stories that are both thought-provoking and entertaining.

Mostly E's: Margery Allingham

Margery Allingham stands out for her complex plots and the psychological depth of her characters, especially her charismatic detective, Albert Campion. Matching with Allingham might mean you are drawn to stories that explore the human psyche, with a preference for nuanced, multi-layered narratives. You have a talent for blending suspense with character study, making your mysteries both thrilling and introspective.

Photo Credit: Anthony Muiamano



Curious to know which Queen was a match for Marie Benedict?

"Well, well, well, I suppose I shouldn't be surprised that, if I had been an actual Queen of Crime, I would be Dorothy Sayers! While I answered a few of the probing quiz questions as if I was Ngaio, Margaret, Emma or Agatha, on balance, I identified with Dorothy again and again. Is this because I've just spent over a year inhabiting the life and mind of this brilliant mystery writer, or because my affinity for her led me to write from her point of view in the first place? You may just have to read *The Queens of Crime* to answer this for yourself..."



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THE BEES' KNEES

Legend has it that Frank Meier, head bartender at the Hotel Ritz Paris in the interwar years, created this cocktail. He certainly included it in his 1936 cocktail recipe book, *The Artistry of Mixing Drinks*. Is it really the "Bees' Knees"? My main character Dorothy L. Sayers and her brilliant peers probably thought so. Decide for yourself as you mix up a batch to share with friends!

Cheers!

Mario Benedict

MARIE BENEDICT

INGREDIENTS

2 ounces gin*

1/4 ounce fresh lemon juice

1 teaspoon honey

Garnish, lemon twist

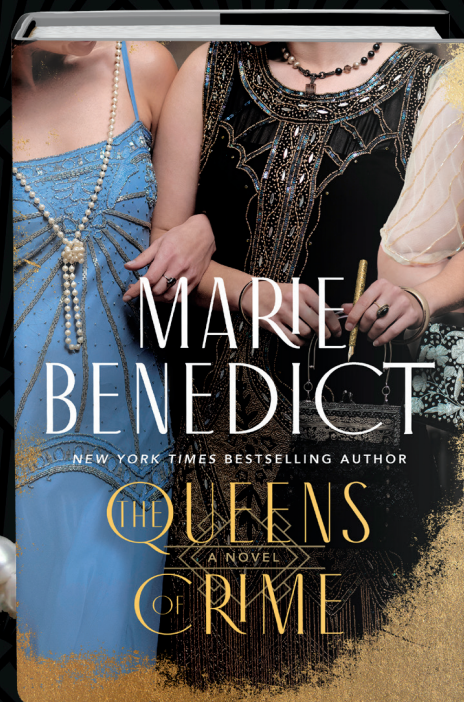
INSTRUCTIONS

Add the ingredients into a shaker with ice. Shake well and strain into a chilled cocktail glass. Garnish with lemon.

*To make this a mocktail, you can use non-alcoholic gin, unsweetened sparkling water, or club soda.



Photo Credit: Will Shenton



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