



Sick of Shadows

Sharyn McCrumb

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The book that started it all for Edgar Award winner Sharyn McCrumb's widely acclaimed series featuring amateur sleuth Elizabeth MacPherson.

When delicate Eileen Chandler is set to marry, her family fears the man is a fortune hunter. Thank goodness, Eileen's cousin Elizabeth MacPherson comes early for support. Unfortunately, Elizabeth also has some detecting to do, as a dead body is found, and none of the wedding party is above suspicion....

"A good deal of suspense...McCrumb writes with a sharp-pointed pen."

LOS ANGELES TIMES

Sick of Shadows Details

Date : Published June 14th 1989 by Ballantine Books (first published 1984)

ISBN : 9780345356536

Author : Sharyn McCrumb

Format : Paperback 236 pages

Genre : Mystery, Fiction, Cozy Mystery, Thriller, Mystery Thriller

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From Reader Review Sick of Shadows for online ebook

Kaethe says

A traditional sort of country-house mystery set on a Georgia estate about to host a wedding. Not as clever as her other works, but really an excellent choice for a day spent lying about sick.

Library copy

Kathryn says

the murder didn't happen until more than halfway through the book... but the characters weren't particularly developed in that time so it just felt like waiting for someone to die

Lydia says

Let me start by saying *Zombies in The Gene Pool* is one of my favorite mystery novels of all time. That being said, I wouldn't use this book to start a fire. The MC isn't even the MC and doesn't get to solve the mystery! Her brother and his roommate who are NOT in the entire rest of the book drive down from college and are like "lol we solved this mystery based on the clues in your letters." What? Can a bitch have some space to solve her own mystery please? GTFO! I was so, so angry at this. I'm just going to take comfort in the fact that this is her first book and she got way way way way way way way better. Maybe anyone CAN be a writer with practice and this book proves that by being terrible.

Linda Rowland says

I read this some time ago and recently decided to collect all the Elizabeth MacPherson books. Just about the only McCrumb that I do not have on collections shelves. I still took almost the entire book to figure out the guilty one. I do not wake up to a new world every day, but not too far from it when it comes to books. I now have the entire set of Elizabeth, so will read in order. I may have read them all but will likely enjoy them again, something said for a non-re-reader. That cannot be correct, but maybe will be understood.

Janis Hill says

Although I've read other books in the Elizabeth Macpherson series, this is the first time I've actually found and read the FIRST book. I don't know how, as I'm a huge Sharyn McCrumb fan, but I'd not seen this one before.

And... it was great. Not disappointed at all. There was a good balance between all the characters and they had that usual depth and colour to McCrumb's character that makes me feel drawn to reading the book. The pace

of reading was good and it didn't give away too much or too little at any time. It's really given me a craving to hunt out the rest of the series and re-read them all as it's been a few years since I've done that.

If you're a fan of Sharyn McCrumb's other works, you will love this. If you're a fan of the sarcastic, strong female, you will love this. If you're a fan of crime fiction, you will love this... I think you get the idea? ;-)

Orinoco Womble (tidy bag and all) says

Sick of this shadowy, poorly written book. The jacket blurb would have you believe it is "witty", yet another southern cozy mystery. It is neither witty nor cosy. Instead, it is a soap opera that could have been set anywhere, but for the faux-folksy sheriff in the white Stetson. (Because, yeah, Georgia is full of cowboys--??). Like all soap operas, it's full of rich people talking, talking, talking constantly, and there is a lot of choppy narration--the author builds up a scene, a character makes a remark like, "Look at this crazy thing!"--and in the next paragraph it's a different part of the "estate" (oh yes) with a different couple of people talking about an unrelated subject. Suspense? Where? Unless they mean suspended...in time, in place, in situation. People hang around waiting to be *told* (by someone else) what's going to happen. Hardly anyone is capable of leaving the house, let alone the jurisdiction!

McCrumb lets herself down repeatedly as author. These super-rich folks live on sandwiches, apparently, made by the visiting cousin (what happened to that housekeeper? she just vanishes). For some reason it starts out as a semi-epistolary novel, as MC writes it all down big for her brother who is a college student and yet has no phone in his apartment. (Hey, I was in college in the early 80s, everyone had landlines. But everyone.) Therefore, it's tell-not-show, a characteristic which carries over into the "action" of the novel. We even don't get to see the body, we are *told* about it secondhand by one of the characters! The "investigation" is patchy indeed, and the big reveal is eyerollingly bad, stupid and unbelievable even for this faux-crazy Southern family.

I hear McCrumb was given an Edgar award. Not for this nonsense, she wasn't. I hear the series (of course, a series) got better, but I wonder if I'll ever be bored enough to try another.

Charlene says

I read this first book out of order, and now I'm glad I did. The second and third books in this series are much better, in my opinion. I'm not sure I would have finished this one had I not read them first.

Now that I'm back on target, with Book Four waiting in the wings, I hope the second and third were previews of things to come...

Cybercrone says

Main character was a dead loss in every way.

aPriL does feral sometimes says

Um. Well.

I guess, in order to keep Amazon happy, as well as fans of this book, I ADORE THIS AUTHOR!

But this *particular* novel makes the sacrifice by the trees to print it a shame. Fortunately, I downloaded it.

I think it was a cozy mystery. I think. It was difficult to tell, though, at least for me. Tone-deaf emotional responses, unintentional comedic scenes, the lamest intentional jokes of the year in a book (and I've read 100 books this year), an uninteresting family, socially inept dialogue throughout (it was if female engineers were trying to make conversation at a party - I apologize to my fellow feminists, but it really was like computer engineers trying for a chirpy presentation) overexplaining the obvious while neglecting to lay any groundwork for other incidents, curious non- or over- or not-in-the-right-movie- reactions, and most alarming, a peculiar plot insertion popping out like a jack-in-the-box surprise similar to a clown clogging across the stage waving balloons in a Macbeth production. The ending is literally demented.

If a Romance reader was trying to write a book in the style of Agatha Christie, it might result in this book. If this wasn't an early effort by this author, well, I don't know how to account for how bad this is. Every attribute of telling a good story is utterly eviscerated, except for the mystery motifs utilized which were popular in the 1930's, which nonetheless, are horribly stitched together by the poor quality of the lighthearted writing. However, I'm very curious now as to how this book led to a *series* of Elizabeth MacPherson the Sleuth mysteries.

In this beginning adventure of Elizabeth's career, she is a social butterfly child-woman attending a family wedding, where a crazy cousin-in-the-attic Eileen is marrying an inappropriate limp-wristed liberal, Michael Satsky. An aunt had a clause in her will that money will be inherited by the first of the cousins to marry. All of the Chandlers are in the top 20% of wealthy Americans, so why this plot point is there, it must be just in case the other motive, inherited insanity, doesn't work for the reader. Elizabeth is relentlessly nice, observing her bizarre relatives and writing notes to her brother Bill, primarily, completely without any detection of dissonance, even though every one of her cousins has a talk with her darkly hinting at the Chandler inheritance of insanity. The only bad moment of her visit, of which includes the discovery of her cousin's body in a boat and that the cousin either died from hitting her head in a fall or by snakebite (yes, lets throw in snakes sitting in the boat for that one fatal minute but which are gone when the body is found, and which are never explained), the insanity of all of her cousins, the medieval castle built by odd laughing Alban across the road, inhospitable and hostile aunt Amanda, Captain Grandfather who believes he is still in the navy, cousin Charles who appears to have autistic tendencies, cousin Geoffrey of the abrupt social transitions - is when the Chandlers curiously ask Elizabeth about the history of the MacPherson branch. She unaccountably is enraged and is defensive while telling them she is part of a Scottish clan and likes tartan colors. For some reason, she is embarrassed and aggravated to talk about this at dinner to the eccentric, delusional, self-involved and schizophrenic Chandlers. It isn't a plot point which is developed further or matters in the least to the mystery. I suppose it was simply a lame attempt to 'humanize' Elizabeth by writing in a show of a disembodied temper tantrum for a character who has been a shallow dimwit so far. Well, imHO, Elizabeth still is a shallow dimwit by the end of the book. She does not solve the mystery or help the Chandlers or in any way charm this reader by the end of this first book in the series.

It doesn't matter if I go on with my review, whether it's for my book diary purpose or for your interest in my opinion. If I was to enumerate every horrible sentence of dull, brainless dialogue or disassociated

meaningless event or fact or inappropriate social interaction, it would mean copying the entire book.

The theme-setting quote at the beginning of the book is from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Lady...

Make of that what you will.

November 26 - edit

I was curious about how such a bad book spawned a series - what a surprise I've been having the last week! I've read two more Elizabeth books - and they are truly funny! In the right way, not unintentionally. Elizabeth is charming, if you don't mind that the author has designed her as a dark-haired member of the 'dumb blonde' club. This series is definitely comedic and satiric - but not sardonic, dark or vicious. If you enjoy the goring of oxen, they are fun. 'Sick of Shadows' must have been an early effort. It's a shame the author didn't get the opportunity to make it right before publishing it. I can see that it was a satire of the 1930's mysteries, but it simply is a horribly written novel. I'd love to read a fixed up version!

If you see yourself as a monument of social probity and middle-class propriety and political correctness, you will likely find in the series a character or a beloved American tradition which appears to have been insulted. You are warned, as the author is using the interests and values of the middle-class as the basis for her ridicule. I agree with the author's vision of our monkey silliness (not just about our actual lifestyles and social pretensions, but also the literary genre conventions in which we package our entertainments!). The author is goring a LOT in this series, gently, and I like it - just not this first book.

Deirdre says

What fun! That may sound a bit strange, considering this is a murder mystery, but altogether it is very entertaining if you like to read about wealthy eccentric families, with some members being literary-minded, some scientific, and others...well, you'll have to read the book.

Elizabeth MacPherson, recently graduated with a degree in Sociology, has received an invitation to spend a week or more at her cousins' home in Georgia, where she has not been since she was a child; before her parents moved the MacPherson side of the family further north. The reason for the invitation is because her female cousin is about to get married and Elizabeth is one of the bridesmaids. Almost the entire first half of this novel is about the Georgia cousins, but there is so much to learn about them, and they are so interesting, you almost forget that someone is going to be murdered and everyone is a suspect.

It's not often I give five stars to any book or movie, but I have so enjoyed reading this, my first Sharyn McCrumb novel, that I now want to read everything she's ever written or is about to write. I thank my friend Barbara for recommending her to me.

Claudia Cheyne says

Elizabeth MacPherson, recently graduated from college with no specific plans for her future, is invited to be

the bridesmaid for her cousin Eileen's wedding. The Chandler side of the family is very eccentric. Things start out strange and continue to become more bizarre with each passing day. The nuptials never take place. There is a funeral instead. Who among this weird group could be a killer? This is the first in a series. I am looking forward to reading more.

Msjodi777 says

I have liked nearly everything Sharyn McCrumb has written, but this one, not so much. Of course, when I looked it up on fantastic fiction, it was her first novel, so that might have something to do with it. I still love the *Ballad* series, and will try the second one in this series, but wasn't very impressed with this particular book. Read the kindle format, so no narrator. <><

Tracey S Choat says

Good mystery

I enjoyed this book more than I expected. I think this was written or set in the 1970-1980's before personal computers, etc. The characters were somewhat strange, but intelligent. I plan to read the next book in the series.

Dianne Degrandt says

Not really crazy about this book. I've read several of Sharyn McCrumb books and this was not one of my favorites.

Katherine Clark says

This is really a 3 and 3/4s book. It is the first in the series, and McCrumb does a lovely job of weaving together humor and pathos. I love the character of Geoffrey, and I think it is with his character that she does and especially good job of quick development. (I am saying this badly). I also love the exchange of letters between the two siblings, and their relationship becomes a welcome mainstay of the series. This won't matter to the vast majority of people, but this book is definitely NOT a cozy. Too much legitimate emotional sadness. (Again, I'm saying this badly, but for my project, this is important.)

Stacie Haden says

Other reviewers say that this series improves quite a bit.

This one was ok. There were some irritants, but overall it was fine. I'll try another at some point.

Tammy Rockvam says

I've read other reviews that say that this series, and this episode in particular, are not as good as her others. I can't compare but must say I didn't really like this book too much. It started out entertaining, with interesting characters and some humor. But some of the characters seemed to change their personalities mid-way through, and the heroine Elizabeth just seems to be muddling through life. If she's the basis of a series, I'd expect her to be a bit more together. Maybe she's an accidental heroine, and murder seems to follow her around?

Moonlight says

When I read a cozy, I expect to get a good sense of place from the book. I don't care if the story takes place in 1884 or 2013. This book had me a little confused. The character's dialog sounded British even though the story takes place in a small town in Georgia.

The copy of the book I read stated it's publication date was 1989. I thought I would have a nice stroll down memory lane as I and most of my friend married around this time. I had to double check the publication date because the attitudes were so out of place for circa 1990. Women are more concerned about husband hunting than establishing a career. One of the characters lives in a commune. The heroine who just graduated from college with a degree in sociology considers a career in Archaeology because her brother's roommate is an Archaeologist and they could excavate together, never mind she hasn't even met the guy. All the female characters are either immature, neurotic or mentally ill. After the death of the murder victim, a family member is scolded for failing to wear black for mourning, not at the funeral but in the privacy of their home. It seemed so Mad-Men-like that I was sure I was reading a book published in the 1960's. When I re-checked the publication date, it was indeed not 1989 but 1984. Even with the earlier publication date, the attitudes seem about 25 years off.

But what really bugged me, was that the mystery was not solved by the heroine but by a minor male character. I think I could have been amused by all the other things but that just went too far.

As to the nostalgia, this novel takes place in a time when people wrote letters, looked information up in an encyclopedia (book), and apparently sent mailgrams. I looked mailgrams up on wikipedia.

The mystery was decent and held my interest. If you can laugh at the mid-century attitudes, you will enjoy this mystery.

Jen says

Can I give zero stars? SO DUMB!

Lisa Cunningham says

I read the second and third books in the series first and enjoyed them more. If I'd started here I doubt I would have read the others.
