



This Private Plot

Alan Beechey

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Sherlock Holmes once claimed that "the lowest and vilest alleys of London do not present a more dreadful record of sin than does the smiling and beautiful countryside."

And Oliver Swithin, reluctant guest in an English village, is about to find out that it's true.

Coaxed out of his clothes and into a midnight streak by his girlfriend, Oliver's amorous intentions are thwarted by the discovery of a dead body dangling from the village's ancient gibbet. When it appears that the famous victim was driven to suicide by blackmail, Oliver resolves to find the blackmailer. And to do so, he needs to discover the dead man's secret.

But in the twenty-first century, when sins that would once have been ripe for shaming are now a cause for hiring a publicist, what foul deeds of the past will people still pay to keep hidden? Is the carefully cut out page from a Shakespeare play, with its reference to a "private plot," really a clue? Why did somebody fill in the victim's grave before his funeral?

And what does any of this have to do with the memoir writers of the Vicar's reading group, the five unmarried Bennett sisters, the mysterious monk known only as "The Vampire of Synne," the case of the two Shakespeares, and the married couple who are never seen in the same room at the same time? Will there be yet another appearance by Underwood Tooth, the world's leading expert on being ignored?

Oliver discovers that the death was no suicide. But that's nothing compared with the next revelation, which turns the entire investigation upside down and puts Oliver's own life in peril.

This Private Plot Details

Date : Published May 6th 2014 by Poisoned Pen Press (first published May 1st 2014)

ISBN : 9781464202421

Author : Alan Beechey

Format : Paperback 250 pages

Genre : Mystery, Humor, Fiction, European Literature, British Literature

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Marie says

Try this for a first sentence to grab you: "The odd thing about a banana," Oliver Swithin mused as he chased the naked policewoman across the moonlit field, "is not that it's an excellent source of potassium, but that everybody seems to know it is."

Witty and amusing, with a lot of literary references, puns, eccentric characters with improbable names, five unmarried Bennett sisters, a mysterious monk who wanders at night, a Shakespeare obsessed brother, streaking, a very funny funeral service, and even some Japanese tourists, make for a very enjoyable read. Filled with hilarity, interesting trivia & anti-trivia, and with lots of red herrings I didn't see the solution coming, -or the final twist. I have now reserved the first two Swithin novels at my local library.

Judie says

Streaking on the Synne Commons at midnight with his Scotland Yard girlfriend, Effie Strongitham, children's book author Oliver Swithin and his uncle, Scotland Yard detective superintendent find the body of Dennis Breedlove, a retired children's radio program host hanging from a tree. The initial investigation discloses a blackmail letter Breedlove's desk. The death is quickly declared a suicide. Oliver believes if such a letter drives someone to commit suicide, that person is guilty of murder. He then questions whether Breedlove had been able to hang himself.

The plot continues with trying to determine other blackmail victims (going by clues in a book of nursery rhymes [learn what composers Handel and Bononcini have to do with Tweedle-dee and Tweedle-dum) as well as finding out how Breedlove ended up in the tree. It includes the activities around the town's local theater performance of Hamlet and questions whether there were one, two, or more Shakespeares.

THIS PRIVATE PLOT is a witty mystery full of the humor for which Britain is well-known as well as showing people's stereotypical actions. It has an extensive list of eccentric characters and situations. Some of my favorites:

Oliver snuck up behind Effie, covered her eyes and said, "Guess who?" She replied, "Johnny Depp."

"You're getting warm." "I would be if it really was Johnny Depp."

"Piles of paper mounting like stalagmites from the carpet...."

One main character is a tall, black man. Several characters ask him if he played basketball.

"...young English women whose careful breeding and dauntless narcissism are in inverse proportion to their intelligence."

It compares the dead after being judged to contestants on a television talent show.

It places "West Side Story" back in an English setting. It points out that the British will forgive and forget almost any kind of misdeed (financial, drugs, alcohol) but fixate on sex.

It strongly demonstrates that a good vocabulary enables authors to write about emotions and sex, including some bawdy scenes, without stooping to vulgarity.

I received this book through the Goodreads Early Readers program and am so glad that I read it.

Lance Wright says

This is a delightfully entertaining, English village-style mystery, with an abundance of wry humor and clever

wordplay sprinkled throughout. More literate-based than action-oriented, though there is plenty of that, especially towards the end, this very enjoyable story is highly recommended. Read our full review, here: <http://www.mysteriousreviews.com/myst...>

Susan says

Oliver Swithin and his girlfriend Effie (that's Detective Sergeant Strongitham to you) are part of a family houseparty visiting Oliver's parents in their retirement home in the tiny village of Synne--don't worry, all the jokes are made--when they come upon the body of an elderly man who seems to have committed suicide. A blackmail note in his cottage gives his possible motive. But Oliver is not convinced that the man killed himself, and if he did, it seems to him that the blackmailer should be punished. You will find it hard to believe all that happens next, from Oliver's brother's obsession with Shakespeare to the five unmarried Bennet sisters to a married couple who look a lot alike to a man who goes about disguised as a vampire...

April says

I have a sense that people either love these books or hate them. I have seldom read a book that so epitomizes the phrase "madcap romp," but Beechey's book definitely does! If you like literary references and lots of puns being tossed off, both good and bad, then you will like this book. I particularly loved the idea of MindSpam...the one factoid that everyone will tell you when you raise a particular topic, such as: George Washington chopped down a cherry tree, or Eskimos have 137 different words for snow. It's a clever book for clever people. Sometimes the fast pace gets a bit exhausting, but I had a lot of fun reading it. The basic plot is that Oliver is on a holiday with his girlfriend Effie, who is a sergeant under his policeman uncle. They discover a body hanging in a tree and Oliver is sure that it was murder, while the investigating policemen are clear that it was suicide. Effie is warned off the case, so naturally, they must investigate. Plot goes through complex turn after turn, like the maze Effie and Oliver run through naked at the beginning of the book.

Fred says

Beechey's mysteries are clever and humorous. Hoping the next one arrives more quickly than the third did!

Nancy says

Unfortunately, I started with the 3rd book in the series, because that's all the library had. But thanks to the awesome St. Louis Public Library, they ordered the 1st and 2nd books in the series! So now I'm looking forward to reading *An Embarrassment of Corpses* and then *Murdering Ministers*. I really like this guy's sense of humor and writing style. Story is set in England and *This Private Plot* has a bit of Shakespeare thrown in for good measure.

Kathy says

What a fun read! This is the first book that I have read that is written by Alan Beechey. This Private Plot is the third book in the Oliver Swithin series. It can stand alone but now I am planning to go back and read the first two...so maybe reading them in order would be a good idea!

Blackmail...suicide....streaking...and that is just how the book starts. Sometimes a little raunchy and filled with puns. This is definitely a fun read. I has been available since May and is a great mystery filled with secrets and British shenanigans!

Laura says

Alan Beechey's latest, This Private Plot, is a wonderful romp. His character, Oliver Swithin, is a children's book author that is currently working on a trivia book. We travel with him to his childhood home in a small village appropriately named Synne, which I am pretty sure is pronounced "sin". Swithin is with his girlfriend, a police officer that reports to Swithin's uncle, who is also on holiday in Synne.

While out on a naked midnight romp in the "Shakespeare Race" an authentic turf maze, our couple finds Dennis Breedlove, a former children's television personality, hanged. The police think it is suicide, because a blackmail note is found. It turns out that Breedlove is actually the blackmailer.

Swithin is on the trail of the killer. Several trails actually. Convinced that one of the blackmailers is the killer, Swithin tries to match up suspects with the nursery rhymes Breedlove used to identify them. With the help of his girlfriend and unheeded warnings from his uncle to stop, he discovers that Synne has more than its share of secrets. They include a strange writing group run by the Vicar, a couple which may be the same person, a recluse monk and possibly his own family.

All of sleuthing is going on while Swithin's brother is trying to prove there were two William Shakespeares and his uncle is starring in a local theater production of Hamlet. There are great tidbits of information on Shakespeare as well as other bits of trivia shared by Swithin while this story unfolds.

Beechey is a master of double-entendre. From names such as Lesbia Weguelin (to which I read "let's be a wigglin'") to the name of the actual town. Swithin talks often about living in Synne. More than once, I stopped to read a particularly funny line to whoever was near me at the moment.

This mystery is so wonderfully British in the spirit of Agatha Christie with the humor of P.G. Wodehouse, I simultaneously laughed and was intrigued. At times, this book was a bit bawdy, but never graphic, I did not find it offensive. Deliciously tangle plot that is perfectly tied up by the end of the book, with a beautiful, unexpected twist at the end.

This is the third book in Beechley's Oliver Swithin Mystery Series. It was the first one I've read and worked very well as a stand-alone mystery. Swithin is an endearingly wacky character. I want to see more of him and the other characters that Beechley skillfully brings to life.

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Mary says

I was so happy to see the third book in the series; it's been about 15 years since the second installment in the series was released, and I most certainly hope that it isn't another 15 years for #4!

I really hated to see this story come to a close, but I couldn't just stop reading. Again, it's a small village...we have a suspected suicide (was it murder?), a blackmailer, and tons of 'secret' risqué goings-on. A vampire, too! Wonderful wordplay, and lots of red herrings. Oliver Swithin and his girlfriend Effie find themselves compelled to get to the truth in the death of a villager--and they have no idea how much they don't know about this village and its inhabitants! Great fun (again).

Cissa says

Imagine: if P.G. Wodehouse were alive and writing mysteries. This is a perfect description!

The plot is nice and twisty, and mostly character-driven. The absurd moments are very absurd, including the shout-out to *Pride & Prejudice* -- in a neighboring town there's a couple named the Bennetts, with five unmarried daughters, although their names and characters are not parallel. There were silly situations that yet proceeded naturally from the course of events, and there were twists that I didn't call at all -- and I've read enough mysteries that I can generally predict the main twists. However, this would have been fun to read even if you are more perceptive than I am!

The dialogue is also great, and lots of fun. Our hero, Oliver, is a nice but occasionally a bit dim chap, and his girlfriend ROCKS.

I'm not going to get into the plot for fear of spoilers. Suffice it to say there is blackmail involved with the murder, and sex is involved -- but not explicitly -- in a way both Wodehouse and Austen would blanch at. This is a mystery definitely in the cozy line, but with more protagonist agency than many of the "cozy" protagonists have.

I loved it, and will be getting the other two books in this series, and will be waiting hopefully for a fourth.

I got this book for review from rambles.net, an online ezine³ devoted to reviewing books, music, and sometimes other media.

Helen Howerton says

Thought this was great until the lame, cliffhanger ending.

Elizabeth says

A perfectly balanced tale with wit, humor and plenty of loose ends woven together to make an excellent whole.

Selena Sheaves says

Took me a little longer to get through this book than I'd anticipated. While I loved the humor (and laughed out loud a few times), the story itself, and the almost keystone cops-like adventure, I found much of the dialogue and particularly the Shakespeare scenes tedious. Ended up skipping through a bit. I did quite like the main characters, however, and because the book was well-written and the plot was interesting and funny enough to keep me engaged, Alan Beechey stays on my To Read list.

Bev says

The odd thing about a banana," Oliver Swithin mused as he chased the naked policewoman across the moonlit field, "is not that it's an excellent source of potassium, but that everybody seems to know it is.

According to local legend in the British village of Synne (standing joke "living in Synne"), it is the custom for young lovers to run naked to a local landmark known as Shakespeare's Race at midnight on May Day and follow the path of the oddly named turf maze to the (most romantic) old gibbet that sits in the center. That would be the reason that Oliver Swithin would be chasing a naked Scotland Yard detective while he himself is decked out in only his best birthday suit. Who knew that his Uncle Tim (and, incidentally, his beloved policewoman's boss) would be doing the same with Aunt Phoebe? And that they would all meet up in the maze to have the romantic moment ruined....not by mutual embarrassment (though there's plenty of that to go around), but by a corpse dangling from the ancient hanging tree.

The local police are quite willing to believe that retired radio personality, "Uncle Dennis" Breedlove has committed suicide. Even after Oliver points out that "Uncle Dennis" wasn't near tall enough to reach the necessary branches. And even after the discovery that dear old "Uncle Dennis" was dirty blackmailer with at least five victims on his list. All sorts of odd things begin to happen--from the Vicar's strange behavior to the black-clad strangers who attack Oliver at night. There is the mysterious man who dresses like a monk but is rumored to be a Vampire. There are the Bennet sisters who have an internet career that no one--not even they--suspects. And there is the dead man who comes back to life. There are nursery rhyme clues and hints of a mystery that involves the great Bard himself. Quite a maze for Oliver and Scotland Yard to negotiate before they find the villain in the center.

Alan Beechey provides plenty of colorful characters in This Private Plot and gives us a solid, eccentric British mystery filled with typical British wit and plenty of red herrings. The book is the long-awaited (15 years!) third book in the Oliver Swithin series and I don't think fans will be disappointed. Great fun, interesting characters, and a plausible motive add up for a quick, entertaining read. It is not necessary to read the previous two books to enjoy This Private Plot, but if you want to catch up on the Oliver Swithin mysteries and have difficulty finding the older books, you'll be glad to know that Poisoned Pen Press has

recently issued new editions of Embarrassment of Corpses and Murdering Ministers, the first two books in the series.

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