



Murder Is for Keeps

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Local artist Penny Brannigan has been spending her summer painting Gwrych Castle and its surrounding landscapes. A privately owned, castellated Welsh country house, Gwrych has been sadly neglected for decades and is in a heartbreaking state of disrepair. So when she learns architectural historian Mark Baker is leading a team of enthusiastic volunteers to restore the castle grounds and gardens to their former grandeur, Penny is thrilled.

But it's not long before disagreements over the restoration turn deadly, and Penny is horrified to discover the body of a volunteer hidden in a castle outbuilding. Penny enlists her friend Gareth Davies, recently retired from the North Wales Police Service, to help investigate. As the two dig deeper into the castle's history, including its glamorous heyday in the 1920s, they find startling connections between an old, unsolved murder and Gareth's own family, and as they solve the present-day murder, Penny recovers a stunning piece of the castle's architectural heritage.

Murder Is for Keeps is the latest book in the charming, traditional Penny Brannigan mystery series.

Murder Is for Keeps Details

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Author : Elizabeth J. Duncan

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From Reader Review Murder Is for Keeps for online ebook

Linda L says

My first Duncan, so did not know Penny Brannigan -- STILL don't know her. Is she a spa owner/worker, an artist, or an amateur detective? And who cares? I know this was a "cozy" mystery, but it was too silly for me. Good enough for her that her nice boyfriend has moved on to greener pastures, so to speak. She didn't deserve him anyway. And the story lacked any semblance of being possible -- picky picky, I know. Good for those who love such drivel.

Linnea says

Wonderful how the characters intertwine. And the recurring characters. Interesting plot with Penny.

Alice says

enjoyable read

consistent with Duncan's previous Penny Brannigan mysteries. The solution hinges on some little remembered/known fact --in this case -oil paint pigmentations which are poisonous have been banned; therefore the finding of those pigments can validate a paintings history.

The placement of the great staircase in plain sight is a further indication of the villain's state of mind.

As with many of these classic mysteries the romantic life of the heroine does not go smoothly. In this book, her partner decides he wants more from a relationship than they have and breaks off the relationship with her.

Eileen says

I really liked the story line...but the prose is so "basic" that I found it boring to read. I finished just to find out who had "done it", but I don't think I'll waste my time with this author again.

Betty says

A long-running cozy mystery set in the Welsh countryside. This is the second book I have read of this series, both out of order but I had no trouble following along. The Gwrych grounds are being restored after years of neglect. Volunteers are working in gardens. Penny Brannigan is painting the castle grounds for a fundraiser when she finds the body of a man. The manner of his death is undetermined. Penny and retired Inspector Gareth Davies look into the matter. Later a grave is found located in the castle rose garden. Gareth's Grandmother worked at the castle in the 1920's. Looking through her belongings, Penny discovers a clue to

help solve the mystery. I recommend this book.

Disclosure: I received a free copy from St. Martin's Press for an honest review. I would like to thank them for this opportunity to read and review the book. The opinions expressed are my own.

Ed says

#8 in the Penny Brannigan series. Average series entry. Not much activity at Penny's spa, and only one scene has her working (folding towels). Much of the book takes place at the ruins of Gwrych Castle where Penny is busy painting (watercolors) and finding bodies. The book will appeal mostly to series fans who will recognize the villagers, seen here in cameos.

Penny Brannigan series - Penny finds a body in the grounds of Gwrych Castle, near her home in North Wales. The dead man volunteered with a crew renovating the castle, and after his developmentally challenged son disappears, Penny pieces together a connection between their family, the renovation's site manager, and a 20-year-old theft. Meanwhile, a skeleton turns up in the castle garden, and Penny's friend Gareth Davies, recently retired from the police force, investigates.

Nese says

As much as I like this series and I am a fan of Elizabeth J. Duncan, I had to force myself to finish this book for the fact there is not much of a story line and most of the book is about a historical manor in Wales and the restoration projects handled by volunteers. Don't get me wrong I like it when stories use historical backgrounds, but while reading the book, it felt like the whole book is about the landmark. (I guess the creative process can't be forced with deadlines and such.) Also there is hardly any interactions or feelings between the characters, making the book lacking any warmth. I understand the main character has baggage like everyone, but I don't like her not having any emotional bond with anybody, especially with Garret Davis. I hope the next book will be mostly about relationships. Three stars.

Judy Lesley says

I received an e-ARC of this novel through NetGalley and St. Martin's Press Minotaur Books. Thank you.

This number eight Penny Brannigan cozy mystery was a solid 3.5 star read for me. It was my first time to read the series and I was impressed with the good writing and plotting I found here. There were just enough location and character names to firmly establish the action taking place in Wales. The clues were well concealed within the story and I did not have the solution completely figured out until it was revealed by the author. While the manner of death was not unusual, the length of time it took to establish that the victim had even been murdered was very well done because of how that death was accomplished. I also liked the way the author established the relationship between Penny and recently retired Detective Chief Inspector Gareth Davies. Taken all together, this was a very pleasant reading experience which I enjoyed.

Tracey says

This is, unfortunately, in in the "against" column for cozy mysteries. It wasn't horrible. But for a three-hundred-page cozy, it was one heck of a slog, and seemed to take me forever.

One of the most important things in a cozy is the cast of characters, and ... the characters in this book did nothing for me. I actually found most of them mildly off-putting. Main character Penny was strangely amorphous, never leaving any kind of strong impression on me at all. She's an artist, of enough impact that when she offers a set of paintings for a fund-raising auction they are happily accepted, and they set off a bidding war – but that's not what she *does*. (One highlight I made: "My paintings will never do it justice. It's got something that's impossible to capture." Not if you're a decent artist, it doesn't.) Her income apparently derives from a spa of sorts she and a friend own and operate – though it sounds more like simply a hair and nail salon than a spa, unless I wasn't paying enough attention (absolutely possible – there was much skimming involved in finishing this book). (This could have been revealed better, for someone who hasn't read – and won't read – the preceding seven books: it took some figuring to realize her position – I had assumed she painted for a living. It's a challenge, providing exposition in a series that will orientate the newbie while not boring the regular reader – and the author failed, I think.) The fact that at one point Penny needs to literally count on her fingers to figure out a date just made me sad.

And then, of course, as another sideline Penny investigates mysteries, for which her partner at one point gives her the sort of talking-to I would expect from a mother to a naughty child, not one middle-aged business partner to another, ticking her off for taking time away from the business to investigate a murder. And yet a little while later she had a complete reversal, and not only encouraged Penny to take a day off to go investigate but volunteers to go with her.

Her one-time (almost?) lover Gareth, now a retired DCI who is having trouble entirely letting go of the job, is also having trouble adjusting to the friendzone Penny has put him in. It was extraordinarily awkward to read about these two people who love spending time with each other, do all sorts of things together, rely on each other in every way, and then kind of clumsily fumble through do-I-kiss-you-or-what-I'll-just-leave-now moments. This might be a good one for my "Just TALK TO EACH OTHER" shelf. They do, talk that is, a little – but it's all ... well, stupid. My notes on the Kindle featured such things as "A MAN HAS NEEDS, PENNY" ... And then, a few pages later, "NEEDS, I TELL YOU." All caps and everything. When I take the trouble to go all caps and put in the comma on a Kindle note, you know I'm serious. ("Still, I thought he was devoted to me, and I didn't really expect this." My God, woman.)

Det. Inspector Bethan Morgan, who took Gareth's job when he retired, was another yo-yo character. She absolutely did not want Gareth's help with the investigation, nor Penny's – despite the fact that the latter found the body ... until she absolutely did want their help, and then she all but turned the case over to them. It was completely unconvincing.

I felt that the writing was strangely uncertain for something that is the eighth book in a series; it seemed to me like some sections were feeling their way toward where they needed to go. Sentences were badly constructed, commas popped up where they shouldn't and failed to appear where they should, and – oh, look, there's Captain Obvious. "...A rusty red blur emerged from the dense woodland behind the castle. It moved with a swift, agile gait, carrying its bushy whitetipped tail horizontal to the ground, as it headed in the direction of the stable yard. A fox, she thought with delight." And here I thought it might be a wildebeest. That's actually kind of typical. The author doesn't seem to trust her readers much, and I found it annoying to be taken by the hand and led through situations baby step by baby step. I don't know if this is an issue of the uncertainty I mentioned, or an inability to write decent exposition, or that desire to make absolutely, completely, and utterly sure that the picture in the reader's head is exactly the same as the picture in the author's. Maybe it's all of the above. It doesn't make for a fun read.

Or maybe it's just sloppy writing. Like this: "... passed round sandwiches, cheese, and biscuits from the cooler.

'Have we got any biscuits?' 'We do,' said Penny, holding out a packet." That would be those things that were just passed around with the sandwiches and cheese. Oh, and "'I'd hate for this paint to fall into the wrong hands.' 'No, I'm sure you wouldn't,' said Penny" ... Um. That doesn't mean what you meant it to mean.

When one young man appears on the scene, his introduction is ... well, not to put too fine a point on it, it's a failure. The initial description is perfectly ordinary. And then suddenly in the midst of talking to our heroes he shuts down and demonstrates behavior that makes it obvious that he is mentally and/or emotionally handicapped – but it was so out of the blue that I was completely knocked out of the story. It's later made clear that this character's challenges are obvious to anyone who meets him, but the only indicator the reader is given is that he stumbles over a long-ish word in one of the first bits of dialogue he's given.

As soon as I read that Gareth was being sent in to clean the debris out of a fireplace in the mansion where he's volunteering, I had a horrible feeling that some priceless piece of evidence would be found stuffed up the chimney. And so it was. That's much the way the whole mystery is solved – through "why, look what I have found!" and coincidence, and a fourth-hand account of something that happened (*counts on fingers*) ninety years ago, of which they have no real proof.

The setting is something else that should be very strong in a cozy – I mean, these things are pretty much the point in this subgenre, aren't they? But apart from names like "Eirlys" and "Bethan" and "Gwrych", and a smattering of Welsh ... this could be picked up and set down in any English country village without disturbing a stick or stone of the story. Which is not, of course, to say that I wanted everyone's speech written out to reflect the dialect, or for anyone to burst into Welsh more often than happened – but there had to be a reason the series was set in Wales, no? I'd have liked to have seen it.

Something that could be considered very much a cozy mystery "thing" – and which became really tiresome before long – was the fact that just about every passage – not every chapter, every passage – seemed to begin with, end with, or otherwise feature food. I may not know much about these characters, but I sure know what they ate.

Finally, I was just deeply annoyed by what was a clever pun the first time I saw it, over five years ago, but ... really, "Game of Thorns" has been done.

No – one more thing. I wonder what the connection is between Elizabeth J. Duncan and Jeanne Dams, author of the Dorothy Martin mysteries – because Dorothy and her husband Gareth make a really odd and rather pointless-seeming cameo appearance in this book. It was weird.

The usual disclaimer: I received this book via Netgalley for review.

Fred says

Murder Is For Keeps is the eighth book in the A Penny Brannigan Mystery series.

It's a joy to venture to Wales and it's beautiful countryside and visit with Penny Brannigan and Murder is For Keeps is not an exception.

Gwrych Castle, at one time, was very elegant with its marble staircase and expensive appointments. But over

the decades it has fallen into disrepair and most of the items of any value have been looted by caravan people. Andrew Warburton, an architectural historian, and author has been raising money and volunteers to at least bring the gardens back to their former glory

Penny enjoyed coming up to the castle sketch and do watercolors of the old castle. One day as she realized all the workers had left for the day and she was packing up to go home, she notices a pick-up truck still parked on the sight. She is sure everyone has left for the day and begins to search the area where something had caught her eye. When she comes to what she guesses used to be the kennels, she finds the lifeless body of John Hardwick, a landscape architect, and volunteer. Once the police do a little investigation they find that Hardwick and Mark Baker, who is in charge of the project, were constantly at odds with just about everything concerning the restoration. Penny feels that Baker is not a murderer and soon convinces her friend and Detective Chief Inspector, Garth Davies, to volunteer to work on the restoration and to watch for clues as to who the murderer was. As Penny and Garth pursue the various avenues in their search they find that the death may have had more do with the ransacking of the castle than disagreements about the current work being performed.

Another well-plotted and written story from Elizabeth Duncan. As in the other books in the series, the cast of characters are equally enjoyable. This reader hasn't given up hope that Penny and Garth might decide to give each other another chance.

Will eagerly be watching for the next book in the series.

Kimberly Ann says

This was a light and easy read...

The main character (see I don't even remember her name) is an artist. Her male friend is the former CID of the town.

They are volunteering together in the ruins of the local Castle Keeps when she discovers the body of a well known garden expert & renovator. He was working there in order to get to know his special needs estranged son.

His son makes friends w/ the protagonist & the former CID, then he disappears....

Meanwhile there comes the question: "What happened to the marble staircase?" The staircase was the focal point of the castle, w/ 55 steps, 2 landings, & a red carpet ending at a stained glass window.

It took me a while to get into the book, because it is a semi-cozy, but when I did, I found it enjoyable.

There isn't gratuitous violence, but there is a back story about the castle and its destruction by "new age travelers" and the nifty solution of the staircase

Deb says

A restoration of an old country house leads to a murder of one of the male volunteers. It was soon found that there was no cause of death, but Penny is approached by his wife because she believes he was murdered. In

the meantime a woman's skeleton is uncovered in the garden that is being restored. Gareth and Penny vow to help the police solve the murder as well as find out the name of the woman skeleton found. I have to admit that when the book ended, I didn't feel that all the questions were resolved. What were the circumstances regarding Lane's mother? Did Gareth research the history on the woman's skeleton and find if the family was still around? Maybe that is going to be in the next book. What was the relationship between Ifor and Angela? Why was she afraid of him? Was Angela helping Ifor? Didn't quite understand why Penny resorted to violence as it appeared she was free to go. Will read next book in series, but felt this one needed more closure on events.

Lynn says

I have enjoyed all 8 Penny Brannigan books. Penny was hiking through Wales many years ago and fell in love with the country and moved there. She now co-owns a spa with a friend.

The grounds of Gwrych Castle are being recovered after years of neglect. Volunteers are working to bring back the fabulous gardens. Penny is on site doing 4 water colors of the Gwrych grounds to auction off for charity to help offset the costs of the work being done on Gwrych grounds. While there she discovers a body of a man. It is not known for awhile if it is a natural death or murder since the cause of the death has not been discovered.

I always enjoy the secondary characters of Mrs. Lloyd and her companion Florence. Retired detective chief inspector Gareth Davis works with Penny on the case. Gareth makes a decision in this book that I was glad to see. Maybe it will change things in upcoming books.

There was a current death and a murder from the past. A lost magnificent marble staircase is mentioned often as to what happened to it when it was stolen and dismantled many years ago. This is a good series and I am looking forward to the next book. I enjoy the characters and each mystery is always different.

Lorraine says

I have traveled through Wales and have been to Conwy Castle, but I do not know North Wales that well. Murder for Keeps (Penny Brannigan #8) by Elizabeth J. Duncan intrigued me with Gwrych Castle, the main setting for this particular cozy mystery, which is an actual castle in North Wales. Thus, I checked it out on The Internet, and it is truly something to see. It was built as a private home which spreads out quite a bit. When I saw the pictures, I could just imagine how it looked in its heyday. It must have been absolutely stunning. Personally, I would have loved to live there. I can certainly see why the author had volunteers cleaning up the site & had Penny continually stating how sad it is that so much had been stolen because w/o security, people would come to the Castle's site and steal whatever they could including parts of the interior. Dr. Mark Baker is in the story and heads up the volunteers, but there is a real Dr. Mark Baker who is the "chairman of the Gwrych Castle Preservation Trust", and he and the volunteers are cleaning up the Castle's site as well as restoring some of the outside areas. It is fun reading a cozy mystery where characters are actually people working on a true site. Enjoyable!

Claudia Cheyne says

Penny Brannigan offered to donate paintings of Gwrych Castle for a fundraiser to bring the neglected grounds and gardens back to their former glory. She is packing up her equipment to head home when she realizes one of the volunteer's truck is still there after everyone else had left for the day. Her curiosity leads her to discovering the body of a man - John Hardwick. While there is no evidence of foul play, Hardwick's widow is convinced her husband was murdered. Gareth Davies, now retired from the police, becomes involved with the case. He has some family ties to Gwrych Castle. Gareth's grandmother had worked as a seamstress there before she was married. Another satisfying book in this series. Many familiar characters appear, and personal relationships begin changing among some of them.
