

A Brush with Death: A Susie Mahl Mystery

Ali Carter

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Susie Mahl knows a few things about the fine art of sleuthing. In *A Brush with Death*, the unlikely detective unravels a murder mystery in the idyllic English countryside. This self-effacing, humorous mystery has a light touch and a good eye for detail.

Susie knows that life rarely goes as planned. Her underwear drawer, packed with fluffy, frilly lingerie, hints at a more glamorous life than the one she's living. Instead of painting fine art, she makes a living as a pet portraitist. Her commissions allow her to mix with the upper classes, "filling a spot as the single, eccentric artistic friend." She's comfortable as a token misfit, but her outsider perspective comes in handy when the Earl of Greengrass is found in a scandalous state, dead as a doornail outside the village church.

As the local police begin their queries, Susie finds a few telling clues of her own. She finds that her artist's eye makes her a perfect investigator. Weaving together details about painting and drawing techniques with crime procedures, *A Brush with Death* is nicely balanced and engaging. Susie segues easily between talking about her love life, her creative work, and the mystery she's embroiled in.

From Susie's perspective, this "murder malarkey" may be nothing, but her natural curiosity pushes the plot along. She's the best-drawn character of the book, offset by a cast of self-consciously British characters with names like Asquitha Cornfield and Antonia Codrington. Susie's gentle, slightly snarky humor pervades the mystery and keeps the tone light. Is it a murder, or just a bit of fun?

A Brush with Death is a perfectly English mystery, with an abundance of all the right jokes, details, and muddy dogs. Author Ali Carter's first book is a lovely romp and shows promise for a wonderful tongue-in-cheek mystery series.

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