



Flowers of Evil

N. L. Holmes

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(315pp)

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Part of a series that draws on real historical events, Flowers of Evil is an engaging mystery novel.

In N. L. Holmes's historical novel *Flowers of Evil*, a budding Egyptian physician takes it upon herself to solve a gruesome murder.

Neferet was hoping that more patients would come through the door of her struggling physician's office, but not like this: a florist, stabbed on his way home from work, dies on her table. With only one word—"rabbit"—as a clue to go on, Neferet, her beloved Bener-ib, and their adopted daughter Mut-tuy uncover a far-flung conspiracy involving multiple spies, a ruthless assassin, and a priest who will stop at nothing to get what he wants...or to stop Neferet from exposing his schemes.

The book begins with a useful glossary of names and historical terms, as well as a map showing how Egypt looked at the time the story takes place. The world of ancient Egypt is made real and relatable through everyday details, as of the sweet taste of sesame treats and with the rich colors of flower fields growing along the Nile.

The strong personalities of Neferet and Mut-tuy, who are both stubborn and headstrong, are tempered by the more cautious voices of Bener-ib and Hani, Neferet's father. These four characters balance out each other's weaknesses, enabling them to conduct a methodical investigation that takes them to diverse locations, including temples, farms, and abandoned buildings. They start by questioning the dead man's family; with luck and patience, they end up confronting the mastermind behind the wicked deeds they're investigating. Class differences and hints at a refugee crisis add more difficulties that Neferet, as an educated woman of the upper classes, learns to navigate in order to solve her case and establish her medical practice in a poorer neighborhood.

Even with a murderer on the loose, Neferet and Bener-ib have other problems: they also contend with an unscrupulous rival doctor spreading lies about the women's practice and a corrupt police chief with a grudge against Neferet's family. In the frightening climax, Neferet's loved ones are placed in mortal jeopardy, and she relies on her own cleverness, courage, and foresight to save them all. Fun characters, a tense plot, and a satisfying conclusion make the story enjoyable and exciting. Though the mystery's solution contains a harsh lesson, it also proves that Neferet is brave, competent, and ready for her next adventure.

Part of a series that draws on real historical events, *Flowers of Evil* is an engaging mystery novel in which even nice people can hide dark secrets.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (October 21, 2023)

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