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Pursuit and Persuasion: Ben Reese Mystery
Sally S. Wright
Multnomah
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Scottish professor Dr. Georgina Fletcher changes her will, writes a letter and hand-delivers it to a friend with instructions to mail it if she should die, especially if she dies of apparent "natural causes." Two days later she becomes ill and dies. The letter is eventually received by Ellen Winter, an American graduate student and heir to the Fletcher estate, which includes a castle and grounds, stock in the Fletcher Tire Company and a sizable sum of money. The letter tells Ellen that Georgina was probably murdered, and she should hire a private investigator to find out who killed her.

Ellen turns to her mentor and college instructor, Dr. Ben Reese. Reese is a former U.S. Army Ranger, World War II veteran, archivist and amateur sleuth. He agrees to cautiously look into Georgina Fletcher's death under the guise of helping Ellen decide what to do with the estate she has inherited. This search will take him to Oxford and into university politics, digging deep into sixteenth century family documents, rare books, falconry, microbiology and rubber manufacturing. Along the way he discovers a series of poems written by Fletcher that sets Reese on the right path. Along the way someone will try to kill him.

Ben Reese is a compelling character: reserved, articulate and tougher than he initially appears. Part of his appeal is how little he says compared to how much he thinks. That is also a good part of the success of the series, of which this is the third release. People willingly talk to Dr. Reese, but rarely tell the complete truth. Like most people, the characters in this rich novel share personal versions of events diluted by their own self-interest.

Although rough transitions sometimes make the novel hard to follow, the writing is eloquent and vivid. Descriptions of Scottish landscapes are finely wrought, though Wright's greatest strength is delineating character and artfully depicting Scottish accents. The narrative is layered and complex, likely to reveal more each reading. This novel succeeds as a labyrinthine mystery novel as well as a larger work of Scottish social mores and behavior.

Mark Terry