

## The Walled Garden

**Robin Farrar Maass**

SparkPress (May 17, 2022)

Softcover \$16.95 (344pp)

978-1-68463-131-5

In Robin Farrar Maass's academic mystery novel *The Walled Garden*, decades-old secrets are given voice by a determined graduate student.

After promising to fulfill her grandmother's dying wish, Lucy travels from California to England to "set free" a secret that her grandmother kept for half a century. She delves into the life of English poet Elizabeth Blacksphear, whose writing and gardens contained clues to the heartbreak that drove her to take her own life. Along the way, Lucy contends with village gossip, a vindictive executive director, and her own self-doubt to find the answers—and perhaps even the home—that she longs for.

Here, the quaint English countryside is filled with historical buildings, buried pasts, and colorful people. From gardens that change with the seasons to exquisite meals served in ancient halls, all is described in luscious detail. Still, this world of beauty and refinement hides more pain than Lucy can possibly imagine.

When not digging through archives or renovating overgrown gardens, Lucy sorts through her romantic feelings for Theo, her prim and pretentious thesis advisor, and Sam, a handsome contractor who is already in a relationship with another woman. These relationships threaten to derail not just Lucy's personal life, but also the investigation on which she has staked her entire academic career—and which her grandmother was counting on her to complete.

The narrative drops enough hints to ease the audience through its twists; anticipating the young detective's discoveries as she works toward a happy ending for her grandmother, her new friends, and herself is engaging. *The Walled Garden* is a gentle novel about forbidden love and the cost of keeping secrets.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (May / June 2022)

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