



The Grave Gourmet

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Campion's debut introduces a beguiling heroine, 28-year-old Lt. Capucine Le Tellier of the Paris judicial police. Bored with her deskbound job pursuing white-collar crime, Capucine jumps at the chance to get involved in a possible murder investigation.

The Grave Gourmet Details

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Author : Alexander Campion

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From Reader Review The Grave Gourmet for online ebook

Nancy says

I wish I had read the reviews before purchasing... It doesn't have any redeeming qualities - there was a description of a gourmet meal that was awful beyond words (started with oyster sorbet - turn to page 37); character development is non-existent; the plot and its development are leaden and the wording itself is pretentious and obtuse. Clearly, it is time to put this book down - I love reading a good mystery, but this one just isn't cutting it.

The line that made me decide it was time to put the book down (it took me 12 more pages to be really sure): "Capucine hesitated, her finger poised on the elevator button in the lobby of the "swimming pool," the DGSE's drab headquarters in the even more drab Twentieth Arrondissement." So many words for such a small contribution to a boring story. But, yes, she did push the button, in case you were wondering.

Andrea says

First, I want to make it clear I read this entire book. Second, I want to make it even more clear that I do not recommend anyone else do so. WOW, this book is a hot mess of confusion. We have tons of information about the French Police system, which made no sense at all to me. We have a main character that sometimes has very feminist thoughts, like being annoyed when male colleagues treat her like an idiot because she is a woman, but then who turns around congratulates herself for being so clever for getting a job promotion by letting the boss look down her shirt at her bra-less boobs. Half the characters in the book make comments about why she is with her husband, an older, overweight food critic with nearly the same name as the author – and from what we are actually provided in the book, I have NO idea why they are together. Also, the author-name thing makes it creepy that they have “off-page” sex about 40 times during the course of this book. As others have mentioned, there are times when the food descriptions – which one would think would be vital to series called “Culinary Mysteries” – are actually really stomach-turning and gross (terrible adjective choices for textures, etc....). My final confusion about this book – Capucine? Is that pronounced like “capuchin”?? Because I got a ton of enjoyment from imagining the main character as a tiny monkey running about solving crimes.

Ms.pegasus says

THE GRAVE GOURMET by Alexander Campion has created in Capucine an unlikely novice crime detective. Nurtured in the financial crimes division, she is anxious to partake of “real” police work, as an escape from her well-bred tastefully comfortable life. Her cousin is a government insider, and her husband is a well-known restaurant critic. The combination of moxie and elegance is a bit reminiscent of Audrey Hepburn – alternating between naïve charm, feminine wiles, and pit bull doggedness. In other words, Capucine is delightfully entertaining if one can get beyond so fanciful a conception.

The plot is convoluted and though entertaining, not riveting. We don't really come to care much in the end about who murdered the president of the Renault company once it has been established he did not die of food poisoning at Jean-Basile Labrousse's three star Parisian restaurant. The real attraction is the writing –

elaborately arch and mocking. Capucine carefully ingratiates herself with the sommelier, Gregoire Rolland in order to extract information: "...once the sluice gates were opened an unstoppable flow of disdain rippled down the channel." At one point, after hearing Capucine's report, her boss, Tallon, "relaxed slightly, making a noise that sounded like the executive summary of a contented Labrador stretching out in front of a fireplace."

The most entertaining scenes are of the restaurant in action. Achille, a junior cook tries to pass off a less than perfectly prepared plate of sweetbreads, chestnuts and black truffles. The scene takes up an entire chapter, and is among the most vibrant in the book. Capucine crashes a staff meal in order to catch the staff in a mood more conducive to gossip. The assortment of characters are suddenly exposed in a way that would have been impossible in a conventional police interview.

Impossible dishes are casual backdrops to Capucine's flirtatious conversations with her husband, Alexandre the food critic. There is a stylish intimacy as the level-headed husband playfully works at shifting his spouse's overly intense moods. If this were a film, we'd say the couple has "chemistry."

In conclusion, an enjoyable light read.

Beth says

This was a free download for my Nook. It was overpriced.

This book contains homophobia (one cop calls another a fag), sexism (the protagonist sees nothing wrong in using her body to influence a superior so she can get a promotion) and a huge amount of pretension. Oh, and a little American bashing is also included.

Overall it has the feeling of someone who spent a couple of weeks in France showing off their "knowledge" of the language and colloquialisms. It really amazes me that in 2013 a nasty little book like this can find a publisher.

Kimberly says

Firstly, the author wants you to know that women have breasts. He'll remind you of that throughout the book.

Secondly, the author is male. You'll know this from the first chapter when our main character, Capucine, mused that she was happy she didn't wear a bra to a job interview. Capucine is young and hot, by the way. She starts out as a bored white-collar investigator who yearns for a grittier job and a chance to use her gun. She gets her shot when a man is found dead inside a restaurant. Since Capucine is married to a man who knows restaurants, she is deemed a good fit for the case.

Thirdly, our author's first name is Alexander and he used to be a restaurant critic, and the name of our breasted protagonist's round, sage, much-older food critic husband is named Alexandre. If she wasn't married to Alexandre, Capucine wouldn't have been assigned this case. Bonjour, Gary-Stu! Spoiler: (view spoiler)

Fourthly, this book makes me never want French food again. Mr. Campion took great pleasure in reducing

some delicious-sounding dishes down to their barbaric ingredients and vile preparation.

Fifthly(?), what was UP with Capucine's male cousin and all of his creepster sexual advances?

And sixthly, hello police brutality! In one scene our young, hot protagonist (who has breasts, btw) watches a suspect get beaten over the head with a hardcover lawyer directory until he bleeds from the ears and passes out.

This was a Free Friday Nook book for me, and from the cover and description I thought it would be your run-of-the-mill cozy mystery, where the crime and perps are contained to the restaurant world. Instead, there's international espionage and discussion of the auto industry. Which wasn't hard to follow, but it was a swerve from what I expected.

I rated it two stars because I didn't pay for it. It would have been one star had I paid any more than \$1.99.

Disclaimer: I have breasts, and I wore a bra while reading this book.

Jessi says

I got this book for 99 cents and wasn't sure what to expect. It was certainly interesting. I have done no Googling for this but I am assuming it was translated from another language. It was very... French.

So, Capucine is a gorgeous police woman. She's been working in financial crimes and wants to work her way up the ladder and also into some more interesting crimes. Her husband is a famous food critic which comes in handy when a body is found in the freezer of a well-known restaurant.

I skimmed over a lot of the physical description of the detective (yeah, yeah, we know she's hot and that men are attracted to her. You've mentioned that.) And I was able to ignore that, but the sexism. Harder to ignore. This may be endemic to France, I don't know the culture all that well, but why create a female detective if she has to rely so heavily on all of the male characters to help solve her crimes?

An okay start but I probably won't hunt down the second book. If it lands right in my path for an inexpensive price, I probably would read it though.

Lori says

This story begins with the discovery of a body in the walk-in cooler of one of Paris' revered three star restaurants. The main character is a young policewoman who is married to a restaurant critic. The characters are well-developed and the descriptions of Paris (and its food) are fun. I'm looking forward to future mysteries in this series.

Nancy says

It's too bogged down with technical crap about the french police. I think three chapters start with Capucine being unable to sleep. Here's some of Chapter 5:

Even the unintentional cynicism of the fiscal division's address--122, rue Chateau des Rentiers, the coupon

clipper's castle--failed to cheer her up, as it invariably did even in the worst of her moods.

For lack of anything better, her plan for the day was rudimentary, a quick run-through of her office at Rentiers to deal with any departmental effluvia that might have emerged during the night and then down to the Quai des Orfevres to sic the three brigadiers on the restaurant staff.

Connie N. says

I had expected something quite different from this book, having pictured it as a cozy mystery with a food theme based on the series name of "A Capucine Culinary Mystery." BTW, Capucine is the heroine (pronounced kap-puy-seen, I looked it up). But the only connection to cuisine is that the dead body was found in a restaurant by the chef. And Capucine's husband is a food critic. Other than that the entire mystery was much more of an industrial espionage story that I found less-than-exciting. The writing is OK. What's odd is that it seems as though it's written by someone not from the U.S., especially since it's set in Paris, but this is in fact not the case. Campion is American, so I guess his writing skills are a little stilted. His language skills are good, however, and I enjoyed the extensive vocabulary he used. The characters are just OK, and I hope I never get arrested in France if this represents how brutal they are with their suspects. I found them to be very heavy-handed and unpleasant. I suppose a female police officer must face a lot of discrimination in any country, but the sexual innuendos handed to her over and over again just got tedious. The point was made the first time or two and didn't need to be continued. I probably won't continue with this series.

Favorite quote about marriage, "She gave Alexandre a withering look that would have been rude had he not been her husband."

Una Tiers says

It was necessary for me to start this book twice before I saw the problem in the first few pages. The author forces four or five words where one would be fine. It is a book best read on a kindle because either the author has a stellar vocabulary or mine is short a few cards. Many of the terms are in French and I soon tired of looking up the terms.

The pace is excruciatingly slow with an inexperienced, if beautiful police lieutenant. She is one dimensional, beautiful. The set up and resolution were overly done.

Jessica says

I liked the idea, but the execution? Ugh!

The first, most important thing Campion has to say about Capucine is that she's gorgeous and knows it. She first appears in chapter one in "straightening, drawing in her tummy, rounding out her buttocks, lifting her breasts against her designer silk blouse." By the second chapter, she is asking her superior for a job transfer, still wearing designer clothes, but having decided that "omitting a bra was essential to the tough guy look." For some reason, Campion feels the need to mention her braless state twice within three pages. Am I supposed to like this woman? I'm honestly not sure.

And then there is the prose. French words are liberally scattered throughout the text, just to remind everyone that this is supposed to be France. They're italicized, to remind us that they're foreign (Yes, I know this is traditional, but it's also distracting, especially when it's happening several times a page).

Then there are the metaphors. Oh the metaphors.

In the first chapter, Capucine's "feeling of well-being popped like a soap bubble, drenching her in cold oily dampness." A few pages later, there is Capucine "releasing an insuppressible smile to flutter across the room like a butterfly."

I hope someone opened a window for the poor thing.

Having made it to all of page eleven, I flipped to the end, only to find someone saying, "My sense is she's cauterizing her spirit."

This may well replace "I left my fear in the dimensional tunnel" as a personal favorite non-phrase(1), but I'm still not finishing the book.

(1) From *Andromeda*, about the time I realized it had stopped being the show I loved. Still, I've gotten a lot of amusement out of that phrase. That's something.

Note: Originally written as part of a multi-book review over at my blog, Bookwyrme's Lair

Lizzerbeem says

Calling Capucine the protagonist is a bit overkill, since she serves only as the conduit for all of the secondary male characters to info-dump the case... and fantasize about her or the female suspects sexually.

Droewyn says

This was a Nook Free Fridays book.

It was a competent enough mystery, but I hated the main character. Capucine was born a rich French socialite but wanted to do something meaningful with her life, so joined the Paris police force. Not content with her cushy desk job in accounting crimes, she wants to be transferred to Homicide. So she puts on her best designer suit (all of her clothing is "a so-and-so tailored whatever"), takes off her bra (because it will make her "look tough"... SERIOUSLY), and goes to talk to her boss. Impressed by her can-do attitude, or her perky nipples, the boss puts her on a murder case in which the body was found in the freezer of a three-star restaurant. Think Reese Witherspoon in one of those 90's Reese Witherspoon movies, except Capucine's not as likeable.

Just... bleah. The quirky foodie bits weren't even that good; just lists of what they ate for the most part.

Amy says

Not sure why I keep trying with mysteries. They're really not my thing, at best palate cleansers between other books. I do however love anything set in a great city like Paris. I approached this one with modest expectations.

And gave up. This book can't seem to figure out what it is--a cosy about lovely meals in Paris, or a glimpse of how hard-edged Parisian "flics" are, or an international spy story. The characters behave in inexplicable ways. Why is the hunky bad-boy cop physically roughing up security guards from the minute he walks up to them--why didn't he just ask them questions? Was there some reason to expect them to lie to the police? Who is this suddenly appearing contact of Capucine's in the DGSE--sure he's a cousin, but why do the two of them giggle at each other so much? Oh yeah, and why wait 15 pages to explain what the DGSE is?

Capucine could have been a fun character to follow, but she's too immature for me to care about. Despite her vaguely feminist grumbles to herself, she gets her big break into the criminal division by making sure the big boss can tell she's not wearing a bra with her expensive suit (which, by the way, is just odd from a getting-dressed-for-work point of view). She's attracted to the cop whose case she takes over, and who stays around to "mentor" her, which means he appears at random intervals and leers at her. Her much older, know-it-all husband is annoying too, but I don't want her to dump him just for a younger know-it-all cop.

This felt a bit rough, like it needed another scrub and polish, but the editors were out to lunch. Sometimes I really needed the back stories about the characters' relationships (the husband, the cousin). I for sure needed more clear explanations about French criminal procedure. If the book originally had been written in French, for French readers, I would let it go (was it?). But if the target audience is more familiar with Anglo-American law, then many readers are likely to be curious why a judge examines police evidence **before** a prosecutor gets the case (or does "juge" not mean "judge"?). "Grave Gourmet" tries to explain this through the characters' discussions, but that just made for clunky dialogue. It needed a four-sentence paragraph that works like an aside. That simple--where were the editors?

And don't get me started on why Capucine and her cohorts keep threatening to send witnesses to jail, for like 20 years, even though the witnesses are actually cooperating. French law couldn't possibly allow the police to arrest everyone for no reason, so why not be more clear to the reader that they're bluffing? I wouldn't mind knowing the cops are sneaky; I do mind wondering if they're dim.

For what it's worth, the descriptions of food and wine were absolutely lovely.

Maybe the first of a series always has some kinks, and the second Capucine book works them out. Meanwhile, for mysteries set in modern Paris, Cara Black's books are still a better place to start.

Chris says

Thankfully I didn't pay for this.

To Male Mystery Writers in General,

Re: Female Characters and Bras

While some women may chose to go bra-less (and in many cases, this is a choice of lifestyle), those who are well endowed usually need one for comfort reasons. Seriously. Secondly, any woman who uses her bra-less state to get a job promotion is not going to be taken seriously by a large variety of readers. Many readers are going to see as an attack on women (because she doesn't get promoted by skill) or as an nod that women only get promoted because of boobs of considerable size.

Furthermore, to endear your heroine with boobs of considerable size to readers of the female gender, it helps if the other women in the book aren't degraded as jealous old cows or butch lesbians cliches with bad haircuts.

And interesting, how the black guy is the aggressive driver.

And seriously, if a woman is harassed by some complete jacka*** touching her, her first thought is not going to be OMG I'm so turned on, then followed by something that basically translates to "she got her feminist on". But really she thinks it is hot, she just has to be a feminist so the old cows don't yell at her.

Thank you,

From a woman who wears a bra and actually does her job
