



An Act of Murder

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In the sleepy college town of Copper Bluff, South Dakota, English professor Emmeline Prather is enjoying the start of a new semester. But when one of her students dies working on the fall musical, it disrupts life on the small, quiet campus. Although the police rule the death accidental, Prof. Prather has good reason to suspect foul play.

Unmasking the murderer proves much more challenging than finding dangling participles, so Em recruits fellow English professor Lenny Jenkins for assistance. Together, they comb the campus and vicinity for clues, risking their reputations and possibly their jobs. After an intruder breaks into Em's house, Lenny advises caution—and perhaps a change of address. Em, on the other hand, is all the more determined to forge ahead, convinced they're on the brink of an important breakthrough.

Book 1 in a new cozy mystery series featuring amateur sleuth Professor Prather.

An Act of Murder Details

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Author : Mary Angela

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From Reader Review An Act of Murder for online ebook

Quintin Honerman says

This book was one of the best mysteries I've ever read. Not only was the setting (a cool college campus) original, the plot moved quickly and was full of surprises. It kept me guessing right up until the end. If you like complex plots and distinctive characters, especially main characters, this book is for you. Imagine Agatha Christie mysteries with a little added humor and wit as well. I can't wait for the next one in the series.

Rosie says

Emmeline Prather sullenly walks to the freshest grave of Copper Bluff Cemetery. The English professor stares at the headstone of her student with his graded assignment in hand. She'd had many lengthy discussions with this boy about poetry, and had been unable to understand his reluctance in doing the assignment which, to Emmeline, had been such a simple one. When he had come to her in confidence to get some underlying personal issues off his chest, she'd moved the conversation back to poetry. Two days later, his body is found on the stage where *Les Misérables* was to be performed and she is saddened by news of his death. Emmeline regrets not engaging with her enigmatic student about his underlying problems and partially blames herself for not being there for him. Her eyes are opened, however, when she starts to notice the reaction of some of the people around her. Emmeline overhears a student's cruel comments when news of his death comes. She also notices some suspicious behavior before Detective Beamer arrives; a police investigation is now underway. A simple unexplained death suddenly becomes something far more sinister and Emmeline decides to do some digging of her very own to get to the truth, but the results hit a lot closer to home and are far more devastating than she could ever have imagined.

Never has my brain been given such a workout in a murder-mystery tale! *An Act of Murder* is a well-written and imaginative tale of a teacher whose determination to get to the truth and see justice done for one of her students is right on the money. Mary Angela's debut novel in this intriguing whodunit series had me glued to every single page, determined to spot any clues in order to try to solve the mystery of the killer's identity before the end. With so many people to choose from, I was shocked when all of the evidence pointed to somebody I had not considered a real contender, and I applaud Mary Angela's technique in presenting such a complex tale. Each of the characters was realistic and engaging, making *An Act of Murder* a real joy to read. I have not given the identity of the student in my review, as that also came as a shock and spoiling a book for others is never on my agenda. I very much enjoyed reading *An Act of Murder* and look forward to more books to come in the Professor Prather murder-mystery series. I recommend this book to all readers over the age of 15 years who enjoy drama, action, mystery and suspense, with a dash of humor.

- Rosie Malezer for Readers' Favorite

Susan says

When one of Emmeline Prather's freshman comp students is found dead, Emmeline feels she has to understand what happened to the promising young man. Of course, as a young teacher herself, she has many

distractions--from a possible romantic attraction to numerous committees to endless grading. And some of her colleagues do not like being questioned. Extra points to author Angela for coming up with an interesting motive for murder.

J says

The opening 5 pages were some of the best I've ever read, but by page 10 it had shifted into something else. :-/ I previously taught on a big-10 campus and some things just felt off to me. It didn't connect with my experience. I'm not sure if that is because her college is significantly smaller or because she is in an "arts" field or something else.

For example, on page 10, she talks about an adjunct professor trying to create a new (French) department. How would an adjunct have the power to do that? And why would tenure-track professors associate with an adjunct?!

I love cozy books, but this has a dash of bad chick lit added to the mix. The author seems to think that cozy books are the same thing as chick lit. They are not.

I loved the college environment created. It made me want to go back to teaching college classes. However, I was highly agitated and annoyed by the main character. She is flighty, boy-crazy, emotionally immature and highly unprofessional. As a woman, she made me cringe. I don't understand bad chick lit. If a man wrote this, we would be offended. But when a woman writes about idiotic women, it is supposed to be fun literature?

Notes:

- The heroine is a college professor who loves all things French, but has never been to France?! Or anywhere abroad?! Odd.
- She is not prepared with her textbooks on the first day of class. Throughout the novel, she appears more like a slacking grad student than a professor. She mixes freely with the students and tries to date other young professors. She is supposedly a seasoned professor but doesn't seem to have established any professional boundaries. She also has no life outside of university life. She behaves very much like a student.
- She feels an inappropriate attachment to "her student" Austin - a boy who attends about 3 of her lectures before being murdered. I'm not sure if this irrational personal connection comes from the smallness of the school or just from bad chick lit. The main character (and author) fixates on her interactions with Austin and his two fraternity friends, but ignores all the other students in her classes.
- She loves romance novels and falls asleep in her office moaning in pleasure while reading. Her boss, the department head, has to wake her up. She doesn't seem particularly embarrassed. The dean laughs it off.
- She doesn't seem particularly embarrassed by any of the embarrassing situations she creates. She also doesn't seem to feel bad about anything - including breaking confidences and following personal whims at the expense of others.
- On page 120, she is revealed to be a non-practicing Catholic who loves the old ladies at the church who bake cookies but can't be bothered to practice herself. A brief reference to karma displays her flighty spiritual notions. :-/

I wondered how much of the main character was autobiographical. Many details (being a female English professor in Sioux Falls, having curly hair, ect) seemed to mirror the author's biography. Is the author originally from Detroit like the main character? Does she irrationally hate fraternities too? Does she eat

copious amounts of (pointedly described) unhealthy food too? Is she a ditz too? It felt like a thinly veiled biography with some fictional murder added.

The other really annoying thing for me, as someone who worked in law enforcement, was the total lack of criminology knowledge. The main character (a thinly veiled version of the author) makes crazy assumptions regarding the crime based on little actual information, takes it upon herself to interview people and investigate, places herself and others in jeopardy and withholds actual information from the police. She seems to treat the police (and others outside the English/literary field) with some level disdain. In the end, she makes a big speech in front of most of the school and accuses various possible people (Poirot style) before unveiling the actual murder. It seemed highly indulgent and irresponsible.

As a cozy, the author did a good job of creating a pleasant environment for the story. However, the murder element was weak. The murder didn't occur until page 100 (of 225 pages). The mystery is wrapped up in the last 50-ish pages of the novel and has little to do with the previous 175 pages. There were no mystery plot developments or clues sprinkled throughout the novel. The focus was more on creating the university environment and following the ditzy adventures of the main character. The murder mystery is purely peripheral.

Many chapters opened with almost poetic descriptions of life on a university campus. It was refreshing to read a book free from grammar errors... until page 201. Talking about character's footwear, the author writes "the low-slung heals" instead of "the low-slung heels". A minor mistake but kind of embarrassing for an author who is also an English professor. You would think she (or her English professor buddies) would be able to proofread.

Ta`Mara Hanscom says

I thoroughly enjoyed this book. Besides being extremely well written, it touched my heart with its location: South Dakota! And if you've followed me for very long you know that I consider South Dakota the greatest place on the planet. Ms. Angela captures the very essence of South Dakota's impeccable landscape and environment. She puts you in the midst of every childhood memory I hold dear almost from the first sentence.

Ms. Angela also gives us a tantalizing glimpse into academia and the way things are processed on campus. I was intrigued on the first page. I love mysteries, but I often find that I can figure them out about 1/4 of the way through the book. Not with *An Act of Murder*! I was guessing around that thing up until the last few pages. It was intense.

***Please note (for my evangelical followers) there are a few places where the characters in this novel take the Lord's name in vain, however the indiscretion is NOT capitalized. Otherwise, this is a completely clean read.

Brit says

An Act Of Murder by Mary Angela begins with all the excitement of a new semester but also with a sense of foreboding as a student stands out from the crowd of freshmen in Professor Emmeline Prathers English class. This farm boy, exploring new interests such as theatre and poetry, drops dead suddenly while working on the

set of a play and his English professor, Emmeline suspects foul play. It could just be that she reads too many fiction and romance novels instead of doing real research. As she pokes around and informs fellow professor Lenny Jenkins of her findings and suspicions, she recruits him to help her follow the trail only to realize the murderer may still be on campus. Both find themselves risking reputation and career to follow up on the loose ends of the student's death.

In a word, this book was charming. As charming as the town and college campus this novel is set in. It's also a decently done mystery, leaving enough clues to keep you up to speed but plenty of twists to keep you guessing. It's also a great setup to what I believe will be an enjoyable series that includes an amateur, wannabe detective, a humorous love interest and sleuthing partner, and many other intriguing and enjoyable characters. It's clean, the romance has great tension, the plot moves quickly and the stakes are high. What more can you ask for from a great sleuthing mystery? It's one of the best debut novels I've read in some time. It's worth a look!

Mary Angela says

As the first in the series, this book is special to me, and I hope readers enjoy reading it as much as I enjoyed writing it. Readers who like Golden Age mysteries or modern cozies might want to give it a try. Happy reading!

Jeannie and Louis Rigod says

Professor Emmeline Prather is excited to welcome the new term teaching at a local university in South Dakota. We are introduced to her fellow faculty staff via a pot-luck dinner. Then, when the class begins (Emmeline is a French Literature professor teaching basic English composition 101,) we meet some of the personalities of the students.

Emmeline quickly realizes that one student doesn't quite fit in. The student is only taking the course as it is a required one. He quickly voices his fear of reading a poem aloud in front of the class. The student is also trying out for a fraternity. Then, somehow he ends up working on the theater project.

Before Emmeline can get to truly know this student, he is dead. Was it a dreadful accident or???

I enjoyed this debut novel. The setting is well displayed to the reader, the dialog was interesting, and I liked the characters. I was surprised at the motive of the killer at the ending. I will look forward to reading the next volume in the series.

Jane Reads says

I just read a really good book, y'all — *An Act of Murder*. *An Act of Murder* is the debut novel by Mary Angela, and the first book in her Professor Prather Mystery series. Let me tell you a little about this cozy mystery.

An Act of Murder stars Emmeline Prather, assistant professor of English at Copper Bluff University in

Copper Bluff, South Dakota. She is "one of the younger faculty members at twenty-eight years old." She is "always searching for ways to look professional," and tries to keep her focus on getting published and receiving tenure. With her youth comes much enthusiasm for her students and her classes. Prof. Prather expects more of her students than do the other professors of the mandatory freshman courses of Composition 101. By requiring them to recite poetry and perform community service, she is ensuring they receive a true liberal arts education and are better prepared for the real world.

Author Mary Angela paints beautiful word pictures of Copper Bluff — the town and the campus. I can clearly picture both of them in my mind. As I read about the fall semester starting at Copper Bluff in *An Act of Murder*, I could imagine the years rolling back to my college days because of Ms Angela's evocative prose.

Author Mary Angela has created a cast of memorable characters, headed up by the quirky Emmeline Prather the Instigator, and her stalwart sidekick Lenny Jenkins. I love their witty repartee, as demonstrated here.

"Are you crazy?" he continued. "I'm pretty sure they call that ... something I could be arrested for."

I grabbed his arm and resumed walking. "Keep your voice down. It's called 'interfering with an investigation,' and you won't be. It's just Dan Fox calling about his gloves; that's all."

"Unless they find out I'm not Dan Fox. Then it's called 'Lenny Jenkins is out of a job.' "

"Oh, don't be so dramatic," I said. "It's not as if we don't have good intentions. When we find out what really happened, you'll be a local hero. They might even name a classroom after you."

"Yeah, Jenkins's Jail Cell," Lenny mumbled. "This is what happens, kids, when you interfere with an official police investigation."

I look forward to reading more about the Adventures of Em and Lenny in future books. I was quite surprised by whodunit in *An Act of Murder*, and also by the reason for the murder. Can you figure it out before Emmeline does?

I recommend *An Act of Murder* to all fans of cozy mysteries, particularly fans of academic mysteries. I think it will have special appeal to fans of Frankie Bow's Professor Molly Mysteries.

I really enjoyed *An Act of Murder*, and bestow upon it Four Stars!

Note: I voluntarily reviewed an Advance Reader Copy of *An Act of Murder*. All opinions shared are 100% my own.

Originally published on my blog at Jane Reads.

A Voracious Reader (a.k.a. Carol) says

3.5/5.0

Read full review in the 2016 October issue of InD'tale Magazine.

Gretchen says

I enjoyed this first book in the series. I like mysteries that involve college towns, professors, and students. The main character Emmeline is an English professor, which attracted me because I was an English teacher. I liked meeting her colleagues and trying to figure out which one could possibly be a murderer and also which one could potentially be a love interest for Emmeline in future books in the series. I plan to read more of these, because I liked the characters, and the plot was clear yet had me fooled.

Karen Cleary says

I liked this to begin with, characters and setting were well done, but by three-quarters of the way through I was totally irritated by the main character's interference with the police investigation of the crime, apparently because she felt somehow personally involved.

Jessica Robbins says

Book one in the Professor Prather Mystery series. Meet Professor Emmeline Prather who teaches in the English department (though she wishes it was the French that she really loves) at a smaller college in Copper Bluff, South Dakota. It is the beginning of the new school meaning a whole new batch of students. Things are going well until one of her students (that she just happened to be a little concerned with) turns up dead found in the theater. It is not apparent at first how he died but due to some odd behavior on the last day she sees him Em cannot help but find herself looking into what really happened along with her friend Professor Lenny. Of course this leads to some interesting developments and a finale that I did not see coming which is always a good thing. I have to admit that it was nice change of pace to read about lead character that is a professor as this is not a usual occupation for mystery novels but it did add a nice layer to the investigation that is not usually considered. Overall this is a nice mystery novel that keeps the reader guessing into the killer is finally revealed. I really enjoyed it so it gets 4/5 stars.

John Vanek says

Emmeline Prather, a language professor, is an interesting choice as protagonist and amateur detective in this cozy mystery. A quick, light read.

LORI CASWELL says

Dollycas's Thoughts

Set in South Dakota in a small college town, big city drama arrives with a murder of a freshmen in the theater. Emmeline Prather was his English professor and she felt like she was just getting to know this young

man but can't imagine why anyone would want him dead. With the help of another professor, Lenny Jenkins, she is determined to find the killer while putting herself in danger.

I had sympathy for the victim, his life had been the family farm and his small high school. Away from home and at college is a huge change for everyone, but he was having trouble finding his place. Em knew he was trying to join a fraternity and her first thought was a hazing incident gone wrong may have been how the student met his demise. The more she and Lenny dug into the case more possibilities and suspects came to light.

As for Em, she impressed me as an amateur sleuth. She is a smart woman and doesn't back down. She followed the clues through several twists very realistically. I was totally surprised where the clues led and the drama that ensued in pursuit of justice.

I like her relationship with Lenny, it brings a little levity to the story. They work well together and exchange a few barbs along the way. I am excited to see where the author takes these characters in the future.

This series is off to a great start. The mystery is complicated and believable. The characters are real with plenty of room to evolve. The setting is intriguing with a huge pool of people to draw into future stories. Mary Angela is an author to watch. I am excited about upcoming installments to this story.
