



The Crow Trap

Ann Cleeves

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Three very different women come together to complete an environmental survey. Three women who, in some way or another, know the meaning of betrayal....For team leader Rachael Lambert the project is the perfect opportunity to rebuild her confidence after a double-betrayal by her lover and boss, Peter Kemp. Botanist Anne Preece, on the other hand, sees it as a chance to indulge in a little deception of her own. And then there is Grace Fulwell, a strange, uncommunicative young woman with plenty of her own secrets to hide...

When Rachael arrives at the cottage, however, she is horrified to discover the body of her friend Bella Furness. Bella, it appears, has committed suicide--a verdict Rachael finds impossible to accept.

Only when the next death occurs does a fourth woman enter the picture--the unconventional Detective Inspector Vera Stanhope, who must piece together the truth from these women's tangled lives...

The Crow Trap Details

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Author : Ann Cleeves

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From Reader Review The Crow Trap for online ebook

Noeleen says

The Crow Trap is the first in the Vera Stanhope series by Ann Cleeves and one of the books in the series that the hugely popular ITV television show Vera is based upon. The extremely talented Brenda Blethyn is excellent playing the role of Vera in the TV show and it's definitely worth a watch.

If you enjoy English murder mysteries, this is an extremely well written, engaging read and a great start to the series. Although over 500 pages long, it doesn't feel like it as the writing reads easily and the story flows along nicely. Vera doesn't appear until about two thirds the way through the book but she is definitely worth the wait! I love the normality of her character, her straight talking, no-nonsense approach to everything. I was definitely second guessing who the murderer was all of the way through and still never got it right! Full of interesting and varied characters with absorbing back stories, lots of red herrings and ultimately beautiful descriptions of the North East of England, this is an ideal English murder mystery which kept me wanting to keep reading on until the end. I have since bought all the books in the series. Loved it! and I recommend this series if you love series like Morse, Frost, Midsomer Murders etc.

Rachel Hall says

The Crow Trap has the indomitable Detective Inspector Vera Stanhope in fine fettle, once against unsettling all and sundry in her presence. Although it is not until over two-hundred-pages into the novel that she becomes known to the guests at remote Baikie Cottage, bringing with her a brash demeanour and distinctly unfeminine appearance, she more than makes up for her late entrance. Originally published in 1999, this is a timeless case with a host of suspects confusing matters and keeping readers on their toes! Baikie's Cottage is the property of a charitable trust left by illustrator and spinster, Constance Baikie, in order to encourage environmental education and research and is the admittedly basic accommodation that plays host to the ensuing mystery.

Although I had picked up on Vera's domestic circumstances from reading later books in the series, it was wonderful to hear Ann Cleeves giving a précis of her history and revealing more about her father, Hector, and demonstrating her understanding on environmental matters. In The Crow Trap Vera is reunited with the hill farms and countryside that she knows so well and sees herself back in Baikie's cottage, a place she knows well, with her father and the elderly lady whose home it was sharing a common interest in the illegal pursuit of stealing birds eggs from their nests. After her mother died in childbirth, Vera spent her youth trekking after her father as he tramped the hills pursuing his passion, with their only close neighbours and contact being with the stationmaster and his wife, Mrs Gregory, whom was the maternal figure in Vera's life. Since their departure and her fathers death, Vera has changed nothing about the desolate and lonely house she avoids spending time in, complete with New Age hippy neighbours who have taken her under their wing. Vera's close working relationship is with her Sergeant and renowned teacher's pet, Joe Ashworth, and the point of view of her harried colleagues is largely omitted is the first instalment but in subsequent novels it has become more prominent. The benefit is the opportunity of seeing and hearing Vera musing on her own upbringing though is a valuable insight into her gruff persona. Although this first introduction to the inspired creation of Inspector Vera Stanhope does stretch to just over five-hundred-pages, it is one of the most satisfying and juiciest cases with the opportunity of seeing Vera amongst the rugged countryside that she grew up with.

Brilliantly constructed in three parts, the first sees three very different women thrown together into the uncomfortably close proximity of Baikie's Cottage in order to conduct an Environmental Impact Assessment prior to the proposed development of a quarry across the landscape. First to arrive is Rachael Lambert, team leader for the first time, still raw from her manipulation by the caddish Peter Kemp, boss of the environmental consultancy that she works for. A return to Kimmerston will see Rachael reunited with her psychology spouting mother, Edie Lambert and with close friend, Bella Furness, wife of Dougie, the farmer at Black Law. Since Dougie's stroke, Bella has resolutely managed the farm and was in love with her husband and her life, hence when Rachael arrives only to be met by her hanging corpse she refuses to believe that her friend would have taken her own life, preferring instead to suspect that this could have something to do with the impending development plans by Slateburn Quarries, where Dougie's own son is now employed. As readers see the unfolding week through the eyes of first earnest Rachael, then move on to married and over-confident man eater, botanist Anne Preece, never short of a flip response and finally through to withdrawn mammal expert, Grace Fulwell, the same period is retold through three very differing pairs of eyes. With all three women having their own closely guarded reasons for undertaking the assessment and staying tight-lipped about their reasons, the tension and stifled atmosphere that pervades generates genuine suspense. This first part ends with the discovery of the body of Grace, only for the second part to see the no-nonsense DI Vera Stanhope enter proceedings, never afraid of probing or phrasing a downright nosy question. Hearing each of the women's reasons for being drawn to the impact assessment means the length of five-hundred-pages rattles past and never seems drawn out, with Cleeves providing a masterclass in entwining psychological suspense within the police procedural genre.

Vera is in her pomp as the second part of the novel opens, firing off questions, gossiping and manipulating with a devious ploy for the two remaining assessors, Rachael and Anne, to continue their work. After all, if the motive for the murder is a corporate act of intimidation, the abandonment of the assessment project will be serving the murders desired purpose. The title of this first outing is also one of the most appropriate, with *The Crow Trap* being a metaphor for the sitting target of two lone females almost acting as a siren in drawing further danger into the remote region surrounding Black Law farm. As Rachael refuses to believe Bella's suicide was her own idea, Vera uncovers every stone and her abrupt stage manner sees her wrong-foot everyone she encounters. Part three is left wide open for DI Vera Stanhope to create merry hell for her bosses with her unorthodox methodology along the way. It is not only Vera and her Sergeant, Joe Ashworth who are brilliantly brought to life, it is the entire cast whose lives are disentangled against the unflinching backdrop of the hill farms. With ulterior motives and hidden secrets waiting to be exposed, Ann Cleeves keeps the shocks coming and combines this with the amusement to be had as the strident Vera leaves her indelible mark on the landscape. *The Crow Trap* is a character driven and thoroughly pleasurable novel with a gossipy overtone and an infectious humour. Vera shrewdly massages egos and smashes others as she plays to the audience with a showmanship that is worthy of the stage.

Television viewers who moan about the dour and wind-swept Northumberland landscapes would be thoroughly well-served by becoming acquainted with the character that Cleeves has created in novel form. It is only through reading her work that I have come to appreciate the multifaceted talents of DI Vera and her long-suffering sounding board, Joe Ashworth. In a world where so much of crime fiction is driven by the dysfunctional male lead detectives, Vera is an inspired creation and no other author comes close to Ann Cleeves for extracting the secrets that give rise to murder and mayhem. I will shed a silent tear when feisty Vera is shepherded into retirement as she never fails to inspire, humour and touch me in a way no other police lead can.

Carol says

The Hook - Begin at the beginning, that's my motto when it comes to most series mystery fiction.

The Line(s) - *"The rich onion flan might have come out of the freezer but Barbara had cooked it before it went in. It was topped with tomatoes and Parmesan and latticed with anchovies and olives. "*

The above lines may seem strange to quote but I was intrigued by this dish intrigued me. Searching for a recipe I saw a latticed anchovy-onion tart, but flan it was not. If anyone has every heard of this or has a recipe please let me know. Anchovies are grand in our family.

The Sinker - I'm not quite certain how I feel about The Crow Trap. I've heard so many accolades to Ann Cleeves and this series that I thought I should get on the bandwagon. One thing I noticed immediately was that Cleeves had a way of drawing us in. One moment all was right with the world and in the next sentence all is changed.

The title is explained in this way:

"The trap was a large wire mesh cage with a funnel in the top. Inside a live, tame crow fluttered provocatively, inviting in another to defend its territory. Once in through the funnel there was no way out. Presumably they had to find some form of co-existence until the keeper came along to put the intruder out of its misery."

Ann Cleeves is a storyteller and enjoys the use of words, painting a thorough portrait of her characters and environs. Detailed and atmospheric it is.

I was surprised that the central character of the series, Vera Stanhope, herself doesn't truly appear until more than 200 pages go by. She makes a cameo appearance, showing up at a funeral of one of the victims being described as a bag lady. If you're paying attention you'll know its she.

Murders, flawed characters and a complicated environmental plot weave in and out in this 500+ debut of the beloved, unconventional DI Vera Stanhope. She is a piece of work. This is not your typical political, sit behind the desk, Detective Inspector. She is odd gal out in dress and appearance, a bit unkempt, and older than many among her rank in the written pages of crime/mystery fiction. She loves to eat, often greasy food; you might even find a half eaten doughnut in her purse along with *"papers, keys, photo, five brios"*. She is outspoken to say the least, barges her way in, has no problem ordering people around for a cup of tea, she'd have preferred a beer if available and expects her team to "get on with it". But she gets results; she's comfortable with herself and is no one's fool. It's even hard to peg this woman in any hole. Literary novel, suspense fiction, crime or mystery? it's a bit of a mix.

The more I think about it, the more I have decided I could easily become a fan of both Stanhope and Cleeves. It often takes me a bit to get into the rhythm of a new series. Vera Stanhope, her eccentricity and her territory of Northumberland are bound to grow on me.

Barbara says

This is the first Vera Stanhope novel. It took a long time to get to the point when Stanhope enters the story which is my reason for 4 stars. There are characters who hide their past and even their identity. There is an early suicide which leads Vera to investigate hidden links between characters. The setting is the North Pennines which are in County Durham, Northumberland, North Yorkshire, Cumbria.

Vera's backstory in the book varies somewhat from the TV series. And although she is not a fashion plate on TV, she is described in a way in the book which makes her sound like she could be mistaken for someone who is homeless, and living on the street.

The audiobook is pleasantly narrated by Anne Dover. I can't comment on the accuracy of the accent. I have a friend who lives in Northern England and finds the accent of the TV character, Vera Stanhope, quite inaccurate. I venture a guess that there is quite a lot of variation in accents in the region. Living in Boston for many years, I found there were many differences from neighborhood to neighborhood.

Ellen says

The Crow Trap by Ann Cleeves.

This is the 1st in the Vera Stanhope series. This book is divided into sections describing in detail 3 women: Rachel, Anne and Grace. These 3 women are connected by their endeavors in an environmental project. They are all naturalists and educated, but there's so much more to their backgrounds and what brought them together in the first place.

The story begins with Rachel discovering Bella had committed suicide. Shocked by this tragedy she is interviewed by the local police. Joe, Vera's right hand man, begins the investigation. A shadowy figure appears to enter and then leave just as suddenly during Bella's funeral. A strange figure that no one seems to know. This was the first brief appearance of Vera.

There is another section devoted to Vera's upbringing and her experiences in that neck of the woods. This was quite a long story but I was involved from the first page. The author brought out details in each character's past that began to knit a story together. I loved this book and highly recommend it to any mystery lover of in depth stories. The truth is uncovered at the very end as only Vera can unravel this years old mystery.

Emma says

I enjoyed this book. I watched Vera on tv a few years ago and enjoyed that too. Now that I've read the book, I think the tv series did the book justice. I enjoyed the different POVs of the 4 women. It did seem a bit too long especially in the central section, not that it put me off. Will probably continue with the series at some point.

Icewineanne says

I had read many good reviews about this author, so being a lover of British mysteries, I decided to give her book a try. Well I was not disappointed, what a great read! This is the first novel I had read by Ann Cleeves and it won't be my last. It is also the first book in the Vera Stanhope detective series. She is not even introduced until you have read 2/3 of the book but the other characters are so fascinating that you don't even notice. Before I had even finished this book, I ordered the second one in the series, Telling Tales, from amazon. I can't wait to read it. While I'm waiting for it to be delivered, I'll have to content myself with other authors. Prior to this book, I had read novels by various Scandinavian authors. I found that these books were too dark and depressing for me. If you enjoy interesting characters, and a good puzzle all wrapped up neatly in the end, then you will find this an enjoyable crime novel. This is the best new author I have read in the last 5 years. I'm surprised that it took so long for me to find her!

Phrynne says

This is the first book in the Vera Stanhope series and gee it was good! I very much enjoy the TV series based on these books and I have to say that they chose really good actors to represent both Vera and Joe. As I was reading I could just visualise them saying the words.

Such a good book - 535 pages but all of them so good that I seemed to be finished in no time. I always find that with a really good mystery I just never want to put it down and this is a really good mystery.

So good in fact that I honestly had no idea who the murderer was. The end came as a complete surprise to me although with hindsight there were clues aplenty.

I always enjoy the way Ann Cleeves writes and I am also partly way through her Shetland series. I think this series may be even better:)

María says

4 de 5 estrellas ???????? (me ha encantado)

Un libro que un casi abandono porque no me estaba gustando pero que afortunadamente continué.

La inspectora Vera, es la encargada de resolver un misterio, de dar sentido a un supuesto suicido de una vieja conocida en una granja en la que se están haciendo estudios para la implementación de un proyecto de una cantera.

El estudio lo llevan a cabo tres mujeres muy diferentes, cada una de ellas con un pasado y una historia que contar y teniendo que convivir juntas un tiempo, hasta que finalice su estudio y puedan dar una respuesta a los empresarios y resto de la población sobre la cantera.

La primera mitad del libro consiste en contar como es la vida de estas tres especialistas y poner al lector en antecedentes y a mí es la parte que se me hizo más pesada porque sentía que no avanzaba nada y ninguno de los tres personajes me caía bien.

En la segunda parte entra en acción Vera, la inspectora encargada del caso y con sus nada convencionales métodos iremos colocando las piezas de este puzzle.

La segunda parte me ha parecido muy buena, muy buenos diálogos, todo se desarrolla muy al estilo british, entorno a un buen té, visitas sociales y otras vicisitudes propias de la region.

Vera tiene mucho de Miss Marple y en general el libro vislumbra constantemente influencias de Agatha Christie.

La resolución del caso me ha dejado muy satisfecha, un final muy coherente y bien hilado.

Brenda says

My first introduction to author Ann Cleeves and her protagonist Vera Stanhope did not go well.

The book first delves into the lives of three women who are sharing temporary quarters while conducting an environmental assessment prior to digging a quarry. One of them is killed. Each woman was given a lengthy chapter. Vera shows up officially to investigate at the start of Part Two, about halfway through. The book is overly long at 535 pages and generally plods along to the conclusion.

I checked reviews. Many abandoned this book. Many loved it. I'm in the meh camp. Several readers had prior experience with Cleeves and feel this book is not typical of her. They encourage others to take heart and continue with the series. Based on the fact I have the second book at hand, I will follow that advice, just not immediately.

Magdalena aka A Bookaholic Swede says

As a long time fan of Ann Cleeves Shetland series does it feel a bit odd to admit that it has taken me this long time to read a book from her Vera Stanhope series. Especially since I have seen the TV series and like it very much. But, I'm a bit grateful for waiting for this gave me the opportunity to read the first book in the series.

I found THE CROW TRAP to be a bit different from the usual crime novels. Of course, I'm used to books with several different points of views, but this book starts off and keeps going for almost half the book before Detective Inspector Vera Stanhope is properly introduced into the story and she will take the center stage first at the end of the book with her own point of view.

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Polly says

Well I finished The Crow Trap in the end, partly because after the character of Vera Stanhope (inspector) was introduced the pace picked up a little. For my taste there were too many unlikeable characters swirling in a morass of damaged interpersonal relationships; absent, obsessed &/or alcoholic fathers, sibling rivalry &/or manipulation, suicidal mothers and others. I also felt that Vera's character was a bit of an attempt at a female version of Inspectors Frost (R. D. Wingfield), Daziel (Reginald Hill) or even more recently Lamb (Mick Herron) and the character didn't quite come off. Was I just too distracted by the many references to Vera's drinking, father, solitary nature, bare legs, sandals and mud spattered feet?!

Thomas says

This is book 1 in the series. I enjoyed it and rate it 3.5 out of 5 stars. It is a long book, 535p., and moves slowly at times, while the author builds the scene. The book is told from the perspective of 4 women: Rachael--1 of 3 women conducting a wildlife assessment to determine whether or a quarry would kill off any protected plants/animals. She has issues with Peter Kemp, whose company is running the assessment. Peter had an affair with her in order to steal her work. He then dumped her and married someone else. Anne--the second of 3 women conducting the assessment. She is having an affair with the owner of the quarry firm.

Grace--The third woman doing the assessment. She is the product of foster homes and socially awkward. She has reconnected with her father.

Vera--Detective Chief Inspector(DCI) in charge of the investigation, when Grace is found dead.

I was not sure who the killer was until the end.

This book is more of a study in how people interact and their relationships than a murder mystery.

Some quotes:

"Anne's sexual appetite was legendary."

Vera leaves the two women to continue their work as decoys. In Rachel's words: "Like the crow, she thought, in the trap."

This series has been adapted for tv and is found in the US on PBS. Thanks to the publisher, Minotaur Books, for sending me this book through the Goodreads Giveaway program.

Obsidian says

What a drag this book was! I have fallen in love with the tv series starring Brenda Blethyn and I was so excited to start a new mystery series. Now of course I am wondering if I should even bother with the second book in the series, "Telling Tales." As other reviews have noted, Vera doesn't even show up in this book til the 40 percent mark (Kindle version) and then we don't even get a Vera POV until I think it was around the 75 percent mark. Instead we focus on three women and go back and forth between two of the women (after one of them is murdered). I have to say the final reveal of who is behind the murders that popped up in this book and why were a bit hard to take. I didn't feel like any of the characters were very well developed besides the three women the book decides to focus the most on anyway.

"The Crow Trap" follows three women: Rachel, Anne, and Grace. These three women are in Northumberland in order to do an environmental survey. There is a possibly quarry that may be built and there are sides for it and against it. When a local farmer's wife commits suicide, it seems to be the catalyst that causes everyone else to realize that maybe something else is going on here. When one of these three women is found murdered, DI Vera Stanhope appears on scene and decides to lay a trap to catch the murderer.

Eh if I have to pick one woman that didn't drive me up the wall, it would be no one. Seriously. Rachel was aggravating, Anne and her personal life..yikes. And Grace's was the most interesting to me, but I honestly had a hard time with that character cause we pretty much skipped over why she was on the survey team until almost the end. I didn't get it myself based on what we found out about her and her real family since it didn't feel like something her father would really care about. It just came out of nowhere.

Vera was a loudmouth who I had to question her intelligence at times. She didn't seem that bright until the book pivoted to her POV. And even then...just a bit uncouth. I don't know. She is not acting how the tv show Vera acts. There seems to be no subtlety at all.

There are other characters in this one, but I refuse to go back and look them up. I just didn't find them that intriguing.

The writing was okay, this book was way too long. The flow as up and down. Going from Rachel, Anne, and Grace and showcasing the same timeline via different POVs made me want to pull my hair out. I started to become bored while reading this. Rachel deciding to investigate with Vera's blessing/derision wasn't much help either. You start to wonder what is going on and how is it all connected.

The ending didn't make a lot of sense to me. I felt like it just came out of nowhere. I had to re-read that part a few times to even get the gist of what is happening. And you don't even get a good sense of closure. The book just abruptly ends.

Eve says

"I expect you think I'm odd...Eccentric...That's not the case, and if I do have a reputation for eccentricity, I have one too for getting results."—Vera Stanhope

I attempted to read a physical copy of this book, but couldn't get into it. I knew that I just had to get along with Ann Cleeves, because I'm such a huge fan of both television series based on her books. So I decided to jump into the audiobook, and it was perfect! I chose to start it on a solitary road trip into the quiet of the forest. Such an atmospheric setting for an atmospheric book. Probably one of the slowest mysteries I've read in a long time, but so fulfilling and worth it. I found myself juggling the audiobook and physical book during times when I couldn't listen. I had to know how it would end, and of course it wasn't anything like what I'd conjured in my imagination.

What's always fascinated me is the psychology behind crime and murder, and that's what makes the Vera books so much more than a British procedural novel. She really draws you into the characters, whether they realize that they'll be embroiled in murder or fall victim themselves. Definitely a character study. Can't wait to continue the series.
