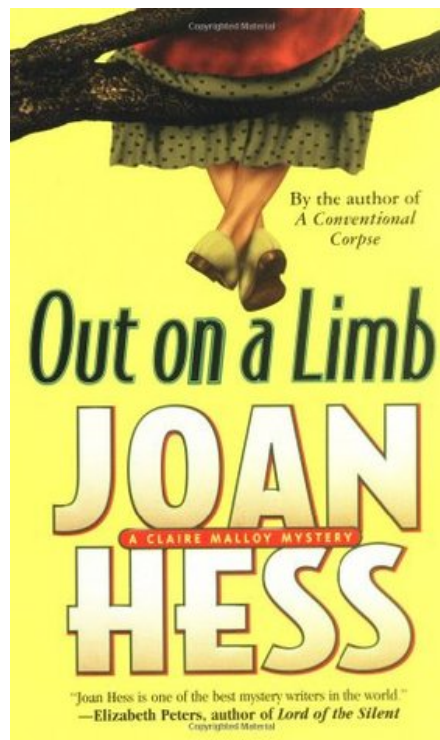




Out on a Limb

Joan Hess

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Out on a Limb Joan Hess

Faberville bookstore owner Claire Malloy is ruminating over the state of her love life when she gets disturbing news. Elderly Miss Emily Parchester is up a tree. Chained to an old oak, packing a thermos of tea and a gun, the retired schoolteacher is ready to go down with the ship, or rather the tree, before she'll let another historic piece of Farberville be bulldozed in the name of "progress," i.e., developer Anthony Armstrong's condominiums.

With Miss Parchester armed, and therefore dangerous, Claire fears this noble act will end tragically. Unfortunately, it does-when someone murders Armstrong. And suddenly Claire herself is out on a limb: a baby has been left on her doorstep, the child's teenage mom is suspect number one in Armstrong's death, and Claire needs to find the real killer fast. Especially when she discovers Miss Parchester knows more than she's willing to tell....

Out on a Limb Details

Date : Published November 17th 2003 by Minotaur Books (first published 2002)

ISBN : 9780312986322

Author : Joan Hess

Format : Paperback 336 pages

Genre : Mystery, Fiction, Cozy Mystery, Humor

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From Reader Review Out on a Limb for online ebook

Donna says

typical Claire Malloy - always in trouble. I do really enjoy Joan Hess stories, they always make me laugh and are just fun to read.

Kurt says

Lots of twists. Mystery books are usually a 3 but this was a 4.

Chi Dubinski says

Another strong book in the Claire Molly series.

The Badger says

The Claire Malloy series is a step above a Cozy, mainly because you actually LIKE the characters. Claire is the single mother of Caron, a teenaged daughter who's at the age of speaking in ALL CAPS. Claire is also the proprietor of a bookstore (which she doesn't seem to spend much time in, on account of solving murders and trying to calm Caron down to at least italics). Peter is Claire's detective boyfriend whom she's lucky to have, otherwise she'd spend the majority of her time in a holding cell for interfering with crime scenes.

If you're looking for a mystery series where you actually LIKE the characters (I love Christie, but spent much of my extracurricular time plotting the death of the sanctimonious bitch Ms. Marple), start on the Claire Malloy series. Likewise, if you're wondering whether to have children, pay close attention to Caron. I work with kids and can assure you that all teen girls go through the "I HATE YOU--I NEED A RIDE TO THE MALL" phase. Unless you're saving for boarding school, pay attention.

Joy says

Claire gets lots of free time from her bookstore, to keep an eye on the local protesters against a developer who has city approval to hack down a lot of trees that are in the way of his planned shopping mall. An elderly lady is spending all her time up in a tree - chained there - to balk tree cutters, and the developer is trying to stop people from supplying the lady with food. And a baby has been left on Claire's doorstep.

This is the first time I have visited this series in 15 years. Now that I have Kindle and buying more books won't take up space I don't have, I have filled out the series and plan to enjoy the tongue-in-cheek tone. I am surprised at Claire wanting to keep her current boyfriend. They don't seem to be a very good match.

Johnny says

Although there are a couple of subtle cross-references to Joan Hess' other famous mystery series (Arly Hanks in Maggody, AR) such as when the protagonists in *Out on a Limb* go to a nearby small town and visit the Pot o' Gold trailer park in search of clues and notice they are being tailed by a police car, I personally feel like the Claire Malloy mysteries are less "out there" in their humor than the aforementioned Maggody series. Maybe it is the difference between the ultra-small town-ness of Maggody compared with a small university town. There is still plenty of humor in the Malloy stories, but it packs a more literate punch than the more outrageous series. I like them both, depending on my moods, but have more empathy toward Claire than Arly.

Don't get me wrong. There is plenty of insanity in Farberville (I'm sure—wink—it's a pure coincidence that it "sounds like" Fayetteville), including preservationists who are quite willing to allow elderly widows to do their grunt work, a homeless eccentric who rents out skyboxes in the university stadium to the other homeless, an incredible gossip who gets everything wrong, the stereotypical gym and country club set, and two incredibly excitable adolescent girls. There is even a biker bar where the proprietor makes customers "behave."

In this case, we have the classic developer vs. protectionist conflict. We also have the classic marriage for money ("trophy wife") trope and the classic new mother giving up everything to stay at home while hubby goes out as he pleases trope. We even have the abandoned baby trope. All the ingredients are there for short-sighted, self-centered murder.

For what more could we ask? Well, we could ask for a closing of the loop. According to information provided to the reader, it would have been impossible for the loophole to have been slipped through until *after* the time of the murder. I can't be any more specific without giving an overt spoiler, but it isn't until after the murder that the loophole is provided. The timeline is slightly askew, almost like it was a belated editorial change. This detail, as important as it could be, isn't really too important because there was much more going on than the "mere" solution to a murder and the disposal of the weapon.

So, let's talk humor. In addition to the faux name that Claire Malloy assumes at the police station (Imagine an attorney named Ms. Miranda!), there is also the derogatory name of the rather mercenary and egotistical minister, Rev. Simpleton. But a few of my favorites were a response to a xenophobic person berating "foreigners" in general when Claire says that if things continue, they'll probably start giving the Nobel prize in Sweden (p. 181). I loved the comment by the only child who said that after she was born, her father calculated the cost of college tuition and immediately had a vasectomy (p. 190). While exploring portions of a large house during a thunderstorm, Claire thinks it's equivalent to paging Mary Shelley to meet her party at the gate (p. 212).

There is even a stylized rhetorical gimmick that Joan Hess uses. A lot of times, when looking at things from the adolescent daughter's (or her friend's) perspectives, she capitalizes phrases like "Little Bit Ludicrous" as though trying to suggest something that would be texted between them like, "Mom is LBL on this." (p. 208) I think that's a really nice touch and it helps me hear the adolescent disgust in their "voices." Caron and Inez have always been interesting supporting characters, but I was even more tickled with their roles in this one—particularly Caron's response to be targeted by malicious gossip. If it wasn't for the loop/loophole problem to which I obscurely referred earlier, this would be a four-star rating for sure.

Larue Bullion says

Loved the lates (to me) in this series, always a laugh a minute

Merry says

Here is a book with a fun and quirky plot, generally interesting and likeable characters, and some twists and turns to keep you guessing. There were a lot of things that were just too ludicrous to be the least bit believable, but I could get past that. But 3 stars was the best I could give it. Why? Simply put, the writing. The style soon became not only annoying, but distracting. After all, how much can you take of sentences like this:

"Her demeanor was that of a tropical storm soon to be upgraded to a hurricane, with torrential rain and winds strong enough to spew tornados at every trailer park within a hundred miles."

"I go to extremes to avoid even the mildest glint of perspiration. Life's too challenging to inflict intentional discomfort. I therefore did not frequent athletic clubs, and would have been equally as familiar with the facilities of, shall we say, the Kremlin or a Klingon battleship."

"I smiled as best I could, causing no more than one well-drawn eyebrow to rise, then waited until they were out the front door before proceeding into the labyrinth, where I might encounter dragons, ogres, and aerobics instructors."

A little bit of the above might be ok, but the entire book was written like that. Just not my cup of tea. So this was my first, and will be my last, Joan Hess book.

Jane says

Another great book for the treadmill. (I accidentally typed dreadmill. mmmm....) An easy read mystery in a good series. You have to love book store owners.

Katie Hilton says

This is a slightly nutty Claire Malloy mystery, set in northwest Arkansas. Some community members are protesting the removal of ancient oaks by a wealthy developer. Then he's murdered in his home. There are plenty of suspects, some kooky witnesses, but Claire untangles the situation.

Sandy Weir says

Miss Parchester is back and I love learning more about her! Another relatively cozy, if complicated Ms. Malloy (plus Caron, et.al.) mystery with several twining threads that include Claire having to care for a new baby and an old tree huger sipping tea in the rain.

Linz Zee says

After reading Josi S. Kilpack's comedic and intense mystery novels, this was just boring and tiresome.

George says

#14 in the small bookstore owner Claire Mallory set in the small college town of Farberville, Arkansas. A central character in this story is from the previous mystery, A conventional Corpse, in this series. The town's major developer is starting a second phase to a housing development and a group of protesters don't want a stand of oak trees cut down for the development so retired teacher Emily Parchester becomes a tree sitter. Soon the developer is found murdered and Claire again becomes involved in determining what happened and by who.

The overall tone is light mainly because of the cast of characters (Emily Parchester is a scene stealer!) topped off by Claire's snarky caustic wit and Caron, her 16 year old daughter, who is the drama queen of all drama queens.

Lacrechia says

Joan Hess mysteries are fast moving and I find them hard to put down until I reach the end...which usually means marathon reading sessions that leave me breathless. Needless to say I am not quite sure how Claire Malloy manages to keep up the pace she does in the story. Joan Hess, as always, weaves a complicated tale with many mysterious twists that only Claire can untangle. And in this one the ending is quite a surprise! You won't want to miss this one.

Levy Roberge says

I was stunned by the ending. Didn't see that coming
