



## A Romantic Cozy Mystery Book Club

An Imprint of Barbour Publishing

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### HEARTSONG PRESENTS: MYSTERIES—What are they?

- A subscriber-based book club consisting of thirty-six titles per year (four books per mailing at six-week intervals).
- 61-63,000-word/256-page mass-market paperback cozy mysteries
- The main element of a Barbour inspirational romance/mystery novel is a puzzle to solve. A very close second element is a sweet romance. All manuscripts in the line should present a conservative, evangelical Christian worldview. Manuscripts that do not reflect this position will be refused.
  - Intensity of the mystery should lean to the *lighthearted* styles found in cozy, caper, and whodunit mysteries.
  - Can include murder, but not necessary in each story.
- Must have a clear **romance subplot**—20%–50% of the storyline.
- Must have a strong **inspirational theme** threaded throughout.
- **Contemporary** manuscripts—present time but not specifically dated.
- We **do not accept** any futuristic, fantasy, time travel, or paranormal stories.
- **Point of view** can be either in the first person or in third person using the purist form without “head hopping.”
- Every story deserves a **happy ending**—or at least a satisfying one. Readers want to finish the last page with a sense that “all is well.” And they want to be reminded that God is good, He is still in control, and that the Bible still holds true today.
- We are currently seeking stand-alone stories that are mysteries with romance and faith. Also considering stories that can be developed into **series** with continuing characters and continuing romance, though each mystery should be complete and stand alone in each story.
- Our **audience** is primarily women in their 40s to 50s, though we seek to attract readers of all ages.
- Since our audience is primarily female, **female characters** should most often take the lead role in solving the mysteries. Heroines, though, need not be hard and callused by the world. Innocence and traditional female roles are still celebrated in our books.
- **Things to avoid:**
  - Foul language
  - Overly gruesome details of violence or death
  - Heavy sexual tension or intimacy
  - Church doctrinal issues
  - Alcohol, drug, or tobacco use by Christian characters
- **Contracts** will be royalty-based.

## HEARTSONG PRESENTS: MYSTERIES—How do I submit a proposal?

- **Electronic submissions only.**
- Please send a cover e-letter (including the date and your e-mail address).
- Proposals should include a detailed plot summary/chapter synopsis and the first three sample chapters.
- Technical *preferences* (not requirements) for document:
  - Times New Roman/12-point font
  - 1-inch margins
  - Single space between sentences
  - In order to save on paper, since we are printing the proposal on this end, I actually prefer single-spaced documents. Failure to comply with any of these preferences, however, will not necessarily disqualify your proposal.
- Unagented and unpublished authors are welcome to submit.
- Do not send full manuscripts unless requested.
- Submit to Acquisitions Editor Susan Downs at [mysterysubmit@barbourbooks.com](mailto:mysterysubmit@barbourbooks.com).

Happy Sleuthing,

Susan Downs,  
Associate Fiction Editor/Acquisitions Editor  
**HEARTSONG PRESENTS: MYSTERIES**  
Barbour Publishing, Inc.

## HELPFUL HINTS FOR WRITING A COZY MYSTERY

### —What makes a cozy different?

- A **Mystery** is set up as a maze to be navigated or puzzle to be solved by the protagonist. Typically, in a mystery, the protagonist sets out to solve a crime that has already been committed.
- On the other hand, . . . a **Suspense** (*which we are not in the market for at this time*) is best represented as a coil that tightens in around the protagonist. In other words, the protagonist is in a race against time to avoid being the victim of a crime.

A simplified generalization would be to say *in a mystery, the protagonist is on the offensive*—actively searching and solving, while *a suspense puts the protagonist on the defensive*—running and evading the villain as time runs out.

### —What common elements do many cozy mysteries include?

1. An **amateur sleuth**. The main character of a cozy mystery is typically a woman-next-door type who possesses one or more eccentric habits or quirky personality traits. Many cozies are told in first-person POV, but we don't discriminate against third-person-POV stories by any means. While traditional cozy mysteries most often have middle-aged or older protagonists, since HPMysteries feature an added romance element which may very well involve the amateur sleuth, your protagonist might be younger than those found in classic cozies. We do, however, still adhere to the guideline of employing a non-professional versus a trained law enforcement officer or private investigator as the mystery's main character.
  - Writer's Tip: Make sure your amateur sleuth has a **strong personal motivation** for wanting to see the crime solved and the whodunit revealed.
2. A **village-like setting**/small-town community "feel." This doesn't necessarily have to *be* a village, but the setting should be somewhat isolated. If it is in a metropolis, the focus should be on a particular neighborhood. If the setting is a professional workplace, it should focus on a specific department. Cozy "extras" often include cats, knitting or quilting, cooking, and pots of tea.
  - Writer's Tip: Treat your story's setting as if it were a member of the cast of characters. Give the town its own unique personality.
3. A **non-graphic inciting crime**, which sets the mystery story in motion, occurs as early in the story as possible—preferably in the first chapter or two. While murder is most often the crime in a cozy mystery, we aren't averse to other juicy crimes.
  - Writer's Tip: The overall tone of a cozy is light, fun, and sometimes comedic. Even though your plot may revolve around a murder, keep the violence to a minimum. Consider having the inciting crime occur "offstage" and discovered after the fact rather than showing the blow-by-blow picture of the gruesome, gory act.
4. A **slew of viable suspects**, each **possessing** a strong motivation for perpetrating the mystery's crime and **lacking** a sufficient alibi that would disqualify them from the list of possible villains.
  - Writer's Tip: Give all the suspects a secret, to be revealed later, that strengthens their motivation to commit the cozy's crime.
5. Plenty of **red-herring clues/suspects** that throw the reader off the trail of the real perpetrator's unveiling until the story's climactic end. Organize in such a way that the amateur sleuth is led down certain paths in the maze that eventually redirect her back to the crime's perpetrator.
  - Writer's Tip: Avoid "surprising" the reader. On the whole, readers are not pleased when information is withheld. It's unfair to the reader for the amateur sleuth to fail to relay information about important activities or discoveries that allow her to solve the crime only to reveal this in the end. Readers like to participate in the mystery's solving alongside the sleuth and deserve to be included in the process.

PLEASE BEAR IN MIND—HEARTSONG PRESENTS: MYSTERIES  
MUST CONTAIN 20%–50% ROMANCE!

**Ron and Janet Benrey**, husband-and-wife author team of Barbour’s trade fiction mystery series *The Royal Tunbridge Wells Mysteries* (including titles *Dead as a Scone* and *The Final Crumpet*) provide the following dialogue, which explores the details of a cozy mystery.

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*Ron:* “COZY MYSTERIES are ‘kinder, gentler’ mysteries—the sort of mystery novels that used to be written decades ago, when clever plot twists played a more important role than graphic in-your-face violence and coarse language, when the action took place in an unusual setting that was fun to read about.”

*Janet:* “For good examples of cozy mysteries, read books by Agatha Christie, Charlotte MacLeod, and Edmund Crispin, among others. Their books honor a tradition that readers have long enjoyed. For example, the typical cozy is set in a small town rather than a large city so that interesting relationships can develop among the cast of characters. And the story deals with a small ‘family’ of potential suspects, all of whom are nice people—the sort who would never, ever commit a felonious crime.”

*(Editor’s note: Other cozy-style mysteries that are popular among ABA-market readers include Lilian Jackson Braun’s *The Cat Who...* series and Diane Mott Davidson’s *Culinary Mysteries* series.)*

*Ron:* “The lead characters in a cozy mystery—its protagonists—are usually ‘amateurs with attitude.’ He, she, or they are drawn into an investigation that really should be conducted by the police. Much of the fun of a cozy is watching a quirky, eccentric amateur sleuth outthink the proper authorities, who despite their access to forensic evidence, have managed to get everything wrong. Along the way, the readers learn a lot about the protagonists’ lives, careers, interests, and relationships.”

*Janet:* “The guilty party in a cozy is almost always a previously upstanding citizen driven by straightforward motives: greed, jealousy, revenge, or self-protection. I can’t imagine a cozy mystery about random murders or a bank robbery gone wrong or a serial killer. And the murder itself tends to be bloodless, which helps to maintain the lighthearted, cheerful tone of a cozy—despite the fact that a murder or other felony has been committed. The culprit is the sort of person you would be happy to invite to dinner at your home.”

*Ron:* “An elegant manor house. An ocean liner in the mid-Atlantic. A ski lodge in the mountains. The setting for a cozy is often a ‘character’ in its own right. Some of your story’s characters will become ‘red herrings’ to keep the reader unsure who did it until the last chapter. Oh—and one other oft-used cozy mystery tradition—feature at least one cat.” 🐱