



The Litter of the Law

Rita Mae Brown

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Rita Mae Brown collaborates with feline co-author Sneaky Pie Brown in a new mystery starring Mary Minor “Harry” Haristeen, the curious cat detectives Mrs. Murphy and Pewter, and Tee Tucker, the valiant crime-solving corgi. Halloween arrives early this year to rural central Virginia, when a twisted killer will stop at nothing to protect a multimillion-dollar scheme.

THE LITTER OF THE LAW

Autumn has descended and crops are being harvested all over Crozet, Virginia, ideal conditions for a scenic drive for Harry and husband Fair. Bucolic views are all well and good, but Harry’s nose for trouble leads her straight to a cornfield’s macabre scarecrow—an all too real murder victim that frightens all but the noisy crows.

This accountant’s gruesome death is only the first of many disturbing events in this normally pastoral corner of the world. While Harry tends her beloved grapes and sunflowers, a killer edges closer—as does Harry’s protective menagerie of animals.

Halloween’s approach brings with it bona fide terror and a beloved local tradition that threatens to become fatal. Rooting out the guilty in the treacherous center of a lucrative conspiracy requires Harry’s farmer’s wisdom—along with the quick wits and extraordinary senses of Sneaky Pie, Pewter, and Tucker. A vicious murderer may know the lay of the land far better than Harry does, but that’s about to change. It’s up to her vigilant four-footed companions to make sure that the unearthing of this plot is not Harry’s last act.

Praise for *The Litter of the Law* and the Mrs. Murphy mysteries

“As feline collaborators go, you couldn’t ask for better than Sneaky Pie Brown.”—*The New York Times Book Review*

“Enchanting . . . Brown demonstrates once again why she’s the queen of the talking animal cozy subgenre.”—*Publishers Weekly*

“As usual, the smart animals provide clues without getting in the way of the human interactions and plot. This is a strong addition to the popular series.”—*Booklist*

The Litter of the Law Details

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Author : Rita Mae Brown

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From Reader Review The Litter of the Law for online ebook

Kat Lebo says

The Litter of the Law

By Rita Mae Brown & Sneaky Pie Brown

A Mrs. Murphy Mystery

Rita Mae Brown is a prolific author, having authored 8 books in the Sister Jane Arnold series, 2 in the Mags Rogers series, this Mrs. Murphy series, plus several other fiction and non-fiction works.

Rita Mae Brown's Mrs. Murphy mysteries are always fun. I have all but one of the Mrs. Murphy books – all of the fiction, but I didn't purchase the Cook Book. This is the 22nd novel in the series. By now, I almost feel like Brown's characters, both animal and human, are a part of my family.

There is a lot to like about this series. The reader will run across few editing/proofing mistakes, although the occasional ones pop up. There are lots of returning characters, all either animal or human residents of Crozet, Virginia, and who by now feel like old friends. Brown usually tackles important issues in the books; this one tackles the lack of federal recognition of Virginia's Native American tribes, as well as the ages old struggle between working good farm land or selling it for residence or business use. Brown can write some pretty spectacular prose, such as this example, which is the first paragraph of Chapter 28:

“Halloween colors, orange and black, gave way to shimmering slate on Thursday night as twilight fell over the rolling Virginia countryside. Those trees without leaves appeared outlined in charcoal, and the conifers swayed blue and silver. The pin oaks, dried leaves till attached, rustled in the light breeze. When the wind lifted their leaves upward, the pale underside contrasted with the tree's dark bark. Then as the wind died down, they turned right side up.”

In this novel, Brown's main human character, Mary Minor “Harry” Haristeen, and her husband, Phararond (“Fair”), discover an unusual scarecrow made of a human body. Soon after, another body is discovered disguised as a witch in a Halloween display. Who is killing these Crozet residents, and why? In a novel spliced with agri-lore, Virginia history, and the struggle to preserve historical lands and places, Brown paces her novel with precision and dash, leading the reader ever onward in a desperate attempt to find the person or persons responsible for the murders, and to protect Harry's friends and family. Her climactic action scene is fast-paced and interesting, bringing the final show-down to a satisfying conclusion. Brown's characters are, by this far along in the series, very well fleshed out. Even the non-human characters are well known to those who have followed the series. Not only Mrs. Murphy, a cool tiger cat, Tee Tucker, and feisty corgi, and Pewter, the couch-potato feline, but also recurring characters such as Simon, the opossum who lives in Harry's hayloft, alongside Matilda, the blacksnake, and Flatface, the great horned owl. And who doesn't love Lucy Fur, one of the Lutheran minister's cats?

Yes, the animals in the novel talk. But unlike the cats in the Joe Grey mysteries, these animals only talk to each other, not to humans. Readers get the story through the viewpoint of the animals (often a more expansive viewpoint than that of the humans) and the human characters, as well.

So, what's not to like? There are a couple of things that bother me about Brown's writing. I'm not a big fan of extravagant verbal identifiers. ‘He said’ and ‘she said’ are good enough for me. I mean, how many times does she need to describe the character as part of the dialogue, as here, on page 23: “...the cat replied as the attractive forty-one-year-old woman returned to her task.” First, remember I said the animals in the story

couldn't converse with humans, so what the cat said wasn't understood by Harry. Second, do I need to know Harry's age? I don't think it's particularly important to this dialogue, nor do I think her being described as "attractive" is necessary. If the author wants to put these two things in the story, a better place might be in describing her as she is getting ready to go to one of the events, or mentioning it in relation to how another person (human) sees her. Also, she often uses the same words to describe multiple characters. A little later in the story, as Harry is speaking, her own dialogue is described as "...said the attractive woman..." and also uses similar wordage to describe another character "The attractive police officer shook her head." I'm not sure what exactly bothers me about this. Perhaps it's because so often any dialogue is full of modifiers describing action that I should have been able to infer from the context: so and so shouted, so and so teased, so and so sighed, so and so smiled, so and so insulted. Maybe it seems overly simple to my eye. Whatever it is about the way Brown uses modifying language with her dialogue, it leaves me feeling like she's talking down to the reader, over explaining because she doesn't believe the reader capable of making correct inferences. One instance of that can be found on page 999:

"Harry, did you see where the USDA" – he used the initials for the United States Department of Agriculture – "predicts the drought reduced our economic growth by almost half a percentage point?..." Umm, I know what USDA stands for, thank you, especially when the entire dialogue revolves around farming!

Or maybe it's just that the wording often feels awkward to me. I can't quite put my finger on the reason, I just know it bugs me. I attempt to read over the top of it, but I always notice it.

Another problem – and this isn't just Brown's problem, but the problem a lot of authors of series novels run into – is bringing in new or previously minor characters in order to have someone to kill off. In this story, both the murder victims were characters who had not appeared in former books in the series, or, if they did appear, weren't prominently enough featured to be remembered. I realize that killing off ones major characters isn't the best idea, but after 22 books, as soon as a new character is introduced, one begins to wonder when that character will get killed. I liken it to the Star Trek "red shirt" syndrome.

Nevertheless, I still look forward to each new adventure and will undoubtedly pre-order the next in the series, "Nine Lives To Die," which is due out in June of 2014.

Randee says

The small town of Crozet, Virginia continues to engage me with its citizens and animals. Pewter is fighting, as usual, with Tucker and Mrs. Murphy and just about anyone who displeases her by any small infraction. Pewter is my favorite character because she reminds me of every cat I've ever been enslaved by. She loves to eat and steal food, she can be very sweet when she wants to be (or wants something) and disagreeable when things aren't going her way (or if she just feels like causing a stink.) But, she is a good-heart and loves her animal and people friends even when she is being a huge pain in the ***.

Dianne says

Gaak.

Full review coming soon

If you want to learn about crimes against indigenous tribes , organic gardening or certain types of politics instead of reading a cozy mystery, then this will be a great book for you.

I have stayed away from Ms. Browns work for a while now ever since she started taking the books into a new direction and infusing them with the authors opinions on politics, world views, religion et al.

I thought I would give this author one more try I am sorry I bothered. We are back to the rants and raves of previous books with the added thrill of the environment. Yes, I know Harry is farmer now so environmental concerns are important, but they don't really make for an interesting cozy mystery read.

People are dying and the corpses are being arranged in gruesome and very public manners. Of course, Harry and Fair stumble accidentally on the first corpse. (Big mistake to take the postmistress job away from Harry, however that came about, it makes for weaker less believable story lines now). It takes about 60% of the novel and a thin novel it is already, for anything interesting or even resembling a clue, to happen!

I usually love the animals, but this time I found their dialogue tedious at best - plain old word filler at worse.

It was a huge struggle for me to finish this book. I used to be able to just sit there and gulp them down in one sitting, but no more. It was like being stuck in school and reading a textbook.*ARC Supplied by Publisher*

Good luck readers!

Margaret Wilkening says

I really used to enjoy the Mrs. Murphy books. Rita Mae Brown's books had a snappy story line, and the animals' viewpoints were fresh and provided an interesting voice to the narrative. However, a number of books ago, I found that they had lost their sparkle and it took a concerted effort on my part to slog my way through. When Netgalley gave me the opportunity to read a pre-release of her newest effort, The Litter of the Law, I decided to give the series another chance.

Unfortunately, the series hadn't improved since my last visit. The plot and characters were one dimensional. Even the animals were primarily interested in insulting each other, primarily about their weight. There were the familiar characters from past books, but there were so few new characters that after a couple were killed off, it wasn't hard to predict who the villains were or why they were placing their victims in bazaar Halloween poses. I think the most off-putting aspect of the series is the preachy tone that Brown takes through most of the book. Whether she is expressing her views on the irritation of new comers to western Virginia or the woes of country people, she tries to put the views on characters, but the author's voice is blaring through. I wouldn't mind so much if it helped the narrative flow more smoothly. However, all I could hear was the blah, blah, blah in my head.

The story picked up in the last couple of chapters as the bad guys were rounded up, so I added a second star to my original evaluation.

I still enjoy Brown's Sister Jane hunt country books, but I think it is time for Mrs. Murphy and friends to retire.

Yvensong says

Not my favorite of the Mrs. Murphy Mysteries, but it was an enjoyable way to pass my time while on a road trip. I enjoy these little, light mysteries as a break from the horror and darker paranormal books I tend to favor, and this one was perfect for my mood.

Lis Carey says

Mary Minor "Harry" Haristeen and her husband, Fair, are out with their dog, Tee Tucker, and their cats, Mrs. Murphy and Pewter, when the animals find a very interesting scarecrow, apparently being torn apart by crows.

Why would crows be attacking a scarecrow?

It's a corpse. His name was Josh Hill, and he was shot through the heart before being dressed as a scarecrow and hung up in the field. It's the start of a frightening October, building toward Halloween and the annual hayride to raise money for the Crozet Library.

Tee Tucker, Mrs. Murphy, and the often reluctant Pewter need to keep a close eye on their favorite human, Harry, as well as doing (in their minds) all the real investigation of this shocking crime.

When Harry and her friend Susan find another corpse, this one dressed up as a witch and inserted into the Halloween display on the lawn of a local church, everyone starts to get alarmed, and Harry, Susan, and their sheriff's deputy friend Coop begin to wonder who it is among their friends and neighbors that's killing their neighbors.

Harry Haristeen is always fun to read about, though of course Tucker, Mrs. Murphy, and Pewter are the real stars of the series. This is a nicely plotted mystery, a visit with old friends, and a pleasant evening read as Halloween approaches. The Virginia boosterism can at times seem a bit smug and a bit much, but I assume most people feel the same way about their part of the country. Indeed, I feel sorry for them if they don't.

Recommended.

I received a free electronic galley of this book from the publisher via NetGalley.

Jean says

This is a series I thought had finished and was surprised to find it is still on going. Rita Mae Brown and Sneaky Pie Brown write about murder in their small town of Crozet, Virginia.

Our protagonists are Mary Minor Harristeen "Harry" and tiger striped cat Mrs. Murphy. Harry had acquired a fat lazy gray cat called Pewter in earlier episodes. The Corgi Dog Tucker has to put up with the cats, it is his nose that follows the evil doers. In the earlier episodes, Harry was the postmistress but now she is

married to equine vet Fair Harristeen. As this book opens they are all out for a Sunday drive in the country when they discover a scarecrow in a field is actually a dead man. This sets them off to solve the crime.

Brown nicely worked into the story information about the local Monacan Native American Tribe and its problems. I found the information about this indigenous tribe most interesting. I was unaware of all the problems Native American Tribes have to go through to be recognized by the federal or state governments. I enjoy the glimpse Brown provides of the daily life in Crozet. It is my opinion that the quality of Brown's writing has declined from the earlier books in the series. But it was nice to meet up again with Mrs. Murphy, Pewter and Tucker.

I read this as an audiobook downloaded from Audible. The book is about seven hours long. Kate Forbes does a good job narrating the book. Forbes is an actress and audiobook narrator.

Ricki says

In a word...disappointing. I've been reading the Rita Mae Brown/Sneaky Pie books since the first one was published and have always thought of her as one of my favorite authors. I've read several of her other books as well, including Bingo, Venus Envy, Riding Shotgun, Rita Will, the Sister Jane series and more, but Harry and the animals have always been my favorites.

Well, Ms Brown seems to have hit a bump in the road with this book in the series, as well of some of the previous ones. Out of the last 5 books, I would have to say that (maybe) only one was up to her previous standards. Perhaps it's time to take off a year or so to renew her interest in the characters, 'cause it doesn't seem to be there anymore. She is such a skilled, creative writer, I hate to see this happening.

I will continue to buy the books because I won't give up hope that Harry and the animals and all the characters will come roaring back, just like the old days.

Barbara Ann says

Fall is my favorite time of the year, and one way I can become immersed in the beauty of autumn is through books, vicariously experiencing the season through the story's setting and characters. One of those novels that does exactly this is Rita Mae Brown's *The Litter of the Law*. The series is set in a small rural farming community called Crozet, Virginia, which is also a real town. *The Litter of the Law* takes place in October and centers on the protagonist, Mary Minor Haristeen or "Harry" who finds herself caught up in solving a series of bizarre murders as Halloween approaches. However, Harry isn't the only one doing some sleuthing. Her loyal, loving four-legged feline companions, Mrs. Murphy and Pewter, along with Tee Tucker the corgi are right there beside her, helping to find clues and providing backup in case it's needed. This little band of quirky sidekicks provides an additional layer of amusement as readers can't help but get caught up in their non-human, often entertaining, bickering and teasing.

This is the first book I've read in the series, and although it can stand alone, I think I would have enjoyed it more if I had started the series from the beginning. The author has created an entire detailed fictional community with lots of characters, townspeople, who have ongoing roles in each installment. Brown does provide a list of the "Cast of Characters" at the beginning of the book to explain each character's connection to Harry and her family and/or their relevance to the plot. However, trying to remember who's who overwhelmed me at times and became a distraction from my enjoying the crux of the book: Harry's search to discover why people are being murdered in her quiet, little close-knit community.

If I followed the series, I may have been more interested in the chit chat that occurs about various characters in the book even though they aren't involved in this particular plot. This slowed the pacing of the story and I was bored by some of these non-relevant conversations. However, when I wasn't distracted by these aspects of the book, I did enjoy trying to connect the clues Harry and the others discover in the scenes leading up to my favorite part of the book: the annual Halloween Hayride. The climax was suspenseful and I wasn't completely sure who the guilty party was until an elaborate scheme is exposed. Of course, Harry and her entourage prove themselves as worthy heroes by the book's conclusion.

Another aspect of the plot I really enjoyed is the author's inclusion of the plight of the Monocan people, Native Americans of Virginia who had been stripped of their rights when the state of Virginia refused to officially recognize this indigenous tribe. The author incorporates their struggles into the plot smoothly and effectively, adding an additional layer of interest to the story.

If you like reading cozy mysteries, then I would recommend checking out this series because, as Brown says, **“It takes a cat to write the purr-fect mystery.”**

Source: I received a copy of this book from the publisher to provide an honest review.

M.L.D. says

There is some laughably bad dialogue in this, moments where I looked up from the page and said, "People don't talk like this." I realize that the author was trying desperately to keep new readers up to speed with a large cast of characters, but still. There are good ways and bad ways to do this, and the author/editor went with laughably bad, stilted, and unnatural.

Another downside: with a cozy of this style, set in a small town with a sprawling cast of regulars, it's pretty easy to determine which characters are untouchable, ie won't be either victims or murderers...leaving a very small pool from which to pull both corpses and perps. Which means: not much mystery here.

Jean says

After a long absence from the world of Mary Minor “Harry” Harristeen and her friends and family (human and animal) in Crozet, Virginia, I picked up *The Litter of the Law*, the 21st of the Mrs. Murphy cozy mysteries by Sneaky Pie Brown and her human co-writer, Rita Mae Brown. Harry is one of those individuals who seems to stumble upon trouble at every turn, and she is always ready to stick her nose in to get to the bottom of things. Her pets, cats Mrs. Murphy and Pewter and corgi Tee Tucker, are always beside her keeping her safe and doing a bit of investigating on their own.

In *The Litter of the Law*, Harry and her husband Fair discover a body posed as a scarecrow. Later, she and friend Susan find the body of Hester Martin, a rather eccentric middle-aged woman who ran a vegetable stand. Her corpse was dressed as a witch as part of a Halloween display. Harry, of course, worms her way into the investigation by asking questions of Deputy Cynthia Cooper, and her pets are with her at the grand finale to help nail the killers.

Having read most, if not all, of the Mrs. Murphy books, I found this to be less engaging than some of her

previous works. The dialogue among the animals was mostly name-calling and bickering, whereas in earlier books, there was much more cooperation among them. In previous stories, also, the animals had a bigger role in solving the crimes. I have lived with cats for thirty years and at present have seven wonderful, unique felines, and I can see bits of their personalities in Mrs. Murphy and Pewter. My “fat” cat is the Queen, and I don’t think any of the others would dare taunt her about her size! (She’s also the smartest.) I can imagine that hearing this story read as an audio book would be quite amusing; however, in this case, I would much prefer the print version because Michael Gellatly's illustrations are magnificent!

I did find the themes of green living and Native American rights that were interjected into the plot to be relevant and interesting. At times, however, they seemed to detract from the mystery itself, and I felt that weakened it somewhat. Despite these few shortcomings, it was still a fun read, and I look forward to the next Sneaky Pie-Rita Mae collaboration.

Kathy says

I received this book from Net Galley to read and review. Up front, let me say that I have never read any books by the author before. This one was cute and flowed quite easily and smoothly from start to finish. The way the animal pets of Harry “spoke” and discovered clues in the mystery was endearing and fascinating. Too bad humans cannot really communicate with them, as it might save some time and effort (as this mystery proved). In the story, while out, Mary Minor “Harry” Haristeen and her husband Phararond “Fair” Haristeen, D.V.M, with Tee Tucker, Harry’s corgi, and cat detectives Mrs. Murphy and Pewter, discover a body posed as a dead scarecrow. Word of the crime spreads rapidly through the townsfolk, but no one in town really has a handle on who murdered the victim, and things get even more complicated when Harry and her friend Susan find another murdered victim in a witches outfit. Again, no one has a clue about who the murderer is. As the town prepares for its famous traditional Halloween scary hayride, things get even more intense, as everyone begins wondering among themselves who the murderer can be and whether this evil person is right there among them. It was interesting the way the author interwove the social problems of the one-time native Indian tribes in Virginia into the story. As I said above, the animals could help the town figure things out, but only if their humans could fully understand them, which they obviously do not. The author obviously is quite familiar with the life and customs of the Virginia area, where the story takes place, as she provides excellent, true to life descriptions of the locale, the people and their customs and culture as well as underlying political/cultural differences/problems. One thing that was off-putting, however, was the somewhat preachy tone the author used throughout the book. I was not quite sure what sort of hidden agenda she may have had, but there definitely was one. Nevertheless, the story was cute and often endearing. The animals were lovable. The characters also are realistic, though not always as well-developed as I would have liked them to be. I think the author relied on the reader having some idea of who and what they were from previous books, and, in that regard, I was at a disadvantage. I enjoyed the story, especially the added animal input. I think it is refreshing to find something that is not filled with the blood and guts of many mysteries today, and which touches on an underlying social problem without getting too political.

Alyssa says

I received this book for free through Goodreads First Reads. I have never read a book by this author before, so perhaps avid readers of these books can take my review with a grain of salt.

Personally, this book was not a good introduction to Rita Mae Brown's books.

Sure, for a mystery book, there were a lot of head scratching moments...but in a bad way. The animal dialogue is really cheesy and served no real purpose. The animals did nothing to help solve the mystery (which I was expecting), and instead they just bickered all the time. The characters in this book were ridiculous caricatures. They often talked about random things that had nothing to do with the mystery at hand. At certain parts of the book I thought they forgot about the mystery all together.

At first I thought maybe this book was written in a style to read out loud to kids, but the contents of the book is so rife with heavily complicated issues which renders it not kid-friendly at all.

So who was this book written for? Probably for Rita Mae Brown herself. The book seemed like a vehicle to insert herself as the hero and show off all of the knowledge she has on various topics.

Laura says

Periodically while reading this book I would forget I was reading a mystery - the author talks nonstop about the environment as well as Native American rights. Both of these are noble causes, but the tone of the writing was off-putting in its preachiness. There is little suspense because the murders seem to be an afterthought.

Received thru NetGalley

Lily (Night Owl Book Cafe) says

I got a copy of this book for free through Netgalley in exchange of an honest review.

Halloween is coming. While the people of Crozet, Virginia are out and preparing their beloved home for the festivities, people are suddenly found murdered and dressed up in costumes.

Eh...

A little disappointed with this book. Okay, quiet a bit disappointed with this one. I picked it up as a Halloween read because it was marked as a cozy mystery and had animals in it, and all the fun halloween stuff. Unfortunately, the book fell very short of my expectations.

First, it is suppose to be a cozy mystery but a lot of the book is oddly filled with what seems to be filler material. For one, 50% of the book had nothing to do with the murder mystery but everything with the events of the town life and it seems to be filled with what seems like useless facts. Seriously... There is a bunch of times in the book where it pretty much said "Did you know..." I felt like I was being lectured on stuff the entire book. Yes, some of these "facts" might be important stuff that's going on in the world that people might overlook, but I don't feel like it should belong in a cozy mystery book. It derailed the story, made it sound very preachy, and made it really hard to continue reading.

I managed to clench my teeth and get through it, but it was a very odd feeling. I have to admit, I almost didn't mind the talking animal's in the story because of it. Of course the human's don't understand them, but that was odd indeed.

This was my first Mrs.Murphy mystery and I am going to have to make it my last. It might sound harsh, but the facts and lecture or preaching whatever you want to call it did nothing but ruin the book for me. Unfortunately, I had a hard time with the writing style. Which is a shame really. I am really sorry if this review sounded a bit harsh, I think the worse I have posted in a while.
