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Beloved children's author Beatrix Potter, wearing the hat of amateur sleuth, returns in this delightful series "with legs—and tails."(*Publishers Weekly*)

Near Sawrey, the seat of Miss Potter's country home, is abuzz—Mr. Wickstead has died under a tree limb. The villagers are certain that his death had to do with a treasure he dug up last spring. But why was he in the wood on a frigid night? And what of the claw marks on the limb? And what was that treasure? As per usual, the town's animals know more than the Big Folk. And only Pickles, Wickstead's fox terrier, knows exactly what happened.

Meanwhile, Miss Potter wonders: can she acknowledge her fondness for Mr. Heelis and remain loyal to the memory of her fiancé? She has no time to muse, what with helping the denizens of Sawrey, human and animal—and the little matter of murder.

The Tale of Briar Bank Details

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Author : Susan Wittig Albert

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From Reader Review The Tale of Briar Bank for online ebook

The Library Lady says

Is it me or are these books getting more "twee" by the book? Or is it just that my saccharine meter is set on high this week?

It's not just the animal bits--which frankly I ignore. It's that she seems to be attempting to write the whole book in the style of a Beatrix Potter childrens books and it doesn't work. It comes off as cloying and phony. All we need is a simpering "Dear Reader".

These books are referred to as "family friendly" in a jacket blurb. Does the publisher or Ms Albert really think that these are something to read to kids? Or is that for blushing Victorian types who faint at words like "scrotum" to reassure them that this is pure and wholesome?

When she just attempts to tell her story, she does well. I think she's done a very good job of getting into Beatrix Potter's psyche--as good as any human can do in interpreting the heart of another.

Speaking of which, while she seems to have read up on Potter herself, her frequent references to the Internet in terms of her research make me leery. Anyone who writes 4 books set in Victorian/Edwardian England, and only THEN discovers that English vets don't use the title of "Doctor" obviously hasn't read/viewed "All Creatures Great and Small" or anything else relevant, let alone read enough books on the period. And that makes a lot of her other details questionable.

Kim says

I really love this series! I just love the mix of the era, the personalities, the fantasy and the animals. And when the dragon appeared, the little girl in me clapped her hands in delight! And it was a NICE dragon! I've read The Wind in the Willows over and over again since I was a child and find stories about animals living people-type lives charming. This series has really made me interested in reading a biography of Beatrix Potter.

Grey853 says

I'm a sucker for books set around or near Christmas. Throw in the idea that it's Beatrix Potter at Hill Top Farm and it's all good.

Natalie (CuriousReader) says

The Tale of Briar Bank is a myriad of things; cozy mystery, historical fiction, and fantasy to name the genre blend for one. Beatrix Potter joins the readers in the Cottage Tales series, as a sort of lady detective light - but she's not the only one helping solving the mystery at hand. Her fictional animal characters, the ones

you're probably familiar with through stories such as 'Peter Rabbit' and 'Ginger and Pickles' are also there, and they have stories to tell. That's part of the fantasy element right there, although there's one more 'traditional' bit of fantasy too, to give you a hint it's a creature you might find in an epic fantasy but not expecting to find in a cozy mystery set in 1909.

The mystery itself isn't that complicated, nor is it particularly grisly. There's your cozy factor; there's a death, a few suspicious people, and a discovered treasure with a possible curse over it - but ultimately it's not a particularly intricate mystery, nor should it be the reason for picking these books up in my opinion. On the other hand, the sense of a whole community is I think a good reason to do so. If you enjoy seeing how a whole community in the Edwardian era would live and breathe in a sort of village setting, you've come to the right place. There's love, drama, unpaid bills, hidden identities, and some of the outsider experience through Potter - buying a farm in a small-knit community and becoming a part of said community.

Another reason this is so much fun is that Susan Wittig Albert definitely did her research before including Beatrix Potter into the mix; many of the things surrounding her character is either true or based on facts, therefor it's in many ways fun to read as someone who's interested in Potter herself. It's set right when she's buying a second farm, and deals indirectly with her complicated relationship with her mother, as well as her slightly tangled experiences with love.

As most other books, there are flaws - one of the main ones for me being the constant presence of the author in the book. Don't get me wrong, I enjoy the occasional interlude of an author coming out to say something to the reader, but not constantly. There's quite a lot of telling instead of showing - like a character saying 'He's a baker, so therefor he has flour on his clothes' (my own example mirroring something similar in the book) - when it's clear to both characters who are talking what the occupation of the person they talked about was. It might not bother others as much as it did me, but it's definitely there. Then there's the feeling of the book possibly taking on a bit much; there are several puzzle pieces, all individually interesting, but it just feels a little underdeveloped in each part so that the entirety isn't as neat or pulled together as I would've liked.

All this said, it was certainly a very enjoyable reading experience. I enjoyed traveling back in time to the early 20th century and experiencing a little bit of farming life, gossip of the village, seeing a fictionalized Potter dealing with loss, love, drama, and prejudice, seeing her animal characters come to life. It was all good fun, and I'd say if I happen to come across another book in the series I would gladly pick it up for a bit of fireplace-reading.

Mascanlon says

The Beatrice Potter series by well inow mystery writer Susan Wittig Albert is a treat. This maybe my favorite of her various characters. Once again Beatrice as escaped from the London grind of waiting on her nasty parents to the lake country where she has bought a farm. Along with the local pets and animals she stumbles on a long ago treasure hunt and frauds underway which leads to a mysterious death at the hands of...oh I won't spoil it for you! This book is a charming blend of romance, mystery a nd nostalgia.

Sher says

I thought I would give this series one more try, but I found the receptiveness of the story line simple too much. The author wants a new reader to the series to know all the back story again and again, and I found myself wandering far, far away in both this book and #4. Just did not work for me.

Debbie says

This series of adult fairy tales is so much fun, and just a happy time to curl up with and just escape.

Susan says

Delightful nighttime reading

Christina says

I love this Beatrix Potter mystery series. I actually bought all of Beatrix Potter's children's books to reread after finishing this book (5th in the series). Beatrix Potter is a reserved but determined citizen of Sawrey, a small town in England where she periodically escapes from her parents in London on her farm - purchased from proceeds of her "little books" - Peter Rabbit and subsequent tales. Ms. Potter is a fully fledged member of the village, participating in the life of the town as concerned citizen and part-time mystery solver. This series is charming and sweet - a world away from the crazy modern pace. The animals play critical roles as observers, commentators and participants in the life of Sawrey.

Sarah says

I loved the first three books in this series, but now I'm tiring of them. Three basic reasons for this:

- 1) It is a great pity that Ms Albert feels it necessary, in each and every novel, to give us the full histories of every Tom, Dick or Harry we come across while reading, despite a fully descriptive "Cast of Characters" at the beginning. Most regrettable.
- 2) And the transitions from one thread to another are REALLY annoying. I hate being told we have to leave so-and-so and go on to someone else. I am NOT a child, I DON'T need the author to constantly guide me, and this just does NOT work in modern adult literature!
- 3) Final gripe: the story was weak and the mild "mystery" dragged on too long after I'd already guessed much of the truth. It would have been so much more interesting to learn more about the village social life at that period and Beatrix Potter's own life, fictional or otherwise.

Again I had to skim over paragraphs and paragraphs of the omnipotent author's comments, repetitive plugs for her other novels, rehashed introductions to repeat characters and long, overly twee animal dialogues! I find this all very off-putting.

That said, I think I will nevertheless read to the end of the series, just for the story of Beatrix Potter, which is very well documented and entertaining, and skip all the extremely boring bump in between.

C. says

Susan Wittig Albert's historical series *"The Cottage Tales Of Beatrix Potter"* whirls across the spectrum. It is a unique introduction to the creator of hundred year-old stories, in *Lake District* life with talking animals. You believe *Beatrix Potter* would have been a keen sleuth and enjoy the variety of 1900s mysteries. Volume three, *"The Tale Of Cuckoo Brow Wood"* was magical and is my favourite. I gave it five stars. It was a dismaying drop that I found *"The Tale Of Hawthorn House"* terrible and could grant it no better than two. Writing habits emerged in volume three, like extensively reiterating the history of every character, which grew irritating from novel to novel. These and other faux-pas have persisted but creative, exciting subject matter compel me to rank this one higher. The consistency of my enjoyment would seem akin to my attempts at bowling!

"The Tale Of Briar Bank" opens with *Beatrix's* parents objecting to her sojourn. Accompanying her from London is a fresh angle, as is overdue defiance upon leaving. I liked this story at once. However **Susan** soon indulged in breaking narration, to directly explain to readers why an adult doesn't live where she pleases in that era. If that didn't halt the story, I kid not that page 17 is entitled: *"A long chapter in which we meet the villagers!"* It goes for 19 pages, with residents having as little to do with the crux as ever. The sole reaction I managed was: *"Well! The author realizes she rehashes and admits it!"*

The stories within are excellent. We meet a household and dog 'Pickles', distressed by his man's puzzling death. We explore a new badger set and relative, who recounts a frightening chase. The most enthralling attribute of all, is the unusual emergence of dragons!

Bridget R. Wilson says

There's a dragon in this book!

Mary says

Pure escapism. I needed this to distract me from my disgust with the gullible, media-spun, lotus eating individuals who voted for the Obama-Biden ticket in this presidential election. If the shoe fits.....

Grace says

I love all the books in this series, but the writing style has changed a bit over the course of the last few books.

There is far more commentary from the author (as in "Let me tell you, dear reader..."). This is a nice touch that harkens back to early 20th century literature (the time period of the story), but I think it's overdone. This book also launched into full fantasy mode, rather than cozy mystery with a fairy-tale feel. While I love fantasy in general, I found the fantastical elements to be a bit far-fetched for the world as it has been established in the past few books. Still, an entertaining read.

Caralyn says

Although I'm all for talking animals, the introduction of a dragon in this installment of the Cottage Tales was a bit much, even for me. Still, it was a fun read. I especially enjoyed the scene during which Miss Potter cleverly convinces the old matriarch of the village to do the right thing:

"But Beatrix felt very strongly that she had right on her side--or rather, on the side of Mr. Sutton. So she began by saying that the village might be at risk of losing its veterinarian (without saying why), and related Dimity Kittredge's idea--that is, the idea that Beatrix herself had encouraged Dimity to form. While her ladyship was digesting this, Beatrix added in an offhand way that Major Kittredge and Captain Woodcock had both paid their bills in full and had conveyed their hopes that the Suttons would continue to live and work in Sawrey, thereby setting an example for others. The Longfords and the Kittredges, the two major landowners in the district, had always been competitive, and Beatrix knew full well that Lady Longford always hated it when Major Kittredge made some sort of generous gesture, for she felt obliged to top it." (p.228)
