



An Impartial Witness

Charles Todd

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To great critical acclaim, author Charles Todd introduced protagonist Bess Crawford in *A Duty to the Dead*. The dedicated World War I nurse returns in *An Impartial Witness*, and finds herself in grave peril when a moral obligation makes her the inadvertent target of a killer. As hauntingly evocative as Todd's award-winning, *New York Times* bestselling Ian Rutledge novels, *An Impartial Witness* transports readers to a dark time of war and involves us in murder, intrigue, and the fascinating affairs of a truly unforgettable cast of characters.

An Impartial Witness Details

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Author : Charles Todd

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Jonathan says

I've been on a historical-ish kick for the past few weeks and every non-historical book hasn't clicked the best with me. But now, I feel as if I can go back to contemporary books! This book was a very good sophomore in what seems to be an excellent series.

I loved the MC, Bess, she was everything I look for in a MC. I also liked that the author(s) featured more of Simon in this book. He's extremely mysterious and I'd love to learn more about him! Her parents were also wonderful. They gave her so much liberty for the timeperiod she was in; it was refreshing.

The mystery was excellent. I absolutely did not see that ending coming and the killer simply blew me away. The only real problem I had with this book was the fact that it was in a different (for the most part) setting and featured an almost entirely new cast of characters from the first book. I typically don't like that in books, however the authors managed to pull it off here.

Overall a very solid, exciting book. I will most certainly be reading the next one!

Shorty says

Very well done. Rosalyn Landor narrated beautifully. The perfect stand-alone novel, in a series about a nurse, in the middle of WW1, embroiled in a murder mystery.

Vintage says

I think Bess and I are going to have to part ways. Mysteries were my first love starting with Nancy Drew then the Grande Dame of all, Agatha Christie, as well as Patricia Wentworth and more than a few American mystery writers: Elizabeth Peters, Margaret Maron, Louise Penny, Martha Grimes and the list goes on....

Unlike some contemporary fiction, with a mystery you have a beginning, a middle and an end as well as a resolution where justice is served. With Bess and her benign tolerance for victims and evil-doers alike I am missing the necessary outrage that murder is wrong, that the bad guy or bad guys will get their comeuppance. Even gentle Miss Marple wanted bad guys to pay.

Charles Todd's books are very well-written, and Rosalyn Landor's narration especially the women's voices is almost faultless, but there are too many unpleasant characters getting away with too much.

4 stars for writing quality, background and ambience, but 2 stars for the mystery element.

Jane says

I liked this one so much better than the first one - glad I went ahead and read it after my disappointment with the beginning of the series. With this story she sees a woman on a train platform crying and despondent while talking to a man that is not her husband. Bess knows this for she has been nursing the husband through injuries suffered in WWI. When the woman is murdered Bess does her duty and goes to the police to report what she's seen. I do find the reasons she gets involved in the investigation a little too hard to believe but allowing for that she gets involved even though the Yard doesn't want her to. She pursues her own investigation and this time her theories are more shaped by the facts and less like the first book where the facts were shaped to fit her theories. There is established in this story a connection with the Ian Rutledge series with the introduction of a character related to both characters. Good story - good writing - and like her parents and her "guardian". And what's going on with that relationship?

Chaitra says

I thought I'd met a new favorite series when I read the first book of the series and found it enjoyable. However, this one didn't quite match up. The setup is similar. Bess, a field nurse during WWI, escorts a young burn victim back to England. Said burn victim is very much in love with his wife, and he carries his wife's picture around with him like a talisman. (Also, it's strangely unburned, when we're repeatedly told he keeps it pinned somewhere in his clothing). However, when Bess gets off the train to get to her London flat, she sees the same lady crying and moaning over another soldier departing perhaps to the war. Bess feels a little bad for her patient, but doesn't make too much of it until she finds out that the lady was murdered that very day.

So, Bess goes haring off to assist the Scotland Yard in their pursuit for the murderer. I was working on a craft project while listening to the book, and in that respect, it wasn't a bad book to pass the time. But more things bothered me than it did in the first book. In the first, Bess feels such a strong feeling towards justice because she was sweet on the man who had entrusted his secret to her. And then she was forced, practically, at gun point. Here, she's actually not all that involved, she's just exceedingly nosy. And just how many days did she spend on leave? If they needed all the nurses they could get, and the British were scared of losing the war, I can't believe the number of days she spent on leave.

Bess' father is retired army. So is his sidekick. They have innumerable connections, and I actually didn't have a problem with Bess using these connections to find out more about the mysteries. But it kind of turned my stomach when I read, in this book, of Bess obtaining more leave and getting mail faster than anyone else because of whom her father and Simon knew. She also uses her car way too much, but how? What about fuel rationing? They had trouble finding stuff to eat. Wartime tightening of belts is described very nicely in the first book, and in the second it's ignored when it makes sense for the plot to ignore it. Why? The war has only progressed.

Eh. Worse still, I cared for what became of Peregrine Graham in the first book, I cared nothing at all for the self pitying Michael Hart of this book. No matter how often I'm told how exceedingly handsome he is. I can only see his stupidity. I'll still continue the series, I continue stuff that are worse. But, it's bugging to me how Bess can do so many things that don't involve nursing, when nurses were so sorely needed. It's just coming off as bratty.

Maureen E says

I started Maisie Dobbs, but the library I'm at the most doesn't have the second book. I remembered that Jess had recommended the Bess Crawford books recently, so I picked up the first one.

In general, I like historical mysteries, so these two had that going for them from the beginning. Also, I've been a bit passionate about WWI since high school, when we read the war poets.

The Bess Crawford books, so far, take place during the war rather than after it (as with Maisie Dobbs). This fact adds a sense of tension. In traditional mysteries, the detective saves one or more innocent suspects from wrongful accusation. Here, Bess might save them, but if they're in the Army, they'll be going back to France. There are no guarantees that anyone will survive. There are no guarantees that witnesses will still be alive when they're called on to give their testimony.

Although I want to evaluate each series on its own merits, it's almost impossible not to compare them. So far, I think I'm liking Bess a bit more. (I'm reading *Birds of a Feather*, the second Maisie Dobbs book, right now.) I'm finding that Bess's world makes more sense to me. I want to like Maisie, and I do like her character (spunky girl detective), but some of the details I have a hard time accepting. Bess is also interesting in that she doesn't set herself up to be a detective. This may mean that eventually I get annoyed with the way mysteries just fall into her lap, but for now I find it a bit refreshing.

This isn't to say that the series is without its confusing points. For instance, everyone seems to be going back and forth to France *all the time*. Now, this may actually be completely historically accurate (when I think about it, it seems quite likely), but an author's note or some other way of pointing to the historical record would ease my mind.

I'm also completely confused about Simon Brandon and his role. He's the Colonel's former batman and he's not in love with Bess's mother. That seems to be all we definitely know, besides the fact that he's clearly a major part of the Crawford household. So...is he in love with the Colonel? If so, the hint is WAY too subtle for me. Or is he meant to be a bit in love with Bess? A moment at the end of *Impartial Witness* kind of hints at that, but again, the hints are way too subtle. Hopefully this will get cleared up in future books.

Finally, I read the second book late at night and I was tired, so this may account for it to some extent, but I found that Bess's involvement and detection was so much less personal than in the first book. This makes sense, but at the same time, it lowered the stakes a bit and made it a tad less engaging.

All in all, though, these two books are excellent examples of historical mysteries, with the added suspense of the wartime setting (they remind me a bit of "Foyle's War" in that way).

Book source: public library

Book information: William Morrow (AHAHAHAHAHA)*, 2009 and 2010; adult historical mystery

* If you're confused.

Linda says

I like this series, review lost in Shelfari Import

Mairita (Marii gr?matplaukts) says

Emocion?li ievalkoši. Šoreiz bija gr?t?k uzmin?t potenci?los vain?gos. Ar steigu j?mekl? turpin?jums.

Lauren says

An Impartial Witness

3.5 Stars

Combat nurse Bess Crawford accompanies a convoy of wounded men home to England. While passing through a train station on her return to the front, she observes a young woman bidding a tearful farewell to a soldier and recognizes her as the wife of one of her patients. When the woman is later found murdered, Bess feels compelled to contact Scotland Yard and finds herself drawn into a convoluted case that may just end in the execution of an innocent man.

Although the pacing is slower than the first book and the villain is a little too obvious, the story is satisfying overall and the WWI setting is wonderful.

Bess is an amateur sleuth with a penchant for asking meddlesome questions and being an all-round busybody (reminiscent of Agatha Christie's Miss Marple). One cannot help but identify with her need to seek justice for those who cannot do so themselves. That said, there are moments in which she could be more modern and forthright in her reactions to people as there are certainly characters in this book who could do with a good slap!

The mystery isn't the strongest and the culprit and motive are easily determined once the facts of the case begin piling up. Nevertheless, Todd is very successful at capturing the social nuances of the times in terms of the small town hypocrisy and tendency toward jumping to conclusions as well as the condescending attitudes toward women.

Rosalyn Landor is a talented narrator and she does an excellent job with both the male and female characters. I look forward to listening to Bess's next adventure in sleuthing.

Magdalena aka A Bookaholic Swede says

An Impartial Witness is the sequel to *A duty to the Dead* and I was eager to read this book since this series has become a favorite of mine.

It's the early summer of 1917 and Bess Crawford is returning home from the trenches of France with a convoy of wounded men. One of the patients is Lt. Meriwether Evanson, a pilot who has been burned beyond

recognition and he clings to life much thanks to his wife Marjorie whose picture he has pinned to his tunic. But Bess notices a woman on a London train station that is bidding farewell to an officer and she recognizes the woman. It's the pilot's wife. But the man isn't her husband. She then discovers back on duty in France that the woman has been murdered and Scotland Yard is asking for information from anyone that saw her that day.

Bess informs the police about what she knows, but it's not enough information since she can describe the man the woman was with, but she doesn't know who he is and soon she starts her own inquiry to learn who killed Marjorie. But it's a frustrating case, and it seems that the killer may be getting away with murder and send an innocent man to the gallows.

I felt that this book was not as engrossing to read as the first book was, but it was still very good, but there were moments in the book when I felt that the pacing was a bit slow and I wanted the story to progress a little bit faster. Not that the story was bad, I mean there were several people in the book that could have been the murderer and it wasn't like I guessed right away who it was. I found the story picked up speed towards the end when a man that Bess had befriended was accused of murder and she had to fight to clear his name. Then, the story got more intense and I loved the ending.

I like Bess Crawford very much, she is a well-written character and I like the fact that even though everyone in the book seems to think that she has more than friendly feelings towards the accused man she is trying to save is she just his friend. Not that I wouldn't mind her finding some happiness (I have read *A Pattern of Lies*, the perfect man is out there for her she just has to see it), but she isn't a woman that is easily swept off her feet. And, that is something I like.

Thankfully the book had a strong beginning and ending and, despite me feeling that the story dragged here and there in the middle was it a good book and I wasn't sure in the end it would end happily.

Nell says

I'm having a little trouble with the conceit of this series. A young woman goes around asking questions that are none of her business of people, who are sometimes hostile to the investigation, who answer those questions even against their own interests. I don't recall that other mystery series I read centered around amateur sleuths have protagonists who are quite this confrontational. And it seems odd to me that in World War I, when supplies, especially petrol, would have been in short supply, that Bess Crawford can go harrying around the country in her motorcar seemingly without a second thought. And that her parents and her father's retainer, I guess one would call him, disapprove and tut-tut but end up going along with whatever Bess wants, and if danger threatens, Simon will just lurk about and be prepared to swoop in to save the day. (I'm predicting that he will end up as the love interest, eventually.) And that she can barge into Scotland Yard at all hours and buttonhole an inspector to listen to the results of her information-gathering and her theories. It just doesn't seem credible, no matter how smart Bess is and even if she's right.

So far (which is a few chapters into the second book), I like this author's Ian Rutledge series much more.

Susanna - Censored by GoodReads says

Actually about a 3.5.

Sarah says

I really wanted to like this series but am giving up after only 2 books. It is not easy to put a finger on it, but there's definitely an ingredient missing.

The 2 stories I've read so far are rather formulaic but, most of all, I think my lassitude is because the characters are so flat. A heroine driven solely by a sense of duty, and becoming involved in murder investigations that have nothing to do with her (or only a very vague, contrived connection) is one thing. Quite another is the historical setting; a WVS nurse in WWI, serving in field hospitals just behind the front lines, would most certainly have neither the time nor the opportunity to solve crimes in England. I can't, therefore, understand how the authors could cook up such an unbelievable context.

Bess Crawford comes across as a nosy, bossy, whimsical busybody. Not at all endearing.

But perhaps that missing ingredient was the authors' lack of sociohistorical research. Take your pick!

LJ says

First Sentence: As my train pulled into London, I looked out at the early summer rain and was glad to see the dreary day had followed me from Hampshire.

WWI battlefield nurse Bess Crawford cared for a badly burned young pilot who had a picture of his wife visibly displayed. In a train station traveling on leave back to London, Bess happens to see the wife who is clearly upset as she sees off a different soldier. Although somewhat perplexed by the scene, it is nothing to the shock Bess feels when a drawing of the woman appears in the next day's paper with Scotland Yard asking whether someone can identify her. Bess learns the woman had been murdered and shortly after, the burned husband commits suicide. Bess feels it is her responsible to find out what had happened.

This is the 2nd book in this new series by the Todd's and I much preferred it to the first book.

Their voice for Bess is much better and she's a stronger character. The sense of chaos and fatigue from being in combat is well conveyed, but with a sense of detachment I feel one would acquire after time. The contrast between the battlefield and being in London, particularly attending the house party, is very effective. I like that Bess doesn't jump to conclusions but gathers the evidence bit-by-bit and over time.

The plot was well constructed and the reason for Bess being involved was justifiable. Although I understood Beth's distance from the events, it did all feel a bit too distant as a reader; I was never emotionally connected to the story.

While I never considered not finishing the book, for me it wasn't a gripping straight-through read either. That said, Todd is an excellent writer and I always look forward to the next book.

AN IMPARTIAL WITNESS (Ama Sleu-Bess Crawford-England/France-1917/WWI) – G+

Todd, Charles – 2nd in series
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Nikki says

I've been reading a fair amount about World War I in the past several months, everything from All Quiet on the Western Front to John Keegan's The First World War (which I'm finding slow going and haven't finished yet). I've also watched some films such as A Farewell to Arms (with Gary Cooper and Helen Hayes) and Passchendaele, and of course I've continued to read some of the mysteries set in WWI and its aftermath, by authors such as Jacqueline Winspear, Carola Dunn, Anne Perry, and not least, the mother-son team known as Charles Todd. I've continued to read their Inspector Rutledge series although I'm getting a bit tired of Hamish; but I find myself really looking forward to the next entry in their new Bess Crawford series. Bess, a Colonel's daughter, is a nurse in France for the British Army. Since one of the few World War I veterans I've knowingly met served as a nurse, Bess's war experiences have a special resonance for me. The Todds have made her strong character believable through their descriptions of her childhood and her family, and they also do well in describing the changes wrought by war in England.

I won't attempt to encapsulate the plot, which has a lot of twists and turns. I would recommend this mystery to anyone who likes historical mysteries with strong female protagonists, and who enjoys characters with some depth.
