



Lost Under a Ladder

Linda O. Johnston

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Is it Luck? Or is it Destiny?

Rory Chasen never thought superstitions were real-until her beloved fiance is killed after walking under a ladder. To find closure and the truth about superstitions, Rory takes her dog Pluckie to a town called Destiny, where superstitious beliefs are a way of life.

Rory's visit to Destiny takes an unexpected turn when Pluckie saves Martha, the owner of the Lucky Dog Boutique. While Martha recovers, Rory reluctantly agrees to manage the pet shop for her. But when Martha becomes the prime suspect in the local bookshop owner's murder, Rory can't believe that the sweet old woman would do it. Convinced the real killer is still roaming Destiny's streets, Rory resolves to crack the case before Martha's luck runs out.

Praise:

"Doggone cute."-LIBRARY JOURNAL"

Lost Under a Ladder Details

Date : Published October 8th 2014 by Midnight Ink (first published October 1st 2014)

ISBN : 9780738740775

Author : Linda O. Johnston

Format : Paperback 321 pages

Genre : Mystery, Cozy Mystery, Fiction

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From Reader Review Lost Under a Ladder for online ebook

Jamie says

I had hope for this first book. A concept of I have not yet come across. A Superstition Mystery. First I have to say that it moved very slowly for me. I don't understand how you could put someone in charge of your lively hood that you had never met before due to the fact she had a black/white dog. Strange dogs were lucky. It was funny that she also just so happened to be an assistant manager of a MegaPet store to boot!!! It made no sense that an employer would allow an employee to have extended/indefinite vacation to run another pet store due to superstition that if they didn't it would cause them bad luck? Really? That's what's great about fiction!! It can be unbelievable and nothing like real life.

Dawn Frazier says

Am I superstitious? I don't think so, but this was a fun book to read. I love the setting, and the names of the stores were great. The story takes us to Destiny, CA, a town based on superstitions. Rory arrives there with her dog, Pluckie, to try to find out if a superstition killed her fiance. She ends up staying longer than anticipated, to help out in a pet store, then gets involved in trying to solve a murder. I enjoyed the book, and liked that there was a touch of romance also. Will be curious to see what happens next.

Bonnie Schroeder says

An entertaining confection about a town ruled—or at least seriously influenced by—superstition. Rory Chasen, the resourceful protagonist, brings her dog Pluckie along on a visit to the town of Destiny to learn the truth about a particular superstition that may or may not have caused the death of her fiancé. Not long after her arrival, she has the bad luck to discover the body of a murdered bookstore owner, a man who had begun to question the power of superstitions—despite having written the definitive book on Destiny and superstitions. When a woman Rory has befriended becomes a suspect in the murder investigation, Rory gets drawn into the mystery in hopes of clearing her friend's name, but she unwittingly places her own life—and Pluckie's—in jeopardy when she starts asking questions.

There are lots of interesting superstitions scattered through the book: not just your routine black cat crossing your path or bad luck for breaking a mirror. There are cautions about buttons and pennies and all sorts of bizarre notions.

Rory is a likable heroine, and so is Pluckie, and the rest of the cast is well drawn as well. The story moves at a nice, suspenseful clip, and the ending may surprise most readers. The clues were there, but cleverly hidden, so one doesn't feel the least bit cheated by the dénouement.

Yvonne says

What an unusual premise for a cozy...a whole town based on superstitions. The stores are all appropriately named, such as the Lucky Dog Boutique, the Shamrock Steakhouse, Wish Upon A Star Children's Shop and the Apple A Day Diner.

When Rory Chasen's fiancé is killed after walking under a ladder, Rory decides to pay a visit to Destiny, California. It's the perfect place for her to do research on superstitions. She isn't much of a believer in these type of things, but she can't help wonder if there's something to it and if superstition could possibly be the cause of her fiancé's death. She quickly learns that life in Destiny is much different than her life in LA.

As Rory, along with her dog Pluckie, walk through town, her dog is very interested in the Lucky Dog Boutique and drags Rory into the store. Rory never expects to find the store's owner, Martha, unconscious. She calls for help and the paramedics arrive quickly. Martha wakes up, but the doctors put her on bed rest. She is in desperate need for someone to run her Lucky Dog Boutique while she recovers. Although they are strangers, she begs Rory to stay in town and help her out. Being an assistant manager at a mega pet store back home, Rory reluctantly agrees.

The action doesn't stop there. Rory pays a visit to the Broken Mirror Bookstore and discovers an author, who wrote all about Destiny's superstitions, has been murdered. It's been one thing after the other since she arrived in this quaint town, but now her boss, Martha, is being accused of the murder. Rory isn't buying it and she's intent to find out who the real killer is and discovers there's a whole town of suspects who wanted to see this author dead.

Toss in a handsome detective and you have a delightful, enchanting start of a brand new cozy mystery series. Rory is a strong character and it shows when she jumps right in to handle running the store, the two employees and Martha's nephew who wants the store for himself. Nothing scared off Rory. The only problem I did have with the story was her reason for going to Destiny. Her fiancé was killed after walking under a ladder, but investigating superstitions seemed a bit strange. However, I quickly got over that and just sat back and enjoyed the ride. It was a great ride!

The story is fast-paced and a quick read. I haven't read this author's work before, although I do want to read her Pet-Sitter Mystery series. I like the author's flair for storytelling. Her dialogue is smooth and her characters are well developed. I'm looking forward to reading more in this series and catching up with the Pet-Sitter mysteries too.

FTC Disclosure: The author provided me with a copy of this book to review for this blog tour. This did not influence my thoughts and opinions in any way. All opinions expressed are my own.

Mary Brown says

Do you ever cross your fingers when hoping for something, or avoid stepping on cracks in the sidewalk to avoid something bad from happening? Do you avoid black cats or worry all day on Friday, the thirteenth? If you believe in superstitions, then the town of Destiny is a place you may want to visit. The whole town caters to those visitors who believe in superstitions and many shop owners earn their living from those visitors. Rory Chasen and her black and white dog, Pluckie, visit the town in hopes of learning if walking under a ladder brings bad luck. Her fiancé died only five minutes after doing such a thing.

Shortly after arriving in Destiny, Pluckie leads Rory into the storage area of the Lucky Dog Boutique. Inside this area, Rory finds the store owner, Martha, collapsed and in need of medical attention. Martha is so thankful to Rory and Pluckie, she offers Rory a managerial position at the boutique until she's able to return. As so often happens in a cozy book, there is a murder of a prominent member of the town. Martha is the number one suspect and Rory takes it upon herself to find the murderer and clear Martha's name.

The mystery of the murderer is carried out throughout the book and there are many suspects to choose from. I was not able to figure out who did the deed until it is revealed at the end of the book. For me, that's always a plus.

The characters are well developed, well rounded and likable. The small town setting is well described and it was easy for me to picture myself there watching all the happenings. Many superstitions are described, some of which were new to me. After a while I got a little bored reading about all the superstition references. It seemed to become repetitive and overtook the book. I realize that superstitions are the theme of the book, but in my opinion it became a little much.

I would recommend this book to anyone who enjoys cozy mysteries and those who enjoy books where animals are a big part of the story. I have read other books by Linda O. Johnston and I've enjoyed them all. *Lost Under A Ladder* was no exception. I did enjoy reading this book and think you will too.

Katreader says

Lost Under a Ladder by Linda O. Johnston
The First Superstition Mystery

Destiny, California is a town ruled by superstition. Residents who may not believe still must realize that superstitions are the bread and butter of the town and need to be respected.

In *Lost Under a Ladder* Linda O. Johnston introduces us to a new heroine in Rory Chasen. Perhaps not as strong as Kendra Ballantine or as determined as Lauren Vancouver, Rory is nonetheless out to find answers. First, was it superstition that killed her fiancé, and then who killed Tarzal? Accompanied by her live good luck charm Pluckie (black and white dogs are good luck) Rory explores Destiny and starts to uncover the secrets it holds.

Linda O. Johnston has certain trademark touches to her books—dogs and a touch of romance. I'm happy to say that both of these can be found in her new Superstition mystery series. Although animals aren't quite the focus in this series, they do play a prominent role. Pluckie, after all, is the one who finds Martha and leads Rory to the murder victim. And Rory herself is the manager of a large LA pet store and now helps Martha at the Lucky Dog Boutique, Destiny's pet store.

Although still grieving the untimely loss of her fiancé, Rory can't help but feel sparks from Justin Halbertson, the small town's Chief of Police. Will their relationship develop? Only time and future books will tell.

I enjoyed the information about superstitions weaved throughout the story. In addition to the common

superstitions-crossing under a ladder is bad luck-there were some unique ones as well. I know that breaking a mirror will bring 7 years of bad luck, but I didn't know that touching a \$5 bill immediately after breaking a mirror nullifies the bad luck!

Lost Under a Ladder is a great start to a new series featuring characters you can care about in a place you want to visit. I look forward to learning about more superstitions and the people who may or may not believe in them.

Renjay says

OK, usually I'm a fan of "cozy mysteries" and I actually have a book about superstitions but this storyline was quite odd.

Aurora "Rory" Chasen had a fiance Warren who walked under a ladder and then died a few days later apparently demonstrating that it really is bad luck to walk under a ladder. To deal with Warren's death and find answers as to whether superstitions are real she decides with the encouragement of her BFF Gemma, to spend a few nights in a town called Destiny, where superstitions reign from nearly every business having a superstition inspired name, to cops wearing lucky charms, to locals believing every superstition as gospel. Right...

The day she arrives in Destiny Rory's dog Pluckie senses trouble in the Lucky Dog Boutique Pet Store. Rory finds pet store owner Martha on the floor ill, so Rory calls 911 and a "just-so-happens" cliché good looking cop Justin arrives (which as readers can guess this will start a "will they/won't they get together" storyline). Martha views Rory's actions and Pluckie as "good luck" and after finding out Rory "just happens" to manage a pet store back in LA asks if Rory will take over the running of the pet store while she recovers.

As Rory ums and aahs over what to do, the following day at Broken Mirror Bookstore, one of the bookshop owners Tarzal is found murdered and it "just-so-happens" that Rory and Pluckie discover his body. Martha becomes the prime suspect, as she was heard arguing with Trazal and business partner Preston as they had tried to get her to sell her shop to them. Rory doesn't believe this kind old lady who has offered her a job could be guilty and so the rest of story is her trying to solve the mystery much to the annoyance of Justin. Now I know this is a work of fiction but there are many things that make no sense or have no explanation by the author:

- 1) How can so many "just-so-happens" incidents happen within two days of arriving in a unknown town?
- 2) Who in their right mind would not just offer a job to a complete stranger, but ask them to manage the whole business with no checking of references or potential criminal background?! Even Rory comments it's odd they trust her considering she's a stranger
- 3) Rory rings her boss in LA to ask if it's ok if she stays in Destiny and manages the pet store for a bit. Her boss "just-happens" to not only approve the idea but tell Rory she's welcome to have her job back anytime. Come on! Any sensible business owner would do one or the other: either come back to the job or leave so they can hire someone else!
- 4) Rory initially plans to stay only 2 or 3 nights but ends being there for a week and inquires at the B&B she's staying at if they do weekly rates. Despite only having 2 or 3 nights worth of clothes and supplies Rory happily stays on for a week, but no mention of buying extra clothes or food to cook
- 5) Although she gets free breakfast at the B&B she seems to eat out a lot. Rory comments the pay offered by Martha is "adequate". If that's the case how can Rory afford rates at the B&B, plus rent or mortgage in expensive LA (where she technically lives) as well as having meals out?!
- 5) It's pretty unprofessional for Justin to not only manipulate Rory into accepting the pet store job but to date her when she was involved in a crime investigation
- 6) Gemma the supportive BFF, only gets mentioned near the beginning of the book and despite Rory saying

she'll call Gemma to see how she is and update her, Gemma doesn't get mentioned again nor does Rory bother to get in touch

This book is an OK light hearted read, but I wouldn't highly recommend it. The eventual culprit is not shocking to the reader and the constant talk of superstitions becomes bombarding after a while. All of these gripes are why I gave it 2 stars and I wouldn't bother reading anymore books if this is to become an ongoing series.

Sara says

Another cozy mystery but this one with a unique setting - a town devoted to superstitions and a heroine who is bound and determined to find out if superstitions are the driving force in life and the reason for every occurrence.

Now you are either going to run away from this premise or just go with the flow and enjoy the story for the novelty it presents in a sea of cozy mysteries.

I thought it was well written and a great start to a new series and I applaud the author for taking an imaginative leap and leading the reader on a new kind of adventure.

OpenBookSociety.com says

<http://openbooksociety.com/article/lo...>

Brought to you by OBS Reviewer Daniele

Lost Under a Ladder begins with Rory Chasen seeking answers and closure after her fiancé dies shortly after he walks under a ladder. Are superstitions for real? She plans to take a few days off from her job as an assistant manager of a chain pet store to go to the small town of Destiny, a place engrossed in superstitions. Every store, restaurant, inn, and street name have superstitious monikers; all of the residents are superstitious (even if for some only for appearances sake). On her way to see the bookstore owner touted as a superstition expert, her dog, Pluckie, tugs her into the local pet shop, and there she finds the proprietor ill in the back room. Pluckie is instantly deemed a hero and good luck charm, and Martha, the shop owner, is so grateful that she begs Rory to step in as manager of her shop while she recovers. This is a pretty farfetched scenario, no? Maybe...or it could just be attributed to the power of luck. Rory agrees to stay indefinitely after the bookstore owner is found murdered and Martha is proclaimed the prime suspect. Rory seeks to clear Martha's name, and she is still on the fence about the validity of superstitions. She is befriended by the local chief of police, Justin, and they work together and separately to solve the crime.

Lost Under a Ladder is the first book in a new series, and it is a light, breezy, quick read cut in the standard cozy mystery mold. It is somewhat predictable but provides a nice foundation for quirky characters and unusual causes of death, all related to superstitions, for future installments. The characters are stereotypically drawn but are not unlikeable and have the potential to grow into something much meatier. There is potential fun to be had here.

I do appreciate the inclusion of Pluckie as central to the plot without giving her supernatural powers or the

ability to talk, etc. She was just a sweet, smart dog. There did seem to be unnecessary reference to a lot of trips outside to do her business though. I do wish the author had incorporated explanations, and maybe a bit of history, of the superstitions. I would have found that interesting, and I am sure that not all readers are familiar with all of the superstitions mentioned in the book. Also, Justin seemed way too tolerant of Rory baiting the killer. I also feel like Rory did not find the answers she was seeking and thus it felt somewhat dangling. But these are minor complaints. SPOILER ALERT: I am usually good at guessing whodunit long before the conclusion of the book but not here. I think that is because I flat out dismissed him as far too obvious a choice and his motive too banal.

I enjoyed *Lost Under a Ladder* and look forward to future installments in the series. I recommend this to dog lovers and those interested in all things superstitious.

OBS would like to thank the publisher for supplying a free copy of this title in exchange for an honest review

Brought to you by OBS Reviewer Andra

<http://openbooksociety.com/article/lo...>

LORI CASWELL says

Dollycas's Thoughts

I admit it, I am a bit superstitious. Cross my fingers, knock on wood, and I would never walk under a ladder.

The town of Destiny, California is all about superstitions with the Broken Mirror Bookstore, Wish Upon A Star Children's Shop, Lucky Dog Boutique and more but the town still has it's share of skeptics. Police chief Justin Halbertson calls himself a superstition "agnostic" but don't let his boss the mayor hear that. The mayor, Bevin Dermot, represents his town and all the superstitious beliefs to the hilt, even dressing in clothes that make him look very leprechaun-ish.

Rory Chasen and her dog Pluckie have come to town to get some answers so that she can get her life back on track but from the start her trip doesn't go as planned. She meets Martha and because of the "good luck" that a black and white dog brings they become fast friends. Rory has a big heart and finds she can't say no to Martha's request.

The premise of this story seems pretty unique. I had never heard of a town like Destiny and never had heard that black and white dogs are good luck. I have a black and white dog that I love but I don't think she has ever given us good luck for a business meeting or in any other way but she is great to cuddle with while I read or keep my feet warm as I type.

We meet some very interesting characters, like the bookshop owners, the one who died had written a type of guidebook to superstitions. The mayor is a bit quirky too but most of the other characters seem pretty down to earth. I do realize this is just the first book in the series so there is still much to learn about the residents of

Destiny and its visitors.

I enjoyed that most of the businesses in town including the eateries allow dogs. In fact most of the restaurants had patio areas perfect for pets. After reading other series by this author I know how important pets are to her so I knew Pluckie would play a major role in this story. Like all mysteries there is the last good twist that gives us readers that “aha moment”.

Linda O. Johnston is off to a good start with this series. I am looking forward to a return trip to Destiny to see what Rory and Pluckie are up to next.

Kim Reads (Read Your Writes Book Reviews) says

Reviewed for Read Your Writes Book Reviews
by Gemini

Lost Under A Ladder had all of the makings of a good cozy mystery. Rory Chasen is trying to understand the validity of superstitions after her fiancé is killed after he walks under a ladder. She goes to a town called Destiny, California to talk to the country's foremost expert on superstitions who is part owner of a bookstore. Destiny is a town rooted in superstitions. It was supposedly founded during the California Gold Rush and was at the end of a rainbow. The mayor even dresses like a leprechaun although I'm not sure that's intentional although all of the townspeople seem to buy into all of the superstitions that exist.

After Rory's dog, Pluckie leads her to rescue the distressed owner of the Lucky Dog Boutique, Pluckie then leads her to the dead body of the one person in town that she came to see. Rory and her “lucky dog” get wrapped up in trying to find the real killer while Rory attempts to embrace the town and all of the superstitions that it's residents have to offer. This information may have been of interest to me as a reader if the book itself wasn't so detailed about everything, and I do mean everything. We always know what Rory is wearing, exactly what she feeds her dog, and every time that her dog takes a squat to use the bathroom. I could not have been more bored in reading this book. I took me more time to read this book than any other book that I have read this year. If I hadn't committed to reading it, I would have cast it aside when I was 20% in.

The last 15% of this book was the best part of the book. If it had been told in reverse, I may have been more interested. I literally have not given you the name of any of the other characters in the book because I just don't care about them. I didn't care if the murder was solved or not. I just wanted to get the book over with.

****Received a copy from Midnight Ink Books in exchange for an honest unbiased review.****

Debbie says

This is a tough one to rate. I probably would actually give it a 3 1/2 star. My problems with this book is that Rory comes to Destiny in search for answers to if superstitions are real because her fiancé was killed after walking under a ladder. I found that hard to believe anyone would research that, but okay, it's different. Then

she professes that she doesn't believe in superstitions but doesn't step on cracks, crosses her fingers, wishes on stars...ah, yes you are superstitious and if it was just admitted then I would have found it more believable. Superstitions are mentioned, a lot, but nothing is ever explained about origins, I think that would have helped. Now what I did like about this book is I loved the characters, unique and fun. The town's shops being based on superstitions sounded fun and I hope that we get to visit a few in upcoming books. The mystery was good, there was one event that I thought was a bit ridiculous but I can't explain without spoiling, actually I found it amusing (I don't think that I was supposed to). I like Martha and Rory's helpers at the shop, love Justin, and I hope that Carolyn becomes a larger part. I will continue on with this series, I think it has the makings of a good series it just needs a couple of things reeled in a little, but that is my opinion.

Carla Johnson-Hicks says

I have never really thought of myself as being superstitious, but as I read this book I realized all the superstitions I really participate in during my days. I always pick up pennies, try not to step on cracks or walk under ladders, I wish upon stars, cross my fingers and more. What an interesting idea for a cozy mystery series. Destiny California, a town that was founded on a superstition, Gold at the end of a Rainbow, and continues to prosper on the theme. The stores are all appropriately named, such as the Lucky Dog Boutique, the Shamrock Steakhouse, Wish Upon A Star Children's Shop and more. The other great thing is that this is a pet-centered town. Pets are allowed in pretty much any store and even in restaurants and cafes, at least on the patios.

When Rory Chasen's fiancée is killed shortly after walking under a ladder, Rory decides find out more about superstitions. After reading a book about superstitions, she decides to pay a visit to Destiny, California where the author lives and owns a bookstore. She doesn't really believe in these type of things, but she can't help wonder if there's something to it and if superstition could possibly be the cause of her fiancée's death. She quickly learns that life in Destiny is much different than her life in LA and she enjoys it.

Shortly after arriving in Destiny, Rory and her dog Pluckie stumble upon an older woman who appears to have had a heart attack or something and they call 911. As it turns out, Martha owns the Lucky Dog Boutique and needs someone to run it during her illness. As one of the superstitions that Martha believes in is that Pluckie, being black and white is lucky, and that Rory actually was the assistant manager of a large Pet store in LA, she is able to convince Rory to help her out as long as she stays in Destiny.

This sets the stage for this interesting mystery. Of course there is a murder and Martha surprisingly, is a suspect. Rory decides to help convince the police and others that Martha could not possibly be guilty. There are a lot of superstitions explained in the book and many of them are fun, if not new ones to me. There is a love interest in the story, the Sheriff, but I like how they are slowly becoming friends, especially due to the fact that Rory's fiancée died not that long ago. The characters in the town are interesting and all share various beliefs about superstitions. Because this is the first book in the series we meet many of the townspeople, but do not get to know them in depth. I am sure we will meet them again in further books and develop a friendship with them. Rory is a strong character and it shows when she jumps right in to handle running the store, the two employees and Martha's nephew who wants the store for himself. Nothing scared off Rory, not even the pet-napping of her dear Pluckie.

The story is fast-paced and a relatively quick read. I like the author's skill at storytelling. I'm looking forward to reading more in this series. I would recommend this book to cozy mystery lovers, pet lovers and those interested in superstitions.

Randee Baty says

I'm a huge fan of cozy mysteries but wow, this was just a complete miss for me. I'm still not sure if it was meant to be making fun of the genre or it really was just a really bad story.

Rory, a manager in a mega-petstore, comes to the town of Destiny to find out whether the superstition about bad luck from walking under ladders is true. Her boyfriend had walked under one and died shortly after. Yes, that is the premise. These type of mysteries are known for not having the deepest plots in literature but really? Whether or not you get bad luck from walking under a ladder is the premise? The town of Destiny makes it's living off being the superstition capital of the world. The tourist trade in people interested in superstitions is how all the town makes it's money. Every business in town centers around one superstition or another and if you are sick of the word "superstition" by now, you'll be pulling your hair out by the end of the book because it's used in almost every other sentence.

When Rory gets there she takes her dog Pluckie (the word "Pluckie" is another word that will have driven you out of your gourd by the end of the book) to a pet store which is full of, not surprisingly, superstition-based pet items. I bet you didn't know those existed. I sure didn't but I do now. But I digress. Rory and Pluckie find the owner of the store on the floor in the back room in some type of health emergency so they call an ambulance to get her to the hospital. From this point on, having done what any normal human would do, Rory and Pluckie are announced to be the luckiest things that ever walked the earth.

So now the owner of this pet store is in the hospital and asks Rory, a person she doesn't know from Adam, to manage her store for her while she's incapacitated. The next day there's a murder, Rory and Pluckie discover it, she does everything the police tell her not to, spends a lot of time mad at people when they've done nothing wrong, and discovers that pets are welcome everywhere in Destiny, even restaurants. Nothing about the plot makes sense to me. Why would you ask someone you've known 12 hours to take over your business, your sole livelihood? Why does everyone allow this absolute stranger to come into their town and act so arrogantly to them? Why does the public school system of Destiny teach superstition in their curriculum? These are the bigger mysteries to me than who killed whom. I seriously considered throwing my Kindle across the room several times and I love my Kindle. This story did not require suspension of disbelief. It required taking your brain out and leaving it on the table.

I received this book through Netgalley in return for an honest review.

Lark of The Bookwyrms' Hoard says

Review originally published at The Bookwyrms' Hoard.

Lost Under a Ladder mingles mystery and superstition in the fictional town of Destiny, California. Superstitions fuel Destiny's tourism economy: the shops, eateries, and B&Bs are named for various superstitions, and the town's businesses cater to – and encourage – tourists to believe. And of course, to spend their money. Some townspeople are true believers, while others just go along because it brings in money.

Enter Rory Chasen. Still grieving after her fiancé walked under a ladder and was immediately hit by a car, Rory comes to Destiny determined to figure out whether superstitions are real. She is, in a sense, both an agnostic and a seeker. At one moment she seems to want to believe, and in the next breath to want to dismiss it.

Almost immediately, Rory stumbles over two bodies in quick succession – one still alive, the victim of a heart attack, but the other murdered. Asked by Martha, the heart attack victim, to stay on and run her pet shop (not as coincidental as it sounds, since running a pet store is in fact Rory's job), Rory finds herself both managing the store and trying to clear her would-be employer from suspicion of murder. . . and deal with her own attraction to the handsome chief of police.

Both superstition and pets, particularly dogs, play a huge role in the book. I really loved Rory's dog Pluckie, who goes almost everywhere with her. Pluckie lives up to her name; she's a plucky dog with a sweet disposition and a sixth sense for people in trouble. It's Pluckie who alerts Rory to both Martha's illness and the murder victim's body, which helped make the coincidence easier to swallow. I also like Justin Halbertson, the police chief. He's attractive and nice, but flawed enough to be human. Some of the other secondary characters, like the two shop assistants, the button-store proprietor, and the bookstore proprietors, are also interesting but not as well fleshed-out.

Rory herself is harder to figure out. She's certainly likeable, and she's fairly sensible in her investigations – always a plus in my eyes.. She adores Pluckie, and the feeling is mutual. She's still grieving her fiancé's death but showing the first faint signs of being ready to move on (and the police chief's charms definitely play a part in that!) Even though she is trying to help clear Martha, Rory doesn't impede the police investigation: she doesn't go around spying on people, carrying out illegal or dangerous searches, or any of the other unbelievable (and stupid) behaviors that should get cozy mystery heroines arrested but rarely do. TSTL heroines are one of my pet peeves, so Rory's sensibility is a big plus in my eyes — though she isn't entirely sensible all the time, which might get boring.

A couple of things bothered me, though. Rory is supposed to be in her thirties, but she comes across as older, or at least old-fashioned, not only in her narrative voice (the mystery is told in first person) but to some extent in her attitudes — and in her relative lack of dependence on technology. She has a cell phone, but not apparently a smartphone, a tablet, or even an e-reader or iPod, though she is competent with the store's computer and the Internet. She doesn't seem particularly connected to popular culture, either; there were few enough references to contemporary music, authors, television shows, or movies that their absence was noticeable. It all makes it hard for me to believe in her as a thirtysomething. I even wondered once or twice if perhaps she was an older woman in an early draft of the story.

I also began to find Rory's constant obsession with superstitions a bit overdone. The story's overall premise is intriguing, and aspects of the town and the townspeople ring very true, both regarding their personal beliefs or doubts and their cheerful marketing of superstitions to the tourists who flock to the town. But Rory's mental musings over “is it real or not, do I believe it or not”, juxtaposed with her clearly growing acceptance (knocking wood, etc.), begin to dominate both her character and the story and sometimes take the focus off the mystery.

The mystery plot itself has several things going for it. There are a number of possible suspects, none of them with motives as strong as Martha's. As an outsider, Rory is willing to consider almost anyone, even if she does reject some possibilities based on her personal feelings about them. There's not a great deal of danger or tension in the early and middle part of the book, but there are plenty of interactions to interest readers, and the tension rises sharply in the last third. Johnston does a pretty good job of keeping the suspect pool wide

open until the last minute. Unfortunately, there are few if any clues to the real murderer, making it almost impossible for Rory, the police, or the reader to figure it out based on anything but instinct. I admit, I did spot the killer pretty early on, but it was mostly educated guessing based on forty years of reading mysteries.

All in all, *Lost Under a Ladder* is an engaging light mystery, slightly flawed but entertaining, especially if you love dogs or are fascinated by superstitions.

FTC disclosure: *I received a review copy from the publisher in exchange for an honest review. All opinions are entirely my own.*
