



# The Vineyard Victims

*Ellen Crosby*

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## **The Vineyard Victims** Ellen Crosby

The death of a former presidential candidate in a fiery car crash at her Virginia vineyard has ties to a thirty year-old murder, as well as to Lucie Montgomery's own near fatal accident ten years ago, as she searches for a killer who now may be stalking her.

When Jamison Vaughn?billionaire real estate mogul, Virginia vineyard owner, and unsuccessful U.S. presidential candidate?drives his gold SUV into a stone pillar at the entrance to Montgomery Estate Vineyard, Lucie Montgomery is certain the crash was deliberate. But everyone else in Atoka, Virginia is equally sure that Jamie must have lost control of his car on a rain-slicked country road. In spite of being saddled with massive campaign debts from the recent election, Jamie is seemingly the man with the perfect life. What possible reason could he have for committing suicide . . . or was it murder?

Before long Lucie uncovers a connection between Jamie and some of his old friends?an elite group of academics?and the brutal murder thirty years ago of a brilliant PhD student. Although a handyman is on death row for the crime, Lucie soon suspects someone else is guilty. But the investigation into the two deaths throws Lucie a curve ball when someone from her own past becomes involved, forcing her to confront old demons. Now the race to solve the mystery behind the two deaths becomes intensely personal as Lucie realizes someone wants her silenced . . . for good.

## **The Vineyard Victims Details**

Date : Published November 7th 2017 by Minotaur Books

ISBN : 9781250076625

Author : Ellen Crosby

Format : Hardcover 335 pages

Genre : Mystery, Fiction, Cozy Mystery

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# From Reader Review The Vineyard Victims for online ebook

## Fiona says

I won this book in a Goodreads giveaway.

As a new reader of this series, I was really impressed by how I was brought into the world of the book. The characters and backstories (and past events seemed to come up often) were summarized and introduced in a way that didn't feel stilted and awkward. Even the pacing and mystery were good.

However, there were two things I didn't like about this book: one is the cover design (minor) but the other is Mick's motivation for killing Webb (major). I know he technically had a reason for it, but whether it was believable...no, it wasn't. However, this may be because I haven't read the previous books in the series and don't know if Mick and Lucie's relationship was covered in depth.

The end felt a little deus ex machina and while it didn't feel rushed, it didn't feel like justice was done to the thirty-something (?) years of history the Darlings shared. How did any of the other characters feel? I wasn't even convinced that Mick had a really good reason to kill. Then again, I might be expecting too much, having read some crime/thriller novels recently.

Even though the world is well-developed, this book felt like other cozy mysteries I have read where the main character may be vibrant and dynamic but the other characters all feel flat and/or remote to me.

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## Avid Series Reader says

The Vineyard Victims by Ellen Crosby is the 8th book of the Wine Country Mystery series set in contemporary Virginia. Lucie Montgomery owns her family vineyard, where she lives with her fiancée and winemaker Quinn. Her neighborhood is rolling countryside with vast family estates. Lucie has a tangled web of relationships to fellow residents in the area, many related to earlier mysteries in the series.

Ten years ago Lucie was in a horrible car crash, on winery property. She walks with a limp, a lasting reminder. To her horror, she is forced to relive the painful memories again, when Jamie Vaughn crashes his car into the exact same spot at her winery. She had little time to speak to him and try to extricate him from the wreck. Neighbor Mick Dunn pulled her away just before Jamie's car exploded into flames.

Lucie feels overwhelming guilt she couldn't save Jamie. Everyone else believes he lost control of his car. The road was wet, Jamie had been drinking. He had recently lost his bid for the US presidency. Lucie is sure the crash was intentional. She puzzles over the identity tag Jamie gave her, with a plea "tell Rick I'm sorry".

Lucie eventually learns of a crime 30 years ago, in Jamie's college days, for which a man is on death row. It explains Jamie's last words, and implies the man was wrongly imprisoned. Lucie still doesn't know who actually committed the crime. She uses all her existing connections, and makes new ones, in her investigation. Which everyone around her tries to suppress, either from fear for her safety, or from fear of their own crimes being discovered.

Recommend read the series in order, to understand the background and motivation of the main characters.

Each mystery, Lucie uncovers a family's secrets and forges alliances as she seeks truth.

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## **Nancy says**

My thanks to Netgalley and the Publisher for an opportunity to read an advanced copy of this book.

After the sixth book in this series, *The Sauvignon Secret*, Ellen Crosby took a break from her Wine Country series and I missed them. When she returned five years later with *The Champagne Conspiracy*, I was delighted but apprehensive since I was not sure if she would be able to return to her characters the way that she had left them. I was not disappointed and now with book eight, I am once again glad to return to Montgomery Estate Vineyards.

Failed presidential candidate Jamison Vaughn sails his car past Lucie on a rain slicked road outside of Montgomery Vineyards and plunges headlong into the stone pillars. Many believe that it was an accident but Lucie was there and knows that it was a deliberate act. No one wants to say the word suicide, but what would cause a man, with so much to live for, to end his life in such a brutal way.

These stone pillars have a history with Lucie, it is in this same location, ten years prior, where she was in a horrendous accident that has left her disabled and people are sure that she is confusing her accident with what she saw. No, she is sure of what she knows and being the last person to see Vaughn alive and hearing his last words, she is determined to find out whom "Rick" is and why he needs to forgive Vaughn.

Suddenly walls have gone up and the Vaughn family is shutting Lucie out. They will handle the press and since her ex-lover Mick Dunne, who has held long ties to the Vaughn's, dismisses her at every turn, Lucie with no option other than to strike out on her own to find answers. The Vaughn family is happy with their "accident" explanation and would like for this whole messy affair to go away, but it appears that Jamie was meeting with a reporter and was about to go public with a long held secret.

Trying to buy Lucie off only seems to get her in deeper and when college cover-ups are revealed, and the truth of whom "Rick" is, leaves a wake of devastation that will send a members of their small community to prison and set an innocent man free.

Ellen Crosby weaves a twisty tale that spans decades, but in the end, loyalties are tested and those that have been hiding a ghastly act have their truth revealed. I cannot say that it was obvious from the start, but by the end, there could have been only one mastermind that could hold it all together and keep Lucie from the truth.

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## **Melissa says**

This is a fun mystery series-just make sure you have a glass of wine handy while reading :). Not super intense, but it is hard to put down until you know "who done it"

"The death of a former presidential candidate in a fiery car crash at her Virginia vineyard has ties to a thirty year-old murder, as well as to Lucie Montgomery's own near fatal accident ten years ago, as she searches for a killer who now may be stalking her. When Jamison Vaughn?billionaire real estate mogul, Virginia vineyard

owner, and unsuccessful U.S. presidential candidate?drives his gold SUV into a stone pillar at the entrance to Montgomery Estate Vineyard, Lucie Montgomery is certain the crash was deliberate. But everyone else in Atoka, Virginia is equally sure that Jamie must have lost control of his car on a rain-slicked country road. In spite of being saddled with massive campaign debts from the recent election, Jamie is seemingly the man with the perfect life. What possible reason could he have for committing suicide . . . or was it murder?Before long Lucie uncovers a connection between Jamie and some of his old friends?an elite group of academics?and the brutal murder thirty years ago of a brilliant PhD student. Although a handyman is on death row for the crime, Lucie soon suspects someone else is guilty. But the investigation into the two deaths throws Lucie a curve ball when someone from her own past becomes involved, forcing her to confront old demons. Now the race to solve the mystery behind the two deaths becomes intensely personal as Lucie realizes someone wants her silenced . . . for good."

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### **Roberta says**

I picked up this book because I'm reading the books that have been nominated for the 2018 Mary Higgins Clark award. I've finished *The Widow's House* and *Uncorking a Lie*. Next up after this one will be *You'll Never Know, Dear*.

Lucie Montgomery witnesses a terrible car crash, involving a prominent local man who recently ran for president. Lucie watches him die trapped in his burning car.

But when Lucie tries to carry out the dying driver's urgent last request, she stirs up a hornets' nest of lies surrounding a 30-year-old murder. If the man who was convicted turns out to be innocent, one of all small group of Lucie's friends must be guilty.

The setting for the story is Virginia's wine country where the reader is given tidbits of information about wine, running a vineyard and winery, with a bit of horse racing and even a mention of riding to the hounds. This book stands alone pretty well but it was good enough that I may go back and look for earlier books in the series.

My usual nit picking: page 212 Quinn tells Lucie "Husbands can't testify against their wives." This seems to be a common misconception. Under the Federal Rules of Evidence, the prosecution cannot **force** the defendant's wife to testify against him. But if she wishes to testify against her husband voluntarily, she is perfectly free to do that. Since Quinn is a winemaker, not a lawyer, I should cut him some slack.

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### **Barbara VA says**

Book 8 in the Wine Country mysteries and for me so timely. The Norton story is what made this book so good for me. I remember the Horton Nortons! Flipping channels one day a few months ago I found a PBS with the Chrysallis interview about the grapes and was fascinated. Then last week we visited, for us, a new winery (it is rough living here in Virginia!), luckily it had power when we did not and was open with heat (even better it had hot mulled wine!). We were told the awesome Norton story , and I had a chance to start this book, I had been waiting for from the library for a long time!The stories are fun, but I do take these personally - vineyards, the restaurants, the small shops like Thelma's, the local history, races, and of course, the wines themselves.

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## Jonathan Shell says

\*\*\* SPOILERS INCLUDED \*\*\*

The Vineyard Victims, is the 8th installment in the Wine Country Mysteries series by Ellen Crosby featuring vineyard owner Lucie Montgomery. I do not remember how I came across the Wine Country Mystery series but I believe it probably had something to do with being from Northern Virginia. I have been to and around many of the places Crosby describes in her series and that local flavor is something which I always enjoy.

The Vineyard Victims was probably my least favorite of the books in the series although it is difficult to say exactly why. The book just seems rushed. The plot, failed presidential candidate Jamison Vaughn, Jamie to his friends is a Loudon County friend of Lucie whose SUV races past her and crashes into the Montgomery Farms front gate. Lucie has a history with that very gate in which 10 years earlier, she was a passenger in her boyfriend Greg Knight's Corvette which also slammed into that gate and caused the injury to her leg and foot which requires her to walk with a cane.

Lucie tries to pull Jamie from the car but she can't and he dies as the flames engulf the car. Jamie's last words to Lucie lead to unraveling a 30-year-old murder which was connected to a small group of friends who were at UVA together.

On the whole, the plot is enticing but I just can't stop feeling that everything came together too quickly, the antagonist was too convenient and the ancillary parts of the story were too rushed. Everything which Lucie uncovers could have just as easily been uncovered by Lucie's best friend Kit digging into the connection between Jamie and the death of Webster Landau which seemed oddly curious that the opposition research never looked into during the Presidential campaign and had Jamie actually won, would have quickly lead to his downfall.

Another warning about \*\*\* SPOILERS \*\*\*

I really did not like the antagonist turning out to be Mick Dunne. From the beginning he seemed to be the likely candidate but I did not think that Crosby would write off such a, dare I say it, central character of the series. Mick's arc has been on a downward spiral for a while but it would have seemed better to have the millionaire playboy simply pull up roots and move to somewhere more exciting than to kidnap Lucie, driver her to Elena's house and have Elena become injured in the way in which she did. If they were going that route, Mick should have just shot her at the front gate.

Does this mean I am done with the series or would I tell someone not to read The Vineyard Victims? No on both accounts. The Vineyard Victims has strong legs as a standalone work but you really shouldn't jump in at book #8 to this series and if you do that by book #8 you should have a connection to the series. Just because I feel that it is rushed doesn't mean the next one won't be better.

Ellen Crosby has set up a nice little world in Atoka and she should continue to come back to that world of Lucie's.

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## **Kristen says**

In Ellen Crosby's *The Vineyard Victims*, the 8th installment in the *Wine Country Mysteries* series, this spine-tingling mystery is so twisted and would leave you at the edge of your seat. A few years ago, Lucie Montgomery was permanently disabled, when her boyfriend crashed her car in front of the wall of the vineyard. Now, she had witnessed Jamie Vaughn, a presidential candidate hopeful and successful vineyard millionaire, crash his car at the same place. In attempts to save his life of the burning car, she knew it was too late, when he told her to relay a message for him. Then he died in the fire. Puzzled by the car crash, she promised Jamie on his dying breath to tell "Rick" that he forgives him for what he'd done in the past. That left Lucie to dig up some dirt and ask some questions around on what referred to, even if it meant people that were the closest to her. Though she wouldn't back down, she searched for answers on what happened 30 years ago, when an innocent man was wrongly convicted for someone's death. The closer she had gotten to the truth, people told her to back off and to let it go, when she stood her ground and uncovered the hidden and shocking truth of secrets and lies. When someone took a potshot at her, it meant more than personal for her as she took a closer look around with her fiancé Quinn, who helps her run her winery and vineyard. In a matter of life and death, she discovered who done it and why in the explosive ending.

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## **Sunsettowers says**

I received an ARC of this book from the publisher in exchange for an honest review. This did not affect my opinion of the book or my review itself.

When Lucie witnesses the death by car crash of a former presidential candidate-in the same spot where her ex-boyfriend once brutally crashed their car-she is sure it wasn't an accident. But everyone else wants her to leave well enough alone.

Lucie, however, refuses to drop her inquiries. As she discovers a connection to a past crime, she finds herself in danger from someone who thought their crimes were buried long ago.

I love mysteries about crimes from the past, and Crosby does a really good job of weaving in the past into the present. Clues come out as Lucie learns them, upping the tension and the mystery.

Lucie is a great main character and narrator. She is strong and stubborn, refusing to give in when others would have given up. Her relationship with her fiance Quinn is a pleasant happiness in the midst of murder.

The setting also becomes its own character, which is always something I enjoy. The town really comes alive.

The solution is a good one that fits with everything that came before, but the very last few pages of the book come across as a bit cliched and don't entirely seem to fit with what we have learned of Lucie's character in the previous pages.

I really enjoyed this cozy mystery. I definitely would like to read the rest of the series at some point.

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## Jenny Wheeler says

Mystery authors readily acknowledge one of the credibility problems with series featuring an amateur sleuth who is not a cop or a PI, is how do you keep justifying an ordinary citizen stumbling across a succession of dead bodies - in Lucie Montgomery's case, now at least eight of them.

And I think it's one challenge Ellen Crosby has always convincingly managed to surmount. All of the Virginia Mystery books seem to me to present quite convincing scenarios for the appearance of the deceased, and *The Vineyard Victims*, (Wine Country Series #8) is no exception.

It opens with a literal roar of engines, as Lucie is nearly run off the road just outside her winery gate by a recently unsuccessful American Presidential candidate who then dies in a blazing crash after hitting the stone entrance way to her property.

Lucie is too busy getting out of his way to turn round and actually see the impact, but she is certain she heard him accelerate rather than brake before hitting the wall. And so we are launched on an intriguing story of family secrets and long hidden misdeeds going right back to college days.

There's the sensitive issue of whether Lucie tells his family - who are personally known to her - her brother Eli is dating the dead man's daughter - what she thinks she heard, or whether she just goes along with the pressure to go along with a genteel cover up. The dead man appears to be in serious financial trouble, with campaign debts still unpaid, and any scandal could ruin the family he has left behind.

It's a scenario that you can only too readily imagine really happening, and I've always felt that Ellen's years as a journalist working close to circles of power imbue all the Wine Countries Mysteries with an enjoyable plausibility that keeps the pages turning.

Another of the strengths of the series, and one of the things I enjoy about it most, is the scene setting - the nuances of season and scene as the story unfolds in the pretty vineyard at its heart.

I'm starting to feel I can really picture this idyllic piece of rural Virginia, backing onto the Blue Mountains, and savor the 400 years of family history on the land, as well as relishing details of the region's history and it's key role in the American Civil War. The historic Goose Creek Inn \$10,000 a place Jefferson Dinner with the menu which could eaten by Thomas himself, with wine he could have drunken I love all that detail.

Of course alongside the nostalgia, runs alongside plenty of hard nosed "reality check" information about the hard work and skill it takes to run a successful winery in the 21st century. Point and counter point. Romanced nostalgia and hard graft battling the weather and chemistry. Frosts right before bud burst and all that. The consistent "back story" that's there in each new mystery really adds to my reading pleasure, and *The Vineyard Victims* fully lives up to expectations on this count. I'm almost ready to believe Ellen actually owns a vineyard like Lucie's.

The plotline for the politician's death is convoluted but credible, and a story line from Lucie's past that began in the first book - being left with permanent injuries in an accident that bore rather similar features to this most recent one - is cleverly interwoven and updated.



Without giving away any spoilers, this instalment advances Lucie's development as a character, as well as her relationship with Quinn, in ways which feel satisfying and leave me feeling I don't want this series to finish yet.

There's life in these characters and this setting, and I want to know what happens next! A really enjoyable romp through Virginia Wine Country. Next thing some entrepreneurial tourism operator will be putting together Wine Country Mystery tours - if they're not already.

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### **Kathleen says**

I have been critical of this mystery series, set among the vineyards of the Blue Ridge Mountains in Virginia, but the latest one was more complex. The apparent suicide of an unsuccessful presidential candidate is tied to a murder thirty years before at UVA and to an inmate on death row. The protagonist, Lucie Montgomery, owner of Montgomery Estate Vineyard, is conflicted about Jamie Vaughn's "accident," his last words to her, and despite his family's warnings, she honors her commitment to him, continuing to probe all the disparate details, uncovering financial woes and unsavory behavior of a tightly coupled group of friends, bound by a terrible secret all these years. While Lucie tugs at the loose threads, she is also pursuing a new relationship. Yet, she remains deeply angry at the driver who caused her disabling injuries ten years before.

Two aspects of this series are of particular interest to me. The first involves the author's description and comments about typically "southern" or horse country traditions, which might appear dated to the unknowing reader but provide deep community connections among residents. The second involves the history of wine making in Virginia, so connected to our country's early history, and all the information about the industry today. Wine making is hard work, requiring passion, commitment, and integrity.

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### **Jill says**

Lucie Montgomery was heading home one night when an SUV blew past her and plowed into one of the stone pillars outside of her vineyard, crashing at a high speed. Lucie tried to get to the driver, former presidential candidate Jamison Vaughn, but the engine was already on fire. She grabbed onto his door handle and pulled, trying to get him out anyway, but her neighbor (who was also passing by and saw the accident) yanked her away to safety before the car exploded in flames.

Lucie was in shock. Vaughn's crash was at the same spot as her own crash--when she was young and in a relationship with the wrong guy, they fought and he ended up driving into that pillar, causing irreparable damage to her leg. But despite Lucie's shock at the memory, she knew what she saw and heard. While she was trying to get Vaughn out of the car, he was determined to stay where he was. But he gave her a message to pass on, a mysterious apology that made no sense to Lucie. But she knew what she witnessed--a man who was not trying to save his own life.

As Lucie tries to figure out what Vaughn's last words meant and who he was talking about, she is also struggling with her own history. Politics, personal pain, relationships, lies, betrayal, and wine all collide in *The Vineyard Victims*, a mystery where the past and present bleed together into a story where Lucie has to

figure out the ending in order to bring Vaughn some peace and to make sure her own story gets to have another chapter.

Ellen Crosby has written yet another fantastic mystery in her Wine County Mystery series (this is the eighth in the series). I have heard Crosby's mysteries described as cozies, and I guess you could make a case for that (amateur detective, "busybody" female protagonist, small community, amateur killer). But I have always felt like Crosby's mysteries were a step higher. I mean no disrespect here because I love a good cozy, but I think of the Wine County Mysteries as having a depth of feeling and of character that elevates them. The Vineyard Victims is no different. It is beautifully written, with complex characters and the texture of a well-drawn setting that creates a deep and moving story of human emotion, betrayal, love, desperation, and revenge.

I highly recommend The Vineyard Victims, as I recommend all the books in this beautiful series. Read it with a good bottle of wine, or (like me) a warm blanket and cup of cocoa.

Galleys for The Vineyard Victims were provided by Minotaur Books through NetGalley.com, with many thanks.

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## **Ed says**

#8 in the Wine Country mystery series. A convoluted mystery that improves over the course of the book. Unfortunately it was short on the viniculture lore that I feel improves the series. Lucy witnesses a fatal car crash in the same spot as the crash that crippled her ten years earlier. It develops that this death was related to a murder at UVA 30 years previously, of course Lucy gets involved in the appeal process of the death row occupant. Then this 30 year mystery is not only connected to the current death but to her accident 10 years earlier.

Wine Country mystery - Virginia vintner Lucie Montgomery has to swerve on a rain-slick road to avoid a head-on collision with a speeding car driven by her neighbor Jamie Vaughn, an unsuccessful U.S. presidential candidate. When Jamie slams into a stone pillar at the entrance to her property, Lucie leaps from her vehicle and races to the wreckage. She's in time only to hear his dying words: "Tell Rick I need him to forgive me." Most people who knew Jamie figure it was an accident, but Lucie is sure that the crash was deliberate. When Jamie's nearest and dearest begin acting suspiciously, Lucie becomes determined to find Rick and deliver Jamie's message. The intrigue grows, as does the danger to herself, after Lucie learns that Rick is Taurique, who's now on death row for the murder some 30 years earlier of a brilliant doctoral student at the University of Virginia.

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## **Julie Barrett says**

The vineyard victims by Crosby\_ Ellen

Story follows Lucy's life at the vineyard. Ten years prior she had gotten into an accident when she discussed her boyfriends affair with her brothers fiancée. He ended up in jail and Lucy has issues with walking.

Present day she's heading home and she avoids a candidate for president as he aimed for her car and ends up

crashing into the vineyard pillar also, same spot as her accident. She rushes over and talks to him but he doesn't want any help at all.

She knows he was trying to commit suicide and learns more from her best girlfriend Kit later when she finds out she had met with him prior to the crash.

She lives with Quinn who likes to watch the stars at night ...he also works at the vineyard.

Love history of the area and the vineyard. Like how she discovers more clues as to the crash.

Love talk of cairn and war time and how it's revelant to the crash and gifts left.

Story gets super involved with events of the past, cool how it all comes together.

Lucy gets too close to the truth and now she's being shot at...

I received this book from National Library Service for my BARD (Braille Audio Reading Device).

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## **Sue Em says**

Another well-done entry in the Virginia wine series, in fact, it might be my favorite. Lucie witnesses an accident at the very spot of her crippling accident years before. And not just a random accident, but a family friend who just lost a presidential election. His dying request leads Lucie to wonder if the accident might have been suicide. As she tries to fulfill his request, the ramifications of her investigation show ties to her family and friends. The mystery kept me guessing and the writing was engaging. Recommended. Thanks to netgalley and St. Martin's Press for the ARC of the book in exchange for an honest review.

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