



The Garden of Dead Dreams

Abby Quillen

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A spellbinding mystery about the price we pay for keeping secrets for fans of literary whodunits like Marisha Pessl's *Night Film*, Carol Goodman's mysteries, and David Guterson's *Snow Falling on Cedars*. *The Garden of Dead Dreams* explores whether it's possible to remake our lives when no one can erase the past.

Vincent Buchanan was one of America's most cherished authors. His 1943 novel *The Western Defense* is not only considered a work of literary genius; it may have helped the United States triumph against Japan in the Second World War.

Nearly seventy years after its release, twenty-eight-year-old Etta Lawrence is a student at the prestigious creative writing academy the late Buchanan founded in a majestic lodge tucked beneath Oregon's fog-laced Douglas firs and Western red cedars. She's intent on rewriting her life by winning the coveted Buchanan Prize, a ticket to literary stardom.

Then a handsome visiting poet arrives at the academy, and Etta's bubbly roommate Olivia latches onto him and begins acting distant, disturbed, and hysterical. Etta peeks through her roommate's belongings and stumbles onto a revelation about Buchanan's personal life that could change the way people think about the famous author.

Etta's convinced the discovery may be connected to the poet's arrival and Olivia's troubling behavior. She enlists two of her smart, quirky classmates to help her investigate. They find clues in the scenes of one of Buchanan's short stories, the academy's dusty administration files, and a dilapidated pioneer cemetery on the school grounds.

But as Etta twists through the murky forest of Buchanan's past, she has more to lose than just her chances of starting over. Someone at the isolated academy is deadly serious about keeping Buchanan's personal history private.

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From Reader Review The Garden of Dead Dreams for online ebook

Pat Eells says

Etta Lawrence, a student at the infamous Buchanon writing academy hopes to rewrite her life by winning the much desired Buchanon Prize. She discovers a secret concerning the school's founder that might keep her from her fulfilling her dream. The 'secret someone' is intent upon keeping it private. Etta and two of her bright classmates pursue solving the mystery. There are many twists and turns that keep the reader's interest; the arrival of a visiting poet and her roommate's strange behavior, sorting through old files, visiting a dilapidated old cemetery and more. Does this mystery get resolved?!

Thank you Goodreads for this book.

Doreen Ann says

Riveting, intense, occasional comic relief at just the right time, kept me in suspense to the very end.

Lindsay Heller says

??Sometimes I find myself thinking about writing review while wearing two hats. The hat that sat through oh so many creative writing workshop courses in college and the hat (I imagine a sort of court jester's cap here) that just wants to be entertained. This book was wildly entertaining. I am a sucker for a good literary mystery, bonus points if it also deals with literary people (as it does here), and this was one hell of a good literary mystery.

??Nestled in the trees of Oregon is an institute founded by Vincent Buchanan, one of the nation's famous sons. An author so brilliant that his novel, The Western Defense, propelled the nation into victory over Japan at the end of the second World War. Etta Lawrence arrives at the academy seventy years after the publication of that famous book. Searching to redefine herself at the prestigious school Etta plans on writing a story so good it will win her the Buchanan prize, and another year (sans fee) before returning to the real world where she will undoubtedly have to build a whole new life for herself. But Etta soon realizes that winning the prize is the least of her problems. When her roommate starts displaying some erratic behavior and then disappears completely, Etta starts searching for some truths. But when reputations are at stake truths are not always forthcoming. Soon Etta is embroiled in a conspiracy that has been buried for almost a century and the question becomes not if she can find the truth but rather if she can survive it.

??I will be honest. This book was not on my radar until the author found me here on Goodreads because of my love of several like stories. I was happy to write a review, of course, because I'm both vain enough to imagine someone would want my opinion and desperate enough for those old college days when it was part of a grade. However, I was a little nervous. I mean, what if I didn't like the book? And here the author was nice enough to look at my blog and find a reference to mention that would actually prove she read the blog. I

knew I would be honest. If the book stunk up the place I was going to say so, in an honest review, but I knew that I would feel pretty bad about it. Luckily, that didn't happen and I am pleased to report that *The Garden of Dead Dreams* was a fantastic read (despite a title that's a tad over dramatic for my liking).

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??There were a few things, of course, that detracted from my love. Etta, for example, is harboring a secret that is referred to repeatedly throughout the first part of the book and then when the reveal comes it's.... just not that big of a deal. Also, towards the end a stand off takes place but then the action moves elsewhere and I was left wondering how exactly that got resolved for the rest of the cast once the lead had exited stage right. And I felt like plot lines regarding some of the characters were left dangling. Though, of course, there were a lot of characters. There's also the problem that happens when a novel is written about others writing novels. Or poetry, play, et cetera, where the author then has to create the work of several different people of varying talents. It rang true about eighty percent of the time here, but the other twenty pulled me out of the story a little. Especially with the poetry, which I do not like and can never figure out what is good or not. Though I am almost certain Robert North was intended to be pedantic and completely up himself with his verse.

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Overall, I would definitely recommend this book. The setting was very fun, the scenery rich, and the characters great. I especially loved Reed. Poppy was pretty good too. Artists are a strange group of people, especially en masse. And I think writers may be the strangest of all. Get a bunch of them in the same room and you never know what might happen. If Quillen has anything to say about it, they may just solve a mystery or two.

Carmen Amato says

Etta Lawrence has staked everything on a year at a prestigious writing academy in the rainy Oregon woods. But truth be told, she's an indifferent writer. She's also distracted by her roommate's distraught behavior and has a crush on the academy's cook, a Texan named Carl.

Quillen's prose drips with atmosphere, quirky characters, and a deep sense of foreboding. The academy's founder, the late great novelist Vincent Buchanan (a Herman Wouk-type figure on literary steroids) is still revered by students and administrators alike, almost to the point of demagoguery. His impact, via fiction, on the outcome of WWII is a central and continuing argument by everyone at the lodge. But as Etta's roommate goes off the rails and personal relationships at the academy begin to fray, Etta grows uncomfortable with the tension-filled atmosphere and certain bad things are happening behind the scenes.

When the roommate, after a major literary success, disappears, Etta finds some improbable clues that implicate both a visiting professor and the late Buchanan. With the help of an old manuscript, Etta begins to piece together a dark secret. But before she truly knows what is going on, the academy administrators show that they'll use all the many means at their disposal to ensure her silence. Yet exactly what is the secret they are hiding and why will they kill to keep it?

The strength of *DEAD DREAMS* is the powerful prose. Descriptions are excellent, whether of people, places, or the quivering tension in the air. Etta retreats into the woods surrounding the academy more than once and Quillen makes you feel the crunch of leaves underfoot and the tang of pine in the air. Later in the book, when Etta tracks the secret to a Japanese mom-and-pop store, the reader is right there amid the paper lanterns and dusty boxes. The prose keeps the reader hooked, even when the mystery is slow to develop. For example, a key clue to Etta's place at the academy wasn't revealed until the 40% point. At the end, the loop doesn't quite close on all the drama, leaving some questions. But perhaps the biggest question is when is

Quillen's next book?

Robyn says

Actually one of the best books I have read this year. It was a surprise...a literary mystery that slowly unfurled and encompassed a bit of American history as well; albeit, not a period Americans are proud of today. This is very well written, and I am reminded of the sign I recently saw in a bookstore's window: "I'm going to clean the house now...ooh, look, a book." This novel was engrossing and compelling and beautifully written. All of my plans fell by the wayside. The prose was lovely and the author made it seem effortless, never forced. Just enough was revealed about the characters to make me want to know more, but I was never bored with unnecessary minutiae. I highly recommend this book and look forward to reading more by this author. A copy was received in exchange for an honest review.

Lorie says

In the dark rainy forest of Oregon, this mystery kept me guessing and turning the pages. It felt like I was hunkered down outside in the cold rain, rather than being inside by the fire all cozy and dry enjoying the sounds of the rain outside.

Angie West says

A well-written who-done-it mystery with plenty of humor throughout. The most notable thing about this book, for me, was the level of detail that was taken with each character. There are plenty of academic types, artistic types that run the gamut from passionate to quirky and each felt very authentic. Recommended.

Aaron Thomas says

Abby Quillen creates an intriguing world in her literary mystery about iconic figures, academia, and the world of secrets, lies, and identity. This book mixes light-hearted playfulness with heavier undertones that arise as the novel progresses.
