



Better Off Read

Nora Page

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When her best hope of saving her storm-damaged library is found murdered, senior librarian Cleo Watkins hits the road in her bookmobile in search of justice.

Septuagenarian librarian Cleo Watkins won't be shushed when an upstart young mayor threatens to permanently shelf her tiny town's storm-damaged library. She takes to her bookmobile, Words on Wheels, to collect allies and rally library support throughout Catalpa Springs, Georgia.

However, Cleo soon rolls into trouble. A major benefactor known for his eccentric DIY projects requests all available books on getting away with murder. He's no Georgia peach, and Cleo wonders if she should worry about his plans. She knows she should when she discovers him bludgeoned and evidence points to her best friend, Mary-Rose Garland.

Sure of Mary-Rose's innocence, Cleo applies her librarian's sleuthing skills to the case, assisted by friends, family, and the dapper antiquarian bookseller everyone keeps calling her boyfriend. Evidence stacks up, but a killer is overdue to strike again. With lives and her library on the line, Cleo must shift into high gear to close the book on murder in *Better Off Read*, the charming Bookmobile series debut by Nora Page.

Better Off Read Details

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Author : Nora Page

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From Reader Review Better Off Read for online ebook

Sherwood Smith says

This cozy mystery is set in the tiny town of Catalpa Springs, Georgia and featuring seventy five year old librarian Cleo Watkins, often accompanied by her Persian cat, Rhett Butler. Cleo is working hard to save the local library, recently damaged, and driving a rickety school bus bookmobile "Words on Wheels," .

Sleazy Mayor Jebson Day doesn't want to see the town spend the money to fix the library, instead he has plans to knock down the building and develop a huge fishing pier. The Mayor has the backing of local bank president Vernon Givens, though Bitsy Givens, the bank president's wife, is trying to get support for Chloe from her Ladies' League.

Chloe goes to visit the local rich eccentric in hopes of a donation. Buford Krandall is rude and mean, though he loves books. He's too busy waging war on his neighbor, Chloe's bestie, who runs a pancake house.

The book started off rocky, with far too much data and names thrown at the reader, in a tone that tried to hard to be whimsical and funny. For example, the narrative tone gives Chloe's reckless speeding in her old bus a wink and a nod, though I don't know how many people find reckless speeding at all funny.

But once Krandall is found dead, the book seems to find its rhythm. The author balances plot with the introduction of new wacky characters, and keeps the reader guessing as to the murderer, while building suspense. There are some rookie errors, like lack of clarity with the local police and investigative forces (my understanding is that even tiny towns are clear about boundaries in such cases) but overall it was a fun read once it got going. The female characters were the most fun, all vivid.

Copy provided by NetGalley

Darinda says

Cleo is a seventy-five year old librarian in a small Southern town. After the library suffers storm damage, the mayor threatens to keep it closed. Cleo brings out the bookmobile, and looks for support to keep the library open. Plus, a local is found murdered, and Cleo's best friend is the prime suspect. Cleo stays busy with her librarian duties, and playing amateur sleuth to prove her best friend's innocence.

The 1st book in the Bookmobile mystery series. A charming town with eccentric characters. I especially enjoyed the spry older protagonist. The story was a little awkward at first, but with the characters and setting in place, this could be a fun cozy mystery series.

I received a digital copy of this book from Crooked Lane Books and Netgalley in exchange for an honest review.

Linda says

Hand me a book with a lovely Georgia setting, a few corrupt citizens aligned against some honest folks, and combine it all with an enticing mystery, and I'm happy! The protagonist is a young 75 year old librarian—Cleo—who is strong, capable, and fun! When the town's new mayor gets it in his craw that they need a fishing pier and casino and he'll just cut out the funds for Cleo's precious library and Words on Wheels bookmobile to pay for them, she's determined to show him how misguided his plans are.

Then her best friend, Mary-Rose and her eccentric neighbor, Buford, get into a dispute over the fresh spring water that runs between their properties and one of them suddenly croaks! Cleo puts her knack for sleuthing to test with the help of Henry—a nice bookstore owner—who's enamoured of Cleo, and Gabby, a female police officer who's also Cleo's neighbor and friend. Rhett Butler, Cleo's library cat, and Mr. Chaucer, Henry's old pug, are usually along for all the excitement!

Author, Nora Page introduces readers to an outstanding cast of characters and a lively plot. I so enjoyed Cleo's spirit and passion for books and her loyalty to her patrons. The story moves along swiftly—I didn't want to put it down! I didn't guess the killer's identity or motive, so this is a great whodunit that snared my attention. The Hummingbird Cake recipe included is similar to one my mother used to make.

I reviewed a digital arc provided by NetGalley and Crooked Lane Books.

abby says

Cleo Watkins is seventy-five and a librarian. Or, rather, she used to be one until a storm damaged the old Victorian mansion that served as the library for quaint Catalpa Springs, Georgia. And with the town's new boy-wonder mayor deciding to invest in a fishing pier instead of repairs, it's doubtful whether Cleo will be a librarian again. Not that she's ready to retire. For the time being, she serves her community with her bookmobile, with her ginger Persian, Rhett Butler, as her copilot. She has a plan to save the library, but it relies on the most eccentric, and hated, resident of Catalpa Springs.

But things go awry when she finds her benefactor murdered, right after he'd ordered a pile of strange crime books. It doesn't look good that nearly everyone in town seems happy that he's dead. Before long, Cleo's best friend, Mary-Rose, and her grandson, Ollie, are arrested. With the help of her gentleman friend-- not boyfriend!-- and his geriatric pug, Cleo decides to do what every mystery novel would warn her against; she sets out to discover the truth.

I thought this book was a lot of fun and it struck the right balance. Cute town, zany characters, nothing too sweet or cheesy. I like that Cleo wasn't a traditional cozy mystery sleuth, although, of course, she does have the standard "love interest." And Rhett Butler has a habit of acting nothing like a real cat. The resolution of the mystery is a bit convoluted. It's suggested that the murderer has a history of sociopathic behavior, but that's never expanded on, and the killer's motives are pretty weak. The author can clearly put together an entertaining book, but I hope she works on her mystery chops for the next installment. I'll be reading.

Thank you to the publisher and NetGalley for providing me with an advanced copy of this book.

Jan says

This was a fun first installment of the new Bookmobile Mystery Series. I enjoyed Cleo, her mobile library and her funny cat Rhett Butler. I felt bad for her as she went up against the young mayor of the town who wants to re-route her much needed library funds to repair storm damage to the town's library. When one of the few library benefactors in town winds up dead things do get a little crazy. There was a lot going on in this story and maybe a tad too many characters to keep straight but all in all it was a good little cozy.

I would like to thank NetGalley and the publisher for an advanced reader copy in exchange for an honest review.

JoAn says

Better Off Read by Nora Page was a delightful cozy mystery set in Catalpa Springs, GA. Cleo Watkins is the town librarian; and though she may be 70+ she is smart, independent and determined to save her library. The plot moved swiftly with plenty of suspects, twists to keep me guessing, and a small town setting that charmed me from the beginning.

Cheryl says

Cleo's library is damaged by a storm and her bookmobile bus is at the end of it's life. The Mayor wants to close the library and the bookmobile. A man who is a major benefactor asks for all the books on getting away with murder and later he is fund dead. Cleo's friend is blamed and Cleo sets out to prove her friend didn't do it. Lots of adventures with the bookmobile and decades old secrets.

Susan Furlong says

Better Off Read had everything I like in a cozy mystery: a charming setting, a smart amateur sleuth, well-developed characters and a furry sidekick. The mystery was well plotted with enough twists and red herrings to keep the story interesting. I especially enjoyed the protagonist, Cleo Hawkins, a spunky 70 + year old librarian who was the epitome of southern charm ... and a bit bad ass, too. All in all, this was a delightful mystery.

I received an early copy of this book for review.

Jeri says

Arrgghh! I hate when I am disappointed by a book I so wanted to like! The whole premise of this book was

likeable but missed the mark.

First, it was the main character, Cleo. She is an aging librarian, like 75! Not only is she working in the library, but she is driving the bookmobile!! Really?! My neighbors are in their 70s and very active, but they aren't nearly as Cleo is described.

Second, there was such an info dump that it overwhelmed and disconnected me from the story.

I was given an eARC by the publisher through NetGalley.

Anna At A Wondrous Bookshelf says

Better Off Read is the first book in the Bookmobile Mystery series. The main character, Cleo Watkins is a librarian who also runs a bookmobile, words on wheels, in the city of Catalpa Springs, Georgia. Cleo is desperately trying to fix the damaged library and prevent the young mayor, Jeb Day, from closing it down. Cleo soon comes across the body of an old patron, Buford Krandall, and evidence seems to point to her friend Mary-Rose, so Cleo decides to solve the murder on her own and clear the name of her best friend.

Ok, so this book was the classic example of judging a book by its cover. I mean, isn't this cover super cute? I loved everything about it--a cute cat, a cute dog, a bookmobile, all the elements for a great cozy mystery. Unfortunately, this book was quite disappointing to me. The premise is great, a librarian fighting to keep the city's public library alive, a murder needing to be solved, a small town setting, Southern cooking, you name it. The problem with the story is that although the premise was great, the characters were very unrealistic and poorly developed. Cleo, the main character, is supposed to be this seventy-year-old lady who really seemed more like someone in their forties or fifties. It is not to say that a person in their seventies can't be as active and energetic as Cleo, but it just didn't feel that way when you were reading the book.

The story as a whole did not hold my interest and I found myself putting this book down way too many times. I really wanted to love this book, but it just didn't do it for me. Since this is book one in the series, I believe there is still hope for the other books to come.

I would like to thank Crooked Lane Books and NetGalley for providing me with a copy of this book in exchange for my honest review.

Tari says

Oh my goodness, I loved this book! I haven't read such an enjoyable senior sleuth since Jessica Fletcher. Cleo is just awesome and this was an amazing first book for what I hope is a long series--so much fun!

Cleo Watkins drove the bookmobile bus in Catalpa Springs, GA a lot more now that a storm caused major damage to her beloved library. A local curmudgeon who wasn't well liked but was a library supporter had basically assured her he had a plan. But someone else had a plan for him, murder. Cleo and her gentleman friend Henry, who owned an antiquarian bookstore, set out to investigate along with the help of her college-

age assistant Leanna. There were plenty of suspects and when another body turned up, Cleo realized she had to prove her own grandson's innocence along with finding the first killer. She was convinced the killer of both was one and the same.

The mystery did get wrapped up very satisfactorily. I like how all the little odds and ends were addressed at the end. The take down was pretty epic...let's just say Rhett Butler, Cleo's cat and the skunks living in the library were heroes!

I really enjoyed reading about Cleo and all her friends, especially sweet Henry who was ever the gentleman. All the characters that were good were so interesting--Adelaide was hilarious (a neighbor at Happy Trails retirement village). I didn't guess the killer at all, was completely fooled but that's okay, that's the name of the mystery game. I'm so anxious for the next book!

I voluntarily read and reviewed this book courtesy of NetGalley and Crooked Lane, thanks going out to them.

Betty says

A new author for me and the start of a new series with an unusual plot with creative parts. I have trouble at the beginning of the sentence had many adjectives slowing down the reading flow but at the time I was turning The pages very fast. The main characters were developed but others needed fleshing out. I did admire the tale and will read the next book. Recipe for hummingbird cake is included. I recommend this book.

Disclosure: Many thanks to Crooked Lane First for a review copy. The opinions expressed are my own.

Lori says

A library with a 75-year-old librarian who still drives a bookmobile (and speeds while doing so)? The set-up for Nora Page's new series features that implausible scenario. The mayor of Catulpa Springs, Georgia, somewhere just north of the Florida state line, wants to do away with its tree-damaged library, its bookmobile, and its librarian. An antiquarian book collector and library friend's death turns suspicion to the man's neighbor. Cleo doesn't believe it and sets out to investigate. Not even Rhett Butler the cat could redeem this book. Far too many characters appear too quickly without sufficient development to sort in the reader's mind. A low-level officer related to one of the characters seems to be the main police officer investigating rather than police detectives or the man referred to throughout the book as "Chief." The conversation-intensive narrative likely appeals to a younger audience while the septuagenarian librarian tries to draw older readers. Unfortunately as someone who recently dealt with aging parents, I question how a town could afford insurance to allow an elderly woman known to speed to drive a bookmobile. While the story does improve as the book goes on, it fails to redeem itself and leaves the reader dissatisfied. I received an advance review copy from the publisher through NetGalley with the expectation of an honest review.

Lee says

I'm yet to be completely sold on cosy mysteries but this was a moderately enjoyable read.

When the library is damaged, 75 year old librarian Cleo makes her rounds in her ‘bookmobile’ (a RV with books basically). At one of her stops, she finds the local bully dead. Cleo then turns sleuth when her friend and grandson are both pinged as suspects in his murder.

Better Off Read includes many of the must-haves of the cosy mystery. There’s the southern US small town setting, the plethora of colourful townsfolk who serve as likely suspects, and the endless description of food. I thought Page did a pretty good job with all of these.

I picked the book mostly because I love books about books and assumed a librarian main character would make this a sure thing. However, I thought there could have been a lot more.

The murder/mystery plot itself was unfortunately kind of boring. There were red herrings but I still somehow realised the murderer quite early. When we got to the reveal, however, I was surprised when Page turned them into a sociopath. Less of a surprise, and less than believable, was the way the fallout of the murderer’s identity was tied up so neatly.

I do love older characters but, at times, I found it difficult to believe Cleo could be quite so sprightly at 75. The romance she has with fellow booklover Henry is also a little underwhelming. I adore older people romance and this should have been right up my alley but their chemistry was just non-existent, I thought. (Although I did find the running joke of him not being her boyfriend amusing.)

I did wonder if Page has the idea to write a prequel for this book, as it’s implied quite heavily that Cleo has solved crimes in the past. It would also give her a chance to include Cleo and Henry’s ‘meet cute’.

Another must have for a cosy is a cat or dog. In this case, Page ticked the box with one of each. I was relieved that neither animal was annoying, so the book earned an extra half a star just from this small point! (The animals in some of the other cosies I’ve read have driven me insane.)

Overall, I would recommend this when you are searching for a light mystery.

3 out of 5

Carrie says

Better Off Read by Nora Page is the first book in the new cozy Bookmobile Mystery series. The story centers around Cleo Watkins who is a seventy five year old librarian who is willing to do anything to save her library when the mayor threatens closure.

After a storm damaged the main library Cleo took to the streets in her bookmobile, Words on Wheels, to continue her lending habits and find support for her cause. But when a supporter of the library winds up dead Cleo puts her years of mystery reading skills to use to help solve the crime.

Better Off Read is one of those books that on the surface seemed to check all those fun cozy mystery boxes that I love. However, there just seemed to be a bit of something lacking in the story that kept me from becoming totally invested in this one.

Cleo is a fun character that gives a whole new meaning to the spunky elderly with her constant on the go,

was that realistic, not necessarily but this is fiction so I did enjoy it. The rest of the characters however weren't really standing out much to me and the story didn't really have that wow factor when it came to the conclusion. I think the series has potential to be really fun but this first book was just an alright read for me.

I received an advance copy from the publisher via NetGalley.

For more reviews please visit <https://carriesbookreviews.com/>
