



## Stiff Penalty

*Annelise Ryan*

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## Stiff Penalty Annelise Ryan

Deputy coroner Mattie Winston knows a thing or two about dead bodies. That's why she's on the case of Derrick Ames, a high school math teacher stabbed to death with a barbecue fork straight to the heart. Sure, she's turned up some motives and a few suspects, but nothing adds up. Especially when the evidence points to Ames's teenage son. Newly pregnant Mattie can't believe it, even as her own long-estranged father may be following her. But one thing's certain, she'd better start figuring things out fast, or a deadly perpetrator could be subtracting two more victims from the population of Sorenson, Wisconsin. . .

## Stiff Penalty Details

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Author : Annelise Ryan

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## From Reader Review Stiff Penalty for online ebook

### Maureen DeLuca says

Wasn't as crazy about this as the others. This is a cozy- I read these every once in a while for a change of pace. Pop corn for the brain. It is a series that I would recommend- IF you are into cozies- not all were good, but like always the first one in this series was, so far the best. I will still pick up the next one just to see what is happening - but again... a cozy. That pretty much says it all.

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### Patrizia says

In questo libro ci sono ben due misteri e non avevo indovinato nessuno dei colpevoli... Gran parte della storia si presenta come flashback in cui la protagonista racconta alla sua psicologa quanto successo negli ultimi mesi; nonostante questo, l'autrice è stata brava a mantenere viva la suspense. Alla fine restano anche tante cose in sospeso, purtroppo: mi sa che mi metterò a leggere il libro successivo molto presto...

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### Gwen says

#### Oh Baby

Mattie seems to act more realistically believable in this book than the previous one. All's well that ends well. I only have to complain about the editing: using they/their instead of the singular s/he or him/her when referring to one person. Also tense issues occur.

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### ✿ Aimee ✿ Just one more page... says

This was a fun read. I chose to request it when I found out the MC and the author are nurses (my husband and I are both nurses). It's always nice to have the medical knowledge and aspects in a murder mystery *actually* correct.

The MC's voice is spunky and hilarious. I had several laugh out loud moments. *Quotes may not match the final book since this is an advance reader copy.*

***"...my relationship with Hurley thus far has had more ups and downs and more ins and outs than a porno movie..."***

***"Was it Gunther? Because if it was, I'm going to chain his legs into that exercise machine he keeps putting me on and spread that sucker until he splits like the wishbone on a turkey."***

***"My good friend Phyllis - aka Syph to those of us in the know -- directed us to the room that held our victim."***

I also liked one quote the author had about her emotional ups and downs while being pregnant.

***"But lately it seems my emotions are hanging on my sleeve like a collection of dangerously loose threads, constantly at risk of being snagged by the slightest provocation, after which they would unravel with terrifying speed, exposing parts of me I'd rather keep hidden."***

This is the 6th book in a series, and for once the history of the MC is summed up succinctly yet thoroughly. I always felt like I understood the character well. This does well as a stand alone book.

The murder mystery keeps a good pace and kept my interest. AND on the plus side, I *didn't* guess the murderer! Woo-hoo!

***Thank you Netgalley for a free digital copy in exchange for an honest review.***

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### **Peggy says**

Good little mystery for a cold winter night!

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### **Sarah "Kat" says**

Love this series! Not too cutesy as some cozies can be and has a little edge. Great main character Mattie - fun reads!

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### **Teresa Kander says**

This was my first foray into this series...but now I look forward to getting caught up on it before there is another added to it.

Mattie Winston is a headstrong, opinionated woman who is used to taking care of herself and doing things her own way. She also has a wicked sense of humor, which I love. She's surrounded by quite an entourage of supporting characters, as well: her boyfriend, Hurley and his daughter, Emily; her boss, Izzy and his partner, Dom; her sister and mother, and numerous other folks around town.

Mattie is trying to solve the murder of a high school teacher, while also trying to solve her own mystery-- who is stalking her and trying to kill her? Throw in pregnancy hormones, and chaos ensues.

I can't wait to find out what led to this point, and then to see what happens next in the series.

\*\*I received a copy of this book in exchange for an honest review. All thoughts and opinions are entirely my own.\*\*

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### **Anne says**

There are two mysteries in this book, a high school math teacher is "forked" to death and Mattie is being followed and getting mysterious phone calls with no one talking when she picks up. This time around Mattie's family, Izzie and Dom and even Hurley (despite being the father of Mattie's soon to be born child) have tiny roles. The mysteries also take a backseat to Mattie's emotional state and the solving of them doesn't really kick into gear until almost 80% of the way through the book (I wish Kindle would use page numbers).

I have enjoyed the previous 5 books as light fun and enjoyed the absurdity of some of the situations Mattie gets into. I wanted a mystery, got two but too much time was spent on Mattie's insecurities. We get lots and lots of insight as to how Mattie feels about her pregnancy, her weight, her looks, Hurley and Emily, her job, her ex, her father, the new videographer making eyes at Hurley, etc. Ultimately, Mattie comes off as a flighty, wishy washy, "girly" type who obsesses about everything. She also constantly jumps to conclusions about elements in her personal and professional life (the murderers, her father lurking, Hurley's interest in other women, David bad mouthing her, etc.). She is devolving despite seeing a psychologist in this book.

I also didn't like how the time shifted when she's talking to her psychologist. That part was in the future a couple of times and then she tells us the story behind what she's telling the psychologist. I was turning back the first couple of times because I thought my ecopy was missing pages or I had skipped something.

The killer also essentially outs him or herself which I dislike. Yes, eventually the police may have followed the lead Mattie had just given them to the correct killer, but the killer's chances to escape justice would have been better if the person had just stayed quiet. The killer's actions made no sense as well because the charges would only be so much worse with the action taken.

So, to sum it up, *Stiff Penalty* was a disappointment to me because the mystery and crime solving took a back seat to Mattie's immature, frequently over the top actions and the engaging secondary characters were mostly cut out. I hope in the next book that Mattie's psychologist actually is used to help Mattie become a stronger character instead of a device to help Mattie tell the story in flashbacks.

### **SPOILER**

For readers of the other books:

Mattie is not seen/photographed in her underpants in this book. There is, of course, an embarrassing scene and not just of Mattie jumping to conclusions and being proven wrong.

I received a copy from Netgalley in exchange for my honest review.

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## **Moondance says**

[ unplanned pregnancy (hide spoiler)]

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## **Bridgette Davis says**

### **Binge reading**

I could hardly put this one down! So much suspense, so many twists, very enjoyable! I'm going to be devastated when I reach the end of this series.

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## **Jonathan says**

Excellent, as all of the books in this series are. Can't wait for the next one!

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## **Lucy Dosch says**

Utterly disappointed. All the things I started out liking the most about this series started becoming annoying as there was no character growth. Each story works to keep Mattie and Hurley apart and each time it seems more contrived. This is definitely my last Mattie Winston mystery.

I forced myself to keep turning the pages on this story simply to get to find out if Mattie has the baby and whether or not Mattie would agree to marry Hurley. Also, once again, someone was out to get Mattie and I held out to see who was the culprit.

Over the course of the series the author has contrived one reason or another to keep Hurley and Mattie from being together. It was several books while Mattie moaned like a teenager whether Hurley returned her feelings. Once they both acknowledge their attraction, their jobs kept them apart since it was a conflict of interest. Just as Mattie quits her job to be with Hurley and they finally "do the deed," and then his ex-wife comes to town with a teenage daughter he never met. Mattie then returns to work and they once can't have a relationship. Hurley leaves town to find his missing ex-wife who left his daughter on his doorstep and Mattie finds out she is pregnant. Now that Mattie is pregnant, Hurley's teenage daughter, who in the prior book loved Mattie and was happy she made Hurley happy, is now faking emergencies and suicide attempts to keep Mattie away from Hurley, and accuses Mattie of getting herself pregnant to force Hurley to marry her. Back and forth, back and forth. As if Mattie's own neurosis isn't enough to come between her and Hurley.

Again, there are scenes that are contrived to create angst. For example, Mattie hasn't told Hurley about the baby yet since he is already stressed trying to locate his missing ex-wife and she wants to tell him face to face. Hurley will be returning tomorrow, but Mattie feels the need to finally go out to buy maternity clothes today...in her tiny town...from the only maternity store...which is owned by the town gossip. Mattie then gets into a car accident and Hurley shows up at the same time as the police since he got into town early, and

Hurley and the cops all learn about her pregnancy at the same time, when they take the bags of maternity clothes out of the car. She couldn't have waited one more day before going shopping or take the time to go to the next town where her OB/GYN was located? Especially since she doesn't wear these new maternity clothes right away. There were comments after this point that she was still wearing too tight regular clothes. More contrived plot twists to create nonsensical drama.

Mattie also determines that each pretty girl who is within spitting distance of Hurley will steal him away. Yes, they are interested in Hurley, but Hurley doesn't seem to be encouraging anyone else's affections but Mattie's. She is so obsessed about it but she won't agree to marry Hurley, too afraid his is marrying her for the baby only. Mattie won't make a commitment to Hurley but is obsessed by the other women who would be happy to snatch up the eligible bachelor.

These are the same issues we have dealt with so far through the series. Besides growing large with a baby, Mattie has not achieved any personal growth or development and Hurley is kept as a very one dimensional characters. He showed no reaction in the last story where Mattie stole a letter that his ex-wife left on his dresser, she opened it, read it and kept it from him for weeks until she determined he was ready to know about it. We understand why she waited, but there was no knee jerk anger from him that she took his letter, that she read it, or that she interfered. Nothing. He took the news in stride. In this story, Mattie waits until she is five months pregnant when Hurley returns to town to let him know he would be a father. Again, we understand why, but there was no initial anger that in all their phone conversations, she didn't give him a heads up. That he has to learn about it in front of everyone else. Hurley takes everything in stride. He is unhappy that Mattie won't marry him, but he isn't particularly angry and he doesn't get overly anger when his daughter starts to interfere and almost keeps him from the birth of his child. Hurley isn't given enough human emotions to make him more than a paper character.

This is definitely my last Mattie Winston mystery since the murder investigations aren't that exciting and the personal interactions between the characters is starting to fall flat and become rote.

Received an ARC from the publisher in exchange for an honest review.

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### **Mary Brown says**

Mattie Watson is a deputy coroner who is investigating the death of a high school teacher, Derrick Ames. Mattie knows it is a murder because he has a barbecue fork sticking out of his chest. With the help of her boyfriend, Hurley, and other members of the police department, Mattie is determined to find out who the killer is. They have only a few clues to go by and even fewer suspects so it will not be an easy task.

While dealing with the murder, Mattie also has a stalker to worry about. She notices a car following her around at different times and she begins getting hang-up phone calls. When there is an attempt made on her life she knows that she is not imaging the threat.

And if that is not enough to handle, Mattie finds out that she is pregnant. She knows the father of her baby is Hurley and she knows that she loves him but she does not know how he is going to take the news. Hurley recently found out that he is the father of a teenage daughter and he has told Mattie that fatherhood is not something he ever wanted. And although she knows that he cares for her, she is not sure if Hurley loves her.

Mattie is a character that I fell in love with. She is stubborn, fearless, funny and loyal. She puts on a brave

face and wants others to think that she has her act together, but that is far from the truth. She has insecurities about being a good mother and abandonment issues since her father walked away when she was young. She is vulnerable and has many worries that she keeps to herself. I literally laughed out loud at some of the things that happened to her during her pregnancy. Memories of my own pregnancy kept creeping in and I could so relate to all the un-fun things that happened during that time. I thought this aspect of the book was perfectly written and I really enjoyed that.

The writing style flows smoothly and the book is an easy read. The two mysteries are carried on throughout the entire book and I was surprised when the killer was revealed. I did not figure out the killer at all and I really like that.

I would recommend this book to anyone who enjoys a well-crafted cozy. This book had it all, mystery, suspense, humor and heartwarming moments. I have read the first book in this series and after reading this book, I now have book two to read. This book could be read as a stand alone, the characters are well developed enough for that, but I would suggest reading the series in order, just so that you can read more about Mattie.

I received a free copy of this book from NetGalley in exchange for a honest review. And I can honestly say that I give this book a five star rating because I thought it was really great. I would like to thank NetGalley and Kensington Books for the opportunity to read and review this book.

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### **Amy says**

An interesting way to tell a story - The main character, Mattie Winston, is visiting her shrink. Part of the story is told to the shrink (as if it already happened) and the rest is told in the present. It all flows very well and I had a really hard time putting this one down.

Looking forward to the next in this series!

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### **Jenni Schell says**

I liked this book but didn't love it. I enjoyed most of the characters. However, I did find that there may have been too much about the main character and that it took away from the actual mystery.

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