



# Steps to the Altar

*Earlene Fowler*

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Meet Benni Harper...a spirited ex-cowgirl, quilter, and folk-art expert who's staking out her own corner of the contemporary American West. *Steps to the Altar* finds her digging up clues to an unsolved murder—and struggling with a very personal crisis of the heart.

Benni Harper is busy planning two weddings—her best friend Elvia *and* Grandma Dove are both getting hitched. The last thing she needs is more work. But when the local historical society asks her to catalog the contents of some old trunks, she agrees—only to find they belonged to alleged murderer Maple Sullivan! Rumor has it that back in the 1940s she murdered her new husband, ran off with his best friend—and was never heard from again...

Benni knows how difficult marriage can be—especially since her husband's gorgeous ex-girlfriend is back in the picture, posing a real threat. Suddenly Benni finds herself empathizing with Maple's plight—and vows to investigate her case. But there's more to this than meets the eye—and more than a few people who'd rather let sleeping dogs lie...

## Steps to the Altar Details

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### **Sue says**

This Benni Harper installment varied from its usual form of first person Benni by including several short chapters in second person Gabe. It was interesting to see their marital crisis from his point of view although I wondered why we didn't see it first person. It would have been a little less jarring, but still it was nice to get in his head a little and see him up close without always going through the Benni lens. As Benni is preparing for Elvia's and Dove's weddings as the matron of honor for both, a woman from Gabe's past shows up in town and causes a severe rift in their marriage that threatens to split them up permanently on the eve of their second anniversary. Benni is also thrown together again with Sheriff's Detective Hudson as they work on a very old murder case she becomes interested in as an historian. Turns out Hud is an historian, too, and they have something else in common which doesn't make Gabe too happy. This book is much more an exploration of relationships as there is no current dead body for Benni to stumble over, just the historical case, but that is an interesting parallel story. I figured out the who early on but not the correct why, so that was a surprise at the end. These cozy mysteries are good reads with interesting, real-life characters that get deeper and richer as the series goes on.

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### **George says**

#9 in the Benni Harper California rancher mystery series set in ranch country in the Coastal Mountains in the Santa Barbara area. This mystery involves the unsolved suspected murder death of a prominent townsman some 50 years earlier. Benni becomes interested in finding out exactly what happened as she starts working on cataloguing affects of the man's wife who is suspected of killing him.

There are frequent references to quilting in the novel.

Serving as the background for this is the upcoming weddings of Benni's best friend and Benni's grandmother, and she is heavily involved in both weddings. Also, her 2 year marriage to the town's chief of police is teetering on the brink as his former police partner and lover comes to town. This last item is a real waste of time as Benni is unable to trust her husband, take him at his word and so practically drives him into the arms of his former partner with her mostly unreasonable behavior. At the same time she finds herself attracted to a deputy sheriff who likes her and makes a play for her. As she wrestles with her feelings and dealing with him, she doesn't see her situation is similar tpo her husband's.

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### **Elizabeth Kennedy says**

For most of this book, I was upset. I didn't like the story of Gabe's temptation nor did I like the back story of Maple and Garvey. I was expecting there to be a horrible cliff hanger to make me read the next book. You see- I love these characters and when they are being divided apart, it makes the story unforgivably hard to read. But, if you are reading this review to decide to read this book, or to continue reading it, (which, I confess, I have done by reading others reviews) DO FINISH IT! WHAT A WONDERFUL ENDING!!!!!!

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## **Kari says**

This is one of her best books. She adds depth to the characters with each book.

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## **Judy says**

This one is one of my favorites of the series so far. Benni is having some real feelings in this one. Gabe is being a jerk, which makes me sad. And Elvia and Emory are finally getting married.

Usually Benni seems to go looking for a mystery to solve, but in this story the mystery sort of falls in her lap. Or is at the very least thrust upon her by an associate. And this murder is an unsolved cold case, so not so very pressing to find the murderer.

As always, Grandma Dove has words of wisdom for Benni when she "just knows" that Benni and Gabe are having problems. And as always, Dove makes me laugh as she prepares for her own "perfect" wedding to Issac.

This story is really a love story more than a mystery. I enjoyed it a great deal.

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## **Becky Galambos says**

This book is one of my favorites in the series. Believe it or not, Benni is making a quilt - actually two. For a quilting named series, we really don't hear much about her projects, just occasional snippets. Both quilts are bridal quilts, one for her friend Elvia and one for her grandma dove. Dove's ideas about her wedding are hysterical. This book has its share of mystery, but it is all wrapped up in the ooey gooeyness of wedding showers, wedding quilts and happiness in the lives of the characters I have grown to love throughout the course of the series.

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## **Kieraanne says**

Gabe is a such dog in this book. Although one of the reasons I like these books is that even though she "gets the guy" by the third book, it's not just sunshine and roses everyday after that. They still have problems they need to work through in their relationship and they're still progressing as people and as a couple in every book. The murder mystery was good too and it's nice to see Hud come back though I'm not sure I like where they're going with him and Benni (yes I know nothing happens, but still).

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## **Amelia-Irene says**

This is the 9th book in the Benni Harper series.

Benni and Gabe are on the eve of their second anniversary, and Bennie has two wedding showers to throw,

two weddings to attend, all her committees to keep straight and now a set of trunks to catalog for the historical society. If that isn't enough to stress you out, there is trouble in paradise, in the form of one of Gabe's former co-workers in undercover, who is also an ex-lover.

Gabe has never told Benni about this co-worker, and so it is a slap in the face when she meets the "other" woman in her husband's life and of course Gabe doesn't want to talk about it.

In the trunks that Bennie is to catalog, is some information about the woman who owned them, a woman deemed locally as a murderess, but Bennie doesn't think so and nearly everyone that she's spoken to who knew the woman also think that she was innocent of her husband's death. Will Bennie find the truth about this old death. Will she and Gabe stay together or will they call it quits? You'll have to read it to find out.

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### **Lynne says**

First book I have read by this author. I enjoyed it. It is not the first in the series, but I was able to figure out who all the characters were. Enjoyable read.

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### **Judy Goodnight says**

My absolute favorite book in this series!

Elvia is getting married and it should be the happiest time for Benni. But Benni and Gabe's marriage is on shaky ground when Gabe's former partner and ex-lover shows up in town. In the meantime, Benni and sheriff's deputy Hud attempt to piece together the truth about an unsolved mystery from the past - A woman said to have killed her husband who then vanished along with the husband's best friend.

The emotions of the characters in this story just reach out and grab you. Gabe's confusion, Benni's anguish, and the revelation of the truth in the mystery all lead to an emotional crescendo at the finish of the book.

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### **Marty says**

Benni is super busy. In a few weeks her best friend is marrying her cousin and she is Matron of Honor and just a week or so after that her grandmother Dove is marrying Issac (introduced in book 12) and again Benni is Matron of Honor. .... She and Gabe are in the process of moving into their new house ..... and who shows up in town but Gabe's former partner from the LA narcotics division. And the partner is a gorgeous sexy lady who has her cap set for Gabe. – It turns out that Gabe and his partner were more than just work partners! ---- To add to this, Benni was given 4 old trunks to catalogue and save. These trunks belonged to a woman thought to have killed her husband and run away ..... but after looking through her things, Benni is sure she was innocent. Can Benni handle all of the responsibility and still solve a decades old murder mystery? --- I think this is one of the better Benni Harper mysteries.

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## **Patricia says**

Benni Harper solves an old mystery while cataloging the contents of some trunks for the local historical society, at the same time that her best friend is getting married & her grandmother is also planning to wed. If that wasn't enough, an old friend of her husband shows up & it becomes apparent that their relationship was more than a friendship at work. Benni handles it all, fearing she will lose her new husband, but eventually solving the mystery of Maple Sullivan & hoping she can cope with whatever happens in her life. Some fairly graphic content but not too much unless you only like "clean" reads.

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## **Charlyn says**

Fowler builds this book around the theme of fidelity in marriage: Benni's grandmother is getting married to a man who has been married five times; her best friend Elvia is getting married after avoiding relationships for a decade because of a betrayal; her own marriage seems to go off the tracks when Gabe's female ex-partner and ex-lover shows up determined to win him back. And Benni is cataloging the trunks of a young woman who everyone believes killed her husband and fled with his best-friend. The solution of the mystery of whether the young woman was the murderer only really matters to Benni, but she is very determined to work it out. I thoroughly enjoyed this book and plowed through it.

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## **Arlene says**

Benni is helping her best friend and her grandmother plan for their weddings when she is asked to catalog the trunks of the town's notorious murderer. The lady had supposedly killed her husband back in the 40's, then she disappeared with the husband's best friend. Then Benni's husband has an old partner show up. Only the partner is beautiful and single and wants Gabe back. Turns out that Del had been part of the reason that Gabe had gotten a divorce to his first wife. I love reading these mysteries.

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## **Betty says**

Benni is planning weddings for Alvia and Dove. She and Gabe have bought a house and they are moving into it when she was asked to catalog 4 trunks for the historical society. She is doubtful at first; but pressed she finally agrees. An ex-partner of Gabe arrives in San Celina and he becomes busy with her. To keep from stressing about Gabe; Benni becomes interested in the case. Maple Sullivan is accused of murdering husband and disappearing in 1940. A good job of weaving these events, so a story is told.

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