



A Pinch of Poison

Alyssa Maxwell

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The cozy mystery *A Pinch of Poison* hits all the right notes: a sweet-seeming and privileged all-girls school with a secret, a deadly charity luncheon, and a shrewd, proper young lady with just the right amount of tact and intelligence to sort out the nefarious events of the headmistress's mysterious death.

Set in 1919 at the Haverleigh School for Young Ladies (housing rich and connected young debutantes), *A Pinch of Poison* opens with the speech of a young Phoebe Renshaw, the granddaughter of the Earl of Wroxly, imploring the students to help the cause of the Great War by holding a luncheon to benefit wounded veterans. The headmistress, Miss Finch, looks on in approval—but, by the end of the chapter, has keeled over, the victim of an apparent poisoning. With the numerous wealthy families hesitant to allow police to question their delicate (and well-connected) daughters, Lady Phoebe takes on the case herself, employing her own brand of charm and wit in order to carefully piece together the clues to reconstruct what exactly led to the headmistress's death. Occasionally stonewalled, Lady Phoebe must use her charisma, as well as the help of her loyal friend Eva, in order to solve the mystery.

Lady Phoebe is an excellent character, both poised and sharp, but also vulnerable. Occasionally plagued by self-doubt, the twenty-year-old nevertheless perseveres in her work, despite the chaos around her. The boarding school also is intriguing; notwithstanding the distance in time and place, the familiarity of a school provides an easy window of connection, and the various characters all seem like they could be encountered in any period. The hint of romance is the perfect cap to this sweet, delightful mystery, which is sure to appeal to historical-fiction and mystery readers alike.

STEPHANIE BUCKLIN (Winter 2017)

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