



Breeding Ground

Sally Wright

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In Lexington, in 1962, Jo Grant, an architect, who put her work aside to nurse her dying mother (only months before her brother dies), has to run the family broodmare farm she'd rather leave behind - when another casualty from WWII turns up in need at her door, traumatized by his work with the French Resistance – right when she and a WWII OSS vet are trying to stop the killer of a friend caught in the conflicts of another family horse business in the inbred world of Lexington Thoroughbreds.

Breeding Ground Details

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Author : Sally Wright

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From Reader Review Breeding Ground for online ebook

Dan says

Couldn't get through it

I got almost half way through this story and finally gave up the ghost. Never finished it. I guess it is not my cup of tea. I prefer more action than was given in the portion that I did read. If you want a lot of adventure, this seems like it will not be for you.

Sara says

I've primarily read cozies for the past number of years, but the opportunity to get a copy of Book 2 presented itself. That book was described as "a standard mystery, and NOT a cozy book" and as I came to cozies from Patricia Cornwell and such, I thought I'd try something different. I like to start a series at the beginning, however, so I purchased this for my Kindle app.

This book is set in "horse country" aka Lexington, KY and the surrounding area, in 1962. Jo Wright begins with an epilogue explaining that she's an architect by training and not a writer, but she feels she must "write the record of what happened".

The story opens as Jo is in Virginia handling things after her brother's sudden death. She can't believe he survived WWII only to die while riding his motorcycle. She finds a letter written to her by her brother, and learns he was in something called the OSS during the war. He gives her brotherly advice, asks her to take care of his horses and to pass on a list of names to an Army buddy named Alan Munro...who appears at her door the next morning.

Jo's cared for her beloved sick horse and then her cancer-stricken mother, losing both not long before Tom's death. With Tom's request, Jo's plan to travel to the East Coast and Europe to study the architecture is put on hold.

Some reviewers have said they're confused, too many plot lines/characters, etc. I'll admit there are a number of stories and characters but they're intertwined more than the list of characters at the front of the book would suggest.

Secrets...between friends, family members, and acquaintances are the connecting thread in this book. The writer made me feel like I'd met the characters in person.

I look forward to Book 2 which I'm starting in just a few minutes!

Chi Dubinski says

Jo Grant is an architect but she has little time to focus on her career or herself. After nursing a beloved horse through a long illness, she saw her mother through an exhausting bout with cancer. When her brother Tom is

killed in a motorcycle accident, it's almost more than she can bear. She plans to settle her brother's affairs at the Kentucky brood mare ranch he ran with their uncle Toss before she takes off on a long awaited trip to Europe to view its architectural wonders.

But there are complications. Should she sell the horse that was Tom's favorite, the one that had meant so much to him? Tom left Jo a tape for her to listen to after his death; it refers to his wartime activities in the OSS, the predecessor to the CIA. But it's twenty year later—1962—and Jo gets in touch with Alan Munro, who served with her brother. Alan refuses to tell Jo about their war time work with the French Resistance, but then Jack Freeman, another former OSS agent, turns up on the farm, looking for Tom.

There are a lot of plots jostling for space in this book. Will Jo keep an interest in the family business or continue her architecture career? What did Tom, Alan, and Jack do in the OSS, and what does it matter twenty years later? There are also parallel plots about two neighboring businesses dealing with horses and a subplot about a groom looking for work.

It's an insider's look at the world of thoroughbred horses and the related economy. The author evokes a feeling of a Jane Smiley novel. But some plots are never resolved, and characters are left hanging. There is an epilogue that explains that readers may want to know what happened to the characters. "It won't get written here," says Jo. "It'll take another book, or two. Or maybe even three."

Carolyn Livingston says

I particularly enjoyed this book because of its setting in the horse country near Lexington, Kentucky, and I appreciated the research the writer had done to make everything realistic for the time (1960's): information about World War II, equine pharmaceuticals, etc.

As others have mentioned, I was a bit put-off by the long list of characters in the front of the book and, at first, all the subplots. In the long run, however, I enjoyed the characters and the story, and I would read other books by this author. I also appreciated the positive problem-solving used by the characters, setting a good example to follow.

Kathy says

I wish I could give this book 3 1/2 stars because it is better than 3. I liked the complexity of the characters and the interaction of the members of the families. The beginning was a little slow but once I got involved with the characters it held my interest. The murder doesn't take place until 2/3 of the way through but by then several suspects and motives have been presented. This book is written by a Christian author so it does have some Christian themes though not over done by any means. The characters talk about God and praying and purpose but only in context with the story. There is a second book in the Jo Grant series and I already have plans to read it.

However, I enjoyed Sally Wright's Ben Reese series more. I have read the first 3 several times. The titles alone made me buy them. Publish and Perish, Pride and Predator, and Pursuit and Persuasion. I think those are her best so far. I really enjoy her writing style and have read everything I have been able to find by this author.

Sandra says

By the third chapter, *Breeding Ground* had captured me. I "knew" each character as mine. Including the horses. After 26 years living and working in Woodford County and in Lexington, KY myself, I can say that Wright's feeling for the lush--but often hardscrabble--culture of the Bluegrass is real and heartfelt. And it's not just about horses and the folks who love and live by them. There are subtle but important messages that come through...messages born of experiences, challenges, and the faith that we can meet each one honorably. I will warn readers though: Sally Wright initially lulls you with a style of writing that carries you in an easy rhythm--much like riding a well-trained horse. Then, just as you feel comfortable, that "horse" startles and you are hurtling down a new trail of terrifying mystery that you cannot stop. I suggest when you get to the last third of the book you set aside the rest of the day...and maybe night because Wright will not let you leave. And I thank her for that.

Liz V. says

Sally Wright's Ben Reese series led me to this series, set in Kentucky horse country, from which Jo hoped to escape after two long years nursing her terminally ill mother. The death of her brother, a short while later, is added impetus. Foiled by her uncle's injury, Jo knows she must stay to help with the horses, but she hadn't counted on so many others needing her stability and nurturing at a time when she is grieving. Nor had Jo expected her brother's tape about his WWII experiences with the OSS.

One discordant note is Jo's purported ignorance of the OSS and Donovan, which had become public with the debate about creation of the CIA and was beginning to be written about by the early 60s.

Ceelee Sunshine says

Breeding Ground is an excellent contemporary novel set in Kentucky Thoroughbred horse country. How appropriate for Derby Week! I really liked the book but I don't think it should be classified as a mystery at least not in the traditional sense. It was more a literary novel with some suspense. There are plenty of characters and that can get confusing but Ms Wright provides a cast of characters so it is good to study that a bit before plugging in. The story is set in 1962 and centers around Jo Grant an architect who puts her career on hold to take care of her brother Tom's business, the family's broodmare farm, after his death. There is plenty of horse politics and drama among the family horse businesses in the area and one of Tom's military colleagues shows up with stories and memories of World War II. The details of Thoroughbred horse breeding and training was very realistic and gave the most depth to the story. The incidents mentioned with the French Resistance were also accurate. Don't pass up reading the Acknowledgement section as ms Wright explains her inspiration of the story and provides reference for further reading. I highly recommend *AN AMERICAN HEROINE*! Although I think the story was a little too complex at times and maybe the mystery was a little over the top I enjoyed the book very much. There were some grammatical errors I would have corrected if I had been her editor but for the most part the story was well written. I got the impression from Jo herself that there will be more to the story and we should expect more books to come. Sounds good to me!

Lou Allin says

Death and Transfiguration in Kentucky

The talented Sally Wright is known for her acclaimed series starring Ben Reese. This time she embraces a place near to her heart, the green rolling hills of Kentucky, world's number-one horse country.

Jo Grant is an architect with a family secret. It relates to a package left to her by her brother, a WW2 vet, who died in 1965 in a motorcycle accident. She's writing thirty years later, and reveals how she became not a seeker, but a facilitator at the hub of the action.

The story opens in Virginia as Jo returns from Tom's memorial service. Alone in his house, she plans to relocate his horses to the Lexington area, where she lives, then sell them. His favourite, Sam, has other ideas. He develops a life-threatening colic which jumpstarts the action:

Sam was drenched and steaming...he rolled onto his stomach...back legs tucked toward the side...his ears hung low and limp...his soft brown eyes were wide and frightened.

Tom has left a reel-to-reel recording tape and a leather book as well as a letter sealed with wax. Much older than Jo, he belonged to the fabled OSS and had sworn an oath of secrecy after returning from the war. Like many men, he had to settle for an ordinary job without the heightened awareness of wartime. Now in her thirties, both parents gone, Jo has the maturity to understand. What does he want from her? Just realizing his amazement at being given the gift of survival when others hadn't?

In Virginia for Tom's service, WW2 veteran Alan Munro stops to pay his respects. The leather book with contact addresses is for him. Fortuitously, he's also moving to Lexington. Even better, he's in equine pharmaceuticals. Their paths will cross again. How could they not with the respect for him shown in Tom's letters? Alan was wounded saving a French woman from a live grenade and spent a year in hospital recovering.

Jo's family business has over forty Thoroughbred mares on twelve hundred acres, for breeding and foal delivery. While not rich themselves other than in ancestral history dating to the Revolution, the Grants have a large profile in the community. Is Jo up to the pressure? What about her own sidelined career as an architect? She had to nurse her mother through a fatal illness, then re-arrange business after Tom's death. How much personal life should one woman sacrifice to uphold the family reputation?

When Jo returns to her horse farm, Buddy Jones, a grade-school pal, shows up in need of a job. Then when he's settled, another more derelict quester arrives. Jack Freeman is a haunted man, old beyond his years and sick with pneumonia, but he was a friend of Tom's and has his own tormented past involving occupied France. Like Tom, he will reveal nothing.

Jo's Uncle Toss's injury brings Buddy into the forefront, but the lapsing alcoholic Freeman is more problematical. He needs money, but working inside terrifies him after his war experiences. Can he, too, be redeemed?

Wright has a special love letter for horse country:

Some hills were wooded, some plowed fields, some blue grass and alfalfa – a hundred shades of green together sprinkled with brown and grey, with wild redbuds turning pink in the woodlots that were laced with white dogwood.

The book contains an underlay of complex details of equine training and medicine. Wright never sugar-coats the truth, but faces facts head on. Just as some horses are too dangerous to live, against this backdrop is the human tragedy and comedy. Greed, jealousy, and revenge can lead to desperation, and even murder. A secret breeding might create a colt worth hundreds of thousands. To trust everyone is unwise, but trusting no one brings a lonely life. That Jo realizes that this is a pivotal point in her adulthood where a man might be welcome ramps up the suspense and introduces a complicated but realistic romance.

In addition to horse lore, sprinkled with a deft touch, and the individual, endearing traits of horses which

only a breeder or owner could know, Wright has done her homework on the OSS in occupied France, and the cross-turmoil of the tumultuous days of the end of the war that haunted many men and women for the rest of their lives.

Rhonda Lane says

This literary mystery begins in equestrian Middleburg, VA, in an ice storm with a scene that will leave readers, especially horse lovers, clutching their chests. Afterward, most of the story moves back home to Lexington, KY's thoroughbred horse breeding farms.

The book is set in 1962. To give you a little perspective, WWII veterans are approaching middle age. JFK is still president and John Glenn was the first American to orbit the earth. Lexington is still largely surrounded by farmland.

As a former Lexingtonian, I know that suburban sprawl and shopping centers galore are on the horizon in less than 10 or 12 years. Likewise, the 1980s dispersal of KY bloodstock hasn't happened yet. Yet, in 1962, the farms are still in the hands of families, not large international entities or partnerships, but those middle class family horse farms like Jo Munro's are already feeling the pinch.

Anyway, main character Jo Munro frustrated and at loose ends. She left her job as an architect to take care of her mother, who wasn't an easy patient, and now has to contend with the fallout of her older brother's untimely accidental death. Secrets, as in classified-in-the-war stuff, emerge. Then, her other brother who also primarily runs their family farm is injured, so much of the responsibility for the farm falls on Jo.

The mystery shifts from what happened to her brother and his Army buddies during the war to the relationships of the families surrounding the Munro farm. Most of the characters work in equine-related businesses, particularly family businesses, like building horse vans, developing equine pharmaceuticals, training horses and running stud farms, as well as other horse industry support positions.

This book is the first in a series and feels like a long setup, but I was fine with that. When the pace is fast, it moves along at a good clip. Then, we spend a lot of time meeting the characters, getting to know their families and their businesses.

Readers who only read mysteries for the whodunnit-and-how-we-find-them might become impatient. Readers familiar with horses and racing and thoroughbred horse breeding will enjoy this book.

I'm looking forward to the next installment.

Jo-Ann Murphy says

I was lucky enough to get this book through the Goodreads Giveaways. The characters are well developed and the story is compelling. The author describes the settings and the details in a way that allows the reader

to feel they are seeing the story unfold. I would not classify it as a mystery as the "mystery" was pretty obvious. But as a novel with some accurate historical events, I thought it was outstanding.

The characters are nicely intertwined with complex back stories and events that converge to bring them together. The plot moved at a nice pace and I hated to put it down because I was enjoying the Kentucky horse farms so much.

Horse lovers should like all the details of the breeding farms and culture. I found them fascinating.

The ending tied up almost all the loose strings. Though it did leave one or two questions before she threw in the teasers in the last chapter to make you look forward to the next volume.

I look forward to reading the other books in this series but if they are like this, they should not be promoted as mysteries.

Aisling says

This is a great book for anyone who loves horses, multi layered family saga, a little mystery, a little crazy....I found it slow starting and just not as gripping as I usually like. I wanted to give it three stars but that felt low, four feels high. It's a nice read (which seems like damming with faint praise, right?) but not a great read. I suppose if you were big into horses, Kentucky or the OSS of WW2 you might find it more engaging.

Joan says

[
The story itself was a mixed bag

Rebecca says

not sure how I feel on this one. mixed. opening sounds like it should be a mystery, but it isn't... or at least not much of one. starts very slow, relies heavily on foreshadowing to try to keep interest. and killer is obvious. on the other hand, it develops some interesting characters and kept me reading. lots going on beyond the "mystery"

Gloria says

Nice mystery with the background of Kentucky racing. Cozy read.
