



A Bitter Truth

Charles Todd

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“Highly recommended—well-rounded, believable characters, a multi-layered plot solidly based on human nature, all authentically set in the England of 1917...an outstanding and riveting read.”

—*New York Times* bestselling author Stephanie Laurens

“Bess Crawford is a strong and likable character.”

—*Washington Times*

Already deservedly lauded for the superb historical crime novels featuring shell-shocked Scotland Yard inspector Ian Rutledge (*A Lonely Death*, *A Pale Horse* et al), acclaimed author Charles Todd upped the ante by introducing readers to a wonderful new series protagonist, World War One battlefield nurse Bess Crawford. Featured for a third time in *A Bitter Truth*, Bess reaches out to help an abused and frightened young woman, only to discover that no good deed ever goes unpunished when the good Samaritan nurse finds herself falsely accused of murder. A terrific follow up to Todd's *A Duty to the Dead* and *An Impartial Witness*, *A Bitter Truth* is another thrilling and evocative mystery from “one of the most respected writers in the genre” (*Denver Post*) and a treat for fans of Elizabeth George, Anne Perry, Martha Grimes, and Jacqueline Winspear.

A Bitter Truth Details

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Author : Charles Todd

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From Reader Review *A Bitter Truth* for online ebook

Deborah says

While I like the character (nurse Bess Crawford) and the time and place (England, WW I), this story was very disappointing. The premise was very weak and the events that followed felt very forced. It lacked an emotional center. This book bore little comparison to the Ian Rutledge mysteries by the same mother/son writing team. Those books are emotional, intelligent and much more engaging.

A more fulfilling series that involves a WW I nurse is the William Monk/Hester Latterly books by Anne Perry.

Marielle says

This book does little to answer *The Question of Simon*. When introduced in the first book, I assumed he must be gay. Why else would a nice guy, still young enough to fight (I'd guess in his 40s), still be single and opt to live in a small cottage by himself? I mean, it's war time, an eligible man who doesn't have to go fight would have women following him around. Then, as I read the books, I thought possibly he was in love with Bess (he goes wherever she goes in England). Or maybe it's her mother since it's her mother that always sends him out to protect/chauffeur Bess. Or maybe it's her father. Someone in the family. This book does nothing to answer this. And her family is odd, she gets sent back to England to deal with a police inquiry and they don't bother to go visit her? They just send Simon? Doesn't that seem odd? Maybe her father is busy with war office stuff, but surely her mother would want to see her since she works in a war zone. Ah well. One thing that I thought would help *The Question* (small spoiler) ([view spoiler](#))

Judith Starkston says

Charles Todd's *A Bitter Truth* interweaves the vices of war with the failings of families into a psychologically and historically compelling mystery set in England in 1917. Bess Crawford, an intelligent and fearless nurse working on the front lines in France, comes home on leave to discover a frightened young woman with a bruised face hiding on the doorstep of her London flat. Unable by nature to leave the mysterious stranger out in the cold winter night, Bess convinces her to take shelter inside. Little does Bess know what a great deal of trouble she has brought into her life.

Charles Todd—who is actually a mother-son partnership made up of Caroline and Charles Todd—excels at keeping the war and its manifold repercussions and tragedies front and center even while much of the action takes place in England. Todd also portrays an extended family already traumatized before the war and now disintegrating under the war's pressures. Bess finds herself unwillingly bound to this family through her initial concern for Lydia, the young woman on her doorstep and the possibility she needs to be protected from a violent marriage. That turns out to be only the first level of secrets and crimes that will be unveiled throughout.

You're never sure whether those crimes and secrets arise from the war or whether they are connected to the

private history of this one family. The interplay shows how, even far from the actual fighting, the war has torn apart even a small country town and its denizens. This is one of the most sophisticated critiques of the effects of war I've read—so subtle you won't notice it while you're enjoying the mystery, but its resonances will stay with you long after you finish reading.

This is the third of the Bess Crawford mysteries, preceded by *A Duty to the Dead* and *An Impartial Witness*. A fourth book in the series, *An Unmarked Grave*, is now available.

LJ says

First Sentence: A cold rain had followed me from France to England, and an even colder wind greeted me as we pulled into the railway station in London.

Returning from the battlefields of France to England for Christmas leave, WWI nurse Bess Crawford encounters a desperate woman, rain-drenched and bruised in her building's entry. Offering her shelter, Bess slowly learns the woman, Lydia Ellis, had been struck by her husband during an argument. Lydia begs Bess to return to the family's house in Sussex with her and, fearing Lydia may have a concussion. Bess agrees, entering a home filled with tension and, ultimately, murder with Bess being an initial suspect.

The mother and son team of Charles Todd write some of the most evocative descriptions creating a wonderfully strong sense of time and place. The alternating settings of London, and English country house and the stark reality, cruelty and death of war are deftly handled. Even more, they deal with the front and the wounded in a manner which is strongly impactful, yet not overly graphic.

The dialogue is so well done; it is atmospheric..."The forest is—I don't know—not haunted, but most certainly, it broods." with a well-placed sense of irony and occasional wry humor. The language doesn't work hard at reflecting the period, but the sense of it is still there, particularly with the use of the old collective noun "a crocodile of children."

Bess is a character who has grown on me with each successive book. She is a dedicated nurse, but the authors have restrained her from coming across as prissy. The relationship with Simon, her father's ex-Sergeant Major and now assistant, is one handled with proper decorum and appropriateness to the period, but one rather hopes to see grow as the series progresses. Lydia, the wife in trouble, is very well constructed as a character who is difficult to like, but one who elicits one's sympathy.

There were a couple weaknesses to the book. It did become tiresome that some of the characters were continuously referred to by their full names and, although I suppose necessary for the plot, I did have a problem with one significant decision made by Bess to not tell the police about a piece of evidence. Both of these are minor points, however, when weighed against the book's strengths.

"A Bitter Truth" is the best, so far, of the three books in the Bess Crawford series. How lucky are we readers to have two such good series from Charles Todd.

A BITTER TRUTH (Hist Mys-Bess Crawford-England/France-1917/WWI) – VG

Todd, Charles – 3rd in series

Wm. Morrow, 2011, Unc. Proof – HC ISBN:

Magdalena aka A Bookaholic Swede says

Bess Crawford is on leave from the front when she stumbles over a woman outside her house. She takes pity on her and learns that the woman has been struck by her husband and has fled to London. She slowly gains the woman's trust and learns that her name is Lydia and that her husband's name is Roger. Bess agrees to travel with her home to her house in the country. But this act of kindness will result in quite a lot of trouble as everyone in the household inclusive Bess will be suspected in a murder case.

Once again has Charles Todd written an engrossing historical novel with where Bess ends up having to find out the truth. She must try to figure out why anyone would kill a houseguest, but this time, even she is a suspect. Prior to the man's death has he asked Roger at dinner about a child that looked like Julianna, Rogers little sister that died when she was just 6 years old. But who is the child in question and could that simple question really be the reason for his death?

As much as I enjoyed the book and the mystery was I also a bit puzzled why it all had to be such a hush-hush thing. When the truth finally was revealed about the child was not that overly surprised, I would have liked a more interesting and perhaps surprising mystery than that. I felt that the family mourning of Julianna was frankly a bit over-the-top sometimes that it could affect the present time that much. Yeah, it was tragical, and yeah she was a beautiful child. But sometimes the truth could perhaps save some heartache and time. Still I enjoyed finding out the truth even though it was a little let down that it wasn't that complex.

But the murders is all whole other story, I failed to realize who the murder was. It wasn't until Bess and Simon Brandon realized who it was and then everything made sense.

One thing that really pleased me (and confused me) was that Sergeant Lassiter Larimore has finally made his first entrance in this book series. I am a bit confused about the name of him since I read about him A Pattern of Lies where he was Sergeant Lassiter, but here is he called Sergeant Larimore. Could there really be two different Aussie Sergeants with the same trademark Kookaburra laughter?

I just have to read on to figure it out...

4.5 stars

Mairita (Marii gr?matplaukts) says

3,5, varb?t 4 zvaigznes. Spriedzes gabals, bet kaut k? viet?m nep?rliecin?ja notikumi un pier?d?jumu pavedieni. Saj?ta par klavier?m no kr?miem, lai gan aiz deguna izvaz?ja smalki.

Katherine says

At the outset it is necessary to say that I have not read the first two Bess Crawford Mysteries so Bess' background and her relationship to Simon, who seems to appear anytime Bess is in dire straits, is not familiar to me. As a result I found the relationship confusing. But, even if I understood that aspect of the story, I

would be hard-pressed to believe the whole basis of the book. That a war-time nursing sister would take in an abused woman in the middle of the night in London was a stretch for me, when the woman was a total stranger. But I put that aside and said to myself -- it is Christmas time, so therefore cold and dark and deserted and Bess is, after all, in the humanitarian business--so maybe. BUT, she then forgoes her visit to her worried parents on a holiday leave to travel with this stranger to the home of the woman's abusive spouse? And the spouse and his mother and grandmother and sister and brother-in-law to say nothing of the town's rector and doctor greet this stranger with open arms and reveal all kinds of family secrets seemingly easily was really stretching my ability to accept.

We are speaking upper society here, with a son who has supposedly swatted his wife in the face! A scandal if ever there was one. Nevermind, that Bess seems to have some pedigree of her own--she is a total stranger. This would never happen. Needless to say, having found this all very difficult to accept the multiple murders and the mystery of who dunnit was really secondary. About the only part that rang true for me was Bess' experiences in France, her meeting the Australian and maybe the nuns and the orphans for whom they were caring.

Since Charles Todd was lauded prominently on the dust cover as a New York Times Bestselling Author I stuck it out but won't run out to buy another of this authors' works any time soon. It wasn't horrible but it wasn't gripping either and I found I don't much care what happens to the characters.

Jennifer Mccann says

So installment 3. Pretty good. A solid 4.

A few things I didn't like: 1) Lydia. Spoiled and making demands of Bess to stay or do things. Jesus woman, just say no. 2) Simon finds a connection between the dead that no one knew of creating motive for another character- how about a wee bit of foreshadowing? Otherwise it looks contrived for a different ending than the illogical mess that came before. 3) Give Bess a love life, a wee bit of romance in her life. Don't make her so flat and only driven by duty. 4) Either give Simon a more prominent role and take that some place, or have her family show up other than the occasional phone call. 5) Someone should hit Roger in the face for being a rude asshole. Yeah he hit his wife once, and yes their reactions were appropriate for the era, but still make him at least a bit apologetic, instead of a total angry asshole, so we can believe at least a little bit that he isn't a total wife beating monster.

Like I said... A solid 4. Good but formulaic. Bess needs growth as a person and in her personal life, instead of randomly getting accidentally entwined/ inserted in someone else's mess. I mean, for the most part Bess was irrelevant to the story.

Rhea says

3.5 stars. Good, but wasn't a compelling read for me - seemed a bit draggy in spots. Protagonist is morally refreshing - enjoyed the author's characterization of this resolute nurse in an interesting WW I timeframe! I believe I did enjoy the 1st one of this series a bit more - "Duty to the Dead" which I recently read.

Bonnie says

I have read the Ian Rutledge and Bess Crawford series by Charles Todd mother and son writers, so I was expecting a great read and I was not disappointed with *A Bitter Truth*. The main character is Bess Crawford who is a nurse in France during the war. On her way up the stairs to her apartment in London, she sees a woman huddled under the stairs. The weather is bitter cold and Bess can see the woman has on a thin coat and is shivering uncontrollably. She invites the woman in and gives her hot tea and offers her a bed for the night. The woman reveals that a quarrel with her husband had erupted into violence, yet she wants to go home--if Bess will come with her to Sussex. What Bess finds at Vixen Hill is a house filled with mourning. The family had gathered for a memorial service for the eldest son who has died of war wounds. The husband of the woman he had quarreled with is tormented by jealousy and his own guilty conscience. When a houseguest is found dead. Bess herself becomes suspect in the case. This is the inciting factor that leads her to a dangerous quest in war-torn France. Lydia, the wife who had been assaulted by her husband has longed for a child and when Bess discovers the child in an orphanage in France, the plot thickens. Did her husband have an affair with a woman in France? The novel is well written and has the reader turning pages until the mysteries are solved.

Leah says

I liked this book but I also found it really slow.

Cate (The Professional Fangirl) says

This is a **Reading Good Books** review.

* In compliance with FTC guidelines, it should be noted that I received the book for free through Goodreads First Reads.

I have a love-hate relationship with the mystery/thriller genre so I'm constantly on the hunt for new titles to see how an author will twist the well-known and loved genre into something new. I haven't read anything by Charles Todd before so I was quite looking forward to reading this one.

A Bitter Truth is third in the series of mystery novels featuring battlefield nurse – and accidental sleuth – Elizabeth “Bess” Crawford. Upon her return to England from war-torn France, she encounters a bruised and beaten woman named Lydia Ellis. Ever the good heart, Bess takes her in. Lydia tells a tale of violence and betrayal and tells Bess that the only way she would come back to her Sussex home is if Bess would accompany her. They find Lydia's home of Vixen Hill in mourning over a lost brother. As Bess prepares to return to London, a house guest is murdered and Bess becomes a suspect.

Okay, the GOOD:

I like the overall mood and setting of the story. Very gothic, noir-like. The scenes in France had a totally different feel from those set in England. It really transports you to WWII era. The story progression, albeit slow, was steady; no flashbacks and almost re-telling of events within the text. It almost had the feel of a dinner theatre mystery. I liked the character of Bess. She was solid and consistent and strong. Simon

Brandon and Sergeant Larimore were very likable as well.

Although I did not like most of the Ellises, they had good character development. However, I am not sure if readers are supposed to hate them as much as I did. They, especially Gran, were cold and self-centered. Lydia was insensitive and impractical (although I did like her the most out of her family). At first, I thought it made sense for the author to antagonize the Ellis family for the sake of the story but towards the end, I'm not quite sure if that was necessary... or even relevant overall.

And, the stuff I did not like:

Okay, I liked the premise of the story and the direction it was going as I read on. But the execution was lacking. Everything was long-drawn-out and it slowed the story down. There were parts where I was reading a passage again and again until my eyes glazed over. I had a hard time getting into it because the beginning was slow and boring. (And as it turns out, the whole first part had absolutely NOTHING to do with the bigger picture. Filler!) And the overall writing was choppy. It was like it was trying to sound like something it's not. I can't quite figure it out. Maybe it's because "Charles Todd" is a pseudonym for a mother-son writing team? Two people with different writing styles. The words did not flow smoothly. The switching between calling the Ellis family members by their first name and full name got confusing fast. "Mrs. Roger, Mrs. Lydia, Lydia Ellis", all one person. Can't we just call her "Lydia"? "Mama Ellis, Mrs. Ellis, Roger's mother"? I gave up after a while and just went with it.

There were also some questionable decisions that I don't want to get into. (That's for a reader guide or a book club to discuss.) I have to say that I was impressed that I wasn't able to crack the case before the book told me who did it. But that was short-lived because more irrelevant things happen towards the end of the book.

With that said, this was enough to spark my interest in seeking out other Charles Todd books. Bess is a great character and I would like to see her in the author's other work.

Rating: 3/5.

Recommendation: This can be a good book club selection. There is a good amount of mystery and intrigue and lots to talk about.

Kathleen (Kat) Smith says

Life is about to change for battlefield nurse, Bess Crawford on a dark and blustery night in London. When the police are searching for a deserter, Bess heads home to her flat alone. Yet on the stoop of her doorway is a woman, hiding and wearing a thin coat, trying to find temporary shelter from the storm. When Bess offers her a cup of tea and a respite from the weather for a few minutes, she sees that the woman's face bears a battered and bruise hand print along with endless tears down her face.

Fearing the worst but don't wanting to frighten the poor woman, she learns that she is running from her husband, Roger Ellis. Not prone to violence against his wife, Bess learns that the woman's name is Lydia and offers her a place to stay. Lydia fears the worst could happen the longer she stays away and asks Bess to accompany her home to Vixen Hill.

There Bess will meet the Ellis family of three generations of widows and meet the spirit of Julianna, who died a young girl and one whom the family can't seem to forget. Bess is talked into staying a few days to help care for Lydia and help her deal with issues involving her husband's jealousy. During her stay, the family is planning a memorial service to lay the headstone of one of the sons that was killed in the war. Only on the eve of the memorial service, one of the house guests George Hughes confides a deep family secret to Bess when neither of them can sleep. When the house awakens in the morning, George is soon discovered murdered and someone in the house is the prime suspect.

I received the novel *A Bitter Truth* by Charles Todd compliments of Harper Collins Publishers for my honest review. It feels like a historical version of the game, *Clue*, as Bess Crawford attempts to solve the mystery surrounding the Ellis family secret and the murder of George Hughes. Set in London during the middle of World War 1, the mystery continues to grow as more and more people turn up missing or murdered as well. I rate this book a 4.5 out of 5 stars and is perfect for you crime solving sleuth fans!

Andrew Macrae says

Bess Crawford is an English army nurse traveling home to spend Christmas with her family in a brief respite from 1917 war-torn Europe. At least that was the plan before she encountered Lydia Ellis, a woman with a badly bruised face fleeing her husband.

This is the third novel featuring WWI British army nurse Bess Crawford and in it, the author weaves a complex tapestry of murder and betrayal out of an almost dizzying assortment of disparate threads. “*A Bitter Truth*” features a large cast of characters, locations ranging from London and the English countryside to the war’s front lines, port cities in England and France and enough murderous motives to daunt the most dedicated detective.

In *Bess Crawford*, the author has created a believable and satisfying heroine. She’s plucky and resourceful as one would expect, but she is also a product of her time and sensibilities. Part of the enjoyment of reading this novel is watching as Bess navigates her way as an independent woman in a male-run world.

Most of the story takes place in and around Vixen Hall, a bleak ancestral home in a dank and dismal part of Sussex. There, Bess finds herself a reluctant and mostly unwelcome guest of the Ellis family, an old and aristocratic family burdened by too many tragic deaths and unresolved secrets.

When a guest is found murdered Bess is caught up in the investigation. It is almost a welcome relief when she is finally free of the house and its family and back working amidst the horrors of trench warfare in a front line medical aid station in France.

But Bess has made a promise and feels duty-bound to keep it and scours the war-torn towns of France for a child who may or may not be real. Meanwhile, back in England, the murder investigation continues with deadly consequences.

Reviewed by Andrew MacRae for *Suspense Magazine*

Monica says

So so. Bess is an inconsistent character, the family that she is drawn in to help is full of stereotypes - and their obsession with a dead perfect child is a bit over the top. The plot is full of red herrings, and bogs down as a result. The war time scenes are good, and the character of the Aussie sergeant Larimore is a welcome

bright spot in the midst of all the starchy and angst ridden types.
