

READERS' GUIDE

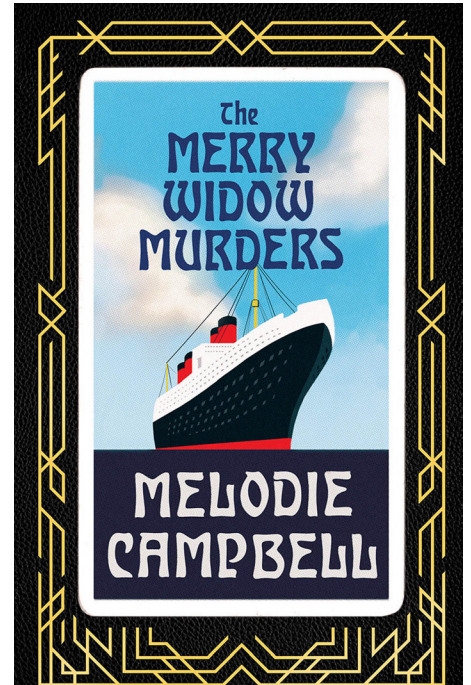
The Merry Widow Murders by Melodie Campbell

INTRODUCING *The Merry Widow Murders*

Lucy Revelstoke, unconventional widow of a young British lord and daughter of a Canadian mobster twice removed, is crossing the Atlantic on a state-of-the-art ocean liner in 1928. Rubbing elbows with the era's elite and reconnecting with her husband's aristocratic friend Tony should make for a swell trip. But a dead body dumped in Lucy's stateroom the first night of the voyage threatens to capsize the new life she's built for herself.

Who is this dead man? And how did he get into her room?

Together with her pickpocket-turned-maid and Tony, Lucy rushes to investigate, just steps ahead of the authorities who will certainly dig too deeply into her dodgy Canadian past.



IMPORTANT THEMES

Societal Roles and Rules – People in both British upper society and North American mobs, nobility or servant, criminal or legitimate, are expected to uphold certain roles. Lucy escaped the restrictions her family placed upon her, took up a new role as a wife to an English lord, and now possesses a different kind of freedom as a widow.

Past Secrets – Lucy and Elf are worried that the murder investigation will dig up secrets from their past. They also look into the past of other characters to seek motive, means, and opportunity. Packed into a confined space for five days, secrets come to light about numerous suspects, though they try to hide it from their peers.

Old and New World – On a transatlantic voyage from America to England, the characters discuss changing societal traditions and technological innovations. The wheels of progress introduces good things, such as women's right to vote, but globalization also leads to problems, such as greedy industrial practices and killer war machines.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Lucy's history includes a childhood around Canadian mobsters and a marriage to an English lord. How do the experience and knowledge she gained from her unique background aid her in solving this murder mystery?
2. On page 91, Lucy states, "Being a widow now gave me certain freedoms, perhaps even more than I had enjoyed as his wife. But even now, if I failed to behave to the minimum required of a dutiful dowager countess, English society would shun me." What are these "certain freedoms"? What is the "minimum required of a dutiful dowager countess"?
3. At the same time, Lucy is an unconventional widow, as Elf is an unconventional maid. How do they defy the traditional definition of the lady-and-servant roles and relationship?
4. *The Merry Widow Murders* takes place years after the end of World War I, but the ramifications of the Great War can still be felt throughout the novel. How do these global and personal struggles resultant from the war affect these characters?
5. Many characters attempt to investigate this murder, from Lucy and Elf, to Mr. Mason and Gray. How do their methods and approaches compare from each other?
6. Lucy decides she will become a "Merry Widow" (p. 4) and often has a macabre sense of humour. How does this outlook on life serve her through challenging times, in her backstory and in the present?
7. A murder mystery aboard a cruise liner means there is a small circle of suspects. When is Lucy guided by skepticism and suspicions? When does she take a leap of faith and put trust in someone else?
8. A mix of Old World (British) and New World (American and Canadian) characters interact aboard the *Victoriana*. How do the concepts of reputation and propriety, marriage and inheritance compare and contrast between the Old World and the New?



ABOUT MELODIE

Called the "Queen of Comedy" by the *Toronto Sun*, Melodie Campbell was also named the "Canadian literary heir to Donald Westlake" by *Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine*. Winner of ten awards, including The Derringer (US) and the Crime Writers of Canada Award of Excellence, she has multiple bestsellers, and was featured in USA Today. Her publications include over one hundred comedy credits, seventeen novels and sixty short stories, but she's best known for The Goddaughter mob caper series. Campbell lives in Burlington, Ontario.