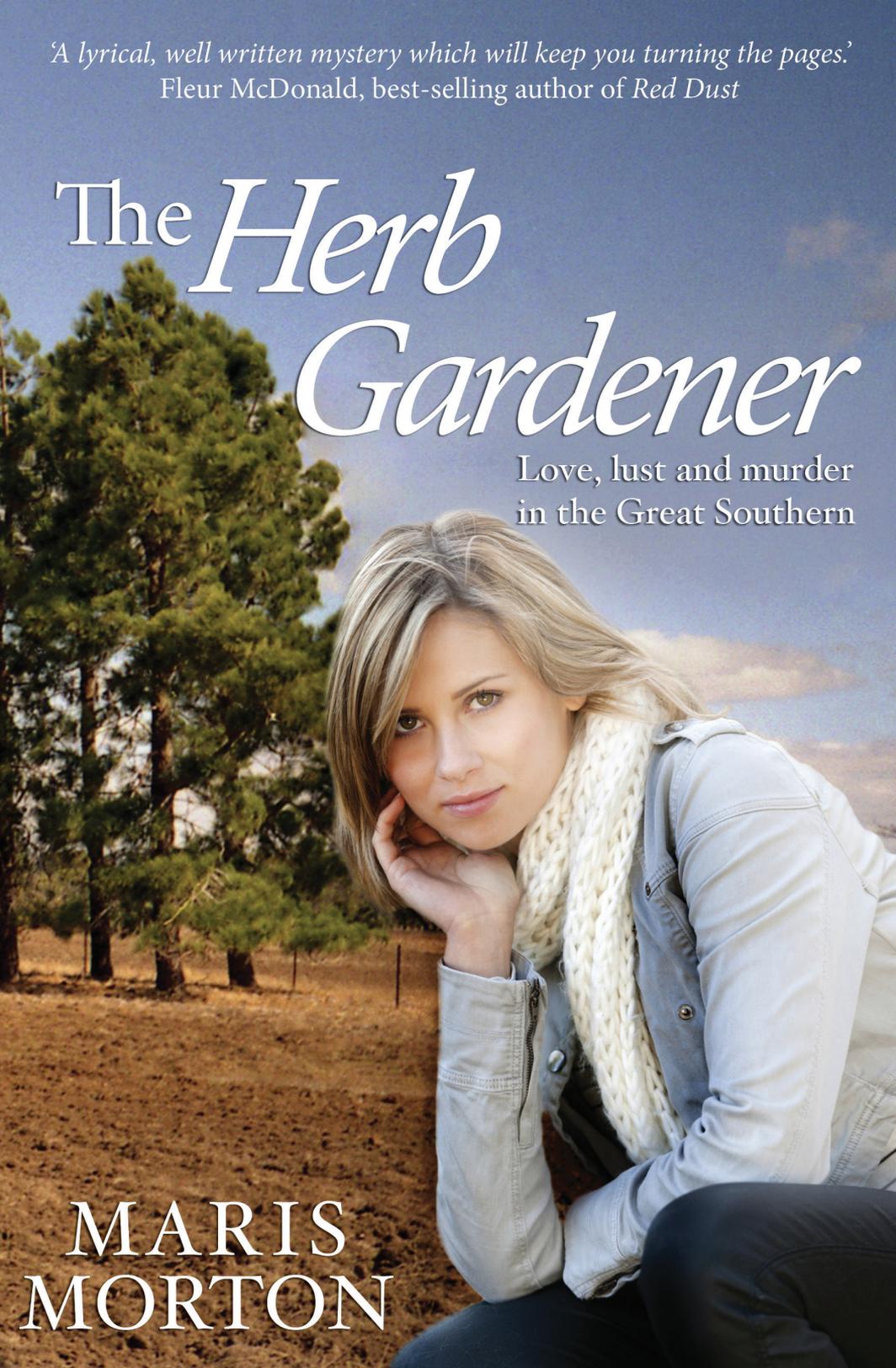


'A lyrical, well written mystery which will keep you turning the pages.'
Fleur McDonald, best-selling author of *Red Dust*

The *Herb* *Gardener*

Love, lust and murder
in the Great Southern



MARIS
MORTON



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The Herb Gardener

Love, lust and murder in the
Great Southern

Still hurting after a painful divorce, Joanna leaves the city, moving with her six-year-old daughter Mia to a country town. She's looking for a better, happier life, and when she meets farmer Chris Youngman, she discovers the possibility of a future as a farmer's wife.

Joanna is at first dismayed by the unexpected isolation of the farm, but Chris's affection helps her to adjust. Then the unexplained death of a young farm worker brings complications she could never have imagined, and Joanna has to fight for her happiness, her family, and even her own life.



RRP: AU\$23.95 pb • US\$19.95 pb
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Crime / Mystery / Outback Romance

270pp ♦ 152 x 228 mm

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“A lyrical, well-written mystery which will keep you turning the pages.” – Fleur McDonald, best-selling author of *Red Dust*

“What a great book to share with all your friends!” – Englewood Public Library

“This is an undiscovered gem of Australian fiction...” – Robyn, Goodreads Reviewer

For media enquiries and ordering information, contact:

Michelle Lovi, Publisher

Odyssey Books

contact@odysseybooks.com.au



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

76-Year-Old Author Maris Morton Releases New Book, *The Herb Gardener*, to an Enthusiastic Response

Australian independent publishing house Odyssey Books has announced the release of acclaimed 76-year-old author Maris Morton's latest book *The Herb Gardener* to the excitement of her many fans.

It's never too late to follow your dreams. That becomes clear when you take a look at the story of Odyssey Books author, Maris Morton, who's only a few years into her career as an award-winning writer. This is remarkable since Morton is 76 years young, having published her first novel at the age of 71. Morton's latest book *The Herb Gardener* will be published in paperback on 17 June; the ebook is already receiving enthusiastic reviews.

'It feels good to be a published author,' she commented. 'I learned to appreciate country life during the two decades I spent in Western Australia. The people and places I encountered there are etched in my memory, and provide the raw material for most of my stories.'

The Herb Gardener tells an exciting, romantic and suspense-filled tale of a young woman who leaves behind her life in the city to live in the country and find love. Danger quickly follows as the plot develops and the twists and turns displaying Morton's strengths as a storyteller and her insight and experience as a human being.

In 2010 Ms Morton won the prestigious CAL Scribe Fiction award for *A Darker Music*.

The early response to *The Herb Gardener* has been overwhelmingly positive.

Robyn Koshel recently said in a five-star review, 'I am a big fan of Australian fiction and this book exceeded expectations. It was the perfect blend of mystery and romance. From the start you are dropped right in the middle of the action. Slowly you get to know these characters by deed and reaction; it is very refreshing not always to have to be told ...'

The book is available from the Odyssey Books website and from all good booksellers in paperback and ebook formats.

For more information visit www.marismorton.com
and www.odysseybooks.com.au.

THE AUTHOR



Maris Morton came to writing late, with her prize-winning debut novel, *A Darker Music*, published after she had accumulated experience in jobs ranging from cooking for shearers, teaching, the public service, arts administration, finally retiring as the director of a public art gallery in 1999.

Two decades of living in country Western Australia has provided the background for much of her writing.

At present, she lives among the rainforests of northern New South Wales, working on a new novel to the accompaniment of a symphony of birdsong.

www.marismorton.com

EXCERPT

THE STRIP OF bitumen stretched ahead through the late afternoon gloom, fringed with the straggly trees that were common in this part of the country. Between the trees Joanna could catch glimpses of empty paddocks but there'd been no sign of the red mailbox she had been told to watch for, and she was starting to get anxious. What if she'd missed it?

Where was the piece of paper with Chris's mud-map? In her handbag, maybe, or somewhere among the clutter of shopping in the back seat. She couldn't remember what she'd done with it. Should she stop and look for it? No, better keep going. This had to be the right road. But what if she'd misunderstood his directions? She could imagine herself marooned on this lonely road, hungry and cold, in the growing darkness. Would Chris come searching for her? How would he know where to look?

'Mummy?'

Joanna glanced at the little girl strapped in beside her and took a careful breath, stifling her fears. 'Mm?'

'Mummy, has Chris got a pony?'

'A pony?' The question came as a surprise, but Joanna tried to answer lightly. 'I don't know, lovely. He hasn't mentioned one to me. I guess you'll have to wait and see.'

Mia nodded, apparently satisfied. Joanna concentrated on the road again. She eased her grip on the steering wheel, straightening the cramped fingers of one hand, then the other, then lifted her left foot away from the clutch, flexing her ankle.

Two hours ago she'd been waiting for the school bell to signal the end of term. Eager to get on her way, she hadn't waited for Marshall's speech and the dreaded sticky cake that Mollie had warned her was an end-of-term ritual. But Mia had been slow coming out of the primary school, and loading up the car and collecting last-minute shopping had taken far longer than she'd expected. If she didn't find the red mailbox soon, it would be too dark to recognise Chris's place.

What would happen if she drove straight past? Where would they end up? How much petrol was there in the tank? If she broke down, how far was she from anyone who would help her?

Mia was reading, quite oblivious to her mother's fears.

Had it been such a good idea to agree to come to the farm? When Chris had suggested it, the visit had seemed like the natural next step in their relationship. It was only now, in the fading light of this autumn evening, that grey doubts were creeping into her heart.

Mia stirred, looking up from her book. 'What'll we do on the farm?'

This was a good question, and Joanna tried to answer it, but in truth she wasn't sure. She'd never visited a farm, let alone stayed on one. 'Chris will be there.'

Mia considered this. 'Chris is nice,' she said.

'Yes, he is.' Joanna went on. 'I'll be cooking for the builders. And Chris.' She managed a smile for her daughter. 'And us, of course.'

Mia smiled back, and resumed reading.

The realisation that she had no clear idea what she was letting herself—and Mia—in for was beginning to frighten Joanna. They were travelling into unknown territory, to be with a man she hardly knew, miles from anywhere.

Something registered in her peripheral vision and she eased her foot off the accelerator. That could have been a red mailbox. If she'd blinked she'd have missed it. Should she go back? Turning on this narrow strip of bitumen wasn't going to be easy and she'd feel silly if she was wrong.

Mia sensed the change in their speed and looked up. 'Are we there?'

'Don't know ...' Joanna applied the brake carefully and came to a stop. The mailbox, or whatever, was long gone. She sat for a moment breathing deeply, then cautiously began making the three-point turn before slowly heading back.

There was no sign of the mailbox. Had she imagined it?

But no, there it was: a red-painted drum mounted on a pole, just as Chris had described it. There was a number on a shiny metal tag fixed to the post, but she couldn't remember what that number ought to be. Where was that piece of paper?

She slowed still more and bumped onto the weedy verge. Something scraped the underside as the car came to a stop.

Mia closed her book and looked around, but there was nothing but grass and trees. And the mailbox.

Joanna turned off the engine, unfastened her seatbelt and got out. Her knees were trembling with tension. If there was any mail in the box she'd see who it was addressed to and know if this was the right place. But when she reached inside the dark interior there was nothing but spider webs. Could there be redbacks? Was that one running up her arm? She shuddered and dashed the sticky webs from her sleeve, feeling her mouth curl with disgust.

Mia was watching her with bright-eyed curiosity. 'Is this it?' She craned to peer through the windscreen. 'I can't see Chris's house.'

'No ...'

In the grey silence Joanna could hear another vehicle. Was it coming from the road, or the farm?

A little cloud of dust materialised along a barely-visible track through the trees that dotted the paddock, coming closer. The car was a dark red, sporty-looking thing, blurred with dust. It slowed to bump over the steel grid embedded in the gateway and came to a stop alongside her Mazda. For a wild moment Joanna thought Chris might have known in some magical way that she was here and come to guide her to the house, but it wasn't his vehicle and she swallowed her disappointment.

The driver started to get out. Joanna backed up nervously, ready to get into her car and close the door, but the young man stopped and waited beside his red car, smiled and raised a hand in greeting.

'Can I help you at all?' His smile was so open and friendly that she felt silly for her caution.

'I'm looking for Chris Youngman's place.' She was embarrassed to hear the tremor in her voice and cleared her throat. 'Is this it?'

He nodded, his smile widening. 'Sure is!' He turned his head and waved at the track winding through the scattered trees, the track he'd just driven down. He looked young, hardly out of school, and radiant with good health. He was wearing sharply-pressed jeans and a white tee-shirt so clean it glowed. His hair was wet, face newly-shaven, and a whiff of aftershave confirmed her impression that he'd just showered. Who was he?

The Herb Gardener

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Publicity contact information:

Michelle Lovi, Odyssey Books

contact@odysseybooks.com.au