



The Last Chance Olive Ranch

Susan Wittig Albert

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In this exciting new mystery from *New York Times* bestselling author Susan Wittig Albert, China Bayles fears for her husband's life as an escaped convict targets him...

Max Mantel, the killer McQuaid put away years ago, has busted out of the Huntsville prison and appears to be headed for Pecan Springs. McQuaid knows there's only one way to stop the vengeful convict--set a trap with himself as bait.

China wants to stay by her husband's side and keep him from harm. But McQuaid insists that she get out of town and go to the Last Chance Olive Ranch, where she's agreed to teach a workshop on herbs.

When China and her best friend arrive at the ranch, she learns the owner, Maddie Haskell, has her own troubles. She inherited the ranch and olive oil business from the late matriarch, Eliza Butler, but Eliza's nephew is contesting the will.

While China throws herself into helping Maddie, McQuaid's plan backfires when Mantel executes a countermove he never saw coming. Now McQuaid's life is not the only one at stake--and this time may really be *his* last chance...

The Last Chance Olive Ranch Details

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From Reader Review The Last Chance Olive Ranch for online ebook

Ann says

For the true cozy fan just saying the name Susan Wittig Albert and they know they're in for a treat. This entry in the China Bayles series is a good read. Both McQuaid and China are busy on their own projects. McQuaid is chasing down an escaped felon intent on killing everyone involved in putting him in prison. To keep her safe, he encourages China to visit the Last Chance Olive Ranch and she gets involved in an inheritance issue. Both solve their case and live to fight another day.

Julia says

I am a big fan of cozy mysteries, and mysteries in general. Somehow, I have never read a book by Susan Wittig Albert. The Last Chance Olive Ranch is the 25th! book in the China Bayles series but I did not have any problems following the action. McQuaid and China are a married couple. A killer McQuaid helped put away has escaped from prison and is killing everyone who helped put him away. McQuaid knows he is coming for him, and has China and his daughter go away for the weekend while he tries to capture Max. And so the book branches off into two separate stories.

Story 1, McQuaid is trying to lure Max into a trap to capture him. Story 2, China and her friend Ruby go to the Last Chance Olive Ranch to teach a class over the weekend. The olive ranch is struggling, and China becomes involved in a battle for ownership of the ranch.

So, I could have done with just one storyline in this book. The McQuaid story read like a police drama, while China's story was more of a soft mystery. There is no real connection between the two. I liked China and all the characters we meet at the ranch. They were the most engaging to me. In McQuaid's story, a woman is kidnapped but because she is unlikable, I really didn't care whether or not she was rescued. There was no real tension there for me.

I thought the book was well written, and I did learn some interesting facts about growing olives. I would not hesitate to read another book from this author.

I received a free ARC from NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

Jennie Rosenblum says

This is #25 in a series and my first experience with the main character of China Bayles - my mistake - I should have found her a lot earlier! For those of you who have read the entire series - way to go and you should have let the rest of us know! This is the perfect popcorn book - cozy couch, big bowl of popcorn, comfy clothes and the joy of a good read. There is enough here that the book could be read as a standalone without feeling like you are missing too much but on the other hand the characters are interesting, friendly and leave you with a feeling of wanting to know what happens next - or in my case what happened before this book.

Not sure if this is in the entire series but in this book there were great and interesting first pages of the chapters with nonfiction information about Olive trees - I learned a lot - now I am looking at the olive oil in my pantry in a whole new way and I'm going to talk with the local olive oil person at my farmer's market. Another nice plus were the recipes at the back of the book.

Susan Tweit says

This tightly-plotted, deftly interwoven story alternates between the voices of herb-shop-owner and recovering lawyer China Bayles and her husband, Mike McQuaid, former cop and now private investigator. China has planned what she hopes will be a relaxing weekend teaching an herbal workshop at an olive ranch with guest cabins. Only the night before she departs, she and McQuaid learn that a serial killer he helped convict has escaped from prison and is gunning for him. Not-so-gently told to get out of Dodge by both her husband and the town's chief of police (and one of her two best friends), China and her other best head for their weekend at the Olive Ranch, where of course, all is not peaceful and China ends up embroiled in a literal firestorm of a family feud.

Albert is at the top of her writing game in this 25th installment of China's adventures, drawing complex characters who show their flaws and their failings, yet manage to find their way out of danger and right things in the end. As always, the issues Albert raises and the situations her characters confront are real and relevant and complex, but never feel contrived, and their musings never seem preachy. Kudos to Albert for another riveting China and friends novel!

Judy says

Once again, the action almost seems second to learning about something new plant-wise. Who knew all of that about olive oil. I had recently read a news article on faux-olive oil by name brands. But to learn all the ends and outs of the olive oil production.

But...olive oil or not, once again, China and McQuaid pull out all the stops and solve the crimes. A great read on a rainy day.

Daniele says

I enjoy this series and liked this installment just fine. Interestingly, there is no murder mystery to solve so it is more light suspense than cozy mystery. I will keep reading about China Bayles as long as Albert keeps writing about her.

Julie Durnell says

It was not one of her best, in my opinion, but maybe I'm just getting tired of the series. There was not much on herbs here unless olive trees are considered herbal.

Teresa in Ohio says

Once a year I get a visit from China and the gang. This time we learn about olives. China and Ruby take a road trip to host a workshop at an olive orchard. Ruby makes regular visits there and hopes China can help her friend with a legal matter.

It seems the will of the vineyard owner is being contested and there is some murkiness in the history of the land and people involved.

We get a second story where McQuaid's past life as a cop comes back with a vengeance.

This remains one of a few favorite series of mine. It doesn't get five stars because I don't care about McQuaid's past and he didn't stay in town and catch up on life there.

Cheri says

This series will always be special to me as it was the first mystery series I ever started reading. I have read everyone of the China Bayles books up to date. The only reason I did not give it 5 stars is because I felt cheated at the end. There were many things left unresolved for me. Confrontations I wished had taken place...especially in the case of M vs M. I guess the unknowns make way for more books for us to patiently wait for. I also hope Ruby has better luck this time around :)

Lisa Ks Book Reviews says

THE LAST CHANCE OLIVE RANCH, is a novel packed with action.

Between the chapters dealing with China, and the other chapters dealing with her husband McQuaid, readers will be hard pressed to find any down time in this story. Both characters have their hands full in their respective storylines. Splitting the chapters as she does, author Susan Wittig Albert makes her books feel like two or more stories in one, yet having them cross at times to connect everything together.

As always, I love that each chapter starts off with something interesting. In this case, each chapter featuring China, had a fact to do with olives. The chapters featuring McQuaid simply start by following a time line.

This was a story with so much energy, at times I felt a rush of adrenaline so strong that I just wanted to get to the end of the book so I could take a deep breath. In the end I was satisfied with the outcome, and found THE LAST CHANCE OLIVE RANCH to be a great story.

I have noticed that with the China Bayles Mysteries, the author is slowly branching away from the more traditional feeling mystery, and getting closer to being considered (at least to me) a suspense thriller series.

So far, you will still see cozy-ish things like small towns, an educational aspect, and wonderful recipes, but you will also see a few edgier scenes, and a bit more cursing.

No matter what genre author Albert is aiming for, the one thing that can't be denied is her truly wonderful writing.

Betty says

A visit with China Bayles is always a delightful experience. This book is no exception and did not disappoint. Want to know more about olive oil the prefix at the beginning of each chapter will inform you. The book has two stories one about McQuaid who lead the team that put Mantel on death row. He has escaped and anyone who helped put him away is being killed. McQuaid sends Catie to her Grandparents and China to the Last Chance Ranch. Thinking they would be safe.

MaQuaid sets himself up as a target.

Arriving at the ranch China finds a number problems as the ownership of the ranch is being challenged in court. While China and Ruby are at the ranch the problems flare up and become dangerous.

The tale swings between McQuaid's and China activities. Will MaQuaid return Mantel to Huntsville and will China escape with her life? The book includes recipes. I highly recommend the book.

Disclosure: I received a free copy from Berkley through NetGalley for an honest review. I would like to thank them for this opportunity to read and review the book. The opinions expressed are my own.

Lisa Morin says

I'm never disappointed when I read a book written by Susan Wittig Albert.

China Bayles is such a strong character I have had the pleasure of reading about for a while now.

This story was fantastic, two separate situations, involving the lovely China and her husband McQuaid. China agrees to give a workshop at Ruby's insistence. As China prepares for her trip, McQuaid receives disturbing news, a criminal he has helped put away has escaped and he is targeting McQuaid.

China refuses to go, but we know that won't fly, so off to the Last Chance Olive Ranch she goes. She isn't expecting to step into a mystery involving family secrets, olives and greed.

When a greedy land owner tries to claim other property, explosions begin and China finds herself in the middle of it all.

This book was hard to put down and I loved catching up with all the colorful, quirky characters in Pecan Springs.

I voluntarily read an ARC of this book provided by the publisher via NetGalley.

lisa says

Even a mediocre China Bayles book is better than an average easy read. In this latest of the series, China

heads off to Last Chance Olive Ranch (and vineyard) with Ruby to teach a class, and McQuad stays in Pecan Springs hoping to take down a criminal from his past who's broken out of prison and is out for revenge.

In some ways these books are getting repetitive. This one was a mashup of Rosemary Remembered and Rueful Death, but in some ways it's nice to see how the characters have evolved. Instead of the stubborn, willful, angry attitude China had in Rosemary Remembered, in this book she realizes the wisdom of staying out of town while Max Mantle is on the loose, even if she doesn't like it. Since we also get McQuad's point of view in this story, we also see some of decisions of his past that haunt him, and cause him to be extra protective of his wife and children. And we learn a lot of interesting information about olive oil, inheriting property in Texas, and even a little bit about growing grapes for wine. And of course, recipes in the back, including one for an olive oil lemon cake!

Since the author was juggling two completely different storylines, both of these stories weren't very exciting, or felt very well resolved. There were some pieces randomly thrown out that made me interested, but they were barely mentioned again. (Brian new live-in girlfriend, for example, or Sally's latest escapades.) Maybe this was hinting at future storylines to come?

I will always, always read China Bayles books, no matter how terrible they are. I am pleased to say this one wasn't. In fact, I rather enjoyed it.

Marlene says

Review at Cozy Girl Reads.

Beth says

I love these books, they are great, laid back entertainment where I always learn something. I loved this story and the two competing situations as they rolled out in switching chapters. Then I got to the end with great satisfaction of a story well told and I had this jarring thought: 1. China Bayles is too smart to drink wine during a head injury. 2. Sofia would not have let the will contest go to trial multiple times without speaking up. The box and fire made a great story, but that woman was too tough to sit and let Maddie worry. So my rating went from 5 stars to 3. I'll read the next book, but I hope that more respect is shown to tough women characters.
