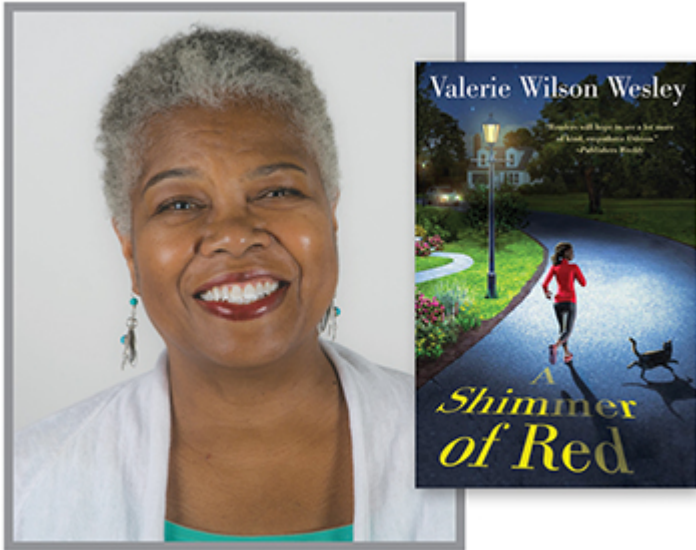


# LJ Talks Mystery Mash-Ups with Novelist Valerie Wilson Wesley

by [Brian Kenney](#)

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*Photo by Paul Chinnery*

With so many genre blends happening in crime fiction these days, it seemed timely to speak with author **Valerie Wilson Wesley**. Wesley's career has included the popular "Tamara Hayle" PI series, but these days she's right on trend with cozy mysteries featuring Odessa "Dessa"

Jones, a real-estate agent/caterer with a cat, a love for tea, and—oh yes, paranormal skills. Dessa reads auras, which she calls glimmers, and when she smells nutmeg, look out! Something bad is sure to happen. The third in the series, *A Shimmer of Red*, will publish in July.

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**Let's talk about Dessa, who's so complex, smart, and empathetic. How did she come about?**

The funny thing about creating characters is that there's always a little bit of me in them. That was true with Tamara, and with Dessa, although she is certainly a much softer character. The more I write her, the more I understand her, and I am able to add depth and layers to the character. I like writing her. It's funny where ideas, and characters, come from. And once you have them, you can play with them across the books.

**What inspired you to turn to cozies?**

I wanted to try a different kind of book, and cozies are different. It's a limited group of characters and can be a more limited setting. It's not like a PI mystery, where some stranger walks into the office and you take the case. Somehow, with a cozy, they have to be connected to the protagonist.

Frankly, the older I get, violence is something I don't enjoy. I never liked writing violent scenes, and you certainly don't have those in cozies.

During this period we've been in with COVID, there was something comforting about writing this character, writing about her world, even writing about her little cat Juniper, who's based on my cat Junior. I never thought I would enjoy writing about a pet, but he's so close to our heart.

### **Cozies are changing, with books including race, sexual identity, and sexuality. Are cozies changing you, or are you changing cozies?**

I hope I might be changing the cozies a little bit because I do deal with race, my characters are diverse in many ways, and I deal particularly with the portrayal of Black men. These are all important to me, as well as what happens in terms of law and order, the justice system, and the police. As a grandmother of a 16-year-old grandson, I am aware of the dangers that can happen to him.

As I came to cozies a little bit late, I didn't realize there might be limitations. Sometimes I think my cozies do go outside the lines a little bit. I've gotten the response from reader/reviewers that "this isn't really a cozy, but I liked it anyway," which always makes me feel good.

### **Why did you decide to include paranormal elements in this series?**

Years back I wrote a few paranormal romances under the name Savanna Welles, and I enjoyed writing them. I like the idea that there is much more to our lives, to the world, than we see. Odessa is intuitive, with a sense of other people. Having this came naturally in the creation of the character. It's also something she shares with other women in her family, like her aunt, which makes it something that's fun to play around with. Really, it's just a part of who we are. We all have parts of ourselves that are different. Precious parts. And as a writer, it allows me—like with the nutmeg—to foreshadow events. Writing has a certain divine element. You write and then you wonder, how did this come on the page? Nutmeg was like that.

**An element throughout the books is mourning, as Dessa loses her husband before the series starts. Where did this come from?**

I'm not a widow, my husband is healthy, but I have lost a lot of people, even before COVID, and I recently lost my brother-in-law. One way to deal with so much grief, as Odessa does, is to open up more. But I think we are a nation in grief, and as a writer, you can help people get in touch with their own feelings.

**As a librarian, I believe that fiction can help people, and I'd certainly refer these books to readers who are themselves mourning.**

Thank you, that means a lot to me. As a writer, more than anything, you want your books to be helpful to people, to give them something. Dessa will always be grieving the loss of her husband, and writing about it helps me to deal with my own grief. That's the therapeutic part of writing.

**Your books include a diverse group of characters. Why is this important to you?**

You go into the world, like into a realtor's office, and you meet all kinds of people. It's a way of bringing people together, and, in a funny kind of way, you become a family. As the book unfolds, and the characters become so concerned about what happened, they grow closer and closer. And as a writer, you can expand the world of the cozy by expanding the world of your protagonist through these relationships.

It's important to have characters that are different. Not everyone looks the same. Not everyone's world is the same. You meet in a workplace, and slowly you realize that we have so much more in common. Then suddenly you realize that they are your friends.

*This interview was edited for brevity and clarity.*

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Valerie Wilson Wesley

cozy mystery

A Shimmer of Red

author Q&A

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