

A Hole in the Attic

Mary Ellen Dias

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In Mary Ellen Dias' debut novel, *A Hole in the Attic*, Trish Montgomery has retired from teaching in San Francisco and moved to Fernville in the Sierra Nevada foothills. Having found the right house, she buys it and begins fixing it up. However, some of the townspeople fear the old Brookins house because of tales of mysterious disappearances in the past. "No good'll come of your living there," one character tells Trish. "It's evil."

Trish begins teaching an art class, attends cookouts, and makes friends in her new town. She also meets and falls in love with Dylan. Meanwhile, the old rumors about the house resurface when Trish's handyman suddenly goes missing. Trish hears sounds of moaning and a baby crying, and black swans mysteriously appear on her lake. Evil is leaking out through a hole in the house, and no one seems to be able to deal with it. At one point, a medium fails in her attempt to deal with the evil. "The wall has opened!" she cries. "On the other side is evil. Demons. Pestilence. Oh, woe! God save us all! I opened a portal to hell!"

A Hole in the Attic is an easily readable book with a tone that is light, not heavy. Language is simple and the writing style direct. The story pulls readers along with small developments and several successive attempts that fail to exorcise the evil. This results in some minor redundancy which is mostly necessary to the plot. Rather than frightening, the evil and mystery create a sense of fantasy adventure as the unbelievable turns out to be true. Characterization is generally shallow, and readers are left to wonder how some of the characters muster the courage to confront the evil they fear so greatly. The story also starts with too much detail that fails to move the plot forward. Once it gets going, however, the plot develops nicely with good foreshadowing. Dias manages plot and characters well enough in this world, but as the story turns toward fantasy, believability suffers a bit.

Despite its shortcomings, this imaginative and outlandish story makes for a fun read that is not too juvenile for adults and not too frightening for a younger audience. Both the writing and plot have a fresh flavor that many will enjoy.

DAVID GEORGE (July 1, 2010)

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