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Closed in Silence

Joan M. Drury
Spinster's Ink (August 1998)
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“Who finds three bodies in her lifetime?” wonders Bay-area journalist Tyler Jones, the lesbian protagonist/sleuth of Joan Drury’s third mystery. In this installment, Tyler attends a reunion of her college pals on an island above Puget Sound, where the body of a dead lumber company CEO is soon found. The island setting creates an intriguing “locked room” mystery scenario, and Drury makes good use of bad weather and other natural features to build suspense around the cottage-bound women. For Edgar-award nominated author Drury, this mystery constitutes a solid, readable effort; as in her earlier work, she focuses more on the atmosphere and relationships than on the action.

Like many reunion stories, Drury, the owner and chief editor of Spinster’s Ink, asks its characters, and, implicitly, its readers if they have abandoned earlier values and ideals. Drury’s extraordinarily socially-involved cast of characters includes a Jewish doctor doing inner-city work with battered women and children, an empowered, self-employed prostitute, a single mom organizing and advocating for women of color, and two feminist attorneys. Tyler and her friends are likable (if somewhat two-dimensional) characters and the dialogue occasionally veers into stilted didacticism when the women discuss issues such as prostitution and politics. The characters are most believable during Tyler’s flashback scenes, which successfully capture the energy and ferment of the 1970s women’s movement.

The plot effectively propels readers along its twists and turns until it rumbles to a halt at the anticlimactic “deus ex machina”ending, which leaves many of the story’s central questions unanswered. Did someone get away with murder? The answer lies closed in silence.

DOTTIE WEBB (September / October 1998)

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