

Dead Love

Linda Watanabe McFerrin

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“My disgust had a smell: the smell from the hospital, from the apartment—the telltale odor of death. My heart raced. I could feel them behind me: a thirsty pack, their hunger, a thick tongue of horror, snatching at my back, creeping greedily up my spine.” Awakening from death, her body decomposing to a zombie’s corpse, Erin Orison is horribly aware of her new world. Smells, sounds, tastes, the living humans who attract and repulse her—it’s a sumptuous, sensual landscape, painted in lush detail by Linda Watanabe McFerrin in the new novel *Dead Love*.

After a summons from her absent father, a diplomat with devilish powers and shady connections, Erin arrives in Japan. She’s beautiful, cultured by boarding schools, already wise beyond her years. But she quickly loses her footing, engulfed in a global conspiracy that reaches from Shinjuku to “Hispaniola’s westward claw.” Stranger still, Erin is the target of more than one murderer. Marked for death by the *yakuza*, Japanese gangsters, she’s saved by Clément—an obsessive ghoul, a shapeshifter who desires Erin, but not as a living girl. It seems that everyone wants Erin dead, and as a half-zombie, she has barely enough willpower to get her revenge. Erin’s adventure into the world of the “nearly dead” is gripping, compelling, and visually oriented—McFerrin spares no detail, including the repulsive, the beautiful, and the humor in the grotesque. She describes, for example, a night out with Clément, barhopping with a gang of ghoulish comrades: “His friends fell into an uproarious chorus of laughter, and one of them laughed so hard that two of his teeth fell right out of his mouth tinkling like a couple of dropped cuff links onto the top of the bar. This sent them all into further hysterics.”

There are a few places where *Dead Love* falters, mostly due to issues with perspective. Though the characters are lively and engaging, as soon as McFerrin moves out of Erin’s point of view, the novel seems unwieldy. For example, in one scene the ghoul Clément speaks at length in French and Creole to the character Ryu, who speaks neither language. Although the scene is written from Ryu’s perspective, it seems to be happening for the reader’s benefit. Small details like this take away from the clarity of the novel, which is in every other way enjoyable and comprehensive.

Delightfully disgusting, *Dead Love* is the new horror genre at its best. Fans of *Twilight*, *World War Z*, and Neil Gaiman will devour this fine novel whole.

CLAIRE RUDY FOSTER (September / October 2010)

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