FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Foreword Review THRILLER

Elective Procedures

Merry Jones
Oceanview Publishing (Jul 15, 2014)
Hardcover $26.95 (288pp)
978-1-60809-116-4

A tale of murder and plastic surgery told with crisp, memorable dialogue.

Elective Procedures, by Merry Jones, combines many familiar aspects of a pulp mystery novel—an exotic locale, multiple suspected killers, the protagonist becoming a potential victim. Instead of a detective, however, the main character is a schoolteacher on vacation with three of her thirty-something best friends, one of whom is traveling to have plastic surgery. The story is a typical genre thriller, with a first half that's mostly effective setup and a second half that packs in red herrings and plot twists. The resolution doesn't quite add up, but the writing is accessible, and the relationship between Elle and her friends reads like a real-life bond.

This is one of a series of novels featuring Elle Harrison, who in *Elective Procedures* heads to Mexico because her friend Jen is getting work done and plans to recuperate with her friends at a hotel. While at the resort, Elle sees a woman fall to her death off a railing. As the investigation into the incident unfolds, Elle learns the dead woman was a patient of Dr. Alain Du Bois, the same plastic surgeon her friend is in town to visit. Soon another woman dies mysteriously, and Elle begins to suspect there is a serial killer preying on plastic-surgery patients. Elle is also haunted by a reading from a psychic named Madam Therese, who told her she carries an aura that attracts the dead, an idea her circumstances keep reinforcing.

The story is told in first person from Elle's perspective, which helps set up situations early but becomes problematic later in the novel. Jones establishes early on that Elle isn't an entirely reliable narrator. She often does what her friends call "pulling an Elle"—a kind of zoning out where she loses track of what the people around her are saying or doing. Also, from the start of the story, she is haunted by visions of her dead husband, Charlie. She sees men who look like him, believes him to be watching her, and often thinks she sees him among the living.

Elle also makes a number of questionable choices that make sense only as ways to advance the plot, from going on dates with someone she sees as a suspect to visiting new areas alone after an attempt on her life to conveniently guessing the real culprit but doing nothing about it. Some of these decisions, along with the sheer number of zone-out incidents and ghost sightings, make the book drag in the second half as they feel like too much padding, especially when the conclusion feels sudden and convenient.

Still, *Elective Procedures* will appeal to those looking for a light, beach-reading mystery story. The early pacing is strong, the writing style is mainstream but crisp, and the narration and dialogue give the characters enough personality to be memorable.

JEFF FLEISCHER (April 17, 2014)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book and paid a small fee to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. Foreword Reviews and Clarion Reviews make no guarantee that the publisher will receive a positive review. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.

Source: https://www.forewordreviews.com/reviews/elective-procedures/