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Framework for Death
Aileen Schumacher
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The mystery genre is prominent for its odd and seemingly endless variety of sleuths, from cops and private investigators to medical examiners and forensic anthropologists, with plenty of range in between to include little old ladies, linguists, journalists, antiquarians….almost anyone?at least in fiction?can solve a murder. In this case, our unlikely duo of crime solvers is Detective David Alvarez of the El Paso P.D. and structural engineer Tory Travers.

It starts out when the floor of a rich woman's house collapses. Two bodies are found beneath the rubble: the owner of the house and an unknown woman with three sets of fake I.D. In an upstairs room a baby is left abandoned. Detective Alvarez, who has worked with Tory Travers before, calls upon her again to examine the house to determine whether it was an accident or sabotage. Well, obviously it's no accident. Alvarez's investigation rather hurriedly gets complicated as the heirs battle for an inheritance, a high-tech drug trafficker comes to town looking for his baby daughter and the dead woman's involvement with a modern-day Underground Railroad comes to light. It's enough for him to do this alone; but Tory has a mind of her own and her own approach to the problem.

This novel is the complete package: charming, likable characters with genuine chemistry, a fairly strong sense of place and a complex plot with at least one major, totally unexpected plot twist. There is wonderful sexual tension between the two main characters, witty dialogue and a nice leavening of humor mixed with pathos throughout. An excellent follow-up to her first novel, Engineered for Murder.

Mark Terry