ForeWord Reviews

From Closet to Casket
Sara Grant
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Fortyish Vera Austin—who lives alone with her short grey hair, her thrift-shop wardrobe and her beloved dog—is being haunted in the mystery novel From Closet to Casket. The spirit belongs to Emily Engle, a tenant of the Indianapolis apartment building where Vera is the resident manager and Emily has gone missing.

In Vera's view, the missing resident is everything she is not: stylish, feminine, confident and attractive. But Emily's past contains secrets, and Vera exposes them as she tries to discover why Emily has disappeared.

At first galvanized by the threat of losing her job because of Emily's abandoned car and unpaid rent, Vera probes more and more deeply into the mystery. As the investigation progresses, her motivations shift: she feels genuine fondness for Emily and wants to know what happened, and she is also developing a fondness for a good-looking police detective named Tom Fuller.

Emily's spirit dispenses fashion advice as Vera tries to catch Detective Fuller's attention, and Vera's determination to solve the case strengthens as Tom's romantic interest waxes and wanes. His initial dismissiveness grows into respect as Vera makes real progress in the inquiry, and Vera must face her own prejudices as she uncovers the truth about Emily… and about the detective and other apartment residents as well.

Grant gives us a female detective in the tough, disheveled spirit of Julie Smith's Skip Langdon and Sara Paretsky's V.I. Warshawski. Although Vera is an amateur, she is every bit as courageous, tenacious and intelligent as these sisters in sleuthing, and Grant's narrative, while somewhat predictable, is almost as strong as these veterans'.

Occasionally Grant's metaphors are belabored, but more often they are fresh and clever, as when Vera is so nervous at the prospect of a first date with Tom that she starts to "decompose like a roll of wet paper towels."

Minor characters come and go like clouds, without warning, but the major figures are believable people. The dramatic climax and Vera's eventual exorcism of Emily's ghost leave the reader hoping for a sequel. From Closet to Casket is exciting and enjoyable, especially for fans of the strong girl detective genre.