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Lament for a Lounge Lizard

Mary Jane Maffini
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Romance has not loomed large for some time now in romance writer Fiona Silk's own life. But it really takes a nosedive after she returns home one night, slightly tipsy, to find a bad poet-and former lover-sprawled provocatively on her bed. Trouble is, he's dead. Although she has a solid alibi, it's not solid enough to keep the single-minded police detective assigned to the case from dogging her footsteps and finding suspicion in every innocent move she makes. So what's a girl to do-especially a fortyish girl like Fiona with a novel to finish, ballooning credit-card bills to deflate, and a raft of loony, self-centered friends to keep at bay? Obviously, she's got to find the murderer herself.

As adept at comedy as she is at laying out a tangled crime trail, the author sets her story in the fictional town of St. Aubaine, Québec. A quaint, scenic river locale, populated largely by the artsy set, St. Aubaine is also a real Petri dish for cultivating envy, jealously, resentment, and other such germs of mayhem and homicide. Because the dead bad poet has been a boastful, parasitic bounder throughout his career, there's an abundance of suspects-from his three most recent girlfriends (not including Fiona) to literary critics and fellow versifiers who are both incredulous and outraged that he's just won the lucrative Flambeau Memorial Prize for Poetic Literature.

The author of the Camilla MacPhee mystery series, Maffini has published works in Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine and Storyteller Magazine. Her story "Cotton Armour" won the 1996 Crime Writers of Canada Arthur Ellis award.

Aiding Fiona in her search for justice and small islands of sanity is her fourteen-year-old sidekick, Josey Thring. A schemer, hustler, and chronic truant from school, Josey supports herself by doing odd jobs under the business rubric "The Thring To Do." She is Tom Sawyer to Fiona's Huck Finn, the engine that drives Fiona onward when she'd rather curl up with the bottle of Courvoisier she keeps hidden in her washing machine. Maffini surrounds Fiona with memorable-but often annoying-friends, among them the brandy-swilling, youth-obsessed Dr. Liz Prentiss, cabbie Cyril Hemphill, faux Irish poet and knitter Kostas O'Carolan (real name Hector Baggs) and Fiona's promiscuously affectionate dog, Tolstoy. Surviving their needs and obsessions is almost as daunting as solving the murder.

Lament for a Lounge Lizard is the first of a projected Fiona Silk series.

EDWARD MORRIS (December 16, 2003)

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