ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

MYSTERY

Louisa Blue
Jeanie Doyle Singler
AuthorHouse
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Three Stars (out of Five)

Grab a pen and paper before reading Jeanie Doyle Singler's third mystery novel, *Louisa Blue*, because it will be helpful to take notes on the action, as this investigation into an unsolved murder grows more complex with each turning page. The list of suspects is extensive, and the potential motives are many, including jealousy, greed, and religion.

Singler opens *Louisa Blue* with an unusual missing persons report. The wealthy Spencer Townshend has been missing for over a year, after disappearing during a ski trip in Whistler, British Columbia. His wife, Louisa, still wonders: Did he take off intentionally, or did something happen to him? Louisa flees Spencer's astoundingly dysfunctional family and moves to Tacoma, where she meets pastor Dark Ansgreth, whose own wife has recently died in a mysterious car accident. Meanwhile, Spencer's illegitimate cousin Alexander LaGuardia receives an odd directive from his father's will: If you want to receive your inheritance, find out what happened to Spencer.

Pulling all of these threads together is Singler's most difficult task, one she performs ably, if somewhat slowly, over three-hundred-plus pages. Her explanation of events is clear, as Alexander retraces Spencer's steps and interviews friends, relatives, and business associates. She uses dialogue to deliver new information, as Alexander talks to Louisa, Louisa talks to Dark, and Dark talks to his friend Davy, a detective.

As the mystery deepens, so do the relationships among the truth seekers. Louisa is enigmatic, vacillating between passionate, emotional declarations and ice-cold, logical evaluations. This volatility, along with Louisa's fairy-tale beauty—long, curly hair and emerald-green eyes—draws men to her side. Alexander and Dark are not immune to her charms, and the potential love triangle adds tension to the search for answers.

Singler is comfortable with details, and perhaps a bit too enthusiastic about the particulars of each scene. For instance, Alexander doesn't just walk in the front door of a new house, but rather surveys the layout of the house and the contents of each room. Run-on

sentences describe the floral patterns in the sofa fabric, along with the carpet color and the type of curtains in the windows. The surplus of domestic details distracts from the action and slackens the pace.

Singler alternately creates and extinguishes tension as the list of likely victims grows. On one hand, the reader follows Alexander and Dark closely, hoping along with them for a breakthrough with each new clue. On the other hand, however, the reader loses sight of the goal when Singler shifts into flowery prose. The gritty details of car chases and police barricades lose their power against the “apprehensive mist” of the moonlight and the “apricot sun” on the horizon.

Resolution comes late in the game, and a reader might turn to her notes in the last pages, curious to see if all the loose ends have been tied up. Mysteries both murderous and romantic are indeed wrapped up with satisfying logic, while leaving ample room for future adventures.

Sheila M. Trask