

No Broken Hearts

Sheila York

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A witty, observant woman makes for a savvy protagonist in this 1940s murder mystery.

When Lauren Atwill shows up, a dead body is not too far behind. Sheila York's *No Broken Hearts* takes the Hollywood script doctor away from her employer, Marathon Studios, to Epic Studios on loan, in a savvy murder mystery rather boldly set in 1947.

In this fourth book featuring Atwill, the thirty-something writer is tasked with taming a popular but edgy novel for the big screen as a vehicle for not only rising starlet Mary Ann McDowell but also aging legend Roland Neale. As Atwill sets up shop at Epic and meets all the necessary players, she also attends a party at the home of the studio chief, after which she spies a dead body—of the young female variety—at the home of Neale. Atwill, with the help of her significant other, private investigator Peter Winslow (not to be confused with the movie-star husband she'll soon be divorcing), works to unravel the mystery of who killed the girl—not to mention who she is in the first place. Meanwhile, Atwill is dodging Epic's henchmen lawyer and security chief, law enforcement, and the occasional mobster.

To set a book series in the 1940s is admirable. Manual typewriters, switchboards, radio news, and a touch of McCarthyism are the norm for York's tale, and it's strangely clever and fun. At the same time, York manages to subtly work in allusions to the way women were treated in that era: they're automatically assumed fragile and innocent, they're spoken about rather than to, men have to put their guns away before they enter a room, and so on.

The main character is sarcastic and able to wiggle her way in and out of all kinds of situations in a grown-up Nancy Drew fashion, regardless of limitations. She's got a writer's drive to observe as she unapologetically, even subconsciously, plots to figure people out. After a tense disagreement between Peter and law enforcement, she says, "Men like them didn't really apologize to each other. They'd just stand there and talk about the case, and let the tone of their voices and their gestures say it for them."

There are just enough entanglements in this mystery to keep the brain of a hard-core reader humming without getting lost on the trail. The writing is simple yet smart. Atwill is in the first person here, so you get inside her head—a genuinely fun experience.

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