

Ordinary Justice

Trudy Labovitz

Spinster's Ink (May 1999)

Unknown \$12.00 (232pp)

978-1-883523-31-2

In her debut novel, Labovitz presents an intriguingly complex mystery set deep in the hills of West Virginia among the secretive, suspicious people of a close-knit rural community

Zoe Kergulin, a private investigator not without her own deep secrets, has returned to the countryside of her childhood in the hope of finding peace and safety. The peace soon ends, however, when Zoe visits her new neighbor; a seemingly troubled woman whom she had met only a few days earlier. What she finds upon arriving sends chills down her spine: Susan Rourke's trailer is a violent mess, bloody handprints are smeared on one of its windows and Susan is nowhere to be found.

Presumed murdered by her abusive husband, Patrick, a search is organized to look for Susan in the surrounding—and extensive—woodlands. When it is Patrick found brutally murdered and police issue a warrant for Susan, Zoe decides to continue her search for Susan by investigating around town. Difficulties arise, though, when Zoe discovers nearly everyone she meets has something to hide: Susan's sister, Laurel, seems determined to protect her friend, Dorsey; Dorsey lies about his past and hides his true identity; Ruth and Ardell, who run the "ordinary" (inn) in town, are open enough to talk about people and show the inn's cellar, yet not open enough to tell her much about anything else; Alma Eskew trusts none of the locals after becoming the town's pariah years ago; and Sam Bennett and Wyatt Harrison talk of Patrick's supposedly expensive dogs, but are tight-lipped on where Patrick might have bought the illegal moonshine found in his truck.

During her research, Zoe finds a garnet ring attached to a skeletal hand in the woods and learns of another abused woman's disappearance. Though seemingly unrelated, Zoe soon discovers their underlying connection to the investigation. Searching out the mystery of the inn, Zoe becomes the killer's target once the secret is revealed. Scared and tired, Zoe runs into the woods, only to stumble into more trouble—and more pieces of the puzzle. It is only after making one last phone call that Zoe can confront not only the killer, but her own past as well.

An engrossing tale with many surprises, Labovitz's work also gives voice to what justice can truly mean. Ordinary Justice is a mystery-lover's delight.

NELLY HEITMAN (March / April 1999)

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