



Paint Her Dead: Murder at the Inn

Wanda Shelton

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Paint Her Dead is an appealing, high-caliber murder mystery.

Something foul is afoot at a charming coastal inn where interior designer Leah Dawson is supposed to spend a week at a painting workshop. Rather than dabbling in acrylics, Leah finds herself focusing on staying alive in Wanda Shelton's *Paint Her Dead: Murder at the Inn*. It seems nearly everyone is a suspect with secrets to hide. With its dash of romance, this murder mystery is enjoyable fun.

Leah has little time to enjoy peace and quiet; in the first few pages, it becomes clear that she is being stalked by her creepy ex, John. Fed up, Leah plans a week-long getaway to rural Maine. The dream of evading him is dashed when John emerges out of the woods, as unwelcome as an inkblot on a pristine canvas.

Meanwhile, the FBI is investigating a notorious ring of art thieves, some of whom are believed to be hiding out at the very same Maine inn that is hosting Leah's art getaway. Agent Nate Parker is masquerading as an art student and hoping to stumble on the crooks. Instead, he falls in love with Leah. There's little time for romance, though, because Nate's fellow undercover agent turns up dead, and her clue-containing laptop has also gone missing. Now the inn is a crime scene. John seems like the most shady character, but he falls victim to foul play, too. It's a classic whodunnit situation.

There are a lot of moving parts here, including multiple characters with their own story lines and alibis. All are well developed and easy to keep straight, from a suave, ponytailed art instructor, Andrew, to ninety-nine-year-old Mattie, who provides much-needed humor and balance. Special Agent Nate is the total package: a handsome, single FBI art crimes specialist who's also a practicing attorney, but who blows his cover to Leah almost as soon as he looks into her mesmerizing eyes. The dialogue is natural, though John always seems to sneer his lines, and Leah comes across as the classic good girl caught in the crosshairs.

Full of potential clues and motives, the novel's important details are easily separable from its mere distractions, and the ways in which everything pieces together are still surprising. Suspense and suspicions arise easily, though one major plot twist strains credulity.

By taking an idyllic locale in rural New England and turning it into a gruesome crime scene, *Paint Her Dead* is familiar without being predictable, engaging without running out of steam, and entertaining without veering into the improbable—an appealing, high-caliber murder mystery.

BARBARA NICKLES (March 19, 2019)

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