



Should Grace Fail: A Twin Cities Mystery

Priscilla Paton

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The mystery novel Should Grace Fail tackles addiction issues in a compelling way.

In Priscilla Paton's mystery novel *Should Grace Fail*, detectives uncover a world of addiction and trafficking while searching for a cop killer.

When Dan Routh is found dead in a dumpster, his complicated history and mixed company makes it hard to locate his killer. Detectives Erik and Deb follow the clues nevertheless, leading them to trafficked and troubled teenagers with addiction problems and possible connections to a dangerous drug lord. Erik and Deb show patience and resolve as they battle dead ends and near-death experiences to solve Dan's murder.

Dedicated and ethical, Erik and Deb are shown to prioritize their work over interpersonal relationships. Their conversations highlight police procedures well. Still, of the two, Deb stands out more. She is constructed in an authentic manner, with both flaws and insecurities, but she perseveres through all challenges to arrive at answers.

Beside her, Erik's unmovable moral compass makes him grating to his fellow officers. The duo's characteristics mirror their mental states: Erik paces throughout, in need of a physical outlet, while Deb's golf game flails when she's distracted by case details. Deb's love interest is a woman, and her presence is refreshing, if underdeveloped. She is bullied by spiteful characters because of her sexuality, gender, and breaks with gendered expectations.

Punctuating Erik and Deb's detective work is Jaylyn's narrative; she is a teenager and a budding musician with a history of drug dependency who struggles amid her friend circle of relapsing addicts. Jaylyn and her friends speak in a tough, youthful way, and her relationship with her music mentor is an entertaining element, though it dissolves as the novel progresses.

Addiction is handled with empathy because of Jaylyn's crowd. Several of her friends have backstories involving abusive parents and difficult childhoods. Their meandering inner monologues inject humor into the dark story, though some of their trains of thought are distracting. Some such behaviors are exaggerated—in two cases, to emphasize that characters are battling a brain injury or fetal alcohol syndrome—resulting in uncomfortable moments.

The criminals within the novel are left a mystery until the book's end, resulting in tension but also the effect of a hurried reveal. Close calls and character deaths raise the stakes, though the story slows when the case stalls. Past adventures are referenced, but the novel is a standalone whose own resolution is tidy, while also hinting at the duo's future.

The crime novel *Should Grace Fail* tackles addiction issues in a compelling way, thanks to its endearing cast.

DELIA STANLEY (October 12, 2020)

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