ForeWord Reviews

Slay Me Tender: An Aubrey Lyle Mystery
Jenny Scholten
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In the genre of detective fiction, it's hard to find a truly original shamus that isn't based on characters like Raymond Chandler's hard-boiled Philip Marlowe or Patricia Cornwell's soft touch Kay Scarpetta. This author, however, manages to create a sleuth quite unlike any of the chain-smoking, chin-rubbing detectives that have come before. Her tough little cookie, Aubrey Lyle, is a stripper by night and, well, a slightly rumpled urchin by day.

Living in San Francisco's rough Tenderloin district, the sincere and sweet Aubrey stumbled into a mystery in Scholten's first book, Day Stripper, but bumps and grinds her way into one here, confident in her ability to solve the disappearance of fellow dancer Plushious Velvett. Although she has moments of wide-eyed innocence about the lurid world around her, Aubrey also has enough street smarts to be believable as a character, a winning combination that's both amusing and irresistible. The way she works through the case of the missing Plushious is standard mystery fare, but Scholten elevates the form by also giving a glimpse of what it truly might be like for a stripper living in a seedy neighborhood, trying to get by while keeping her thong in place. The outlandishness of the clues is also charming, in a perverse kind of way—where else but the Tenderloin would a scrappy young stripper dig a bloody breast implant out of the garbage?

In many of the chapters, the fate of Aubrey seems more compelling than the clues about the case. Even in the last pages, when the action gets heavy, it's more interesting to see if Aubrey, who of course has a knack for getting in trouble, can keep her chin up and her head down long enough to keep safe than it is to see if the mystery will unravel as predicted. Scholten has created a character who'll last through multiple gun battles and bad nights at the strip club, and readers should thank her for it.

Elizabeth Millard