



The Fugitive's Doctor

Deirdre Elizabeth Parker

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Dr. Doe Vaughn isn't entirely surprised when she learns that her husband, Sam, has been lying about his name since before they met. Neither is she shocked when federal agents search their Florida home while she and Sam are away. She has always known there were parts of her husband's past he kept secret. Out of love and the desire for a happy marriage, she never questioned him much about his parents, siblings, children, or other subjects he made clear were taboo.

So when Sam is arrested for crimes he was convicted of almost twenty years ago, Doe refuses to divorce him, as many of her relatives urge. Instead she applies her considerable resources—money, intelligence, and emotional support—to getting the man she loves a new prison sentence that will allow them some life together after he serves his time.

Part love story, part legal thriller, this debut novel has something to offer many readers. Deirdre Elizabeth Parker, who lives in the same state the novel is set in, writes with concision and clarity; readers will appreciate the polished quality of many of her sentences. She also offers a far-reaching cast of characters that exhibits different reactions to the main conflict, thereby giving the audience a chance to consider a wide array of responses.

A few issues, however, keep the book from being consistently enjoyable. The dialogue is often used to present legal information that interrupts emotional connections between characters, such as this exchange between Doe and Sam: "So what's Kristen Garlick going to do for us?" "She's the writer. She's going to write the PSI response to the Judge and gather everyone's character letters together." "What do you mean? And what's a PSI?" "PSI is the Pre-Sentence Investigation report that the probation officer writes for the Judge. In the report, the PO makes a secret recommendation to the Judge on sentencing."

The plot of the novel is intriguing, but the structure is distracting: Doe is being interviewed by a character with the same name as the author after the events have transpired. The interviewer's presence adds no intrigue to the story.

Also, early chapters tell what happened to Sam, so few secrets actually get revealed over the course of the novel. The author may have ended up with a more interesting book had she kept some elements hidden in the beginning.

Another problem can be found in the characters. Only Doe manages to exhibit any realistic traits. The other main characters remain as pale and unfocused as the peripheral ones; as a result, the emotional arc feels contrived. Even Sam doesn't stir much sympathy—not because of his crimes but because readers never quite feel his frustration and sadness.

Despite some editorial weaknesses, the novel may find an eager audience among people looking for an entertaining love story about an unusual situation.

ANDI DIEHN (November 2, 2011)

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