

The Maker of Swans

Paraic O'Donnell

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An impulsive decision forces a clandestine order to take protective measures in Paraic O'Donnell's surreal novel *The Maker of Swans*.

For as long as she can remember, Clara has lived at the manor house at the edge of the lake. Unwilling to speak, she communicates through stories that are vivid musings on nature and the fantastical. She is an observant child. But on the night that changes her entire world, she is asleep.

Mr. Crowe, her guardian, has abilities that have necessitated that he join a secret society. An impetuous act of his goes against their binding code, and the society's gentleman disciplinarian is dispatched to ensure that it does not go unpunished. Crowe's head of staff, Eustace, prepares the house, the grounds, and the affairs for this unwelcome visit.

The narrative is methodical and steeped in shadows, spending more time on its slow, preparatory build toward conflict than on the conflict itself. Just when the action picks up, the focus shifts to a seemingly unrelated corner of the countryside. Bringing the two disparate halves of the story together takes the same winding approach, laying the foundations for a stunning conclusion.

The book conveys its tone and mood with subtlety. Eustace is not one to raise his voice in anger or frustration. He is much more inclined to drop to a whisper, increasing the tension, making him a character not easily crossed. In contrast, Mr. Crowe is not quite bombastic, but much more carefree. He has the dual privileges of age and ability in the conflict, and he uses both to his advantage. The book's use of formal language creates a layer of distance, contributing to the story's eerie, far-removed-from-society atmosphere.

Shrouded in secrecy, *The Maker of Swans* is a suspenseful novel wherein all is not as it seems.

DONTANÁ MCPHERSON-JOSEPH (July / August 2022)

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