

The Patricide: A Locked-Room Mystery

Kim Ekemar

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Kim Ekemar creates an intriguing, complex mystery with brisk pacing and a skillful unraveling of clues.

Kim Ekemar's engaging murder mystery, *The Patricide*, brings a troubled French family together for its patriarch's seventy-fifth birthday celebration—a traditional family dinner with a twist, as changes to estate owner Patrice Lafarge's will are to be announced that night. The tension rises as Patrice's children wait to hear news of the bequest that may relieve them of their pressing financial difficulties, and each hopes that they won't have to wait too long to receive it.

A large and lumbering man, Patrice enjoys his rustic life: wine from his own vineyards, good but simple food, and having the time to indulge in his passion for literature. Known to be stubborn and elitist, Patrice also likes things they way they are, and he has every intention of keeping them that way, even after his death. His lack of regard for others is reflected in his treatment of his children, including his mentally challenged fifty-year-old illegitimate son, Gaspard, who lives on the property as its caretaker. Both Patrice's estate and his lifestyle are well designed to guard his privacy and his secrets...until a locked room and a suspicious fire that results in his death reveal the source of a burning rage.

Ekemar's intimate psychological profiles of his characters reveal the inner conflict driving their behaviors and offer possible motives for murder. All of the Lafarge children, with the exception of Gaspard, are shown to have inherited their father's weaknesses, including his selfishness, lack of concern for others, and penchant for self-indulgence. Yet though their behaviors are less than honorable, all are portrayed, down to the patriarch himself, as possessing a childlike simplicity and vulnerability that makes them likable.

The text carefully sets the stage and lays out the props for the night of the murder and the events that play out afterward, causing the suspects to squirm as their secrets are brought to light. The inclusion of Inspector Rimbaud's elderly Aunt Emilie, who brings both her culinary gifts and intuitive sleuthing skills to the case, adds a touch of whimsy and a taste of real familial love to the tale.

The story is laid out like scenes for a stage play, and the table of contents lists sections accordingly, providing a concise and helpful time line. A list of all the major and minor characters is also provided, including their names, dates of birth, and their roles in the story. However, the text contains several incorrect uses of idiomatic expressions, some awkward wording, and occasionally errant grammar; these errors are distracting.

With *The Patricide*, Kim Ekemar takes a much-used theme and creates an intriguing, complex mystery with brisk pacing, effective and natural dialogue, and a skillful unraveling of clues that leads to a satisfying conclusion.

KRISTINE MORRIS (July 29, 2016)

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