

★ **The Simple Art of Killing a Woman****Patrícia Melo****Sophie Lewis, Translator**

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A Brazilian lawyer is reminded that intimacy is perilous in Patrícia Melo's searing novel *The Simple Art of Killing a Woman*.

While researching fatal crimes against women, a lawyer lists the varying slights that caused men to kill their partners, daughters, and neighbors: they were full of themselves, they disobeyed, they chose the wrong outfits. There were unapproved looks at parties; there were career advances that made their husbands feel lesser. It doesn't take much to push a violent man over the edge, she notes. And no one knows this better than the lawyer herself: her father murdered her mother; her once trusted partner just crossed the line into violence.

Fleeing toward the Amazon, where she experiments with ayahuasca and records the trial of three men accused of the vicious murder of an Indigenous teenager, the lawyer notes that, for women and girls, safety is always illusory at best. "The first thing you learn when you dive into the world of femicide," she says, "is that dark streets, deserted alleys, and dodgy neighborhoods are not genuinely dangerous places for us. The truth is that there's nowhere more perilous than our own homes."

Between chapters appear the death records of murdered women, whose killers make transparent excuses for their executions. These interludes are brief and laid out like poems; they drive home their stark realities with brutal clarity. And they are a discomfiting fit with the lawyer's fevered forays into her buried memories of the night that taught her, better than any investigation could, to draw a hard line at the first sign of danger.

Women rise defiant against misogynistic forces in the truth-filled novel *The Simple Art of Killing a Woman*. While the dead cannot be resurrected, lives might be spared with knowledge—and via feminist alliances.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (January / February 2024)

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