



The Tangled Web

Phyllis Falls Rogers

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In this murder mystery set in a small town, the surprising events are not only related to the crime, but to secret relationships and thoughtful acts of kindness.

In her first novel, *The Tangled Web*, Phyllis Falls Rogers depicts the quiet town of Bibly, which is unsettled by the puzzling death of one of its residents.

When Hank Jasper—a wealthy car dealership owner who moved to Bibly from Martinsburg, Texas, after divorcing his wife, Rhelda—is found dead in the town’s Episcopal church, at first a heart attack is suspected. Quickly, new details lead police to confirm he was murdered and several suspects emerge, from jealous husbands and boyfriends to extended family members and even people who were closest to Hank before his death.

Throughout the investigation, Police Chief Mack Scofield uncovers clues leading to the killer and to Hank’s many long-held secrets. Known as a “Casanova” in the town, Hank was rumored to have fathered children other than Sam, his adult son with Rhelda. Before Hank’s death, Sam asked his father about the gossip, but Hank always denied knowing of any other children. Still, Sam wasn’t so sure he believed him, and those suspicions only continue to grow after Hank’s death and his “other life” is revealed.

Rogers captures the interconnectedness of people in small towns, from a church pastor reaching out to comfort those in need and next door neighbors conversing over a fence to a tangled web of relationships, as the title suggests.

However, the plot is not suspenseful or full of intrigue, particularly about the investigation. Details and dialogue are repetitive, often reviewed or retold three or more times among different characters, which slows the pace. At the same time, other information is vague, including the town’s specific location; without a detailed description of the setting it is difficult for the reader to put themselves in the story.

Several characters have the same or similar sounding names, which creates confusion at times. In addition to Hank, there is Harold Todd, a suspect, and the Hampton brothers, Fred and Tommy. There are two other characters also named Tom and a fourth named Dr. Thomas. The result is a group of characters without significant distinctions that would reflect their uniqueness and bring their experiences to life more vividly.

While not a complex or nuanced crime story, *The Tangled Web* has many heartwarming aspects about neighborly kindness and sibling bonds.

MARIA SIANO (November 1, 2012)

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