ForeWord Reviews

HISTORICAL

The Trial of Dr. Kate
Michael E. Glasscock III
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A reporter returns to her hometown to cover the trial of her old high-school friend but dredges up more than she bargained for, in this mystery with Southern charm.

This well-paced mystery is permeated with old-school Southern charm. The second installment in the Round Rock, Tennessee, series, author Michael E. Glasscock III delves into the death of Lillian Johnson and her alleged murderer and best friend, Dr. Kate Marlow. The setting is 1952, and Glasscock takes advantage of the time period by addressing themes like alcoholism, racism, homosexuality, and sexism.

Kate, the only doctor in the depressed town of Round Rock, works tirelessly to serve the medical needs of this farming community. Overworked and barely paid, Kate is a dedicated physician with one serious flaw: she is an alcoholic. She drinks while she works and often blacks out. So when one of her syringes is found at the scene of Lillian's death—Lillian is a young woman with multiple sclerosis and cancer who has died of a barbiturate overdose—Kate is the prime suspect. She is left defenseless because she can't remember visiting Lillian the day she died.

Even though Kate and her trial is the focus of the novel, the story is told from the close-third-person point of view by Shenandoah Coleman, Kate's high-school friend who is now a reporter working for the *Memphis Express*. Drawn to cover the trial of her old friend and to do research for the book she's writing, Shenandoah returns to confront the past she has tried to outrun. Once she arrives in town, all her old ghosts haunt her: growing up in poverty, her vicious relatives, and the repression of a small Southern town.

As he moves Shenandoah through her efforts to uncover the facts about Kate in efforts to help her, Glasscock introduces all the local characters, relying heavily on stereotype. The loathsome, misogynistic local sheriff; the muscled, hunky mechanic who becomes a love interest for Shenandoah; the town drunk who just happens to be Shenandoah's uncle would all prove more interesting and complex if they didn't speak like worn imitations of Southerners.

What is refreshing about *The Trial of Dr. Kate* is Glasscock's unconventional ending. Readers who like plot and pacing will appreciate his honest conclusion of the story lines. This is a mystery for readers who like to be drawn along by a likable, strong female character. Glasscock's writing style is easygoing with enough of a folksy touch to gain many fans for the Round Rock series.

Monica Carter