



The Empty Kayak: Queen City Crimes #3

Jode Millman

Level Best Books (May 30, 2023)

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When a detective's best friend's ex disappears, their friendship is tested, in the serpentine thriller The Empty Kayak.

In Jodé Millman's propulsive thriller *The Empty Kayak*, a drowning investigation leads to legal wrangling.

Ebony, a Poughkeepsie detective, responds to a call about a potential drowning in the Hudson. She's shocked to see Lily, the one-year-old daughter of her longtime best friend, Jessie, at the scene. The purported drowning victim, Kyle, turns out to be Jessie's ex and Lily's father, complicating the investigation. Ebony always disliked Kyle, and her investigation reveals more about the kind of man he was.

The story is told from the perspectives of three women: Ebony, Jessie, and Cindie, the new district attorney. All three have different interests in the drowning. Cindie covers the book's legal issues in her thoughts and conversations; her presentations of the issues are clear and detailed.

Though there are repeated twists across the multiple storylines, the book is cohesive and forward moving. After the discovery of Kyle's body, it slows down to introduce people who have connections to Kyle and the crime scene; Ebony, Jessie, and Cindie conduct interviews with many of them. And while there is some duplication involved in these conversations, these scenes ably reflect the painstaking, necessary process of evidence gathering.

Midway through the book, the excitement increases: new theories about the case emerge, and the chapters adopt cliffhanger endings as they move from one woman's perspective to the next. At the same time, the potential motives for the crime multiply, expanding the pool of possible suspects.

The prose is emotive and sensory. When Ebony is left speechless, her "entire vocabulary lodged in the back of her throat like a fishbone." When exposition factors in, it's concise and exciting—as in the high-stakes opening chapter, when Ebony knocks on Jessie's door with Lily in her arms, bringing the news that Kyle is missing, and the women are fleshed out in terms of both their appearances and their reactions, efficiently illustrating Ebony's yearning to reconcile with Jessie after their recent falling-out.

Indeed, the book's heroines are rendered in deep, distinctive terms that honor their individual personalities. As they converse with one another, their gestures, assumptions, and self-analyses leave keen impressions. In effect, the book doubles as a study of how women assume power, while also showing how such roles affect their lives and relationships.

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MICHELE SHARPE (May 5, 2023)

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