

The Orchids Lady: Prequel to the Cop & Doc Mystery Novels

Freya Smallwood

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A mudslide sets off a string of unexplained violence in *The Orchids Lady*, a sun-suffused mystery novel in Freya Smallwood's Abelow and Bradley series.

Ogy Bradley is a neuroscientist and widower who returns home to find his quiet neighborhood, nestled in the shadow of Mount Reposo on the California coast, brimming with anxiety and police activity. Babby, a longtime resident, has been found dead in the hillside gardens she cultivates. The circumstances seem sinister; Bradley begins asking questions about Babby's demise, uncovering the tangled history of two orphans adopted into Babby's family and her late-life enthusiasm for genetic ancestry tests, among other peculiarities. Drawing on ties in the community and a maverick partnership with Detective Tor Abelow, a once-celebrated professional surfer, Bradley is not surprised when the death is ruled a murder—and when violence continues to haunt the neighborhood under Mount Reposo.

Steeped in the tight-knit communal bonds that grow between lifelong neighbors, this mystery captures the ebb and flow of friendships strained by fear. As suspects multiply, Bradley finds himself at odds with Ingrid, the former archaeologist who's been in his life since childhood, when he doubts the intentions of Babby's charming young niece. Elsewhere in the sprawl of characters and subplots, Abelow races to follow leads, shifting focus from jewelry thieves to city council candidates. The dense and overlapping relationships result in verisimilitude in this high-stakes murder investigation. Multilayered conversations, including witty dinner party repartee, become inseparable from the sleuthing as Abelow and Bradley are forced to unmask identities and get to the bottom of who their friends really are.

A charming mystery novel that captures the complexity of small-town communities, *The Orchids Lady* explores the secrets buried under the veneer of social life.

WILLEM MARX (September / October 2024)

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