

Austen-esque Mystery is a Delightful Read

“A Gentleman of Fortune: or The Suspicions of Miss Dido Kent” by Anna Dean.
Minotaur Books, 2011. \$24.95, 335 pages.

At the ripe old age of thirty-five, Miss Dido Kent is most certainly a spinster. At least, in Regency England, she is. As a woman without her own fortune or husband, she is often at the beck and call of her relations, usually to act as a companion or a nurse or to fill some other role for her family.

Recently, Dido has come to stay in Richmond with her young cousin Flora Beaumont while her husband has gone away, and the serenity of the town is quite a change from her previous visit to a relation which involved dead bodies and scandalous secrets. So when an older neighbor dies suddenly, leaving her vast estate to her nephew, Dido cannot help but be intrigued by the rumors beginning to circulate that Mr. Lansdale must have had something to do with his aunt’s death.

Certain that Mr. Lansdale is innocent of murdering his aunt, Flora begs Dido to investigate, but the more she unearths, the more evidence seems to point towards him. Despite this, Dido is still convinced that Mrs. Lansdale’s death was not the result of any actions of her nephew.

When she receives an anonymous note, warning her off her investigation, Dido only becomes more determined to uncover what really happened the night Mrs. Lansdale died.

Her resolve to unravel the mystery is threatened though when her own suitor, Mr. William Lomax arrives in town full of concern for her safety, imploring her to leave the investigation to the magistrate. Should she acquiesce to his request, or should she continue to do what she believes is right and expose the truth?

“A Gentleman of Fortune” is part “Emma”, part Sherlock Holmes and part Agatha Christie. It’s the world of Jane Austen, if someone had poisoned Lady Catherine De Bourgh, that is. The Regency setting is pitch perfect, the characters are believable and entertaining, and the mystery is a clever puzzle that comes together piece by piece to reveal a most enjoyable narrative.

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