



# Poet's Cottage

*Josephine Pennicott*

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## **Poet's Cottage** Josephine Pennicott

Poets had always lived there, the locals claimed. It was as if the house called to its own...

When Sadie inherits *Poet's Cottage* in the Tasmanian fishing town of Pencubitt, she sets out to discover all she can about her notorious grandmother, Pearl Tatlow. Pearl was a children's writer who scandalised 1930s Tasmania with her behaviour. She was also violently murdered in the cellar of *Poet's Cottage*, and her murderer never found.

*Sadie grew up with a loving version of Pearl through her mother, but her aunt Thomasina tells a different story, one of a self-obsessed, abusive and licentious woman. And Pearl's biographer, Birdie Pinkerton, has more than enough reason to discredit her.*

*As Sadie and her daughter Betty work to uncover the truth, strange events begin to occur in the cottage. And as the terrible secret in the cellar threads its way into the present day, it reveals a truth more shocking than the decades-long rumours.*

*Poet's Cottage* is a beautiful and haunting mystery of families, bohemia, truth, creativity, lies, memory and murder.

## **Poet's Cottage Details**

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Author : Josephine Pennicott

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## From Reader Review Poet's Cottage for online ebook

### Karyn says

I initially struggled with the ending of this book, but on reflection, it wasn't important who the murderer was, but rather about how the tragedies of a life can impact on a family for generations.

I also lived in Stanley for a few years and even went to Burnie High School. It was strange reading so many familiar things initially. Of Henry Hellyer and the ghosts at Highfield House.

This is a beautiful story that would make a fantastic movie. I see Cate Blanchett as Pearl.

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### Chelsea says

With a striking cover, interesting premise and a semi-local author (Australian) it was hard to pass this one up.

Sadie and her daughter Betty have moved to Tasmania to start anew after divorce and personal issues have made life impossible for them in Sydney. Poet's cottage is a beautiful house with a lot of history. Sadie's grandmother Pearl who was a children's author in the 1930s scandalised the locals with her free spirit and eccentric ways. She was beautiful and glamorous but she was also brutally murdered in the basement. With the murder unsolved for over 50 years Sadie wishes to write and publish a book. But her mother Marguerite is dead and Thomasina her Aunt tells a very different and darker story of her grandmother.

Soon Sadie and Betty begin to experience strange and frightening things. Is it Pearl? or someone who doesn't want the truth known?

This book was deliciously dark and atmospheric. There were more than a few scenes that were frightening. Bit by bit Pearl is revealed. She is such a complex character, neither bad nor good. I loved every moment of this story. I had my suspicions on who the murderer could be but I was completely wrong! I love being surprised.

The writing was wonderful. A almost perfect book. I cannot wait to see what Josephine writes next!

4.5 stars

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### Noella Van Looy says

Dit is het meest meeslepende boek dat ik de laatste tijd gelezen heb. Moeilijk om weg te leggen.

Als Sadie en haar dochter Betty in Poet's Cottage komen wonen, het huis van Sadie's grootmoeder Pearl, komen vele mysteries en geheimen naar boven, die voor veel spanningen zorgen, en langzaam ontrafeld worden, met een zeer verrassende ontknoping.

Zeer mooie karakterschetsen van de personages, je kan je hen zo voorstellen, en het is fantastisch hoe de

relaties tussen hen zich ontwikkelen.

Een aanrader!

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## **Jennifer (JC-S) says**

‘Something was wrong.

The fictional Tasmanian fishing town of Pencubitt provides the setting for this novel. Sadie inherits Poet’s Cottage when her mother dies, and moves from Sydney with her teenaged daughter Betty. Sadie wants to make a fresh start after her marriage break-up, and she also wants to find out as much as she can about her notorious grandmother, Pearl Tatlow. Pearl, a children’s author, was brutally murdered in the cellar of Poet’s Cottage in 1936, and her murderer was never arrested.

Sadie’s mother Marguerite had very good memories of her mother, but her older sister Thomasina (who still lives in Pencubitt) did not. Sadie has always dismissed her aunt’s views as reflecting her particular bitterness and eccentricity, but Pearl’s contemporary Birdie Pinkerton confirms that Pearl was a woman given to extremes in behaviour. A beautiful woman, living a bohemian lifestyle in a small Tasmanian town in the 1930s is bound to ruffle at least some feathers. With Betty’s help, Sadie is determined to find out what really happened in Poet’s Cottage in 1936.

‘The cry of blood will pursue him to terrible but righteous judgement.’

Strange things keep happening in Poet’s Cottage, it’s almost as though the ghosts of the past have taken up residence and refuse to let go. And the more Sadie discovers about her grandmother, the more complex she realises the story of Pearl’s life really is. Can Sadie trust Birdie Pinkerton’s account of events? After all, Sadie was in love with Pearl’s husband.

‘When we can’t let go of the past, we resurrect what should be at rest.’

The novel is written as a parallel story, moving between the present day and the 1930s, and Pearl’s murder is not the only mystery to be solved. I enjoyed this novel, especially the physical setting of the fictional town (which draws on both Stanley and Oatlands for some of its elements). The beautifully restored cottage has an appropriately oppressive atmosphere, and while many of the locals are not surprised that Sadie has returned to the island, not everyone is happy about the fact. While the novel is a clever combination of historical murder mystery, atmospheric ghost story and family drama, the plot becomes quite complicated by the end. Still, for me, solving the mystery became secondary to enjoying the story as it unfolded. I can only hope that the real ‘Poet’s Cottage’ in Stanley has a less macabre history.

Jennifer Cameron-Smith

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## **Essie Fox says**

This is an enchanting novel...and it seemed rather exotic to me, being set in Tazmania, with some very distinctive evocation of place. But the novel is also grounded in an English classic murder mystery style that

sometimes reminded me of Agatha Christie or Conan Doyle. The female characters are all so well drawn, and the youngest - Betty - is quite a sleuth...so much so that I could envisage her taking wing and having some break-away adventures of her own. The story is charming, and sometimes amusing, with Pennicott's humour very wry - but it's also very dark at times, not flinching from exposing the horrors of truly disturbing crimes.

I was kept guessing right up until the end. I really enjoyed this novel and very much looking forward to reading more from Josephine Pennicott's imagination.

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### **Linda Hardy says**

This book has a lot of atmosphere, set in Tasmania in the 1930's and present day, it tells the story of Pearl, a children's writer, who was murdered in the 1930's, but the murderer was never caught, and Pearl's family in the present day. Pearl's granddaughter Sadie moves into the old family home after the death of her mother, known as Poet's Cottage, the story tells of ghosts, but are there? and who murdered Pearl? I felt like the ending was a little rushed, and the story between Sadie and Simon could of progressed further, maybe a sequel, but did enjoy the book very much

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### **Kathryn says**

This is Australian author Josephine Pennicott's first non-fantasy novel - at least according to Goodreads. Her website indicates she has several others written prior to this one, but I haven't read them, and my library doesn't have them.

I enjoyed this one, although I do not read a lot in the Gothic mystery genre. At the time of reading, I did feel there were some points that were laboured over, although I can't recall what they were now. This was a readable book, but not one that gripped me from the outset and made me compulsively turn the pages. I liked that it was set in Tasmania - I don't think I've read any books set there before! I will look forward to reading Currawong Manor at some point.

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### **Karen says**

Josephine Pennicott has written three dark fantasy novels, and won three Scarlet Stiletto Awards from the Sisters in Crime Australia, so it's no surprise that her latest offering, POET'S COTTAGE has a little of the sensibility of both genres.

Set in the small, fictional town of Pencubbit in Tasmania, POET'S COTTAGE is really a story about generational memory. Sadie, and her teenage daughter move to Poet's Cottage after Sadie's mother Marguerite dies. The house, childhood home to Marguerite and her older sister Thomasina, and their parents Pearl and Maxwell is also the place where Pearl was brutally murdered. Pearl was a children's writer, an eccentric and erratic woman, capable of profoundly shocking behaviour particularly in that time and that place, remembered very differently by her two daughters - Marguerite with affection, Thomasina with loathing.

Sadie returns to her mother's childhood home to write a book about her grandmother, to uncover the truth of her death, to recover from her own divorce and grief at the death of her mother. Along the way she finds why Thomasina loathed the mother that Marguerite loved, and why the locals were so shocked and scandalised by Pearl.

The book moves backwards and forwards between the time of Pearl's life and her antics and the current day. The conduit for much of this movement is Birdie Pinkerton. Childhood friend and then long-time lover of Maxwell after Pearl's death, Birdie is still alive, albeit nearly 100. Her connection is multi-part. She was part of Pearl and Maxwell's circle during the time that they lived in Poet's Cottage, part of Maxwell's life post Pearl and the writer of an earlier book about Pearl that was part of what set Sadie on her path. She still lives in Pencubbit and has a connection with the town, the architecture and the people that is informed by her interest as a historian, and also because she has been there for such a significant period of time.

I understand that part of the plot line of POET'S COTTAGE was inspired by the story of children's author Enid Blyton, whose own daughters have conflicting opinions on Blyton as a mother. Whilst that might be an inspiration, the process of revealing the reason for the differences is interesting in this book, and Thomasina, who still lives in the vicinity, is a complex portrayal both in childhood and as an adult. In fact there are a lot of vaguely unpleasant characters littered throughout the book - some of whom go onto be revealed as maybe just a little misunderstood, some of whom remain unrepentant.

POET'S COTTAGE was a most unexpected reading experience, and one of the problems with writing a review of a book like this is avoiding revealing much of the detail - as this is a very detailed, complicated but extremely readable story. It is really less about solving any mystery around who murdered Pearl, although that is eventually revealed, but more about 4 generations of women in the family, and the women and to a lesser extent, the men, around them. The concentration is very much on the worlds that those women inhabit. Influenced by war, judged by society norms within all the generations, tempered by the isolation and tightness of a small community, connected to each other via flawed and accurate family recollection, POET'S COTTAGE uses a lot of threads to build a beautifully woven story.

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## **Zoey says**

### **3.5 ★**

An unsolved murder from the 1930's, ghosts, secrets, scandal, family drama all revolving around the one house alternating between the 1930's & present day.

A really good story right up to the end, where the mystery was solved & it was like "Really that was it??" I was expecting the murderer & the reasons behind it to be more exciting & scandalous maybe but No. It was a bit disappointing.

But still overall an enjoyable "read". Especially being set in my own home State of Tasmania

I listened to the audio version & thought the narrator was quite good, but just had one little complaint – The Tassie locals in the book were pronouncing the name of one of our cities incorrectly. Launceston (the beautiful city where I live) is pronounced Lonceston NOT Lawnceston. A fairly common mistake made by most non-Tasmanians ?

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## **Karen Brooks says**

This is a wonderful, haunting piece of work that starts in the present day when newly divorced Sadie, along with her teenage daughter, Betty, moves to the sea-village of Pencubitt in Tasmania to claim an inheritance, the benignly and yet appropriately named, Poet's Cottage. On arrival, Sadie finds herself welcomed by both the rather closed and somewhat eccentric community and the gorgeous house that, according to locals, needs a writer and, particularly a Tatlow, to bring it to life. Once the home of Sadie's grandmother, the infamous children's author, Pearl Tatlow, Sadie knows little about her relative except that her mother adored her and what she can glean from the children's books her grandmother wrote and the snippets of delicious scandal that followed in Pearl's wake. The other certainty that rightly unnerves Sadie and Betty is that Pearl was brutally murdered in the cellar of Poet's Cottage - a death that seems to have leached into the very foundations and walls of the house itself. As the killer was never found and Pearl's presence lingers, not only in the house, but in the memories (written and otherwise) of many of the villagers, Sadie determines to unravel the mystery of her grandmother's death and try and resolve the conflicting stories she's told about Pearl Tatlow: which was she? Adored mother and talented writer, whimsical, imaginative and warm? Or a selfish seductress and abusive mother and wife who cared for little but herself? Sadie must delve deeply to find the truth, crack open the shell of lies and fabrications to reveal the real woman behind the shiny, beauteous facade. Pearl is, in this regard, aptly named: she is either a precious thing buried beneath layers of grimy history and skewed familial and local stories or she is merely a broken promise, an empty shell devoid of depth. There are risks to this kind of search for the truth as Sadie is about to find out...

Segueing between past and present, from first person narrative (being an unedited version of a published book about Pearl called *Webweaver*, written by a local, the interesting Birdie) to third person, as a reader you're drawn into both Pearl and Sadie's stories that centre on family, relationships, female desire, social standards, gossip, assumptions and the power of words. This book is, in so many ways, a tale about the way words shape, inspire, create and destroy. How they can both build and harm. The Tatlows and others in the novel are either professional users of words or people who deploy them with a specific purpose such as in letters or wills. Within these forms, they construct versions of events, history and themselves... But for what purpose and what, if anything, are they hiding or revealing? What is fact? What is fiction? Just as writers construct imaginative worlds and tales for others to escape into, it seems other characters are not above doing this for themselves, whether it be a children's book, a work of non-fiction, letters, retellings of occasions or conversations or even Betty's wistful blogs. In all these modes, the subjective nature of 'truth' is exposed and questioned as is the transformative ability of words. Through words, of the novel and those given to the characters, imagination and memory are shown to be powerful tools that are wielded freely and in ways that mirror how we utilise both to protect, preserve, alter events to privilege a specific version and hasten forgetting of another. But this is not the time for fiction... Sadie wants and needs facts, but they're proving harder to uncover than she ever realised.

The story is also about survival - surviving loss, the abnegation of longing, abuse, thwarted desires, and shattered or even fulfilled dreams and the role memory can play in these as well. It's about female bonds and the capacity women have for great unity and destruction - mostly of each other. As we follow the many threads that weave both Pearl's tale and thus Sadie's, we're seduced into a particular kind of thinking and believing. It's testimony to Pennicott's exquisite prose that just as you think you understand where the characters and stories are heading, your expectations are overturned. I loved this about the novel. What I also loved is that I could see these characters; what they wore, ate, how they walked. I could feel the wind on my face, walk through the misty streets of Pencubitt, and feel the cold embrace of Poet's Cottage. Pennicott evokes time and place with a light and meaningful touch: a word, a mood, a gesture all bring the past and present lives of those dwelling in the village into acute focus.

This is a gorgeous, sometimes harrowing but always moving and deep story that remains with you long after the last page. Simply lovely. A triumph.

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### **Kerry Hennigan says**

It's hard to describe this book in terms of a particular genre... part gothic mystery, part dysfunctional family drama; you could imagine either Victoria Holt or Agatha Christie dreaming up the eclectic cast, atmospheric setting and some of the events.

In terms of its cast, there are enough characters populating both past and present to be confusing at times – enough sisters, friends, aunts, uncles and fishermen inhabiting the 1930s and present day in the (fictional) village of Pencubitt on the coast of Tasmania, to confuse the reader.

At the heart of the book is the haunting specter of a brutal murder that took place at Poet's Cottage, which has now been inherited by Sadie Jeffreys. The history of the house fascinates Sadie, who moves there with her teenage daughter Betty following the death of her mother and the break-up of her marriage.

Is it her notorious bohemian grandmother Pearl whose presence haunts Poet's Cottage? Or is it something much more sinister? Is one of the characters that once populated the house and the village responsible for Pearl's grizzly death?

Without giving anything away I can only say that the author's caught my attention from the beginning of the book, and held it for most of the journey. Only near the end did I find my attention flagging, and disappointment creeping in.

In the end, Poet's Cottage is an entertaining read that does not quite live up to its promise. I loved the setting and the evocative atmosphere so deftly described by Tasmanian born author Josephine Pennicott. However, after having given my time and attention to keeping up with the colourful cast across two time periods, I felt let down by the mystery's resolution.

It is the author's request in a closing note that the ending not be given away... I leave it to other readers of Poet's Cottage to decide for themselves whether the secret is one worth keeping.

Review by Kerry Hennigan  
5 January 2013

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### **Susanna Montua says**

Wertung: \*\*\*\*

Cover: Sehr sehr schön, die Aufmachung ist super, der Einband in tollen Pastelltönen gehalten, wahrlich ein Buch, welches ich im Laden aus dem Regal genommen hätte.



Meinung: Ich durfte im Zuge einer Lovelybooks-Leserunde mitmachen und freute mich riesig - bis es dann losging. Dieses Buch schaffte es, auf den ersten Seiten, in mir einen Aberglauben zu wecken. Ich las etwa das erste Drittel sehr mühselig, immer wenn ich es zur Hand nahm, wuchs ein beklemmendes Gefühl in meiner Brust.

Der Prolog fesselte mich sofort, man wird direkt Zeuge von etwas Furchtbarem. Mit wenigen Worten erzeugt die Autorin eine Stimmung, die unheimlich und beängstigend ist, was wahrlich auch daran liegt, dass Kinder beteiligt sind.

Ab da ging es dann los, immer wenn ich es zur Hand nahm, geschah zu Hause etwas: die Kinder wurden krank, ohne Vorwarnung, ich wurde krank, meine Tochter schlief nicht mehr durch.

Nach langem hin und her beschloss ich, nicht weiterzulesen.

Bis vor kurzem. Ich sagte mir, wie man denn so dämlich sein könnte und diese Vorfälle mit einem Buch in Verbindung bringen könnte und zwang mich, es zur Hand zu nehmen und weiter zu machen und siehe da - nichts.

Außer, dass es mich fesselte.

Man lernt Pearl Tatlow, eine verrückte Autorin, eine Lebefrau kennen, deren Schicksal bald einen dramatischen Höhepunkt findet. Zeitgleich tritt Sadie ins Leben, ihre Urenkelin, die in das Poet's Cottage zieht und gewillt ist, dem Geheimnis um Pearls Tod auf die Spur zu kommen. Dies erhofft sie sich, indem sie das Buch von Birdie Pinkerton, Die Netzesspinnerin, liest. Birdie lebt heute noch und hat in diesem Manuskript niedergeschrieben, wie ihr Leben in Bezug auf Pearl war.

Zeitgleich streift scheinbar ein Geist durch das Poet's Cottage. Sadie wird scheinbar bedroht, wieder ein gefundenes Fressen für den Puls, aber auch einige Seiten, die zum Schmunzeln einladen.

Die Autorin hat es geschafft, ihre Figuren super miteinander zu verweben, man fiebert mit, rätselt mit und verdächtigt mit. Jedoch, und das muss ich deutlich sagen, auch sehr viel Geredet wird, was man durchaus auch hätte weglassen können, bzw. mit weniger Worten ausdrücken können.

SPOILER:

Dann das Ende. Es war, ehrlich gesagt, etwas enttäuschend. Nach all dem Rätseln hätte ich mir gewünscht, dass es auch jemand aus dem direkten Umfeld gewesen war, doch dem war nicht so - es handelte sich, indirekt, wirklich um einen "fremden".

Es wird auch nicht näher auf die Wahrsagerin Jean und ihren Bruder Louis eingegangen, sie waren es eben, sie machten dies andauernd etc. Wobei es, rein von der Logik her, mehr Sinn gemacht hätte, Pearl zu schröpfen, anstelle eine einmalige Zahlung zu erhalten und Pearl daraufhin zu killen. Weiter machte es in diesem Zuge keinen Sinn, weshalb die beiden nur einige Zeit zuvor Teddy umgebracht haben, zumal sie von dem armen Fischer wahrlich kein Geld zu erwarten hatten.

Darüber hinaus die Tatsache, dass Thomasina wusste, wer der Mörder ist und der Fall dennoch, bisher, nie aufgeklärt werden konnte. Zweifellos, sie war ein verstörtes Mädchen, dennoch wäre die Polizei, hier allerdings nur eine Vermutung, nicht abzuschütteln gewesen, wenn sie zugibt, den Teufel gesehen zu haben.

Nun denn ...

Fazit:

Ein tolles Buch, tolle Aufmachung, tolle Beschreibungen, man ist mitten in Pencubitt und mitten im Poets Cottage. Man empfindet Sympathie für manchen Charakter und verabscheut wiederum andere. Man verzweifelt und muss sogar eine Träne verdrücken. Man empfindet Spaß und Zorn - ein gelungenes Buch, wenngleich das Ende leider nicht überzeugt. Daher vier gut gemeinte Sterne.

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## **Elisabeth Storrs says**

If you ever have doubts as to whether ghosts exist, then you should visit Tasmania. With its convict and colonial past there are buildings a plenty where phantoms reside. Poet's Cottage by Josephine Pennicott is set in one such haunted dwelling - a house whose walls hide the clues to solving a crime committed decades ago.

Sadie and her daughter, Betty, leave Sydney for the small seaside village of Pencubbitt in Tasmania. Sadie has inherited Poet's Cottage where her grandmother, Pearl Tatlow, was brutally murdered in 1936. Pearl was a 'free spirit' whose bohemian behaviour constantly challenged the morals and sensitivities of her neighbours. Acclaimed as an author of children's books whose characters themselves have dark undertones, Pearl was charismatic, promiscuous, vicious and on the verge of madness.

The novel swings between the current day and the year of the murder. Sadie leaves behind the trauma of a divorce and the recent death of her mother, Marguerite, to write a book about her famous ancestor. Soon she is trying to uncover both the mystery of Pearl's character and her demise. Sadie's views are coloured by the fondness of Marguerite's memories for her mother while Thomasina, Pearl's other daughter, tells a different story of physical and mental abuse. Sadie learns more about the circumstances leading up to her grandmother's death through a manuscript written by Birdie, one of Pearl's friends. However the reliability of this account is thrown into question given Birdie's relationship with Pearl's husband.

Poet's Cottage is a story with strong female personalities but the house itself has its own character too. Its aspect is charming but a visceral foreboding pervades it which gives the story a gothic feel. At times I found the accumulation of ghost stories concerning both the house and the village to be overplayed, particularly when coupled with the presence of a sinister cloaked woman. Pennicott is skilful, though, in drawing the

reader through the maze of various versions of Pearl while building up the undeniable presence of the dead woman's spirit as the threads of the mystery are unravelled.

There is another spectre that looms over Sadie and Betty – that of insanity. Birdie tells how the temperamental Pearl's mood would swing between elation, obsessiveness and despair. There is also evidence of a deeper history of mental illness in the family. Pennicott hints of this legacy but never fully develops Sadie's fear that she might not have only inherited Pearl's beauty and writing talent but also her madness, nor her apprehension that seeds of instability might have been sewn in her teenage daughter as well. And while Thomasina's tortured childhood is vividly depicted, I would have liked to know a little more about Marguerite, the favoured child.

Poet's Cottage is an accomplished, engrossing novel with fine language and powerful descriptions of the small town inhabitants of Pencubitt in both past and modern times. Most of all, in creating the damaged and damaging Pearl, the author has created a character so compelling and complex that the image of her lingers just as surely as the strains of music from her gramophone drifted through Poet's Cottage both before and after her death.

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## **Sarah says**

"Dornentöchter" von Josephine Pennicott erzählt die Geschichte einer Familie in einem kleinen (fiktiven) tasmanischen Dorf namens Pencubitt, die mir insgesamt gut gefallen hat.

Inhalt: Nach dem Tod ihrer Mutter und der Trennung von ihrem Mann Jack zieht Sadie mit ihrer Tochter Betty nach Tasmanien, in das Dorf Pencubitt, wo sie das Poet's Cottage geerbt hat, das alte Haus ihrer Großmutter Pearl. Pearl war eine berühmte Kinderbuchautorin und sehr exzentrisch, bis sie 1936 im Keller des Poet's Cottage brutal ermordet wurde. Seitdem soll es dort angeblich sogar spuken....

Sadie, selbst auch Autorin, hat sich vorgenommen, die Geheimnisse ihrer Großmutter zu entschlüsseln, ihren Tod aufzuklären und ein Buch über sie zu schreiben. Im Garten des Poet's Cottage lebt noch immer Sadies alte Tante Thomasina, die voller Hass für ihre Mutter ist - ganz im Gegenteil zu ihrer Schwester Marguerite, Sadies Mutter, die stets nur gut von ihr gesprochen hatte. Mit einem anderen Buch über Pearl, geschrieben von ihrer alten Freundin Birdie, die immer noch in Pencubitt lebt, versucht Sadie das Leben ihrer Großmutter zu verstehen...

Dieser Roman, der sich irgendwo zwischen Familienschicksal, Kriminalroman und Gruselgeschichte bewegt, war nicht leicht zu lesen. Auf den knapp 400 Seiten tummeln sich nicht wenige Protagonisten, deren Schicksale und Geschichten zu einem Gesamtbild geflochten werden wollen. Das gelingt der Autorin zwar sehr gut, sodass die Handlung mir zum Schluss sehr stimmig und gut durchdacht erschien, aber mit dem eher trockenen Schreibstil hatte der Roman leider doch einige Längen, die von den kurzen Gänsehaut-Momenten und den starken Charakteren nicht aufgewogen werden konnten. Sprachlich wirkt "Dornentöchter" leider recht altbacken, etwas stelzig und staubig - und das nicht nur in Birdies Buch "Die Netzspinnerin", welches der Leser mit der Hauptfigur Sadie gemeinsam liest, sondern auch in der modernen Gegenwart. Der Wechsel zwischen gegenwärtiger Geschichte und Birdies Erzählungen von Pearl und ihrer ungleichen Freundschaft aus der ersten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts sorgte allerdings ein wenig für Auflockerung.

Die Charaktere waren allesamt sehr vielschichtig und stark und sorgten mit ihren Entwicklungen im Laufe des Romans für Überraschungen. Besonders interessant ist aber Sadies verstorbene Großmutter Pearl, deren Leben in dem kleinen Dorf Pencubitt, der Heimat ihres Mannes Maxwell, alles andere als einfach war. Pearl wurde durch ihre exzentrische, freizügige Art zum Zentrum von Klatsch und Tratsch im Dorf und machte

sich schnell Feinde, was die Aufklärung ihrer Ermordung nicht gerade einfach macht. Ihr wurden Affären mit mehreren Männern nachgesagt, sie trank, kleidete sich auffällig und selbst ihre älteste Tochter hatte nichts als Verachtung für sie übrig. Mit Sadie gemeinsam einzutauchen in dieses abenteuerliche Leben, das ein so tragisches Ende nahm, war sehr spannend und macht den eigentlichen Reiz dieses Romans aus.

Fazit: Eine interessante Familiengeschichte mit ein paar Geistern aus der Vergangenheit und einem ungelösten Mordfall. Leider etwas trocken zu lesen, aber dennoch ein lesenswerter Roman aus dem fernen Australien. 4 Sterne

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## **Shelleyrae at Book'd Out says**

Set in Pencubbit, a fictional fishing town in Tasmania, Poet's Cottage is a story of scandal, intrigue and family. Pearl Tatlow, an eccentric children's author, was brutally murdered in Poet's Cottage in 1936, while her young daughters Thomasina and Marguerite, played in the garden. Her killer was never identified. Seventy or so years later Marguerite's daughter, Sadie along with her teenage daughter Betty, moves into Poet's Cottage to write a book about Pearl, the woman revered by her mother but reviled by many. As the story moves between the past and present the truth of Pearl's life, and death, is revealed.

While there is a mystery at the core of Poet's Cottage, the story is about much more than Pearl's grisly end. In life Pearl was a polarising force, despised by her daughter Thomasina who was the target of her mother's physical and emotional rages, she was put on a pedestal by Marguerite, whose memories of Pearl are far more rosy. Sadie has always taken her mother, to whom she was devoted, at her word, dismissing Thomasina, who still lives in Pencubbit, as a bitter and eccentric woman. It is Birdie Pinkerton, a contemporary of Pearl, who confirms that Pearl was indeed a disturbed woman. In an unpublished manuscript, Birdie reveals a narcissistic woman who openly had affairs, scandalised the small and conservative community with outrageous behaviour and delighted in careless cruelty. Sadie is unsure if she can trust Birdie's memories, which could be biased by her relationship with Pearl's husband, but it paints a damning portrait of a sadistic, albeit, mentally ill woman. Still, Pearl had a strangely magnetic personality, attracting lovers and admirers easily, many of whom were willing to forgive her her faults.

As Sadie learns more about her grandmother, Pearl's shadow seems to loom over the present. Despite the amount of time that has elapsed it seems Pearl still haunts the town.

Poet's Cottage has a touch of the gothic about it. The house, though beautifully restored, has an oppressive atmosphere, there are hidden passageways, a creepy, perhaps haunted, basement and a hooded figure lurks in the grounds. Thick fog rolls across the town which is populated by enigmatic characters, many of whom are unpleasant. There is a brusque and brooding romantic interest for Sadie, who is threatened by unseen forces, and though she may not be the fainting type, she succumbs to the unease that envelops the Cottage.

Poet's Cottage is a beautifully written, atmospheric mystery with surprising depth. A literary novel that offers many surprises, it is sure to capture your imagination and have you reading long into the night.

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