



A Schedule of Drugs in the Valley of Death

by Sarah Reith

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Isobel Reinhardt is a hot mess. The daughter of a wire-walker turned federal fugitive and a high-end sex worker who likes to call herself a feminist, Isobel has failed decisively at everything she's put her hand to. So she comes to Mendocino County to grow pot for a woman who knows all her family secrets.

When she narrowly escapes arrest while delivering pot for Alizarin, Isobel does a quick risk assessment and decides it's time to get a legitimate job. Without a marketable skill set or a well-developed resume, she jumps at the opportunity to be one of two live-in caregivers for a dying German woman.

As death and madness converge in a lonely country house at the end of a long dirt road, Isobel realizes the role of ferocity and beauty in her life.

From the author

It's funny, how a seemingly whimsical idea can just stroll into your mind and take over your life for the next few years. I was trimming weed alone one day, listening to audio books that a friend had found at a garage sale. Over the course of a week or so, I became fascinated with *Red Poppies* by Alai, about a feudal Tibetan family that grew opium poppies at the time of the Communist Revolution. Then the same thing happened when I listened to *Ava's Man*, by Rick Bragg, about a Depression-era bootlegger. It occurred to me that a) there is a theme going on here; and b) there is not a lot of really good literary fiction about the last days of the Mendocino outlaws. The idea stuck with me, and a few years down the line, I decided to take my BA in creative writing and my now-expired criminality and see if I could change that.

Discussion Questions

1. Do you trust Isobel Reinhardt as a narrator? Why or why not? Are there particular points where you think her presentation of a situation might be inaccurate or self-serving?
2. What do you think about Isobel's mother, Caitlin? Is she purely a performer, or do you see flashes of sincerity in her? Do you find her sympathetic or exasperating, or both?
3. Do you think Alizarin is an honest person? What do you think about her decision to grow pot so she can be an artist and an activist? Why do you think what you do about that?
4. Do you see any similarities between Isobel's and Reina's lives? Reina's friendship with Danica and Isobel's relationship with Alizarin?
5. What do you think changed Reina's attitude about her daughter's decision to have the baby? Do you think Reina's boyfriend Raymond had anything to do with it?
6. What does Akana, the white wolf, symbolize?



7. Do you think Fiona Jones is a powerful person, and, if so, where does her power come from?
8. Do you suspect that Isobel, knowingly or not, allowed Fiona to kill Mariana Blanchefleur by administering too much morphine? What do you think about the circumstances of Mariana's death?
9. This book addresses several controversial topics, including cannabis cultivation, in-home hospice death, and sex work. Which of these subjects is most troubling to you, and which of the characters is most compromised? Why?
10. What do you think about Isobel's attitude towards her parents at the end of this book?

About the author

Sarah Reith was born into a circus family in San Francisco, and ran away to join the army as soon as she turned eighteen. She was a parachute rigger at the jump school on Fort Benning, Georgia, where one of her incidental duties was "wind dummy," or jumping out of an airplane ahead of a class of airborne students so the instructors could check the wind conditions. After concluding that life as a dummy lacked intellectual stimulation, she used her GI Bill to earn a BA in creative writing at Mills College for women. She worked as a bike messenger and a barista for some years before going back to school in Germany. She studied for her MA in German literature in the shadow of a medieval castle, burying her nose in little yellow volumes with very dense print and lots of umlauts. She is currently a reporter in Mendocino County, working on her second novel.