



# The Tea-Olive Bird-Watching Society

*Augusta Trobaugh*

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The women of a small town's bird watching society secretly plan to "eliminate" the husband of one of their members in this new novel—a modern spin on the classic film *Arsenic and Old Lace*—written by the beloved author of *Sophie and the Rising Sun*.

In a story replete with coconut cake, grits, and poisoned turtle stew, it's easy to see why Augusta Trobaugh has been heralded as having "a voice from and for the South, as complex and resonant as the region itself" (Anne Rivers Siddons). With her latest novel, Trobaugh displays that distinctly Southern charm and beckons new readers to her work.

Founding members of the Tea-Olive Bird Watching Society in tiny Tea-Olive, Georgia, are Beulah, Sweet, Wildwood, and Zion, each named after a hymn. Pillars of the community, seemingly beyond reproach, two of these ladies are nonetheless conspiring to murder retired Judge L. Hyson Breed, a newcomer to Tea-Olive. It all begins when the judge tricks Sweet into marriage, steals her land for a development project, and sweet-talks his way right onto the town council. By the time Beulah and Zion discover his evil plans—and realize that Sweet has endured personal harm, with more to come—the judge is already a permanent fixture in town. Or is he? When Beulah and Zion attempt to do away with the judge—while always remaining unfailingly polite—the novel takes a wild turn. The result is a delightful black comedy from a novelist at the peak of her powers.

## The Tea-Olive Bird-Watching Society Details

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Author : Augusta Trobaugh

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## **From Reader Review The Tea-Olive Bird-Watching Society for online ebook**

### **Emma says**

I don't necessarily think this is a bad book, I'm just perhaps 50 years younger than the target audience. Also being from Australia, I couldn't quite relate to all the quirks and charms of life and people in the American South, though I do generally love reading books set in that area.

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### **Kathy says**

If this was not a Book Club selection for October....I would have stopped reading after the first chapter. I am being a snob when I say that this book is written for readers who like something "simple" and not complex. Trying to be kind..... Even the bad books offer something for discussion. I believe that this one will lead to discussions of victims of domestic abuse. All will discuss friendships. How do we assist a friend who is clearly being abused?

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### **Judy says**

I couldn't finish it -- just skimmed the last third or so! It had some promise, but the villain was a cardboard cartoon, and therefore the entire novel suffered. I suppose it was supposed to be an ultimately "feel good" read -- after all, good triumphs over evil! But getting there was a drag. There wasn't enough humor to make it feel like "Arsenic and Old Lace" (a wonderful romp!), nor enough drama to make it a good suspense novel. Just maddening fluff. And ultimately, a waste of good reading time! Too bad. The setting -- small southern town -- was good. But not enough detail on the female characters, who could have been interesting!

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### **Shirley Schwartz says**

This book was a fun little read and highlights the unique form of women's friendships in the south. The book was set in little Tea Olive Georgia and we meet some fun and whimsical ladies of the Tea Olive Bird Watching Society. These are women that grew up together, and whose ancestors settled and farmed in the area around Tea Olive. They are all busy with volunteer work, board meetings and of course bird watching. Then a new man arrives in town, and a retired judge from the north no less. The whole community is all in a twitter. Then they begin to realize that this judge doesn't necessarily have their best interests at heart and has his own hidden agenda. When one of the club's ladies marries the judge, it brings all the troubles ever closer. Reading as these ladies plan ways to help their friend is hilarious. This author does a good job of character development, and the setting is portrayed realistically too. Lots of fun and quite delightful.

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### **Barbara says**

Something off about this book, not just the fact that two older women are trying to bump off the new abusive and controlling husband of their childhood friend. I can't really put my finger on what seems off though. I keep wondering what interested me in this book originally and why I kept reading it. I think there were elements of cliché characters but that wasn't entirely what seemed to be throwing me off.

The story was okay. I didn't ultimately dislike it - is just couldn't embrace it.

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### **C.C. Thomas says**

This book had the feeling of "Arsenic and Old Lace"; therefore, I loved it!

Who knew little old ladies from church were so mercenary and vengeful? The Tea-Olive Bird Watching Society is made up of four gentle Southern women who like to drink tea and watch birds. Whatever you do, do not fu\$! with them. They will mess you up!

The Society is made up of Zion, Wildwood, Beluah and Sweet, all named for Bible hymns and life-long friends. They have grown up together in Tea-Olive, GA, but they couldn't be more different. When Sweet marries for the first time at the age of 60+, the ladies are thrilled for her.....until her personality starts to change from 'sweet' to fearful. When Sweet's happiness and health are threatened, the others go into full-on Ninja mode. Beware when you mess with a Southern lady! Friends and family will eviscerate you. Usually, just figuratively. But, in this book, more literally.

Beulah and Zion aren't going to just hand over Sweet without a fight to her new abusive husband. They come up with a plan to murder him. The plan is ingenious-and hilarious-and fails in such an epic way. But these ladies aren't quitters and they'll do whatever it takes to get their main--in a coffin!

I really loved this book. It had moments of sweetness and sadness and just pure fun, both good-natured and the naughty kind. It was a rare book that transcends age and one I whole-heartedly recommended to my very Southern Baptist mother.

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### **Olivermagnus says**

I thought this was a charming little story. Sort of a combination of Golden Girls meet Agatha Christie, combined with elements of Arsenic and Old Lace. The main characters of the story are Beulah, Sweet, Wildwood and Zion, four genteel southern ladies in Tea-Olive, Georgia who attend church together and like to go birdwatching. Their old friend Love-Divine has died and left them a parcel of land for their bird watching activities. She's also left money to the local library and the Homework Helpers Group that helps local kids with their school work. The only caveat is, if the club breaks up, the town obtains the land to do what they want with it.

We learn how the ladies met, meet their families, and hear about their careers. None have children and a couple have never been married. They follow traditions where every girl is named for a church hymn, and they love their small town lives in Tea-Olive. Soon, retired New York Judge Hyson Breed moves to Tea-Olive where he courts Sweet. They marry and he immediately gains control of her family estate, which he plans to develop. In just a short time Hyson isolates Sweet from her friends. Beulah and Zion worry about

Sweet and when they sneak over to see her they notice bruises and other signs of abuse. Once they realize Hyson is planning to exploit the town they decide the only way to save Tea-Olive and Sweet would be his death.

This book was witty and well written. The events and location of the story were interesting, and I loved the way it showed the ladies' friendship. The ending was really wonderful. It's not a story for anyone wanting a complex plot but is more of a cozy type of novel.

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### **Ellyn says**

I couldn't finish it, having realized that while I'm old as dirt, I'm still not quite THIS old. And also, it was silly.

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### **Pam says**

The story was about a group of southern women in a small town called Tea-Olive. Sweet, one of the women in the group, falls for an ex judge who moved from New York to Tea-Olive. There is something really wrong about him and Sweet doesn't see it until she marries him and is abused. Her friends plan ways to do away with him. The plots are funny and the characters are really characters. It's a good book but nothing spectacular. It was a pleasant change and I would recommend it if you need something light.

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### **Anne Hayes says**

Kinky

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### **Emily Crow says**

In this one, several middle aged ladies in a small town in Georgia find their world shaken up when their friend dies. The founding member of their small "bird watching society," Love-Divine Brockett King's will bequeaths a small patch of woods to the society as a bird sanctuary, and the rest of her house and land is to be sold and the proceeds given in support of the public library. One of the bird ladies, Wildwood, is the town librarian.

A retired judge from New York State soon buys their late friend's property, and charms his way onto several important town committees, as well as into the heart of another bird watcher, Sweet. (The women are all either widowed, divorced, or in Sweet's case, never married.) Her friends warn her against a whirlwind courtship, but in vain, for Sweet marries the judge almost immediately.

Alas, he is a thoroughly evil man, having descended upon the town only to manipulate the residents for his own gain, like a carpetbagger from the days of yore. (The author does not come right out with the comparison, but it was hard not to think of it.) He weasels his way onto the town council and library board, trying to find ways to shut the library down, so Love-Divine's money will go to the town instead, where he

can better shunt some of it off for himself.

As if this weren't bad enough, he immediately begins to abuse Sweet and keep her caged in the house, threatening to get a restraining order when her friends try to visit. Really, this man was so dastardly, I pictured him like a silent movie villain, twirling his mustache. Or like Oil Can Harry from Mighty Mouse.

Since no one will believe them and Sweet is too downtrodden to stand up for herself, two of the bird watchers, Beulah and Zion, decide that they have to take matters into their own hands, and begin plotting the judge's murder. Of course, it doesn't go right, and they have to keep plotting.

I found the first two-thirds of the book to be rather entertaining. It was like going back in time forty years, where everyone is naive and proper, and neither cell phones nor the Internet have been invented. Actually, that part was a bit weird, since it seems to take place in the present day (more or less), and yet the women were always going to pay phones or having to get Wildwood, the librarian, to find common information for them. And I wasn't sure how old the ladies were supposed to be--in their 50s? 60s? Zion runs a dairy business single-handed, so they couldn't be that old, but in many ways, they acted like old ladies. But still, it was fun.

And then... Why does this always happen? Is it my fault? Am I too picky for my own good? Because by the end, the story got pretty stupid. The judge began to act like a psychopath. Sweet went from being naive to being completely dumb and spineless.

I know a book like this is just for fun. The characters are more caricatures than well-drawn personalities. It's not meant to be serious. And I'm OK with that. I want fun! Unfortunately, for me, towards the end the plot just fell apart.

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## **Marj says**

NFM

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## **Dwight Hurst says**

A cool idea: a group of proper southern women decide to murder their friend's new and physically abusive husband. Unfortunately this falls into a wide category of cool ideas that turn into mediocre stories. Sorry, I really tried to go there. I expected to enjoy it.

My feedback is twofold:

1. The antagonist (abusive new husband) played out like every cookie cutter abusive guy in fiction. The revelation of his controlling, manipulative, abuse behavior was obvious and blatant from moment one. It seemed as if this was just a part the story wanted to get out of the way ASAP, and it came across as cartoonish.

2. Everything happens so quickly. Friendships form quickly, marriage and abuse happen and are discovered immediately. The decision to jump from friendly concern to planning homicide also seemed to happen without a ton of development.

How would you switch track and ask your friends to help you kill a guy, no matter how much he deserves it? I realize this is a tricky narrative to develop, and I feel for the author. It just never really came together for me.

I would read this author again, talent for dialogue and description of the environment of the story, but I'd hope to see more work put into the world building and story development.

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### **Carol Kean says**

We know from the cover blurb that two ladies plot the murder of their friend's abusive husband. We don't know if they'll succeed, and that's what kept me turning pages to the end. Lots of humor, horror and heart-wrenching good intentions here. The law-abiding citizen in me wishes the ladies would find legal ways to get their friend out of her unfortunate marriage, but the realist in me knows that abused wives all too often feel escape is impossible. It staggers the imagination--we can't imagine an intelligent woman allowing herself to be owned and controlled by her husband, but it does happen, and libraries are full of psychology books explaining the how and why and what to do to break the cycle of abuse. All too often, it seems death is the only thing that will stop an abuser, but how does an ordinary citizen, "my word against his," gather evidence to get a man arrested, tried and sentenced? It's a good thing capital punishment is administered only by the courts, or too many people would be killed by spouses, family members and neighbors. Then again, when evil men know how to elude the legal system, vigilante justice is the only way to stop them. But.... can two church-going, respectable, small town ladies get away with murder? Can they even accomplish murder in the first place?

Some of the situations in this novel struck me as contrived or cliché - e.g., the obvious awfulness of a man who'd cut funds to libraries and children - what a villain! Crucify him! Kill him! Somehow, this aspect of the plot left me wanting to drop the rating to two stars. Then again, such men do exist in real life. They're the kind who see a turtle crossing the road and swerve, not to avoid hitting it, but to crush it. (Just saw this in today's news.) So the judge who kills a bird in front of a bird-watcher is all too believable. Most animal lovers would feel driven to murder such a man on the spot. Wanting to kill is one thing, but actually plotting to kill is an act of human will that would make this novel a great choice for book club discussions. It sounds awful for two elderly women to judge and condemn a man without fair trial and a jury. If they could get away with this in real life, it's horrifying to imagine how many people might end up dead at the hands of judgmental neighbors. BUT - the way this novel is written, we share their outrage and see the urgency of stopping this man. I kept turning pages. Yes, the pace is slow, if you were expecting a thriller. This novel is more character driven, which to me can only be a good thing. The gradual build-up of evidence against the judge is logical. The flat tire on Sweet's car, the caged bird, the bull, the red robe - so many images are memorable and evocative, it hardly matters if other scenes seem a little contrived (such as Tobia giving a speech about the benefits of the after-school library program).

I like this book so much, I bought a paper copy for my cousin in Arizona. I'm curious to see how she'll react. Raised in the Midwest, widowed at last from her own abusive husband, living like a recluse now in the desert, how will she like the Tea-Olive bird watchers? She'll either hate the book or love it. I'm as eager to learn her response to this novel as I was to reach the end of the novel.

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## **Ronna says**

Augusta Barough has deftly written about the 'proper' southern lady with a group of friends who live in Tea-Olive. Their oldest friend has died and left them a beautiful parcel of land for their bird watching activities. She's also left money to the local library and the 'Homework Helpers Group' that helps local kids with their school work.

We learn how all the ladies met, their families make up, and their livelihoods. None have children, and a couple might be called 'spinsters', but they enjoy their lives together in Tea-Olive. They follow traditions---like every girl being named for a church hymn---and they thoroughly enjoy their small town lives.

When a retired judge moves to town and too quickly woos one of their own into marriage, all 'hell' tries to break out. He's abusing their friend and seems to want to take over her property and turn their happy small town into a money making, larger city. The ladies are trying to do everything possible to save their friend from this evil man, but their good-hearted, Bible believing ways are getting in their way as they try to think of means to 'exterminate this vermin'. Imagination and some hilarity drive this story of real spousal abuse.

I very much enjoyed the 'ladies of the town', and this author definitely knows spousal abuse, but the 'real' refusal of their friend to do anything to help herself, within a 'fun' type story did not necessarily make for a truly enjoyable book. It did have a very satisfying conclusion, but I would have preferred a more light hearted plot for these very interesting and enjoyable 'southern galls'!

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