



# Houses of Stone

*By Barbara Michaels*

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It is a find of inestimable value for Karen Holloway. The battered manuscript she holds in her hand—written in the nineteenth century and bearing the mysterious attribution "Ismene"—could prove a boon to the eager young English professor's career. But Karen's search for the author's true identity is carrying her into the gray shadows of the past, to places fraught with danger and terror. For the deeper she delves into Ismene's strange tale of gothic horror, the more she is haunted by the suspicion that the long-dead author was writing the truth . . . and that even now she is guiding Karen's investigation, leading her to terrible secrets hidden behind the cold walls of houses of stone.

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## Houses of Stone By Barbara Michaels Bibliography

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## Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

The bestselling romantic suspense author ( *Vanish with the Rose* ) falters here with a novel that lacks both romantic intrigue and suspenseful plotting. The story begins well, with vivid descriptive writing and convincing dialogue briskly setting up the premise. Karen Holloway, an ambitious assistant professor at an unnamed women's college in the Northeast, learns of a previously unpublished novel by a 19th-century author known only as Ismene. Since she herself made Ismene famous in the academic world by publishing a volume of her verse, Karen knows her reputation will skyrocket if she can buy the manuscript from the bookseller who found it and issue it with her commentary. She and her colleague Peggy Finneyfrock (a well-drawn character) travel to a dilapidated estate in Virginia's Tidewater region in search of clues to Ismene's identity. But other academics are also in hot pursuit, and Karen finds herself haunted by nightmares brought on by the claustrophobic themes in Ismene's work ("houses of stone" is a phrase from one of the pseudonymous author's poems). Michaels's attempt to bring feminist critical ideas into the mainstream results in conversations that sound like lectures, and her plot's initial momentum bogs down in extraneous details, overly intricate narrative twists and the sporadic appearances of Karen's prospective lovers, who seem decidedly secondary to the main story.

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From [Booklist](#)

Michaels sets her heroine, Professor Karen Holloway, to the task of discovering the provenance of a remnant from an old manuscript. Holloway is convinced that it is a thinly disguised autobiographical novel by an obscure feminist poet whose verses have already helped Holloway carve a niche in the cutthroat business of academia. The professor's archenemies, two fellow literature experts, are equally convinced of the work's value and attempt desperate measures to gain access to the manuscript. Michaels has composed a mystery that is brimming with suspense yet revolves around authorial research rather than money and multiple murders. One of her best. *Denise Perry Donavin*

From Kirkus Reviews

Reminiscent of A.S. Byatt's *Possession*, though less lofty, Michaels's latest (*Vanish With the Rose*, etc.) sets a feminist literary scholar chasing after the origins of an 18th-century manuscript on a Virginia estate--and finding unexpected romance along the way. English professor Karen Holloway is thrilled to come upon a novel by a mysterious early American writer who identified herself only as "Ismene." Karen had begun to make her academic reputation when she discovered and edited a book of Ismene's poetry. Now she recognizes the chance for a scholarly coup. She traces the provenance of the manuscript to an old, decrepit estate in Tidewater Virginia, owned by the handsome, melancholy Cameron Hayes, then takes an apartment in the neighboring town to use as base camp for her explorations. Karen is subjected to the nosy intrusions of her landlady, who ropes her into giving a talk to the local ladies' literary club--but the old woman gets more than she bargained for when Karen mischievously chooses as her topic "The Pen as Penis." Meanwhile, other English professors have caught the scent of a literary discovery and converge upon the town hoping to beat Karen out in bringing to light Ismene's true identity. Quickly it becomes clear that this will be a gloves-off competition: Karen is attacked in her apartment, nearly run over, and stalked. Her search is also impeded by eerie supernatural events: every time she approaches an old stone bunker in the woods near the estate's main house, a disembodied scream rings out, scaring her witless. Adding to the suspense is a question: Will the bristly Karen allow herself to be won over by either of the two men vying for her affections--the taciturn Cameron Hayes and the slick rival scholar Bill Meyers? It never gets the pulse pounding, but it's diverting--with a refreshingly intelligent and unstereotypical heroine. -- *Copyright ©1993, Kirkus Associates, LP. All*

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