



**The War Against Miss Winter**  
By Kathryn Miller Haines  
Harper  
\$13.95

## ACTING THE PART

Mystery novel by local author set against backdrop of 1940s New York theater scene.

Rosie Winter needs to land a part—and how. Trudging among cattle-call auditions can really bring a girl down, and her room at a boarding house for working actresses (OK, so it's not a great room, but it's a place to sleep) is at stake if she doesn't get cast in something soon. Add in the war (WWII) and the fact that her boyfriend, Jack, has just shipped out with the Navy, and Rosie's got some worries—and that's before she gets to her day job as an office manager for a private eye and finds her boss, Jim McCain, hanging in his closet.

Sure, it sounds like your basic mystery-novel set-up—and it is. Still, in her first novel, local actress and director Kathryn Miller Haines brings some new tricks to the form, though to explain how would spoil the fun. I'll just say that the final acts—sorry, chapters—of *The War Against Miss Winter* are highly satisfying and very clever.

Rosie's no dummy, either. Sure, she may struggle to land a role: For example, she gets rejected at one audition for having "too much personality" and falls off the stage while dancing at another. But she may have an untapped talent for sleuthing, and she gets her chance when one of Jim's clients, an avant-garde playwright named Raymond Fielding, hires her to finish a job, finding some papers he believes were stolen from his house.

But then Fielding turns up dead, too, and the word on the street is that the missing papers could be his last, greatest play. Plenty of directors would kill to get their hands on that, of course. And, since the play is rumored to uncover some closely held secrets, other people might kill to keep it from being produced. Suddenly, in fact, it seems everyone Rosie encounters has some interest in the play.

In between auditions, Rosie, whose hard-boiled exterior is mostly an act, tries to make sense of the mystery that keeps drawing her in despite the obvious dangers. With help from her loyal roommate, Jayne, and their combined dramatic skills, she breezes into places she's not supposed to be to uncover clues she and Jayne later analyze back at >>>

the boarding house over smuggled-in gin martinis.

Rosie's worries about her man overseas provide some distractions, as do the other actresses at the boarding house and a cat named Churchill that Rosie smuggles in from the office. Also distracting, for the reader at least, are far too many expressions such as "cups of joe," "broads," "dolls," "coppers" and characters who "bump gums" instead of just talking. Granted, the language helps evoke the mood of 1940s New York, but at times it threatens to overwhelm what is otherwise a well-constructed theatrical treasure hunt when it should be playing a supporting role. As the Bard reminds us—the play's the thing.

