

A Winsome Murder

James DeVita

University of Wisconsin Press (June 2015)

Hardcover \$26.95 (196pp)

978-0-299-30440-9

The desires of these characters are deeply ingrained, propelling this murder mystery into psychological terrain.

A tale of a small-town girl murdered introduces this sordid novel of a serial killer and the big-city policeman dedicated to stopping him. Strong characters and pictorial writing drive *A Winsome Murder*, with a seizing plot elevating and accelerating the story.

Deborah Ellison, who is caught up in drugs and disappointing her father, has been murdered and mutilated, her body left in an unused part of town. Jillian is an author writing her reflections on the murder for a literary magazine in Chicago, where Deborah had lived on and off for a few years. When the magazine editor receives a bloody hand and a note to stop printing Jillian's articles, Detective Mangan, from Chicago PD's violent-crime task force, is put on the case. Identifying the owner of the appendage sparks an investigation for a serial killer and draws Mangan into Deborah's story.

James DeVita, a New York native now living in Wisconsin, weaves the small-town/big-city differences seamlessly into his tale of terror. He creates deep and substantial characters with histories that drive their motives. Detective Mangan's internal voice often quotes Shakespeare, both questioning and clarifying the murderers, giving him characteristics of a deeply intelligent, well-read man working an unjust and bloody job.

The author's illustrative writing draws a picture in the mind, displayed wondrously when he describes the differences of someone before and after drug addiction: "She began to change, a metamorphosing before his eyes, unstoppable, until, like some malformed butterfly, she emerged from her bedroom one day a still-breathing abortion of herself, a skeletonized shadow gorging on her own flesh." Embracing the macabre of the genre, DeVita does not shy away from the gore but displays it in a wonderful, cringe-worthy fashion.

The plot is propelled perfectly by the motivation of the characters: Jillian's desire to write, the killer's need to kill, and the need of Detective Mangan to stop the murders. At times, the story is written from the point of view of a character only once, displaying the story through the eyes of an outsider or a true insider (even from the victim's view), which adds a well-roundedness to the book.

BETH VANHOUTEN (Fall 2015)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. No fee was paid by the publisher for this review. Foreword Reviews only recommends books that we love. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.