

Abomination

Colleen Coble

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Bleeding from a stab wound and dazed by a concussion, a woman drives a deserted highway toward Michigan's Upper Peninsula, looking for a place where she can ditch the car to cover her tracks and escape a faceless yet very real threat. Though her name and the details of her life are erased by the concussion, she knows that the infant sleeping in the back seat of the car is under her care and the threat that chases her would surely bring harm to the child. At the first opportunity, she disposes of the car and takes the sleeping child with her down a country road, quick to bolt if she feels the man who'd tried to kill her has been able to pick up her trail.

Down the peninsula, Detective Nick Andreakos is frantic with worry over the disappearance of his wife and their little girl. When he is assigned to a string of bizarre murders, the reconstructed faces of the dead women look alarmingly like his wife. In his search for the killer, he is catapulted into the world of "geo-cacheing" an anonymous, Web-based treasure hunt with clues and general coordinates posted online. The aficionados of this sport take their Global Positioning Units and hunt for the "prize." However, the sport takes a deadly turn when the latest "cache" turns out to be the remains of a woman who was cruelly mutilated and ritually positioned—the work of a serial killer. The police discover an untraceable post with the coordinates of the woman's body and the message, "Sins of the past."

With authority and grace, author Coble delves into the psyches of the serial killer, the woman robbed of her past, and the frantic detective seeking to catch the killer who he believes has both murdered his wife and abducted his child. The killer is often shown in scenes of singular beauty: when he rows not far from shore to deliver his grisly package into a lake, he is surrounded by swans that "soared heavenward ... he was left alone with a single feather wafting toward him on the shifting fog. He caught it in his hand and brought it to his face. He brushed it over his lips like a kiss. A benediction." In other scenes, he demonstrates the perfect balance of pride in the rightness of his cause, "A Vedic proverb says, 'sacrifice is the navel of the world,' and was his mantra," and disdain for humanity when he searches Web sites for news of his latest cache, "They proved that the human race was corrupt and evil to the core. He had a ripe field."

The heroine grapples with the realities of her situation. She has no name, no money, and fears reporting her attack to the police. Hiding in a small town on the shores of Lake Superior, she wants to repay the family who took her into their home when they found her wandering barefoot on a cold night, carrying a toddler and bleeding from her abdomen. She seeks employment to repay the family and to start rebuilding her life, but without a valid social security number and with her terror of being discovered, she is stymied. Months pass but her memory does not return: "Every time she tried to tug away a corner of the blackness, she found nothing but mist." When the killer finally reveals himself, hiding in plain sight, it is a shock. Even though the author scattered clues to his identity, he is quite simply the last person one would expect.

The author, known for her Women of Faith books, *Alaska Twilight* and *Midnight Sea*, and for her Rock Harbor and Aloha Reef suspense series, imbues this novel with the deep and gritty choices facing her characters, choices that often hinge on faith. She does not flinch from the fanaticism of her villain, yet she brings the questions of guilt,

remorse and finally, the promise of redemption to her characters.

CAROL LYNN STEWART (August 8, 2007)

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