



Beautiful Woman

Alan Mowbray

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Contrasting the extravagant wealth and the devastating poverty of Miami, *Beautiful Woman* is a political statement as much as a novel. A liberal columnist for the *Miami-Sun Times*, the protagonist pits himself against a stratified city in this terrifying story of a successful journalist's downfall after his romance with a Sanctuary Island socialite goes bad.

Tom Journey is outspoken and intelligent, an articulate writer with common sense, until he deludes himself into believing that his passion for Kelly Chandler, a rich woman in an open marriage to an aging husband, is destined for happily-ever-after. Like a stereotypical roller coaster ride, this predictable relationship is fraught with tension and misunderstanding, then threatened by an enraged ex-boyfriend turned criminal. What appears at first glance to be a glitzy plotline transforms into a series of scary, stalking horror scenes laced with guns, blood, and, eventually, suicide.

A gloomy mood infiltrates large sections of the novel: "As I opened the door to my apartment, I knew I could not stay for long. The terror of Kelly's screams bounced off the walls. I lingered at the door, feeling a chill from inside and the thick humidity outside. Seconds later, the screaming faded away and disappeared through the walls."

Far from dreamy, this couple's heavenly lovemaking escalates into a mad, high-risk pursuit that can have only one logical conclusion: tragedy. From a dramatic standpoint, the author has implemented the classic setup, which can only lead to the classic result of a ruined character. Tom Journey reveals a harassing, controlling nature as the affair crumbles. His refusal to relinquish his hold on an attractive woman who is portrayed as a predatory snake indicates a deeper flaw.

Mowbray's book is entertaining, but an overly melodramatic progression of events and a lack of credibility bring the rating down one notch. Yet another debatable strike against the work is a borderline sexist characterization of an evil, indecisive seductress, rather than a realistic, tormented personality.

Outstanding line editing helps make up for these shortcomings, for the layout is practically without error, excluding the strange fact that no synopsis appears on the back cover. This is a necessary element of packaging, and the inability to determine what the book is about in advance of purchase will hinder promotion.

Alan Mowbray is a resident of Jacksonville Beach, Florida. *Beautiful Woman* is his second novel, a commendable effort and a fascinating escapade into the dark elements of possessiveness and jealousy. This title will appeal to diverse readers interested in psychological probing as well as gritty action.

JULIA ANN CHARPENTIER (September 10, 2012)

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