



Crooked

Frederick McClendon

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A private eye's private battle with nicotine and familiarity with NYC streets add a twist and excitement to this classic-style detective novel.

What happens when you quit smoking, cold turkey, and have to solve the murder of a noted mob boss all in the same week? Dreams of menthols chasing you and awkward situations involving men with guns control your days and nights.

Forsaken packs of cigarettes haunt Kelly, a PI who is a former NYPD officer. They are never far from his reach and are always in his dreams, causing him to be very irritable and difficult to work with. Peppermints are Kelly's constant companion. The ignored pack of cigarettes manages to invade every scene, and McClendon plays this unique twist to the hilt in his standard New York City private-eye story of good guys versus corrupt cops.

On top of trying to beat his nicotine addiction, Kelly is drawn into a difficult case by his childhood friend Julie Black, now an attorney. Where is Nick and why has he disappeared? Kelly slowly becomes fond of James Turner, the young man haunted by Nick's disappearance. Kelly explores Nick's involvement with the local mob and investigates where the money is that Nick hid in his restaurant office.

Kelly's relationship with Julie is standard detective-fiction fare. The unrequited love interest brings out Kelly's softer side and calms his nicotine cravings. When Julie disappears, the case takes on new meaning for Kelly and throws him into the ring of dirty cops and mob connections, all of whom are searching for the hidden cash.

Characters show little growth, primarily because nearly every member of the cast is a well-known type in detective fiction. There is the taciturn detective with a heart, the police officer fighting against corruption within, the corrupt cop who will do anything to hang on to the money, the wrongly accused young man—they're all here.

The author's familiarity with his setting adds excitement to the story. McClendon clearly knows the places he describes, and this lends interest and an air of reality to his writing: "They drove to Buffalo Avenue and Eastern Parkway. Kelly recognized the park. Lincoln Terrace ... back in the day, prostitutes, johns, pimps and drug dealers had used the park. ... It was a murky cold day; no sunlight was able to pierce the clouds."

There are minor grammar and word-usage issues throughout the book. Along with those, the dialogue is often clunky, rarely making use of the contractions that are generally present in natural speech: "I did not grab them when I left the car." Readers will likely have trouble envisioning the conversations because they seem stilted by formality. Though this is a fast-moving detective story, it often reads more like a Victorian novel.

Those who are struggling with nicotine cravings will appreciate McClendon's take on quitting cold turkey, a plot element not often found in detective fiction.

LYNN EVARTS (September 23, 2013)

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