

Don't Believe It

Charlie Donlea

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Don't Believe It is a highly topical thriller, a work of pitched intrigue that follows a documentary filmmaker and crusading journalist, Sidney Ryan, who has exonerated several inmates convicted of murder.

Sidney agrees to take up the case of medical school graduate Grace Sebold, who has been in a St. Lucian prison for ten years since the murder of her boyfriend, Julian, who plunged to his death during spring break at a beach resort. Sidney finds more suspects, new evidence, and holes in the original investigation, leading authorities to reopen the probe. As her television series, "The Girl of Sugar Beach," draws to its end and Grace gets released, Sidney discovers she might have been played, and could be in serious danger.

Don't Believe It displays excellent craftsmanship, from the way sentences are constructed to the serpentine plot. The prose sings. Sentences are short and punchy. Word choices are specific and impeccable.

The story captivates. The central mystery unfurls in layer after layer of falsehoods and deception. It's easy to get hooked on the book's heady cocktail of highly rated television and high-stakes subterfuge.

Episode descriptions, interview summaries, and jury deliberations lend verisimilitude. The book displays a sophisticated familiarity with the modern media landscape, and comes across as of-the-moment. Twists and turns feel well plotted and earned, but still startle. This is escapism that feels grounded in research.

Don't Believe It is substantive work. Its lead faces not only physical perils, but also moral ones: she must choose between the fame and fortune that accompanies "a ratings juggernaut" and the truth.

JOSEPH S. PETE (May/June 2018)

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