

Fatal Females: A Tony Rawlins Mystery Trilogy

M. Paul Chinitz

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Accountant Tony Rawlins has never had much luck with women, and the pattern shows no sign of changing anytime soon. It seems that every woman who crosses his path complicates his life in one way or another, and *Fatal Females* explores several of these complications in a trilogy of interconnected novellas.

Following a divorce and a successful struggle to overcome alcoholism, Tony is trying to move on with his life when he answers an intriguing personal ad. His leap of faith turns out to be the first of many ill-advised decisions involving women, and when he is initially stood up, he nearly gives up. "I should have just dropped the business then and there, crossing it off as a cruel prank played on a lonely but rather stupidly gullible man." He doesn't drop it, and the decision ultimately lands him in jail for a murder he didn't commit. As he tries to prove his innocence, Tony becomes entangled in other mysteries, some of which are related to his own case.

M. Paul Chinitz has created a likable, somewhat unlucky protagonist in Tony Rawlins. Readers will sympathize with Tony's sincere efforts to pull his life together, even if he often seems to get in his own way. Supporting characters are well-realized, and their motivations are generally fully explored. Most of the women in the book tend to be either conniving or needy in some way, and the vast majority of them find Tony irresistible enough to invite him into their beds. Tony refuses few of such offers, and although the sexual encounters are relatively frequent, they are not described in any detail.

The mysteries and crimes Tony encounters are absorbing enough to maintain interest, although readers may find his skills at criminal investigation unusually advanced for a CPA. Equally curious is his tendency to share nearly all of the details of his amateur investigations with suspects or witnesses he has just met, some of whom clearly do not have his best interests in mind. His habit of sharing information results in many instances of details being repeated several times in the dialogue. This repetition, which occurs most heavily in the last third of the book, detracts from the story's dramatic progression of events.

Most unfortunate are the multitude of spelling and punctuation errors throughout the book, beginning with a misspelling of the protagonist's name on the cover. The errors occur often enough to be distracting and, combined with dialogue containing frequent run-on sentences and long-winded speeches, run the risk of pulling readers out of the otherwise interesting story.

Fatal Females is Chinitz's second novel. His storytelling skills show promise, and the end of the book hints at further tales to come for Tony Rawlins. With more meticulous editing and paring down of repetitive or unnecessary detail, readers may find themselves intrigued enough to follow along.

JEANNINE CHARTIER HANSCOM (May 10, 2012)

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