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CLARION REVIEW ★★☆☆☆ THRILLER

Fool Me Once Part II: A Rebecca Novel

Mary Burton King
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In Mary Burton King's *Fool Me Once Part II: A Rebecca Novel,* a sequel to her previous novel, *Fool Me Once*, the reader again finds King's characters in dire straits.

Rebecca Johnson, widow of the abusive Marcus, mistakenly thinks she and her adult children can breathe a sigh of relief. After all, her vile ex is presumed dead. But then her nemesis, a drug dealer named David, reenters the picture. Other characters lead seemingly hopeless lives as well. Young Marie and her aunt Anna have theirs ripped apart by job loss and a brutal pimp. Shelia, David's cousin, goes from poor to rich, and back again, all the while victimized by both David and a ruthless con artist who charms women out of their money. Meanwhile, Inspector Gonzalez' investigation is hampered by a job transfer. Some of these disparate plotlines connect, while others run parallel to one another.

King, the author of one previous book in addition to the Rebecca series, excels at creating dastardly villains. David casually uses people for his own ends, delights in torture, and murders without remorse—a chilling psychopath. Likewise, the money-mad womanizer and the nasty pimp go to great lengths to justify their disgusting crimes.

Unfortunately, the consistently evil antagonists are the best part of this novel. The multiple stories are difficult to distinguish from one another and draw attention away from Rebecca, who is supposed to be the main character. The bulk of the narrative consists of summary paragraphs. King's need to tell instead of show distances the audience unnecessarily from the action. To further obfuscate matters, the third-person omniscient point of view changes abruptly with only a few lines of blank space between sections to separate each character's viewpoint.

Although this is the author's second novel, many events seem to be included only for the sake of convenience. For example, a character will suddenly lose her license by leaving her wallet somewhere, without the author having bothered to first set the scene. On a bigger scale, characters and subplots appear, only to be wrapped up and dismissed too neatly. For example, Rebecca's daughter hoards; the problem is unrealistically solved when Rebecca issues an ultimatum and forces her offspring to clean house. Subsequently, the daughter realizes the error of her ways and attends therapy, seemingly over the worst of it. In reality, hoarding is a severe mental illness that should not be introduced and dealt with in just a few paragraphs.

The narrative constantly vacillates between present and past tense and the dialogue lacks appropriate capitalization. The ingredients for a good thriller exist in *Fool Me Once Part II*, but sadly, things never quite coalesce.
JILL ALLEN (February 13, 2012)

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