

From a Dark Place

Lee Beck

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Killers don't get more cold-blooded than the murderer Lee Beck draws in his grim psychological thriller, *From a Dark Place*. Beck explores the psychology of the serial killer, offering a portrait of a psychopath that is at least as compelling as the pursuit. However, it will take a persistent reader to get through this lengthy novel.

Why would someone slay single women with surgical precision and little apparent passion or rage? That's the question driving the Philadelphia police investigation led by Captain Leo Gromski and Detective Cheryl Kelly. The murderer is not as much of an enigma for the reader, however, as Beck reveals a great deal about the villain's childhood traumas and misdeeds in the first few chapters.

There's little left for the reader to do after these revelations except let the series of murders unfold and follow the investigators as they try to piece together the possible involvement of the Catholic Church, federal government, and pharmaceutical trade. Conspiracy theories abound, but Beck repeatedly returns to the killer's perspective. This omniscience lets a lot of air out of the tires, mystery-wise, but still Beck asks us to continue along on the ride.

Gromski and Kelly are a likable pair, and one of Beck's strengths is his ease with dialogue among the police department team members. The playful banter feels natural and highlights the family-like relationships that can develop on a police force. Sometimes the exchanges are difficult to follow, however, due to missing punctuation, such as closing quotation marks. Beck also creates a convincing setting, with his knowledge of Philadelphia's streets and neighborhoods evident throughout the story and echoed on the book's cover.

Beck's writing style slows the pace as he is apt to use a string of adjectives where one would suffice. His vocabulary is formidable, but it becomes a distraction as he reaches for yet another way to describe, for instance, the damp city air. What starts as a "fine mist" in one chapter becomes "opalescent" in the next, and "mucilaginous" later. Beck's prose is packed with synonyms like this that are too often used to describe the same scene with new words. The repetition becomes tiring, and readers may find themselves skimming portions of the book, looking for new information.

Frequent spelling errors and homophone confusion—phrases like "halves and have nots" or "as you know doubt understand"—create more stumbling blocks for readers trying to see where this murder investigation leads. All trails do indeed lead to one person, and readers will undoubtedly be content to call this case closed.

SHEILA M. TRASK (June 20, 2013)

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