

Clarion Review ★★★★★

GENERAL FICTION

## House Call

**Darden North**

Ponder House Press (October 2005)

Hardcover \$24.95 (360pp)

978-0-9771126-0-9

In Dr. Darden North's debut novel *House Call* readers will be quickly drawn in by North's suspenseful writing as he skillfully unfolds several mysterious deaths within the small Southern community of Montclair Mississippi. Using his background as an obstetrician and gynecologist North sufficiently sets the stage for the action at a prosperous OB/GYN clinic its affiliated hospital an exclusive hunting camp and the surrounding communities.

Shortly after introducing Grace Community Hospital Nurse Taylor Richards readers will witness her tragic death in her own home at the hands of a stranger. Richards' death is soon followed by that of Dr. Cullen Gwinn the very likable principal and founder of a Montclair medical clinic. Initially believed to be an accidental death a mysterious shooting at hospital administrator Jay Rutledge reveals that Dr. Gwinn's death was intentional but who would kill the dedicated doctor and why?

In addition to the unexpected murders several of the story's primary characters become embroiled in staffing controversies and shortages. Faced with rising costs both the clinic and hospital must increase their workloads and profitability without adding staff. Stuck in the midst of the clinic's quest for profits is Dr. Knox Chamblee who has been unsuccessful in building a patient base of his own despite his stellar qualifications and agreeable bedside manner. Without Dr. Gwinn's support partner Dr. Aslyn Hawes is quick to fire Chamblee despite the clinic's need for more manpower. Can the clinic sustain itself without him?

Sprinkled throughout the story North offers limited profiles of both major and minor characters doing so in such a way that won't leave readers confused or overwhelmed. North shares just enough information for readers to get a sense of the characters and how they contribute to the story without offering extraneous details. For readers who crave a little more one-on-one interaction North deftly sprinkles in a little romance without overtaking the main storyline.

Despite the gruesome cover photo the book leaves little to be desired. While the astute reader will find the occasional grammatical error or misused word this first novel by Dr. North is not only well written but also well edited. The story flows smoothly the suspense is sufficient without being overwhelming and the characters are both interesting and likable. North does an excellent job of bringing his characters to life in a well-woven intricate tale. For mystery lovers the debut novel *House Call* is a sure bet.

(August 21, 2009)

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