

In Shadows

D. R. Willis

iUniverse (Apr 4, 2014)

Softcover \$11.95 (138pp)

978-1-4917-3115-4

This fast-paced mystery lays the groundwork for a promising series.

The lives of two brothers, two young women, and a ruthless man with a mysterious past and a murderous mission intersect with deadly results in this mystery.

Roth Braun sets off on an exploration through Thailand in search of a package connected to his father. Months later, in Savannah, Georgia, his fiancée, Teresa Sullivan, hires a private detective to investigate him. Nelson Davis just wants to open a chocolate store in New Jersey with his brother Christopher. Instead he finds himself in Savannah on a quest to protect Christopher and a precious list of names. Twenty-year-old reporter Rose Blake responds to a call from a police officer at a murder scene, and recognizes the victim. As events play out for each character, their lives intersect and intertwine; the truth of Braun's past and Christopher's list are revealed, and those who know the secrets will resort to anything to save themselves.

The short, tightly written chapters of this novella are fast paced, cutting from one character's perspective to the next; intrigue heightens as the individual stories unravel, and their connections to one another become clearer. The descriptions are rich, revealing the dense jungle of Thailand where Braun's mercilessness results in his survival, and the quaint southern Georgia setting where Teresa lives in the lap of luxury. Though the characters are archetypal and somewhat superficial—for example, the villainous Braun and the innocent, naive Rose—they can be engaging and witty, as when Teresa says to the PI who notices she is wet, "It rained. I hope that's not the extent of your investigative abilities."

While the story does have action and conflict, deus ex machina usually resolves these episodes, as in Braun and Teresa's final fight. Though the premise for the plot and subplot are promising, their execution leaves questions, such as what exactly the connection is between Braun's infamous past, his secret possessions, and Christopher's list. As the story progresses, it also becomes unclear which is the main plot and which is the subplot. The lack of development extends to the revelation of Braun's secret, which is anticlimactic given the deft build up of his hidden past and the package he went to find in Thailand. Refining the plot and subplot and enriching the characters would help this mystery reach its potential.

A cliffhanger ending effectively sets up the sequel. *In Shadows* lays the groundwork for a promising mystery series.

MAYA FLEISCHMANN (November 5, 2015)

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