

Lies Deceit and an Innocent Man

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The premise of *Lies, Deceit and an Innocent Man* is a good one and could make for an excellent mystery novel. A man returns, after many years in prison, to his hometown, where his life falls apart following a woman's murder. He is, naturally, a suspect.

The story begins well, grabbing the reader's interest: "The train stopped and the doors opened. It had reached its destination. He picked his backpack up and hurried out the station gate." Who is this guy and where is he going? It's drudgery to find out.

Yet, as early as the fourth sentence, confusion overtakes curiosity. With no paragraph break nor quotation marks, the reader runs headlong into the character's thoughts, stumbling through the remainder of the paragraph, with its mystifying single quotes and the snapping apart of a sentence midstream: "And I'm relieved those that might remember me are probably too tired after a long day at work. And a long train ride home to bother about me."

The text is almost entirely conversational. Speakers have no identity. Most often, there are multiple speakers in a paragraph. Even when not, it comes out like this: "Wash your hands Malcolm dinner is ready. And why are you smiling. Faye you will never guess who was on the six forty train tonight. Faye you have left the cooker on." It seems no one takes a breath in this town of Bradford.

Lack of narrative and, therefore, the lack of description of place or time does not allow readers to gain any sense of context. This also contributes to a lack of sequence to the story. Chapter breaks seem to be placed in at random. And because there is no reason for them to begin or end when they do, they defy titling. So, they are numbered.

There are some characters whose conversations, when laid out in a strategic order over time, would create some depth and even garner pathos from the reader. As it is, there is no chance for the reader to connect.

The "romance" is not believable. This man who was convicted of murdering the woman he loved suddenly has a new girlfriend, within just a couple days after returning to town. This girl pounces with lightning speed, as if she were just waiting to date an ex-convict who has murdered one woman, and now maybe two. Within a few pages, they are getting married.

If the author were to start with a basic outline, comb through the story and extract a chapter's worth of related material, put those chapters into order, and finesse their contents, this could turn out to be a good read. All the bits and pieces are there.

PATRICIA MORROW (June 14, 2013)

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