

Outside the Gate

Tom Milton

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Milton succeeds in establishing a sense of impending disaster—a race against the clock—as a horrific kidnapping is seen through a parent's eyes.

Two twelve-year-old girls are abducted from a Caribbean island to be used as sex slaves for an Asian criminal ring in Tom Milton's social thriller *Outside the Gate*. This parents' nightmare transpires in an authentic look at the international business of kidnapping and raping girls for profit.

Carol Delaney loses her daughter to a Russian yacht strategically operating near the posh Royal Palms resort. Amanda and her friend leave sequestered safety to explore unchaperoned, and they disappear from the pampered vacation community. Milton emphasizes the unpredictability of their transfer to other hands, implemented at lightning speed.

This horrific story is seen through a parent's eyes, as Carol searches for her child with the help of law enforcement. Rather than focusing on gritty descriptions of pedophilia and sexual assault, Milton allows the reader to feel a mother's pain as she contemplates her daughter's terror. "She imagined the girls in the cabin of a boat that was taking them to an unknown destination," he writes. "They were probably being watched by a thug, who had a gun that he threatened to use at the slightest provocation."

Achieved through understatement and plainspoken style, this straightforward narrative may not always focus on what seems important, yet the author succeeds in establishing a sense of impending disaster—a race against the clock. "She gathered the clothes and hung some in the closet and put some in drawers, tenderly folding a top she had bought for Amanda the weekend before they left on vacation. Amanda had worn it to dinner their first night here, and with a sudden pang of fear Carol wondered if her daughter would ever have a chance to wear it again."

Attention to seemingly insignificant details and mundane actions enhance the realism, creating empathy—a sense of helpless outrage. Heavy reliance on dialogue to convey essential information lends a tone typical of genre fiction, yet the serious situation places this book in a sophisticated market.

Milton is the prolific author of seven novels. With a background in journalism and banking, he has lived and worked in foreign countries from which he draws the vividness of his settings. Milton's intent is to shine a spotlight on an appalling crime of human trafficking that persists in many parts of the world. His ultimate message may be taken as a warning. Psychological and physical damage to a girl cannot be repaired overnight. Instill a streetwise approach at an early age, opposed to sheltering, to help prevent abduction.

JULIA ANN CHARPENTIER (May 14, 2013)

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