

The Comfort of Black

Carter Wilson

Oceanview Publishing (Aug 4, 2015)

Hardcover \$26.95 (288pp)

978-1-60809-129-4

A rollicking pace, complex characters, skillful turns of phrase, and evocative imagery make this book enjoyable.

Carter Wilson's *The Comfort of Black* is a superior thriller full of unpredictable twists. Themes of the repetition of history, familial dirty secrets, and one woman's journey to self-empowerment cruise deftly through this novel's suspenseful scenes.

Wealthy Hannah used to have everything: material comforts and a loving, passionate marriage. But lately, her husband, Dallin, has become menacing and even violent. As her marriage disintegrates and she goes on the run, she finds herself dogged by memories of her abusive father, Billy. These recollections and the constant presence of her dad's mocking voice in her head have diminished her self-confidence and feelings of self-worth. When she teams up with a mysterious ex-cop named Blackstone, she hopes to find the courage to escape the pursuit of Dallin's goons and her tortured past with Billy.

Although Hannah endures many horrific ordeals, she remains easy to relate to because she doubts herself and then talks herself out of self-debasement in a way that seems authentic, like a real person going through a tough time and not merely a character in a thriller. Additionally, the voice of her father in her head creates effective examples of the stuff abusers say to their victims, and the negative self-talk often internalized by the abused. The relatability of Hannah's self-defeating thoughts and her ability to overcome them render her a likable protagonist.

Moreover, Hannah's evolution from fearful to self-confident occurs in such a nuanced manner that she seems like Everywoman, giving female readers a road map to follow for self-determination, even if they don't go through Hannah's terrifying ordeals. Blackstone also represents a dynamic character, evolving from steely protector to emotionally open, honest man. The progression of the relationship between him and Hannah is rendered all the more believable because Wilson shows the characters' soft spots and flaws. Billy, despite his unrelenting, disgusting behavior, has a shocking motivation for his actions, and his layers of sliminess serve to emphasize the nuanced characteristics of Hannah, Blackstone, and even secondary characters such as Dallin and Hannah's sister.

In addition to its rollicking pace and complex characters, the book's turns of phrase and evocative imagery make it enjoyable. Hannah's premarital fling is "a romance that lasted not much longer than the flowers." A promontory is described as "a snake of land." Hannah thinks of the color black: "She could hide in [it]. Wrap it around her." Thriller aficionados, especially women, will wrap themselves in this novel's pages with gusto.

JILL ALLEN (July 23, 2015)

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