

The Corsican Dove

Thomas deKooning

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The Pink Panther meets the twenty-first century in this hilarious noir parody.

The first in a planned series, *The Corsican Dove* kicks off the investigative adventures of Ramone Ramone, a gumshoe in the tradition of Jacques Clouseau. Befitting the noir genre, Thomas deKooning's novel is indeed about sleuthing for criminals and capturing them at the apex of another offense, but with a parody twist.

As is typical of noir, the book's first-person narrative is all about its hard-boiled, sleazy, and narcissistic central character, the San Francisco-based private eye. But deKooning has taken these elements into a modern-day setting and transported Ramone's personality there too. He has the appearance of a supreme knucklehead who masterfully solves criminal cases, and he uses hard-core street language, which is very unlike Clouseau's more sophisticated verbiage. And where Clouseau was always stumbling into things, Ramone routinely botches his words.

Ramone's first case concerns the stolen heirloom copy of a book titled *The Corsican Dove*, which is now in the hands of a cult leader. With the addition of two other cases, his investigation quickly becomes convoluted to the point that he desperately needs help. deKooning has created an immensely amusing cast of supporting characters for Ramone. From the Chinese bookshop owner who constantly twists American maxims, to an old hippie college friend who is perpetually high and stuck in the 1960s, to a twelve-year-old from the Oakland hood who helps him figure out how to listen to his phone messages, it is a wonder that Ramone can gather any leads. Yet his contacts lead him to enough evidence to point him toward Washington, DC.

Aside from the zany characters that come to Ramone's aide, deKooning keeps the narrative fresh and continuously flowing by alternating between Ramone's thought processes and side-splitting conversations. Both are replete with twisted maxims ("You never heard the old saying, 'The politician who robs Peter to pay Paul can always count on the vote of Paul?'") and sarcasm, such as when Ramone is investigating one of his suspects, who is at a motel having sex: He thinks aloud, "Now anyone with a shred of decency or an ounce of humanity would have backed out and left them to their private endeavor. I put my gun away, pulled out my iPhone, hoping it was charged, and set the function on photo. I don't get to see evidence in progress very often and I didn't want to let this pass me by."

People are always knocking Ramone for being stupid—a theme that is tightly woven throughout the narrative. Their abrasive comments don't appear to affect him in the least. But "when things get difficult," he turns to the teachings of Lao Tzu: "Other men are sharp and clever, but I alone am dull and stupid.' I'm not altogether sure what he was driving at, but if that was good enough for Lao Tzu, it was good enough for me."

Uproariously funny, entertaining, and totally unhackneyed from beginning to end, *The Corsican Dove* is a perfect read for those who can't get enough Pink Panther humor.

ANITA LOCK (April 11, 2014)

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