



The Impressionist Murders

William Sargent

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Art is often meant to provoke the viewer to consider new perspectives, even when the point of view is that of a serial killer. William Sargent combines his love of art with his affinity for sleuthing in *The Impressionist Murders*, a novel filled with the sort of suspense that savvy thriller readers crave.

Detective Ross Clayton is haunted by a string of murders committed by a killer whose only clues are promises of his next hit. Redhawk Simmons thinks he can identify the killer, but he's been in so much trouble with the law that he's afraid to get involved. Richey Sneed is a cocaine addict whose poorly planned heist drops him straight in the middle of this mess. When these men's lives collide, the drug money, kidnapping, jealousy, and murder keep the action going strong. Add some romance, self-improvement, forgiveness, and unexpected acts of bravery and kindness, and the result is a thoughtfully created, well-rounded world in which the plot seems believable and the characters are quite real.

Sargent's main characters make such strong first impressions that it's hard to forget them, but his minor characters are a convoluted group, their names blending into a blur. Even the author has a hard time remembering them—Thelma Thompson, for example, eventually becomes Lushanda Johnson. This story would have benefited from a smaller cast as well as some light editing for spelling and punctuation. And the three main characters' fates parallel one another too closely. Even so, the happy ending is satisfying.

Like the art it's modeled after, the novel's hard-hitting impressions of its characters are rich and satisfying. Each point of view is easy to follow, despite the numerous changes of viewpoint within each chapter. The story, for example, follows the killer as he commits his first murders, switches to Sneed and his desperate wife, and then pivots to another character, Delores Rucker, who wants to make her deceased father proud. Each new scene is brief, adding to the story's quick pace and suspense. Individually told, each character's tale presents its own set of intrigues. But combined, their interactions create a dynamic adventure.

Clayton's feelings for his partner, Leona Stillwell, grow into a believable romance, even though he's committed to keeping their working relationship as professional as possible. The reader sympathizes with Redhawk as he struggles with his newfound conscience and the realization that he could actually become the person he's always dreamed of being, thanks to the support and love of his remarkable new girlfriend.

As if a well-spun plot weren't enough, the themes of solidarity and hope in this novel add another layer of worthiness. Despite the book's considerable amount of bloodshed and violence, the reader will remember the characters' courage in making better choices. Readers who can overlook minor spelling and punctuation errors will discover an enjoyable story in *The Impressionist Murders*.

EMILY ASAD (January 14, 2013)

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