

The Only Pure Thing: A Stuart Clay Mystery

Patrick Hyde

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Grisly murders are nothing new to the back streets of Washington, D.C., but when the severed head of a man with mob connections is found impaled on a parking meter outside Georgetown's hottest nightspot, the city explodes with macabre fascination. Cleveland Barnes, a street person of questionable mental capacity, is found wearing the dead man's shoes and is quickly arrested. Stuart Clay is his court-appointed attorney, and he believes his client was wrongly accused. Clay and his idealistic assistant set out to free Mr. Barnes by finding the real murderer, but the trail leads them into the dangerous underbelly of the city and to more gruesome deaths. When the two of them are separated while tailing a key witness, Clay cannot imagine the terrible turn his life is about to take.

The author has crafted a compelling mystery of murder, treachery, and suspense and placed it in a setting he knows well. He is a vastly experienced trial lawyer who is intimately familiar with the innermost workings of the D.C. criminal defense system. The verisimilitude he brings to the gritty setting and the multi-faceted characters in this book lends enormous credibility to the story. For example, only a veteran D.C. criminal lawyer would be able to describe the intricacies of the District's legal system while also knowing where to begin looking for a key witness, who happens to be a hooker known only as "Tiffanie."

Hyde's extensive experience as a big-city criminal defense attorney imbues the book with stark realism, including this wonderfully unusual perspective that Clay has on what most people would passionately dread—going to jail: "I liked a few hours in jail. Going to jail can be relaxing for a defense attorney. Moments and even hours spent waiting for a client in a Plexiglas and iron interview cubicle can sometimes be very restful. [...] It's a good place to get thinking done, to organize a case, even to catch up on billing."

The author, a lawyer for twenty-five years, has more than 1,300 criminal cases to his credit, and is the former president of the D.C. Superior Court Trial Lawyers Association and was appointed to the D.C. Sentencing Commission. He has written articles in many publications, including *The Defender* and *Capitol Crimes*. He is the Vice-President of the Mid-Atlantic Chapter of the Mystery Writers of America. This is his first published novel.

With its fast pace, gripping plot, and tight storytelling, *The Only Pure Thing* combines Mickey Spillane with John Grisham to produce one terrific mystery novel.

ALAN J. COUTURE (February 8, 2007)

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