

## The Seriously Pink V

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The title of this mystery novel refers to a brand of lipstick-Seriously Pink

and the V stands for, we are led to believe, Vengeance, or perhaps Vigilantes. It does not, however, stand for five. The vigilantes in question are four Miami Beach socialite women who band together to murder criminals released from prison who return to their original crimes. (Why exactly, is never completely clear. One of their members was raped, but she's the least enthusiastic participant in the killings.) On each of their victims, generally killed in dramatically hideous ways-hauled behind a car handcuffed to the door handle, for instance-the women mark a V with the lipstick.

The novel begins with the murder of Judge Karen Hudson. Her husband Tom is close friends with Chief of Detectives Alan Blake. Judge Hudson was stabbed in the street, a platinum and diamond ring cut off her finger. Judge Hudson was dying of cancer and the murder only hastened her death, but Tom can't deal with his grief, and especially with the unsolved status of his wife's case.

From this point, the novel zigzags back and forth between the Seriously Pink V'ers and Tom's grief and his search for the killer. Seemingly unrelated is the story of George Montgomery, a computer professor who is incarcerated after murdering his wife. There is also a subplot regarding a private school on whose board Tom Hudson serves, and the re-introduction into his life of a college sweetheart.

Each story has compelling elements, but the story of Tom Hudson is the most important and central to the story. His grief is palpable, his exasperation with the police believable. What Tom wants isn't just closure, but vengeance. When he discovers that the police have a suspect, he plots his own revenge.

Finally, in a not-entirely clean fashion, all the stories are wrapped up? more or less. There are references to the Witness Protection Program that never quite fit in, and Montgomery's involvement in the case of the Seriously Pink V seems entirely too pat. However, the novel is compelling, many of the characters are memorable, and the writing overall is crisp and professional. Not a great novel, but a flawed diamond in the rough.

MARK TERRY (November / December 2001)

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