ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

GENERAL

The West Side Kid
Valentine Cardinale
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Three Stars (out of Five)

In a new twist on the concept of the popular movie and TV series, *The Fugitive*, author Valentine Cardinale's protagonist is a former Hollywood actor whose wife was murdered twenty-two years earlier. Under suspicion because none of his tough buddies in New York City will back up his alibi, Lorne Bennett (known as the West Side Kid) leaves his infant daughter with his wife's relatives and heads west.

Now grown and working as a copywriter in Manhattan, his daughter Laura is determined to learn the truth about her parents.

Freelance reporter Billy Volpe follows Bennett's trail and attempts to solve the cold case with the help of his own observant twelve-year-old daughter Alex. The character of Billy draws on Cardinale's own training as a journalist.

Cardinale skillfully throws suspicion on a series of individuals as Laura is repeatedly warned by a mysterious caller not to get involved in the investigation. The threats on her life only heighten her determination. Her father is difficult to locate, partly because of his ability as an actor to create disguises. Lorne knows he must outwit all pursuers. At one point, he quickly changes plans in an airport and doesn't board his plane. "As he walked into the desert heat, a gentle breeze embraced him and encouraged him to keep on going," Cardinale writes. "There were two things he needed now: new clothes and new luggage."

Readers are asked to suspend disbelief when characters improbably show up at an airport or restaurant. It's also curious that a father would take his young daughter across the country to meet a man wanted for questioning in a murder, but the question of this risk isn't considered by Billy Volpe until late in the story. He evidently needs his daughter's help as much as her company. Alex's sleuthing produces nice touches. Her observations, such as the address on a matchbook, often take her father in the right direction.

Better editing would have caught capitalization problems, and better typesetting would eliminate pages of uneven text length. Background information is often told rather than shown

through dialogue or other less prosaic devices. For example, Cardinale writes six paragraphs reporting Billy's marital history: "Trudi went back to work and started going out with her friends again on a regular basis. At one outing, she called to say that she was not coming home that night. Over the next few weeks, Billy learned that Trudi had met someone, the handsome, fun-loving, Louie Zampone…"

Such issues aside, the author has left the door open for sequels featuring the precocious Alex and her dad, and Laura and the West Side Kid. Cardinale's fast-paced imaginative twists and turns should keep his fans asking for more.