



Thrill Kill

Ralph L. Motley

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Someone is killing women in Tilton, Virginia, and Detective Zack Townes is determined to put a stop to it. With the assistance of his new partner, Kim Patterson, Zack follows trails from the seediest parts of town to the swankiest as he tracks down the murderer.

Zack's efforts are complicated by an undeniable attraction to Kim, described as "an Alicia Keys look-alike." A husband and father, Zack is tested by the daily presence of his beautiful partner, and merely working with her brings unwanted tension to his family life. Regardless, he and Kim set aside their personal issues to track down the killer before he strikes again.

Overall, Ralph L. Motley's *Thrill Kill* is a competently rendered crime story, and the novel is constructed well enough to help it succeed in building some narrative tension. The main villain is effectively characterized with just enough backstory to add credibility, but other characters sometimes come across as cultural or racial stereotypes. The dialogue is largely natural. A few typographical errors are present, but not enough to detract from the flow of the story.

Lack of attention to certain details may prove confusing for readers. For instance, two minor characters named Carlos have similar sounding last names, making it difficult to keep them straight. There is also a puzzling moment late in the book when Zack is feeling empathy for the murderer's victims and thinks to himself, "I have kids, a daughter." However, the only child ever mentioned prior to this scene is an infant son.

Another issue that many readers may view as a stumbling block is Motley's characterization of Kim. While her profession as a police detective (chosen when teaching elementary school became too stressful) offers ample opportunity to portray a strong and capable female character, Motley instead focuses on Kim's sexual exploits. Most of Kim's time off the job is spent in pursuit of men, and her oft-repeated desire for sexual intimacy ultimately puts her in danger. This development suggests the possibility that her promiscuous behavior is intended as a cautionary message; however, her interest in sex is such an overwhelming aspect of her character that it completely overshadows her other traits. A pointless scene involving masturbation further sexualizes a character whose intelligence and skill as a police officer could have been an effective focus.

Motley's plot flows easily toward what initially promises to be an exciting conclusion. However, after several chapters of build up, the novel ends abruptly and wraps up several major storylines in the space of a few paragraphs. Readers will likely reach the last sentence and wonder if the publisher accidentally omitted the final pages. This hasty conclusion is regrettable, and readers who invested their time in the novel may ultimately feel unsatisfied.

Thrill Kill has many of the elements necessary for an effective thriller, and Motley is a capable writer with some interesting ideas. An oversexualized main character in addition to a rushed conclusion proves difficult to overcome, however, and a more thoughtful revision of the novel would be beneficial and worthwhile.

JEANNINE CHARTIER HANSCOM (December 6, 2012)

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