

## Treacherous Obsession

**Kenneth A. Studstill**

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*Part legal thriller, part '40s-style noir, Treacherous Obsession explores well-drawn, imperfect characters.*

Many lawyers dream of not only interpreting the law, but also of shaping it for the better. Kenneth Studstill's new novel *Treacherous Obsession* explores what happens when a lawyer who wants to do some good is falsely accused of a crime.

Kevin Charles seems to have it all: a successful law practice, good friends, and a comfortable life. He may even be part of a lucrative lawsuit that could help a lot of people. All of that changes the moment Victoria Roberts, a beautiful young widow, walks through his door seeking counsel.

Kevin is conflicted. He is attracted to Victoria, but loyal to his emotionally distant wife. As he digs into Victoria's case, Kevin gives in to what he assumes to be mutual feelings. Instead, he is accused of sexual assault. As his life is thrown into turmoil, Kevin suspects that he was set up, and the only person who can help him is the person threatening everything.

*Treacherous Obsession* is a novel that straddles two genres. On one hand, the story is a legal thriller set in the 1990s. Studstill uses the Tobacco Master Settlement Agreement, which forced tobacco companies to pay Medicaid for health-care costs, to propel his characters through the plot. But the book is also a throwback to the noir detective novels of the 1940s. Studstill sets Kevin up as the prototypical fall guy and Victoria as the femme fatale who falsely accuses him. These imperfect characters are well drawn. Throughout the story, Kevin and Victoria struggle with their own temptations and even yield to them, yet they are just engaging enough to keep readers rooting for them.

The blending of genres also works well. Throughout the novel, Kevin discusses the settlement, breaking it down in detail so readers can understand it clearly. In some ways, the legal dialogue seems comparable to a gumshoe talking to a suspect while tracking down a lead. Yet the book relies heavily on these conversations to propel the plot. While much of the prose is strong—particularly in romantic scenes between Kevin and Victoria—an overreliance on exposition, rather than action, proves distracting.

*Treacherous Obsession* is a great legal thriller for anyone who enjoys John Grisham or Dashiell Hammett. While the law may boil issues down to black and white, and file people as either innocent or guilty, this blended-genre thriller shows that even people who do questionable things can change the world for the better.

KATERIE PRIOR (January 6, 2016)

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