

A Negro and an Ofay

Danny Gardner

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It's 1952, and Elliot Caprice is a man on the run. He owes people: the mob, the Chicago police department, political operatives in Washington, DC. He's managed to stay one step ahead of everyone until, one day, the racial taunts are too much. He gives better than he gets and finally ends up in jail for his efforts. Luckily, the same people Elliot owes are powerful and still have a vested interest in getting something out of him. What they want and what they get are different matters, as Danny Gardner shows in *A Negro and An Ofay: The Tales of Elliot Caprice*.

Elliot is sprung from jail by attorney Mike Robin, son of the local crime lord, and unceremoniously delivered back to his hometown. Once home, everything and nothing is the same. The family farm faces foreclosure. Important childhood figures have been replaced by Elliot's former playmates. And the politics, here and everywhere else, still remain.

To clear his debts, Elliot works as a process server for Mike and his paralegal lover, Elaine Critchlow. Elliot has legitimate grievances, and Gardner allows him vengeance but not martyrdom. Although Elliot initially holds his job and employers at a distance, Elliot soon discovers that he's not the only one with a complicated past. Neither is he alone in trying to make a future. Despite himself, Elliot connects with people again, and when his past catches up with him, he's finally ready to face it on his own terms.

Gardner's hard-bitten crime drama is candid, unflinching, and full of gallows humor. As Elliot says, "You avoid surprises by being the surprise," and Gardner's hero is just that—a bright new entry in the genre, ready to take on the world in word and deed. Debts owed, lines drawn, claims made, Elliot settles up and finds a way to live the life he can't outrun.

LETITIA MONTGOMERY-RODGERS (May/June 2017)

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