

Blood and Mascara

Colin Krainin

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Softcover \$17.00 (292pp)

979-898998680-4

In the explosive thriller Blood and Mascara, an unlucky investigator hopes to prove to himself that his flaws can be overcome.

In Colin Krainin's haunting thriller *Blood and Mascara*, an endearing but broken detective is driven to stop a ruthless assassin.

Once, Bronze had a storied career as an investigative journalist. But in the aftermath of a story about a serial killer, his mental state fragmented. Feeling helpless, Bronze transitioned into private investigations. He now leads a downtrodden life, haunted by trauma and burdened by sobriety.

Then a newspaper article about a congressman's probable murder shocks Bronze into action. As he investigates, caroming from seedy corners of Washington, DC, to a massacre at a brothel, the body count mounts. Caught in a violent maelstrom of lies and political intrigue, Bronze is himself targeted by the calculating assassin—an efficient killer who has yet to fail, whose services are used by the CIA and private parties alike.

The book's characterizations are limited in scope, focused most on three pivotal players: broken Bronze; his isolated landlady Iris, who's also a romance novelist; and their friend Roth, who works for the metropolitan DC police. Bronze and Iris narrate much of the story, commanding attention with their staggering backgrounds, overcoming their personality flaws—and perhaps even kindling a romance, if in fact their connection is based on more than the violence that surrounds them.

The prose has throwback sensibilities; it makes use of both hard-boiled detective tropes and more original haunted and poetic musings. Bronze's undisclosed feelings for Iris, for example, are conveyed in terms akin to a cocktail description:

He does like the taste of this one. The Iris flavor is slippery subtle with a delicate depth, a love like still waters in an ancient well, dark blues and winter greens, layer after plunging layer of melancholy color.

And from the moment Bronze determines to solve the mystery, the book's pace is consistent and intense, following the assassin's machinations with care and maintaining intrigue with its reminders of Bronze's stacking failures. Even the book's flashbacks, which flesh Bronze and the killer out further, don't harm its momentum. Throughout the story, there's a real sense that the hero could fail, making the book's violent climax all the more gripping.

Blood and Mascara is an unpredictable noir novel in which a man shaped by trauma faces down a formidable assassin.

JOHN M. MURRAY (June 4, 2024)

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