



Hanging Hill

Mo Hayder

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When the body of Lorne Wood, a popular teenage girl, is found alongside a towpath in a quiet middle-class community, the neighbors are understandably disturbed. But it gets worse. The corpse is found partially covered with a tarp, a tennis ball forced into her duct-tape covered mouth, and there was a strong “sexual element” to her death. Investigator Zoe Benedict soon discovers that Lorne’s attempts to break into the modeling business had led to a much darker place. A shocking thriller, rife with graphic (albeit artistically rendered) scenes of rape, murder, and dismemberment, this book isn’t for the faint of heart. It is, however, a hell of an exciting read for those who enjoy shocker-thrillers.

The characters are memorable, particularly detective Zoe and Sally, her recently divorced, financially desperate sister. The plot is complex, yet believable, and there is a fascinating subplot involving hand-painted tarot cards that is utterly creepy. The dialogue is fantastic, too. Unfortunately, the pacing is uneven throughout. There is a touch of adverb poisoning here and there, and portions of the story suffer from a tremendous excess of details, likely leading readers to skim ahead looking for the exciting parts. Nevertheless, this setback is forgivable; there definitely are exciting parts aplenty. In fact, easily a half dozen disturbing scenes are utterly unforgettable. Consider this excerpt:

Steve had a pair of pliers, which he used to remove some teeth from David’s broken bottom jaw. There was no vice in the garage so he had to hold the jaw between his knees to get a purchase on it. Sally took photos using his camera. She heard the noise of gristle tearing as the teeth came from their sockets, and knew she’d never forget it. To the electric drill he fitted an attachment with a helical blade, meant for mixing paint, then together they loaded joints of bone and flesh into the bucket. They used more plastic sheet taped down around the drill to stop the contents spraying out and Steve switched it on, ramming it into the bucket over and over again, pulverizing the pieces.

And that’s one of the milder scenes. It’s impossible to read this book without being disturbed by the contents. Which is exactly what the author intended.

Hayder is the acclaimed author of *Birdman*, *The Treatment*, *The Devil of Nanking*, *Pig Island*, *Ritual*, *Skin*, and *Gone*. She has MAs in both filmmaking and creative writing and leverages experience she gained working as a barmaid, hostess, security guard, and English teacher before becoming a fulltime author. Her books draw not only upon personal encounters with criminals and prostitutes but also close consultation with law enforcement officers to bring a gritty realism that is often lacking in the genre. Her prior works have been nominated for the Barry Award for Best British Crime Novel, among others, a testament to having truly done her homework. All that research is one of the best aspects of this memorable book. It’s a crazy, scary, screwed-up set of circumstances, but it doesn’t for one minute appear fake. And that’s a remarkable accomplishment.

LAWRENCE KANE (Spring 2012)

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