

Throwaways: A Jake Savage Mystery

Elliott Light

Bancroft Press

(236pp)

978-1-61088-597-3

Powerful predators and their forgotten victims are centered in this refreshing thriller.

In Elliott Light's foreboding thriller *Throwaways*, a Florida Keys man with a traumatic past gets embroiled in a murder case.

Jake Savage is scuba diving when the mutilated body of a teenager drifts past. But the police department is preoccupied; they dismiss the victim as a transient who fell overboard. Jake, who has a preternatural skill with details, remembers that she had an expensive, custom tattoo; he suspects that there's more to the girl's tale than a simple accident. Haunted by his own mother's murder, he invests in the case in the officers' stead.

With the help of his stepmother's caretaker, Tess, Jake investigates the girl's identity. This leads to discovering that another runaway, who knew the victim, has gone into hiding and is also in danger. Then a billionaire who's been suspected of sex trafficking in the past enters the frame. To further the tension, a detective warns Jake and Tess that the billionaire will hunt for them.

Though it rests in the trope of unsavory men preying on young women, the novel also includes some twists. Its coverage of Jake's case is interspersed with intriguing side elements, including Jake's restoration of his childhood home. And Jake's deep desire for justice makes him a fascinating, motivated hero. He develops a strong rapport with Tess, too, who hints that she has her own reasons for wanting to save society's "throwaways." Their connection is quirky—more so because of their respect for each other's prickly, secretive tendencies.

Some of the characters are stereotyped, however. The book's villains act as expected: there's a brutal guard and a nebulous, cool-minded arsonist. And the book's secondary characters are underdeveloped, including a dying detective and various women who are involved in sheltering abused girls. Critical disclosures about the case also tend to come by way of people offering information at opportune moments.

But the Key West setting is developed in terms of the town's variations. It is acknowledged both as a hot spot for tourists and as a haven for misfits fleeing their pain; hedonistic cruises stop there as well. Because of its contrasts, it is both beguiling and threatening. A larger theme concerning the wealthy's power to suppress news and pressure law enforcement is provocative, too: it pits Jake and his supporters against odds that seem insurmountable. Their resolve becomes all the more salient, and suspense gathers around how they might circumvent their pursuers.

Throwaways is a chilling mystery novel that introduces a solitary amateur sleuth who's attuned to his Key West community.

KAREN RIGBY (July 21, 2023)

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