

Murder Book



Richard Rayner

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Murder Book

«HarperCollins»

Rayner R.

Murder Book / R. Rayner — «HarperCollins»,

‘About as noir as it can be...excellent’ Frances Fyfield, Daily Telegraph
The city is Los Angeles, the birthplace of the American dream, a city that has come to symbolize both heaven and hell. Billy McGrath is an enigma, half American, half English, who once dreamed of pursuing a career as an academic philosopher, but for the last fifteen years he’s been a homicide detective – one of LA’s best. He knows the rules, and understands a justice system that punishes the underprivileged and lets the rich go free. He’s an unhappy man, divorced from the wife he still adores and separated from a daughter for whom he’d willingly die. If he hasn’t yet thought of suicide, he soon will. McGrath is called to a crime scene – a woman dead on a kitchen floor in one of the city’s seamiest neighbourhoods, an apparently routine assignment until he discovers that the murdered woman’s son is LA’s biggest crack dealer, an idol of the ghetto who offers him a one-million-dollar bounty for the name of the killer. Making the wrong choice for what might be the right reasons, McGrath initiates both his own fall from grace and, as he strives to redeem himself, a series of wild and furious actions that hurtle him through the many identities of corrupt Los Angeles. In McGrath, Rayner has created a sympathetic everyman who becomes both victim and victor. Set against a bleak cityscape, Murder Book is a dark, violent and sexy thriller that is impossible to put down.

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RICHARD RAYNER

Murder Book

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Praise

From the reviews of *Murder Book*

‘This is a masterpiece of a procedural thriller . . . Unputdownable’

HARRIET CASTOR, *Sunday Express*

‘It [*Murder Book*] is complex, engrossing’

Guardian

‘Scary and convincing cast of characters and sympathetic hero’

Literary Review

‘*Murder Book* is neo-neo-noir, a mannerist thriller that shakes free of the period-piece mode of both Ellroy and Walter Moseley. Rayner’s book has a ’90s kind of bleakness. . .[and] a multiracial cast of characters adds a welcome up-to-date feeling’

Los Angeles Times

‘Terrific new novel. . .I am tempted to call Rayner a thinking person’s Elmore Leonard except that would do a disservice to two fine writers’

Boston Globe

‘Dense and disturbing. . .*Murder Book* makes a fitting companion to *LA Confidential* – the book and the movie – as it walks the same emotional beat as James Ellroy’s LAPD, only forty years later’

Chicago Tribune

‘This modern noir thriller has atmosphere to burn. . . a complex and meaty novel’

San Francisco Chronicle

Dedication

for Päivi and the boys

Epigraph

With an host of furious fancies
Whereof I am commander
With a burning spear
And a horse of air
To the wilderness I wander;
By a knight of ghosts and shadows
I summoned am to tourney
Ten leagues beyond
The wide world's end —
Methinks it is no journey
— *Tom o' Bedlam's Song, anon.*

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MURDER BOOK

1

MY NAME IS Billy McGrath. I'm forty years old, a little under six feet, and find myself in my office late on this sulfurous Los Angeles night, talking to a tape recorder out of both sides of my mouth. I'm half American, half English — offspring of two nations, two languages, and two different ways of seeing the world. I was conceived in Arizona, born on the sixth floor of Santa Monica Hospital, but made my first confession in England, where I learned to shoot among drystone walls old as Julius Caesar and studied philosophy three years at the university of a northern town dominated by a soot-blackened cathedral on a hill, medieval reminder of man's lofty aspiration and worldly impermanence.

It was a scholarship that brought me back to America, to study postgrad at UCLA, though the Ph.D. was already out of the picture by the time I met my wife, from whom I'm now divorced, at Marty McFly's sports bar off Interstate 5 in Burbank with a Jack Daniel's in my hand only three days before she saved my life. We have a kid, a girl, Lucy, and we used to live together in a two-story house that was painted muddy brown on one of those walk streets in Venice where you can't park a car. After I moved out, my wife had the house remodeled and it's now a pretty blue. I'm a cop, though it's a while since I had anything to do with law and order.

Hanging from the ceiling in my office is a redwood sign that says HOMICIDE and has on it a little picture of a smoking gun, a 9 mm, lest I forget. Spinning in my chair, I see the locked filing cabinets that surround my desk on three sides. These cabinets, very different from the wrecked metal models elsewhere in the building, are custom made from pine by a carpenter in Mar Vista, a guy who also makes coffins, as it happens, and, perceiving an appropriate symmetry, offers the Department a rate.

The cabinets gleam and shine; there are eight of them, each six feet high by three feet wide, each containing seven shelves, and each shelf in turn supporting thirty two-inch blue plastic binders, the murder books, the records of every homicide investigation in the precinct. Some have a red dot on the spine — unsolved, still in progress. Those with the yellow dots we've closed: arrived at perpetrator and motive, teased out the causes of obvious or sometimes seemingly random events, brought order if not meaning to bloody chaos. Seven of the cabinets are completely filled. Only the one immediately at my back has any space left in it at all — two empty shelves. At my feet there's an open box containing a stack of handsome new binders, ready to go, but it's behind me that I reach, for one book in particular.

Before opening it, I want to mention that my very first homicide wasn't here, in Venice, but down in South LA, Sixty-fifth and Vernon, a nice-looking wood frame house next to a host of similars, and every one of them had bars on every window. Two victims. First was a black guy, the back of his head taken away by a cross-nosed bullet. Second was his white girlfriend; she'd been shot in the face, and both her arms had been hacked off. The shovel that was used for the job was on the floor amidst a butcher's mess of blood and bone. One skinny white arm lay next to it, and we never did find the other or figure out that particular detail, though the really bad thing was the little girl, a child of mixed blood, two years old and fine, at least not physically hurt. She'd been strapped in her highchair with her mouth taped shut so she couldn't scream while she saw the death of her mother and father.

I was just a rookie, a raw recruit, a *boot*, a uniform at the door trying not to get his feet in the mess, but when I went home that night the soles of my boots were clogged with blood and a dried grayish matter I realized must be brain. I sat at the kitchen table to clean them off and asked myself how such things could happen. I wondered at what point an act became evil. How bad and premeditated did it have to be? I swore that I'd keep in contact with that little girl every six months or so to make sure that she was OK. I made good on the promise until she was a six-year-old with pigtails who still refused to talk, but then for no good reason I can remember I missed an appointment, then another and another, until at last I felt embarrassed to go back.

I don't want to make too much of this, though I think the story, along with my lack of the proper equipment of roots, my missing of that cathedral on a hill, does have a bearing on all that happened. I grew too used to seeing evil done. You begin by trying to make a difference and end by doing it yourself, though even that sounds like casting around. At forty I had twenty years' English and twenty American, which might be to say that I had nothing.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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