

Devil in a blue dress

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Although the main character Ezekial (Easy) Rawlins is not a licensed private detective, he is given the opportunity to work as if he were one. At the end of the book he writes to a friend whom he tells he has had a couple of additional cases as well as the one featured in the book. As one might expect this leads to more mysteries to solve. Currently there about eight sequels to Devil in a Blue Dress. The series is popular and sells well. The novel is set in Watts, one of the poorer and primarily black sections of Los Angeles, in 1948. Easy Rawlins is a black war veteran.

During the war he initially worked as a typist because black soldiers were segregated from the white soldiers and usually put in noncombatant positions. Rawlins volunteers for combat where he participates in D-Day and later fights in General Patton's tank corp. Until just before the book begins Easy has worked in an airplane manufacturing plant. After an argument with his foreman, Easy walks off the job and is fired. Easy Rawlins is the main character. He is a large, tough black man originally from Houston, Texas. He mistrusts white people in general and white policemen in particular.

He lives pretty much hand to mouth except that he has managed to obtain a mortgage and buy a house. Trying to pay his monthly mortgage is often a struggle and is a motivating factor for his actions later in the book. Easy is extremely proud of his house with its fruit trees, flowers and yard. He cares for it so much that at times throughout the book when it is suggested he avoid physical attack by leaving the area he refuses because he won't leave his home behind. Despite his feelings about white people and his frequent confrontations with violence, Easy is a very likeable man. He has an eye toward the ladies and they often reciprocate.

When the book opens Easy has nothing to do since he lost his job the previous day. He visits an illegal bar located near his home and run by a friend of his, an ex-heavyweight fighter named Joppy. The bar is located above a meat warehouse and always stinks of meat. Since Joppy has a checkered past regarding encounters with the law and because the room above the meat warehouse would never be approved by a health inspector, Joppy doesn't have a license, he buys stolen liquor that has been high jacked from trucks to sell to his patrons and the bar has no license, the bar doesn't officially exist.

In fact much of the world Easy occupies doesn't exist in the eye of the law. The world is full of jazz, cigarettes, alcohol and violence. At the bar Joppy introduces Easy to a white man, DeWitt Albright. Albright is an old friend of Joppy's and he needs someone to find a white woman named Daphne Monet. He offers Easy one hundred dollars to find Monet and to tell him where she is. Albright claims he needs Easy to look for Monet because she has been seen in clubs considered to be black night clubs and a white man asking questions, no matter how tough, would be unlikely to get the information he sought might even be killed.

Since Easy is well-known and well-liked in the community Albright believes he will be more successful in finding Miss Monet. Although Easy suspects that Albright is a gangster or some other type of criminal and probably very dangerous, he needs the money to pay his mortgage and accepts the job. Thus begins Easy's journey through Watts, East L. A. , Santa Monica and other cities in the L. A. area. During that time Easy is arrested for murder and beaten by the white police.

He is threatened with numerous guns, attacked with a knife, accused of messing with one of his friend's woman and visited by a second friend with who he shares a criminal past. Despite the above named adventures, Easy has little difficulty finding Daphne Monet. His reaction to her is typically male and he would consider giving up everything to be with her. Besides Easy, a variety of characters appear. Easy seems to know everybody and has a past with them. Some of these such as Coretta, who has an eye for men, appear briefly and are used by Mosley as victims of murder. However two characters deserve more mention.

Mouse is a man without a conscience and a good deal of skill with both a knife and a gun. One can't describe him as immoral because he has no ethical standards to break. He is amoral. He doesn't recognize morality and it plays no role in his life. Given enough motivation, i. e. , money, Mouse would kill anyone without hesitation or remorse after the fact. Mouse is a good man to have on your side in violent situations, but he needs to be closely watched to make certain he doesn't suddenly turn on his friends and change side should it be to his personal advantage to do so.

It is large through Mouse's skills with guns and a proclivity toward violence that East survives the case. Daphne Monet is a fantasy woman. She plays the role men want her to play and has learned to work men so well that she gets what she wants when she wants. She is physically small, beautiful, has a sensuous body with doe-like eyes that can melt a man's heart while exciting him with the possibility of a sexual relationship. She knows how to use all her charms to get what she wants and rarely hesitates to make use of them.

She is out for herself and will likely do whatever it takes to get what she wants. Daphne Monet is an alias for Ruby Hanks, although she passes for white, she is a light skinned black woman from Lake Charles, Louisiana who like so many of the characters in the book has a past with Easy. Throughout the book Rawlins fails to recognize Rube when he meets Daphne because she has grown up and out since he last saw her when she was a child.. Unlike Mouse Daphne Monet has a conscience and an awareness of what is right or wrong, however she probably wouldn't hesitate to do wrong should the situation call for it.

Money is her motivation and one wonders if Mosley used the last name " Monet" because of its similarity to the word " money," a driving force in here life. The crime that starts all of the violence and killing is Daphne's stealing \$30, 000 from Albright. Naturally he wants it back. Throughout the novel Daphne uses Easy to avoid being killed and to keep the money she as stolen. Ultimately she is successful. Daphne, Mouse and easy keep the money, Albright, among others, is dead. Rawlins is satisfied at the end of the book. Although there are threads of crimes left hanging, Easy is satisfied.

He has settled things to his own standards and couldn't care less if the white police still have crimes to solve. Mosley's book provides a well plotted scenario with a very likeable main character. Typically private detectives are white males. Using a black man as a detective and revealing events to the reader through his eyes is an interesting device. Easy Rawlins has been treated as an inferior all of his life by white people. Easy Rawlins is a man with faults. He has prejudices that are understandable and provide a more rounded character.

He is a believable multi-dimensional character that does not fall prey to the many stereotypes many writers of detective stories use. Easy Rawlins is neither such an all bad person that he is unbelievable nor is he so pure and good so that he appears insipid. The plot of Devil in a Blue Dress is quite plausible. There was never a doubt that most of the events such as those happening in the book could and did occur. The only difficult part to accept is that the main characters were able to divide the money evenly and each of them keep their \$10, 000 share.

It appears more likely that someone else would show up looking for the money. However, a willing suspension of disbelief easily remedies this small issue. The description of the location and time period appears to be historically accurate. Mosley is aware of historical facts and provides explanations for those things that might appear to be inaccurate. For example, because the military was segregated by race during World War II, most blacks did not serve in combat. Mosley deals with this by recognizing that blacks could serve in combat if they volunteered to do so.

It is interesting to note that at the time when the novel takes place there are truck farms growing artichokes, strawberries, and lettuce between downtown L. A. and Santa Monica. Today there is nothing to separate L. A. from Santa Monica except a sign announcing the city limits of Santa Monica. Roads that are wide and well-traveled today are little used roads in the country. The book is very readable and interesting. It is interesting to read a detective novel from the point of view of a black man.

His opinions of white people are largely negative and based on the events in the novel, correct. Easy was interesting and likeable. Daphne Monet was an

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exciting, sexy woman written to engender attraction and lust for male readers. The pacing was good and added to the suspense. At times the prose seems to lead the reader, subtly suggesting the reader continue to read and to read faster and faster. Devil in a Blue Dress appears to be authentic not only in its historicity, but in the way it feels and the atmosphere Mosley creates.

While reading the book the reader is able to assume the persona of Easy Rawlins and look at events through his eyes. One of the best features of Mosley's book is that he uses language and terms that would have been used in 1948. Easy thinks of himself as a Negro, not as a black or African-American or some other recently developed politically correct term. This is refreshing given the extreme attention to political correctness today. It is irritating when people try to rewrite history by pretending that political correctness extends eternally to the past.

Over all, Devil in a Blue Dress is quite a good book. Easy Rawlins is a believable character and interesting character. He provides a point of view to the reader that is unusual if not unique. One wonders if Daphne/Ruby is really The Devil in a Blue Dress as she is made out to be. For the male characters in the book and to men reading the book she is definitely an angel. The plot is intriguing and intricate enough to engage the reader and to encourage the reader to read the other books in the series. Works Cited Mosley, Walter. Devil in a Blue Dress. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1990.