



Phaire, Dorothy

MURDER AND THE MASQUERADE:

*Book 1 of the Dorothy Phaire Romantic
Mystery Series*

iUniverse (299 pp.)

\$18.95 paperback

September 21, 2007

ISBN: 978-0-595-44787-9

Two African-American women in the Washington, D.C., metro area face their middle-age struggles with love, family and murder charges in this empowering romantic thriller.

Dr. Renee Hayes seems to have everything—a lavishly decorated French Colonial house, a successful psychology practice and a popular series of self-help books. On the inside, however, she is just as troubled as any of her patients. One of these is Veda Simms, a suicidal paralegal who has estranged herself from her ex-husband and daughter as a result of her dangerous obsession with LaMarr Coleman, a crooked attorney at her law firm. At first, the patient and doctor seem to be the antithesis of each other (with the exception of a shared hairdresser). Veda is petty and self-absorbed, concerned only with what LaMarr thinks of her, while selfless Renee tends to an infant with AIDS in her off-hours. A series of seemingly unrelated crimes befall the two women,

and Renee finds herself in the throes of a torrid affair with Deek, a young detective investigating the crimes, as a relief from her tepid marriage. At the end of her patience with LaMarr's shady activities, Veda goes from a weepy mess of nerves to a wrathful ex. When both women are wrongfully charged with LaMarr's gruesome murder, they begin to question their chosen paths. In this rewrite of her 2001 book *Almost Out of Love*, Phaire devotes a sizable chunk of the story solely to her characters' biographies, giving the reader a detailed psychological portrait of the two women but occasionally hindering plot progression. Mystery and suspense take a back seat as chapter-long childhood flashbacks play out, drawing the reader deeper into the psyches of Veda and Renee.

Displays a knack for shaping round characters with rich and troubled pasts—sure to be a treat for armchair psychoanalysts and book clubs alike.

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