



Land of Shadows

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Along the ever-changing border of gentrifying Los Angeles, a seventeen-year-old girl is found dead at a construction site, hanging in the closet of an unfinished condominium.

Homicide detective Elouise “Lou” Norton’s new partner Colin Taggart, fresh from the Colorado Springs police department, assumes it’s a teenage suicide. Lou isn’t buying the easy explanation. For one thing, the condo site is owned by Napoleon Crase, a self-made millionaire... and the man who may have murdered Lou’s missing sister thirty years ago.

As Lou investigates the death of Monique Darson, she uncovers undeniable links between the two cases. She is convinced that when she solves Monique’s case she will finally bring her lost sister home. But as she gets closer to the truth, she also gets closer to a violent killer. After all this time, can he be brought to justice... before Lou becomes his next victim?

Land of Shadows Details

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From Reader Review Land of Shadows for online ebook

Lekeisha The Booknerd says

I received a copy of this book from the publisher via Net Galley in exchange for an honest review

This is a good Crime/Mystery read. One that will keep you up reading all through the night. Not so good in my case, because it had me asking my fiancé to walk me out to my car in the mornings on my way to work. I was kind of shook up after reading it, but I like reading about decades old cases coming to light, whether it be fiction or real life.

Detective Lou Norton gets assigned a case of a possible suicide. As she and her new partner, Colin Taggart, investigate the case, she is positive that it is no suicide. As they delve deeper into the mystery, she sees links that goes back to the disappearance/possible murder of her sister 30 years prior.

Detective Lou is one tough lady. I really liked her character. She has this no-nonsense air about her, and that's a great thing to have if you are in law enforcement. Trying to solve the case, and also teach her new partner the ins and outs of the streets in LA, is what she is about. As she gets closer to the mystery behind her sister's disappearance, she also becomes a target herself.

It really picks up pace after about a quarter into the book. I really enjoyed reading this book, and I'm definitely looking forward to reading more about Detective Norton. If you love Crime Fiction, this is a good book to add to your shelf.

Rebecca Trotter says

Land of Shadows is a crime thriller with a heartbreaking twist. It was that twist of a 25 year old unsolved crime against a teenage girl that made me want to read Land of Shadows. It was the perfect pacing of dialog, action, and historical events that make me want to read everything Ms. Hall has written.

I have found a new favorite author, Rachel Howzell Hall.

Kathy says

I loved this excellent debut for this series. Can't wait for more with this female black detective as the protagonist. What a refreshing new voice we have in Rachel Howzell Hall. The writing is vivid and fresh. The "local color" provided by the people and parts of Los Angeles that may not be as well known as other parts was an added bonus. This along with an intriguing storyline made for a great read.

Autumn Crum says

Fantastic read

The author has a way with words. Colorfully painting a picture with words. I loved Lulu and am glad she got her closure

Nakia says

I really enjoyed this one. Lou is an LAPD detective summoned to investigate the death of a young woman. The scene looks like a suicide but evidence points to it all being staged to cover up her murder. Lou is determined to find the killer, not only because it's her job, but because this case reminds her of her own sister's disappearance 20 years ago. She has a feeling she knows who was behind her sister's disappearance when they were teens, and will do whatever it takes to nab him for both incidents. Throw in a new, wet behind the ears partner from Denver, a philandering husband away on business in Asia, and a history that makes it hard to open up to others, and you have fast talking, no nonsense Lou: kicking ass and taking names.

I loved the way this story was told. Smart and full of mouthy wisecracks, Lou's personality drew me in immediately. I also loved the idea of a Black woman detective on the hunt to find the perpetrator behind the killing of Black women. Our tragedies often go unnoticed, and it seems that Rachel Howzell Hall intentionally wrote this story to create a heroine who has our back, without specifically having to say, "Here is a heroine who has our back." The funny one-liners were priceless, and the realness and pain behind Lou's tragic flashbacks of her sister's disappearance and how she and her mother coped, were authentic. I didn't love the ending, but the overall story was so entertaining, that I can't wait to read the two follow ups in this series. Rachel Howzell Hall is a definite new fav.

Mark Stevens says

One word: energy.

Another: attitude.

Rachel Howzell Hall's writing has both.

In abundance.

Add a terrific issue (urban renewal), a likable and feisty detective (Elouise Norton) and a vivid setting (a glam-free L.A.) and you've got a winner. "Land of Shadows" is just that.

"Land of Shadows" is Elouise "Lou" Norton's story. Hall infuses Norton with such a strong point of view that you can't help but go for the ride.

The lines fly:

"After working all day and then being called back in, I need a Billie Holliday. Vodka, grenadine, and ginger ale, all living happily ever after in my bloodstream."

"The more time passed, the more witnesses forgot and the more people grew reluctant to talk. How far you

got in the first forty-eight hours helped determine whether you would be taking victory laps or playing a sad trombone.”

“Greg had sent creamy brown roses when he had been cheating on me with Amarie. And when I had busted him texting her while he was supposed to be watching Letterman, he upgraded my Ford to the almighty Porsche. Purple roses ... Who was the lucky whore now? And what would he buy me next? A space shuttle?”

“He was so shiny that he probably bled Windex, so clean, he probably peed Lysol.”

You get the idea. Lou is full-blooded, opinionated. And she’s trying to hold her own in a world of male cops, including a new partner, Colin, fresh from Colorado Springs. “He was almost hot but then, in the LAPD’s candy shop, perfection didn’t matter.”

And this new case leads her through a whole bunch of men. And (see quote number three above) there’s the questionable husband always in the background.

Snappy with a line and quick with a comeback, Lou Norton also has a heart. She feels the pain of her victims. That’s in part because she lost her own sister Tori, mysteriously, twenty-five years ago. And this new case, involving a young teenager found hanging in a closet, may lead back to the same set of characters that knew something about what happened to Tori. Lou and Tori were from the heart of “black Los Angeles.” Lou knows every inch of this ground and this case forces her to re-live the most haunting moments of her youth.

“Sometimes, I wished that I could read something horrible in the newspaper and say, ‘Wow, that’s too bad,’ then drive down the hill to buy a handbag and a Frappuccino. But I can’t, no matter how hard I try, even when I’m doing just that. One day I will luck out. One day, a callus will form around that part of my heart, and then I will stop caring like some cops, and then I will be as good as I can be. This will lead me to Hell, but at least I won’t care only because I can’t.”

Land of Shadows draws its plot straight out of the controversial, real-life issues surrounding the attempted re-development of Santa Barbara Plaza. That project’s intractable issues were the source of considerable real-life news coverage that entangled big-city politicians and big-time developers. Hall takes full advantage of the chance to highlight the complexity of such “renewal” efforts, spotlighting those who line their pockets and locals who left out in the cold.

Hall ramps up the suspense to a taut finish and sets up a beautiful hand-off to the next book, *Skies of Ash*.

What a book.

Movie producers? Television series writers and developers? Come check out Elouise Norton.

Don Gorman says

(3 1/2) Thanks to my Goodreads friend James Thane for turning me on to this one. I had read Hall's latest book (*Skies of Ash*), really liked it, and then discovered this one because of James. I think it is even better

than the new one. Elouise Norton is just an outstanding protagonist in this story, her introductory exposure. Fun, tough, emotional, human, she is the complete package. The flashback feature here is not overdone, it is handled well, and the plot has a wild grouping of connected characters that keep us interested from A to Z. A really good effort with no downtime at all. I have now put Hall on my must read list. Looking forward to spending some more quality time with "Lou."

Melissa says

The more sparkly side of three stars. Although I figured most of what was happening about halfway through, I really enjoyed Elouise Norton even as I scoffed at her 90% completion rate. Nice detecting, solid back story, and really the only fly in the butter was a line about getting the "toxicology reports" on the DNA evidence recovered at the scene.

Eileen says

Land of Shadows was an excellent read - very exciting and thought provoking. The writer's style created a clear vision of each scene. The mystery kept pace with the reveal. She ties it up nicely in the end with enough clues laid out to make it enjoyable. I was right there with Elouise as she discovered who killed her sister. Very good - as my mother and father would say v.v.g.

Nancy McFarlane says

Detective Eloise "Lou" Norton thinks she may finally be able to solve the disappearance and probable murder of her sister 30 years earlier. As she and her new partner investigate the death of a young black teenage girl Lou keeps seeing links to her sister's case. Determined to prove they are real, and not just wishful thinking, she doggedly pursues clues and leads and goes back and interviews witnesses from her sister's case. Lou is tough and street smart and is determined to 'educate' her new partner in the rough ways of South West LA. But at the same time she is a vulnerable wife, with a philandering husband, and a daughter, who is still filled with guilt for leaving her sister alone years ago. A great new voice in crime fiction I can't wait to see more from LA Homicide Detective Lou Norton.

L says

What a great read! Lou, the African American, woman detective, is a terrific character. Colin, her annoying new partner, is, well annoying, but learning. The mystery itself was quite good--perhaps a few too many bodies--going somewhere other than where I thought the author was taking us. I'm looking forward to reading more by this author.

Gina says

I really like reading murder/ mystery novels with female leads. They are all over the place and not difficult to find. I was recommended this book by Goodreads and so it sounded good and I checked it out of the library. The wonderfully surprising thing about this book is that the female lead detective is black and the author is black as well. The book was well written and didn't have any of the stereotypical black images in the book. The book was based in South LA but as to the main character she was a strong female lead written without any urban language in her dialogue, except maybe a little when she was with her girlfriends. It's refreshing to finally see a black female detective in a lead role without any affirmative action or getting there because of her race or gender. She got her job because she is smart, tough, and gets it done. I will definitely be following this series and this author. Her writing is fantastic! 5 stars!

The FountainPenDiva, Old school geek chick and lover of teddy bears says

Damn! Who the hell recommended this book anyway, lol?! Now I've got to read the next one in the series. Screw sleep!!!

I know a lot of people talk about Michael Connolly's Harry Bosch series in regards to LA based detective stories, but Rachel Howzell Hall brings a nuance to the LA that most people only hear bad things about. The Crenshaw/Leimert Park/Baldwin Hills/View Park/Ladera Heights Districts are complex communities filled with the best and brightest as well as the dark despair and violence. These are neighborhoods I know intimately. My great-grandparents lived in the tidy Spanish-styled apartments in Leimert Park. Many of my grandmother's co-workers with the LAUSD bought homes in View Park and Crenshaw when White people left in droves ("white flight"). The area is undergoing an uncomfortable shift as White millennials, unable to afford living over the hill in Culver City and Westchester, are slowly moving into these predominantly Black and Brown enclaves.

There are very few books I heavily fangirl over, so when I do, that means you need to put aside whatever it is you're doing and get this right now! Why are you still sitting down, move!

Oh, you're probably reading my review. Okay, after that, go get this book and let's get to work doing two very important things: 1) making Rachel Howzell Hall as big, if not bigger, than Connolly and 2) calling Oprah stat. Tell her to end her love affair with Tyler Perry and to get to work making an Elouise Norton mystery series. Or, we could always call Shonda.

Elouise Norton is my kind of heroine. I like them snarky, strong, no-nonsense with real flaws. Here's how she introduces herself to Colin, a White guy transplant from Colorado and her new partner:

"I'm sassy, but not Florence-the-Jeffersons'-maid sassy. Nor am I ultrareligious. I'm sure as hell not an earth mother, so there's that to remember, too. Actually, you'd be better off seeking comfort from that palm tree across the street before coming to me."

Also:

"I hate watermelon but I love chicken. I can say 'nigga' but I will break every bone in your face if I hear you say it. And you look like someone who's been around people who say it a lot. So be careful, please. On a lighter note: yes, the myth is true. The blacker the berry and so forth and so on."

Poor guy.

She's a detective in the LAPD, black and female in the years after the riots. College educated, having studied for a career as a lawyer. Unfortunately she flunked the California Bar Exam twice. Don't roll your eyes. The Cal Bar Exam is one of the toughest in the nation and less than 35% pass it the first time. No shame in Elouise's game. She worked her way through the ranks and seems to have a damn good success rate when it comes to solving murders. Save one. Her missing sister Tori. That open wound of not knowing but certain of the guilt of a wealthy Black developer is part of the engine which drives her. And now, an eerily similar set of circumstances which culminated in the murder of an eighteen year old girl with a ton of secrets in her closet brings those ghosts front and center.

Unfortunately, Elouise is also dealing with a headed off the cliff marriage to a game designer with a penchant for cheating and then making it up with really expensive gifts. This aspect had me feeling kind of sad because there are so few Black game designers, especially in fiction, and I would have loved for Elouise and Greg to have a healthy relationship. Oh well, c'est la vie. Oh, did I mention that she's a bit of a nerd herself? Cool points.

The peripheral characters are not stereotypes. Hall infuses them with a complex humanity that only *aware* authors can do. The gangbanger shows a vulnerability even as he tries to be hard. The heroin addict is somebody's little girl whom society has abandoned. The baby mama does the best she can with what she has. And while it may seem there's some slut shaming involved, what is being shown is the complexity of Black girls negotiating womanhood in a world that has no place for them. There's a wonderful catharsis in having the disappearance and deaths of two Black girls actually worked on with diligence and solved with tenacity. Given the lack of concern when our girls disappear, this catharsis is powerful. Thank you Ms. Hall.

Of course, it's important that such an awesome heroine have a coterie of best girlfriends who will ride hard for each other. Lena and Syeeta are Black, upper class and unapologetic. They come armed with Laboutins and Beemers and good advice when their "sister" needs it. Given the fact that positive Black female friendships are seldom shown, it's always nice to see them reflected.

And Colin. I liked him, even at his most deer in the headlights clueless. In the beginning he stumbles, misses a lot of cultural clues. Still, his heart is in the right place and as the novel goes on, he and Elouise iron out the kinks every new cop partner must go through.

Before I forget, this line right here: *And I hated men like Von Neeley, the "nice" guys who always wanted to pray with you, who always offered you blessings and put-on smiles. Men who always told women how to live, what to wear, who to sleep with, all in the name of God. Whores and thugs in the shadows, many of them, who committed the worst acts of violence against women and children. Men's Central was filled with huckster-holy men who had hooker problems, free-flying fists, and "sex addictions." I had thrown my fair share of these assholes in jail myself and so I knew one when I saw one. And Von Neeley was definitely a Jerk-in-the-Lord trainee.*

So. Much. Truth.

My grandmother has been bugging me to read this next. So I'm off to the next in the series. Tina, if this was your idea (again), I owe you a venti coconut milk mocha caramel macchiato. We just won't be going to that Starbucks in Ladera Heights. Hall was dead on about that place. I could tell you stories. Talk about bougie. When you make this Valley nerd girl throw shade your way, you know it's bad.

Renee says

Full disclosure: this was a Goodreads First Reads preview win for me. And that alone makes me soooooo happy.

In my bedtime prayers, I have asked for a series to follow Rachel Howzell Hall's book featuring Elouise "Lou" Norton. Because this is a great read. But better, Lou Norton is a great character. She is flawed, she is funny, and she is fashionable. But mostly she is smart and tough and she gets the bad guy. She has a life beyond the badge and it is messy, like most of us. I believe a higher-brow way to put it is that her character is fully realized.

This is a great kick-off for a series. Will the dead teenage cheerleader turn out to be connected to the decades old unsolved disappearance of Lou's own sister? Will the landscape of LA--changing and evolving from the time of Lou's childhood through the 1992 riots to the hands of developers--really change the cast of characters as she knows them? Will she find the who and the why of this young girl's death and the who and why and what-happened of her own sister's death. Will she find some peace and space if she does? Oh, and then there's that husband of hers.... Good thing she's got good friends, a superior officer who's got her back and the rest of the homicide A-team to annoy her and support her in equal measure.

Dear literary gods, let there be more.

Annie says

Typed out a review and computer crashed. Lost the steam to rewrite the review.

Basically, Lou is a really snippy character who mocks other people constantly in her head (she loves to dump on other peoples' appearances even when they have done nothing to her). Also, the pacing was terrible. We learn nothing for 270 pages, zero clues, and then suddenly in the span of 3 pages we get an insane amount of info-dumping and so many answers thrown at us when we didn't even really have enough information to ask the questions.

Also I was right to hate genre fiction as a rule.

~~~~**BOOK RIOT'S READ HARDER CHALLENGE**~~~~

#21: A mystery by a person of color or LGBTQ+ author.

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## **Tina says**

I feel like this book was written especially for me. Like, I sat with the author and gave her a checklist of stuff I was thirsty for in a good police procedural. Stuff like:

1. I want the main character to be an African American woman
2. I want her to be smart and tough
3. I also want her to be funny and have an irreverent sense of humor

4. I want her to have the best, best girlfriends who will come to her house with wine and barbecue give her come to Jesus talks when she needs it
5. I want her to be competent in her job, so much so that she is valued by her boss and peers
6. I don't her to be perfect though, give her some flaws that make me roll my eyes a time or two, but still with enough self awareness that she knows she has these flaws
7. I want her to have a well rounded inner life
8. I want her to kick ass when necessary
9. Give me all that with good writing, a good sink-your teeth in crime, excellent side characters, dead-on dialogue that make me wince, guffaw and nod my head in recognition, and give me space to admire a well crafted scene and a turn of phrase.

In this story Elouise --aka Lou -- Norton is a Homicide detective in Los Angeles. She grew up in the hood but went to college and then law school and married very well to take herself out of the hood. But no matter how high you fly you don't ever really disconnect from your roots. In her case Lou is assigned to the Southwest Division of the LAPD that keeps her still within spitting distance of the place she grew up. And the case she catches in this book hits a little close because the circumstances of the death of a pretty, young African American teenager eerily mirrors the disappearance of her own teen aged sister, in the same area, some twenty-five years ago.

My favorite thing about this book -- beyond the great characterization of Lou -- is the dialogue and the writing. It is written from Lou's first person perspective and her voice is so vibrant and interesting and funny. She is a sharp observer, peppering her perceptions with sometimes hilarious, sometimes stinging commentaries.

*"Bass boomed from car stereos as some so-called rapper muttered on top of the beat, "the hat, walk with it, walk with it, the hat, get low..."*

*Somewhere in New York KRS-One and Chuck D were sobbing into their Fuzzy Navels and Cool Ranch Doritos*

or

*Von's "I loved Monie" was Splenda compared to Derek's Pure Cane "I loved Monie."*

*I bristled, cuz boy, I hated artificial sweeteners. And I hated men like Von Neeley, the "nice" guys who always want to pray with you, who always offered you blessings and put-on smiles. Men who always told women how to live, what to wear, who to sleep with, all in the name of God.*

The dialogue is also spot on. This is the type of dialogue that sounds 100% authentic. There is this great scene of Lou questioning a gang-banger in the matter of his girlfriend's death and their back and forth is electric. The one scene of conversation made the young banger sound tough, smart, vulnerable, wise, and hurting. But all spoken with the LA streetwise argot that young men would use. This is compared to scenes of Lou and her best girlfriends, all well-to-do, Louboutin wearing, black professional bourgie women who

Speak that specific language of the black bourgeois women.

I also enjoyed the characterization of Colin, Lou's fresh from Colorado partner. A youngish white guy who on the one hand does some cringingly awkward things, but on the other hand begins to learn and grow in his partnership with Lou. The Colin at the end of the book was different than the Colin at the beginning of the book.

The police procedural/crime aspects of the story were well laid out. I did get a little exasperated over a few things that come straight out of fiction conventions 101. For instance, a key piece of information by a witness could have been relayed earlier and broke open the entire case. But I can't get too mad at it, the book takes place in just about a four-day span and people IRL often work against their own best interests.

Also Lou's personal life is a broke down mess. I loved her girlfriend intervention and wishes she would take their advice already. But baby steps.

And finally, I have never been to LA. But the author has included so much detail about Lou's corner of LA here, that it is practically another character.

So yeah, I enjoyed the heck out of this book from almost page one. About to go inhale the second one.

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## **James Thane says**

Twenty-five years ago, Elouise Norton's older sister, Tori, was caught stealing candy from a neighborhood store owned by a man named Napoleon Crase. In a panic, Elouise ran from the store and never saw her sister again. The police conducted a perfunctory investigation but never discovered what might have happened to Tori.

Perhaps the investigation was so slipshod because the cops were lazy or perhaps because they were overburdened. Perhaps it was because the victim, Tori, was a black teenager who did not have a sterling reputation to begin with. But whatever the case, a quarter of a century later, Elouise remains haunted by the loss of her sister and has become a homicide detective herself, having promised her mother that she would yet bring Tori home.

Elouise (Lou) and her newbie white male partner are called to the scene of a condominium construction site, where a seventeen-year-old girl named Monique Dawson has been found hanging in a closet. Lou's new partner, Colin Taggart, jumps to the conclusion that the dead girl was a suicide, but Lou quickly disabuses him of that notion and insists, correctly, that Monique is the victim of a homicide.

Interestingly, the condo development project is owned by Napoleon Crase who, in the years since Tori's disappearance, has pulled himself up by the bootstraps to become a millionaire developer, and the site of the project is very near the site of the store where Tori disappeared.

Inevitably, these coincidences will weigh on Lou, but will they compromise her ability to conduct a full and fair investigation into the death of Monique Dawson? And as if she doesn't have enough on her mind to begin with, Lou's husband, a game developer, is in Japan. He's calling Lou infrequently and is generally staying out of touch. Lou wonders if he's cheating; if so, it wouldn't be the first time. The last time Lou caught him, he "apologized" by buying her a \$90,000 Porsche SUV, but that may not be enough if he's

straying again.

Lou pursues the case, which takes a variety of twists and turns and involves some pretty sleazy characters. But she's a detective driven by the need to know the truth and she pursues it with a grim determination. She's a new and original character, and Rachel Howzell Hall introduces her in a very compelling story. Hall also creates a very convincing and intriguing setting in an area of south L.A. that's undergoing a black gentrification, and the end result is a book that will appeal to large numbers of crime fiction readers. I'm looking forward eagerly to Lou's next case.

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## **Raven says**

Finding myself esconsed in the lonely space between finishing the DVD of the late, lamented and quite brilliant LA cop show *Southland*, and awaiting the next Connelly/Wambaugh etc for my Los Angeles fix, I espied this- a new police thriller set in Los Angeles. Result, I thought, and, in a nifty change of reading for me, the main character is a female police officer, the feisty, but 'still waters running deep' kind of gal, Homicide Detective Elouise 'Lou' Norton. With the dual temptations of the location, and the promise of a notable debut, I dove straight in...

In a refreshing change of style for the well-trodden path of Los Angeles based crime, the main character Detective Elouise Norton has grown up on the wrong side of the tracks in Los Angeles, clawing her way out of the social depravity of the projects, and fuelled by the mysterious disappearance of her sister, some years previously, to become a police officer, and work her way up through the ranks to become an intuitive and focused homicide detective. With the discovery of a murdered young girl on a construction site, Norton quickly focuses on the involvement with the victim of a certain Napoleon Crase, and his dual implication with the unsolved disappearance of Norton's own sister, Tori, during her childhood. So the central thrust of the plot is whether Crase as guilty as he appears, or does Norton simply want some closure on her own sadness, and sense of unfinished business? To be honest, the plot with its slightly clunky central premise, and connection between the detective's past and present investigations, was satisfying enough, and there was a good build-up of tension, despite the relatively slow opening. The investigations were engaging enough, with a particularly creepy criminal perpetrator at their centre, and there was plenty of scope for Hall to vividly bring to life the surrounding environs of Los Angeles, and gives us a real insight into the city. However, of far more interest to me, was Hall's adept characterisation and the wonderful interplay and development of Norton's character in the realms her personal and professional life, and this was the real strength of the book.

With Norton's untrustworthy husband, away at a conference, and cheating like a demon on her, Hall strikes a nice balance between the different personas of her central protagonist. As her personal life unravels, and the emotional weight of the familial loss of her sister, impacts so greatly on her investigation, her focus and efficiency as a police detective provides a good counterpoint to the stresses of her life away from the job. Throughout the book, Norton remains a point of interest for the reader, and the ups and downs of the investigation gives ample opportunity for us as readers to really get beneath her skin, and make us entirely comfortable with this engaging character. As some light relief to the sadness she imbues through her experiences in the book, there is time for some delightful banter with her recently assigned new partner, Colin Taggart, from the less demanding police department of Colorado Springs. With this relationship, Hall is given the freedom to poke gentle fun at this relatively unworldly wise detective, now in the alien environment of one of the most dangerous cities in the US, as Norton seeks to shape him into a decent partner. The back and forth repartee between them, compounded by the endearing idiocy of Taggart, is a joy, fuelled by equal amounts of growing affection underscored by frustration- a partnership that bodes well for

potential further books in the series.

So very pleased to report that, all in all, Land of Shadows was a more than competent debut which provided enough interest in this first book for me to return for more. Looking forward to the next one. A good read, and would definitely recommend.

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## **Sandy says**

A refreshing lack of stereotypes. I read a lot so it's always a treat to find a book I really enjoy from a previously unknown (to me) author. This police procedural/thriller features a strong, smart & compassionate female protagonist trying to juggle a demanding career with a failing marriage.

Elouise "Lou" Norton is a LAPD homicide detective who has risen above a childhood riddled with poverty & tragedy. She grew up in "the jungle", a bleak & sullen area of the city where career options include gangsta, teen pregnancy & welfare. It's also where she lost her sister. Twenty five years ago, Tori disappeared from behind Napoleon Crase's liquor store & it's haunted Lou ever since.

So when a teenage girl is found hanging on one of Crase's construction sites, Lou is more than a little interested.

She has always believed he knows more about Tori than he let on. In the interim, he's become a wealthy & powerful businessman...one with a rep for getting physical with pretty young things. As Lou & her partner Det. Colin Taggart start to dig, another girl is found dead.

In alternate chapters, the story is told by the anonymous killer. The reader travels with him as he trolls for his next victim & becomes fascinated with Lou. It's obvious he's ill, fighting off hallucinations & physical tics with a steady diet of booze & coke. We also meet his companion, a young woman who knows what he's done & caters to his every need.

It's a complex plot with many ties between the past & present. Several characters have secrets they've kept hidden for years & the author does a good job of slowly revealing their histories. There is a large diverse cast ranging from tech wizards to gang bangers & their respective neighbourhoods are well described in atmospheric & gritty prose.

I really enjoyed this. It's refreshing to encounter a female cop who wasn't portrayed as the stereotypical bitch on wheels, always at odds with her male counterparts. She's not an iconoclastic loner with her name engraved on a bar stool. Lou is smart, acerbic & popular with her colleagues. She shows up each day armed with a gun & the black humour that's as necessary as kevlar for protection ("I could spot a fake Chanel handbag quicker than I could spot a hooker on fire").

Her achilles heel is her husband who creates popular video games. They've been married for 11 years & his success affords them an affluent lifestyle. Unfortunately, he's not a big fan of monogamy & Lou suspects he's fallen off the wagon again (quick moment of your time, Lou....kick this rat bastard to the curb....NOW). Other characters include her BFF's Lena & Syeeda, a freelance reporter featured in the book "No One Knows You're Here". Their relationships come across as genuine, the kind of gal pals who have your back. Colin is an unwitting source of humour. He's a recent transplant from Colorado & couldn't be a bigger fish out of water. Compared to his home town, LA might as well be Mars & his character is the perfect foil for the street smart Lou.

Except for chapters narrated by the killer, the story is told from Lou's POV. The prose is fluid, descriptive & witty as we accompany her throughout the investigation. Her wry comments concerning the city & its' inhabitants run the gamut from funny to poignant, making the reader feel as if they're in the car with her, riding shotgun.

If pressed, I had two minor quibbles with the story. One concerns the sister of the first victim. Without

divulging more of the plot ( there are some startling revelations in store), she begins her own investigation with Lou's tacit support & this just didn't ring true for me. I get that Lou identifies with being the sister left behind but I doubt any homicide detective would encourage a family member to actively search for a dangerous killer.

The other is the amount of space dedicated to flashbacks into Lou & Tori's childhood. We revisit much of their life before Tori was snatched & I felt this slowed the pace & interrupted the mounting tension of the current investigation. However, other readers may enjoy this in-depth history so I think it's just a matter of taste.

By the end, our killer is uncovered & Lou is left reeling from what she learns of Tori's fate. It's a stylish, fast paced read that keeps you turning the pages. I would definitely pick up a sequel to find out what's in store next for Lou & Co.

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## **Tina says**

Homicide detective Elouise ???Lou??? Norton and her new partner, Colin, are called out to a condo construction site for what initially appears to be a teenage suicide. But, after viewing the scene Lou is convinced that this is a homicide not suicide.

As she delves deeper into the case she starts finding more and more evidence that this murder is related to the disappearance of her sister, Tori. Thirty years ago, Tori and Lou walked to the store where Tori was caught shoplifting. Lou was terrified and immediately ran home. That was the last time she ever saw her sister. Obsessed with finding out what happened to Tori, Lou will go to any lengths to find the murderer. With her job and marriage on the line, Lou will not give up, but as she gets closer to the truth she also gets closer to a violent killer who already has her in his sight.

I enjoyed the characters in this book and the story moved along very well. I???ll definitely be watching for more books from this author.

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