



The Red Chameleon

Erica Wright

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As a private investigator, Kathleen Stone relies on her ability to blend into the background. Aided by her street-smart drag queen friend and the best wigmaker in New York City, she feels confident that her camouflage is up to snuff. But when a cheating spouse she's been trailing ends up dead under suspicious circumstances, she fears that someone she angered in her past job--busting gangs and drug dealers as an undercover cop--has seen through her disguises. Now she must work with her former colleagues in the NYPD to solve the case before she's the next victim.

The Red Chameleon Details

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From Reader Review The Red Chameleon for online ebook

Olivia Farr says

"The Red Chameleon" tells the story of Kathleen Stone who escapes her life into her work as a PI, with lots of different personalities/disguises. Her past is quickly catching up to her after the man she is tailing to examine for cheating ends up shot at the bar where she had followed him. Investigating his death takes her into her past and finds her confronting the people she used to know when she was with the police.

The book is pretty slow at first with in-depth descriptions of wigs and costumes, making the story a little scattered at first. It picks up halfway through and becomes really interesting as we get into solving the murder. There's a bit of a forced love triangle with two of Kathleen's former colleagues and I think we could have done without one of them, as it felt a little forced.

It's a relatively short and thus quick book overall, but I kept putting it down during the first part, as I found it a little hard to follow/less interesting. The ending was worth it, and I really liked the character as we got to know her better and her quirks started to make more sense. I am curious to see where this series will go/if the next one will be more focused/fast-paced.

Please note that I received this book through a goodreads giveaway. All opinions are my own.

Steph Post says

I love Kat Stone and it was great to go back and discover her origins (I read The Granite Moth first). An original, interesting female P.I. and one that I will definitely be following!

Cheryl says

This was a fun, quick read. However, I had a hard time understanding how a former NYPD detective could make such amateur mistakes. Unfortunately, I notice this a lot in mystery books with a female lead. It would be much more appealing to have an intelligent, competent female lead than one who bumbles through situations. I enjoyed the Kathleen/Marco/Ellis dynamic, although I wish that the author had developed these relationships a bit more. Meeza was also an enjoyable character. Perhaps this is the start of a series and that is why things were left so open? If so, I like these characters enough to read the next installment in the series.

Gordon says

Good, basic fun. I read these books when I'm overwhelmed by the realities of my world. The lead character in this crime novel is an interesting girl, the prose is solid, and I look forward to reading more books by Wright who is an established American poet and an editor of a prominent poetry magazine. For those of you who are native New Yorkers, the sights and sounds of the city are a pleasure as are the discomforts of the ex-policewoman who has become a not-so-hard-boiled detective. Fun.

Julie McElwain says

I picked up *A Red Chameleon* before the holidays, and only managed to read the first chapter before work and Christmas overwhelmed me, and I was forced to put the book down. Once the holidays were over, and work became a bit more manageable, I resumed reading, which I've been itching to do, and almost finished the book in one sitting (If I could pull all-nighters like I used to, I could have finished it in one sitting.) Erica Wright did everything that I love in a series — she created a cool, complicated, kick-ass female protagonist with Kathleen Stone, a solid mystery that I could not figure out until the killer was revealed at the end, and, oh, yeah, a couple of hot guys that had me speculating over a possible romance for the heroine.

Ms. Wright deftly balanced the tension in the book (which involved Kathleen's past as an undercover detective and her present as a P.I., hunting for the murderer of the man she'd been hired to tail) with a wonderful dry wit that had me smiling and laughing. One snippet: a character at a country retreat who struggles to express her concern through her Botox. Still makes me smile.

Next up on my reading agenda is the sequel, *The Granite Moth*. I only hope that there will be more Kathleen Stone. The character deserves her place with other beloved female detectives like Sara Paretsky's V.I. Warshawski and even Janet Evanovich's more lighthearted Stephanie Plum.

GateGypsy says

This was a fun book. It's clearly the beginning of a series, establishing characters that will run through it, and a love triangle that has our main character flummoxed. As far as love triangles go, though, it's a lot better than what one generally finds on the market, with believable reasons why characters may be vying for the main character's attention.

The mystery was interesting, and I suppose, as a person who knows nothing about the police, really, or PIs in general, the reasons for our main character to be involved in the investigation seem legit enough.

I'll be moving on to the next book and looking forward to finding out what happens next with the unanswered questions at the end of the first :o)

Mallory (toweroftomes) says

Find this review and more fantastical things at [The Leaning Tower of Tomes](#).

Source: I received this book from the publisher in exchange for an honest review. Thank you, Iris and Pegasus Books!

The review:

Kathleen Stone is a Private Investigator and ex-NYPD undercover cop. Her current job has her tailing a potentially cheating husband... until the man ends up murdered and Kat finds herself trying to solve a “whodunit?” case. The mystery, while a pretty standard plot, does have many layers that get uncovered and explored. This is both a good and a not so good thing. Good, because the mystery is actually pretty complex at times, but not always so good because I found myself forgetting various things brought up and mentioned. The plot sprawled a bit too much for my taste.

There are some great aspects of the book, don't get me wrong. Perhaps one of my favorite parts is the setting: New York City, almost exclusively Manhattan. This book was written by a New Yorker, poet Erica Wright, and this book was read by a New Yorker — me! It was very cool following Kathleen around my crib. All the locations were explained accurately and in detail. Rest assured that the author isn't making assumptions about the setting!

Kat Stone was an interesting protagonist. Despite making some seemingly amateur decisions for an ex-undercover cop, she felt very real. Her voice sounded current; she appeared like any young woman her age living in today's world, complete with the appropriate snark. (I love snark and snarky characters. Kat's not an overly snarky person, but her quips are well used and placed.)

Kathleen's also a chameleon — she has many identities and different wigs to accompany them. Going into the book I was skeptical that her multiple personas would be a gimmick, but they, thankfully, are not. I never had too much trouble keeping her different identities straight, but I found that each and every one of her characters didn't act a whole lot different. It was still Kathleen Stone under it all. Which I actually prefer; I want to get attached to a protagonist instead of having them be five different people at the same time.

The supporting characters make up a good cast, but I wish they'd all been fleshed out some more. I'm sure we'll get to know them better in future books, though. Meeza was definitely my favorite. She had a great energy to her and really complemented Kat's personality. Plus, she cracked me up. I liked Dolly, but I wanted him to have more page time, and play a more prominent role in everything. Then there were the two guys Kathleen has histories with: Detective Ellis Dekker and undercover agent Marco Medina. Both men are very different, and it's obvious Kat still has deep feelings for both of them (and for each of them, vice versa with her). I liked Ellis for his patience and dedication, and for his faith in Kat, and I liked Marco for his raw edges and air of mystery. Ellis is a much more prominent character than Marco in the book, but I thought that Kathleen and Marco had more chemistry together.

The Red Chameleon is a good mystery with solid writing that flows well and is upbeat. The pacing, however, while never slow, didn't always entice me. It took me a while to motivate myself to read more than just a chapter or two at a time. A reason for this is probably the plot, which, while perfectly fine, isn't wholly original. There are no surprising or unique spins. The case wasn't rich or funky enough to completely hook me in, but I did mostly enjoy The Red Chameleon. It was entertaining to see where Kathleen was snooping around, and I think she is a compelling character with much room to grow. ♦

So tell me...

Have you read The Red Chameleon? If you haven't, would you be interested to? What was the last crime/mystery book you read? What is a book you've read that is set in New York City? Comment below letting me know! And, as always, happy reading!

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Paige Ellen Stone says

Ah, the first novel by a new author. I bought this novel because I am a bit OCD when it comes to authors. Erica Wright has asked me to review her second novel. Since it involves the same characters, I felt, yes, compelled to read this predecessor to "The Granite Moth," her second novel, which I am now nearly finished reading.

But to the task at hand. First novels are a achievement, even in this day when self-publishing is so easy. Having the guts to put one's work out there and say, 'there it is. I believe this is worth your time.' In this case, I am happy to say, it is well worth the time. Erica Wright writes as if she was born to it. Her prose flows easily. I did not find this novel to be a "page turner", but the characters and the story line held my interest such that, despite losing no sleep, I read quickly and with enjoyment.

One of my requirements in any protagonist is a snarky attitude. Ms Wright's lead character, whose given name is Kathleen Stone, goes by more names than I can count, mostly female names and personae, with the one exception of Keith, her one male persona. Kat is a former undercover police person, whose "big" case ended with a cloud of doubt hanging over her head. She was so worn out from the assignment that she took a break from policework that became permanent. Like so many other protagonists in mystery novels, she is a former cop now working in the private sector. As to snark, she is very snarky but tends to keep it to herself, in her first person narrative.

That is the challenge, how to take a (sorry) tired premise and draw the reader in. She does this with skill and aplomb. I found myself fascinated by the cast of characters (and characters they are) with whom she surrounds herself. Her best friend is Dolly, a drag queen who is the star at the city's leading drag club. They met at the workplace of the wigmaker they have in common, who working out of Brighton beach is, of course, a character herself. Dolly and Kat agree on one thing for sure, their wigmaker is the best in town. She can handle the needs of Dolly, which are, of course, outrageous, as well as she meets the needs of Kat, who is a master of disguise, with identities ranging from her cover as a real estate agent to soccer mom, and so forth.

Another character to whom we are introduced is Meeza, who moves from being a secretary for all the tenants on the floor to taking a job as Kat's personal assistant, and whom starts to become a P.I. in her own right. The plot involves something typically mundane for a run of the mill P.I., which quickly becomes more complicated and draws Kat into a possible brush with "the one that got away" from her undercover case. He is a mobster and he is a danger to Kat and her loved ones.

The story unfolds with some lovely twists and turns and ends in a way that is mostly satisfying but clearly sets up a sequel. It's all good.

If I have one criticism, there are times when, as the text flows, I felt that Ms Wright was struggling for the right word, and I believe sometimes did not come up with the word she wanted. That is a minor thing, believe me, as it does not interfere with the story in any way.

In truth, given that this is a first novel, I would have given it 4.5 stars but the ratings systems don't allow for that. Here is why I found it a cut above most first novels. Ms Wright's prose flows easily as I have said. To her credit, despite the sometimes seamy settings and characters, her language is spot on without indulging in trying to demonstrate her "street creds" by utilizing foul language, graphic violence or drawn out, overly detailed sex scenes.

This is a very good novel by an up and coming author. I recommend "The Red Chameleon" highly and look forward to her next book.

Wanda says

I believe I have found a new author for my reading reservoir. Erica Wright drew me into the story after the first few pages. I wanted to know how the story would unravel and reach that peak.

Through every reminiscence of romantic escapades, work, and personal setbacks, I didn't get lost nor side-tracked as to what the main idea of the story was about. At every turn, I was trying to piece together the significance of the term "the red chameleon"--the power of appearance. The use of hair was a nice twist as the foundation for this mystery story. I thoroughly enjoyed this read.

Marie says

You know a book is good when you're sad it ends, and you know a character is good when you can imagine what she's doing when she's not IN the book. It might seem odd for a poet to write a crime mystery novel, but Erica's poems are always precise and underscored with danger just out of sight, which makes her the perfect person to write noir. The Red Chameleon is tight, funny, and thrilling. I had to stop myself from finishing it in one travel day, reading half on the plane to vacation, and the other half on the way home. And now I want the next installment in what I hope is a series!

Skip says

Hard to believe that a former NYC undercover cop could make SO many stupid decisions, and have things miraculously work out. Told from perspective of heroine Katherine Stone, we follow her around. The highlight is her ability to play many roles, with an impressive collection of wigs and outfits, her friend Dolly, and occasional humor. Reminiscent, but not as good as Evanovich's Stephanie Plum, Kat even has dual love interests, but a failure to launch. The downside is this book lacks thrills, any real mystery, and a clear ending. Also, the attempt to integrate her back story was choppy and distracting. Skip it.

Frances Post says

The Red Chameleon is full of verve and intrigue, humor and lots of wig changes. The plot keeps you on the edge of your seat, not able to put the book down, but what's most exciting is the quality of the writing. It's no surprise that Erica Wright is also an award-winning poet. This book offers a rare delight: a thriller that cares much about plot as it does language. Kathleen Stone is a nuanced and complex protagonist, a joy to accompany on the twists and turns of The Red Chameleon. This is a summer must-read.

Laureen Andrews says

Not the best narration. Sometimes strange words or syllables accented, like it's the first time she's reading a phrase, such as: "I'd have to wait for the parking lot to get a couple shot" making it sound like she was planning to shoot them with a gun rather than a camera.

Anne says

A young ex-undercover cop starts her own PI firm investigating cheating spouses only to find herself embroiled in a murder investigation. My favorite part about this book was the main character who's smart, a go-getter, funny, and at times immature. But I found her immaturity to be one of the most intriguing things about her. She lost sight of who she was during her stint as an undercover cop and she's trying to find herself again. The plot was a simple who-dun-it mystery (at times a little too simple) with a hard-boiled detective novel feel to it that I liked. The ending, however, felt rushed and didn't do justice to the rest of the novel.

James Hill says

The Red Chameleon is the first of at least two Kathleen Stone mysteries, and I hope there are many, many more. To this reader, what makes Stone a unique detective in the genre is her vulnerability, a quality often suppressed in female sleuths, lest we mistrust their competence. Erica Wright, an acclaimed poet, infuses her sentences with plenty of concise power, but the twisting, satisfying plot, with its many, often amusing pit stops in the seedy underworld, betrays no evidence that the author wasn't born to write mysteries.
