

The Love Killers Short Guide

The Love Killers by Jackie Collins

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Characters

Regular fans of Collins will find the familiar female character types in *The Love Killers*: the five B's — the brain, the bitch, the baby, the bombshell, and the bimbo. Cass Long, "a short, untidy-looking woman, with cropped brown hair and a cheerful disposition," is the brain in that she has little sex appeal and serves as the secretary and assistant to Margaret and the "avengers." Rio Java is the bitch: "over six feet tall . . . starvation thin, with a long dramatic face, shaved eyebrows, and exotic makeup . . . part Cherokee Indian and part Louisiana hillbilly [who] lived her life exactly as she pleased." The baby is the ingenue Beth Brown, "twenty, . . . clear-skinned and fair haired, with hair that hung straight and thick, reaching below her waist. She was a very pretty girl. Her face had a childlike innocence, with large blue eyes and a wide, soft mouth." Lara Crichton, the Collins love-goddess-type, is the bombshell: "a perfectly beautiful woman of twentysix. Slim, suntanned, with rounded sensual breasts, a mane of sun-streaked hair, and wide, crystal-clear green eyes." The bimbo, who wears tight, very low-cut dresses, and caters to Enzo's every whim in the expectation that it will pay off in some kind of financial security when he eventually dumps her, is Mary Ann August.

The male characters include the familiar heartless, powerful tyrant, Enzo Bassolino, whose only apparent weakness is his three sons. The sons are all handsome and intelligent, and although Frank, the oldest, is becoming as ruthless as the father, the other two have some redeeming qualities that make them almost — but not quite — irresistible to the two women who are out to destroy them.

Dukey Williams and Rose Bassolino, Enzo's crazed wife, are the "loose cannons" Collins always has in her novels — the unknown quantity with an unpredictable but profound impact on the outcome of the other characters' plans.

Social Concerns

The conflicts and motivations of this novel are based on the revenge theme and such social concerns as the feminist movement and organized crime.

Within the first two chapters, a leading advocate of women's rights, Margaret Lawrence Brown, is assassinated, and it is soon revealed that her successful campaign to encourage prostitutes to leave that life has so interfered with the operation of one crime boss's profits that he ordered a "hit" on her. Although equality for women is not preached, Collins shows through the aggressive response of the women who knew and loved Margaret that women can take charge of their lives.

The women characters seek revenge against the assassins with an elaborate scheme designed to get at the crime boss through his sons. Three entirely different types of women, bonded by their friendship and admiration for Margaret, plan three different methods to entrap the three sons of crime boss Enzo Bassolino. Another character also seeks revenge: Margaret's lover, who has no patience for the complicated schemes the women have planned.

These four revenge stratagems create four narrative threads. One other character, late in the story, also plots revenge directly against Enzo. All come together, in typical Collins style, in the last few pages for a lurid climax. Collins presents revenge as a legitimate response to uncivilized, brutal behavior, and as handled by Collins, the efforts of the avengers are cheered by the reader who finds satisfaction in the women's ultimate success. Collins does not often show women working together to achieve an end; this story makes for a surprisingly strong statement about the power of women working in concert.

Collins depicts a family of modern criminals, the Bassolinos, and shows how organized crime works in today's world: the far-flung enterprises and the proverbial far-reaching tentacles of violent reprisal. The father is the coldblooded, merciless crime boss; the three sons are involved in the family business with varying degrees of dedication. The brutality of these criminals, their seeming respectability, and their avarice are vividly detailed in scenes where crime boss Enzo and his lieutenants carry out the whims of his hard, cruel mind. The way they operate comments on the cleverness and corruption that underlies the facade of seemingly respectable business enterprise.

Techniques/Literary Precedents

Unlike her other recent novels, *The Love Killers* is told chronologically, beginning with Margaret Lawrence Brown's killing. No in media res opening, no lengthy flashbacks: Collins deals with each major character's actions sequentially so that the reader knows what each is doing at approximately the same time as the others.

There are the usual four-lettered dialogue and several scenes of lovemaking and violence. Seekers of disguised celebrities will be disappointed for the most part; this novel is not likely to be thought a roman a clef. Only three very incidental characters hint at possible "real" people: Billy Express, April Crawford, and Sammy Albert, and there is not much about them to warrant scrutinized speculation. *The Love Killers* is a mainstream novel with sex, violence, and a happy ending.



Related Titles

Originally written in 1974 and published as *Lovehead*, this novel is similar in style and length to Collins's earlier novels, like *The Stud* (1969) and *The World Is Full of Married Men* (1968).

In subject it is closer to *Chances* (1981) and *Lucky* (1985). It almost seems a 1980s Collins book in the making: It is as if it were the detailed outline of a novel in progress, with its complete intricate plotting, fast-paced montage of scenes, fully-drawn characters, and exciting climax. But it lacks the thorough exposition and description typical of a Collins book.



Copyright Information

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