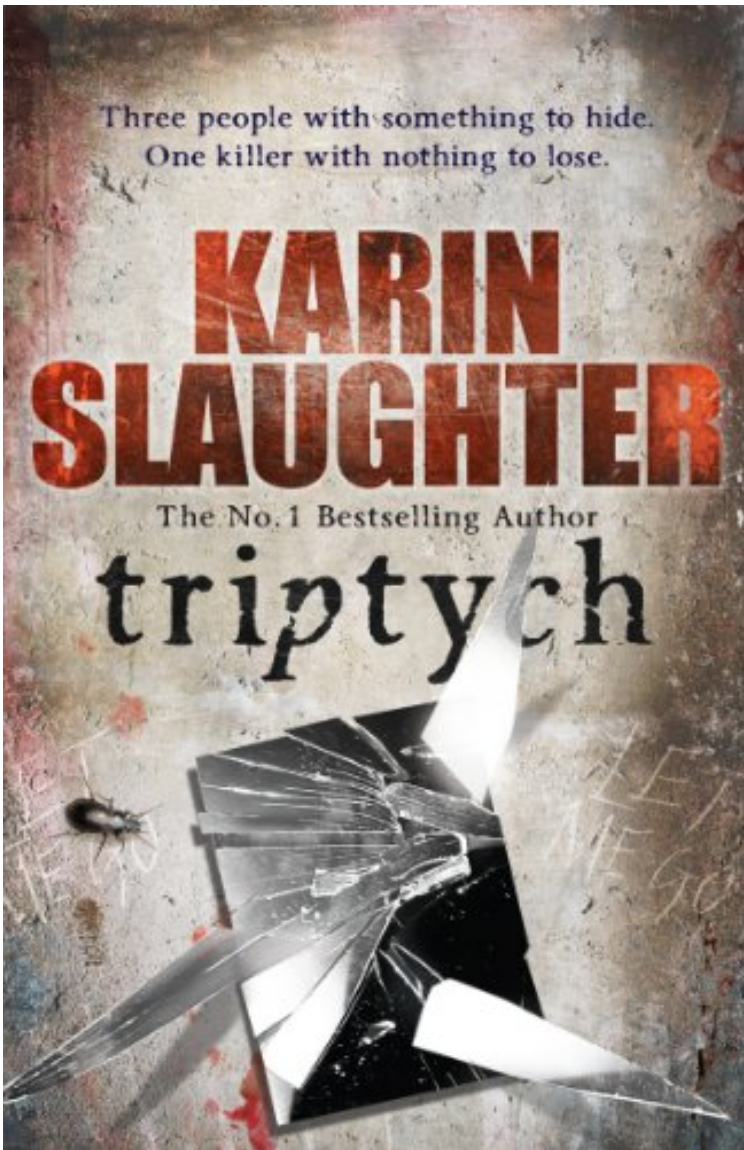


(Free download) File size: 27.Mb

# Triptych: (Will Trent Series Book 1)



*Par Karin Slaughter*  
*ePub | \*DOC | audiobook | ebooks |*  
*Download PDF*

Dtails sur le produit Rang parmi les ventes : #69079 dans eBooksPubli le: 2008-09-04Sorti le: 2008-09-04Format: Ebook Kindle

(Free download) Triptych: (Will Trent Series Book 1)

**Par Karin Slaughter : Triptych: (Will Trent Series Book 1)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Triptych: (Will Trent Series Book 1):

Download

Read Online

## Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurThe first Will Trent novel, from the No. 1 Bestseller. When Atlanta police detective Michael Ormewood is called out to a murder scene at the notorious Grady Homes, he finds himself faced with one of the the most brutal killings of his career: Aleesha Monroe is found in the stairwell in a pool of her own blood, her body horribly mutilated. As a one-off killing it's shocking, but when it becomes clear that it's just the latest in a series of similar attacks, the Georgia Bureau of Investigation are called in, and Michael is forced into working with Special Agent Will Trent of the Criminal Apprehension Team - a man he instinctively dislikes. Twenty-four hours later, the violence Michael sees around him every day explodes in his own back yard. And it seems the mystery behind Monroe's death is inextricably entangled with a past

that refuses to stay buried ...ExtraitChapter One February 5, 2006 Detective Michael Ormewood listened to the football game on the radio as he drove down DeKalb Avenue toward Grady Homes. The closer he got to the projects, the more tension he felt, his body almost vibrating from the strain by the time he took a right into what most cops considered a war zone. As the Atlanta Housing Authority slowly devoured itself, subsidized communities like Grady were becoming a thing of the past. The in-town real estate was too valuable, the potential for kickback too high. Right up the road was the city of Decatur, with its trendy restaurants and million-dollar houses. Less than a mile in the other direction was Georgias gold-encrusted capitol dome. Grady was like a worse-case scenario sitting between them, a living reminder that the city too busy to hate was also too busy to take care of its own. With the game on, the streets were fairly empty. The drug dealers and pimps were taking the night off to watch that rarest of miracles occur: the Atlanta Falcons playing in the Super Bowl. This being a Sunday night, the prostitutes were still out making a living, trying to give the churchgoers something to confess next week. Some of the girls waved at Michael as he drove past, and he returned the greeting, wondering how many unmarked cars stopped here during the middle of the night, cops telling Dispatch they were taking a ten-minute break, then motioning over one of the girls to help blow off some steam. Building nine was in the back of the development, the crumbling red brick edifice tagged by the Ratz, one of the new gangs that had moved into the Homes. Four cruisers and another unmarked car were in front of the building, lights rolling, radios squawking. Parked in the residents spaces were a black BMW and a pimped out Lincoln Navigator, its ten-thousand-dollar razor rims glittering gold in the streetlights. Michael fought the urge to jerk the steering wheel, take some paint off the seventy-thousand-dollar SUV. It pissed him off to see the expensive cars the bangers drove. In the last month, Michaels kid had shot up about four inches, outgrowing all his jeans, but new clothes would have to wait for Michaels next paycheck. Tim looked like he was waiting for a high tide while Daddys tax dollars went to help these thugs pay their rent. Instead of getting out of his car, Michael waited, listening to another few seconds of the game, enjoying a moments peace before his world turned upside down. He had been on the force for almost fifteen years now, going straight from the army to the police, realizing too late that other than the haircut, there wasnt that much difference between the two. He knew that as soon as he got out of his car it would all start up like a clock that was wound too tight. The sleepless nights, the endless leads that never panned out, the bosses breathing down his neck. The press would probably catch on to it, too. Then hed have cameras stuck in his face every time he left the squad, people asking him why the case wasnt solved, his son seeing it on the news and asking Daddy why people were so mad at him. Collier, a young beat cop with biceps so thick with muscle he couldnt put his arms down flat against his sides, tapped on the glass, gesturing for Michael to roll down his window. Collier had made a circling motion with his meaty hand, even though the kid had probably never been in a car with crank windows. Michael pressed the button on the console, saying, Yeah? as the glass slid down. Whos winning? Not Atlanta, Michael told him, and Collier nodded as if he had expected the news. Atlantas previous trip to the Super Bowl was several years back. Denver had thumped them 3419. Collier asked, Hows Ken? Hes Ken, Michael answered, not offering an elaboration on his partners health. Could use him on this. The patrolman jerked his head toward the building. Its pretty nasty. Michael kept his own counsel. The kid was in his early twenties, probably living in his mothers basement, thinking he was a man because he strapped on a gun every day. Michael had met several Colliers in the Iraqi desert when the first Bush had decided to go in. They were all eager pups with that glint in their eye that told you they had joined up for more than three squares and a free education. They were obsessed with duty and honor, all that shit theyd seen on TV and been fed by the recruiters who plucked them out of high school like ripe cherries. They had been promised technical training and home-side base assignments, anything that would get them to sign on the dotted line. Most of them ended up being shipped off on the first transport plane to the desert, where they got shot before they could put their helmets on. Ted Greer came out of the building, tugging at his tie like he needed air. The lieutenant was pasty for a black man, spending most of his time behind his desk basking in the fluorescent lights as he waited for his retirement to kick in. He saw Michael still sitting in the car and scowled. You working tonight or just out for a drive? Michael took his time getting out, sliding the key out of the ignition just as the halftime commentary started on the radio. The evening was warm for February, and the air-conditioning units people had stuck in their windows buzzed like bees around a hive. Greer barked at Collier, You got something to do? Collier had the sense to leave, tucking his chin to his chest like hed been popped on the nose. Fucking mess, Greer told Michael. He took out his handkerchief and wiped the sweat off his forehead. Some kind of sick perv got ahold of her. Michael had heard as much when hed gotten the call that pulled him off his living-room couch. Where is she? Six

flights up. Greer folded the handkerchief into a neat square and tucked it into his pocket. We traced the nine-one-one call to that phone. He pointed across the street. Michael stared at the phone booth, a relic of the past. Everybody had cell phones now, especially dealers and bangers. Womans voice, Greer told him. Well have the tape sometime tomorrow. How long did it take to get somebody out here? Thirty-two minutes, Greer told him, and Michaels only surprise was that it hadnt taken longer. According to a local news team investigation, response times to emergency calls from Grady averaged around forty-five minutes. An ambulance took even longer. Greer turned back to the building as if it could absolve him. Were gonna have to call in some help on this one. Michael bristled at the suggestion. Statistically, Atlanta was one of the most violent cities in America. A dead hooker was hardly an earth-shattering development, especially considering where she was found. He told Greer, Thats all I need is more assholes telling me how to do my job. This asshole thinks its exactly what you need, the lieutenant countered. Michael knew better than to arguenot because Greer wouldnt tolerate insubordination, but because hed agree with Michael just to shut him up, then turn around and do whatever the hell he wanted to anyway. Greer added, This ones bad. Theyre all bad, Michael reminded him, opening the back door to his car and taking out his suit jacket. Girl didnt have a chance, Greer continued. Beat, cut, fucked six ways to Sunday. We got a real sick fuck on our hands. Michael put on his jacket, thinking Greer sounded like he was auditioning for HBO. Kens out of the hospital. Said come by and see him anytime. Greer made some noises about being real busy lately before trotting off toward his car, looking back over his shoulder as if he was afraid Michael would follow. Michael waited until his boss was in his car and pulling out of the lot before he headed toward the building. Collier stood at the doorway, hand resting on the butt of his gun. He probably thought he was keeping watch, but Michael knew that the person who had committed this crime wasnt going to come back for more. He was finished with the woman. There was nothing else he wanted to do. Collier said, The boss left fast. Thanks for the news flash. Michael braced himself as he opened the door, letting the damp, dark building slowly draw him in. Whoever had designed the Homes hadnt been thinking about happy kids coming home from school to warm cookies and milk. They had focused on security, keeping open spaces to a minimum and covering all the light fixtures in steel mesh to protect the bulbs. The walls were exposed concrete with narrow windows tucked into tight little corners, the safety wire embedded in the glass looking like uniform cobwebs. Spray paint covered surfaces that had been painted white once upon a time. Gang tags, warnings and various pieces of information covered them now. To the right of the front door, someone had scrawled, Kim is a ho! Kim is a ho! Kim is a ho! Michael was looking up the winding staircase, counting the six flights, when a door creaked open. He turned to find an ancient black woman staring at him, her coal dark eyes peering out around the edge of the steel door. Police, he said, holding up his badge. Dont be afraid. The door opened wider. She was wearing a floral apron over a stained white T-shirt and jeans. I aint afraid you, bitch. Clustered behind her were four old women, all but one of them African-American. Michael knew they werent here to help. Grady, like any small community, thrived on gossip and these were the mouths that fed the supply line. Still, he had to ask, Any of yall see anything? They shook their heads in unison, bobbleheads on the Grady dashboard. Thats great, Michael said, tucking his badge back into his pocket as he headed toward the stairs. Thanks for helping keep your community safe. She snapped, Thats your job, cocksucker. He stopped, his foot still on the bottom stair as he turned back toward her, looking her straight in the eye. She returned the glare, rheumy eyes shifting back and forth like she was reading the book of his life. The woman was younger than the others, probably in her early seventies, but somehow grayer and smaller than her companions. Spidery lines crinkled the skin around her lips, wrinkles etched from years of sucking on cigarettes. A shock of gray streaked through the hair on the top of her head as well as the ones corkscrewing out of her chin like dreadlocks. She wore the most startling shade of orange lipstick he had ever seen on a woman. He asked, Whats your name? Her chin tilted up in defiance, but she told him, Nora. Somebody made a nine-one-one call from that phone booth outside. I hope they wash they hands after. Michael allowed a smile. Did you know her? We all knowed her. Her tone indicated there was a lot more to be told but she wasnt the one who was going to tell it to some dumb-ass white cop. Obviously, Nora didnt exactly have a college degree under her belt, but Michael had never set much store by that kind of thing. He could tell from her eyes that the woman was sharp. She obviously had street smarts. You didnt live to be that old in a place like Grady by being stupid. Michael took his foot off the step, walking back toward the cluster of women. She working? Nora kept her eye on him, still wary. Most nights. The white woman behind her provided, She an honest girl. Nora tsked her tongue. Such a young little thing. There was a hint of challenge in her voice when she said, No kind of life for her, but what else could she do? Michael nodded like he understood. Did

she have any regulars? They all shook their heads, and Nora provided, She never brought her work home with her. Michael waited, wondering if they would add anything else. He counted the seconds off in his head, thinking hed let it go to twenty. A helicopter flew over the building and car wheels squealed against asphalt a couple of streets over, but no one paid attention. This was the sort of neighborhood where people got nervous if they didnt hear gunshots at least a couple of times a week. There was a natural order to their lives, and violence or the threat of it was as much a part of it as fast food and cheap liquor. All right, Michael said, having counted the seconds to twenty-five. He took out one of his business cards, handing it to Nora as he told her, Something to wipe your ass on. She grunted in disgust, holding the card between her thumb and forefinger. My ass is bigger than that. He gave her a suggestive wink, made his voice a growl. Dont think I hadnt noticed, darlin. She barked a laugh as she slammed the door in his face. She had kept the card, though. He had to take that as a positive sign. Michael walked back to the stairs, taking the first flight two at a time.

All of the buildings at Grady had elevators, but even the ones that worked were dangerous. As a first-year patrolman, Michael had been called out to the Homes on a domestic disturbance and gotten caught in one of the creaky contraptions with a busted radio. He had spent about two hours trying not to add to the overwhelming smell of piss and vomit before his sergeant realized he hadnt reported in and sent somebody to look for him. The old-timers had laughed at his stupidity for another half hour before helping get him out.

Welcome to the brotherhood. As Michael started on the second flight of stairs, he felt a change in the air.

The smell hit him first: the usual odor of fried foods mingled with beer and sweat, cut by the sudden but unmistakable stench of violent death. The building had responded to the fatality in the usual way. Instead of the constant thump of rap beating from multiple speakers, Michael heard only the murmur of voices from behind closed doors. Televisions were turned down low, the halftime show serving as background noise while people talked about the girl on the sixth floor and thanked the Lord it was her this time and not their children, their daughters, themselves. In this relative quiet, sounds started to echo down the stairwell: the familiar rhythms of a crime scene as evidence was gathered, photos taken. Michael stopped at the bottom of the fourth-floor landing to catch his breath. He had given up smoking two months ago but his lungs hadnt really believed him. He felt like an asthmatic as he made his way up the next flight of stairs. Above him, someone barked a laugh, and he could hear the other cops join in, participating in the usual bullshit bravado that made it possible for them to do the job. Downstairs, a door slammed open, and Michael leaned over the railing, watching two women wrangle a gurney inside the foyer. They were wearing dark blue rain jackets, bright yellow letters announcing MORGUE on their backs. Michael called, Up here. How far up? one of them asked. Sixth floor. Mother fuck, she cursed. Michael grabbed the handrail and pulled himself up the next few stairs, hearing the two women offer up more expletives as they started the climb, the gurney banging against the metal railings like a broken bell. He was one flight away from the top when he felt the hairs on the back of his neck stand up. Sweat had glued his shirt to his back, but some sort of sixth sense sent a chill through him. A flash popped and a camera whirred. Michael stepped carefully around a red stiletto shoe that was flat on the stair, looking as if someone had sat down and slipped it off. The next step up had the perfect outline of a bloody hand gripping the tread. The next stair had another handprint, then another, as someone had crawled up the stairs. Standing on the landing at the top of the fifth flight was Bill Burgess, a seasoned beat cop who had seen just about every kind of crime Atlanta had to offer. Beside him was a dark pool of coagulating blood, the edges spreading in rivulets that dropped from one step to the next like falling dominoes. Michael read the scene. Someone had stumbled here, struggled to get up, smearing blood as she tried to escape. Bill was looking down the stairs, away from the blood. His skin was blanched, his lips a thin slash of pink. Michael stopped short, thinking hed never seen Bill flustered before. This was the man whod gone out for chicken wings an hour after finding six severed fingers in the Dumpster behind a Chinese restaurant. The two men did not speak as Michael carefully stepped over the puddle of blood. He kept his hand on the rail, making the turn to the next flight of stairs, thankful for something to hold on to when he saw the scene in front of him. The woman was partially clothed, her tight red dress cut open like a robe, showing dark cocoa skin and a wisp of black pubic hair that had been shaved into a thin line leading down to her cleft. Her breasts were unnaturally high on her chest, implants holding them up in perfection. One arm was out to her side, the other rested above her head, fingers reaching toward the handrail as if her last thoughts had been to pull herself up. Her right leg was bent at the knee, splayed open, the left jutting at an angle so that he could see straight up her slit. Michael took another step, blocking out the activity around him, trying to see the woman as her killer would have seen her. Makeup smeared her face, heavy lipstick and rouge applied in dark lines to bring out her features. Her curly black hair was streaked with orange, teased

out in all directions. Her body was nice, or nicer than you'd expect from what the needle marks on her arms indicated she was: a woman with a habit she fed between her legs. The bruises on her thighs could have come from her killer or a john who liked it rough. If it was the latter, then she had probably willingly endured it, knowing she'd be able to get more money for the pain, knowing more money meant more pleasure later on when the needle plunged in and that warm feeling spread through her veins. Her eyes were wide open, staring blankly at the wall. One of her fake eyelashes had come loose, making a third lash under her left eye. Her nose was broken, her cheek shifted off center where the bones beneath the eye had been shattered. Light reflected against something in her open mouth, and Michael took another step closer, seeing that it was filled to the top with liquid and that the liquid was blood. The light overhead glinted off the red pool like a harvest moon. Pete Hanson, the medical examiner on call, stood at the top of the stairs talking to Leo Donnelly. Leo was an asshole, always playing the tough cop, joking about everything, laughing too loud and long, but Michael had seen him at the bar one too many times, his hand a constant blur as he slammed back one scotch after another, trying to get the taste of death out of his mouth. Leo spotted Michael and cracked a smile, like they were old pals getting together for a good time. He was holding a sealed plastic evidence bag in his hand and he kept tossing it a couple of inches in the air and catching it like he was getting ready to play ball. Leo said, Hell of a night to be on call. Michael didn't voice his agreement. What happened? Leo kept tossing the bag, weighing it in his hand. Doc says she bled to death. Maybe, Pete corrected. Michael knew the doctor liked Leo about as much as everyone else on the force, which was to say he couldn't stand the bastard. I'll know more when I get her on the table. Catch, Leo said, tossing the evidence bag down to Michael. Michael saw it in slow motion, the bag sailing through the air end over end like a lopsided football. He caught it before it hit the ground, his fingers wrapping around something thick and obviously wet. Leo said, Something for your cat. What the Michael stopped. He knew what it was. Lookit his face! Leo's shotgun laugh echoed off the walls. Michael could only stare at the bag. He felt blood at the back of his throat, tasted that metallic sting of unexpected fear. The voice that came out of his mouth did not sound like his own; it was more like he was under water, maybe drowning. What happened? Leo was still laughing, so Pete answered, He bit off her tongue. CHAPTER TWO February 6, 2006 When he had returned from the Gulf War, Michael had been haunted by his dreams. As soon as he closed his eyes, he saw the bullets coming at him, the bombs blowing off arms and legs, children running down the road, screaming for their mamas. Michael knew where their mothers were. He had stood helplessly as the women banged the closed windows of the schoolhouse, trying to break their way out as fire from an exploded grenade burned them alive. Aleesha Monroe was haunting him now. The tongueless woman in the stairway had followed him home, worked some kind of magic in his dreams so that it was Michael chasing her up the stairs, Michael forcing her back onto the landing and splitting her in two. He could feel her long red nails sinking into his skin as she tried to fight him off, choking him. He couldn't breathe. He started clawing at his neck, her hands, trying to get her to stop. He woke up screaming so loud that Gina sat up in bed beside him, clutching the sheet to her chest like she expected to see a maniac in their bedroom. Jesus, Michael, she hissed, hand over her heart. You scared the shit out of me. He reached for the glass of water by the bed, sloshing some on his chest as he took large gulps to quench the fire in his throat. Babe, Gina said, touching the tips of her fingers to his neck. What happened? Michael felt a sting on his neck and put his fingers where hers had been. There was a rent in the skin, and when he got up to look in the mirror over the dresser, he saw a thin trickle of blood dripping from the fresh cut. She stood beside him. Did you scratch yourself in your sleep? I don't know. He knew, though. He still hadn't caught his breath from the dream. Gina wrinkled her nose as she pulled his hand to her mouth. For a second, he thought she was going to kiss it, but she asked instead, Why do you smell like bleach? He'd had to scrub it off him; that smell, that stickiness, that came from being around the dead. Michael didn't tell her this, didn't want to open up that conversation, so instead he squinted at the clock, asking, What time is it? Shit, she groaned, dropping his hand. Might as well get dressed. My shift starts in two hours. Michael picked up the clock to see for himself. Six-thirty. After processing the crime scene, tossing the woman's apartment and going through the paperwork, he had gotten maybe four hours of sleep. The shower came on, pipes rumbling in the wall as the hot water heater kicked in. Michael went into the bathroom, watching Gina slip off the shirt she'd slept in. Tim's already up, she said, taking off her panties. You need to make sure he's not getting into anything. Michael leaned against the wall, admiring her flat stomach, the way the muscles in her arms stretched as she took the band out of her hair. He's fine. Gina gave him a look, noticing him noticing her. Check on him. Michael felt a smile on his lips. Her breasts had kept their fullness after Tim, and his mouth was almost watering at the sight of them. Call in

sick, he told her. Right. Well watch a movie, make out on the couch. He paused, then tried, Remember how we used to just kiss for hours? Christ, he hadn't had more than a peck on the cheek in months. Let's kiss like that, Gina. Nothing else. Just kissing. Michael, Gina said, leaning in to check the water temperature. She stepped into the shower. Stop leering at me like I'm a hooker and go check on your son. She closed the shower door, and he waited a full minute before leaving, watching her silhouette behind the glass, wondering when things had started to go wrong between them. He had met Gina before his unit left for the Gulf. No one was expecting to get hurt over there, but Michael and his fellow grunts had played it up, getting all the action they could before being dropped in the desert. Ellen McCallum was a petite, bottle blonde, not too bright just the kind of girl you wanted to remember when you were stuck in some filthy, sand-encrusted tent a million miles from home, telling the guys about the girl back home who could suck the leather off a couch. Michael had spent the better part of a week trying to get into Ellen's pants when he walked Gina, her cousin. She had pretty much ripped Michael a new one for messing around with her favorite baby cousin, but when he had shipped out a couple of days later, it was Gina he was thinking about. Her curly brown hair, her delicate features, the smooth curve of her ass. He started writing to her, and to his surprise, she wrote back real mean at first, but then she calmed down a little, almost got sweet on him. He was in Kuwait, supposedly keeping the peace, when some dumb-ass teenager fooling around with a handgun accidentally shot him in the leg. The kid was a lousy shot, but the wound wouldn't heal. When Michael was sent to the base in Germany for surgery, it was Gina he called first. They got married a week after he was discharged and two weeks later he signed up with the Atlanta Police Department. Gina graduated from nursing school at Georgia Baptist and got a good job at Crawford Long Hospital. Two years later, she went over to Piedmont where they paid her more. Michael got his gold shield and was moved from his patrol beat at Grady to Vice, with a pay bump to match. Soon, their life was rolling along better than Michael had ever expected. They bought a house just north of Atlanta, started putting money away for a rainy day, thinking about having a kid or two and making it a real family. Then Tim came along. He was a quiet baby, but Michael saw a sparkle in his big blue eyes. The first time he held Tim was like holding his own heart in his hands. It was Barbara, Gina's mom, who saw the problems first. He never cries. He doesn't engage. He stares at the wall for hours. Michael fought it tooth and nail, but the doctor confirmed Barbara's suspicions. Tim had been deprived of oxygen at some point during Gina's pregnancy. His brain would never develop past the level of a six-year-old. They didn't know how or why, but that was just the way it was. Michael had never liked Barbara, but Tim's diagnosis made him hate her. It was a cliché to despise your mother-in-law, but she had always thought her daughter traded down and now she saw Tim's problem as Michael's failure. She was also some kind of religious nut, quick to find fault in others, not so quick to see it in herself. She wasn't just the glass-is-half-empty type; she thought the glass was half empty and they were all going to hell for it. Tim? Michael called, putting on a T-shirt as he walked through the house. Where are you, buddy? He heard giggling behind the couch, but kept walking toward the kitchen. Where'd Tim go? he asked, noting his son had scattered a full box of Cheerios all over the kitchen table. Tim's blue bowl was filled to the rim with milk, and for just a second Michael could see Aleesha Monroe's red, red mouth, the way it had been filled with her own blood. Boo! Tim screamed, grabbing Michael around the waist. Michael startled, even though Tim did this practically every morning. His heart was thumping in his chest as he lifted his son up into his arms. The kid was eight now, much too big to be held, but Michael couldn't help himself. He stroked back the cowlick on the top of Tim's head. You sleep okay, kiddo? Tim nodded, pulling away from Michael's hand, pushing at his shoulder so he could get down. Let's clean up this mess before Ba-Ba gets here, he suggested, scooping some of the cereal into his hand and tossing it into the box. Barbara came during the week to watch Tim. She took him to school, picked him up, made sure he had his snack and did his homework. Most days, she spent more time with him than either Michael or Gina, but it wasn't like either of them had a choice. Ba-Ba won't like this mess, Michael said. Nope, Tim agreed. He was sitting at the table, legs pulled up underneath him. The fly to his Spiderman pajamas sagged open. Tuck in your equipment, buddy, Michael admonished, trying to fight the wave of sadness that came over him as Tim fumbled with the buttons. Michael had been an only child, probably a little more than spoiled. When Tim came along, he didn't know anything about caring for a baby. Changing Tim's diaper had been embarrassing, something to get over with as quickly as possible and with minimal contact. Now, all Michael could think about was the fact that Tim would hit puberty in a few years. His body would start growing, changing him into a man, but his mind would never catch up. He would never know what it was like to make love to a woman, to use what God gave him to bring pleasure to another human being. He would never have children of his own. Tim would never know the joy and heartache of

being a father. Who made this mess? Gina asked. She was wrapped in the blue silk robe Michael had given her for Christmas a couple of years ago, her hair swirled up in a towel. Did you make this mess? she teased Tim, cupping his chin in her hand as she kissed his lips. Ba-Ba wont like this, she said. Michael got a secret kick that the kid hadnt been able to call Barbara grandma like she wanted. Tim started to help clean up, making more of a mess in the process. Uh-oh, he said, dropping to his knees, picking up one Cheerio at a time, counting them out loud as he handed them to his mother. Gina asked Michael, You getting home at a decent hour tonight? I told you I had a case. In a bar? she said, and he turned his back to her, taking a couple of mugs down from the cabinet. Hed been too wound up last night to come straight home. Leo had suggested they get a drink, talk about the case, and Michael had taken him up on the offer, using the excuse to toss back a couple of bourbons and take the edge off what hed seen. Eleven . . . Tim counted. Twelve . . . Gina said, You smell like an ashtray. I didnt smoke. I didnt say you did. She dropped a handful of Cheerios into the box and held out her hand for more. Fourteen, Tim continued. I just needed some time. Michael poured coffee into the mugs. Leo wanted to talk about the case. Leo wanted an excuse to get shitfaced. Uh-oh, Tim sang. Sorry, baby, Gina apologized to their son. She softened her tone. You skipped a number. What happened to thirteen? Tim shrugged. For the moment, he could only count to twenty-eight, but Gina made sure he hit every number along the way. Gina told Tim, Go get dressed for Ba-Ba. Shell be here soon. Tim stood and bounced out of the room, skipping from one foot to the other. Gina dropped the Cheerios into the box and sat down with a groan. She had pulled a double shift this weekend to pick up some extra money. The day hadnt even started and already she looked exhausted. Busy night? he asked. She took a sip of coffee, looking at him over the steam rising from the mug. I need money for the new therapist. Michael sighed, leaning against the counter. Tims old speech therapist had taken him as far as she could. The kid needed a specialist, and the good specialists werent on the state health insurance plan. Five hundred dollars, Gina said. Thatll get him through the end of the month. Christ. Michael rubbed his fingers into his eyes, feeling a headache coming on. He thought about the BMW and the Lincoln hed seen at Grady Homes last night. Tim could see fifty specialists for that kind of money. Take it out of savings, he said. She snorted a laugh. What savings? Christmas. They had raided their savings for Christmas. Im gonna ask for another shift at the hospital. She held up her hand to stop his protest. Hes got to have the best. Hes got to have his mother. How about your mother? she shot back. Michaels jaw set. Im not going to ask her for another dime. From Publishers Weekly Bestseller *Slaughter* departs from her Grant County crime series (*Faithless*, etc.) with a stand-alone thriller notable mainly for a jolting mid-book twist similar to one Ira Levin used with more subtlety in *A Kiss Before Dying*. The case of a prostitute's brutal murder provides a welcome break for Michael Ormewood, a cynical, world-weary Atlanta cop weighed down by dealing with the city's underclass and the heartbreak of a mentally impaired son. Since the victim's tongue was severed, linking the crime to several other recent outrages, the Georgia Bureau of Investigation intervenes. Suspicions focus on a recently paroled sex offender, John Shelley, who viciously butchered a neighbor more than a decade earlier. *Slaughter* unexpectedly switches the narrative's perspective, but the shock value garnered by the plot twist isn't matched by the predictable denouement. (Aug.) Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.