

Author: WEBSTER, Suzanne *Wetick*
Publication Information: New York: Morrow, c1992.
Genre:
Detective and mystery stories.

Library Journal Review

Tough young journalist Sherry Estabrook moves to Miami to escape her aristocratic, unloving parents and takes a job on *The Citizen*. On assignment at a high school for a story about teens and drugs, she meets Manuel Velo, who tells her that he has been a hit man for the Lopez mob since he was 14. With visions of a Pulitzer goading her on, Sherry furiously pursues the story, not realizing that Manuel is becoming obsessed with her. The psychopath draws her ever more tightly into his web, until her poor judgment leads to tragedy. The author, herself a former journalist, crafts a gripping plot in this first novel, not as gruesome as Thomas Harris's *The Silence of the Lambs*.

Booklist Review

Intelligent and suspenseful, this thriller, the author's first, has already been optioned for a movie and selected by the Literary and Mystery Guilds. A clinch for popular success, it's chock-full of exaggerated characters, juicy subplots, digestible social commentary, passion, obsession, insanity, ambition, dread, and violence. It's the kind of book that makes the reader feel both superior and eager, always two steps ahead of the main character but several behind the writer. Sherry Estabrook, a novice newspaper reporter and the daughter of a corrupt judge, came to steamy Miami by way of Marblehead, Massachusetts, a bastion of Yankee aristocracy and decadence. All nerves and spleen (but, of course, drop-dead beautiful), she's determined to land the one big story that will catapult her to fame well before she turns 30. Poor judgment is the leitmotif of the book. Sherry's is evident in everything she does, from choosing boyfriends to harassing her nasty neighbors, but her worse offense is to trust a 16-year-old assassin. Manuel offers her the story of her life: the story of his, including detailed descriptions of 17 murders he committed for the ruthless Lopez family. Sherry spends hours alone with Manuel and her tape recorder, in spite of his obvious infatuation with her and lethal madness. Naturally, things get dicey, dangerous, and complicated, pulling Sherry's friends and coworkers into a vortex of stupidity, evil, and death. Clever, well-constructed, and not too bloody, this will please the good-read crowd. (Reviewed Apr. 15, 1992)0688109306Donna Seaman

Publisher's Weekly Review

Ambition and personal need clash with the law and professional ethics in this engaging but uneven first novel about murder and the media in the killing fields of South Florida's cocaine trade. Beautiful, brash and bright, Sherry Estabrook has fled the country-club lifestyle of her New England heritage for the heat of Miami, where she reports on crime for the *Miami Citizen*. While researching a piece on drug use in the schools, she and her partner, Belinda, meet Manuel, a 16-year-old assassin for the Lopez crime family. Spurred by visions of a Pulitzer Prize, the young women set out to chronicle Manuel's handiwork--some 18 grisly murders so far. Soon Sherry is entangled in a complex, dangerous relationship with the troubled boy. For star reporters, Sherry and Belinda are incredibly naive, blind to perils that scream out at the reader and to important details of the story they're pursuing. Despite a tendency to over-explain characters' personalities and motivations, Wetlaufer's evocation of steamy Miami, her unusual villain and clever plotting create a gripping, often horrifying thriller. Literary Guild and Mystery Guild alternates; film rights to Disney. (July) (c) Copyright PWxyz, LLC. All rights reserved

Kirkus Review

A reporter's juicy nightmare: Miami *Citizen* scribe Sherry Estabrook, investigating drugs in a local high school, meets 16-year-old Manuel Velo, who tells her he's iced 18 people (he thinks it's 18) for Mimi Lopez's mob. Of course it doesn't sound like a nightmare to Sherry and her sidekick Belinda McEvoy, who are dreaming of Pulitzers before Sherry can even set up the first taped interview with Manuel. But as Sherry--still trying (courtesy of endless flashbacks) to use this story to get even with her unloving Boston father, Judge Estabrook--is running Manuel's sordid, matter-of-fact revelations through a lie-detector test, driving him around to revisit the scenes of his hits, and swallowing his tale of wanting to start a new life away from the mob, she's overlooking screamingly telltale signs: Manuel's lack of remorse for his crimes, his obsessive attraction to her, and incidentally her sometime lover Brazil's newfound devotion to his hardscrabble wife Jeanie, and Belinda's unlikely romance with Officer Eladio Alvarez. All guarantee that Sherry's life is about to go into a horrifying, lonely tailspin. After chapters and chapters of painful teasing--it's in this queasy-making middle section that first-novelist Wetlaufer really shines--Manuel tries to consolidate what he thinks is his romance with Sherry by executing two pesky neighbors who'd killed her cat, and the book promptly goes over the top with a whirlwind of threats, betrayals, counterplots, sleepless nights--and one final midnight meeting between Sherry and Manuel, whose heart-rending denouement is reassuringly predictable. Like Manuel, Wetlaufer goes for the jugular; there's more subtlety in a tabloid headline.