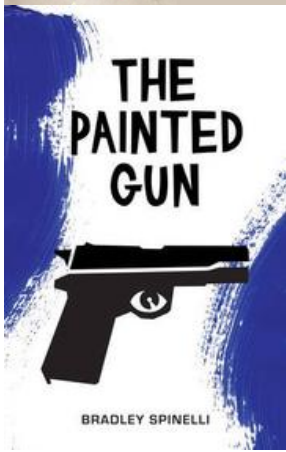


KIRKUS

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# THE PAINTED GUN

by [Bradley Spinelli](#)

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## KIRKUS REVIEW

An unofficial San Francisco shamus whose tale is set in 1997 but whose heart is stuck in 1947 hunts for the world's most elusive missing person.

It's clear that David "Itchy" Crane ("I'm not a private investigator...I'm an information broker") is looking for a young woman named Ashley. But that's about the only thing that is clear. He doesn't know where to look for Ashley or whom she might be hiding with. He doesn't know whether she's dead or alive. He doesn't even know her last name, which has been conscientiously blacked out of all the documentation about her sent by McCaffrey, the dislikable LA private eye who pressed him to take the case. In fact, he never would've agreed if McCaffrey hadn't sent him a clincher: a painting of Ashley's whose subject is the spitting image of Crane himself. Accepting the \$25,000 retainer McCaffrey has mailed him, Crane gets lucky when he finds the Dalton Gallery, whose artists include his quarry, even though she's been officially dead for several years. But that lead turns cold when first gallery owner Jeffrey Dalton, then Susan, his sister and heir, are gunned down, the latter hours after having unprotected (and therefore eminently detectable) sex with Crane. Crane's seen the killer but can no more identify him than Ashley, who turns out to be a lot closer to him than he imagined. The increasingly loopy plot, whose complications promise a lot more coherence than they deliver, will force Crane into confrontations with a Hawaiian-Samoan gunsel and a killer in a sharkskin suit before justice is done on the streets of Santa Cruz, Guatemala.

"I keep meeting people who wind up dead," aptly observes the narrator/hero, in a fair epitome of this retro pastiche's style. If you'd like more where that came from, Spinelli (*Killing Williamsburg*, 2013) is your man.

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