

Library Journal
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SEMI-MONTHLY

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FEB 1, 1995

LUCE M64787
PRESS CLIPPINGS

Comfort, Bonnie. Denial.

S. & S. Mar. 1995. c.304p. ISBN 0-671-89696-2. \$22.

Sarah Rinsley is a 33-year-old psychotherapist with a successful practice, a radio talk show, and a lovely Southern California home. However, she is unable to maintain a stable relationship or to reconcile with her parents. All this is brought into question when patient Nick Belmont develops an obsessive attachment to Sarah. When Belmont finds he cannot seduce her, he attempts to destroy her professionally. In mounting her defense, Sarah asks herself why she let Nick go as far as he did. Did she subconsciously find him attractive? Why didn't she refer him elsewhere when it became obvious the therapy was failing? Comfort, a clinical psychologist, writes convincingly and well in this first novel, compelling the reader to explore the underlying motives of a concerned therapist. Highly recommended for public libraries.—*M.J. Simmons, Duluth P.L., Minn.*

Los Angeles, CA
TIMES
Los Angeles-Long Beach Met Area
SUN 1,576,426

MAY 14 1995



P1328

LUCE PRESS CLIPPINGS

IN BRIEF

By ERIKA TAYLOR

FICTION

DENIAL by Bonnie Comfort. (Simon & Schuster: \$22; 302 pp.)
When psychotherapist Sarah Rinsley takes on Nick Arnholt as a patient she has no idea that this man will simultaneously ruin and save her life. Nick is handsome, charming and utterly amoral. His increasing attachment and sexual attraction to Sarah bring up conflicting feelings in her that deepen as Nick begins to behave more and more inappropriately. Disaster is inevitable, but exactly who is at fault and what form the crisis will take is the subject of "Denial," psychologist Bonnie Comfort's uneven, but ultimately gratifying first novel.

"Denial" begins with a flashy prologue, inserted there one might suspect, to get readers through Comfort's entertaining yet slightly laborious first half. The prologue doesn't help. One of the conventions of commercial fiction is the need for a strong plot or character-driven story, and even though



Comfort's writing is effective stylistically, "Denial" sort of meanders along good-naturedly for well over 100 pages until something really happens. Actually, two things.

The first is that Sarah Rinsley begins to slowly come apart—her defenses no longer working, her fears sharking straight through a previously well-ordered life. The second thing that happens is that Bonnie Comfort begins to write with enormous velocity.

Ultimately, this is a story about courage, grace and the redemptive power of love. Although it takes a little while for "Denial" to find its trajectory, Comfort has written an accomplished and moving first novel.

THE LOVE SONGS OF PHOENIX BAY by Nisa Donnelly. (St. Martin's: \$21.95; 301 pp.) For some strange reason, Nisa Donnelly's novel, "The Love Songs of Phoenix Bay" becomes about 10 times more enjoyable whenever Phoenix Bay isn't in the picture. This is unfortunate since she is the main character. Having been unceremoniously dumped by a lover of many years, Phoenix, an incredibly depressed, overwhelmed, gay woman, moves in with Rennie, a close friend dying of AIDS. Eventually, they are joined by Cecile, Rennie's sister, who, like Rennie and Phoenix, is suffering from a terrible loss.

As she struggles to pull her life together and find love, Phoenix often falls prey to a subtle kind of solipsism, a clouded belief that she is the center of the universe.

Comfort, Bonnie. Denial. Mar. 1995. 304p. Simon & Schuster, \$21 (0-671-89696-2). Galley.

When psychotherapist Sarah Rinsley accepted a referral from another doctor, she began a two-year spiral into darkness. The patient, Nick Belmont, a brilliant young attorney, entered therapy to reduce stress. Instead, he fixated on Dr. Rinsley to the point where he stole personal items from her office, searched computer data banks for her home address and phone number, and appeared in public places where she met with her lover and friends. During Nick's therapy, Sarah tried to work through his erotic fantasizing about her to locate the source of his problems, but her own attraction to him and their lack of progress led her to discontinue his therapy. Within 48 hours, Nick attempted suicide and charged Sarah with malpractice, and most damaging, he claimed she seduced him while he was a patient. In the ensuing media frenzy and professional furor, Sarah's protestations of innocence go unheard, her professional and personal lives fall apart, and a jury will decide who has the best case: a concerned psychotherapist or a suicidal lawyer? Dr. Bonnie Comfort's 20 years as a clinical psychologist provide the realism, making this novel enthralling and sure to please.
—*Melanie Duncan*

Kansas City, MO
Star
Kansas City Met Area
SUN 434.347

MAR 20 1995

N3364

LUCE PRESS CLIPPINGS

IN Brief

Trashy but fun

Sarah is a shrink who doesn't have much of a love life. Nick is a hip, coked-up, woman-chasing lawyer who goes to Sarah because he isn't happy. Nick, of course, wants to bed Sarah, to take her as a trophy. Sarah, who has a popular radio show, just wants to cure Nick and stay ethical. Unfortunately, Sarah has some urges toward Nick that are unethical. Nick stalks Sarah, who retreats. Then, Nick sues, claiming that Sarah has victimized him sexually.

Denial, by
Bonnie
Comfort
(302 pages;
Simon &
Schuster;
\$22)

This is a messy plot but it works. Nick is a bag of snakes with an evil shine of attraction. Sarah is all professional cool, with a garter belt under her tailored suit. The dialogue sounds like silk tearing, the pace is murderous and you'll never guess what happens in the end. Is this a trashy novel? Who cares?

— Marc Munroe Dion

JUN 4, 1995

N3622

LUCE PRESS CLIPPINGS

ON SLOW

The following books are new arrivals at the Onslow County Public Library.

■ **"Pearl Moon" by Katherine Stone.**

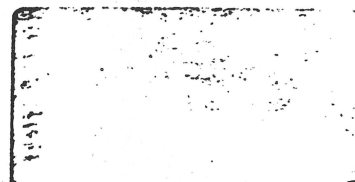
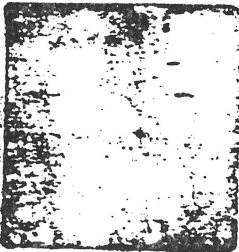
Handsome English developer James Drake has hired Sam Coulter to build a posh hotel in the exotic city of Hong Kong. The hotel's young architect is Maylene Kwan, the daughter of a fashion designer and an American man she has never met. Drake hires Texas photographer Allison Whitaker to capture the vistas of British ruled Hong Kong for hotel murals. Meanwhile, Maylene is falling for Coulter and will come face to face with the sister she never knew existed. "Booklist" calls this "a can't-miss combination of multigenerational romance and international suspense, financial rivalry and family secrets."

■ **"Surfing On The Internet: A Neth-**

er's Adventures On-Line" by J.C. Hertz. This funny and detailed excursion into Net culture is written by a staff member of "Wired" magazine. Hertz rides into the endless lines of text messages, IRC real-time chat, the fantasy game intricacies of Multi-User Dimensions and the loopy stuff too. For example: the Alt.b-armey.dinosaur.die.die.die newsgroup dedicated to destroying the "purple pederast;" and Alt.alienvisors and its discussions of good and bad space aliens.

■ **"Denial" by Bonnie Comfort.** Thirty-three and single, psychotherapist Sarah Rinsley accepts a referral from another doctor and the downward spiral begins. Her patient is Nick Belmont, a young attorney who is used to getting what he wants in and out of the office. He entered therapy to reduce stress, but he's pushing the therapy over the line. Suddenly, Sarah is followed and items from her office disappear. She discontinues therapy but Nick retaliates with some damaging charges — including seducing a patient in therapy. Tensions escalate and Sarah must prove her innocence before a judge and jury. Bonnie Comfort is a psychotherapist who practices in L.A.

■ **"Lighting Style: The Complete Guide To Lighting Every Room in Your Home" by Kevin McCloud.** A unique book dedicated solely to the science and decorating magic of lighting for the home. McCloud looks at the five illuminating types of lighting (accent, ambient, decorative, kinetic, and task) and applies each type to rooms in the home. This beautifully illustrated book answers almost every lighting question under the sun, from what kind of fixture and bulb to use to how to work with an electrician.



...you two get along about as well as a pair of cats," he declares as he prepares to leave with Zach while he sets off on a hunt for substance in their novels may ch and Cleopatra's stylized longings. herate off-repeated declarations such as them suddenly seemed to be humming and frightening feeling of promise" may take.

ACTERS in Elizabeth's Gage's novel outlined sexual longings. This author along to the When-in-Doubt-Throw-in-a-school of novel writing. I didn't start 122, but from my score I calculate that zizzling coupling about once every 25

It was at the waiting door of her pas- sion of ecstasy harmonized with the call stance.

its marathon celebration of sensuality tie from its silly plot and wooden, set in small-town America and the con- world, the story is dominated by a- tiful Jill Fleming emerges from an as a calculating seductress. Lovely Jill's moral opposite number, out- childhood to become a successful ad- handsome Jordan Lazarus escapes his iminings to become, at 33, the richest it's more, he's the only living human and rich enough to save the cities only Gage had told us his plan. Alas,

anted, beautiful and high-IQ trio all andic musical chairs. Despite their roughly described matings, fate in jealousy, forsaken vows, wounded and plain bad luck makes hash out rs and desires. It takes suicide, mur- K and a fatal stroke to straighten is up to the task and the novel ends on't be disappointed.

Recent mystery set in Baltimore is

M

ICHAEL PALMER'S *Silent Treatment* is a fast-paced medical thriller. It's guaranteed to terrify anyone who belongs to an HMO or has reason to step inside the doors of a hospital. Palmer, an internist and former emergency room physician, hooks his reader with a torture scene conducted by a nightmare doctor. Incident after incident follows in which hospital patients die from the ministrations of a mysterious lab technician specializing in lethal pharmacology. What's behind all this medical mayhem? It's a murderous cabal of insurance executives who'll stop at nothing to keep health-care costs down and their own bank balances skyrocketing.

Palmer's hero, Dr. Harry Corbett, is a good-hearted GP defending his colleagues and patients against money-grubbing specialists who want to cut GP privileges at Manhattan Medical Center. When Harry's beautiful journalist wife dies under mysterious circumstances at MMC and Harry is accused of her murder, he finds himself in the middle of a macabre conspiracy.

With the help of his brother, a beautiful and sexy alcoholic, and an ex-DEA agent, Harry manages to extricate himself from a web of evil woven by health professionals who have forgotten their Hippocratic oaths. But he has to go through hell and an exciting car chase to do it.

Though Palmer's novel is weak on character development, his successful evocation of the medical milieu and his dynamic plot more than compensate. *Silent Treatment* is a good read, fast-paced and engrossing. And the subject is certainly likely to interest as well as alarm most readers.

HEROES AND LOVERS

By Lucy Kavalier
Dutton. 440 pp. \$22.95

UCY KAVALER deserves congratulations for the audacity of her plot concept. The story opens with Beatrix Tremaine, a beautiful young woman dedicated to preserving her Arctic explorer great-grandfather's heroic legend. When a tabloid television journalist named Stephen Avery threatens to sully Byron Tremaine's hallowed memory, Beatrix rushes to the rescue.

To clear Byron's name of any hint of scandal, Beatrix sets off to discover the truth about Viola Lambert, a beautiful young woman who accompanied him on an early expedition to Greenland. Beatrix's investigation is the frame for the novel's central story of Viola's tempestuous affair with Byron.

Viola was a passionate and rebellious young woman

ment. Beatrix finally learns that it was Viola's all-woman expedition that reached the Pole and that her grandfather falsified his claims by stealing Viola's photographs and discoveries. After this revelation, Beatrix's own life is liber- sated from the stuffy writing taboos and illusions.

Kavalier's slicked writing doesn't make the most of the rich dramatic possibilities inherent in her plot. Though Beatrix's frame story is told in first person, Beatrix's di- tion is so stiff and lifeless that she remains a flat character who sounds less contemporary than the turn-of-the-centu- ry Viola.

When Kavalier moves to the past and Viola Lambert's tale, she tells us Viola is an exciting and vibrant woman but doesn't show Viola's charisma by dramatizing her through dialogue and action. Instead, Kavalier relies heavily on third-person objective narrative "telling" for much of the Lambert part of her story. Nevertheless, the novel's subject, the struggle for woman's suffrage and the race for glory in the Arctic wastes, ought to appeal to many readers with an interest in this period.

DENIAL

By Bonnie Comfort
Simon & Schuster. 302 pp. \$22

DENIAL is that rare thing, a suspense novel with no dead bodies. When Nick Belmont walks into Sarah Rinsley's office for some psychotherapy, both characters would appear on the outside to have everything going for them. Nick is a handsome and successful lawyer. Sarah is a psychotherapist with a boom- ing practice in Westwood, a radio talk show and a house in Brentwood.

But Nick, a complicated man with a tortured past who equates self-respect with sexual conquest, engages Sarah in a bizarre duel for psychological and emotional mastery. She, on the other hand, hugs some pretty heavy childhood baggage of her own. Some of the troubles that develop between Sarah and Nick during the course of his therapy stem from unresolved issues in her family background.

Both characters quickly become dangerously obsessed with each other. As the story draws to its climax, Nick is suicidal and perilously vindictive, and Sarah has lost her home, her practice and her lover and is on the point of emotional and physical collapse.

Comfort, a psychotherapist herself, has written a convincing account of the dangers inherent in exploring the dark places in the human psyche. Though Comfort's heroine, Sarah, is never completely engaging and seems, at times, too coldly analytical, this is a good read with a sat- isfying conclusion.

BOOK WORLD

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LOCAL

Comfort: 'Every therapist has a blind spot'

Ashland woman makes her literary debut with a tale of obsession

By Louise Watson
Ashland Daily Tidings

Ashland author Dr. Bonnie Comfort has a caveat for readers about her first novel, "Denial," a tale of relationships gone wrong: suspense, stalking — and sensuality.

"I think I started writing this book before (the movie) 'Fatal Attraction' ever came to the screen," she said in a recent interview. "The movie is quite different (than the book), but it is a similar theme."

A full-time Ashland resident for five years, Comfort drew heavily on her background as a Los Angeles psychologist to write the story of Dr. Sarah Rinsley. Sarah is a successful Los Angeles therapist whose patient, Nick Arnholz, becomes obsessively attached to her. Nick, handsome, successful, arrogant, slowly creeps into Sarah's life and eventually tries to seduce her. Her rejection of his advances triggers his fixation, which, in turn, leads to Sarah's downfall, personally and professionally. In the process, she has to deal with some unresolved issues in her own life.

"The thing interesting about obsessive love is that it's often triggered by rejection," she said.

Obsession and all its accompanying behaviors are more common now than 50 years ago, Comfort said. A half-century ago, peoples' lives were more stable. Now that the family has broken down more, individuals are more isolated and perhaps more prone to these behaviors. She discovered in her research that 43 percent of the people



Bonnie Comfort is the author of the new novel, 'Denial,' published by Simon & Schuster.

who stalk are unknown to their quarry: 57 percent know the one who is being stalked. Her advice on dealing with this problem?

"It's very important to avoid any person-to-person contact that may fuel this desire," Comfort said. "There is no correlation between the person threatening to harm and actually harming you. But

take every threat seriously."

Before "Denial," Comfort had never written any fiction, although she had penned professional reports and evaluations of people for clinical purposes. Ten years ago, she started "toying" with the idea of writing a novel that could draw from her clinical background.

"Every therapist has a blind spot that could get them into trouble," she said. "When I exaggerate that into a story, it becomes more interesting."

Comfort, who said she was in her 40s, opted to only put in a few sex scenes. However, she said those scenes has a psychological meaning in terms of character and story. "I have a fertile imagination," she said, with a laugh about the writing of the scenes.

If you're the type who reads the last page of a book first, you'll find a well-known Ashland name in the acknowledgement, Sandra Scofield. Other local people of note include Dori Appel, Joan Kalvelage, Joan Sanger, Leah Ireland, Jan Gregory and Betsy Beers.

Comfort also said she was thrilled at getting a top publishing house, Simon & Schuster, to publish and market her book. She is now on a book tour of the West Coast and is hard at work on a second novel, which has a psychological setting but a new set of characters.

Although she had writing help from experts, the background comes from what Comfort has experienced in her practice. Even the actual office described in the book closely approximates Comfort's own L.A. office. The dog Sarah owns is an actual basset hound Comfort once owned.

"I manufactured the actual content but the process a therapist goes through is similar," she said.

Stockton, CA
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Saturday

MAY 20, 1995

P1500

LUCE PRESS CLIPPINGS

"I Don't Want to Be Inside Anymore" is filled with a memorable combination of intelligence, insight and suffering, a combination that rings true regardless of its source (Basic Books, \$22).

'Denial'

When psychotherapist Sarah Rinsley takes on Nick Arnholt as a patient, she has no idea that this man will simultaneously ruin and save her life.

His increasing attachment and sexual attraction to Sarah bring up conflicting feelings in her that deepen as he begins to behave more and more inappropriately. Disaster is inevitable, but exactly who is at fault and what form the crisis will take is the subject of psychologist Bonnie Comfort's uneven, but ultimately gratifying first novel.

"Denial" begins with a flashy prologue, but meanders along good-naturedly for well over 100 pages until something really happens. Actually, two things.

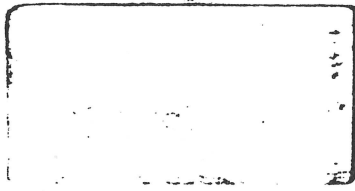
The first is that Rinsley begins to slowly come apart — her defenses no longer working, her fears sharking straight through a previously well-ordered life. The second is that Comfort begins to write with enormous velocity.

Ultimately, this is a story about courage, grace and the redemptive power of love. Although it takes a little while for "Denial" to find its trajectory, Comfort has written an accomplished and moving first novel (Simon & Schuster, \$22).

Best sellers

Popular paperbacks





Ann Arbor, MI
News
Ann Arbor Met Area

Thursday, 0 67.117

JUN 29, 1995

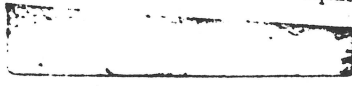
LUCE N3108
PRESS CLIPPINGS

New books at Ann Arbor Public Library:

"A Day in the Life: The Music and Artistry of the Beatles," by Mark Hertsgaard - Author Hertsgaard was given access to the Beatles' recorded archives, long locked away in London's Abbey Road Studios. In this study, he unravels the evolution of the group's genius.

"Denial," by Bonnie Comfort - Just when things seem to be going so well for psychotherapist Sarah Rinsley, she takes on a new client, sexy Nick who soon is stalking Sarah, even as she fights her attraction to him.

"When Elephants Weep: The Emotional Lives of Animals," by Jeffrey M. Masson - Masson's tales (including those of an elephant who sketches, a gorilla who loves Pavarotti, and a mongoose whose best friend is a squirrel)



charm even as they instruct us in the range of feelings animals share with humans. The author was at the center of a raging controversy over Freudian psychoanalysis.

"On a Blanket with My Baby," by Bill Kent - Louis Monroe is a squeaky-clean Atlantic City cop who is recovering from a near-fatal beating. Local politicians do not want him investigating a crime that may be too close to the mayor; so that is exactly what Louis intends to do.

"Dr. Bob Arnot's Guide to Turning Back the Clock," by Robert Arnot, M.D. - Written for men in their early 30s-50s, Arnot's guide combines advice on nutrition with some exotic suggestions for out-there athletic pursuits and an emphasis on muscle building.

"Never Let a Stranger in Your Home," by Margaret Logan - Olivia Chapman, Boston-based interior designer, takes into her home abused best-selling novelist Lori Lutz. Olivia's slovenly house guest is really getting on her nerves when Lori becomes the prime suspect in the violent demise of her loathsome spouse in this suspense story.



THE ATLANTA JOURNAL BOOKS: REVIEWS AND OPINION

Trio of firsts full of twists and turns

NIGHT SINS
By Trami Hoag
Bantam, 496 pages, \$19.95.

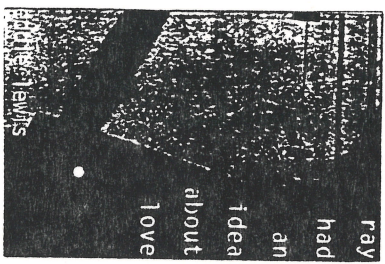
DENIAL
By Bonnie Comfort
Simon & Schuster, 302 pages, \$22.

RAY HAD AN IDEA ABOUT LOVE
By Eddie Lewis
Simon & Schuster, 256 pages, \$21.

By Joyce Slater
FOR THE JOURNAL CONSTITUTION



Pop Fiction



Long pre-publication avish pre-publication praise can be a mixed blessing for a first-time novelist. It's a bit like being named queen before you have a date or a dress. "There's a new master of suspense," Bantam shouts, "and her name is Trami Hoag."

Miraculously, Hoag manages to survive being compared, however obliquely, to the likes of Stephen King and Mary Higgins Clark. "Night Sins" will not disappoint.

Hoag delivers her first shiver in a Journal entry on Page 1. Anonymous, dated 1968, it begins: "They found the body today. Not nearly as soon as we expected. Obviously, we gave them too much credit. The police are not as smart as we are. No one is."

The entry ends: "They are blind and stupid and trusting. They would never think to look at us. We are 12 years old."

Police Chief Mitch Holt and special investigator Megan O'Malley soon see that they're not dealing with anything as logical as a ransom demand or as final as murder. Someone's playing an evil head game, rules and objective unknown. Hoag has a fine sense of pacing, and her characters are more than stick figures to move the plot along. She's earned her courage and her spotlight dance.

Every novelist used to do something else for a living. Where do the stories come from, if not from the writer's personal and professional experience?

Dramatic livelihoods naturally lend themselves to a writing transition. Los Angeles cop Jo-

seph Wambaugh led the way, closely followed by doctors and lawyers. It's a wonder psychiatrists didn't make the leap long ago. Confidentiality could be a problem, but the Clancy's and Grishams have figured a way around that.

Now here comes Bonnie Comfort, a psychotherapist in practice for more than 20 years, with her first novel, "Denial." Comfort is the last thing you'll derive from an evening with this scary story about the perils of transference. In an age of litigation and stalking, where does a professional draw the line between empathy and personal danger?

Analyst Sarah Kinsley is finding that line blurrier by the minute. The 33-year-old radio personality has an analyst of her own who warns: "One particular patient can creep into your mind, find a soft spot you've hidden even from yourself, and lean on that spot until it drives you mad."

Sarah's particular patient is a charismatic lawyer who presents himself as a stress victim, but the doc discovers early on that most of Nick's troubles are the result of a runaway Casanova complex. Nick's goal is not to get "well." He wants to reverse the power balance by seducing the therapist.

When Sarah won't play along, she's subjected to terrorist tactics. It won't spoil Comfort's nail-biter to observe that she clearly knows the difference between menace and melodrama.

I'm nothing if not an equal opportunity reviewer. If I happen to review few male authors, that's not a result of any sorting process of mine, any feminist bias. It's because, in an age of

man-hashing, few gents care to dip a timid toe into the swirling, angry pop fiction pool.

That's our loss, particularly when a mere man can deliver a first novel as intuitive and charming as "Ray Had an Idea About Love." Eddie Lewis makes no bones about the fact that this story is mostly about him, especially when he thanks, in his acknowledgments, "friends and family who were with me in the divorce trenches."

Poor old Ray can't even come up with a satisfactory explanation when he announces to his wife, Betsy, and their two small sons that he's leaving home. "The 'why' eludes him, and he's not being evasive or dishonest. Ray was somehow promised enduring and nurturing love a long time ago, in songs and movies, and he cannot find it anywhere in his life. So he's gone. So there.

"Ray had an idea about love," Lewis writes, "that it was like finding a bright coin on the sidewalk, that it was a special moment of fate. He thought it wrong, a perversity of nature, to press it by."

Ray discovers, to his sorrow, that in his aimless search he may have lost more than he found. His sterile bachelor apartment isn't the answer, and neither is a half-baked girl named Julia.

I guess it would be unrealistic to expect this moving story to find a receptive audience among the disgruntled wives. That's too bad, because this novel explains better than any in recent memory how high a price you pay for leaving. Even if you're the one who said goodbye.

Joyce Slater is a Kennesaw reviewer.

EVENTS

James Hall signs "Come Wild," 7 p.m., Monday, Oxford Book Store, 360

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MAR 9, 1995

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LUCE PRESS CLIPPINGS



Photo by Ladye Eugenia Stewart

Denial

Bonnie Comfort

Simon & Schuster, \$22

Sarah is a young therapist with a thriving practice and a radio call-in show — and she even has time for a personal life. But all that is threatened when one of her patients, a high-powered lawyer used to getting what he wants, decides that he wants her. And she, unfortunately, seems to want him, too.

Novels' psychologist stands up to analysis

Life is good for L.A. psychologist Sarah Rinsley. At 35, the attractive therapist has a ritzy private practice, a radio talk show, a house in Brentwood and a hunky Latino boyfriend. A new patient, swaggering stud Nick Arnholt, changes all that.

Superficially confident but full of inner snakes and ladders, Arnholt becomes obsessed with Rinsley. When finally rebuffed and referred to another therapist, he files phony sexual misconduct charges, intent on destruction.

Bit by bit, Rinsley's life begins to collapse around her, culminating in a courtroom drama with a surprising finale.

Such is the central plot of *Dental* (Simon & Schuster, 302 pgs., \$30), better-than-average summer reading and the first novel by Bonnie Comfort. And although the story is anything but autobiographical, the author is working on familiar turf, lending an admirable degree of authenticity to the work.

For more than 20 years, Comfort worked as a Los Angeles therapist, often appearing as an expert witness in personal and industrial injury cases. And aside from the usual hopes for respect, wealth, fame and the ability to entertain zillions of readers, the pleasant, 40-something-ish budding novelist also set out to engage in a little myth-exploding. In town recently for a wedding, (she's married to screenwriter/former CICA broadcaster Bob Comfort), she held forth on professional stereotypes over a bottle of Perrier.

"I really find the depictions of women therapists — particularly in movies but in print as well — aggravating. Somehow, we're supposed to believe that professionals are vulnerable to any small seduction, capable of throwing off ethics, profession-



Alan Kellogg
Arts and
Entertainment

"I really find the depictions of women therapists — particularly in movies but in print as well — aggravating. Somehow, we're supposed to believe that professionals are vulnerable to any small seduction..."

— Bonnie Comfort

al integrity, years of training and experience, just like that. I was determined to portray my characters more realistically."

Born and raised on Winnie's famed Bannerman Avenue, the former Bonnie Brothman grew up in an arts-adjacent household of overachievers. Dad was a lawyer and alderman, one sister now heads up the family firm and the other is a successful interior designer. After a University of Manitoba M.A. in social work and a stint at Indian Affairs, Comfort moved to L.A. in the late '60s and began a career in crisis therapy. She met her future hubby at a party in the early '80s, hooked by the offer of the last few Smarties in the box — expat Canuck pick-up line of the century. "It was



Ed Kaiser, *The Journal*
Comfort's first novel *Dental* has been well-received by reviewers

Kismet," she laughs. "Our parents even had the same silver pattern."

And it was Comfort who encouraged her to turn her talent for writing boffo professional papers into popular fiction. By 1990, she had quit her private practice, resolved to learn the craft and tackle her first novel. Three years, 2,500 pages and three different endings later, *Dental* became a salable work and has become a success for a first novel in, as they say, "commercial women's fiction," garnering favorable comment in *People*, the *Chicago Tribune* and the *Toronto*

Star among other publications. The fact that the book's climax involves a sensation-al trial hasn't hurt interest either, although it was written long before O.J. took the long-lonesome Bronco ride.

"It certainly piqued interest in obsessive love, spousal abuse and erotic obsession. And the trial has been a fascinating insight into the American legal system. There is timeless quality to the drama."

At any rate, lucky timing or not, it's a writer's life for Comfort.

"(The learning curve) was a long, important and wonderful experience. I don't know what I think until I write it down," when I'm actually into the process. It's an odd and gratifying thing to be living in a world no one knows."

On the lite side of lit, *Dental's* nonetheless touches on a number of contemporary issues, from the litigious nature of America, 1995, to the value of radio psychologists, the breakdown of the family unit, individual and collective rights and sexism.

So it will be for the next book already in progress, "a similar book with a new cast of different psychologists. I've learned so much I'm able to concentrate on not only keeping the treatment of a moral and ethical crisis accurate, but of honing the suspense. This is a suspense novel with no dead bodies."

For her part, having moved to the less frenetic environs of Portland, Comfort is excited about her new career. And for all the societal problems and individual malaises she's professionally involved with, she maintains an essentially sunny outlook.

"I do feel hopeful about the future; I have faith in humankind, that kindness and care for others will prevail over selfishness and meanness."

A pair of debuts full of chills and promise

By Joyce R. Slater
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

First novelist Tami Hoag delivers her first shiver in a journal entry on page one of *Night Sins* (Bantam, \$19.95). Dated 1968, it begins: "They found the body today. Not nearly as soon as we expected. Obviously, we gave them too much credit. The police are not as smart as we are. No one is." The entry ends: "They are blind and stupid and trusting. They would never think to look at us. We are twelve years old."

"We," apparently, despises innocence and targets little boys. Twenty-six years later, when 8-year-old Josh disappears in Deer Lake, Minn., a note is left in his duffel bag. "Ignorance is not innocence but SIN," it reads.

Police chief Mitch Holt and special investigator Megan O'Malley soon see that they're not dealing with anything as logical as a ransom demand or as final as murder. Someone's playing an evil head game, rules and objective unknown. Hoag has a fine sense of pacing, and her characters are more than stick figures.

Every novelist used to do something else for a living. Where do the stories come from, if not from the writer's personal and professional life experience?

Now here comes Bonnie Comfort, a psychotherapist in practice for over 20 years, with her debut novel, *Denial* (Simon & Schuster, \$22). Comfort is the last thing you'll derive from an evening with this scary story about the perils of transference. In an age of litigation and stalking, where does a professional draw the line between empathy and personal danger?

Analyst Sarah Rinsley is finding that line blurrier by the minute. The 33-year-old radio personality has an analyst of her own who warns: "One particular patient can creep into your mind, find a soft spot you've hidden even from yourself, and lean on that spot until it drives you mad." Dr. Rinsley's particular patient is a charismatic lawyer who presents himself as a stress victim, although the doc soon sees that most of Nick's troubles are the result of a runaway Casanova complex.

Nick's goal is not to get well but to reverse the power balance by seducing the therapist. When Sarah won't play along, she's subjected to terrorist tactics. It won't spoil Comfort's nail-biter to observe that she clearly knows the difference between menace and melodrama.

I am nothing if not an equal opportunity reviewer. If few male authors appear in this column,



is mostly about himself, especially when he thanks, in his acknowledgments, "friends and family who were with me in the divorce trenches."

Poor old Ray can't even come up with a satisfactory explanation when he announces to his wife, Betsy, and their two small sons that he's leaving home. The "why" eludes him, and he's not being evasive or dishonest. Ray was somehow promised enduring and nurturing love a long time ago, in songs and in movies, and he cannot find it anywhere in his life. So he's gone.

Ray discovers, to his sorrow, that his aimless search for true love may have lost him more than he found. His sterile bachelor apartment isn't the answer, and neither is a half-baked girl named Julia.

I guess it would be unrealistic to expect this moving story to find a receptive audience among the ladies. That's too bad, because this novel explains better than any other in recent memory how high a price you pay for leaving. Even if you're the one who left.

"What to Expect When You're Expecting" is a currently popular book for prospective moms. I guess you could say that Julie Myerson's remarkable first novel, *Sleepwalking* (Nan A. Talese/Doubleday, \$20), deals with the kind of life-altering experiences no pregnant woman could ever expect.

There was no best seller particular enough to warn Susan about what would happen in the eighth month of her first pregnancy. But then, nothing in her life has been going according to plan. She discovers she's going to have a baby about the time she's decided that her safe, complacent marriage is a mistake. Then her father commits suicide. Since Susan considers herself an unemotional person—"numb" is an adjective she uses often—she amazes herself by becoming involved in a highly charged affair with an artist she's just met.

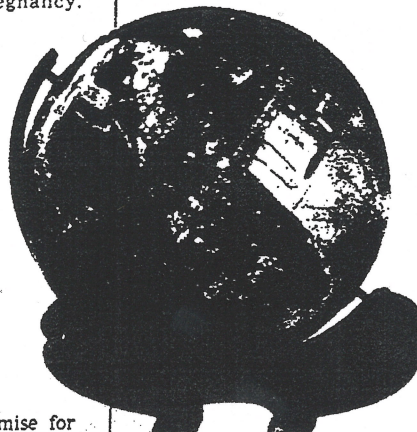
If this sounds like a distasteful, depressing premise for



Hannah Arendt's "idea of a group was

Hannah Arendt and Mary McCarthy were among midcentury America's most gifted intellectuals.

They were also best friends who were as simple and affectionate when writing to each other as they were often cavalier and caustic when writing about their contemporaries. Now we have the letters they exchanged from the start of their friendship, in 1949, to Arendt's death in 1975.



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DENIAL

No Denial About Talk Show Challenge

Except for the likes of Jackie Collins and Stephen King, novelists are personas non grata on talk shows. So the challenge for public relations professionals Barbara Meltzer and Pacari's Carrie Winston was how to promote Simon & Schuster's newest novelist, Dr. Bonnie Comfort on a book tour.

One of the first steps in their strategy was to bring the author to Ready For Media to tap into Anne Ready's 10 years of experience in talk show production.

Initial interviews indicated that the author is a very savvy psychotherapist with 20 years experience practicing in Los Angeles. Add to that a fictional heroine who, like popular t.v. personality Frazier, also hosts a pop psychology call-in radio talk show. And perhaps best of all for its timeliness, was a story about an erotic obsession that turns to hatred.

But a novel is a novel and most shows have a policy of not booking unknown novelists.

Starting with print interviews to build up a "press" kit, which now includes book reviews from *People Magazine* and the *Chicago Tribune*, we helped create a list of media answers that touched on the non-fiction aspects for topical discussions. Q's like how do you pick an ethical therapist? What is the value of radio psychology? How often does obsessive love turn violent? What is denial? were included.

After appearances in LA, Seattle, Portland and Winnipeg, the author added fuel to her fire with a *Court TV* commercial, voiced over by Joseph Benti. It airs in the Prime Time Justice segment week-day evenings 5-7 p.m. PDT.

"I spent most of my advance publicizing this first book," the author confided candidly, "because the irony of the business is that until you've established yourself as a profit-maker, the publishing company doesn't want to spend much on you."

In March, she threw a book signing at Borders. For the event, the publisher contributed a giant-sized poster of the book's cover and the author created walking billboards among many of her friends with "Denial" t-shirts. Book sales



The Cover of 'Denial', a book by Simon & Schuster's newest novelist, Dr. Bonnie Comfort

are doubling every week, and according to Dr. Comfort, promoting this book has been a real education.

"Ready For Media taught me not only confidence but gave me a roadmap to a country for which I had no guide. Even simple things like knowing what to say and how to say it takes practice. Most importantly, I learned to speak in concise sentences. If you ramble, interviewers interrupt you, cut you off and you lose your opportunity to make your point. It's also crucial to keep reminding people why you are there as well as mentioning the title of the novel, *Denial* and the publisher, Simon & Schuster because interviewers seem to forget.

"For my 'showcase reel', I learned to take my own blank tape to every live interview so I could bring a copy of it back with me. God help you if you try to get it later.

"And thanks to Beverly Hills expert hair stylist and colorist, Sotiris, personal shopper Jennifer Butler and makeup artist Susan Ella, I looked great, too."

Soundbite

"The irony is that no one trusts lawyers in the media or believes the actuaries in court,"

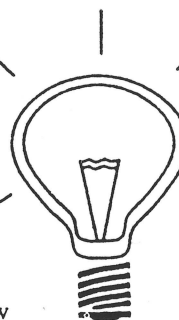
commented Rick Dinon, 20th Century Insurance Sr. Vice President of Corporate Relations as he booked Ready For Media for soup-to-nuts crisis communications.

BRIGHT IDEAS!

Your Voice Can Maximize Attention

We all know that most audiences have a short attention span. One way to elicit, maintain and increase their attention is through PITCH VARIETY.

80% of the time your voice should remain at the same pitch level. 20% of the time the pitch should move up & down. Follow these general guidelines:



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2. Vary the pitch in the middle.
3. Raise & lower pitch only one tone.
4. Practice on the telephone.

*Contributed by:
Laverne A. Slavin, M.A.,
The Professional Voice.*

(a health care insurance cartel killing clients for "cost containment") give Palmer's new medical thriller (after *Natural Causes*) a big boost—but poor writing, including a series of unlikely plot twists, ultimately sinks it. Dr. Harry Corbett, two weeks short of 50, is trying to save his marriage to beautiful, ambitious journalist Evie, 11 years his junior, who's facing surgery for an aneurysm in Harry's hospital. When Evie dies in hospital, and her lover, about whom Harry knew nothing, accuses Harry of killing her, a boorish NYPD detective vows to nail the distraught doctor. Further murders follow, committed by one Anton Percheck, a physician who used to torture for drug dealers and repressive governments and now works for the cartel. Meanwhile, Harry is beaten, abducted, drugged, chased by villains and the law and nearly killed more than once. As in his earlier novels, Palmer's medical expertise (he's a practicing physician), as well as his ability to write a suspenseful scene, rival those of Robin Cook; unfortunately, so do his pedestrian prose, shallow characterizations, reliance on forced coincidences and maddeningly dim hero (grilled by the vicious cop, Harry doesn't call his lawyer because "he had done nothing wrong"). *Major ad/promo; audio rights to BDD. (Mar.)*

MYSTERIOUS SKIN

Scott Heim. HarperCollins, \$20 (256p)
ISBN 0-06-017175-8

"The summer I was eight years old, five hours disappeared from my life"—so runs the catchy opening to Heim's impressive first novel. The speaker is Brian Lackey, now a troubled teenager, once an introverted kid growing up scared in the small town of Hutchinson, Kans. The reason for his memory lapse and his fear, as we and Brian learn during the course of the novel, turns out not to be the space aliens that he first suspects, but his molestation at the hands of his Little League coach. The key to Brian's reclamation of those lost hours is homosexual hustler Neil McCormick—the slugger on that Little League team and an accomplice to Brian's sexual abuse. Working its way over the course of a decade toward Brian and Neil's reunion, the narrative unfolds through chapters whose points of view alternate among Brian, Neil and a handful of their siblings and confidants. Heim makes numerous freshman mistakes, including a relatively static narrative, prominent characters who outlive their usefulness and occasional lapses in the writing. He also creates scenes of genuine beauty, however, and handles his complicated characters and delicate subject matter with calm assurance. *(Mar.)*

DENIAL

Bonnie Comfort. Simon & Schuster,
\$21 (304p) ISBN 0-671-89696-2

From first-time novelist and longtime psychologist Comfort comes an entertaining but not entirely convincing tale of romantic suspense with an overlay of psychoanalytic theory. The heroine, Sarah Rinsley, is a well-known therapist in L.A. (she even has a radio call-in show) who becomes entangled with a dangerous patient, Nick Arnholt. Though a seemingly charming and successful attorney, Nick exhibits all kinds of self-destructive behavior: he uses cocaine, courts a parade of women without sustaining a relationship and ultimately behaves irresponsibly enough to lose his job. But matters reach a crisis point when he becomes sexually obsessed with Sarah and believes that she returns his feelings. Sarah is herself distressed by her therapy sessions with Nick as they stir up a number of unresolved issues from the past. As Nick becomes a more demanding patient, Sarah's burgeoning romance with the sexy Nicaraguan restaurateur Humberto Cortazar begins to unravel. She also finds herself confronting aspects of her relationship with her mother that plunge her into a depression and psychological confusion. At this juncture, Nick slaps her with a lawsuit—slanderous, scandalous and spurious. Will she be able to defend her reputation, on which her future happiness (not to mention economic solvency) depends? Comfort seems to have constructed her characters from textbook cases of dysfunctional behavior, and the denouement will strain the limits of even the most willingly suspended disbelief. But readers of commercial fiction who enjoy suspense coated with slick analytic detail will doubtlessly find Sarah and her problems appealing. *(Mar.)*

BÔAÏT PEÖPLË

Mary Gardner. Norton, \$21 (288p)
ISBN 0-393-03738-X

Vietnamese immigrants struggle with the burdens of faraway loved ones, unfamiliar customs and the scars of their flight from home in this evocative novel set in Galveston, Tex. Hai Truong is possessed by a spirit, a "ghost husband" who will not let her sleep or eat. While she is hospitalized, her daughter, Linh Nguyen, takes on adult responsibilities for her father, a fisherman, and her two younger siblings, even as she works to excel in school. Meanwhile, Linh's older girlfriend, Trang Lam, living with an aunt and uncle who blame her for their son's death, and troubled by the mystery of her unknown, American father, manages to

succeed academically and be recruited by a private Catholic school; she also develops a crush on Lang Nguyen, an intern at the local hospital who, despite his accomplishments, remains bewildered by the American way of life. Gardner (*Milkweed; Keeping Warm*), who compares the struggle of Vietnamese immigrants to that of African Americans, fills her story with atmospheric details of Vietnamese culture and tradition, at the same time illuminating the uneasy ethnic mix of Galveston's lower-class community. Some readers may tire of the brief staccato sentences meant to convey her characters' disjointed lives and their lack of familiarity with the English language, but Gardner succeeds in communicating the bewilderment and anguish that at times overwhelm people torn from their cultural heritage and forced to struggle in a hostile environment. *(Mar.)*

FYI: Boat People won the 1993 Associated Writing Programs award for the novel.

THE LAST HIGH GROUND

Robin A. White. Crown, \$23 (320p)
ISBN 0-517-59694-6

Japanese villains in a conspiracy novel are sometimes a pretext for gratuitous Japan-bashing; but in this crisp thriller by White, everything he has to say about Japan is an integral part of the premise. In October 1995, a high-stakes merger between the Boeing Aircraft Company and a Japanese consortium is in jeopardy because Boeing's new 777 jets are falling out of the sky. Independent investigator Brian MacHenry suspects something a lot more sinister than terrorist bombings, especially after receiving information from a discredited Boeing employee that the crashes are due to faulty parts. Meanwhile, Shig Onishi of Japan's national police force is also investigating the Boeing merger. The company heading the consortium, Nippon Aerospace, is run by the current head of a Japanese gangster family, and he, along with powerful forces on both sides of the merger, wants to make sure that MacHenry and Onishi fail to discover just exactly what is wrong with the Boeing 777. White (*The Sword of Orion*) keeps the plot complex without making it complicated, and he makes his points about the underlying U.S.-Japanese conflict subtly and dramatically. This hard-edged thriller is somewhat undermined however, by White's decision to use the name of an actual aircraft company and to make innuendos about poor control over software, testing and production. And a final ironic plot reversal involving a high-tech sabotage gimmick could frighten air

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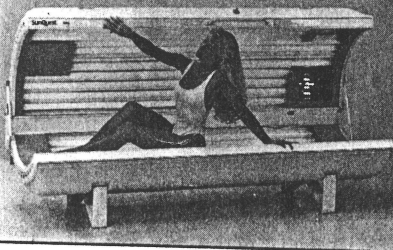


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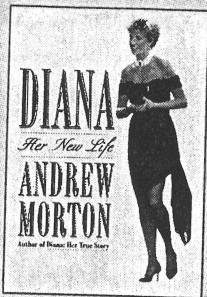
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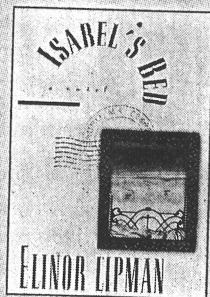
Diana: Her New Life

The world's most famous woman often dines alone or with her butler, sleeps with a teddy bear, and looks back on her fairy tale wedding as the worst moment of her life. This new book by Andrew Morton (Diana: Her True Story) covers the warring camps of Charles and Di, complete with intrigue and soothsayers, like British monarchs of old. But Diana's methods of dealing with stress (colonic irrigation and Prozac) are strictly New Age. (Simon & Schuster, \$23)



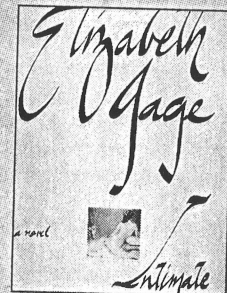
Isabel's Bed

Tossed out like trash when her live-in lover of 12 years jilts her for a younger woman, Harriet Mahoney retreats to Cape Cod. She becomes a ghostwriter for Isabel Krug, who was sharing wealthy Guy Van Vleet's bed when his wife murdered him. So down-to-earth Harriet finds herself living in this a fabulously luxurious oceanfront home with Isabel and her discredited artist husband, Costas, plus a sexy guy Friday named Pete. Elinor Lipman's third novel is a hilarious, heartwarming, feel-good book. (Pocket Books, \$20)



Intimate

This novel opens with a murder, but the victim's identity remains a mystery until the very end. Is it handsome Jordan Lazarus, the world's richest man? Or Tony Dorrance, a slimy ne'er-do-well? Is the woman in bed with the victim Leslie Chamberlain, who's been loved by both? Or Jill Fleming, who sleeps her way to the top? Elizabeth Gage (A Glimpse of Stocking) leaves no stone unturned—be it kidnapping, illegitimacy, or incest—in this steamy pageturner. (Pocket Books, \$23)



Denial

Psychotherapist Sarah Rinsley has a thriving private practice in Westwood, a popular radio call-in show and the respect of her peers. She also has a handsome new lover, Humberto Cortazar, owner of a trendy Los Angeles eatery. But when Nick Belmont becomes her patient, Sarah's world starts to crumble. He's a sexy, successful lawyer who becomes obsessed with Sarah and begins stalking her. Author Bonnie Comfort, a clinical psychologist in Los Angeles, has the expertise to create a riveting first novel. (Simon & Schuster, \$22)

—Jean Graham

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WORK
AT HOME!

Former Winnipegger's novel a journey of intrigue

Denial, a novel by Bonnie Comfort, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1995. 302 pages.

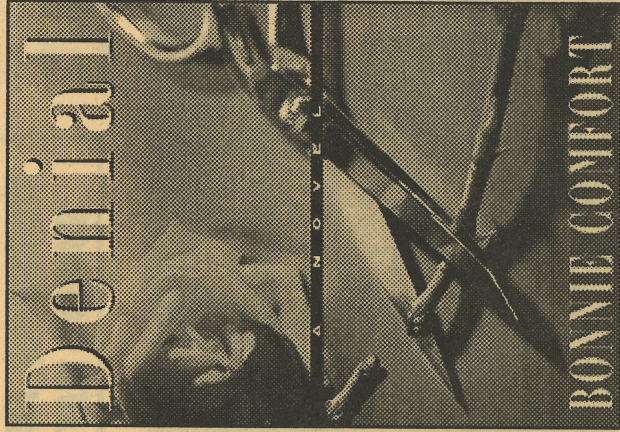
Review by ROCHELLE RISMAN

Writing compellingly from start to finish, former Winnipegger Bonnie Comfort leads us on a journey of intrigue in her bestselling first novel, *Denial*.

POST & NEWS BOOK REVIEW

A psychologist, Comfort skillfully involves the reader from the prologue onward, the main character, psychotherapist, "Dr. Sarah Rinsley", is at the centre of media attention because she's forced to defend herself in a court of law.

The path has been estab-



the novel, "Nick".

Through Rinsley's thoughts and actions, we get a rare look at psychotherapy from the doctor's viewpoint. We become intimately acquainted with various patients, including the confused **o v e r - a c h i e v e r**, Nick.

From the beginning of Nick's psychotherapy sessions with Rinsley, we gradually witness a change in both characters. What starts as a healthy doctor-client rela-

tion is more than eager to follow the plot. Chapter one goes back to the beginning, when Rinsley meets her newest client and the focal point of

tionship also changes - to one as tense as a violin string.

Nick enters psychotherapy after having been referred to Rinsley because he is having many physical symptoms, but apparently feels fine emotionally. Through his sessions with Rinsley, however, we gradually begin to see Nick shedding layers of the protective covering he developed after years of abuse as a child.

At the same time, he begins to express increasingly stronger feelings for her, and to stalk her. Rinsley uses her best efforts to thwart Nick's advances and to keep their relationship on a professional level, but to no avail. Nick is convinced that if he becomes physically involved with her, his life will be fulfilling, so he

continues to vehemently and aggressively pursue her.

Our sympathies remain with Rinsley throughout the novel, and that's a fault in Comfort's storytelling. There is little surprise as we reach the critical junction of the novel. The reader never doubts who is innocent and who is guilty in regards to the court case.

There is one other aspect of this novel some readers might find objectionable - explicitly sexual language and descriptions of sexual acts. Although not crucial to the novel, they do show the humanity of the characters.

All in all, this is an excellent work of fiction, especially for a first attempt. We'll probably see Comfort on the bestseller list again in the future.