


The *New York Times* bestselling author of *Bad Boy Brawly Brown*

WALTER MOSLEY

FEATURING AN ORIGINAL EASY RAWLINS SHORT STORY "CRIMSON STAIN"

DEVIL IN A BLUE DRESS



"I read *Devil in a Blue Dress*
in one sitting and didn't want
it to end. . . . astonishing . . ."
—Jonathan Kellerman

FROM WALTER MOSLEY'S SIX EASY PIECES

CRIMSON STAIN

ETHELINE," SHE SAID, repeating the name I'd asked for.

"Yeah," I said. "Etheline Teaman. I heard from my friend that she works here."

"Who is your friend?" the short, nearly bald black woman asked. She was wearing a stained, pink satin robe that I barely glimpsed through the crack of the door.

"Jackson Blue," I said.

"Jackson." She smiled, surprising me with a mouthful of healthy teeth. "You his friend? What's your name?"

"Easy."

"Easy Rawlins?" she exclaimed, throwing the door open wide and spreading her arms to embrace me. "Hey, baby. It's good to meet you."

I put one hand on her shoulder and looked around to the street, making sure that no one saw me hugging a woman, no matter how short and bald, in the doorway of Piney's brothel.

"Come on in, baby," the woman said. "My name is Moms. I bet Jackson told you 'bout me."

She backed away from the entrance, offering me entrée. I didn't want to be seen entering that doorway either, but I had no choice. Etheline Teaman had a story to tell and I needed to hear it.

The front door opened on a large room that was furnished with seven couches and at least the same number of stuffed chairs. It reminded me of a place I'd been twenty-five years earlier, in the now defunct town of Pariah, Texas. That was the home of a pious white woman—no prostitutes or whiskey there.

"Have a seat, baby," Moms said, waving her hand toward the empty sofas.

It was a plush waiting room where, at night, women waited for men instead of trains.

"Whiskey?" Moms asked.

"No," I said, but I almost said yes.

"Beer?"

"So, Moms. Is Etheline here?"

"Don't be in such a rush, baby," she said. "Sit'own, sit'own."

I staked out a perch on a faded blue sofa. Moms settled across from me on a bright yellow chair. She smiled and shook her head with real pleasure.

"Jackson talk about you so much I feel like we're old friends," she said. "You and that crazy friend'a yours—that Mouse."

Just the mention of his name caused a pang of guilt in my intestines. I shifted in my chair, remembering his bloody corpse lying across the front lawn of EttaMae Harris's home. It was this image that brought me to the Compton brothel.

I cleared my throat and said, "Yeah, I been knowin' Jackson since he was a boy down in Fifth Ward in Houston."

"Oh, honey," Moms sang. "I remember Fifth Ward. The cops would leave down there on Saturday sunset and come back Sunday mornin' to count the dead."

"That's the truth," I replied, falling into the rhythm of her

speech. "The only law down there back then was survival of the fittest."

"An' the way Jackson tells it," Moms added, "the fittest was that man Mouse and you was the fittest's friend."

It was my turn to throw in a line but I didn't.

Moms picked up on my reluctance and nodded. "Jackson said you was all broke up when your friend died last year. When you lose somebody from when you were comin' up it's always hard."

I didn't even know the madam's Christian name but still she had me ready to cry.

"That's why I'm here," I said, after clearing my throat. "You know I never went to a funeral or anything like that for Raymond. His wife took him out of the hospital and neither one of them was ever seen again. I know he's dead. I saw him. But Etheline met somebody who sounded a lot like him a few months ago, up in Richmond. I just wanted to ask her a couple'a questions. I mean, I know he's dead, but at least if I asked her there wouldn't be any question in my mind."

Moms shook her head again and smiled sadly. She felt sorry for me, and that made me angry. I didn't need her pity.

"So is Etheline here?"

"No, darlin'," she said. "She moved on. Left one mornin' 'fore anybody else was up. That's almost four weeks ago now."

"Where'd she go?"

Another woman entered the room. She wore a man's white dress shirt and nothing else. All the buttons except the bottom one were undone. Her lush figure peeked out with each step. She was maybe eighteen and certain that any man who saw her would pay for her time.

When she sneered at me, I understood her pride.



FICTION

Los Angeles, 1948: Easy Rawlins is a black war veteran just fired from his job at a defense plant. Easy is drinking in a friend's bar, wondering how he'll meet his mortgage, when a white man in a linen suit walks in, offering good money if Easy will simply locate Miss Daphne Money, a blonde beauty known to frequent black jazz clubs. . . .

DEVIL IN A BLUE DRESS

Named "One of the 100 Favorite Mysteries of the Century"
by the Independent Mystery Booksellers Association

"Richly atmospheric. . . . *Devil in a Blue Dress* honors the hard-boiled tradition of Hammett/Chandler/Cain in its story line and attitude, but Mosley takes us down some mean streets that his spiritual predecessors never could have. . . .

A fast-moving, entertaining story written with impressive style."

—*Los Angeles Times Book Review*

"A suspenseful novel of human detection more than simply a detective novel. . . . [Mosley is] a talented author with something vital to say about the distance between the black and white worlds, and with a dramatic way to say it."

—*The New York Times*

Look for these other Easy Rawlins mysteries from
Walter Mosley and Washington Square Press:
Gone Fishin' *White Butterfly* *A Red Death*
A Little Yellow Dog *Black Betty*

Each volume features an all-new Easy Rawlins short story!

\$14.00 U.S./\$16.00 Can.

ISBN-13: 978-0-7434-5179-6

ISBN-10: 0-7434-5179-1



9 780743 451796

WSP
WASHINGTON SQUARE PRESS

Cover design by Jeanne M. Lee
Cover illustration by Dan Kilpatrick III

Register online at www.simonsays.com for more information on this and other great books.

PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.