23 SHADES OF BLACK

Ken Wishnia
Introduction by Barbara D'Amato

23 Shades of Black is socially conscious crime fiction. It takes place in New York City in the early 1980s, i.e., the Reagan years, and was written partly in response to the reactionary discourse of the time, when the current thirty-year assault on the rights of working people began in earnest, and the divide between rich and poor deepened with the blessing of the political and corporate elites. But it is not a political tract, it's a kick-ass novel that was nominated for the Edgar and the Anthony Awards, and made *Booklist's* Best First Mysteries of the Year.

The heroine, Filomena Buscarsela, is an immigrant who experienced tremendous poverty and injustice in her native Ecuador, and who grew up determined to devote her life to helping others. She tells us that she really should have been a priest, but since that avenue was closed to her, she chose to become a cop instead. The problem is that as one of the first Latinas on the NYPD, she is not just a woman in a man's world, she is a woman of color in a white man's world. And it's hell. Filomena is mistreated and betrayed by her fellow officers, which leads her to pursue a case independently in the hopes of being promoted to detective for the Rape Crisis Unit.

Along the way, she is required to enforce unjust drug laws that she disagrees with, and to betray her own community (which ostracizes her as a result) in an undercover operation to round up illegal immigrants. Several scenes are set in the East Village art and punk rock scene of the time, and the murder case eventually turns into an investigation of corporate environmental crime from a working class perspective that is all-too-rare in the genre.

And yet this thing is damn funny, too.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kenneth Wishnia was born in Hanover, N.H. to a roving band of traveling academics. He has lived and worked (and been chased by riot police) on three continents, including several years in Scotland, France and Ecuador. The urgent need for a day job forced him to earn a B.A. from Brown University (1982) and a Ph.D. in comparative literature from SUNY Stony Brook (1996). He teaches writing, literature and other deviant forms of thought at Suffolk Community College in Brentwood, Long Island, where he is an Associate Professor of English.

His first novel, *23 Shades of Black*, was nominated for the Edgar and the Anthony Awards and made *Booklist's* Best First Mystery list, and was followed by five other novels, including *Soft Money*, a Library Best Mystery of the Year, *Red House*, a *Washington Post* Book World "Rave" Book of the Year, and *The Fifth Servant*, an Indie Notable selection and a finalist for the Sue Feder Memorial Historical Mystery Award.
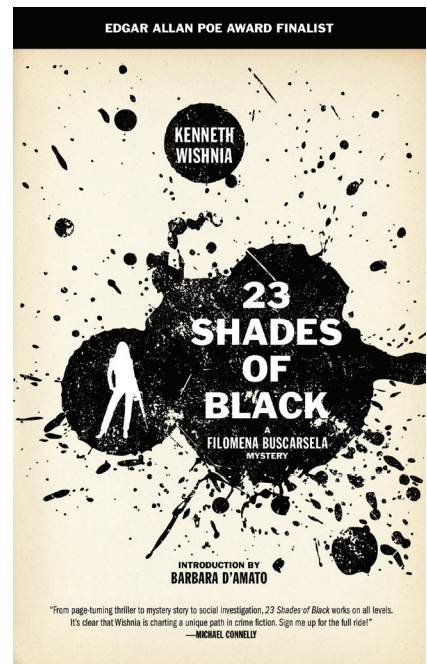
ABOUT BARBARA D'AMATO (INTRODUCTION)

Barbara D'Amato has won the Carl Sandburg Award for Fiction, the Mary Higgins Clark Award, the Anthony twice, the Agatha twice, the Macavity, and others. She is a past president of Mystery Writers of America and of Sisters in Crime International.

ACCOLADES

"From page-turning thriller to mystery story to social investigation, *23 Shades of Black* works on all levels. It's clear from the start that Wishnia is charting a unique path in crime fiction. Sign me up for the full ride!"

—Michael Connelly, author of *Lost Light*

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