

*Hangman: A Decker/Lazarus Novel* by Faye Kellerman  
(HarperCollins Publishers; William Morrow, August 3, 2010)

Beautiful yet vulnerable, Teresa McLaughlin knows how to push people's buttons to get what she wants; she's had lots of practice during her volatile fifteen-year marriage to Chris Donatti, who morphed from her high school sweetheart into a professional killer. That's how she met LAPD Lieutenant Peter Decker, the detective working on Chris' case shortly before they were married. Now, Teresa abruptly reappears in Decker's life to ask a favor of him, a favor he knows will draw her sociopathic husband back into his life as well.

Reluctant to become involved, Peter asks advice from his wife, Rena Lazarus, knowing she will disapprove.

"Of course I don't want you to do it,' Rina answered. 'He shot you for God's sake!'"

"So I'll call her up and say no."

"A little late for that, don't you think?" Rina continues the dialogue with Peter, pointing out the reasons he should not say yes and emphasizing the reasons he cannot refuse to help Terry. At the bottom of her list is the fact that Terry is beautiful; the list is topped with Rina's desire to keep her husband from being shot again. Then, too, what about the boy – Terry and Chris's teen-age son, Gabe?

Within hours, Decker regrets becoming involved. Terry is missing; Donatti disappears; and Gabe is homeless. Refusing to leave the precocious 14-year-old on his own, Decker and Rina take him in temporarily. Now Peter worries about the father's influence on Gabe; how safe is his family with Gabe in the house? Will Gabe's presence draw Chris to them creating even more danger for Decker's family?

Fate will not allow Decker to focus just on his family concerns or to bemoan the fact that he is on the verge of turning 60, or that he sincerely wants to reunite Terry and Gabe; murders continue to happen. A nurse from St. Timothy's Hospital is found dangling from the rafters in an upscale house under construction six hours after her shift ends. Decker calls in his team of topnotch investigators, led by Sergeant Marge Dunn, a large woman with an even bigger heart. While investigating Adrianna's death, trying to determine whether it is related to her eclectic lifestyle or whether a crazed killer is on the loose, other murders by strangling occur; and where is Adrianna's boyfriend? The team is led from L.A. to Los Vegas and back, left wondering if there could be two serial killers afloat or just one with a long-term voracious appetite for human extinction. And where is Terry? Is she really in harm's way, or could she have concocted a complex plot to leave her son with the Decker's, knowing Gabe will be well cared for while she escapes the deadly clutches of her husband? Too many questions, too few answers.

Just when the reader decides that one talented detective can't possibly stretch himself far enough to solve all these crimes, Detective Peter Decker writes a report, that readers become privy to, in order to summarize everything that has happened, showing a satisfactory ending, not necessarily a happy one, for all concerned. The report hints at what lies in the future for those who remain alive and explains the whys and wherefores of the demise of those who passed on.

Faye Kellerman does an excellent job of describing her characters to offer the reader the feeling of knowing them well; her descriptions of time and place excel as does the alternating scenes throughout the book to tie all actions together so the reader is not lost in the maze or left mystified. The one shortfall with *Hangman*, in this reader's view, is the truncated ending. After being spoiled, and feeling like a participant in the investigation, throughout the book with precise character development and meticulous detail of police procedurals, the report summary gives one a sense of being left out of the concluding action. In spite of the one deficit, *Hangman* is a 'must read' for fans of the thriller and suspense genres. They will find that even the ending, though less satisfying than the rest of the book, is a well executed way of wrapping it up and tying it all together.

Faye Kellerman has authored 27 novels, including 20 NYT best sellers featuring the husband and wife team of Peter Decker and Rina Lazarus. She has teamed with husband/author Jonathan Kellerman for two short novels and more recently with daughter Aliza to cowrite the young adult novel, *Prism*. The Kellermans live in Los Angeles and in Santa Fe, NM.

*Reviewer Lois Bennett, Ph.D. is a former psychologist turned editor and writer, author of Beyond Forever: Experiences from Past Lives, written under the pseudonym of Taylor Shaye (Fireside Publications) and ebook, Deadly Visions (Amazon Kindle). Her non-fiction book, Essays on Living with Alzheimer's Disease: The First Twelve Months is due for release in September 2010.*