



The Madman's Tale: A Novel

By John Katzenbach

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It's been twenty years since Western State Hospital was closed down and the last of its inmates reintegrated into society. Francis Petrel was barely out of his teens when his family committed him to the asylum, after his erratic behavior culminated in a terrifying outburst. Now middle-aged, he leads an aimless, solitary life housed in a cheap apartment, periodically tended to by his sisters, and perpetually medicated to quiet the chorus of voices in his head. But a reunion on the grounds of the shuttered institution stirs something deep in Francis's troubled mind: dark memories he thought he had laid to rest, about the grisly events that led to Western State Hospital's demise.

It begins in 1979, when twenty-one-year-old Petrel descends into the state-run purgatory of an overcrowded, understaffed Massachusetts mental hospital. Surrounded by inmates roaming the halls like drugged zombies and raving behind locked doors, well-meaning orderlies, jaded nurses, and patronizing doctors, Francis finds friendship with a motley assortment of fellow patients: a would-be Napoleon, a wise ex-firefighter, and a man obsessed with battling imagined devils. But there's nothing imaginary about the young nurse found sexually assaulted and brutally murdered late one night after lights-out.

The police suspect an inmate, while patients whisper about visions of a white-shrouded "angel." But the striking and mysterious prosecuting attorney who arrives to investigate has her own chilling theory—about the grim, telltale "signature" left on the victim's body, a string of unsolved sex killings, and a very real devil who, by chance or design, has come to turn a madhouse into a slaughterhouse.

Now, with the past creeping back to haunt his thoughts, and nothing but a pencil and the bare walls of his bleak apartment, Francis surrenders to the overwhelming need to tell the story of those nightmarish days. But because the crime was never solved, it's a story doomed to remain unfinished. Until, like Francis's long-buried recollections, the killer resurfaces . . . with a vengeance.

A tour de force narrative journey through the eerily unpredictable mind of an utterly unusual hero, *The Madman's Tale* will keep even the most astute thriller reader uncertain, unnerved, and unable to resist the tantalizing twists and turns of this fiendishly suspenseful shadow show.

From the Hardcover edition.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

The conceit of this impossible-to-put-down thriller—the story of the hunt for a serial killer-rapist who has concealed himself among a psychiatric asylum's insane—is that it was written in pencil by a madman on the walls of his apartment. More than 20 years ago, Francis Xavier Petrel, nicknamed C-Bird for the seabird his name evokes, was confined against his will in the Western State Hospital, a run-down residential mental health facility that rivals Kelsey's Cuckoo's Nest for evil administrators and whacked-out inmates. A shy, frightened 21-year-old who endures a cacophony of disembodied voices, C-Bird is befriended by Peter the Fireman, nicknamed for the church he burned down with a pedophile priest still inside. (C-Bird and Peter appear almost normal amid the hospital's other catatonics, manic-depressives, psychopaths and psychotics.) Then they discover the raped and mutilated body of nurse Short Blond (nicknamed for her hair) stuffed into a storage closet. All evidence points to paranoid-schizophrenic inmate Lanky, who earlier in the day had identified Short Blond as an agent of evil, but Lanky claims the killing was the work of an invisible Angel of Death who committed the crime to save them from some unspecified devilish fate. C-Bird and Peter, knowing that Lanky has been unjustly accused, set out to find the real killer. They are joined by state prosecutor Lucy Kyoto Jones, who believes the killer is the same man who has committed other savage crimes beyond the walls of the hospital. Katzenbach (author of the bestsellers *Just Cause* and *The Analyst*) delivers an uplifting story of justice, friendship, mystery and, above all, the courage of certain men and women who rise up, no matter the circumstances, to defeat evil, no matter the consequences. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

From [Booklist](#)

The narrator isn't exactly a madman but, rather, someone whose madness is quieted by meds. "It is a very hard thing, in this time of ours, to be mad and middle-aged," hero Francis Petrel writes early on. Perhaps the best feature of veteran crime writer Katzenbach's latest is the way he fleshes out the everyday desperation of someone living on the fringes of society. Petrel receives an invitation to a reunion of former "guests" of the insane asylum his parents consigned him to as a teenager. This not very credible plot starter leads Petrel to investigate what horrors led to the hospital's closing, his thoughts especially revolving around the unsolved murder of a nurse. Intriguing, but far too long and too encumbered with Petrel's Byzantine thoughts to generate suspense. Still, the Edgar-nominated Katzenbach has a following, and this introspective tale will interest those who don't read thrillers for the thrills. *Connie Fletcher*
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Review

"Few writers of crime fiction seem to understand the criminal mind as well as Katzenbach."
-- *People* (*People Weekly*)

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Sara Otoole:

In this 21st one hundred year, people become competitive in every way. By being competitive today, people have do something to make these survives, being in the middle of the particular crowded place and notice through surrounding. One thing that occasionally many people have underestimated this for a while is

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Cheree Kramer:

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Lois Wiggins:

A number of people said that they feel bored when they reading a publication. They are directly felt it when they get a half areas of the book. You can choose the particular book The Madman's Tale: A Novel to make your current reading is interesting. Your own personal skill of reading talent is developing when you including reading. Try to choose very simple book to make you enjoy to learn it and mingle the sensation about book and looking at especially. It is to be initial opinion for you to like to open a book and study it. Beside that the guide The Madman's Tale: A Novel can to be your brand-new friend when you're feel alone and confuse with what must you're doing of that time.

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