



## South of Hell

*P.J. Parrish*

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Dig up the past. Pay the price.

With one phone call from a man he barely recalls meeting years ago, South Florida detective Louis Kincaid heads to the Michigan town of his college days to reopen a disturbing cold case -- and finds himself confronting his own painful past secrets...secrets that risk his future with the woman he loves, detective Joe Frye.

Ann Arbor police detective Jake Shockey wants Kincaid's help in the case of Jean Brandt, who went missing nine years ago -- and whose husband, Owen, has since been paroled. Now, Owen Brandt's girlfriend appears to be at risk, and Shockey is desperate to get involved. Kincaid soon unearths the deeply personal reasons why...and with Joe Frye assisting, Kincaid links yesterday's jealousies with today's potentially lethal vengeance. It's only a matter of time before one will win out over the other -- and before Kincaid's own shattering revelations will be forced out into the light of day.

## South of Hell Details

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Author : P.J. Parrish

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## From Reader Review South of Hell for online ebook

### William Bentrin says

South of Hell by P.J. Parrish

Parrish (or should it be Parrishes) have crafted another entertaining thriller. Once again, Louis Kincaid a former cop who now is a P.I., is ensnared in OPP (other peoples problems). These problems involve maturity, death, philandering, friendship, love and perhaps a tiny pinch of the occult.

Louis's friend Mel plays a very small part in this book. His failing health saddens Louis. Louis's girl friend is going to run for sheriff in Michigan. This driving of roots makes Louis aware of the widening rift with him and Joe. A Michigan detective requests Louis's help on a case. It seems serendipitous to be paid to fly to Michigan so he incorporates his work and a reunion with Joe. Louis's journal to see Joe is in an area of Michigan where multi-racial affairs may be seen askew. The reunion leads to his embroilment in not only an old murder but an even older murder.

Amy and Lily, two children, share some similarities in their desire to reach their roots. Louis finds a part of himself that he never knew he lost. Joe discovers things about herself she never knew she had. There were both touching and highly disturbing scenes in this book. Overall, this was a better book than the previous Parrish book I read.

I recommend the book.

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### Ben says

Not bad, just boring. The problem comes down to flat characters and repeated scenarios. Nothing interesting happens in the first half of the book.

The farmhouse is central to the whole plot, but the number of times that it is revisited in a similar context gets ludicrous. In simple terms, the house is broken into many times in order to snoop around. And the young girl goes through "regression" a few too many times as well. It's the same thing over and over, peeling back layers like eating a raw onion.

Characters are weak. Joe loves Louis, which I assume has been established in previous novels, but I can't see that love here. She reacts horribly when one character believes (view spoiler), and Louis backs her up despite his past. Louis is like a cardboard cut out, just wandering around trying to put things together with no real logic. He says "calm down" twice in a rather heated scenario. The antagonist is one-dimensional but at least he's vile and that makes him more interesting than the rest.

The last third has more action and rapid plot development. But it also does a bait and switch a bunch of times, mostly regarding the fate of characters, which counters the increased pace and wastes some potential. Also the final revelation on the farm is pretty lame.

It's competently written; the dialogue is decent and the descriptions are sometimes good—despite the absurd burger scene. It could have been compressed into a novella or maybe even a short story.

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## Alex says

SOUTH OF HELL (Pub. 2008) by P.J. Parrish was an enjoyable read. This was my first time reading a book by Parrish (a sisters writing team) and I will definitely read more of their work. The authors have a smooth writing style, and the story moves at a good pace.

The story opens in an intriguing way, and largely held my interest all the way through. It is about a 16-yr old girl named Amy, who has been living with an elderly aunt, until the aunt dies. Amy is driven to return to her childhood home on a farm in Michigan, where she witnessed horrific abuse of her mother by the man she thinks is her father. Amy is there to find her mother, who Amy last saw being stabbed multiple times, and assumes she is dead. The author does not specify how many years passed between that event and Amy returning to the farm, which to me is one of the few weak spots of the story.

The main character, Louis Kincaid, is a 29-yr old black man who is working as a P.I. because he was kicked off the police force. Kincaid is a recurring character in a series, and SOUTH OF HELL is several books into the series, but reads as a stand-alone. While I enjoyed Kincaid's role in the story, I can't say that he fascinated me enough as a character to drive me to read the rest of the series (like Jack Reacher).

Kincaid receives a phone call from Detective Shockey, who is seeking his help to solve a years-old missing persons case--Amy's mother. But it turns out Shockey has a personal stake in the case and he breaks the law in several ways in trying to solve the case. Kincaid and Shockey end up out at the farm and discover Amy hiding in the cupboard, traumatized from PTSD/flashbacks and goes on from there.

The climax is a whirlwind of violence, and ultimately we learn what happened to Amy's mother, which is the big mystery, and also learn the 'end' of a subplot related to another murder that occurred on the farm in 1850.

All in all, SOUTH OF HELL is a good read. I really enjoyed the author's writing skills, but the story doesn't have enough pizzazz for my personal tastes to cause me to read this specific book again. But I can highly recommend the author's writing style and will definitely check out their other books.

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## Yvonne (Fiction Books) says

"Great Crime Fiction With A Thought Provoking Social Edge"

This is my first brush with the character PI Louis Kincaid and by now he his into his ninth adventure, with the tenth case seemingly to be his last, as the author is launching a new character later in the year.

In this instance though, I have no real urge to go back and read all Louis's earlier cases and history, not because it isn't a fantastic series, which it is, but because this book works great as a stand alone novel, and by now the character has been `fleshed out' and given his full personality, which is so complex and sensitive, that to read earlier books would probably be a retrograde step.

Not only is this book a great thriller that kept me guessing right until the end, never really knowing what the final outcome would be, until the very last page, but it is also written with the keen attention to detail that made the characters believable, well developed and real to me, drawing an immediate empathy from me, as I was so easily able to relate to them.

This book is written, and almost comes across as two separate stories, covering two disparate worlds and periods of time; the hard hitting angle of a great piece of modern day crime fiction writing and an invaluable

insight into the many social problems of society, both modern and historical.

Louis Kincaid, born half black, into a small town, where prejudice is, even today, very much the norm. His mother passed away when he was young, his father abandoned him to a succession of foster homes, some good, some not so good. A law degree abandoned mid-way, for a career in the police, from where he is subsequently dismissed. He is now a PI, living on the edge of society, hated by the police, still an outcast in his home town and now living a very much anonymous life in the city, but unconsciously desperately trying to bring closure to his past and move on with his life.

His long distance relationship, with a serving female police officer, who has moved far away, seeking promotion in her career, is strained to say the least and that loyalty and love is to be tested even further, when she is drawn into this complex and emotional case, initially against her will, but then with an increasing sense of need and fulfillment, that will either draw them closer together once again, or separate them forever.

Louis is forced back to his roots, as if by an invisible cord, when a voice from his past asks for his help in solving a case and finds himself thrown headlong into prejudices he had hoped to try and leave behind, whilst being forced to face up to the responsibilities of a long ago action, which evokes feelings in him that he could never have imagined.

The crime is one against a string of unfortunate women, perpetrated by a single man, so cruel and viciously violent, as to be vile to everyone who comes into contact with him. Could some of this madman's actions stem from stories of long abandoned 'Underground Railroads to Canada', used by the slaves and found to be hidden on his land, or from the fact that, it transpires that there is a history of 'black blood' in his family, which in an area where blacks are still only just tolerated, has sent his mind into a downward spiral, from which he is unable to escape?

Seemingly, only one young girl, long ago abandoned to her fate, has the key to the answer. Amy is portrayed as a vulnerable, timid person, obviously frightened of Owen Brandt, yet having an inner depth and courage to face up to him, in order to solve the mystery of her mothers disappearance, one crime for which he has never been charged.

Amy's transition into an emerging confident young woman, gathers pace as Owen Brandt's capture comes closer, although she is prepared to place herself in terrible danger, to ensure that he is forced to pay for the crime and thus atone for the wrongs inflicted on her mother and all those unfortunate souls, from long ago.

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## **Natalie says**

Entertainingly fast read

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## **Toria Bedell says**

This book had a lot of twist and turns in it. Louis is called by a cop in Michigan to help with a cold case. Louis decides to go help him but soon learns this cop isn't telling him the truth. The missing women in the case has ties to the cop and Louis almost doesn't help him but something intrigued him with this one.

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## **Irrlicht says**

Okay, also mit dem Buch haben sie mich irgendwie voll verarscht. Der Klappentext klang interessant, der Fall an sich sowieso und Thriller sind immer gut. (Naja, meistens.)

Da ich allerdings eine Aversion gegen alle möglichen la-li „Lovestories“ habe, die absolut keinen Sinn machen, für die Handlung des Romans KOMPLETT unwichtig sind und/oder absolut an den Haaren herbeigezogen sind, habe ich das Buch mal oberflächlich durchgeblättert, ob ich etwas entdecke, das mich gleich angewidert abwinken lässt. Aber siehe da! Nur männliche Vornamen, außer der weiblichen Hauptperson, um die es geht: Das traumatisierte Mädchen! Keine fadenscheinige, traumatisierte Frau, für die besagtes Trauma nur erfunden wurde, damit sie möglichst schnell mit dem großen, starken (und wahrscheinlich mir ihr völlig inkompatiblen) Helden im nächsten Bett landen kann. (Kotzwürg!)

Dass der Name „Joe“ doch tatsächlich die Abkürzung für den Namen „Joelle“ ist, konnte ich nun wirklich nicht ahnen! (Und mal ehrlich: Was für ein Name ist Joelle?)

\*tief seufz\*

Wie dem auch sei. Es endete jedenfalls damit, dass ich mich die Hälfte des Buches lang über die für den Fall völlig belanglosen Beziehungsprobleme der männlichen Hauptperson mit eben dieser Joelle aufgeregt habe, and den langweiligen und unsympathischen Charakteren fast verzweifelt wäre und letztendlich eigentlich nur wissen wollte, wie der Mordfall ausgeht.

Der Fall an sich war auch ziemlich interessant, nimmt hinter dem ganzen Beziehungs-drama und dem restlichen Drumherum aber leider nur ca. ein viertel des Buches ein, was das Lesen für mich ein BISSCHEN anstrengend gemacht hat.

Aus irgendwelchen Gründen mussten sie das Opfer/traumatisierte Mädchen dann auch noch leicht übersinnlich machen (á lá „Ich sehe tote Menschen.“), sodass sich das Buch irgendwie nicht so ganz entscheiden konnte, ob es jetzt natürlich oder übernatürlich ist und welcher Fall jetzt wichtiger: Der von dem aktuellen traumatisierten Mädchen oder der von vor keine Ahnung wieviel Jahren mit dem ermordeten Sklavenmädchen. Bla.

Echt schade. Hätte ein guter Thriller werden können. So nur unter Durchschnitt.

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## **Miche says**

Worthwhile read - Story is well thought out and keeps you gripped until the end

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## **drey says**

I never knew there was a Hell in Michigan. Apparently there is, and so South of Hell is also a place — and one that's not making it onto my must-visit list anytime soon. Not as long as I still have the heebie-jeebies from reading this book, that is.

Louis Kincaid — former cop, current private investigator — is asked to return to Ann Arbor, Michigan, to help a cop solve a missing-person case that's nine years old. When he gets there, he realizes that this was a case he'd looked at, and filed under "ran away". Then things get a bit wonky.

There's a husband-slash-suspect, who might've killed the missing woman, and is just out on parole. There's his girlfriend, who takes the abuse he heaps on her. There's a mystery teenager hiding in a kitchen cupboard when Louis "visits" the farm that's south of Hell. There're bones buried in the barn on that farm, that predates all of them. Oh, and there's a blast from Joe's past that swings by with a surprise.

Phew.

All of that ties together, with help from a hypnotist, a cop-slash-girlfriend, and a really smart little girl. I was impressed and amazed by the depth of the characters, as well as the plot. Everything flowed seamlessly, everything wrapped up neatly (if not easily), and the characters, while flawed, were human. Well, except for the bad guy.

South of Hell is one white-knuckled ride through some very unpleasant events, that will grab and hold your attention until you heave a sigh of relief at reaching the last page. And now I need to check out the previous 8 Louis Kincaid books. Thanks for adding to my TBR pile!

drey's rating: Excellent!

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## George1st says

This book first published in 2008 forms part of a thriller series featuring Louis Kincaid and Joe Frye and was recently mentioned at a crime book discussion group I attended. Therefore as I needed something to read on a long train journey across the UK (this is not a land of high speed trains) that was entertaining, gripping but not too intellectually taxing I decided to give it a try. P. J. Parrish is in fact a pseudonym used by Detroit born sisters Kelly Nichols and Kristy Montee who have written a number of critically acclaimed and commercially successful mystery thriller novels. Firstly the good news is that you need not to have read any of the proceeding novels in the series to get an understanding of the characters and their circumstances for the reader is quickly brought up to speed allowing this to be read as a stand alone novel.

The plot involves PI Louis Kincaid going from Florida back to his old patch in rural Michigan where he has been asked by a local detective to take another look at one of his former cases from eight years ago involving the disappearance of a missing woman. When Louis accompanied by his girlfriend detective Joe Frye visit the abandoned and now derelict farmhouse where the missing woman lived which is located just south of a town called Hell, they discover hiding there a teenage girl who claims to be the daughter of the missing woman although there is no record or local knowledge of the woman ever having a child. What is going on? With the release from prison and the arrival on the scene of Owen Brandt the missing woman's husband who has a history of violence but claims his wife left him we are now set up for the mystery to be unraveled.

Interwoven with the present day mystery is also the dark and shameful story of racial intolerance and slavery that still has a powerful debilitating influence over much of American society and consciousness. The writers are not afraid to tackle such a subject and this adds an added resonance to the story which they also supplement with a supernatural element. I certainly enjoyed the story and it had more than enough gripping and page turning moments. If nothing else it made a long journey seem a lot quicker as the time flew by as I became increasingly engrossed. If you like a good thriller with an added social dimension then this is worth a try.

## Rebekkila says

With one phone call from a man he barely recalls meeting years ago, South Florida detective Louis Kincaid heads to the Michigan town of his college days to reopen a disturbing cold case-and finds himself confronting his won painful past secrets...secrets that risk his future with the woman he loves, detective Joe Frye. Ann Arbor police detective Jake Shockey wants Kincaid's help in the case of Jean Brandt, who went missing nine years ago-and whose husband Owen, has since been paroled. Now, Owen Brandt's girlfriend appears to be at risk, and Shockey is desperate to get involved. Kincaid soon unearths the deeply personal reasons why...and with Joe Frye assisting, Kincaid links yesterday's jealousies with today's potentially lethal vengeance. It's only a matter of time before one will win out over the other-and before Kincaid's own shattering revelations will be forced out into the light of day.

I didn't like this book as much as I liked Island of Bones. I would recommend it.

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## Jill says

I'll say it again, this series just keeps getting better and better! PI Louis Kincaid heads back to Michigan in this story at the request of a homicide investigator who wants his input on a missing person case that Louis worked nine years ago. Of course the question is why is homicide working a missing person case and as Louis discovers there is a whole lot more to this case than what meets the eye. Joelle is already back in Michigan working as undersheriff in Echo Bay and is a critical piece in helping Louis solve this mystery, but their relationship is turning into a mystery itself. I can't wait to read the next one!

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## Mary says

I actually didn't finish. I had read another Parrish book I liked so picked this up. But the story/main characters weren't compelling enough to put up with the asshole character. So many of these guys in real life I just couldn't get in the mood. Maybe its my age:)

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## Wayne Zurl says

SOUTH OF HELL by PJ Parrish

There is a Hell on earth. In this case, it's just northwest of Ann Arbor, Michigan along route 32.

If you're not familiar with the Louis Kincaid mysteries or P.J. Parrish, the author is/are two women—sisters. So, if I want to reference the writer(s), I will use plurals like the authors or the ladies and not perpetuate the fantasy that P.J. is one person.

I liked a lot about this book, but there were a couple of glaring things with which I take strong exception.

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Perhaps it's just this book, but I think it's more about the series. And I've read a bunch of them and will read others—I just claim my inalienable right to argue with success.

Louis receives a call from an Ann Arbor detective which whom he is remotely familiar from working there years ago. Jake Shockey wants Louis to help him shed light on a cold case of a missing woman who Shockey is certain was murdered by her ex-con husband who was recently released from prison.

Why Kincaid would travel from south Florida to Michigan to help this guy with whom he is only slightly acquainted requires a little suspension of disbelief, but Louis writes it off as going up north to also see his girlfriend, who left Florida law enforcement to become an undersheriff in Leelanau County Michigan.

Owen Brandt the ex-con is well constructed—a real low-life rat-bag. That's good. More good comes in the shape of Amy Brandt, a teenager found crashing at the Brandt homestead which has been abandoned since Owen began his hard time. Fans of the paranormal might like the idea that Amy gets, what seems like, “messages” from someone dead since the mid-19th century. The authors do this aspect very well and make it uncertain whether this is really a paranormal adventure or if somewhere in the deep recesses of Amy's mind there's information that will shed light on her mother's disappearance AND crimes of an earlier life.

My complaint comes with the character development of Louis Kincaid and to a lesser degree, Joe Frye, his girlfriend. Louis seems to be a character wandering the country in search of a personality. Through back-story in every novel, the ladies tell us lots about his early life, but not enough for me to get into his present day head. He gets less dialogue than Clint Eastwood had in the spaghetti westerns. And Joe isn't much better. Supposedly they love each other. They make love. They occasionally hang out together, but I see little affection or passion or personality rearing its head between them. I would like to see more to make these characters likable, identifiable, and larger than they presently are.

The next complaint comes from the lady's formulaic use of glaring mistakes made by Louis to create the contrived tension they (and presumably the editor and publisher) want to interject at the ¾ mark in the story. I understand the desire to crank up the reader's interest, but the way the ladies do it destroys Louis's credibility as a competent ex-cop / PI. Basically, he screws up big-time and almost gets himself killed—twice! I don't want provide a “spoiler” here, but he does the same exceedingly stupid thing twice. Yikes! If I were his supervisor, I'd take the lad behind a diner and thrash him with a nightstick for such stupidity. It could have been done better, leaving Louis in jeopardy, but not leaving cops, ex-cops, and fans of good police procedurals disgusted with a protagonist they're trying to like. Shockey also screws up, but his mistake is mitigated by alcohol use and being in a general blue funk at a time when he needed to be on top of his professional heap.

There are a few very good characters in this: The psychiatrist who assists Joe and Louis with getting inside Amy's head, the State police detective who becomes the obligatory semi-antagonist, Owen Brandt's sleazy girlfriend, who, in the end, does the right thing, and a super-cool little girl named Lily are only a few. Readers less finicky than I will enjoy this book more. I know; I'm a pain in the ass with stuff like this. But I do recommend the book positively, and give it 3.5 stars.

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## John says

This is my first PJ Parrish book. I found the characters of the investigators Louis Kincaid and Joette Frye highly interesting. The bad guy, Owen Brandt is a really bad guy. Such monsters do walk among us and very few get what they deserve. There are a lot of harsh memories entwined to make this a very good story, but

hard to read. You'll never look at an old farm house in the country the same way again.

The historical and personal perspectives regarding the underground railroad were a surprise, since I had little knowledge of how important it was in the lives of so many ordinary people. The young woman, Amy, is a character with such depth that I know we will be hearing from her again. Jake Schockley is unforgettable as a man haunted by the opportunities that we all miss at sometime in our lives.

All of this made me want to read more by these writers. The next book I read was *A Thousand Bones*, giving the background of Joe Frye during her rookie year as a police officer in 1975. I found it refreshing that the authors have chosen a time period without cell phones and the internet, without lab rats pretending to be investigators. We've all become so used to being exposed to those things that the story often gets lost in the DNA analysis. This is written and should be read for the stories of the victims, the investigators and yes, even the criminal.

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