

Book Review: Anatomy of an Alibi
By Ashley Elston

I enjoyed Ashley Elston's 2024 debut adult novel "First Lie Wins." So, it was an easy decision to check out her follow-up novel "Anatomy of an Alibi." Unfortunately, this one doesn't measure up to her first book.

To begin, the narrative is written in three timelines: before the alibi, the alibi, and after the alibi. And within each timeline there are multiple perspectives. If that's not confusing enough, as the story progresses there are plot twists – some of which are highly suspect – and an overlap of timelines. Factor in a large ensemble of characters and the narrative loses its flow.

Sometimes, the keep it simple approach really does work.

The story opens with Camille Bayliss wanting a divorce from her lawyer husband Ben. She enlists Aubrey Price to masquerade as her, handing over her cell phone and car and having Aubrey travel to different locations, thereby establishing an alibi. It appears Ben has a penchant for monitoring his wife's movements.

But the story bogs down (and loses reader interest) because there's not enough depth to the characters. Both Camille and Aubrey, as well as Ben, Camille's brother and sister-in-law, and all four of Aubrey's housemates for that matter, are flat. There's little in their past or present that made me care about them.

From a plot standpoint there's corruption, abuse of power, coercion, trust violations, wrongful convictions, and even a bit of romance. But the constant shift of timelines and perspectives hinders each element from fully taking hold. Too often I had to pause and scan back over a previous chapter or two to make sense of what I was reading.

No one trusts anyone else. Everyone wants to cover their butt. And criminal behavior is perfectly acceptable in the interest of protecting family or a loved one. A strange kind of justice.

The ending is wild (I won't give anything away) in its attempt to tie together all the loose ends. And in doing so left me feeling unsatisfied.

Three stars for "Anatomy of an Alibi." It's a novel with a narrative that tries to do too much.