

WALTER MOSELY

When Walter Mosely published *Devil in a Blue Dress* in 1990, he was immediately hailed as a major new talent on the mystery scene. *Black Betty*, *Red Death*, *White Butterfly* and *A Little Yellow Dog* (all the titles are color-coded) quickly cemented his reputation. And for good reason. Mosley's hero, Easy Rawlins, a WWII veteran trying to make it L.A. in the late 1940s and 50s, brings fresh point of view to the private eye genre. Not just an African American version of Ross MacDonal's Lew Archer, Easy is an authentic new character, doing "favors" for blacks who are too poor to afford a private detective.

Now, after a six-year hiatus comes a new book in the series – *Bad Boy Brawly Brown*. The story takes place in 1964, long before Watts exploded in riots. But the signs of growing dissatisfaction and militancy are already evident. At the same time, Easy has carved out a little spot in the sun: he has a good job, a house, and is creating a family for himself.

When an old friend asks him to look for her son who may have gotten himself into trouble, Easy gets drawn back into the gray area between legality and crime, the world of deceptions and violence. There he meets a slew of shady characters among budding civil rights groups and secret police units ready to infiltrate them. With humor, muscle and the kind of wisdom it would take most of us several lifetimes to acquire, he negotiates a minefield of lies, greed and idealism gone awry before he can return home.

Mosely's books are about what it takes to survive with your identity and values intact in a world where the rules are stacked against you. Despite being a member of a disenfranchised underclass, Rawlins' passionate pursuit of the American promise of property, family and security makes him a kind of Everyman. He is smarter than most people know. When he acts humble in the face of white authority figures, he uses their stereotypical views of him to his benefit. But there is a cost. We witness the hurt and vulnerability beneath his mask and how swallowing his rightful anger eats away at his self-esteem. Nor does Mosley let us forget how precious his little haven of sunshine is. Easy Rawlins dances on thin ice, and we in our more comfortable surroundings realize that, in the larger scheme of things, so do we.