



THE JURY BOX

by Elizabeth Foxwell

Mysteries often provide insight into societal issues both past and present as well as acute, sometimes poignant, reflections on killers, victims, and investigators. This column's offerings are no exception.

**** Ethel Lina White, *Blackout and Other Tales of Suspense*, Crippen & Landru, \$22. Many mystery fans may be familiar with White's *The Wheel Spins* (aka *The Lady Vanishes* of Alfred Hitchcock fame) and *Some Must Watch* (aka *The Spiral Staircase* of Robert Siodmak fame); her story "An Unlocked Window" was the basis for a chilling episode of *The Alfred Hitchcock Hour*. This collection, which provides an early short-story version of *The Wheel Spins* ("Passengers"), showcases White's extraordinary talents for establishing menace at the outset and transforming mild characters into champions of justice amid danger and deception. Standouts include "At Twilight," "River Justice," and "The Gilded Pupil" (with older female characters seeking to protect younger women), as well as "The Holiday" (with a young bedridden man playing an unexpected role against a criminal), and "Catastrophe" (with an equally jaded man grappling with the collision of values and larger forces). Lost too early to cancer, White well deserves renewed appreciation of her work.

*** Madelon St. Denis, *The Hollow Tree Mystery*, Coachwhip Publications, \$15.95. Little information is available about Massachusetts-born St. Denis (original surname Dennie), whose work was published in the 1930s. The brisk *The Hollow Tree Mystery* (1930) features smart Tam O'Brien, daughter of a former chief of detectives and principal of "Tam O'Shanter, Inquirer." A father asks Tam to investigate his banker son's disappearance while his daughter-in-law states that her husband stormed off after an argument. Tam spots signs of foul play and, with the help of her resourceful child sidekick, Dips, follows the clues to suspects in the neighborhood. St. Denis is skillful in showing how Tam, because she is a woman, detects motives and family circumstances missed by a male police inspector, and her treatment of the case's hidden violence is unusual for the period.

**** Madelon St. Denis, *The Jekyll-Hyde Murder Case*, Coachwhip Publications, \$15.95. Private investigator Tam O'Brien is on the scene when Leslie Carew, a leading light of local society, is found dead in a private club's summer house. The body and its environs have been carefully staged, and Tam learns that the woman had been expecting a dinner guest. (Continued on page 27)

baby was born dead. She wasn't even allowed to see it. Isn't that awful? She couldn't bury her baby, and her boyfriend turned out to be a Stasi agent who spied on her and reported everything she did." Rebecca shuddered. "I'd have run away too. She and her boyfriend had even chosen a name for the baby—Sandra if it was a girl, and Sandro if it was a boy. That must have been a common name back then." She scrutinizes me and lays one hand on my sore arm. "Just imagine: Maybe they only told her the baby was dead because she didn't toe the line the way they wanted. After all, she never saw it!" I can feel the heat rising into my face.

Rebecca reached for the master key. "But where is she? I can't stop think-

ing about it. I'm going to go take a look in her room," she says, her steps dying away on the stairs.

Your mother left you; she wanted a life without you, said my father. Blood pounds in my ears. I feel the ground tilt beneath my feet and grab the countertop for support, propping myself up with my lower arm. My right hand reaches for my back pocket. It's still there. I pull out the chain by the tips of my fingers. The heart pendant for Jule sparkles in rich blood-red.

My legs give way. I fall in slow motion, watching the heart—it must have slipped from my fingers—strike the floor and shatter. Then everything goes black. ● © 2025 by Franziska Henze; translation © 2025 by Mary Tannert

Author's Note: From 1949 to 1990, the inner German border separated the German Democratic Republic (GDR, also East Germany) and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG, West Germany). Established as a boundary between the Western and the Soviet occupation zones of former Nazi Germany after WWII, it was one of the most heavily fortified frontiers. On the eastern—communist—side, where economy was centrally planned and state owned—the border, with its high fences, barbed wire watchtowers, minefields and booby traps, was guarded by thousands of GRD soldiers. The GDR state security, which was initially tasked with combating escapes from the republic and acts of sabotage, developed into a surveillance apparatus that was active in all areas of the country.

THE JURY BOX (Continued from p. 17) Tam soon uncovers skullduggery at the club, grudges against the less than honorable victim, and intrigues involving Leslie's family members and fiancé. Soon another murder occurs. Like *The Hollow Tree Mystery*, St. Denis provides an uncommon take on a scourge that resonates in the present day and the enduring pain of a truncated life.

*** Sara Woods, *Bloody Instructions*, Dean Street Press, \$16.99. This accomplished first novel by Woods (pseudonym of transplanted Yorkshire native and Canadian resident Eileen Mary Lana Hutton Bowen Judd) returns after many years out of print. After an elderly solicitor is knifed in his office, the police regard the celebrated Shakespearean actor Joseph Dowling as the likely murderer, as the solicitor's client was suing Dowling for divorce. But barrister and World War II veteran Antony Maitland, who was outside the solicitor's office at the time, is convinced that the mysterious figure seen entering the office was not the actor, although other witnesses refute Antony's testimony. The reader will puzzle over the perpetrator and enjoy the inimitable curmudgeon Sir Nicholas Harding, Antony's uncle and Dowling's defending counsel, and Jenny Maitland, Antony's perceptive wife.

*** Miles Burton, *Murder M.D.*, Ramble House, \$22.00. Published in 1943, this novel by the prolific Burton (British military officer Cecil John Charles Street) centers on a doctor who believes his village's residents are idiots and wages vendettas against them. It comes as little surprise when he turns up dead, but a visiting intelligence officer does not view his death as an accident. (Cont. p 37)

and we had great fun when we were younger. Our father died in a steel-mill accident, and our mother remarried a guy we didn't like. His nickname was Flip, but when he wasn't around my brother and I called him Flip the Dip. Timmy and I spent a lot of time together, so we formed the Brothers Club. I'll never forget that."

I glanced out of the corner of my eyes. Jacob stared forward, distant behind the ball cap and the sunglasses. My words meant nothing to him. He showed no sign of remembering the childhood that I'd shared with Timmy. In fact, he regarded me with no more interest than a piece of furniture.

Marie handed him a handful of peanuts. I watched as he cracked them with his thumb and dropped them into his mouth, discarding the shells on the concrete.

The excitement I had held that this man was my long-lost brother left me before the next ninety-mile-an-hour fastball hit the catcher's mitt. It wasn't my brother. I was sure now. *I has to pizz* had been a weird coincidence, as was the fact that the

Pirates had been playing the Cardinals that day in 1968. I had probably wanted to believe it was Timmy so badly that I convinced myself it was him.

The ordeal had exhausted me. I was glad it was over.

After the game, we walked back toward the restaurant to the lot where we had parked our cars. We shook hands, and Norm led his family across the street. I was sullen. It was as though I had found what I was certain was a lump of gold, only to discover it was pyrite—fool's gold.

I went into the restaurant and ordered a cup of coffee to go. As I crossed the street, Norm was pulling his SUV out of the lot. I waved with my free hand as they waited for a delivery truck to pass so they could merge into the street. Jacob was in the back seat behind the driver. For the first time all day he seemed to actually see me, and there was the slightest of smiles pursing his lips.

As they drove out of my life, he raised a right index finger to his face and brushed it across the side of his nose. ●

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THE JURY BOX (Continued from p. 27) When another body turns up, it becomes clear that something more sinister is afoot. Unerring in his depiction of village and World War II life, Burton offers a clever solution to the mystery.

*** Dorothy Cameron Disney, *The 17th Letter*, Stark House Press, \$15.95. In this novel originally published in 1945, a journalist and his wife are caught up in wartime intrigue after they receive an enigmatic and disturbing message from their friend Max, a photographer on assignment in Iceland. Uncertain of whom to trust, they piece together clues that signal danger to an Allied convoy poised to depart from Canada. The couple's unswerving devotion to their friend even in the face of jeopardy, as well as Disney's adroitness with plot, sudden turns, and unexpected characters, will keep the reader riveted.

*** Mary Fortune, *Nothing but Murders and Bloodshed and Hanging: Stories of Crime and Detection by a Pioneering Victorian Mystery Writer*, edited by Lucy Sussex and Megan Brown, Verse Chorus Press, \$19.95. Between Americans Harriet Prescott Spofford and "the mother of detective fiction" Anna Katharine Green, there was Mary Fortune (1832–1911), who arrived in Australia in 1855 after a childhood in Ireland and a marriage in Canada. (Cont. p. 48)

"It was just us for so long. Me and him. And then Amy. She's like my daughter, you know. Came over every day after school. Ate dinner with us. Stayed a few nights. Then she was staying every night." She took another long drag, let it out, and flicked the butt to the ground. It hissed against the moisture. "I knew the day she told him. I saw it in his face when I got home. The sort of anger that would only get bigger with time and space. So I went out to see Jerry. If I hadn't done it, he would have. I knew. And then what?"

I felt vaguely sick and wished she would stop talking. I wondered if I had it in me to do the same. I imagined what Paul would do if he were in my shoes. In her shoes.

Her voice had trailed off and we both knew what needed to happen.

"Sure," I said. "I get it. Really. But Matty didn't do it."

"No," she said. "He didn't."

I took my phone and called the local precinct. I handed it to her. She took it and said what she needed to. I

waited for her to finish and return the phone to me, which she did with an efficiency that I admired. She was the sort of woman who got things done.

And then she turned and went inside.

I waited in my car until the cops showed before driving home. I didn't feel like talking but I didn't feel like being alone either.

Sloane's Saab was in the driveway and the lights were on in the kitchen. I stared for a minute at the outline of the rhododendron against the street-light and thought about how the blossoms in early June were a pinkish orange and reminded me of sunsets over the ocean. The window by the sink was fogged the way it got when the stove was on and it made me think of Paul and his tea and the pasta he liked to make from scratch and the blueberry pancakes he'd cook on Saturday morning and all of the other good things in this world that I tasted, that I savored. ●

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THE JURY BOX (Continued from p. 37) Her life had elements reminiscent of a Mary Elizabeth Braddon novel (such as a bigamous marriage and a career-criminal son). In her forty-year writing career, she contributed journalistic pieces and lurid tales of crime and murder under various pseudonyms to Australian periodicals. This collection features some representative samples of her "detective's casebook" type approach that was popular in the mid nineteenth century and benefited from the experience of her second husband, a police constable. Although *Fortune* might not be considered a great plotter (perpetrators tend to conveniently confess before they expire and more than one loose end is left dangling), her keen insight into the hardships and culture of the Australian bush and singular characterizations of women, such as the wife determined to learn what has happened to her missing husband in "The Midnight Watch" (1867), the older dressmaker fearful about the fate of a naive wife in "Bridget's Locket" (1886), and the calculating spouse thwarted by an inventive detective in "The Stolen Deed" (1875), provide fascinating angles on early detective fiction. ●

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