

BOOKAHOLIC

For the Mystery Addict

January 2006

Vol. 4, No. 2

HAPPY NEW YEAR!

Sally Owen

WHAT I'VE BEEN READING

***SLIPPING INTO DARKNESS*, Peter Blauner, Little Brown. \$24.95**

Twenty years ago, Julian Vega was convicted of murder thanks to Detective Francis X. Loughlin who, making a name for himself with his first case, pushed the seventeen-year-old Vega into convicting himself. Now Vega is out of jail early on a technicality and there's another murder. A young doctor is viciously killed in her Manhattan apartment and there's a link to the case that launched Loughlin's career. But when Loughlin arranges a DNA test to nail Vega, the results blow up in his face. The blood under the victim's fingernails does not belong to Vega. It belongs to Allison Weiss, the woman murdered twenty years before. This is just terrific stuff, beautifully written. A remarkable portrait of a detective, who is losing his sight, struggling on the slope of his declining career. Blauner is very underestimated writer.

***PURSUIT*, Luiz Alfredo Garcia-Roza, Henry Holt. \$23.00**

This is fifth in the series featuring Inspector Espinosa of the Rio de Janeiro police, and it is the first I have read. Espinosa is approached by a troubled psychiatrist whose daughter has disappeared and who thinks one of his patients may have been the kidnapper. The structure of this book, Story Number One, Story Number Two, and Story Number Three, adds to the tension of the plot and the locations are wonderfully evocative. But what enchanted me was the character of Espinosa, a literate cop whose true love is books and who spends all his spare time in used-book stores.

***THE LAST TEMPLAR*, Raymond Khoury, Dutton. \$24.95**

In the Great Hall of the Metropolitan Museum of Art all is in readiness for the much-anticipated *Treasures of the Vatican* exhibit. The press is in attendance and the who's who of New York are just arriving when, out of Central Park, four horsemen dressed as Templar Knights proceed down Fifth Avenue and up the steps of the Museum. At first it is thought to be a publicity stunt until a guard, trying to impede the progress of the horsemen, is decapitated with one sweep of a sword. The horsemen plunder the treasure

and take off into the park leaving behind chaos, and a great story. This is the latest Dan Brown rip-off! That doesn't mean it isn't good. It is. Very good.

***ALMOST BLUE*, Carlo Lucarelli, City Lights. \$11.95**

This was recommended to me by one of you. Thank you. Thank you. In the city of Bologna—which is one of the stars of this well-told, grisly murder mystery—university students are being murdered. Rookie detective Grazia Negro is in charge of the investigation and she gets help from an unexpected quarter—a young blind man who spends his days at home alone, listening to jazz and the sounds of the city on his scanner. This gripping story is told from three perspectives, that of the detective, the blind man, and the assassin. The translation by Donagh Stransky is seamless (I hate it when awkward translations get in the way) and I am longing to read more. Lucarelli has written two other in this Italian Noir series but they appear to be out of print.

***ISOLATION WARD*, Joshua Spanogle, Delacorte Press. \$22.00**

This first novel starts off well. In Baltimore three women are brought to the hospital with a baffling and, seemingly, unstoppable virus. Dr. Nathaniel McCormick, an investigator from the Centers for Disease Control, must look into the lives and habits of these three women and track that ever elusive patient zero. And here's where the author falters. The three women are all residents of Baltimore's group homes for the mentally impaired and Spanogle spends entirely too much time, for my taste, exploring the sex lives of those spending their last days in homes and assisted living facilities. Please! Not while I'm eating. It's a pity, because this author is a very good writer. But that first third of the book was too much for me. Murder and mayhem, yes. Sex among the elderly, no.

ON MY READING LIST

***ARTHUR & GEORGE*, Julian Barnes, Knopf. \$24.95**

George is the son of a Midlands vicar and Arthur comes from Edinburgh. One is in the legal profession while the other studies medicine before discovering a different calling. The reader follows each through their lives until it becomes clear that George is of Indian descent and that Arthur is the creator of the world's most famous detective. This extraordinary novel was short-listed for the Man Booker Prize in the UK and was the favorite to win. It was beaten out by *The Sea* by **John Banville**. Some say Barnes was robbed. Whether that's true or not, this is a must for Sherlockians.

***CELL*, Stephen King, Scribner. \$26.96**

This last-minute addition to the Winter publishing list is most welcome – at least to me. Stephen King does not own a cell phone and he obviously views them with a jaundiced eye. It is October and all's right with the world. The stock market is high and most planes are landing on time. Two weeks later only the birds can be seen flying and the stock market is a memory. By Halloween every major city from New York to Moscow

stinks to high heaven and the world as it was is gone. This gory novel doesn't ask the question, "Can you hear me now?" It answers it.

***THE PEOPLE'S ACT OF LOVE*, James Meek, Canongate. \$24.00**

In a country recently torn apart by civil war, groups of people live a fragile coexistence: a small Christian sect and its enigmatic leader, a photographer raising her young son by herself, and a company of Czech soldiers desperate to get home but on the losing side of the recent conflict. When an escapee from Russia's northernmost prison camp enters the community, he is apprehended and brought before the Czech company's megalomaniac commander. His arrival has also caught the attention of the others, and when murder follows, the village is engulfed in suspicion and intrigue. This major novel has already been published in England to much acclaim.

***JACQUOT AND THE WATERMAN*, Martin O'Brien, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$24.95**

Chief Inspector Daniel Jacquot investigates a series of disturbing killings – beautiful female victims found battered and submerged in water. Jacquot is a former rugby star and a lover of good food, wine and the blues. This is the first of a series set in the port of Marseilles and this title, first published in the UK, is commanding enormous sums of money for first editions.

***THE BLACK DAHLIA FILES*, Donald H. Wolfe, Regan Books. \$25.96**

For more than fifty years the murder of Elizabeth Short, known as the Black Dahlia case, has remained "open and unsolved" in the files of the LAPD. In this new book, Wolfe claims to tell the true story of the murder. He identifies the killer, reveals the motive and writes about the cover-up behind the case involving a corrupt L.A. Police Department, shady, famous Hollywood figures, and crooked politicians. Who can resist?

FIRST MYSTERIES

***CURIOSITY KILLED THE CAT SITTER*, Blaize Clement, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$23.95**

Dixie Hemingway is a professional pet-sitter in Sarasota, Florida. When she goes to feed the cat of a vacationing client and discovers the animal hiding from a very dead intruder, she starts to search for her now suspicious-looking client who has vanished. This is the first of a new cozy series.

***THE BERLIN CONSPIRACY*, Tom Gabbay, Wm. Morrow. \$24.95**

In June 1963, Jack Teller is in Berlin where, days before President John F. Kennedy is scheduled to visit the city, he is contacted and told that there is important information that can only be told to him. Jack hasn't been a company man since the Bay of Pigs, but a spy is never really out of the game. Jack's handlers believe it is a communist setup, although

Jack isn't so sure. The information he is given involves a treacherous plot that reaches into the highest levels of the U.S. government.

***PRODIGY*, Dave Kalstein, St. Martin's Press. \$23.95**

In the year 2036, Stansbury School is the world's most elite prep school. The students, or specimens as they are known, are screened at a young age and then given twelve years of the finest education, and developmental drug regimen, possible. Stansbury graduates are in a class by themselves. When the alumni begin to be murdered, school officials, trying to avoid publicity, keep the police in the dark. They ask the school's valedictorian to solve the mystery, but he discovers a massive conspiracy that reaches to the highest levels of the US government (again. Didn't I just say that in the review above?). Sounds fascinating to me.

***SUNSTROKE*, Jesse Kellerman, Putnam. \$24.95**

Gloria Mendez is single and hopelessly in love with her oblivious boss. He too is single and far too old for her but she has worked for him for ten companionable years. When he disappears on his annual trip to Mexico, Gloria impulsively goes in search of him and finds that he is not at all who she thought him to be – nor is he anything she could have imagined in her wildest dreams. Jesse is the son of Jonathan and Faye.

NEWS FROM THE UK

***PRIEST*, Ken Bruen, Bantam Press**

Jack Taylor is back in town and he's being asked to investigate the murder by decapitation of Father Joyce in a Galway church.

***DEATH CALLED TO THE BAR*, David Dickinson, Constable**

Barristers are being murdered at London's Inns of Court. Lord Francis Powerscourt is summoned to discreetly investigate. Set at the beginning of the 20th Century.

***CONSPIRACY OF VIOLENCE*, Susanna Gregory, Time Warner**

Charles II is back on the throne and London seethes with energy. Thomas Chaloner, a reluctant spy, finds himself immersed in murder and treason.

***BLOODFEVER*, Charlie Higson, Puffin**

Second in the series featuring a young James Bond. Paperback Original.

***THE PARLIAMENT HOUSE*, Edward Marston, Allison & Busby**

Christopher Redmayne is celebrating the completion of a new home he has designed for a London merchant, but when a guest is murdered upon leaving the house, Christopher feels compelled to help investigate. Set in 1670.

***DANCE WITH DEATH*, Barbara Nadel, Headline**

Inspector Ikmen, summoned from Istanbul, investigates when a body is discovered in a cave in a remote region of Cappadocia, Turkey. The woman died of gunshot wounds but her corpse has been undisturbed for twenty years.

***WINTER IN MADRID*, C.J. Sansom, Macmillan**

Set against the backdrop of the Spanish Civil War and war-torn London, the story follows the fortunes of three young men, formerly at school together. They are now on opposing courses and navigating the world of 1930s Spain with their differing values and political affiliations. As the Second World War draws near, one is sent to spy on another and the ramifications will haunt them all.

***PRODIGAL SON*, Kate Sedley, Severn House**

Roger the Chapman is surprised to find he has a half-brother, but when that man is accused of robbing his mistress and murdering a fellow servant, Roger investigates the charge.

***MR. CLARINET*, Nick Stone, Michael Joseph**

Miami PI Max Mingus is offered \$10 million to locate a billionaire's son who has been missing for over three years. Young Charlie Carver disappeared in Haiti where, over the decades, scores of children have gone missing. Rumors of black magic and a mythical figure called "Mr. Clarinet" abound.

THIS AND THAT

End-of-year list time!!

***The New York Times* 100 Notable Books of the Year**

Here are the titles of particular interest to Bookaholic readers.

Fiction***Empire Rising* – Thomas Kelly**

The Irish erect the Empire State Building in a corrupt New York.

***Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* – J.K. Rowling**

I know, I know!

***The Hot Kid* – Elmore Leonard**

America's criminal landscape in the 1930s.

***Lunar Park* – Bret Easton Ellis**

Still the darling of New York after all this time.

***The March* – E.L. Doctorow**

Sherman marches to the sea in 1864.

***Missing Mom* – Joyce Carol Oates**

A woman's sudden absence is explored here.

***No Country for Old Men* – Cormac McCarthy**

Some said he wouldn't be able to write a crime novel. Ha!

***On Beauty* – Zadie Smith**

Nowhere near a mystery, but included because sometimes a writer just comes into her own and sweeps the competition.

***Saturday* – Ian McEwan**

A surgeon ponders the war in Iraq. Superb.

***The Sea* – John Banville**

Surprise winner of this year's Man Booker Prize.

***Seven Types of Ambiguity* – Elliot Perlman**

So huge in scope that it takes seven narrators to tell the story.

***Shalimar the Clown* – Salman Rushdie**

A brutal life in Kashmir.

***The Successor* – Ismail Kadare**

A whodunit tragicomedy.

Non Fiction***The Lost Painting* – Jonathan Harr**

Caravaggio's "Taking of Christ" lost and found.

Very few mysteries or crime novels on that list, but all these books should have been on our radar throughout the year.

A week after publishing that list, *The New York Times* published the 10 Best Books of 2005:

Fiction***Kafka On the Shore* – Haruki Murakami*****On Beauty* – Zadie Smith*****Prep* – Curtis Sittenfeld*****Saturday* – Ian McEwan*****Veronica* – Mary Gaitskill****Non Fiction*****The Assassin's Gate: America in Iraq* – George Packer*****De Kooning: An American Master* – Mark Stevens & Annalyn Swan*****The Lost Painting* – Jonathan Harr*****Postwar: A History of Europe* – Tony Judd*****The Year of Magical Thinking* – Joan Didion**

My Favorites of the Year***Black Fly Season* – Giles Blunt**

The most overlooked writer of a great series? I think so.

***Incendiary* – Chris Cleave**

This *cri de coeur* from a grieving British woman to Osama Bin Laden is a wrenching look at living in the age of terror.

***The Lincoln Lawyer* – Michael Connelly**

My favorite book from Connelly. Hands down.

***Nocturnes* – John Connolly**

Connolly's novel, *The Black Angel*, drew attention away from this superb collection of short stories that speak to our deepest fears

***Red Leaves* – Thomas H. Cook**

A terrific writer on top form.

***Valley of Bones* – Michael Gruber**

Second in the series featuring Miami detective Jimmy Paz. Extraordinary!

***The Devil in Nanking* – Mo Hayder**

A haunting novel about the 1937 massacre told through the eyes of a visiting research student.

***Dark Harbor* – David Hosp**

This is one of only two first novels which I adored this year.

***The Cold Dish* – Craig Johnson**

This is the other.

***The Historian* – Elizabeth Kostova**

It took her ten years to write. Some say it takes that long to read. But if you stick with this extraordinary historical whodunit, the rewards are great.

***Saturday* – Ian McEwan**

You know you're in the hands of a master storyteller here.

***Cloud Atlas* – David Mitchell**

This is from last year and it surprised many by not winning the Man Booker Prize.

COLLECTING

Entertainment Weekly calls it the "Rip-Off of the Week," but I call it collecting.

In a recent issue of EW, the editors deplored the fact that the publisher, Scribner, was re-packaging *Brokeback Mountain* by **Annie Proulx** to take advantage of the critically acclaimed movie. This short story, which is 55-pages long (and that's been stretched from the original) is \$14.95 in hardcover and \$9.95 in paperback.

Here's the history of that particular short story:

1998. Published in *The New Yorker*. Won the O. Henry Short Story Award and a *National Magazine Award*. This is the true first.

1999. Scribner published *Close Range: Wyoming Stories*, a collection of Proulx's stories of hard times set in a brutal landscape. *Brokeback Mountain* is the final story in this excellent collection. This gorgeous book contains watercolors by William Matthews and although the original price was \$25, if you can find a first edition, it's going to cost you.

2000. Scribner publishes the trade paperback edition of *Close Range: Wyoming Stories*. For non-collectors, this is the bargain. Eleven stories for \$13.00.

So, now there's a movie tie-in edition. I shall be buying the hardcover edition at \$14.95 and I'll be calling it a "first edition thus." I collect Pulitzer Prize-winning author Annie Proulx (and maybe you should too) because I consider her among the finest writers at work today. In any case, read this story, see the movie.

BOOKS OF THE MONTH

Bernhardt, William, *Capitol Murder*, Ballantine. \$25.95. Ben Kincaid, trial attorney, goes to Washington D.C. when the senior senator from his home state is accused of murder.

Bond, Larry & DeFelice, Jim, *Larry Bond's First Team: Angels of Wrath*, Forge. \$24.95. A team of elite operatives takes on a group of terrorists known as the Seven Angels.

Braun, Lilian Jackson, *The Cat Who Dropped a Bombshell*, Putnam. \$23.95. James Qwilleran and his felines Koko and Yum Yum are back!

Depoy, Phillip, *A Minister's Ghost*, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$23.95. Fever Devilin, folklorist, spots an apparition at a railroad crossing. He returns home to discover that his friend's two nieces have been killed in a suspicious accident.

Dezenhall, Eric, *Turnpike Flameout*, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$23.95. When a private jet crashes in the Jersey Pine Barrens, the search begins for faded rock icon, Turnpike Bobby Chin.

Eccles, Marjorie, *The Shape of Sand*, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$23.95. At the beginning of the twentieth century, a woman disappears. Forty years later, workmen on the premises uncover a cache of letters and notebooks that her family hope will answer the riddle of her disappearance.

Fairstein, Linda, *Death Dance*, Scribner. \$26.00. Alex cooper investigates the disappearance of a world-famous dancer who suddenly vanished backstage at the Lincoln Center's Metropolitan Opera House.

Fielding, Joy, *Mad River Road*, Atria. \$25.00. After a year in prison, Ralph has plans for his first night of freedom. Someone will be held accountable.

Frazer, Margaret, *The Sempster's Tale: A Dame Frevisse Medieval Mystery*, Berkley Prime Crime. \$24.95. 15th in the series. Set in London in the summer of 1450.

French, Nicci, *Catch Me When I Fall*, Warner. \$24.95. A woman suffering from bipolar disorder descends into uncontrollable behaviors.

Fulmer, David, *Rampart Street*, Harcourt. \$25.00. The third Storyville mystery featuring Creole detective Valentin St. Cyr.

- Gannascioli, Joseph R., *A Meal to Die For: A Culinary Novel of Crime*, Forge. \$22.95.** Mobbed-up Brooklyn chef Benny Lacoco prepares the dinner of a lifetime knowing that someone is going to get whacked before the last course. By the actor from *The Sopranos*.
- Gardner, Lisa, *Gone*, Bantam. \$25.00.** Former FBI profiler Pierce Quincy searches for his partner and lover Rainie Connor. Her car has been found on the side of a deserted road. Blood stains on the driver's side, and Rainie's gone.
- Goodman, Carol, *The Ghost Orchid*, Ballantine. \$24.95.** Novelist Ellis Brooks is writing a book based on the dark events that took place at the Bosco Estate during the summer of 1893.
- Granger, Pip, *No Peace for the Wicked*, Poisoned Pen. \$24.95.** Lizzie Robbins searches for a young Chinese girl in the East End of London. Set in 1956.
- Grippando, James, *Got the Look*, HarperCollins. \$24.95.** Miami attorney Jack Swyteck is up against a killer who's so fiendishly clever and so diabolical that even Jack may have met his match.
- Harper, Karen, *The Fatal Fashion*, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$23.95.** When starch is invented, it takes the Elizabethan fashion world by storm. It also triggers the murder of the royal starcher.
- Kane, Andrea, *Wrong Place, Wrong Time*, Wm. Morrow. \$21.95.** Murder and suspense in the competitive world of horse show jumping.
- Kelman, Judith, *The Session*, Berkley. \$24.95.** P.J. Laffery, a therapist on Riker's Island okays a jailhouse mock wedding and, when the bride is murdered, she loses her job and struggles to get a private practice going. With patients from hell.
- Krentz, Jayne Ann, *All Night Long*, Putnam. \$24.95.** Irene Stenson receives a telegram from her best friend from high school asking for help. When Irene arrives, her friend has died suddenly leaving behind some ugly, unanswered questions.
- Lewis, Roy, *Grave Error*, Carroll & Graf. \$25.00.** DCI O'Connor investigates an international ring thieves stealing ancient artifacts.
- Long, Jeff, *The Wall*, Atria. \$25.00.** When Hugh Glass sets off to climb the "big walls" of El Capitan he is at once revisiting his past and unwittingly becoming its prey.
- McGarrity, Michael, *Nothing But Trouble*, Dutton. \$24.95.** Kevin Kerney investigates the murder of a young man near an isolated Mexican border crossing.
- Martinez, Michele, *The Finishing School*, Wm. Morrow. \$23.95.** Federal prosecutor Melanie Vargas gets a case that will pit her against a very clever, very scary killer.
- Nunez, Sigrid, *The Last of Her Kind*, Farrar, Straus & Giroux. \$25.00.** A woman is convicted of killing a policeman in a misguided attempt to rescue her activist boyfriend.
- O'Shaughnessy, Perri, *Sinister Shorts*, Delacorte. \$21.00.** A collection of short crime fiction, locked-room mysteries, hard-boiled cases, psychological thrillers, and cozy whodunits.
- Perez-Reverte, Arturo, *Purity of Blood*, Putnam. \$23.95.** Book Two of the Adventures of Captain Alatraste which chronicles the heroic adventures of a 17th Century swordsman.
- Randisi, Robert, Ed., *Greatest Hits*, Carroll & Graf. \$25.00.** Collection of stories about hit men by Lawrence Sanders, Max Allan Collins, John Harvey, Lee Child, etc.
- Reilly, Matthew, *Seven Deadly Wonders*, Simon & Schuster. \$23.00.** The greatest treasure hunt of all time, a race to find the seven wonders of the ancient world.

Robb, J.D., *Memory in Death*, Putnam. \$24.95. Lieutenant Eve Dalls walks a tightrope between her professional duties and her private demons.

Royal, Priscilla, *Sorrow Without End*, Poisoned Pen. \$24.95. Set in 1271. Terror grips a remote North Sea priory.

Seranella, Barbara, *An Unacceptable Death*, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$23.95. Munch Mancini swears vengeance when her fiancé is shot down by his fellow cops in a drug bust gone wrong.

Stabenow, Dana, *Blindfold Game*, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$23.95. Stabenow writes her first thriller involving a terrorist plot to attack a valuable, and vulnerable, American target.

Todd, Charles, *A Long Shadow*, Wm. Morrow. \$23.95. Set in 1919 and featuring Scotland Yard Inspector Ian Rutledge.

Tremayne, Peter, *The Leper's Bell*, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$23.95. Sister Fidelma returns home to her brother's castle to discover that her son's nurse has been murdered.

Tremayne, Peter, *An Ensuing Evil and Others*, St. Martin's Minotaur. \$14.95. This paperback original contains fourteen historical mysteries by one of the best loved writers of historical mysteries.

Van Wormer, Laura, *Mr. Murder*, Mira. \$24.95. TV anchor Sally Harrington's biggest fan is also a killer.

Willig, Lauren, *The Masque of the Black Tulip*, Dutton. \$24.95. The romantic adventures of England's greatest spy, the Pink Carnation, continue.

Woods, Paula L., *Strange Bedfellows*, One World, \$23.95. Detective Charlotte Justice returns to an investigation she once had to leave behind.

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