The Casual Reader

December 2016

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Michelle Fields and Judy Howell, Editors

FISHBOWL

Ian, the goldfish, suddenly finds himself falling off the balcony of his owner’s 27th floor apartment. Often written in the first-person, the story centers around the occupants of the apartment building as seen from the falling fish’s point of view. The reader gets drawn into the drama of the lives of the tenants and can’t help but develop compassion for their various plights. For instance, one woman gives birth to a breech baby, while one old man dies, another man must choose between lovers, while another man is a construction worker by day and a cross-dresser by night, another woman works at home as a phone sex operator, while a young boy is being bullied at school and has trouble maintaining consciousness under stressful circumstances, finally, there is a very lonesome maintenance man while another young woman sadly uncovers the truth behind her cheating boyfriend. Take the plunge along with Ian and enjoy getting to know the residents of Seville on Roxy! — Sabra Jacobs


CROSSTALK

This was my first Connie Willis novel, but it won’t be the last. I loved every page of this funny story that was part science fiction, part romantic comedy. Biddey is an executive at a cellphone company who is dating another executive at the same company. He has just asked her, not to marry him, but to have a procedure called an EDD. This trendy procedure (all the cool people are doing it!) would give the two of them an empathic link. Willis really nails both the fun of a romantic comedy with snappy banter and characters who are quite enjoyable, but also using a SF lens to look at the overwhelming bombardment of information in our time as well as to ponder how much privacy do we have in the modern world, and why do we seem determined to give up even that. — Michelle Fields

Crosstalk by Connie Willis. (512 pages) Available in Hardcover, Kindle, iBook.

BORN TO DIE

Dr. Kacey Lambert has moved to a small town. Dr. Lambert’s grandparents lived here and she now lives in their home surrounded by memories of their marriage and love. Kacey’s life takes a mysterious turn. It begins with the death of a B-Movie actress. Then the elementary school teacher dies. The curious thing is that both of these ladies look disturbingly similar to Kacey. Detective Selena Alvarez and Detective Regan Pescoli are investigating these deaths. At first blush, they seem to be accidents or suicides, however, there are inconsistencies. All these women seem to have links to Kacey’s new love interest, Trace O’Halloran. How are all of these women connected? Why do they look alike? If you like a good mystery, read this book. It’s a fast paced story with enough twists to keep you guessing.

Born to Die by Lisa Jackson (473 Pages) Available in Hardcover, Paperback, Kindle, Nook, iBook.

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**What We Are Currently Reading**

**Judy:**

The Trailer Park Princess and the Middle Finger of Fate by Kim Hunt Harris

Truly, Madly, Deeply by Wendy Delany

The Further Adventures of Ebenezer Scrooge by Charles Lovett

Dark Matter by Blake Crouch

Arcadia by Iain Pears

The Fifth Heart by Dan Simmons

Girl Waits With Gun by Amy Stewart

The Fox Woman by Kij Johnson

**Michelle:**

Defensive Wounds by Lisa Black

The Warden by Anthony Trollope

An Impartial Witness by Charles Todd

Would you like to make a book recommendation? We are looking for guest reviewers. If you are interested, please contact either Michelle Fields or Judy Howell by Jan. 2. Recommendations only have to be around 100 words, so please join the fun. We enjoy hearing about new books just as much as we like telling other people about ones we’ve enjoyed!

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**DEFENSIVE WOUNDS**

Sometimes when people are murdered, no one cares. When Marie Corrigan, a defense attorney, is murdered, no one really cares. Theresa MacLean wants to care, but doesn’t really like the attorney. She is most concerned that the place of Marie’s murder is at the hotel in which her daughter works. The assumption is made that this is a romantic evening gone incredibly wrong. That theory works until the bodies start piling up.

In her role as a forensic specialist, Theresa investigates fully every case. These cases seem to be related. The same hotel. The same staging techniques. How much danger is Theresa in? Is it safe for her daughter to work at the hotel? If you like a fast paced thriller with complicated plot, this is the story for you.


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**THE WARDEN**

The Warden is a small, quiet novel that has a simple plot. At its heart it is essentially a character study of the warden of the title. This is not a prison warden, which some of you may be thinking, but a church warden. Mr. Harding is a man whose life gets put through a microscope after reformers decide that the church is misusing funds for the poor. As the person who administers those funds, he has a difficult choice to make. If you were told that a law suit against you related to your job could not win due to technical reasons, but were not reassured that you were morally right would you continue as you were or resign the position? The first time I read this novel I thought it was rather bland and found Trollope’s other Barchester novels more exciting. This one has stayed with me in a way the others haven’t, though, and a recent re-read confirms its patient but durable power.—MF


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**AN IMPARTIAL WITNESS**

Bess Crawford, a nursing sister in World War I, has returned home with a convoy of seriously wounded soldiers. She is walking through the train station to catch a taxi and observes a young woman in serious distress. The young woman is crying pitifully and Bess begins to think she should ask if she needs assistance. Bess is unable to catch up to the young woman and continues to her own apartment. Bess has a wonderful visit at home and then returns to her duties in France. By complete chance, Bess discovers in the paper an advertisement from Scotland Yard requesting any information about the young lady. When Bess steps forward as An Impartial Witness, she unwittingly puts her own life in danger. During this war time, Bess expects danger in France but not at home. If you like a mystery with many twists and turns, but with much historical ambiance, then you will love the Bess Crawford mysteries.