

Twice Dead: A Lieutenant Beaudry Novel by Michael Kent

Date Read: 20200727

My rating: 3 star

Another good entry in a fine crime series that I really enjoy and I know I can always expect an entertaining read especially if I need a good story after finishing a not so good book. This one has all the usual expected elements of books in this series with great descriptions of the Montreal setting, weather, traffic and, of course, the food. A pretty solid plot, great and realistic CSI and forensics. Maybe a bit unorthodox but effective procedurals, a bit of a surprising twist and a solid and satisfactory ending and all accompanied with a fair bit of the usual Beaudry humour. Pat is a fine character but Crackers is something else again! And, oh yeah, Rob is really losing as it because for the first time I can remember the perp actually ends up ALIVE and in custody!

Now the reasons why this is not at least a 4 star read. Number 1 again is there is NO Table of Contents just a page that says – Start – which takes you to the cover. Number 2 and yes I don't know if it's fair to downrate a book for this reason but the author must be at least partially to blame along with GoodReads for the horrendous mess in the Goodreads catalogue with titles, editions and author's name which makes it virtually impossible to tell anyone what to enter as the search criteria to find the specific editions of any of the books in this series that I have reviewed. So it is impossible to get a list of all the titles in this series along with their number in the series. The only way to find titles in the series is the list given at the end of each of the books. Anyway I'll sure stumble around and somehow find and read more in this series when I need some more great entertainment.

Every Dog has his Day (Albertus Eagle Detective Beagle #1) by Chloe Grace

Date Read: 20200724

My rating: 1 stars

I broke some of my usual rules and bought and read this book by an author who's work I have never read before, who is a UK author and the story is set in the UK. Anyone who follows my reviews knows that I am not a fan of crime fiction by UK authors and/or set in the UK although, of course, there are some I have really liked. However this is not one of those. I really only tried this book because of the supposed Beagle as over the last 60 + years I have owned many Beagles and I think they are one of the finest pets and companions anyone could have. Anyway I did not enjoy this read, found very little, if any, humour in it, thought it was all a bit silly and repetitious, had to force myself to finish reading it and I think at \$1.33 CDN it is grossly overpriced. If it wasn't my own fault for not doing my usual thorough check before buying a book I would be

very put out about paying for this book.

Frozen Fear: Murder In Season - Book 1 (Murder In Season Cozy Mystery) by Anne Shillolo

Date Read: 20200723

My rating: 3 star

I enjoyed this mystery by a new to me Canadian author who is one of a very few writing cozy mysteries and even fewer with settings in Canada as implied in this book but not really proven as the quite well described setting could be in any place with that type of terrain and weather. This story has most of the elements required to qualify as a cozy but my understanding is that the protagonist in a cozy is supposed to be an amateur sleuth and I don't know if Claire really qualifies as she is described in the synopsis as "No badge, no gun, no backup. But injured cop Claire Becket". Anyway a pretty good main plot and not overloaded with too many subplots, as many mysteries seem to be nowadays, and everything gets tied into the main story in the solid and satisfactory ending. Lots of action and a spectacular car chase where Claire turns out to be quite the driver even with a frostbitten hand and Miles becomes the closest to being a bit too much of a superhero. Claire is a fine character and Miles Gallagher is great but Kojak steals the show. I thought quite early that it was obvious that JAG was somehow tied in to Miles but I couldn't quite figure out the appropriate timeline or motives until Miles' reveal. This book is well written and fairly well edited except for several occurrences of words being out of order as in this example from Chapter 39 -

"brief smile, before the serious tone returned. "But I know that right now this be must the last thing you would consider.""

where be must should obviously read as must be.

A good read and I am glad I found a new go to Canadian author and I'll definitely read more of her stories in this series and her other cozy mystery series.

Frozen in Death: A Tale of Murder and Survival in the Canadian Rockies by Jo Ann Creore

Date Read: 20200721

My rating: 3 star

I quite enjoyed this adventure mystery by a new to me Canadian author and I hope to read more by Ms Creore as this type of story fits very well with the kind

of crime fiction I like. Lots of well described settings and weather and I'm still cold and wet and sore! Plenty of action and an appropriate, if a bit predictable, ending except for one thing that comes close to violating one of my pet peeves about the endings of mysteries and contributed, although only in a minor way, to my deducting a star from this read. This book is populated with a very large cast of very well developed characters with, as usual, some likeable and some not and some quite intriguing and interesting. However I think this is where I start having some problems that cause me to downgrade this story at least a star. I think there is just too much going on with too many characters each with their own agendas and motives for being on the mountain and none of the subplots really tie into or advance the main plot very much. That is if there really is one main plot because it is a long way into the story before we get any hint of the any motive that involves the MCs. And for all their experience and knowledge the MCs, Mora and Wally, and Joe who I think is the best character in the book, sure make so many stupid errors and decisions it is hard to really like them completely. Then my peeve with the ending – I don't like any story ending with any of the culprits walking off into the sunset scot free – but in this case the major perp was actually arrested but managed to talk his way out of facing justice for the long list of murders etc he committed and stay out of prison at least for a while so as I said this only partially violates my pet peeve. Anyway I enjoyed this book and I'll watch for more by this author.

Of Spice and Men (Pancake House Mystery #3) by Sarah Fox

Date Read: 20200718

My rating: 3 star

This is another good entry in this series that I like to read when I need a little lighter read. There are not too many Canadian authors like Sarah Fox writing cozy mysteries and I guess this book qualifies as a cozy although it is a bit grittier and has a bit more on screen violence than most cozies. All the Flip Side crew are here in great form and once again I think Ivan is probably the best character in this story. A good main plot murder mystery that Marley solves with some good investigation and a few convenient coincidences that has a solid and satisfactory ending plus a couple of other sub plots that also get wrapped up pretty well. Lots of rain and wind which also play roles in the mysteries and, of course, lots of food! I found the inside look at a Hollywood on location movie shoot to be quite interesting and at first glance you would think all the Hollywood people were written as stereotypes except from personal experience I can attest that in many cases they are portrayed very much as they really are. While I lived in Woodbridge Ontario and trained horses at the Woodbridge Fairgrounds I watched Mickey Rooney in town to shoot a scene on the main street, which then was Pine St and is now Woodbridge Ave, for The Black Stallion. Also was involved with another minor feature film shot in the Fairgrounds plus some scenes for the CBC television series "Backstretch" where we had to teach the

actor how to push a wheelbarrow out of the barn and dump it on the manure pile! The only thing this book and the rest of Ms Fox's books needs is some humour to make them great cozies.

No Sadness of Farewell by Michael J. McCann

Date Read: 20200715

My rating: 4 stars

Another fine read in what has quickly become a favourite series of mine. I think part of why I like this series so much is because I am somewhat familiar with the area in which it is set and I like how Mr McCann has kept the place and road names real and the descriptions so accurate. This is a good Police Procedural with the usual personality conflicts and internal politics within the OPP units and once again I am happy to learn some new things about forensics and procedures. There is not a lot of humour in this story but Dr Ash Latimer is a fabulous character that, with all his serious work, is able to lighten up things considerably. He's a person I would love to know personally! Although Ellie White is billed as the star she hasn't been a big favourite of mine in the previous books but I have grown to like her a lot more in this book but Kevin Walker is, again, by far the top detective in the story with Mark Allore a close second. In many ways the main plot is a study of a very dysfunctional family and of their actions and accidents in the past and the consequences of what happens when a person with severe mental health issues falls through the cracks in our social safety net. The sub plot with the missing animal turned out to be another look at our society's involvement with dementia and a slight crack at a Judo-Christian religious belief. I thought it was a clever twist when Kevin solved Mark's missing animal case while Mark wound up Kevin's "Bones" case but both because they are observant and keep watching what is going on around them. As everyone knows I'm very stingy with 5 star ratings but only a couple of small things prevent that here. First I thought there should have been a bit more of a wrap up to the Missing Animals case and we should have found out what happened to the old couple involved. Then I think there was just a bit too much of an info dump leading to the trial in the Bones case with a lot of unnecessary detail. However the real reason I deducted 1 star is because once again there is no Table of Contents causing me a lot of scrolling when I switch reading devices. Anyway a good, enjoyable read and I hope Mr McCann has some more on the go in this fine series.

The Bachelor Girl's Guide to Murder (Herringford and Watts Mysteries #1) by Rachel McMillan

Date Read: 20200712

My rating: 3 star

I read this book because I read Crime fiction and give preference to Canadian authors and I particularly like historical mysteries. It's even better if they are set in Canada as is this one and I'm always looking for new, or at least new to me, Canadian authors and the blurbs sounded like I may like this story. Also as I had just finished Tracy Tonkinson's good "Tontine" book 3 of the Diamond and Doran series set in Chicago in the 1880s I thought it might be kind of neat to compare these two with this one set in Toronto in 1910. I have awarded this book 3 stars because it is a good story with good descriptions of characters, settings, weather, customs and food and drink but unfortunately I didn't enjoy the read as much as I thought I would. I found this quite a slow read and although I don't mind a bit of romance in a mystery story I thought the romantic elements overwhelmed the mystery a bit too much for my liking. The last part of the book did have a lot more scary suspense and an OK ending but obviously allowing the corrupt politicians and police to escape justice is a means to lead into a subsequent book and I feel the author and publisher should have made that clear in the synopsis. I have and will read the next book in the series but I won't be in a huge rush to do so. Now there is one major factual error that I found detracted a lot from my enjoyment of the story especially after reading the Author's Note which includes this quote -

"While the Globe and Mail and the Tely were daily papers in Toronto, the only accurate thing about their representation here are their names."

Wrong!

The Globe & Mail did not exist in 1910. The two papers operating in 1910 that eventually merged to form the "Globe and Mail" were the "Toronto Globe", a Liberal paper, and the "Toronto Mail and Empire", a Conservative paper. They didn't merge until 1936 to become the Globe & Mail. Even the name "the Tely" is not quite accurate but is probably acceptable as that was the common nickname used as the paper's actual name was the "Toronto Evening Telegram"

Tontine (The Diamond & Doran Mysteries Book 4) by Tracy Tonkinson

Date Read: 20200707

My rating: 3 star

Another good read in this fine series that, as usual, is as much a character driven family drama as it is a mystery but Ms Tonkinson's writing is so good that both the family events and the mysteries are so well integrated in the story that neither overwhelms the other. Again as is usual in these stories there are some pretty gruesome and violent "accidents" or murders or attempted murders and it is difficult to see how they all tie together until Billy and his fine crew solve the mysteries and wind up the main plot. However I think I can only rate this a 3 star read because there are a few sub plots that are left open with, of course, the Sam Rostov and Sarcha story having no conclusion which I suspect and hope

leads into another good book in the series. It was nice to see the satisfactory ending to the Paddy O'Rourke saga and the Sinead and Arthur romance after so many mess ups. However I don't think Arthur quite realizes what he has got himself into! Always some good history, this time with Harry's car and the telephones. It might be nice if sometimes the perps would end up locked up alive and not killed off in some way but this time at least the ending was very ironic and appropriate! I did find one probable editing error as shown in the following quote from Chapter 6 when Billy was talking to Boyd in the Chicago Club which obviously is in Chicago -

"The three men shook hands and Doran thanked Boyd for his help. As Boyd was striding towards the door he stopped and came back. "One thing, probably nothing, but in light of the fact you're investigating Cassidy and Stackhouse's deaths, I should probably mention that shortly after I got back from Chicago there was a boiler explosion on my steam launch."

Obviously "back from Chicago" should read back to Chicago. Overall an enjoyable read and I'm looking forward to the next in the series.

Dead Ringer (Music Lover's Mystery #1) by Sarah Fox

Date Read: 20200705

My rating: 3 stars

I'm really quite pleased to have found Ms Fox who is one of the few Canadian authors writing cozy mysteries that I can read when I need a lighter read after finishing a dark, gritty, violent and serious crime novel. Now Ms Fox's stories, including this one, are a bit grittier than most cozy mysteries and usually don't include much, if any, of the humour I like in these type of books but I did get a few pretty good smiles and chuckles out of this one. In many ways this story fits the usual cozy formula with some quirky characters, a suspicious murder, a tenacious amateur sleuth, lots of suspects and red herrings and a bit of a twist that kind of took me by surprise leading to a satisfactory ending. This one did have a bit of a different setting of which Ms Fox writes some pretty good descriptions. I think Midori, Dori or Dora whatever you want to call her should do some serious rethinking about her romantic interests. I'm not a great fan of classical music and I really know very little about Philharmonic orchestras but the various references didn't detract anything from my enjoyment of this book. I'll read more books in this series and I have already acquired some more of them.

The Damned Don't Die (Reed Ferguson Mystery #16) by Renee Pawlish

Date Read: 20200704

My rating: 3 star

I have found this series to be one of my favourites to go to when I need a lighter comedown read after finishing a serious crime novel. However while I found this entry to be an enjoyable and easy read I don't think it had much of the usual humour found in previous books in the series. This story has a good murder plot, lots of suspects and red herrings, a much better than usual investigation by Reed and a great new character in Holly but is missing some of the familiar elements that we have come to look for in these books. For instance much of the humour is missing because Ace and Deuce, the Goofball Bros, don't have a big role or get into any of their usual hilarious situations, there is much less of the references to the movie noir stuff that has made this series famous and above all else Reed solves the case without getting beaten to a pulp as he does in most of the books. Great to see Cal have a starring role and his and Holly's love affair is probably one of the highlights of the book. A good solid ending and a HEA for Reed and Willie and Humphrey at least until their next adventure which I most definitely will read because I'm trying to read this whole series in order.

Mermaid (Sean O'Brien, #11) by Tom Lowe

Date Read: 20200703

My rating: 4 stars

I really enjoyed this story and I am very glad to be reunited, after waiting for a much too long a time, with Sean O'Brien and all his friends at the Marina and especially with Max - the star of the show. This book is a little different from the previous books in this series because it tends to include quite a bit more philosophical thoughts from Sean and Winona and a bit less of the fast, furious and usually quite violent action of the earlier books but there's lot's of suspense, suspects, a great investigation of the murders by the various law agencies and Sean and Winona and I love the Forensics and when the action does start Sean is at the top of his game all leading to a complete and entirely unexpected ending for a horrendous monster. Of course as always in these books one learns a bit of science and is exposed to the ecological and environmental problems facing our Earth and in particular the State of Florida today. This book may be worth more than the 4 stars I have awarded but I know anyone who reads my reviews is aware of how stingy I am with 5 stars and I do have a bit of an excuse why I didn't assign 5. I thought for about the first 25% or so of the book there was, perhaps, a bit too much back story on Sean, Winona, Nick and Dave most of which is not needed by anyone who has read the previous books in the series, Then I kind of felt Tom was trying to make this book more readable as a standalone or for someone jumping into the series for the first time. However later on in the story there are references to people like Joe Billie and events from earlier books with no backstory so if that was the idea it wasn't completely successful. Anyway another great read with a bit of a twist on the usual Travis McGee ending with McGee sailing off in to the sunset to resuscitate

the damsel in distress. This time when Travis O'Brien, or is it Sean McGee?, finally sails off with Winona on the "Dragonfly" it's actually hard to tell who is really the healer and who is really in distress – Sean or Winona? Good read in one of my favourite series and I look forward to more good Tom Lowe books.

The Nanny's Secret (A Locke Industries Novel) by Kiersten Modglin

Date Read: 20200630

My rating: 1 star

Also see my review of "The Assistant's Secret" by Emerald O'Brien

I read this book because I have read and enjoyed many books by Emerald O'Brien and I thought the premise sounded excellent but I'm very disappointed because I did not like either book very much. I think both authors missed a great opportunity to write crime fiction books that are unique and original. I really didn't know in which order I should have read them but I because of the last characters left standing I think I guessed correctly. Technically these are both well written and fairly well edited books except for the couple of things I noted in my review of "The Assistant's Secret" but they have too many of the things I don't like in crime fiction for me to enjoy them. I find it almost impossible to like a book when I do not like any of the characters in the book and that is the exact case with this book. Also I believe that in no case in any crime fiction can any of the bad guys be allowed to walk off into the sunset and not brought to any kind of justice as happens in this book. I also like a fair amount of action in a crime novel and while there is a small bit in "The Assistant's Secret" there is virtually none in this book. I don't know in what sub genre of crime fiction I would slot these books but I sort of classify them as wishy washy romantic suspense novels and I just did not like either of them very much. Of course I'll read more of Emerald O'Brien's works but I doubt I'll ever read any more by Kiersten Modglin.

For convenience and consistency I am attaching a copy of my review of "The Assistant's Secret"

The Assistant's Secret by Emerald O'Brien

Date Read: 20200618

My rating: 1 stars

Emerald O'Brien is one of my favourite authors and I have read and enjoyed her "Avery Hart" trilogy and her 4 book "Knox and Sheppard" trilogy which ended

with hints of a 5th book and the fabulous standalone “What She Found” but I didn’t really understand the concept of this new series until I read this book. Now I see how this ties in with “The Nanny’s Secret” by Kiersten Modglin and I have decided neither to write a complete review for this book nor to rate it until I have read “The Nanny’s Secret”. However here is a quote from Chapter 10 that I think needs some editing -

“She just needs to know what she’s getting herself into if she stays.” I can feel her eyes on my but I can’t stop staring at this guy. The dark circles under his eyes and his greasy hair beneath the visor hat he wears higher on his forehead. “She’s a good person. She needs to get out before—”

I don’t know whether ‘my but’ should read ‘my butt’ or just ‘me’ but it sure isn’t right the way it is.

And then we have the controversial ‘Bring/Take usage appearing again in the following quote -

*“Tell me right now.”
“The last time your sister O.D.’d, he’s the one who brought her to the hospital.*

Which I think would not only be more correct but would also read a lot smoother if ‘brought’ read ‘took’ instead.

Besides that I didn’t like any of the characters in this story with the possible exception of Tackman and Carver. The whole Locke family are horrendous people and Jo Oliver is a whiny, selfish wimp with no ethics or morals. My review will be continued after I have read The Nanny’s Secret.

Wine and Punishment (Literary Pub Mystery #1) by Sarah Fox

Date Read: 20200628

My rating: 3 stars

This is a good read in a pretty good Cozy mystery series by an author who I am not afraid to go to when I need a bit lighter comedown after finishing one or more serious crime novels. Although this has all of the required elements of a cozy it is a bit grittier than most cozies and has a bit of a more serious mystery plot. Lots of characters with motives for the murder and the rest of the mayhem and thus lots of suspects and red herrings and, surprisingly, many of the suspects have the same motive. Now of course the MC, Sadie Coleman, manages to solve the whole mystery but not by her investigation but by luck and coincidence and the security prudence of her neighbour Grayson Blake. Oh yeah there’s quite the romantic interest between them – pretty obvious by Grayson and quite reluctant but definitely there by Sadie. Now I never imagined the twist leading to the culprit and it wasn’t really telegraphed through out the

story but it wasn't hidden either and it sure was logical. Yeah and the same motive! Sadie has some great friends like Mel and Damien and Aunt Gilda and Shontelle and Wimsey. The only thing really missing that would make these books great cozies would be some humour which I expect would be provided by Wimsey but it isn't. The only real smile I had was in the ending and the catapult scene. Overall an enjoyable read by a goto author and I'll read more of her books.

Burn Country (A March and Walker Crime Novel #2) by Michael J. McCann

Date Read: 20200626

My rating: 3 stars

This book is a very good read that I really liked and would be a solid 4 star read except that the Kindle edition I read has no table of contents just a "Start" that takes you to the cover and makes it very difficult for someone like me who likes to read on various devices such as my iPad, Kindle reader or Kindle app on my iMac for instance which all give different %ages of reading thus making for a lot of annoying scrolling Therefore I have deducted 1 star. Now for all the good stuff I enjoyed! This book really has 3 separate mystery investigation going on simultaneously that appear to be connected but really are only by a couple of coincidental copy cat events and the OPP team led by Ellie March manages to wrap them all up with solid endings although I wasn't, personally. too happy with the way one ended. The main plot with the death of Senator Lane was solved through good sound police procedurals aided immensely by Kevin Walker's fine observational skill and a slightly convenient coincidence. Then perhaps that's the realistic way many such crimes are solved. I still think Kevin Walker is the real star of this series and has so many fine and deep characteristics, aptitudes and abilities and is a person that I would definitely like as a friend. I still find Ellie March a bit of an enigma because I've liked her much more in "Burn Country" and "Sorrow Lake" than I did in the 3rd book "Persistent Guilt" which, unfortunately, I read first because of it's 2020 Arthur Ellis nomination. Lot's of well developed secondary characters and Rosa Battaglia is sure a real nasty piece of work. All of Mr McCann's books are well written and edited with few, if any, typos, but with great descriptions, if perhaps a bit too detailed, of the weather, settings, clothing food and drink and incorporate a pretty accurate picture of the various law enforcement agencies, jurisdictions, protocols and procedures in Ontario including all the in house politics. I did have Janie's "problem" figured out before she ever told Kevin and I guessed Kevin's reaction and for once I was right! There is one thing in this story that I really liked and I think is quite unique in contemporary crime fiction and that is when Mr McCann has Ellie talk to the Prime Minister of Canada in person and informally. This type of interaction between real and fictional characters happens quite often in historical mysteries but I think this is the first time I have read it in a contemporary crime novel and it was very well done and appropriate to the

investigation. Overall a fine and enjoyable read and I hope Mr McCann has some more instalments on the way.