

Death in the Dales

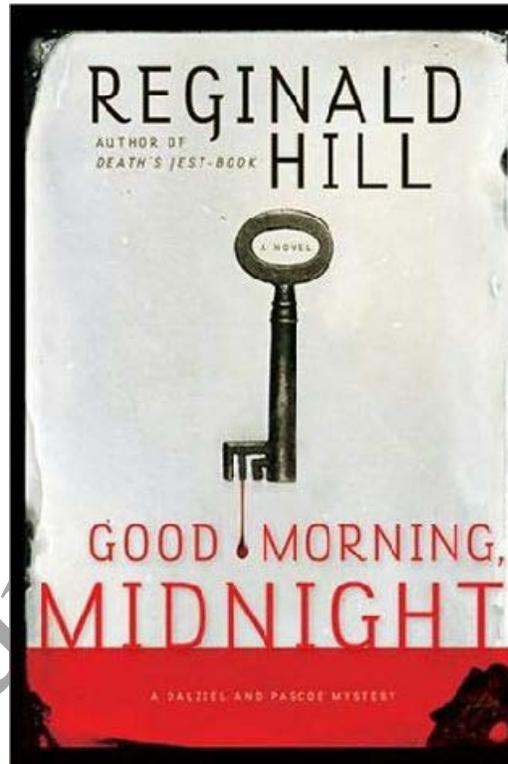
Suspended Sentences

by Jim Napier

Can there be many mystery buffs out there who never have seen the BBC series *Dalziel and Pascoe*? Starring Warren Clarke as the irrepressible, one-of-a-kind Andy Dalziel, and Colin Buchanan as his long-suffering sidekick, this engaging mystery series has been running for years, most often on TVOntario. One of the very few top-notch series that remain, inexplicably, unavailable on DVD. Well, I have good news for their fans: you can access the exploits of this crime-fighting duo any time you want, for the price of a paperback book – and they're every bit as good in print.

Reginald Hill

Reg Hill has been penning mysteries since 1970, and has amassed over thirty crime novels to date. Along the way he's won a host of awards, including a Crime Writers Association Golden Dagger for his Dalziel and Pascoe series, and a Cartier Diamond Dagger for his lifetime contribution to the genre. The son of a professional soccer player and factory worker, Hill demonstrated an academic turn of mind, winning a scholarship to Oxford. After graduating he tried his hand at being a schoolmaster, and later lectured in a Teacher's College, before turning to writing full-time. Hill and his wife live in a Victorian vicarage in Cumbria, England.



Good Morning, Midnight (Seal Books, 2004)

Superintendent Andy Dalziel was first introduced to readers in 1970, in the novel *A Clubbable Woman*. He made his presence known even in those early days:

“When he took his jacket off and dropped it over the back of a chair it was like a Bedouin pitching camp. He had a big head, greying now; big eyes, short-sighted, but losing none of their penetrating force...and he blew his nose into a khaki hand-kerchief a foot-and-a-half square.”

Dalziel's demeanor is no less imposing. He belches, farts, and scratches himself at will, and he doesn't suffer fools, lightly or any other way. Largely self-educated and in his mid-fifties, his penchant for always speaking his mind guarantees that Fat Andy (as he is known *only* behind his back) will cut to the heart of a matter, even though it means offending all within earshot. He has no time for diplomacy or political correctness. Did I mention that he has an eye for the ladies?

Dalziel's partner-in-crimebusting is a university-trained sociology graduate, what Andy calls 'a sensitive sort,' twenty years his junior. He is reflective and—goaded on by the admonitions of his militantly feminist wife (who, early on in the series, leaves him with their daughter)—spends much of his time trying vainly to repair the damage done by Andy's outspokenness, or (even more ambitiously), get Andy to change his ways. One might as well spit into the wind.

Dalziel and Pascoe are, in a word, Yorkshire's Odd Couple, their irreconcilable differences tempered only by their mutual respect and their commitment to get to the heart of a problem.

In the opening pages of *Good Morning, Midnight* businessman Pal Maciver decides to end his life. Not especially unique, perhaps, except that he commits suicide in exactly the same way—and place—that his father did, ten years to the day earlier. Pascoe must satisfy himself that the son's death was, indeed, a suicide, which means trolling in the murky waters of perhaps the most dysfunctional family this side of Sigmund Freud's notebooks. Pal's stepmother, Kay Kafka, wars incessantly with one of his sisters, who, it is clear,

blames her for both the son's and the father's deaths; and they are joined by an eccentric (if not downright dotty) aunt who lives in the woods, cultivating in equal measure the friendship of avian squatters who roam at will throughout her home, and a certain leafy crop known best for its hallucinogenic properties. In a forensic odyssey worthy of Homer, Pascoe must also unravel the personal history between Dalziel and Kay Kafka, investigate the significance of a midnight visit to the scene of the crime by a local hooker named Dolores, the Lady of Pain, determine the relevance to Pal's death of bits of poetry by Emily Dickenson, and unravel corporate machinations connected with the current war in Iraq. Enough flesh here, then, to satisfy even the most ravenous of crime-fiction carnivores.

Grim themes and dark humour

Told through multiple points-of-view, *Good Morning, Midnight* is a multi-layered, articulate tale that can trace its roots back to Chaucer, Shakespeare, and LeCarré. The structure of the book (employing flashbacks and witness statements) almost guarantees that the reader will solve it before the end, but that's not important. In Hill's case the process (reading the novel) is every bit as entertaining as the product (solving the mystery). As in all of his tales, Reg Hill combines grim themes with dark humour. It's a rare book these days that provides you with a smile from every page. At 500 pages plus, and a list price of \$10.99, that's about two cents per chuckle. A real bargain.

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