

New Cop, New Beat

Michael Connelly launches new series

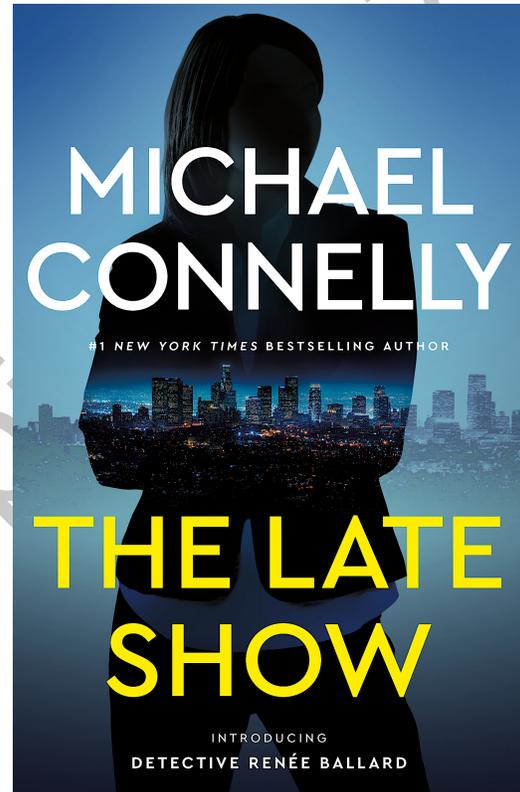
Suspended Sentences

by Jim Napier

The Late Show marks the debut of an exciting new lead character for Michael Connelly. Known around the world for his gripping series of novels featuring now-retired LAPD detective Harry Bosch, as well as his successful series *The Lincoln Lawyer*, Connelly has struck out with another new series, strongly based, he tells the reader, on an actual detective with the LAPD.

In the jaded jargon of the LAPD, the shift between midnight and eight AM is known as The Late Show. It's not only because it comes at the end of the day; it's also because that's when a lot of the criminal elements surface at the night clubs, on the streets, at 24-hour service stations and convenience stores, taking advantage of the darkness to ply their trade, whether it's drug dealing, prostitution, or simply robbery.

Thirty-something Police Detective Renée Ballard works the late show. It wasn't her choice. When she'd reported sexual harassment by her superior officer her partner, who could have confirmed it, didn't stand up for her. She'd been exiled



to the night shift. It's a slot few officers like. For one thing, the incidents that she encounters on the street are turned over to daylight teams at the end of her shift, so there's no continuity, and given their caseload, often no follow-through. Frustrating for Ballard, who only wants to close cases and do justice for their victims.

Ballard has already had enough grief in her life. She was fourteen when she saw her father drown while surfing, her mother was never part of her life, and her only family is her grandmother, who she sees sporadically and her rescue dog, Lola.

Working a routine night shift, checking out the transgender victim of a vicious assault lying in a coma in a nearby hospital, Ballard is called away to a local night club known as Dancers, where a multiple homicide has just taken place. Four dead and a fifth victim fighting for her life. Even in LA it's a big deal, and all detectives and forensics support is being focused on the case.

An old nemesis, Lieutenant Olivas, is heading up the investigation. Bad news for Ballard, and not much better for him, as he's the senior officer she'd accused of sexual harassment two years earlier. Olivas sidelines her with a specific assignment: notify the next of kin; his not-so-subtle way of saying he doesn't want Ballard anywhere near the case.

But Ballard doesn't let go of things that easily, and when another

detective working the case—and Ballard's former partner—is found executed in his own driveway, she decides to get to the bottom of things, orders or not.

The challenge facing the gutsy detective is to avoid the twin fates of a villain someday getting the best of her and the equally deadly nature of the job itself. As a colleague tells her

"You have a job, detective, that takes you into the bleakest side of the human soul...If you go into the darkness, the darkness goes into you. You then have to decide what to do with it. How to keep safe from it. How to keep it from hallowing you out."

The Late Show marks yet another auspicious point in Michael Connelly's impressive writing career. Featuring an engaging protagonist, layered with a complex backstory, and marked by Connelly's meticulous attention to detail and cracking dialogue, it's a series that has got me clamoring for the sequel, and I'll bet I'm not alone.

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Since 2005 Jim Napier's reviews and interviews have appeared in several Canadian newspapers and on various crime fiction and literary websites, including his own award-winning site, *Deadly Diversions*.