

Born Again Blues

Reissued debut novel a minor masterpiece

Suspended Sentences

by Jim Napier

Over a decade ago I read a debut novel by an unknown Oxford-based author. I was impressed. Published by a mainstream North American press, but given minimal publicity, it nonetheless managed over the years to sell over one million copies in six languages. When I learned recently that it was to be re-issued I took the opportunity to read it again, and it holds up wonderfully. It is a book that any crime fiction fan can take satisfaction from, whether their focus is on a good plot, convincing characters, or a finely-developed theme. There is much here to savour, and for those who warm to his writing there is more good news: in the interim Griggs has published three more standalone novels.

ON TOUR IN EUROPE, middle-aged and drug-addicted rock star Matt Silver takes stock of his life, personal and professional, and finds it wanting. His career, firmly grounded in an exceptional talent, has made him a global star, but at a cost: his family has suffered from his frequent absences and his dependence on booze, drugs, and on-the-road sex. Realising that he's at a tipping point, Silver abandons his tour in mid-run to return to England to try to save his troubled marriage with his wife,

Lauren. But arriving at their country home in the early hours of the morning he finds Lauren about to leave him with their twin ten-year-old daughters, Freya and Gudrun. Still high on coke he pushes Lauren out of



the way, bundles the children into their luxury car, and speeds off toward London. Before long his erratic driving attracts the police, and he's involved in a high-speed pursuit. Approaching Lambeth Bridge he drives through a construction barrier

and plunges into the icy river. In the chaotic aftermath, Gudrun drowns, Freya is rescued, and Matt's body cannot be found.

In the aftermath of the tragedy, DI Sam Cobb is assigned to head the police enquiry into the accident. His superiors are concerned about the press fallout over the crash and their failure to find Silver's body.

BUT COBB BRINGS his own personal baggage to the case: although he has a flat in London, he spends much of his personal time with his father Fred on their family farm a little over an hour from the city. At seventy-eight, his father can use the help, and their time together allows Sam to decompress from the pressures of the job as he contemplates ending his policing career.

As Lauren struggles to cope with the magnitude of her loss, Silver's ex-manager, Tommy Hudson returns from Europe and moves into the family home, allegedly to help Lauren fill the vacuum caused by Matt's absence. Is he simply a longtime family friend there for her in her hour of need, or is he a cagey opportunist looking to take Matt's place in Lauren's turbulent life?

WHEN THE PRESS stakes out their home, Sam reluctantly gives Lauren and Freya sanctuary at his father's farm. Slowly but surely Lauren and Freya become part of his cloistered life, and they begin together to form a healing bond, adding yet another layer of intrigue to the already engrossing tale.

Lauren has never accepted that Matt Silver died that night. Sam Cobb questions her belief, but being the good copper that he is, presses for clear evidence one way or the other. If Silver did survive the events of that night, why hasn't he surfaced? And if he does reappear, how will Lauren and Freya's lives — and his own — be affected?

Redemption Blues has genuine depth, and is by turns poignant and fast-moving. It is a writers' book: Griggs has a commanding narrative voice, so convincing that it could be non-fiction, so compelling that the pages fly by. Small wonder, then, that it has already sold a million copies. Available once more in print, and now also as an e-book, this latest edition of *Redemption Blues* should earn the author legions of new fans.

Since 2005 Jim Napier's reviews and interviews have appeared in several Canadian newspapers and on such websites as *Spinetingler*, *The Rap Sheet*, *Shots Magazine*, *Crime Time*, *Reviewing The Evidence*, *January* magazine, and *Type M for Murder*, as well as on his own award-winning site, *Deadly Diversions*. He can be reached at jnapier@deadlydiversions.com