



The Penguin Pool Murder

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For the third graders at Jefferson School, a field trip is always a treat. But one day at the New York Aquarium, they get much more excitement than they bargained for. A pickpocket sprints past, stolen purse in hand, and is making his way to the exit when their teacher, the prim Hildegarde Withers, knocks him down with her umbrella. By the time the police and the security guards finish arguing about what to do with Chicago Lew, he has escaped, and Miss Withers has found something far more interesting: a murdered stockbroker floating in the penguin tank.

With the help of Detective Oscar Piper, this no-nonsense spinster embarks on her first of many adventures. The mystery is baffling, the killer dangerous, but for a woman who can control a gaggle of noisy third graders, murder isn't frightening at all.

The Penguin Pool Murder Details

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Author : Stuart Palmer

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From Reader Review The Penguin Pool Murder for online ebook

Ying_ko says

A wonderful mystery

A witty, fun, mystery with an old maid school teacher and her sharp tongue pitting wits with a police detective. Witty banter and one liners abound to add fun to a great mystery. Can you solve the crime? The clues are there.

Vintagebooklvr says

That was darb! Welcome to the Hildegarde Withers mysteries. Withers is an intelligent, no-nonsense school teacher with a desire for some action and likes some romance in New York shortly after the depression starts. When she gets pulled into a murder she quickly takes advantage of it (to experience some of the action she always wanted) to help the police during the investigation. She is not happy that the police seem to be settling for the most obvious culprits and determined to continue the investigation on her own. So begins her amateur sleuth career...

I liked Withers. She is a bit unconventional but nothing too out there and has a definite sense of character that I don't always feel with some heroines of mystery series. Piper, the detective, was portrayed in the beginning as one of those bully type investigators who just picked the most obvious solution and plowed through forcing everything to fit his conceived picture. Luckily, he turned out to be a bit more than that and did look at some other ideas. He still came off as a stereotype at times which did annoy me.

Overall, I enjoyed the book but there was something that made it seem a bit contrived that put me off a higher rating. I would definitely read another in the series.

Christine Cody says

Reading this book is like watching a 1930s classic film. Each character jumps from the page, particularly the main two, perfectly created and perfectly matched. Not surprisingly, the movie based on this book was a hugely popular hit in the early 30s.

Jane says

I don't usually pick the murderer out of the gate, but I did in this one. Not a bad one, but SP is clearly still hitting his stride with Ms. Withers & co - it's not as smart or atmospheric as The Puzzle of the Red Stallion. I'll definitely keep going in the series, though!

Zane says

Okay

I'm sorry but I'm unable to separate the fact that I am reading a book from when the laws of this country was different.

Sjervey says

A mystery from the thirties set right after the stock market crash featuring a female detective. Dated, but fun to see nascent emergence of a woman in a previously all man's world.

Jan C says

I think I've seen the movie too many times. Amazing how close it stuck to the book.

I read the Rue Morgue Press reprint. Received it several years ago before it came out on Kindle. Originally published in 1931 and meant to take place shortly after the beginning of the Crash in '29. In the edition I have there is a little blurb in front, after the Cast of Characters, about Stuart Palmer. Who knew that Miss Withers was partially based on Edna May Oliver, plus a librarian he had known. And he was from the circus town of Baraboo, Wisconsin.

The Crash figures largely in this story. Gerald Lester has a fixed up marriage with Gwen, his partner's daughter. Never any love there. And it appears he may have a thing with his secretary (I think they cut her out of the movie). And the daughter had a thing with an aspiring lawyer that Daddy didn't quite approve of. These three - Lester, Mrs. Lester and the lawyer all meet up at the Aquarium one day, along with Miss Withers and her "Grade Number Three", along with a number of other people. But they won't all be leaving. Lester, the questionable stock broker, will wind up in the pool with the penguin (The title kind of gives that away).

Inspector Oscar Piper shows up and somehow Miss Withers tags along with him, taking notes, insinuating herself into the case.

An entertaining read.

I only had one question: didn't taxis get tipped in those days? Miss Withers comes across a clue of a cab receipt that says "\$1.75 - pay no more". So I'm wondering if they weren't tipped in those days. Not sure if that's the kind of minutiae that Google would have an answer for. And the vast majority of the people who could answer that question are gone now.

Jenn Estepp says

Although I sussed out both the murderer and motive pretty easily, I still really enjoyed this entry. It's the first

in the series and I liked the main characters - a spinster school teacher and a very indulgent cop - quite a bit. Will definitely read more in the series.

Linda Dotson says

Couldn't put it down

This book was so well written, I felt immersed in the story and that these characters were real. Stuart Palmer drew a wonderful picture for me of Miss Withers and the Inspector. The plot was well thought out and executed with an exciting surprise ending. Great fun!

Leslie says

3.5*

A fun Golden Age mystery, even if I did figure it out about halfway through.

Sg.00 says

Light & bright mystery, but I must admit - I liked the movie better!

Tracy says

Dated but still an entertaining read - you can even watch the film on you tube if it takes your fancy. And Hildergarde is a most worthy sleuth.

Ivonne Rovira says

In the interest of full disclosure, I am a teacher myself; therefore, I am admittedly inclined to love the no-nonsense Miss Hildegarde Withers, a third-grade teacher at Jefferson School in New York City just months after the 1929 Stock Market Crash. However, you don't have to be a schoolteacher to fall in love with Miss Withers!

The novel begins with Miss Withers and her overly enthusiastic charges on a field trip at the New York Aquarium. While there, Miss Withers -- unflappable, clever, acerbic and observant -- foils a purse snatching and then forcefully introduces herself into a murder investigation. Miss Withers and a student find the victim, an unsavory and possibly unscrupulous stockbroker by the name of Gerald Lester, in the penguin exhibit. Teaming up with the investigating police officer, the cigar-chomping Inspector Piper, Miss Withers proves herself more than his equal in ferreting out the facts of the case and the identity of the murderer.

The Penguin Pool Murder reminds one of the filmed version of Dashiell Hammett's *The Thin Man* or a Noël Coward play. The witty dialogue and pitch-perfect characters create a sparkling book evocative of the 1920s and 1930s. How is it that Miss Withers isn't more well known? She certainly ranks up with there with Roderick Alleyn, Lord Peter Whimsey, Miss Maud Silver, and Albert Campion -- all of whom are much, much more celebrated.

Published in 1931, the slim novel is firmly grounded in the period. While just in her 30s, Miss Hildegarde is already deemed a spinster. Lester's beautiful wife, Gwen, emerges as a blonde narcissist who uses men without an afterthought. Police routinely and openly beat confessions out of suspects in a time where "the third degree" isn't just an idiom for intensive questioning. Inspector Piper calls secretaries and receptionists "baby" and "girl" with the casual sexism of the era. The country is lurching into what will become known as the Great Depression. But the novel never feels dated, and Miss Withers never seems the least bit . Instead, the reader will feel Miss Withers' joyous excitement at the chance to take part in the murder investigation and her well-founded sense of confidence. As she puts it while sparring with the hard-headed Inspector Piper:

I'm having the time of my life. And I tell you for your own good that some person like me, who doesn't look at all like a detective, could find out more in ten minutes from most people than any three of your operatives.

This is the first in a mystery series by Stuart Palmer. How wonderful that the prolific Palmer penned 19 more adventures for Miss Withers!

Susan Willis says

Really a 3.5. The later books in this series are much better on my opinion. It was good to see how it started though.

Lisa Kucharski says

Written in 1938, the murder mystery is solved by a grade school teacher and police inspector. There are so many rules broken that allow people to tamper with evidence, that it makes it difficult to read for the mind in 2011. You can't help reading it and thinking, you can't allow that Inspector!

The writing seems to play to the heart as much as to someone hoping to read a mystery story. I would say this falls under the category-- Romantic/Mystery writing typical of the 20's through 40's.
