

“the other side of silence,” and its environs for the piano player and his cronies.

The author of more than seventy novels, including the long-running Nameless Detective series, Bill Pronzini is also the writer of more than 300 short stories and novellas and an anthologist of mystery, western, and science fiction collections. The veteran mystery writer comes to this novel as a highly decorated award winner. A two-time nominee for the International Crime Writers Association’s Hammett Prize, he has also been honored with three Shamus Awards and The Eye, a Lifetime Achievement Award, from the Private Eye Writers of America. In addition, Pronzini has been nominated six times for an Edgar Award by the Mystery Writers of America. In 2008 he garnered their Grand Master designation.

A character-driven plot, tight storytelling, and insightful observations about the Southwest’s terrain and urban sprawl keep readers glued to Fallon’s nail-biting leads and dead ends. Once he crosses a law-breaking line, becomes involved in a death, and finds that Casey has also vanished, he is doubly determined to locate the boy and his mother before anyone else is injured, or even worse, murdered. When this charismatic hero tracks down the missing piece in the mother and son’s whereabouts, with the help of a fellow investigator, Fallon just may be able to find the silence he longs for—and even share that silence with another. (October) *Angela Leeper*



The Ruffian on the Stair

Gary Newman
Soho Constable, Hardcover
\$25.00 (256pp)
978-1-56947-543-0

Sebastian Rolvenden is gifted with the written remains of his namesake grandfather’s life: a journal of sorts, a map, and letters which reveal that his vicar ancestor was much more than a religious man in his earlier days; he was a bohemian, a carouser, and—perhaps—a murderer.

Sebastian’s own life is a fragmented puzzle. Recently divorced and now estranged from his son, he has his own demons to contend with. As Sebastian’s curiosity impels him to investigate the enticing clues distributed throughout his grandfather’s effects, more and more of the man’s secret life is revealed, not to mention a possible treasure. Sebastian is not alone in the quest for his grandfather’s truth, and the other parties are none too scrupulous or altruistically motivated.

Gary Newman, once a teacher of languages in the UK and elsewhere, now works as a translator and resides in northeast England. The author tends to repeat the intricate details of the puzzle he’s created overmuch, perhaps nervous that they would be forgotten. However, the dialogue is snappy, witty, natural, and adds to the appeal

of this highly entertaining book. Written in the author’s thick authentic English accent, it is heavily idiomatic, which seems to conjure the period and the setting more artfully. For instance:

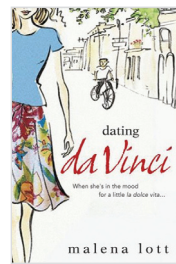
“...I turned my head slightly and took a sly dekho through the glasses...”

“...I asked, biting a wedge off my salami baguette...”

“...I lay doggo on the other side of the privet shield.”

Using such colorful language, Newman is adept at stringing out the clues and revelations while maintaining a constant sense of forward motion. *The Ruffian on the Stair* is a story of family secrets, but not just one family. It is filled with “ah-ha” moments of revelation, but not just one revelation. It is a race to see who will cheat death and who is the ruffian on the stair. (November) *Donna Russo Morin*

ROMANCE



Dating da Vinci

Malena Lott
Sourcebooks Casablanca,
Softcover, \$12.95 (288pp)
978-1-4022-1393-9

The heroine of this romance, Ramona, is a thirty-six-year-old widow with two young sons, a mother and a mother-in-law who are both pillars of a local church, a sister who is the star of a local TV fitness show, and zero *joie de vivre*. She’s still a Griever trying to explain to a world of Normals that she’s just not ready to move on, but her family and friends are getting very pushy. “If it was time to transition to a Normal,” she says, “it had to be on my terms, not taking the scraps of others’ sympathy to piece together a life without Joel.”

Ramona teaches English as a Second Language in a private school in Austin, Texas. As the fall semester opens, she welcomes the usual students, immigrants who need to learn about life in America. It’s when the last student comes to class (late) that her life begins to turn upside-down. This student is Leonardo da Vinci. He’s twenty-five years old, six-foot-three, drop-dead gorgeous, endearing—and broke. Taking pity on him, Ramona lets him move into her late husband’s studio in her backyard. Pretty soon, da Vinci (note that Dan Brown erred in capitalizing the D in da Vinci) moves into her heart. She helps him with his English and invites him to eat with her and her sons. Pretty soon, he’s cooking for her. Pretty soon, they’re kissing and petting. Pretty soon, they’re making love.

“I could see the way other women looked at him,” she writes. “If I were feeling poetic, I could think of him as my savior, my rescue pilot, my wake-up call. Mostly, though, I just thought of

him as da Vinci, the man I taught English to who taught me about so much more.”

By Christmas, Ramona’s life is fuller that she ever imagined. As she’s finishing her doctoral dissertation (in record time!) on “the language of love,” she’s also learning about the permutations of *amore*. She deals with unfinished issues with the woman Joel almost married (who married his best friend) and finds herself irresistibly attracted to the handsome physician her mother tried to fix her up with but who is suddenly “with” her sister. After two years of widowhood, she buys new “funderwear,” and a new bed. Ramona cleans out Joel’s clothing, and discovers that Christmas can indeed be merry again. (November) *Barbara Ardinger*

SPECULATIVE



Ledfeather

Stephen Graham Jones
University of Alabama Press,
Softcover \$17.50 (216pp)
978-1-57366-146-1

Stephen Graham Jones is the author of five novels, including the award-winning *The Fast Road* and *The Bird is Gone*. With hallucinogenic lyricism and a nonlinear narrative, his new novel *Ledfeather* moves back and forth through time. A disjointed structure and multiple narrators provide a subtle exposition for the story and unique perspectives on the complexities of the main character, Doby Saxon.

Since his birth, Doby, a young Indian man living on a Blackfeet reservation, is exposed to poverty, violence, hatred, death, disappointment, and defeat, which he embraces as his legacy. Then he finds and becomes obsessed with letters dated back to 1883, written by an Indian agent to his wife. At first the epistles are eloquent and loving, but after confessing to committing an atrocity against the Blackfeet tribe, the agent’s letters break down into seemingly insane ramblings. Jones writes, “And the part of him the Indian agent wanted to keep buried had seen.... Forgotten lodges with the sleeping dead....Dogs feeding on a horse while it was still alive....And now...a ghost, a reflection of the Agent’s own guilt and fears and self-pity.”

The letters amplify Doby’s angst and suicidal tendencies and he becomes a phantasm, an entity that represents the despair of a once strong and proud Indian nation that was reduced to its lowest dregs. He begins to live simultaneously on the thin line of converged realities between the present and the Blackfeet spirit world called the “Sandhills.”

Readers who enjoy the trippy books of Kathe Koja, a disjointed structure like Joseph Heller’s novel *Catch-22*, a plethora of characters as narrators like D.M. Thomas’s novel