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Murder on the Minnesota

THE BOOK

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A WELL-CRAFTED VINTAGE WHODUNIT

Murder on the Minnesota *by* Conrad Allen, paperback
St. Martin's Minotaur, St. Martin's Press, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010: 295 Pages: ISBN 0-312-28092-0: Price US $24.95, Canada $34.95



What makes Conrad Allen's third novel in the series of murder mysteries so utterly endearing is not only its brilliant portrayal of a perplexing case but also for the revival of the classical era of crime whodunits that is rarely found in these days of marauding thrillers that are often passed under the

guise of detective fiction. The rich prose vibrant with the atmosphere and the élan of a bygone period would definitely rekindle the interest of the modern reader. The sweeping saga of murder and deceit is based on the Pacific Ocean and the flamboyant characters that infest the cruise liner, Minnesota, are a world onto themselves and to unmask the murderer the protagonists must apply their entire detective prowess, even braving murderous attempts to reach the happy ending.

Conrad Allen

Conrad Allen, the author of this book, is the author of two previous mysteries in this series, "Murder on the Lusitania" and "Murder on the Mauretania". He lives in England.

The protagonist pair of George Porter Dillman and Genevieve Masefield is hired by the Minnesota passenger liner to keep a sharp eye around for some suspected foul play on its passage to the Far East. The suave and gentlemanly Dillman along with the ravishingly charming Genevieve has had major successes in the past working for the Cunrad Line. Purposefully maintaining a discreet distance they board Minnesota separately and are accommodated in different decks. By the time *Minnesota* sails off from Seattle over the deceptively placid Pacific, Genevieve had befriended the delectable couple of Horace and Etta Langmead. Among the other distinguished passengers are a Catholic clergyman Father Slattery, Mr. Rutherford Blaine, Joseph McDade and his wife Blanche, Fay Brinkley, and several others.

Mike Roebuck, the purser and an old friend of Dillman, briefs the detective that they suspect one Mr. Rance Gilpatrick of using the vessel for smuggling contraband goods consisting of silk, arms and ammunitions, and even possibly drugs. Rance Gilpatrick is with his new wife Maxine on the present passage. He is a known crook and has a hand in almost all kinds of shady deals. Though he has been under suspicion for long, no one had been able to fix anything on him. An earlier detective hired by Roebuck to keep an eye on Gilpatrick was beaten up brutally by thugs. In short Gilpatrick was a dangerous adversary who would not stop at anything to achieve his end. Dillman had to find out what was actually going on and get Gilpatrick behind the bars. Gilpatrick is also accompanied by his henchmen Tommy Gault, who is a retired prizefighter.

The very first night in the dining saloon several incidents occur. Father Slattery earns everyone's ire with his admonitions towards all at not having the right kind of faith and seeking to convert anyone who would listen to him. Genevieve gains a friend in Fay Brinkley and a pathetically infatuated admirer in the shabbily dressed but brilliantly talented artist David Seymour-Jones. The artist is so enamored by the charming grace of Genevieve that he has eyes only for her and tries to please her with all sorts of ploys that only infuriate Genevieve further. Dillman strikes a pleasant chord with Rutherford Blaine and suddenly notices that someone was keeping an eye on him. Some time later when Genevieve was playing piano in the ladies boudoir Mrs. Maxine Gilpatrick overheard her and joins in with a soprano rendering. This gives a most desired opening to Genevieve to get close to Rance Gilpatrick and learn about his crooked deeds. Maxine finds Genevieve extremely adorable and literally takes the young woman under her wings. She decides that the two of them must hold a public performance where Genevieve would accompany her in piano. As their friendship grows Genevieve learns several things about Rance asking subtle questions once in a while. Rance is wary of Genevieve as he feels that she had more to her than what one saw on the surface. He tasks Tommy to keep an eye on Genevieve.

> *..."Murder in Minnesota" leaves the readers with a fairy tale effect where not only good wins over evil but love kindles too in the right hearts, and narrates another fast-paced, exhilarating mystery into the exquisitely rendered world of romance and suspense in the early twentieth century. Fully recommended to all lovers of romance and suspense...*

The composed life onboard is shattered one morning with the discovery of Father Slattery's body, killed with a garrote by an expert assassin. Soon Dillman discovers that the intended victim was actually Rutherford Blaine and only because his cabin had been exchanged with the Clergy was the reason he was still alive. Blaine had a bodyguard too who is injured in a deadly scuffle with the assassin. On learning that Blaine was actually a highly placed diplomat visiting Japan secretly as the President's emissary to enrich the bond between the two countries, Dillman takes up the task of protecting the diplomat. One night, Dillman who was occupying Blaine's cabin is assaulted by the assassin, and though he manages to hurt the killer the latter escapes. One thing is established though that the assassin was short, an expert in jujitsu, very agile, strong and an expert garrote.

Genevieve's life is made complex by the addition of another unwanted suitor in the form of detestably smooth talking Willoughby Kincaid who simply can't keep away from beautiful women and sets his mind to waylay Genevieve at every pretext. He is a big mouth too spinning unbelievable tales of hunting and shooting and his supposedly globetrotting around the world. Needless to say Genevieve is least impressed and finds his company decidedly uncomfortable. Meanwhile the artist discloses two very vital clues to Genevieve of his having seen Father Slattery with a Japanese passenger and that of Horace Langmead with a Chinese steward, each engaged into serious argument with the other. She also learns from Maxine that Joseph McDade was a business associate of Rance. This draws the web of suspicion around Joseph too. Tommy who is spying on Genevieve sees one night Dillman entering her cabin and Rance draws the obvious conclusion that the two were working together and were conspiring against him. Tommy also searches through Genevieve's cabin though finding nothing suspicious. When Maxine learns Rance' suspicion of Genevieve and what he had ordered Tommy to do, she leaves him and moves into a separate cabin. This marital discord disturbs Rance rather deeply and that only aids the detectives in their quest.

Eventually the smugglers are caught as the contraband arms are discovered in the hold and so are the murderer and his employer. The unwanted suitors are got rid of and Genevieve and Dillman finally find one in each other's company and they are accepted by their friends as the perfect pair, a conjecture that isn't far from the truth and suits them both.

Murder in Minnesota leaves the readers with a fairy tale effect where not only good wins over evil but love kindles too in the right hearts, and narrates another fast-paced, exhilarating mystery into the exquisitely rendered world of romance and suspense in the early twentieth century.



-Satyabrata Dam
Satyabrata Dam is a leading crime fiction writer. His book "Eyewitness and other tales of detection" published by Minerva Press has been hailed as a landmark in Crime fiction.

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-Editor-in-Chief