

tery series has generally been well regarded, but I have found the last several to be very disappointing. To become familiar with a true genius of puzzle mysteries, readers are urged to try any of Rex Stout's only slightly dated mysteries with the orchid-growing Nero Wolfe as detective.

Body Double is a foray into a recently popular plot twist involving the appearance of the heroine's previously unknown identical twin—sometimes dead and sometimes alive. Lisa Scottoline's *Mistaken Identity* and Judy Mercer's *Fast Forward* are two recent examples. In Gerritsen's story, medical examiner Maura Isles returns from a conference in Paris stunned at the gathering of police officials and neighbors in front of her home. As Detective Jane Rizzoli steps aside to let her see the body, Isles realizes why everyone has been gaping at her. The corpse is her double.

The body is that of Anna Jessup, and it is soon established that the two are twins, each adopted by a different family at birth. The question is who, exactly, is Jessup, and which of them was the intended victim? A detective, Rick Ballard, comes forward convinced that Jessup was killed by her lover, a pharmaceutical baron, who abused her and jealously stalked her after she left him. Ballard had assisted Jessup with her "disappearance" into a town in Maine after anonymous threats suggested there might be a deadly ending. Ballard's intense involvement makes Isles wary, but at the same time she senses a personal chemistry.

Sprinkled among the chapters on Isles and her sister's murder is a parallel subplot, seemingly unrelated, of a young pregnant woman who has been kidnapped and kept entombed alive in a coffin-like box.

Unconvinced by Ballard's theory, Isles travels to Maine to retrace her sister's recent past. While she is ensconced in the cottage that Jessup had rented, human bones are found buried nearby in the woods. Ultimately these bones lead to the discovery of a series of bizarre disappearances across the country. The

disappearances guide Isles to her birth mother, and the two plots start to converge. There is a nice interplay of approaches as Isles searches for her own identity and Detective Rizzoli follows police procedure.

The characters are engaging and vulnerable, although Isle's stiffness and isolation seem exaggerated. The

plot is both hellish and creepy. The many strands come together and despite the complexity form a cohesive story. And just when everything appears to be tied together in a neat package, Gerritsen gives you the final shocker, and you wonder whether you should have seen it coming.

Random Family: Love, Drugs, Trouble, and Coming of Age in the Bronx

by Adrian Nicole LeBlanc; New York, Scribner Publishing, 2003, 304 pages, \$17.50

Nancy Glimm, C.S.W.-R.

Random Family: Love, Drugs, Trouble, and Coming of Age in the Bronx, is a remarkable book. Its author, Adrian Nicole LeBlanc, makes frequent contributions to magazines and newspapers. She has several master's degrees, has been a visiting scholar in journalism, and has received numerous awards for her writing. This is her first novel.

The story is set in the Bronx at the end of a fierce decade—the 1980s—when drug gangs ravaged neighborhoods, buildings, and families. LeBlanc, on the basis of ten years of observation and reporting, has captured this moment with fairness and a narrative that brings the reader right onto the street. She also gives health care providers a tremendous insight into the intricacies of the culture of poverty in urban America today. Beyond the drug wars, which appear to have been quelled, the book offers the clinician a direct view into the lives of individuals and families who are alive and well in 2004.

The novel is based on the lives of several families as they cope and make life choices. Multigenerational patterns of behavior are described; it is possible to track the lives and observe these patterns as they play out, from mother to child to grandchild. Patterns of repeating compul-

sively destructive behaviors are described with lucidity and compassion. The culture of poverty and deprivation translate directly into the quality of the relationships. Individuals feel excluded from the material culture, and disenfranchised. The power of the subgroup becomes almost irresistible under this pressure. The disintegration of family structure creates its own new forms of relationships. This transformation is described as characters strive and are crushed by the forces they encounter or recreate. It is possible to understand how the characters see no way out, and how the structure of services available to individuals who are embedded in such chaos renders these individuals untouched by the offerings of health care providers.

The children in these families are subject to maternal deprivation and severe disruptions in their attachments. They have difficulties of separation and in overall functioning. These problems are evident and again play out in a lack of ability to function in school and a lack of interest in learning, starting at a young age. These early traumas lead to despair and rage. Boredom and the inability to connect with any positive identification lead to risk taking, drug use, alcohol consumption, and extreme sexual promiscuity. Many of the characters in *Random Family* are desperate for a positive connection with any person, activity, or sub-

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stance. They are without internalized skills for self-soothing or self-reflecting, and they have lost the ability to trust and engage with the broader culture. Criminal behavior, domestic violence as culture, prison culture and gang life, and drug and alcohol abuse all too clearly become substitutes for more stable living. LeBlanc makes this all come alive—the striving of real people trying desperately to make life work, to make connections, and to have something material and positive happen. Her characters suffer greatly. They are also passionate and full of life.

What can this marvelous book teach us as clinicians? Certainly we need to be mindful of cultural forces outside the mainstream that we may not know very much about. After reading *Random Family* one might look more closely at early trauma and the quality of attachments in clients' lives. It is possible to see clients' problems and despair, but it is also important to consider solutions that offer hope. A colleague recently said to me that the most important thing we can offer our clients is to be fully present and to enjoy them as they speak their truth, tell the story of their lives. The characters in *Random Family* represent with uncanny precision individuals who are alive and well today in the Bronx. These individuals are our clients in schools, hospitals, and mental health centers in urban environments around this country. How can we help them? How can we show them that they are worthy? My colleague's solution sounds so simple yet so profound. May we show them that they are worthy by showing them attention and enjoyment, something so many of these individuals have not had from their earliest moments.

Random Family would make an excellent teaching tool for medical residents, psychology students, and social work students. It is well written and could be of benefit to health care providers working with severely disenfranchised individuals and their families. The book provides a profound look into the lives of the urban poor.

Pretty Dead: A Jack McMorrow Mystery

by Gerry Boyle; New York, Prime Crime, 2003, 336 pages, \$23.95

Jackie Goldstein, Ph.D.

Former newspaperman and longtime Maine resident Gerry Boyle draws on his own experience in creating the setting and profession of *New York Times* stringer Jack McMorrow. McMorrow's profession, thanks to Boyle's imagination, has led him to accidental entanglement in cases involving mysterious disappearance, murder, and marijuana.

In *Pretty Dead*, the seventh in the series, McMorrow's live-in girlfriend, social worker Roxanne Masterson, investigates the case of a wealthy Boston couple suspected of abusing their five-year-old daughter. Roxanne must interview the parents; McMorrow goes along for the ride, and once again his "fun" begins. McMorrow's ingrained investigative nature is on the trail of a situation that goes beyond child abuse, as Boyle introduces one new tantalizing element after another yet always makes us wonder how these elements will surely be woven together into a unified story.

In a short preamble, a female is found buried in a small clearing hidden in the wilderness, and gender is all that we know of the apparent victim. In the first chapter, the first-person format is established as McMorrow learns about Roxanne's child abuse case. McMorrow ends the narrative of his latest adventure 325 pages later, when he's offered consolation that "the world is basically a good place. . . . It's just some people who aren't."

We don't have to read too far to discover the real story behind the child abuse. A quarter of the way into the book we learn the apparent identity of the murder victim introduced in the preamble. But before, during, and after the apparent resolution of those mysteries, through a maze of suicide, adultery, jealousy, and drug running (and that's only a sample), the author taunts us with the task of figuring out

which characters in the world of *Pretty Dead* are basically good and which ones bad.

If moral and legal infractions aren't enough, psychological complications also play a major role in the story. They drive the behavior of a main character, and they appear in the dramatic climax—well, close to the climax—where we find that people aren't necessarily all good or all bad but perhaps capable of both in motives and behavior.

While the reader is trying to figure out who is good and who is bad, Jack and Roxanne are having a little problem with that themselves. They're drawn into a friendship with the charming accused couple but, from time to time, wonder about what seems too good to be true. Reading from the perspective of a psychologist, it's also hard not to wonder about the ethics of such a friendship. But Boyle is an adept storyteller, and I was glad he hadn't challenged my ethical restrictions too much. Although Boyle might not know as much about psychology as he does about Maine and reporting, he uses his knowledge well enough to create some interesting twists and a good weekend read.

The Concrete Sky

by Marshall Moore; Binghamton, New York, Haworth Press, 2003, 273 pages, \$17.95 softcover

Kenneth P. Mitchell, Jr., M.D.

This novel's classification by its publisher as gay male fiction and literature appears to be a product of niche marketing. In reality, while the novel's main characters are indeed gay, the work, described as a fictional offbeat thriller, attempts to deal with

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