



The Salton Killings: A British police procedural set in the 1970's (A Chief Inspector Woodend Mystery)

By Sally Spencer

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When the strangled body of teenager Diane Thorburn is found buried in the salt store, Chief Inspector Woodend is drafted in from London to investigate. An outspoken Northerner, he does his policing the old-fashioned way, and he is convinced that Margie Poole, Diane's best friend, knows more about Diane's last movements than she is prepared to tell. Then Woodend's inquiry turns up the death of another young girl a generation before. The similarities in the two cases begin to look more sinister than mere coincidence. Could there be a serial killer on the loose . . . ?

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Editorial Review

From Kirkus Reviews

Cheshire in the 50s, before English villages succumbed to the same murder mania as Manhattan, was still a dangerous place for blond schoolgirls. Diane Thorburn, strangled on her way home to the hamlet of Salton from Maltham Secondary, turns out to be only the latest in a string of suspicious deaths stretching back all the way to the War, when Yank flier Gary Ripley presumably strangled Mary Wilson, the local lass he was sweet on, and got off scot-free because nobody could find any evidence. This time, though, Scotland Yard Chief Inspector Charlie Woodend, banished to the provinces by higher-ups who are waiting for him to make a hash of things, is convinced that there's evidence to be found, and his unlikely plan to pursue his favorite technique settling down in Harry Poole's pub and listening to village gossip gets two big boosts. First, he finds a young police cadet, Phil Black, who's lived in Salton all his life, and may know even more than he knows about the case; and second, the killer's determined return to the latest crime scene--the salt pile Diane Thorburn's body had been buried in broadly hints at some incriminating evidence left behind. But what telltale clue does the daunting pile of salt conceal? Despite a few impolitic coincidences Salton turns out to be even more hazardous to young ladies than it seemed. Spencer's US debut provides sturdy mystery-mongering, reliably quaint suspects, and an unusually detailed list of clues. Looks like Woodend was right after all. -- *Copyright ©1998, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.*

Review

After a young girl is drowned in the English village of Salton in the late 1950s, the village police realize they have a serial killer in their midst. The police chief in this Cheshire town calls in Scotland Yard and gets Chief Inspector Charlie Woodend, a middle-aged iconoclast (a mix of Rumpole and Morse), and his rookie partner, Detective Sergeant Rutter. Through grueling police work and the ability of Woodend and Rutter to immerse themselves in the life of the village, the murderer is unmasked after a surprising, frightening confrontation. This fine mystery succeeds both as a nuts-and-bolts procedural and as a portrayal of an English village moving from the quiet rhythms of rural life to the contemporary beat of rock 'n' roll. Spencer conjures a great sense of menace in the troubled village, and her epilogue is a real stunner, promising more from a very talented writer. -- *Booklist*, August 19, 1998

Cheshire in the '50s, before English villages succumbed to the same murder mania as Manhattan, was still a dangerous place for blond schoolgirls. Diane Thorburn, strangled on her way home from Maltham Secondary, turns out to be only the latest in a string of suspicious deaths stretching back to the war. Scotland Yard Chief Inspector Charlie Woodend, banished to the provinces by higher-ups, is convinced that there's evidence to be found and his unlikely plan to pursue his favorite technique - settling down in Harry Poole's pub and listening to village gossip - gets two big boosts. First, he finds a young police cadet, Phil Black, who's lived in Salton all his life, and may know even more than he knows about the case; and second, the killer's determined return to the latest crime scene - the salt pile Diane Thorburn's body had been buried in - broadly hints at some incriminating evidence left behind. But what telltale clue does the daunting pile of salt conceal?

Spencer's US debut provides sturdy mystery-mongering, reliably quaint suspects, and an unusually detailed list of clues. -- *Kirkus Reviews*, July 1, 1998

From the Inside Flap

She didn't ask why she was being murdered - she had seen her killer's face and that was enough.

When the strangled body of teenager Diane Thorburn is found buried in the salt store in a village in Cheshire, Chief Inspector Woodend is drafted in from London to investigate. An outspoken Northerner, he does his policing in the old-fashioned way: local knowledge and a healthy pinch of intuition. And he is convinced that Margie Poole, daughter of the local pub landlady, and Diane's best friend, knows more about Diane's last movements than she is prepared to tell.

Then Woodend's inquiry turns up the death of another young girl a generation before. The similarities in the two cases begin to look more sinister than mere coincidence.

Is there a serial killer on the loose, and if so, where and at whom will he strike next?

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Mary Edick:

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