



A Gone Pecan: A Cady McIntyre Mystery

Dusty Thompson

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Nothing much happens in small towns—at least that's how it appears to outsiders driving through. Inhabitants of tiny, out-of-the-way communities may be few in number, but they still experience betrayal, feuds, assassinations, and all the other permutations of human interaction. Murder rarely enters the mix, but it does happen, both in real life and in fiction.

In his first novel, Dusty Thompson explores the lives of small-town southern folk. The title, *A Gone Pecan*, comes from a regional term meaning "somebody's done for." Cady McIntyre lives in Romania, Mississippi, and narrates the story. When the estranged husband of Cady's best friend, Finney, turns up dead at the town's high school where he taught English, the sheriff proclaims the death accidental. Finney claims that her husband, unpopular because of his outsider status and superior attitude, feared someone might kill him. The two women bungle along in their efforts to solve the mystery, following nebulous clues and investigating quirky suspects.

Thompson has lived in a handful of southern states and graduated from Southwest Mississippi Community College. He works as a program analyst for the Department of Veterans Affairs and lives in northern Virginia.

After Finney calls Cady about her husband Noelcai J. Boddy's tragic end, Cady passes the news on to her mother, who doesn't know the man or his name. "Noe Boddy died last night," Cady says. The mother accepts the news with puzzling nonchalance. Despite repeated efforts to explain the sad event, the older woman remains unmoved. "Lord, Mother," Cady finally says, "Dr. Boddy died last night! Finney's husband?" This play on the deceased's name gets the book off to a good start.

In one of the plot's numerous diversions, Cady tells Finney about the idea she had several years ago to encourage local interest in state elections. Extrapolating on the phrase, "politicians make strange bedfellows," she had proposed holding a nonpartisan forum at the town library. "I thought it would be fun to have all the candidates for all the state offices some [sic] to the library and sit on a bed and answer questions."

Before his death, Dr. Boddy had befriended Two-Dan Walker, a good-natured fellow who has trouble communicating. Cady and Finney suspect Two-Dan has something important to say but can't get his message across to them. "Somehow none of us were on his wavelength," Cady says, "and, sadly, we always assumed it was because he wasn't smart."

The characters who inhabit this story are fleshed out with convincing dialogue and realistic personality traits. But the use of verbs to attribute dialogue, such as "smiled, instructed, pouted," instead of "said," makes the writing seem amateurish. Dropped or misplaced letters and words, repetitive sentences, and grammatical errors add to this effect.

Readers who like a farcical tale will enjoy this story, with its larger-than-life characters and puzzling mystery. Thompson plans to include some of the characters introduced here in his next book.

MARGARET CULLISON (June 28, 2010)

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