

Mystery

Assumption

Percival Everett

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Ogden Walker—biracial, former Marine, sheriff’s deputy, main character in Percival Everett’s latest novel, *Assumption*: a man who prefers fly fishing to firearms and violence. Or so we assume.

Everett’s prose is stark, so plain in places that the smallest details have an eerie glow. All of it, of course, leads up to an ending that has the reader questioning every assumption he or she has had over the course of the three cases presented in this novel, a triptych of murder mysteries.

When Ogden investigates gunshots in a local neighborhood, the gun’s owner turns out to be an elderly woman who has never liked him (he assumes because he is black). Encountering her reminds Ogden of his own father’s bigotry, how he “hated white people, but not enough to refrain from marrying one, Ogden’s mother.” It was hard, Ogden acknowledged, “for a son to think that his father hated half of him. Perhaps this is why he was willing to care enough about the bigoted white woman who was now missing.” But it turns out she’s more than missing—she’s dead.

The next case seems easy enough—a young woman comes from Ireland to find her American cousin who supposedly lives high in New Mexico’s mountains. Ogden discovers a remote mountain cabin with a wounded woman inside. It is not the missing woman, but someone else entirely. No one is who they seem.

“People scare me,” Ogden tells his mother later. Her reply, “They should, son.” They *should*. The final case, “The Shift,” begins innocently—a trout fishing expedition on Ogden’s day off. He runs into the local game warden arresting a poacher. It’s a chance meeting that changes everything and soon Ogden is on the run to prove his innocence. Or maybe not.

His father spoke to him, a dead voice telling Ogden that he was a fool, a fool to love the desert, a fool to have left school, a fool to

have joined the army, a fool to have no answers, and a fool to expect answers to questions he was foolish enough to ask.

Percival Everett teaches at the University of Southern California and is the author of eighteen novels, including *I Am Not Sydney Poitier*, *The Water Cure*, *Wounded*, *Erasure*, and *Glyph*.

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