FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Blood and Circuses
Kerry Greenwood
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Many agree that prolific Agatha Christie led the Golden Age of the Mystery in the early twentieth century. Immediately reminiscent of a Christie mystery, *Blood and Circuses* by Kerry Greenwood is an entertaining whodunit set in that idiosyncratic time period.

The murder reveals itself as the victim's blood drips through the floor and into the teacup of the formidable Mrs. Witherspoon, whose boarding house is home to a cast of eccentric circus performers. One boarder, a Miss Parkes, had already served time in prison for the murder of her husband and becomes the lead suspect.

Phryne Fisher, a recurring character for Greenwood, is a scandalous woman by the standards of the times; she curses, travels extensively, poses nude for artists, and has multiple lovers. She is also sorely lacking in motivation: "There seemed to be no reason to get up and go through the process of being dressed when there was no one she wanted to see and nothing she wanted to do," Greenwood writes.

It was the perfect occasion for Alan Lee, carnival performer and ex-lover, to re-enter her life. Ill luck shrouds his present association, Farrell's Circus and Wild Beast show, putting it and his own living in serious danger. All sorts of costly and threatening events have plagued them, now including the death of Mr. Christopher, formerly of Mrs. Witherspoon's boarding house and a circus performer. Alan asks for, and gets, Phryne's help. Phyrne agrees to disguise herself, join the circus and attempt to discover the source of the mayhem.

The circus and carnival characters add bawdy fun to an exciting tale that moves at a quick clip. Added into the mix are street gangs and a sinister criminal underground, all great character fodder and superb scene setting: "Lizard Elsie did not reply in words. She seized a stool and flung it at the bar.

> *Bottles shattered. Mary the barmaid ducked and came up splashed in liqueur and picking glass out of her hair. Small specks of blood freckled her magnificent bosom. Three drinkers leapt to help her*

remove the splinters.

Greenwood is the author of more than forty novels and six nonfiction books and has received the Ned Kelly Lifetime Achievement Award from the Crime Writers' Association of Australia. She artfully and deftly creates the chaotic and raw lives of the destitute and lawless of the era. Yet, in her Christie-like voice, she does so with an elegant formality that both author and characters share.

At times too many characters are thrown into the fray too frequently, making it difficult to distinguish and know them. In one sentence she introduces us to Wholesale Louis, MadPole Janucz, Mr. Ellis, and Cyclone Freddy.

The big finish does appease with genre distinctive twists and successfully ties up, as all good whodunits should, all the threads of the blanket of mystery.

Donna Russo Morin