

Father Mark's Journal

B. A. Trice

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Father Mark's Journal is an enjoyable mystery that explores the hidden life of a man of God.

In B. A. Trice's clever mystery novel *Father Mark's Journal*, the intimate details of a priest's life make a point about religion and science.

The book begins with Father Mark's dead body. He was killed on the streets of New York while traveling between one church and another. The police arrive, including two detectives, George Teller and Mike Craig. The two rule out a mugging gone wrong. They turn their eyes to the victim, a well-liked and important priest, and discover his journal, which got him beaten up, his home broken into, and led to his death.

A standard police procedural follows Teller and Craig as they begin to peel back the layers of Mark's life. It becomes apparent that Mark was no ordinary priest. He lived in a secluded part of a downtown cathedral behind a metal door, with bars on the windows and a hidden safe filled with documents connected to the private lives of the mayor and the heads of organized crime families. This background creates a host of interesting possibilities about who might have wanted to keep Mark's silence eternal.

Building on the police work by providing glimpses of Mark's life in the months and days leading up to his death, the book captures a man well in touch with himself and those around him. He is shown struggling through cancer, and is a genuine, interesting lead. Craig's family history of military service, wife, and child play in, too. Other characters are more generic, with few details provided to make them feel human.

The narration is smart and engaging, answering reasonable questions about its plot and its characters at the right times—for example, better fleshing out the detectives as questions arise about who they are. While the villain's motive seems clear upon first reading, with hindsight it comes to mean something else. The crisp pace at which these telling details and plot twists are revealed makes the story more engrossing.

Polished descriptions convey the vibe of New York City, as does the book's use of local dialect, understanding of the city's streets, and details about city living. Mark's journal is added at the end of the story after the culprit is unmasked; it focuses on the priest's battle with cancer. By then, it's already done its work in the tale; nothing new is revealed. The reveal of those responsible is itself a satisfying twist.

The text plays with form, including both a traditional mystery novel and the journal. These two styles allow the book to rise above its detective novel roots and point to something greater about what really matters in life. The juxtaposition of the two styles makes for a satisfying reading experience that is more than the sum of its parts.

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