

For You Were Strangers

D.M. Pirrone

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A historically resonant post-Civil War mystery features Chicago itself as the star.

Like its predecessor *Shall We Not Revenge*, D. M. Pirrone's *For You Were Strangers* follows Chicago police detective Frank Hanley as he encounters a mystery in the great city on Lake Michigan. The year is 1872, and America is trying to heal from the Civil War. Chicago, in particular, is also determined to rebuild from the devastation of the horrific fire of 1871.

In this well-researched novel, Chicago itself is the most memorable character—a prairie metropolis full of legal and illegal grifters, hardworking immigrants, criminals, ladies of the night, and many otherwise good-hearted, slightly skeptical souls. Through flashbacks and continuing narrative, Pirrone weaves a tale of the failed 1864 conspiracy to make Chicago the northwest Confederate capital, along with the murder of a seemingly revered Union officer and other bitter postwar scores still needing to be settled.

Pirrone's Frank Hanley is an intriguingly flawed and intrepid investigator who knows his city and its people, from rat-hole social clubs and brothels to Gilded Age hotel dining rooms. Raised in Chicago's poor Irish section, the Patch, he superstitiously dreads returning to his old neighborhood, afraid to "pick up its dust on his shoes" and find himself "fit for nowhere else once again."

Hanley's romance with a spirited young Jewish woman, Rivka Kelmansky, continues from *Shall We Not Revenge*. Rivka's brother now faces danger due to his interracial marriage to a former slave. But Frank and Rivka's courtship proceeds slowly, with consciousness of their cultural differences. Hanley himself proves to be a fairly open-minded man, yet he is far from politically correct. When he discovers that a colleague is an African American passing for white, his disbelief is profound, and he feels almost dazed. This attitude, though not progressive, reflects a truth to the times and gives *For You Were Strangers* further historical resonance.

Though some coincidences in the novel may require suspension of disbelief, readers with a love for, or burgeoning interest in, Chicago will find *For You Were Strangers* as satisfying as a richly coursed meal of the era.

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