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## Quarrel With the Foe

**Mel Bradshaw**
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Like all well-crafted historical mysteries, this novel is a double delight. Not only does it tantalize with a deliciously circuitous unraveling of the crime, it also totally immerses the reader in another and fascinating world.

The author has re-created the world of 1926 Toronto. Wounded and embittered veterans of the Great War walk the city's streets. Prohibition is in effect but rapidly losing public support. Cars and radios are symbols of the well-to-do. Women are on the far periphery of commerce. Newspapers still matter.

Bradshaw's short stories have been published in a variety of journals, and he has also written for *The Canadian Forum* about the Canadian army's victory at Ortona during the Italian campaign of World War II. His debut mystery novel was *Death in the Age of Steam*. He begins this newest tale with a flashback to 1915. A young Canadian soldier is fatally and grotesquely injured at the second battle of Ypres—not by the Germans, but by a defective shell from his own armory. That the shell had been painted to disguise its structural flaws enrages the soldiers' buddies, one of whom is Paul Shenstone.

Eleven years later, Shenstone surfaces as the police detective who's been assigned to solve the bizarre murder of industrialist Digby Watt. It was one of Watt's many companies that manufactured and masked the fatal shell. Because of the murder victim's prominence, Shenstone's superior insists that he find the killer quickly, even if he has to cut corners to do it.

A clue at the crime scene suggests to Shenstone that the murder may be linked to the soldier's death. If so, the killer could be someone Shenstone knows from that distant battlefield. But there are plenty of other suspects, among them Watt's cowed and timid son, his seemingly dutiful daughter, his much younger paramour, maybe even the city's "Bolsheviks" who rightly viewed Watt as a class enemy. Shenstone doggedly follows each thread of suspicion, always with his boss nudging him to work faster.

As a character, Shenstone is decidedly low-key. He doesn't wisecrack, flirt, behave insubordinately, or habitually rough up suspects. He does, however, have a fondness for strong drink and one particular lady of the night. His appeal stems primarily from his relentlessness, a quiet determination to find as many pieces to the puzzle as he can before he succumbs to his boss's urging to put them together. His case work is built on shoe leather.

Bradshaw is especially effective at conveying the feel of postwar Toronto—its grimy streets, utilitarian tramcars, stuffy offices, and "blind pig" saloons. Following Shenstone around is as fascinating in its own way as accompanying Sherlock through the thoroughfares of Victorian London.
EDWARD MORRIS (August 18, 2009)

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