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FOREWORD REVIEW ♥♥♥♥♥ TRUE CRIME

Ten Percent of Nothing: The Case of the Literary Agent from Hell

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Of the 10,000 novels published by legitimate American imprints this year (almost one an hour!), few will greatly profit either their author or publishing house. The book trade is historically poorly paid and genteel. A solitary writer, answering an inner voice, toils long to deliver a manuscript to its first true believer: a literary agent, whose intercession with publishers will effect a sale, by which the writer, reborn in hardcover, will become one of the chosen: an author. Anyone who writes, or dreams of writing, knows the potent myth and harsh reality of this story line.

A publisher's contract with a writer for permission to print a manuscript typically offers a non-refundable advance on the good faith that sales from this book will earn the publisher back his advance, and generate future profit royalties for both sides. Only then does the writer tithe from his advance a standard ten-percent fee to his ministering angel/agent. Then onward to fate, the trial of fire by reviewer and marketing department.

Enter the villain, Dorothy Deering. How Deering, a failed singer, book-keeper, convicted embezzler and unpublished novelist, and her uneducated relatives parlayed a Kentucky garage, fancy letterhead, and an advertisement in *The Literary Market Place* into a bogus literary agency makes for a stark yet curiously dispiriting exposé. Deering preyed on eager writers and their ignorance of standard business practices, charging them several million dollars in dubious "reader's fees" and advances in expectations of books that never materialized, and spending the money herself. If only these clients had contacted a legitimate vanity press, where all costs are paid by the writers themselves, they might have had a book to call their own.

No books were called to her defense in the class action suit made by her defrauded clients. Nor were there any punitive damages collected-Deering's conviction and jail sentence were their sole vindication. The Kentucky prosecutor's moral was sadly simple, almost biblical: "There is nothing more vulnerable than a vain writer."

The author is a former F.B.I. agent who has written many other true-crime books, including *The Ghosts of Hopewell: Setting the Record Straight in the Lindbergh Case*. A professor in the Department of Political Science and Criminal Justice at Edinboro University of Pennsylvania, he is also an investigative expert consultant to numerous national news programs.

True to disgraced CEO form, Deering called her trial a conspiracy of ungrateful writers, and passed her jail time teaching writing classes to fellow inmates. Released in late 2003, she spoke of establishing a correspondence school for aspiring writers. Her name, again, is Dorothy Deering.
LEETA TAYLOR (October 16, 2004)

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