

Unwanted: A Murder Mystery of the Gilded Age

Andrew Young

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Unwanted is a sober and carefully researched narrative of murder and justice in the late nineteenth century.

Andrew Young's *Unwanted* resurrects a Gilded Age murder mystery, immersing audiences into the mental and emotional world of a hurting American Midwest, where stern public morality frequently contrasted with private behavior.

Early on a damp, foggy winter morning in 1896, a teenage boy taking a shortcut across a field in northern Kentucky made a gruesome discovery. Sprawled on the ground, amid spattered blood and torn clothing, was the decapitated body of young Pearl Bryan. The mystery of her identity and the shocking manner of her death became an overnight sensation in nearby Cincinnati and throughout the nation. While professional police detectives and amateurs from the general public worked together to identify the victim and bring the perpetrators to justice, the case inspired several sentimental ballads, as well as purple-prosed pamphlets with lurid titles like *The Headless Horror*.

Unlike its yellow-journalistic predecessors, *Unwanted* is a sober and carefully researched narrative of murder and justice in the late nineteenth century. Young proves to be a skilled and diligent researcher, having carefully combed through nineteenth-century newspapers, magazines, books, and popular culture for details, such as the pervasive haze of coal smoke, that help him to subtly guide audiences into the period. Occasionally this attention to detail leads into digressions that seem only tangentially relevant to the main story, but even these side trips are related in an entertaining manner.

Unwanted is a passport to a different time and place, as well as a riveting account of how police detectives and a helpful shoe merchant, lacking modern CSI-style forensic techniques such as fingerprint identification or chemical blood analysis, nonetheless identified the victim of a grotesque crime, traced her origins, and relentlessly closed in on the guilty. It will intrigue anyone who is interested in a good detective story or in exploring the gritty underside of the Gilded Age in America's heartland.

BRADLEY A. SCOTT (Fall 2016)

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