

"Tragedy at Law" reviewed by Bev H on June 23, 2013

Your Name:

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Book Title:

Tragedy at Law

Author:

Cyril Hare

Why did you read it? Why did you finish it? Who would you recommend it to?:

Judge William Hereward Barber's tour of England's Southern Circuit begins as normally as possible in wartime--true there are no trumpets (as Judge Barber mentions many times), but there is still plenty of pop and circumstance and the scarlet and wig to wear. The court calendar is full of the usual cases ranging from civil complaints to criminal charges. It looks to be a normal run--and a normal run-in with his long-time rival Francis Pettigrew. Pettigrew and Barber were once rivals in love--with Barber winning the hand of the lovely Hilda--and now Barber loves to use his position on the bench to put Pettigrew in his place as often as possible. And he settles in to enjoy another round. But then the odd things start happening. Anonymous letters and poisoned chocolates. Midnight attacks on Barber's wife and a loose stair railing. An attempt to do the judge in with gas. A man that Barber sentenced rather severely in the past has recently been let out of prison and the Barbars wonder if perhaps Heppenstall is behind the ominous notes and life-threatening attempts. Added to the mix, the judge unadvisedly drives home one evening after consuming a bit too much brandy and manages to run down a famous pianist--who isn't shy about threatening to take the judge to court over the matter. Things begin to look rather bleak for the judge and his lady--at the very least financial ruin in a settlement and quite possibly the loss of his position on the bench if the case can't be settled out of court. Through all of the attacks and a final suicide attempt by the judge (who doesn't want to face public ruin), his wife Hilda manages to save him from the unknown assailant and himself. Until the judge's last court appearance when he is murdered on the court steps under the watchful eyes of his wife and the City Police. Inspector Mallett is presented with several suspects....including Pettigrew himself. But Pettigrew produces an obscure point of law that will direct the way to the solution. Cyril Hare was the pseudonym for Alfred Gordon Clark, an English judge, who used his legal experiences to good effect in his crime fiction. When he was a young man, he served as a judge's marshall--an experience that gives breath and life to his descriptions of such a young man, Derek Marshall, who serves as marshall to Judge Barber. Tragedy at Law gives us a very detailed look at the legal life in Britain during World War II and manages to do so without boring the reader with the details. Hare's characters are interesting and fleshed out--with flaws and all--and Judge Barber soon becomes a man we love to hate--and yet we're still sorry when he's killed. There are plenty of subplots and red herrings in the path to keep the reader guessing. And even though this was a reread, I still wasn't sure of myself on who did it. Excellent reread--I loved it as much now as I did 20 years ago.

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yes

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Bev H