

Manuel Muldoon
Peary Perry
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Reviewed by Tammy Petty Conrad for Reader Views (9/06)

Only eighteen, Manny, or “Mann-uuu-well” as his boss’s wife calls him, wants to be a writer. The only problem is that he graduated “...summa cum barely...” from high school. So instead he works for his small town’s local hotshot banker, Robert Sturmwell, as a houseboy/errand-runner/anything-you-want employee.

We quickly learn to feel sorry for him, trapped with this dysfunctional family. Nancy Sturmwell loves to lecture on any topic she can think of and doesn’t even begin to be politically correct with her Hispanic help. She is the type of woman that Manny imagines would “...ask for a hairdresser and someone to come in and do her nails...” just prior to her execution on Death Row. There are plenty of other annoying characters that inhabit Marshlake, Texas, and Manny seems to run into them all. Edward Ruiz plays the over-eager cop who can’t let a traffic violation pass by. I am happy to say that he gets what he deserves in the end. As do all the bad guys.

It isn’t too long before the dead body appears, but we know from the start who did it and why. The only mystery left is how long it will take the police and the victim’s husband to figure it out. And of course how many other family secrets will come out in the end.

Unfortunately, the point of view switches back and forth constantly, which slowed me down as I read, forcing me to decide whose head I was supposed to be in. I also wish that the author had allowed me to figure some things out on my own rather than telling me everything. Peary Perry can turn a phrase, such as “...these people were slick enough to steal the radio and leave the music”. But even though I’m from Texas myself, I wondered at times if there wasn’t too much Texas detail included. I did like the story idea and I wanted to know how it ended, but despite the plot thickening, it wasn’t a book that I couldn’t put down at night.

In the end, we finally discover if Manny will be a writer. We are reminded that he thought his life was too boring and he had nothing to write about. Throw in a few dead bodies and some blackmail and suddenly he’s got a story!