



A Piece of Justice

Jill Paton Walsh

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The late, great mathematician Gideon Summerfield ought to be a safe subject for a biography, so why has it been so difficult to get the book written?

Imogen's lodger Fran is close to discovering a secret about Summerfield. She is in danger, and Fran must act before it is too late.

A Piece of Justice Details

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Bev says

A Piece of Justice by Jill Paton Walsh is the second of her Imogen Quy (rhymes with "why") mystery series. Imogen is the nurse at Cambridge's imaginary St. Agatha's College. In this particular outing another student may be in danger and this time the student is one of Imogen's boarders and friend, Fran Buillon. Fran, a graduate student in need of money, gratefully undertakes to complete a biography of a mathematician. A seemingly simple task that was begun by three other biographers but never finished. Curiosity drives Imogen to discover that all three of the previous scholars have disappeared or met untimely ends. What is it about the obscure and fairly boring life of Gideon Summerfield--now dead himself--that could drive someone to murder? During the course of her investigations, Imogen finds a trail of academic jealousy, competition, and cheating. She is also involved in a quilt-making project that ultimately helps her find some answers in Wales of all places.

This is another solid British mystery from the pen of Paton Walsh. The character of Imogen Quy is believable and interesting. I enjoy her quiet compassion and inquisitiveness which lands her in the middle of her mysteries. I also liked the way Paton Walsh was able to weave the quilt theme into her mystery. It provides a very unique solution to the crimes. As I mentioned before, I much prefer Paton Walsh's mysteries with her own characters to those she has done with Lord Peter Wimsey. These are competent mysteries with engaging characters. I thoroughly enjoy the academic setting and will continue to seek out the rest of the series.

Ali says

Entertaining, but a bit silly.... being a quilter and knowing Cambridge well, made it fun for me.

Carolynne says

Imogen's friend Fran takes over an uncompleted biography of an obscure Cambridge mathematician, only to discover that those who previously researched his life had either died or disappeared in mysterious circumstances. A beautiful old quilt in a quaint Welsh farmhouse has an unexpected significance to the story. Complex, literate mystery. I am anxious to read more about Imogen Quy--I've always liked Paton Walsh's books (Fireweed, The Green Book, Goldengrove and Unleaving) but her mysteries represent a new genre for me.

Rob says

Disappointing! I expected more from this novel, as I had read Knowledge Of Angels by Paton Walsh many years ago.

This sold itself as a kind of Morse-esque detective novel - set in a university town, I thought it would be

erudite and clever. Instead, it was dull and bookish.

Read *Knowledge Of Angels* if you want to enjoy Paton Walsh's writing. Steer clear of anything that mentions Imogen Quy

Mary Ronan Drew says

Some folks like Jill Paton Walsh and some don't. I do. And of all her many books her Imogen Quy (rhymes with Why) series are perhaps my favorites. The first book in the series was *The Wyndham Case*. This is the second.

Imogen is the school nurse at St Agatha's College, Cambridge. She is friends with the master's wife. And she rents a couple of rooms in her Victorian house to students. This puts her in the center of college doings and she is alarmed when one of her roomers takes over an academic biography and discovers the three previous biographers who worked on this book have disappeared in what Imogen considers suspicious circumstances.

What can possibly have happened in those three days in 1978 that are missing from the voluminous records of the dusty old mathematician whose life held no other mysteries. Everyone knows about his mistress, including his, wife, so why is she so defensive about these three days so long ago.

The answer involves an old quilt, a student in Newnham College in the 1920s, and a dangerous trip to rural Wales.

Laura says

Mystery and danger threaten Fran when she takes over the biography of mathematician Gideon Summerfield.

Jane says

I took this book to read while travelling and it held my interest. The heroine, Imogen, is a younger version of Miss Marple. Her interest in quilting helps her solve this mystery.

Alejandrina says

Well written British University mystery, but I just could not believe the story. There is a deranged character going to extremes to protect someone's reputation. Ok. But there is another deranged character committing crimes to protect another reputation. Hmm.

Kath says

Read the two Imogen Quy novels (bound into one paperback) while on holiday in Asia. Interesting experience of being in the tropics while reading about English university life (need to check if set in Cambridge or Oxford!). Imogen Quy is an interesting character, may be too much in the tradition of Miss Marple - OK not quite, but be warned . . . everyone's friend, unlucky in love. Fellow reader used word 'twee' (?) to describe . . . I enjoy it for the 'inside look' into life at Oxbridge and there is usually a particular topic of interest in each novel (e.g., one was about the calendars and the change from Julian to Gregorian - or the other way 'round?! Must review these books sooner after reading!).

Simon Mcleish says

Originally published on my blog here in November 1998.

A Piece of Justice is the second of Walsh's detective novels to feature Imogen Quy, nurse at St Agatha's, a fictional Cambridge college. As you would expect from a Booker shortlisted author, it is well written, though it doesn't have a particularly difficult puzzle.

Imogen has taken a lodger, a postgraduate student named Fran writing a thesis on the nature of biography. To be able to live while working on this, she asks her supervisor if he has any suggestions of paid work she can do. He offers her the chance to ghost a biography he has been asked to write, of a prominent St Agatha's mathematician, Gideon Summerfield, about to (posthumously) receive the Waymark Prize, the (fictional) mathematical equivalent of the Nobel Prize.

When Fran receives the papers which have been amassed about this man, she and Imogen discover something rather odd. In the rather dull chronology of his life, there is a month which cannot be accounted for. Not only this, but there have been three previous biographers who have begun to work on the project, all of whom have disappeared when they tried to investigate the missing month.

The major characters are well-drawn, and (unusually for genre fiction) even the minor ones are individualised. Only the standard crime novel problem of unbelievable coincidence mars the plot in places.

Lawrence says

A solid comfy mystery - cum- academic novel. Tea and crumpets; the protagonist talking "crisply" and making sure to put the quiche in the oven before returning an important phone call; the lead cop, Mike, always doing things "cheerfully" -- this is more *Midsomer Murders* than *Morse*, and that's not necessarily a criticism. My wife couldn't get beyond the description of the quilting party in the first chapter, and I can't blame her, but that turns out not to dominate, and instead to establish the context for the solution of the crime. As it had better if we have to read about effing quilts. A decent combination of Cambridge dons and Welsh nationalists who sick their dogs on the English, if in the service of some pretty far-fetched ideas about how mathematics works. And one day maybe I'll read or watch a story about academics in which they don't come across as total a-holes. One day ...

Susan says

This story has an underlying theme of quilting, from the 'piece' of the title, to the quilting group of Cambridge nurse Imogen Quy and her friends, to an old quilt discovered in a farmhouse in Wales. The plot centers around Imogen's lodger Fran, who is in danger of losing her financial support until her professor asks her to ghost-write a biography - he will take the credit but she will get the money. The subject of the biography is a famous mathematician, Gideon Summerfield, who is about to be rewarded the Waymark Prize posthumously. When the accumulated paperwork is delivered to Imogen's house, the box breaks and papers are scattered all over. Imogen and Fran try to sort them out out, and in the process discover that the book has already had 2 or 3 previous biographers working on it, all of whom have quit or disappeared. Imogen begins to fear for Fran's safety, and begins to investigate the previous biographers, much to the dismay of Summerfield's widow, who appears to be slightly crazy. The plot was a little convoluted, but Imogene eventually figures out why the widow is so dead set on having only parts of his revealed and also what happened to the other biographers. I had a little trouble keeping track of all the characters, but enjoyed the book nonetheless.

Jane says

Intricate patterns

This is a fascinating story, in part about the relationship between quilting patterns and mathematics. I don't want to give the plot away.....suffice it to say that the novel starts off with the heroine and two friends designing a quilt, and there are references to textile history, in particular the history of quilts and of the use of cotton. Meanwhile someone is commissioned to write a biography of a mathematician, and the stories intertwine.....there is a particularly poignant reflection upon the fact that women's art is often not taken seriously as art because women work in textiles.

Michale says

The second book in the Imogen Quy mysteries, this delightful story is understated and sweet. Antique Road Show fans will appreciate her quilting discussions in this mystery. I think Paton Walsh did a wonderful job completing Sayers' Lord Peter series. Although these mysteries are set in Cambridge rather than Oxford, the distinctions are lost on me as a savage American. I'm looking forward to completing this series.

kp says

A simple and gentle mystery with a subtly feminist message.
