



31 Bond Street

Ellen Horan

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Based on a true story, mystery and intrigue in pre-Civil War New York The sensational murder of Dr. Harvey Burdell in his lower Manhattan home made front-page news across the United States in 1857. "Who killed Dr. Burdell?" was a question that gripped the nation. 31 Bond Street, a debut novel by Ellen Horan, interweaves fiction with actual events in a clever historical narrative that blends romance, politics, greed and sexual intrigue in a suspenseful drama. The story opens when an errand boy discovers Burdell's body in the bedroom of his posh Bond Street home. The novel's central characters are Dr. Harvey Burdell, a dentist and unscrupulous businessman; his lover, the ambitious, Brooklyn-born Emma Cunningham; the District Attorney, Abraham Oakey Hall (later to become mayor of New York); and Henry Clinton, a prominent defense lawyer. The enigmatic relationship between Emma and Dr. Burdell makes her the prime suspect, and her trial is nothing less than sensational.

During the trial, the two lawyers fight for truth, justice and their careers. This novel is set against the background of bustling, corrupt New York City, just four years before the Civil War. The author intertwines two main narratives: the trial through the perspective of the defense attorney Henry Clinton, and the story of the lovely young widow Emma Cunningham whose search for a husband brings her into the arms and home of Dr. Burdell.

31 Bond Street Details

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Author : Ellen Horan

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From Reader Review 31 Bond Street for online ebook

Linda says

The 1850's. Manhattan's elite are only just setting out to make 5th Avenue their enclave. The rest of the population is simply trying to earn a living. Displaced Native Americans, runaway or freed slaves, and unmarried women are particularly vulnerable to the twists and turns of fortune. Emma Cunningham, mother of two adolescent daughters, is desperately searching for a man to replace their now deceased father. Emma believes she has found him in prosperous dentist Harvey Burdell, who wines and dines her, invites her and her family to move into his townhouse, and convinces her to invest her daughter's dowry on land on the Jersey waterfront. Alas, one winter evening, Dr. Burdell is stabbed to death, and Emma is brought to trial for his murder.

Interspersing investigation and court scenes with flashbacks to Emma's relationship with Burdell, 31 Bond Street recounts the story of Emma's defense by Attorney Henry Clinton, who has risked his career and his livelihood to help her. This is anything but a straightforward case, although that's what the DA would like people to believe. Were Emma and her dentist married? What happened to Burdell's coachman, Samuel, the last person to see him alive? Was Burdell an upstanding citizen or a con artist who preyed upon women?

Author Horan ends her novel with summaries of the lives of the principals following the trial's dramatic conclusion. Relying upon the historical record, she seems to have deftly accomplished the difficult task of fictionalizing a real event without distorting the facts.

Arah-Lynda says

This is a novel wove around one of the most sensationalized crimes of the 19th century. One morning in 1857, the body of Dr. Harvey Burdell, a dentist, living in high style at 31 Bond Street, New York City is found brutally murdered in his office by an errand boy. Emma Cunningham, a widow with two daughters also lives in the upper floors of Dr. Burdell's home. She is the housekeeper/ lover/ fiancée of the victim and immediately becomes the primary suspect of the coroner who sets up an inquest into the murder, detaining Mrs Cunningham and her daughters until such time as his inquiry is complete.

This was a particularly gruesome murder, with exceedingly few clues left behind to steer investigators toward the culprit. In the absence of any other real information about the crime, the media embraces the coroner's initial conclusions and assists him in painting Mrs. Cunningham as the killer.

Defence attorney Henry Clinton believes Emma to be innocent of this crime and putting his own career in jeopardy agrees to represent her.

Those are the bare bones of the crime around which Ellen Horan builds her novel and I can certainly understand why any writer would choose this small slice of history to recreate, reimagine. It offers an absolute plethora of material to work with: sex, greed, political corruption, media fed public opinion and gender/ racial/ economic inequalities abound.

Fascinating, and although it is clear that Horan has done her research well here she failed to bring these characters or this city to life for me. I was waiting to be drenched in the historic atmosphere of mid 19th

century New York City, held captive by the life and death situation these characters found themselves embroiled in. I cannot explain how it is some writers are able with their words arranged as they are, to transport the reader to another time and place, to invest them in the characters of the story, infuse them with the heartbeat of the city. I can only say that it did not work here.

One thing that really bothers me is when the protagonist all of a sudden begins to act out of character, with no lead in or reasonable explanation provided. It just does not ring true and upsets the whole bloody apple cart.

My apples can be found badly bruised, in a heap, at the bottom of the hill.

Sandie says

Ellen Horan's 31 BOND STREET is a well researched work of historical fiction that takes the reader back in time to an era when a man's character and status were determined by the height of his hat. In the case of suspicious death grand juries were convened in the home of the victim and autopsies were performed on the premises while witnesses and potential suspects were sequestered in the home awaiting questioning without benefit of counsel. Additionally, the press were invited into the victims' home and allowed to report every gory detail and bit of innuendo uttered during the grand jury proceedings on the front pages of their respective newspapers. (Sort of eliminated the chances of a "fair and impartial jury of your peers").

In lower Manhattan circa 1857 the murder of Dr. Harvey Burdell provided the basis for a media circus when Emma Cunningham a young widow who, along with her two daughters, lived on the upper floors of the doctor's home was charged with his murder. More than that I will not divulge lest it compromise your pleasure in reading this book. Suffice to say that the story on which the book is based has been diligently researched via newspaper articles, trial transcripts and other items of public record and integrated with the author's vivid imagination to present the reader with a fascinating fusion of fact and fiction. Ms. Horan even includes a section in her author's note that reveals what happened to the chief characters in this drama after the resolution of the case.

Visualize, if you will, an amalgamation of the flavors of Upstairs, Downstairs, The Devil in White City, and the writings of Caleb Carr with the courtroom drama of John Grisham and you will have a small idea of the reading pleasure 31 BOND STREET holds in store.

Zohar - ManOfLaBook.com says

"31 Bond Street" by Ellen Horan is a historical fiction novel taking place in 1857 New York City. The book follows the notorious trial of Emma Cunningham for the murder of her landlord Dr. Harvey Burdell, a famous dentist.

Emma Cunningham is a widow with two daughters who is lodging in 31 Bond Street, NYC – the residence of Dr. Harvey Burdell. One fine morning the household wakes up to the horrific news that the doctor has been murdered in his room – with no signs of forced entry.

The immediate suspicion falls on Mrs. Cunningham who has to be defended against an aggressive and corrupt district attorney who has big political ambitions and his minions. Attorney Henry Clinton (YES!!! That one) takes up the case of Mrs. Cunningham, but as everything in life, it is not clear cut.

“31 Bond Street” by Ellen Horan is an enjoyable book which, for me, was hard to categorize. It is a bit historical fiction, a bit a mystery and a bit court room drama – I guess a legal mystery might fit the bill.

The story is actually based on an actual murder case from 1857 and several of the characters are people who actually lived and were involved. Yet several others are not – Ms. Horan makes it clear who’s who at the end of the book in the “Author’s Note” section (which I find as a big plus in any historical fiction book).

I quite enjoyed the historical aspects of the book, the class system in NYC and the “if it bleeds it dies” sensationalistic media. It is amazing how little has changed, even today the media can hang on a sensationalistic case, completely blowing it out of proportions and like good little lap dogs we eat it all up (the O.J. Simpson case for example).

The book juxtaposed between the investigation, court case and flashbacks to Emma’s relationship with Mr. Burdell where she was a “housemistress”, in today’s terms she’d be a live-in lover which didn’t get to much respect in the 1850s. There is some Upstairs/Downstairs (showing my age?) quality to how Emma talks and acts with Mr. Burdell’s servants and their defiance to take orders from her.

The famous lawyer Mr. Clinton (No, not that one) was, for me, the main protagonist of the book. Mr. Clinton (Not that one either) was Mrs. Cunningham defense attorney and I had a fun time following his thought process (albeit fictional) about the trial and his strategy.

The book is absorbing and the blend of fact and fiction is fascinating. While the fascinating characters are well drawn and the narrative is well written, the real star of the book is 1850’s New York City society. The rich doctor, poor widow, the black groom who is an abolitionist and knows he’s not safe in the north, the poor 11 year old boy who works to support his family, the way marriage are arranged even though one of the betrothed is disagreeable are all absorbing and ... the status quo. Ms. Horan doesn’t try to shock us into thinking that pushing a 19 year old into an undesirable marriage is an unforgivable sin, quite the opposite – the sin is that she refuses the arrangement.

Please visit my bookish blog at <http://www.ManOfLaBook.com>

Felicia Roff Tunnah says

I generally don’t read murder mysteries but this was quite a page turner set in old New York. I really couldn’t put it down!

Doug Beatty says

I know I do give out five stars quite freely, so let me preface this book by saying if I could give out six stars, this would be a six star book.

I read a great many mysteries, and this one had me early on, and I have to say I quickly reached a point that I was frantically turning pages because the story had me enthralled.

The setting is 1856 in New York, and Doctor Harvey Burdell, a dentist, is found dead in his room, having been murdered in a spectacularly grisly fashion. Emma Cunningham is a woman who lives on an upper floor with her two daughters and is acting as housemistress, and the coroner in the case immediately suspects her and refuses to allow her to leave the house while he investigates. Enter hotshot lawyer Hentry Clinton who realizes that Emma can't be held against her will without counsel and becomes determined to represent her in a rather dramatic court case. And this is only the beginning.

The author weaves a present time narrative with a series of flashbacks, so you learn the story as it has been progressing as well as following the trial and the aftermath. I don't want to reveal any intricate plot details but there are some revelations and the writer adds enough spice and suspense that you really want to know more. I will definitely be putting this one on display at the library. It will be an easy book to sell to mystery readers, even ones who don't normally read historical.

I even found the cover to be very appealing, it jumps right off the shelf into your hands! Definitely give this one a read. But be prepared. Once started, you will want to finish it soon!

Sophie Narey (Bookreview- aholic) says

Published: 01/02/2011

Author: Ellen Horan

This was an absolutely amazing book! It was very hard to put it down, it is definitely a 'page turner' in this book we follow the investigation to find out who killed the dentist (Dr Harvey Burdell) we see it from the view of Emma Cunningham and Samuel. It is set in New York before the Civil War, we see what it was like for people living there and they way that they believed that things should be. We also see the prejudice that was against Samuel and other people (such as the plan to have them as slaves). It is a fast paced who done it which lets you see it from two points of view which lets you see what is happening at the present (in the trial) and what actually happened to the dentist. It is incredibly well written by the brilliant Ellen Horan, it is definitely one of my favourite books that I have read.

This genre of books is one of my favourite genres and I thought that this was a great portrayal of the crime fiction genre. In this novel we are trying to find out who it was that killed Dr Harvey Burdell, Emma is in the spot light as she hasn't been married to her for long she has the whole village against her, saying it must be her, but with the help, love and support of her daughters she stays strong against everyone who is against her. The story that we read about Samuel is touching and is so descriptive that it does make you feel like you are reading a real life story about someone and reading about the things that happened in his life. This is a truly incredible novel and this shows just how amazingly talented Ellen Horan! I love her writing style.

LJ says

First Sentence: For a boy who watched boats, his room was the perfect perch.

The brutal murder of well-to-do dentist, Dr. Burdell, immediately places his housekeeper, Emma

Cunningham as the prime suspect. Attorney Henry Clinton parts ways with his respected law partner and, with the support of his wife and the help of others, sets out to prove Emma's innocence.

From a very good opening which establishes the sense of time place the impact of the weather and the demeanor of the characters, this compelling story proved very difficult to put down, even for meals and life's necessities. Horan provides a fascinating look at the justice system and New York City during this period leading up to the Civil War when free blacks in the North were being kidnapped and sold into slavery in the South. It is always interesting to gain a picture of society live, and the concerns of women; the workings of the house and meals of the period. But it is as equally interesting look at investigative methods, techniques and forensics of the time.

The story is told in duality; something which can be awkward as one thread is often stronger/more interesting than the other. That is not the case here. One thread begins with the crimes and moves through the trial, while the other provides the background of the characters leading up to the crime. Ms. Horan does a remarkable job of keeping both stories equally fascinating and distinct. At no point does one wish to get through the current segment into order to return to the other thread. That is very rare indeed and not only does each thread holds its own, but the suspense contained within each builds at an equal pace. That exhibits remarkable skill by the writer.

While many legal thrillers today spend more time being thrillers, this really does focus on the legal process of the time, yet it is driven by the characters who are fully developed and alive. There was not a superfluous character in the story; each added weight and merit. In some ways, one could say the story has two villains and two victims, both being the same characters at different times. The heroes, if you will, are quite unexpected and unusual.

The plot is excellent with very effective twists, plenty of suspense and a dash of tragedy. The author paints visual pictures that take the reader through all the story's locals both attractive and foul. There is an unexpected revelation and even unanticipated motive.

While I don't usually care for books based on a true crime, "31 Bond Street" is an excellent book with exceptional writing.

31 BOND STREET (Hist Mys-Emma Cunningham-NYC-1857) – Ex
Horan, Ellen – 1st book
Harper Perennial, ©2011, US Trade Paperback – ISBN: 9780061773976

Natalie says

I really liked the premise and the plot behind the book. The way the author leaned on a actual event gave the story this great feel and, I felt, increased the drama. All and all, it was a rather quick read because the plot moved very fast. And although I enjoyed the book as a whole, I felt that the ending was rather a bit too neat and some of the characters a bit too one-dimensional. I was surprised and saddened by the way that her ordeal ultimately affected the main character - but it was an interesting twist. I was disappointed that all five male characters (Burdell, Wicken, Clinton, Samuel, and Katuma) were written as either being "good" or "bad" and did not deviate from that classification at all. The latter three were upstanding, caring, moral men. The former two were evil, terrible, and heartless. What made Emma so interesting was that she was human -

a combination of right and wrong. Her heart was generally in the right place but it led her astray when she tried to rationalize her life's decisions and press them too hard.

The ending itself was a bit abrupt - especially how Samuel was "caught" but then not caught. There was never any discussion about that backlash or repercussions and it seemed just a way to have the trial be over quickly. There was never a follow up on the D.A., who seemed an interesting character and was never fleshed out. What part did he have to play in the smuggling ring? Was he just demonized or was he also "all evil"? One of the daughters, Helen, seemed a bit left out at the end - which seemed a bit lop-sided since we heard about Augusta.

SPOILER (DON'T READ AHEAD IF YOU WANT TO READ THE MYSTERY)

Overall, while I liked the book and enjoyed the majority of the read, the ending was a bit of a disappointment. Katuma's involvement, while good for the storyline, was just too neat. Ultimately, the killer could have been Emma, Samuel, or "someone else". The first two were too obvious and so left the last option. I was just hoping for more of a twist - perhaps Emma's involvement - intentional or not. Or more of Samuel's but for a less noble reason. More depth would have been appreciated.

Stacy says

I thought the author did a good job weaving fiction around the actual facts of the case--until the addendum at the end I couldn't tell who the real and the fictional characters were. The book was well researched and seemed historically accurate. But aside from all this, it was just a good read. The characters were interesting and well defined. I liked Emma and, although her machinations and manipulations may not have been entirely above board, I'm not sure she deserved the hand she was ultimately dealt. I felt compelled to read on to find out what happened to her. I thought this author's shifting back and forth pre and post crime was an effective way of holding the reader's interest. I know other readers mentioned not liking the ending, but I found it an effective frame to the story in the character of the young boy. A somber end to a sad story.

Whitney says

With a great mid 19th century New York as the backdrop of the story the reader truly feels as if they're there experiencing the daily life of each character. Horan's writing style let's the reader dive into the scenery of the time and helps you feel the feelings of the characters. There are a few times within the book that the writing lags a bit yet it picks up quickly if it did. The surprise ending keeps you guessing. Beautifully written and a thriller to boot makes this book a good read.

Amina Mirsakiyeva says

I like historical detective novels in general. This one based on true story caught my attention.

The book starts with a murder of Dr. Burdell and accusing his housekeeper/lover Emma Cunningham. Story happened in the middle of 19 century in New York. We can feel the historical background: women are depended on marriage, "coloured" people are discriminated. And world is full of adventurers who is seeking

for more money.

The author is mixing events before and after the murder helping us to understand the main characters. I did enjoy almost all book, except the ending. I found it too predictable.

Tara Chevrestt says

I am writing this even tho I have 50 pages left in order to be sure I don't reveal anything I shouldn't. This is by far one of the best books of 2010 and I can honestly state that just a mere two months into the year. I have not been able to put the book down. It's like an episode of Law and Order in 1857.

The book goes back and forth between the trial in 1857 following the lawyer, Mr. Clinton and the the summer and fall of 1856 following the suspect, Emma and her dealings with the murder victim, Dr. Burdell. Was she mistress or wife? Was she a gold digger? Who was really supposed to die? Who killed Dr. Burdell? Enter the early days of Manhatten and shady business deals and the risky world of real estate and scam artists to find out...

Fabulous look at the way the law was played out back then. Wow. Thank goodness there have been changes to our constitution since then. It didn't look as tho Emma was going to get a fair trial there for a while as the coroner took over the case and placed her under house arrest and did not permit her to see a lawyer, nor her daughters.

I encourage readers to read the author's excerpt regarding how she came across the idea for this book. That page is just as intriguing as the story itself. Highly recommended for mystery and historical fiction lovers alike.

Misfit says

The story begins in 1857 as police are called to 31 Bond Street upon the horrific murder of Dr. Harvey Burdell. Poised for a run at the mayor's office, ambitious D.A. Abraham Oakey Hall sets his sights on Widow Emma Cunningham as his #1 suspect. Supposedly living in Burdell's house as a tenant and *housekeeper* of sorts, Emma produces a marriage certificate (but can she prove its real?) and further complicates the matter - did she murder the not-so-good doctor for his money and prestigious home? In steps defense attorney Henry Clinton to get to the bottom of it all. Clinton's efforts to unravel the mystery lead to many side trips, from land speculation to the underground slave trade to shady Tammany Hall politics to courtroom drama.

The book is based on real people and events and while very well written, this one just didn't come to life for me. I didn't connect well with Emma and really didn't care much what happened to her and the only character I truly cared about came to a sorry end. I found the courtroom scenes rather tedious, but then perhaps with a jury summons in my very near future that was the last thing I needed reminding of (been less than three years since the last time). Lastly, despite all the hype I don't feel the author really brought the city and it's players to life for me, I've seen better in Celeste de Blasis' Wild Swan trilogy as well as Kathleen Winsor's Wanderers Eastward, Wanderers West and the Castles in the Air series by Patricia Gallagher. Don't get me wrong, this is a good book it's just not a great one.

Marie says

The first chapter of this murder novel is absolutely fantastic, smacking of an old fashioned novel steeped in intrigue and nostalgia. It was pure genius and had me hooked, as I plowed through the rest of the story which was steeping with mystery, drama and multiple intrigues. This is a novel that is based on the true story of a horrific murder in 1857, amidst Dick Tracy style policemen and the thriving city of New York. Bond Street, to be exact, was the fashionable focal point of houses for the rich and well-to-do folks of New York City.

One of the these residents was Dr. Harvey Burdell, who lived at 31 Bond Street, and Ellen Horan's novel begins with the young errand boy, John, finding his employer the dentist Dr. Burdell brutally stabbed in his office. Dr. Burdell had a young lady, Emma Cunningham and her daughters, boarding upstairs in his house and of course all suspicion is directed at her. Emma pleas for help from the local criminal attorney, Mr. Henry Clinton, because she has been sequestered at 31 Bond Street without representation. The prosecutor is out for justice, and his fingers point to Emma.

I must confess, before my passion for European historical fiction on royalty overtook my reading habits, I once could be found reading only Lawrence Block, James Patterson, Lee Child, Mary Higgins Clark and Anne Rule. If you enjoy those writers, you will also be enamored with this novel by Ellen Horan. Imagine my glee with this blast from my reading past, for a well honed murder mystery that is a true story, set in the state where I grew up, and where the case remains hanging in suspense as it is unsolved to this day. Ellen Horan stumbled on this story while browsing through bins in a print shop and found a clipping regarding nearby Houston Street, NYC, one thing led her to another, and we now finally have this fascinating look into a murder mystery that took place within a row of townhouses that are no longer there, replaced by the growth of retail and warehouses and parking lots. Instead of writing the intended non-fiction work on this murder mystery, Ellen Horan adapted this into a much more dramatic fictional tale. She leaves a few of the original characters in, but embellishes greatly and adds her own twists to the story. Since I had absolutely no idea about the 'true story' I was completely and utterly enthralled with this fictional tale as Ellen Horan spins it.

I can understand though, that those who prefer to stick close to facts when dealing with a true-crime situation, may be a little annoyed at the fictional leaps that the author takes. Since I was not looking for a realistic account of the murder at this time, this novel kept me entertained for an entire Sunday, refusing to let me sleep until I finished it. I am so glad I spent my Sunday on this, and I will spend some more time googling for more interesting twists and facts that really happened between this murder mystery involving the dentist and the widow. A classic who-dunit.. of who was the real victim, and who was the villian?

I was very impressed with the writing style of this debut author, as I was both immersed in the visual time period of 1857 that Horan vividly describes, and with the characters that Ellen Horan portrays. Doubly enticing were the backstories of slave trade and the corrupt police departments. The murder victim, Dr. Harvey Burdell, is also portrayed as being a total loser who was a womanizer and knee-deep with the aforementioned corruption which includes transporting slaves. The accused murderer, Emma Cunningham, is one where you really couldn't tell what was going on in that warped head. Since the true murder mystery remains unsolved to this day, I have a feeling that not a lot of people could tell what was going on inside of Emma Cunningham's head. The epilogue was quite interesting as well, but even that leaves out some of the critical factors that occurred in the case.

My absolute favorite characters were Samuel, the negro driver to Dr. Burdell, and John, the 11 year old boy who was the errand boy. But still high on that list was the defense attorney, Henry Clinton, who was portrayed as a shrewd attorney without an unethical bone in his body. The author inserts his wife within the novel, when in reality they did not marry until after the case, and it was with similar subtle changes that Ellen Horan used to make her novel her own, creating a sensational blend of murder, passion and suspense. Emma Cunningham also only has two daughters in the story, when in reality it was reported that she had five children. The crooked district attorney, Oakley Hall, was indeed crooked in real life, though (surprise!). For those wanting a strictly-the-facts type of book, there is the non-fiction work that was written in 2007 by New York City historian Benjamin Feldman titled *Butchery on Bond Street - Sexual Politics and The Burdell-Cunningham Case in Ante-bellum New York*, which has now caught me eye after reading this story. He also runs the blog for where the above clipping was borrowed from.

For those wanting the intriguing drama of a historically themed suspense, this work by Ellen Horan fits that bill perfectly. It was an unforgettably nostalgic journey through 31 Bond Street in New York City that I would not hesitate to recommend to fellow mystery lovers. Visit Ellen's website regarding the book at, none other than: 31 Bond Street.

Giveaway going on until 3/27/10 at <http://www.theburtonreview.com/2010/0...>
