



What's Happening With... Jeanne M. Dams

by Brian Skupin



In 1994, Jeanne Dams was at the Dark and Stormy Nights writers' conference and waiting for the critique of her submitted chapter. She was dreading the result, since editor Michael Seidman was not known for his fondness for cozy mysteries. But his reaction was, "Why hasn't this been published yet?"

That book became her Agatha award-winning novel *The Body in the Transept*, and led to her nine-book Dorothy Martin series, about a widowed American living in England, and to a six-book series featuring Hilda Johansson, a Swedish housemaid in early 20th century Indiana who works for the wealthy Studebaker family.

Dams herself has lived in Indiana her whole life, with the exception of a three-year period in California. She didn't enjoy it, and moved back to Indiana for good.

Things took a turn for the better when Dams met her eventual husband, Ed. "I had known him slightly, through friends of friends, and was not interested. But I was at a party with my then-boyfriend, who I was ticked at, so I decided to do my own thing. This being a 60's-type party of course my boyfriend and I had gone to the party separately anyway." Dams and her future husband went for a drive and then spent the whole night talking, were engaged by the end of the night, and were married one year later.

Her boyfriend from the night of the party came to the wedding, gave her "a soulful look," and said, "I think I made a mistake." Dams recalls, "That was very satisfying."

Her writing career did not get off to the same swift and satisfying start. Dams had started working life as a primary school teacher, and later was a junior administrator at a university. She had often thought about writing, but felt she didn't have enough time, so she quit work to write full time. "It

was eight years from the time I started writing fiction until I was published."

Dams is well-known in the mystery community for her love of hats. At her first convention, the 1992 Bouchercon, she won the hat contest, wearing "a wide-brimmed, quite elegant, black and white hat. I call it my Ascot hat, and I still wear it." Dams bemoans the lack of opportunities to wear hats to social events these days, but always wears one to church on Sunday, and owns about 50 in all.

Dams wrote 14 books over 10 years to good reviews and a loyal readership but now hasn't had a book out since 2005's *Crimson Snow*. What happened?

"In 2002, several very unpleasant things happened in the same week," reports Dams. "My husband went in for a routine test that became a triple bypass. At the same time, we had an epic winter storm, and I had no electricity at the house for 4 days. It was 47 degrees inside the house. Then our kitten died, and I had to tell Ed at the hospital. And then my agent called, and told me that Walker would no longer be publishing mysteries."

Although Michael Seidman brought the Dorothy Martin series with him when he moved to TOR, and her agent placed the Hilda Johansson series at Perseverance Press, various financial constraints made it impossible for Dams to continue as a full-time writer. So she has spent the last few years working at other things, including an editorial service for other writers.

But now there is great news for readers. Dams has completed the next Hilda Johansson novel, *Indigo Christmas*, and Perseverance will publish it this fall. She's also working on a new Dorothy Martin book—and that's not all.

"I've written another book with two co-authors. It's a thriller, with a delightfully

THE DOROTHY MARTIN SERIES

The Body in the Transept (1995)

Trouble in the Town Hall (1996)

Holy Terror in the Hebrides (1997)

Malice in Miniature (1998)

The Victim in Victoria Station (1999)

Killing Cassidy (2000)

To Perish in Penzance (2001)

Sins Out of School (2003)

Winter of Discontent (2004)

THE HILDA JOHANSSON SERIES

Death in Lacquer Red (1999)

Red, White, and Blue Murder (2000)

Green Grow the Victims (2001)

Silence is Golden (2002)

Crimson Snow (2005)

Indigo Christmas (Coming Fall 2008)

evil villain, and it will be out in the spring of 2009. I can't say anything else about it now."

For further news and updates, fans can refer to Dams' newly re-designed website at www.jeannedams.com.

Brian Skupin is the co-publisher of Mystery Scene. Lost track of a favorite writer? Contact <brianskupin@mysteryscenemag.com>.