

Boisjoly Bulletin

Quillfeather Chronicle

December '24 ★ Christmas Hype Edition ★ Weather Forecast: yes, there will be a spot of weather

Teddy Quillfeather in Racy, Revealing Cover Reveal



Teddy Quillfeather returns in her second manor house mystery of manners, *Frauds On Favourite*, when her slightly dotty uncle is accused of fixing the races, gambling Teddy's family's standing at the track and the entire future of the ancient village of Middleditch.

If that were all it would be too much, so obviously there's much much more — to prove her uncle's innocent Teddy must also track down a track tout who seems able to see into the future, expose a spy, save a beloved family horse from being auctioned off, foil a blackmailer, stop a track-wide conspiracy, and rejoin sundered hearts. It's a race to the finish on a dodgy course on a dark horse against an unknown force without remorse, of course.

Frauds On Favourite was meant to be available for Christmas and it was very nearly a photo-finish, but this tale has literally more overlapping mysteries than it has characters, and so it's going through the spin cycle a couple more times, such that it's neatly pressed in time for a cosy January release.

Merry Christmas from Anty and Teddy and me

Teddy's Timelines

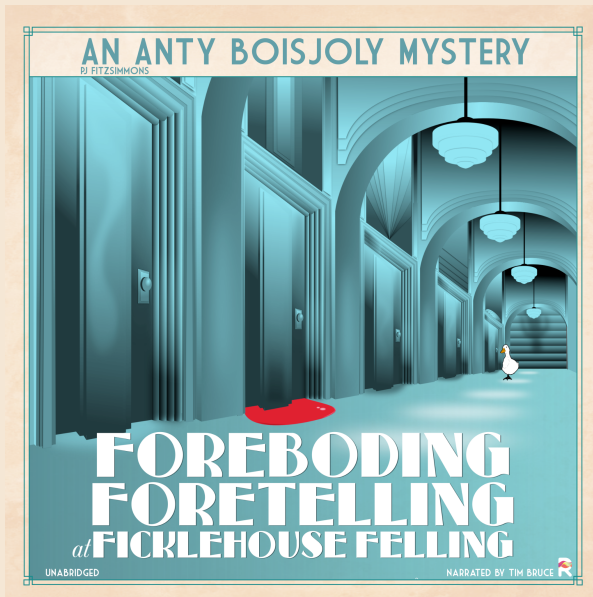
A vanishingly tiny minority of readers have noticed that Teddy Quillfeather's stories take place roughly a year before she was introduced in *Mutiny and Malice aboard RMS Ballast*, the eighth title of her cousin's series, Anty Boisjoly Mysteries. This is all part of a deliberate and complex and largely irrelevant plan to eventually bring those timelines together.

Of course, both series are composed of stand-alone stories so it makes little difference, but Teddy will be visiting Anty in 1929 for the tenth Anty Boisjoly, *The False Clue of the Twisted Red Herring's Footprint*, which brings back many characters and dark mysteries from previous books for an explosive tin anniversary, expected mid '25.



With thanks and apologies to Edwin Austin Abbey, *A Christmas Carol*, 1876

Foreboding Foretelling on Audible



The most recent newsletter featured a classic strop about Audible's carefully calculated random spanners keeping, in this case, Foreboding Foretelling at Ficklehouse Felling from publication a full month after it appeared every elsewhere.

So, of course, the very next day FFaFF went live at Audible but it's not as though I could send out an erratum just for that, so let's call this the official announcement that Ficklehouse is finally gottable on Audible.

**Foreboding Foretelling
on Audible**

The Cast of Christmas Past

I didn't know what to get you for Christmas this year, so I thought I'd re-use an idea from the past two newsletters and include a custom-written cast list for *The Case of the Ghost of Christmas Morning*.

These cast lists are based on what I provide to Tim Bruce, the narrator of the audio books, but I never gave him one for *The Case of the Ghost of Christmas Morning*, and it's just as well because when I do they're full of spoilers, so below is a combination of subtexts and excerpts, which I offer along with my hardy and heartfelt hopes for a happy and healthy, peaceful and friendly Christmas and beyond.

Anty pits his sardonic wits against another pair of impossible murders in the *Case of the Ghost of Christmas Morning*. This time, footprints in the snow show conclusively that Anty Boisjoly's Aunt Boisjoly is the only possible suspect when a murder victim stands his old friends a farewell drink at the local, hours after being murdered.

Anty Boisjoly (pronounced Beaujolais, like the wine region). Golden-age gad and fun-loving lad, Anty approaches all things with a happy enthusiasm that he endeavours to render contagious. Born in London in 1900, Eton and Oxford educated, he came into his father's estate in suspicious circumstances in 1928 and it's now 1929.

"That is, I confess, my principal occupation," I confirmed, "and it consumes most of my waking hours, but I have my fingers in many pies, running the gamut from clubbing, idling, and man-about-towning, to helping mates through scrapes. Perhaps you heard of the twin tragedies that befell the Canterfell family this past summer?"

Aunt Azalea is Anty's aunt on his father's side, so she'll be roughly a generation older, although she presents as even older and more retiring, owing to a pathological shyness, to the point of hiding in her room when guests visit and communicating with her butler by note. She's had a privileged life, like Anty, and will have even less idea how the real world works than he does, and so is particularly unprepared to be a suspect in an impossible murder.

Aunt Azalea was always the eccentric one in a family not widely famed for an extravagant excess of marbles. She was very like my father and myself physically — tall and narrow with a pasty-white and chestnut livery and the famous Boisjoly eyebrows that give the impression that we're easily and constantly surprised — but in addition to belonging to the school that pronounced the family name "Bo-juhlay", like the wine region, as opposed to "Boo-juhlay", like the wine region, she was timid almost to the degree of genius. She was to bashfulness what that Pythagoras chap was to sorting out the area of the square of the hypotenuse once and for all.

Puckeridge is Auntie Azalea's butler and head of household staff. He's the most butlerly butler that Anty's ever met, and so never expresses the resentment he feels at his employer's reticence to receive guests and let him fully realise his strengths in service. Like most of the characters in this story, Puckeridge is native to Hertfordshire.

I'd never met the man before arriving at the manor that day, but I'd understood from my father that Puckeridge was local talent, the second son of a proud dairy family, and he'd acquired the equivalent of a PhD in butlering at some of the great houses of Bedfordshire. He was accordingly as correct as high tea and otherwise a stout representative of his beef and milk-fed heritage, generous of jowl and midships.

Vickers has been valet to the Boisjoly gentlemen since the invention of Boisjoly gentlemen. His age is a matter of continuous speculation, guided by the fact that all of his long-term memories predate the coronation of George V. However he has extensive general knowledge, with particular emphasis on the upstairs and the downstairs of the nation's nobility.

"Tea-time?" This was not out of character for Vickers. The man had been a pillar of the British valeting industry by that point for the better part of a century, and the pinions would intermittently pop a sprocket. It's a good job I'm not a man of routine, because Vickers would oft-times serve cocktails at sunrise and run my bath in lieu of preparing dinner.

Inspector Ivor Wittersham is a DIY Scotland Yard detective inspector who's worked his way up and around the barriers of his upper-class origins, starting with a WWI spent mainly in the trenches, so he's roughly ten years older than Anty. His family is from all over England but he was born and raised in London. In this, the second time he and Anty have worked together, he's developed a very grudging respect for Anty's pie-eyed perspective.

"I'm very much of two minds about that, Mister Boisjoly," he said, staggering the delivery as he lit his pipe. "In light of your contribution to the affair in Fray last summer, I'm inclined to either grant you some limited role in this inquiry, or have you arrested and held as a public nuisance until it's complete."

Constable Kimble is another working-class copper taking on the odds from a small town in Hertfordshire, where he walks a beat and for the first time in his career is given a murder to solve, only to have a Scotland Yard inspector imposed on him from London. Kimble is a big, suspicious, lumbering but meticulously competent constable with a secret of his own.

The immense policeman would occasionally stoop to examine a compelling bit of snow and take note of it in his notebook, before continuing and eventually disappearing over the meadow's edge. By and by, he returned, performing the same staggered, fastidious examination of his route, and now that he was facing me I could see that he was a square-jawed, serious-faced chap who, having resigned himself to gingerhood, had gone all in and sprouted a wobbly great orange moustache.

Trevor Barking is Graze Hill's blacksmith and deacon and taxi and Jack-of-all-trades-remaining, with ambitions of greater things. He's a native of Graze Hill and in fact his father was blacksmith and, probably, his father and his father before him. Barking would very much like to bring an end to the cycle, and as the story begins his secret plots and plans are already becoming overwhelming.

I stood outside, contemplating the treacherous hillside, when Henry returned triumphantly from the pages of a Dickens novel, seated next to a large, avuncular, cloth-capped Little-John holding the reigns of a dappled grey Clydesdale and riding an open landau that had been converted, with the addition of two ingenious skis, into a sleigh, complete with silver bells.

Sally Barnstable is landlady of the only pub open over Christmas, the Sulky Cow, and guardian of several secrets of her own, the most salacious of which regards her status as landlady of the local. She's roughly Anty's age but has a very matronly attitude and reputation with respect to the town of Graze Hill, and she keeps and cares for Hildy, a completely new and curiously constructed breed of cow.

Sally turned slowly back to me, like one of those Bavarian clockwork figures, just marginally more terrifying.

Everett Trimble is Graze Hill's biggest booster and, in fact, the positive force of kinetic energy in the entire town and beyond. Anty suspects straight away that this high-octane optimism is hiding a secret and, as is so with literally everyone else in town, he's right.

There was a jaunty, bouncy quality to Everett's narrative, not unlike the sensation of being in a small boat in choppy seas. I found myself following his line of thinking like a harried Christmas shopper running alongside a Route Six to Oxford Circus, trying to hop aboard.

Soaky Mike is the local soak, competing with the deceased for the charity round so rare in winter in Graze Hill. But that's not Soaky's only secret — in point of fact it's not a secret at all and Soaky spends every waking minute, seemingly, angling free drinks, but there's more to his rivalry with Flaps Fleming than a barroom rivalry.

The careless jumble of winter coats raised its head, revealing it to be a gentleman of advanced years and general air of dreamy contentment, as one who knows what he likes and where to get it. Soaky favoured me with a waggle of his white eyebrows and the lifting of a cup of mulled wine. As though to economise on the action, on the descent the cup stopped at his lips.

Reverend Padget is the local vicar with ambitions for the town and his little church that are only slightly at odds with the rest of Graze Hill and its standing feud with neighboring Steeple Herding. He also harbours secret hopes for a little fame, and in advancing them proves himself to be a very canny country cleric indeed. Mister Padget is another local and will be at least ten years older than Anty and he, too, served in the trenches in WWI.

"Welcome, welcome," said Padget, with the deliberate sort of austerity of men who deliver bad news professionally. "Welcome to Saint Stephen's." He was a short and slight man, and he wore a cope of purple velvet and ivory piping that had been made for a bigger vicar. He completed the picture of the oppressed, harried village parson with fingers that fidgeted as though knitting an intricate and invisible cardigan.

Cosmo Millicent is the black sheep nephew to the deceased, who only discovered his relationship to the war hero weeks before the story begins, and immediately set out to exploit his new-found vocation of official biographer. Like everyone else in Graze Hill, his accord with the victim isn't what it seems, and he harbours a harrowing secret. Cosmo is among the few suspects who aren't from Graze Hill. He'll be roughly Anty's age. *"Oh, all right, all things and all that, what?" said Mister Millicent with a lisp that spoke of public schools and fox hunts and a worryingly uncomplicated family tree.*

Montgomery Hern-Fowler is a brother-in-arms to the deceased flying ace, and he's returned to visit his old wingman on the very day he dies, adding to an already very suspicious set of circumstances and secrets surrounding the gruff, bluff, blustery flyboy. He's slightly less than a generation older than Anty, but the weight of war and sorrow seem to add to his years, and he knows something scandalous about the deceased, just as the deceased knew something worse about him.

"Ah, there you are, Millicent." The rafters of Saint Stephen's quivered existentially with this booming announcement. Cosmo and I turned to receive what I took to be a baritone soloist appearing in the role of a country squire. He was twenty-odd years older than Cosmo and I and he had that bushy, jowly appearance of a class of gentleman who grow bushy and jowly as a matter of duty to God and country.

Josilyn Boodle is Flaps Fleming's solicitor and failed veteran of WWI. He manages all of the war hero's rich financial affairs across the feuding fiefdoms of Steeple Herding and Graze Hill, and is in possession of a particularly damning piece of evidence.

"Wounded?" guessed Ivor.

"Deeply." Boodle nodded gravely at the painful past. "They took my rifle away when I accidentally discharged it in mess hall. It was a dreadful overreaction — the sergeant got his hearing back in time. But they said a man of my talents would contribute more from Dover. Can't say they're wrong, but my survivor's guilt gave me nightmares for, oh, must have been a good week. Sure you won't have a drink?"