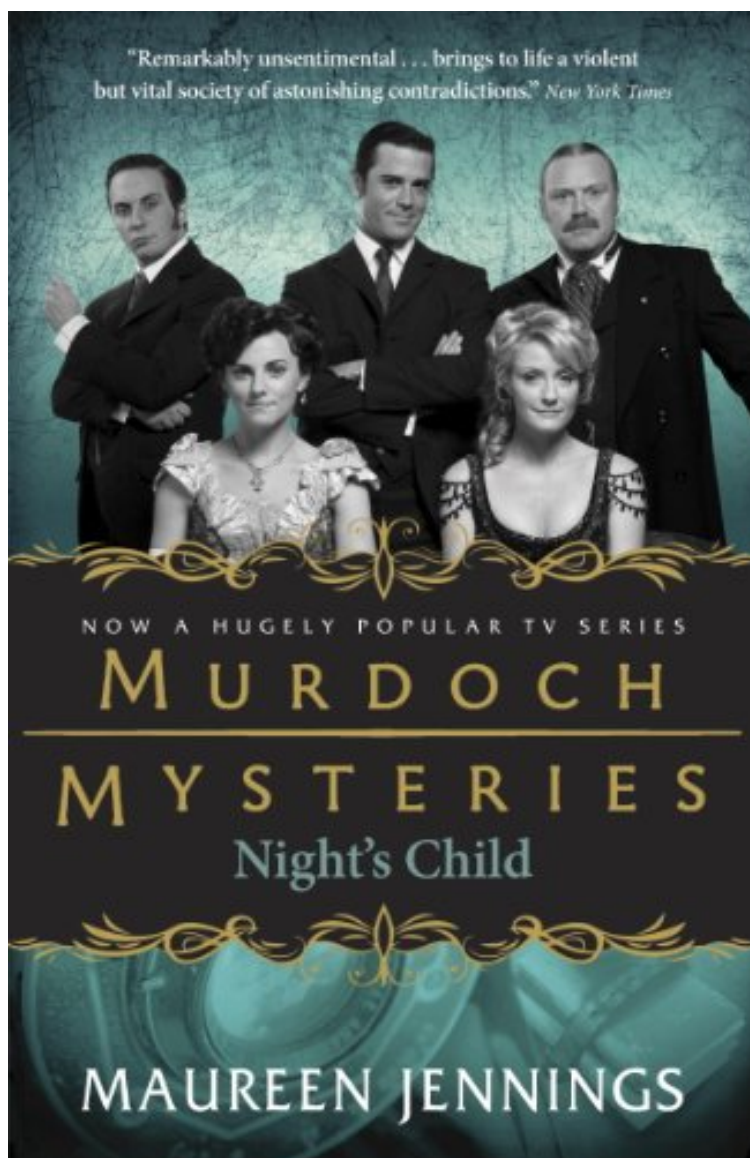


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Night's Child: A Detective Murdoch Mystery



Par Maureen Jennings
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurAfter thirteen-year-old Agnes Fisher faints at school, her teacher, the young and still idealistic Amy Slade, is shocked to discover in the girls desk two stereoscopic photographs. One is of a dead baby in its cradle, and on the back Agnes has scrawled a terrible message. Worse, the other photograph is of Agnes in a pose captioned What Mr. Newly Wed Really Wants. When Agnes doesnt show up at school the next day, her teacher takes the two photographs to the police. Murdoch, furious at the sexual exploitation of such a young girl, resolves to find the photographer and to put him behind bars. Nights Child is the fifth novel in Maureen Jennings highly praised historical mystery series. Three of Jennings novels have been made into TV movies under the title Murder 19C: The Murdoch Mysteries. Bravo/CHUM is currently

developing a series based on the character of Detective William Murdoch for broadcast in 2007.

Chapter One

Miss Amy Slade was seated at her desk, surveying her class. For the moment, the room was quiet, the only sound was of chalk moving on slate boards. By rights the children should have been writing in notebooks, but Miss Slade had taken spare slates from the lower standards and used them for rough work. Then you don't have to worry about perfection, which as we know doesn't exist, she told her pupils. She caught the eye of Emmanuel Hart and frowned at him. How many times must I remind you, Emmanuel? The mind is like a muscle and must be exercised else it grows flabby and inert. The boy bent his head immediately to the task of long division. He was a big boy, too old to still be in the fourth standard, but he had missed a lot of school and his reading and writing was barely at the level of the younger children. In a different classroom he would have been either the bully or the butt of ridicule. Not here. Miss Slade, without ever resorting to the cane, ran a tight, disciplined ship. She was strict about what she called the rules of order, which she had established on the first day of the term. No talking when there was work to be done; only one voice at a time when there was a question-and-answer period; absolutely no tormenting of other children. Any infraction of these rules and the offending child, almost always one of the boys, was sent to the Desk of Thoughtfulness, which was right under her nose. Here he had to sit and reflect on his behaviour while all around him the class enjoyed the games and competitions that Miss Slade used to liven up her lessons. Learning should be the most fun you ever have, she told her pupils. And so she made it. On her desk was a large jar full of brightly coloured boiled sweets. The winner of the competition could choose one. But it was not just the succulent bribery of raspberry drops that won the children's devotion, even though that helped a great deal. What they came to respect most was Miss Slade's justice. She dispensed praise and occasional scoldings with an absolutely even hand whether it was to a hopeless case like Emmanuel Hart or to Mary, the clever, exquisitely dressed daughter of Councillor Blong. One or two of the girls, already too prissy to be saved, disliked and mistrusted her, but the others loved her. This was Miss Slade's third year of teaching at Sackville Street School and her fourth placement. Although her pupils didn't know it, her contract was precarious. She was far too radical a teacher for the board's taste, and if she hadn't consistently produced such excellent results, she would have been dismissed long ago. She waited a moment longer, enjoying the put, put sound of the chalk on the slates. Then she clapped her hands. "Excellent. There is nothing quite as fine as the silence of the intelligent mind at work. What is it that makes so much noise? Hands up if you know the answer. Every arm shot up, hands waving like fronds. Good. I would expect you to know the answer to that as I have said it innumerable times. Who hasn't answered a question lately? Benjamin Fisher, you. The skinny boy's face lit up. The most noise in the brain comes from the rattle of empty thoughts, Miss Slade. Yes, of course. You can get a sweet later. Now, wipe off your slates, everybody, and put them in your desks. There was a little flurry of activity, desk lids lifted, as the children did as she asked. Monitors, open the windows wide, if you please. Florence Birrell and Emmanuel Hart got up promptly and went to push up the window sashes. Cold air poured into the classroom, which was hot and stuffy. The large oil heater in the centre of the room dried out the air. The girls who were sitting closest to the windows wrapped their arms in their pinafores for warmth while the boys remained stoic. Good! Stand beside your desks, everybody, and assume your positions for cultivation of the chest. The children stood in the aisles, their heels pressed together, toes turned out at an angle. Remember now, your weight must be forward on the balls of your feet. Let me see. Rise up. One or two of the boys deliberately lost their balance, which gave them an excuse to flail their arms and grab on to the desk beside them. George Strongithorn, stop that. You will sit out the exercise in the Desk of Thoughtfulness if you misbehave again. You are quite capable of standing on your toes. All right, children, you may assume your correct position once more. Miss Slade began to walk up and down, inspecting her pupils. She had her cane pointer in her hand but not to whack at any child, merely to correct. Benjamin's older sister, Agnes Fisher, who was directly in front of the open window, shivered violently. She was wearing only a thin cotton jersey underneath her pinafore. Agnes, come to the front. It's warmer out of the air. Miss Slade faced the class. Now, all together. Inhale . . . and exhale as you say the word far. Whispers please. Farr. There was a soft sighing throughout the room. Twice more. Joseph, for goodness sake, your mouth should be closed, not catching flies. A giggle ran through the ranks. Miss Slade, whose chest was well cultivated, lead the way. Inhale through the right nostril only. And exhale through the left nostril. Henry Woolway had a bad cold and blew out some snot as he exhaled. He wiped it away with his sleeve. Without comment Miss Slade handed him a clean handkerchief from her pocket. The children continued to breathe, first through one nostril then the other, puny chests thrust out and upward. All right, we will pause for a moment. Isaiah, you are still prone to making your shoulders do all the work. That is wrong.

It is the lower chest that must rise. Sorry, Miss Slade. My chest bone hurts if I breathe in too deep. Isaiah had a persistent dry cough. She tapped hard on her own chest with her two fingers. This is what you must do every day without fail, Isaiah. Firm percussion for five minutes. Then splash cold water on your neck and chest, followed by a dry warm towel. Within three weeks, we should see some improvement. Yes, ma'am. There were four younger children in Isaiah's family and the closest he got to water in the morning was a damp rag that his mother made him whisk around the face and ears of the two next down. She didn't seem to notice whether he did the same to himself. Miss Slade read his face correctly. On second thoughts, Isaiah, we'll do the exercise when you come to school and I will be able to supervise. Yes, ma'am. *Revue de presse*

"The fifth novel in this remarkably unsentimental series . . . brings to life a violent but vital society of astonishing contradictions." - New York Times "Jennings has . . . a fine eye for telling details and good characters. . . . Jennings handles all the plotlines with aplomb, while never losing her grounding in Toronto history." - Globe and Mail "The portrayal of Victorian life in Toronto rings true. We feel the chill of the poorly heated rooms. . . . This is a well-written, tightly plotted mystery." - Quill Quire