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Posted on 17 March 2019 By Ngaio Marsh

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3.5 stars great fun as an audiobook, I'd give 4 stars for the setting, the interesting, quirky characters, but three stars for a rather questionable motive and too pat a resolution no spoilers, but I wasn't really satisfied with the ending and the way Inspector Alleyn arrived at his solution So, I'd give this Inspector Alleyn mystery, Marsh's 18th in a long series, 3.5 stars. I did enjoy the idyllic English country setting, and the couple of old county families that Marsh provides as the victim, and the primary suspects, in a brutal bludgeoning death the victim was well liked, and bizarrely, found with a dead fish beside him Lady Lacklander, leader of county society and an old friend of Alleyn's mother, as well as neighbor of the victim, calls Scotland Yard to demand he investigate Of course, as Alleyn soon learns upon arrival and beginning his investigation, old families are often hiding old secrets I did enjoy Marsh's setting and several characters, even if I got a little bogged down with Alleyn's recitation of the forensic evidence at the end She seemed to be almost parodying the English country house murder, and the old, privileged families that had ruled their rural fiefdoms with unquestioned authority for generations She peels back the layers of family honor, reputation and noblesse oblige to show the sordid scandals dwelling beneath the surface of a seemingly golden family I found that theme well done however, as I said above, the identity of the killer seemed a bit pat and convenient, and I really didn't feel we had seen the perpetrator as a realistically vicious murderer Having said that, I always enjoy watching Inspector Alleyn and his assistant Fox work, and look forward to reading in this series I read this book with the Reading the Detectives group, and look forward to continuing with the Ngaio Marsh reading challenge. I made the mistake of telling my stepdad, a man with an interest in fishing, that I'd read a mystery in which the scales of a trout played a major role Oh, yeah he said How big was it I had completely neglected to remember this absolutely crucial piece of information and had to go back and find the passage where this important fish is introduced My stepdad listened Five pounds Yeah, that's a big fish for England I know rivers here where the average size is seven pounds He then proceeded to enlighten me on the differences between fishing in England and NZ, and why there are rules against taking fish over a certain size as well as under Fascinating stuff and we'd never have had the conversation if it hadn't been for Ngaio Marsh. Inspector Fox and Nurse Kettle were absolutely delightful, and I loved Sergeant Oliphant. This, the eighteenth, in the Roderick Alleyn series, was published in 1955 and is set in a changing world Not that you would know it from the idyllic village of Swevenings, a classic setting for a Golden Age mystery However, the local families, who have all lived there for centuries, are beset with old feuds and secrets, while incomers, who are not quite, endure the frosty politeness of an outsider These families are viewed from the complacent snobbery of local, Nurse Kettle,

who travels around, seeing everything, knowing everyone and, later in the book, causing Fox some romantic interest for the first time in the series. When Sir Harold Lacklander is dying, he entrusts his memoirs to Colonel Carterette for publishing. These memoirs include a very contentious chapter, concerning the suicide of the only son of Mr Danbury Phinn, who was known to Roderick Alleyn in an earlier life. There are some odd characters in this book, including Danbury Phinn and his cats, and Commander Syce, an alcoholic, lonely man, who practices his bow and arrow and invents attacks of lumbago, so Nurse Kettle will visit. This mystery has a touch of the Montagues and Capulets, with Mark Lacklander and Rose Carterette providing the young, wistful, sweethearts, Kitty Carterette the temptress and Nurse Kettle the mature, but rather touching, love interest. On one hand, this is a typical, Alleyn mystery. A murder by a stream, the mystery involving the importance of trout scales—a pun on the Scales of Justice, used in the title—and family secrets. However, it is also about a country which is dealing with changing attitudes to class, particularly in the countryside. In a sense, the way Marsh deals with this is realistic than you would expect. I do find Marsh an excellent author although she is inconsistent and her books vary widely in quality. This is one of her better ones. A cute little murder mystery. But the best part is I found it on youtube read by Benedict Cumberbatch. Romantic sigh he could make the phone book sound good. The man is a genius at acting the various roles. Oh, and the story is good, too. A whodunnit mystery involving a fish. Apparently their scales vary as much as fingerprints. Who knew. Many, many, many, many years ago, when I was a little boy in Scotland, the family went on holiday to somewhere Really Glamorous and Thrilling, like Tomintoul. There wasn't much to do in Tomintoul at the best of times except admire the gravestones in the cemetery, but there was even less to do when it was bucketing with rain. So there I was, stuck in a poxy little BB for several days. But wait. There was a book in the BB. Had some earlier guest left it behind, or had the BB management invested in it for precisely such emergencies as this, like a fire extinguisher. Who knows. But it was put into my small hands. And it was you've guessed it Ngaio Marsh's Scales of Justice. I was most reluctant to read it. First of all, it wasn't science fiction. Second, it was quite obviously far too old for me. I'd by this time probably encountered crime fiction before, in the form of Enid Blyton's Famous Five and Secret Seven books, but that was about it. This was a book for grown ups and it was in the wrong genre. One wan look out the window at a gray and blurry world, and then with a sigh I got started. And was, of course, absolutely gripped. I've had an extraordinarily sentimental affection toward the book ever since. Years later, when I must have been in my late teens or early twenties, I read it a second time and enjoyed it all over again. And now, finally, in connection with Rich Westwood's Past Offences 1955 book signup, I've read it again. In a small but aristocrat heavy village, Swevenings, local dignitary Colonel Cartarette is found gorily murdered at the side of his favorite fishing stream. Called in, Roderick Alleyn and Br'er Fox soon elicit that this may well have had something to do with the fact that, on his deathbed, Sir Harold Lacklander, the blue bloodedest of the local

bluebloods, requested that Cartarette take charge of editing his memoirs for publication, and that those memoirs blow wide open a long held guilty secret Of course, for fear of Scandal, everyone s stupidly unwilling to tell Alleyn what that secret is must be the inbreeding, I guess There are various other intrigues and counterintrigues going on, and of course a young couple madly in love whom circumstances seem to be conspiring to drive apart And there s also the mystery of the substituted trout. The narrative features some good hard knocks at the class structuring of at least this small society Here s a diatribe from someone who s widely rergarded as an outsider, and who so regards herself So how did it go We married and came here and he started writing some god awful book and Rose and he sat in each other s pockets and the county called Yes, they called, all right, talking one language to each other and another one to me Old Occy Phinn, as mad as a meat axe and doesn t even keep himself clean The Fat Woman of Nunspardon, who took one look at me and then turned polite for the first time in history Rose, trying so hard to be nice it s a wonder she didn t rupture something The parson and his wife, and half a dozen women dressed in tweed sacks and felt buckets with faces like the backside of a mule My God, what have they got They aren t fun, they aren t gay, they don t do anything and they look like the wreck of the schooner Hesperus Talk about a living death And me Dumped like a sack and meant to be grateful The trouble is that view spoiler this character, who for the above speech alone we ve ruefully come to admire, turns out to be the baddie, so that the ghastly old sticks are allowed to continue in their unruffled way, as if they and we can reasonably conclude that it was low blood that caused the criminal to be a criminal hide spoiler As a true murder mystery not so much As English village farce, very rich indeed The reader is invited from the outset to look down at the houses and trout stream, from the point of view of the village nurse who stops with her bicycle car in shop for repair surveying the scene she so admires Smoke rose in cosy plumes from one or two chimneys roofs cuddled into surrounding greenery Nurse Kettle thought with satisfaction, It is pretty as a picture This view of the village will quickly be brought to rights with sharp exchanges from the various inhabitants who bicker over cats, arrows and most of all the big old trout that escapes capture through the years. Dame Marsh was having a game of it as she put together the characters in this book By page 56 Nurse Kettle finds a body The leading family knows people, so of course Lady Lacklander is a friend of Alleyn s mother and calls Scotland Yard to demand Alleyn come solve the murder. I love that roofs cuddled what a portent, eh Like, this village is too good to be true One of the old dudes starts his drinks early in the day, and when sufficiently lubricated goes out to his bucolic area of greenery to shoot off arrows from his 60 pound bow Shooting his neighbor s cat was simply an accident, he claims. The action kicks off with the dying husband of Lady Lacklander breathing his last instructions to his neighbor to ensure that the truth will be told in his published memoirs a hidden secret that will harm his family s reputation By page 177, Alleyn has had enough of the secrecy You may as well sit down, Rory One feels

uncomfortable when you loom There is, after all, a chair Thank you, Alleyn said, taking it I don't want to loom any than I can help, you know, but you can't expect me to be all smiles and prattle when you, as a group, close your ranks with such a deafening clank whenever I approach you A great deal of mumbling went on in a family gathering until Alleyn had to give it up since the Lady was not granting anyone permission to speak frankly I suggest that you consider just exactly what is at stake in this matter When a capital crime is committed, you know, all sorts of long buried secrets are apt to be discovered It's one of those things about homicide I did enjoy the book, yet another pristine paperback from my library from Felony Mayhem. Scales of Justice 1955 is one of Ngaio Marsh's most classically British mysteries In fact, despite its 1955 printing date, it has a very pre WWII feel to it It is set in the standard small charming village with all the familiar figures former British military types Colonel Carterette, the murderee, and Commander Syce, an inebriate ex navy man the local landed gentry represented by Lady Lacklander and her son recently elevated to Sir George Lacklander after the death of his father the nosy middle aged woman this time Nurse Kettle, the county nurse, the romantic young couple Dr Mark Lacklander George's son and Rose Carterette's the Colonel's daughter and the Outsider in the form of Colonel Carterette's second much younger wife There's a nice, healthy on going feud between Carterette and his neighbor Mr Octavius Danberry Phinn over fishing rights and the attempt to catch the Old Un a rather spectacular trout. Then Carterette manages to alienate his friends the Lacklanders when Sir Harold while on his deathbed commissions the colonel with taking charge of and seeing to the publication of his memoirs That wouldn't be so bad, but Sir Harold had made some alterations and confessions that the family would rather not see the light of day Sir George has a huge row with Carterette and tells him that any understanding between their children is now off This is followed by another loud disagreement with Danberry Phinn over the Old Un and then later that evening, Nurse Kettle stumbles across the Colonel's body with the disputed fish lying beside it. Lady Lacklander doesn't want the local bobby mucking up the investigation, so she calls in favors at Scotland Yard and asks that Inspector Alleyn take up the case Because he is a gentleman And..because she knew him when he was young and it appears that she thinks she may be able to manipulate him into hushing things up She and her family also think they can keep Sir Harold's skeletons firmly in the closet She and her family would be wrong As they soon learn, Alleyn may be a gentleman but he is also a dedicated copper and will follow up every lead, no matter how fishy until he has identified the murderer. This really is quite good There is a lot of humor in the book Marsh pokes fun at the class distinctions particularly the Lacklanders without making them into caricatures The country village setting is well done and we're given a nice overview of the landscape and social set up in the opening with Nurse Kettle Marsh lays a good trail of clues with a nice batch of red herrings mixed in mixed better than my metaphors, I'm happy to add Though I show on my reading list that I'd read this one, I had no memory of having done so and little of the production with Patrick

Malahide as Alleyn, so Marsh was able to lead me up the garden path for quite a bit of the book I did manage to untangle the clues before Alleyn explained it all, but not long before Overall, a satisfying read forgive me, I couldn't resist First posted on my blog My Reader's Block Please request permission before reposting Thanks. I generally keep my reviews brief, but this was an odd book I experienced two stories at the same time The first story gets a quick comment, the second prompted an essay The essay is full of spoilers, so skip that if you are planning to read the book anytime soon.¹ The classic murder mystery small English village, upper crust suspects, buried secrets, a femme fatale, a couple of young lovers, and a humorous district nurse The solution hinges on the fate of Old Un, the trout that everyone has wanted to catch for years I enjoyed it, Marsh is a good writer I thought the ending was unlikely I didn't believe that the murderer would take such a huge risk with so little chance of gain.² Women and bad relationships view spoiler Marsh spends a lot of time on this story as well in fact, the murder does not make any sense without this reading The theme is made clear by Lady Lackland, who warns that love can disguise people's true character Detective Roderick Alleyn plays little part in this story it is focused on the women, especially the district nurse, Miss Kettle The book opens and closes with her She is down to earth, cheerful and practical sometimes annoyingly so, and insightful She is also a defender of the role of the upper class She accepts them and makes excuses for their poor behavior She is comfortable in her role as a caretaker for them, and is an intimate in their small society Kitty, the femme fatale, is a complete outsider She is the wrong class, has the wrong shoes, the wrong mannerisms, too much makeup, the wrong everything Her husband regrets marrying her and prefers his daughter's company to hers She has few options in her life, and embarks on an affair with George Lacklander because he is the only person in the village who doesn't completely reject her She will never be accepted in this closed society, and Marsh makes it clear that her loneliness and sense of rejection is the true motive for the murder Marsh also gives us clues that all is not well in the love affair between ingenue Rose and assertive Dr Mark He consistently dominates her and overrides her wishes When we first see them together, she has rejected his marriage proposal But he refuses to accept the rejection, and eventually she changes her mind When her father walks in on them, Mark is embracing her and she was making but ineffectual attempts to escape She does not want to take sleeping pills he insists She does not want to stay with him he insists His dominance feels vaguely sinister At one point, she is unhappy, and has an argument with Mark, who wants her to depend solely on him for her emotional support Marsh makes it clear what Rose's future with Mark will be Sometimes there exists in people who are attracted to each other a kind of ratio between the degree of attraction and the potential for irritation Strangely, it is often the unhappiness of one that arouses an equal degree of irascibility in the other The tear-blotted face, the obstinate misery, the knowledge that this distress is genuine and the feeling of incompetence it induces, all combine to exasperate and inflame After he gets angry with her, Rose accedes to his wishes and goes

to stay at his house At the end of the book, he promises that he loves her and will always watch over her This is couched as a happy ending, but Marsh has given us too many clues that tell us otherwise She contrasts this ending with that of another romance, between Nurse Kettle and repressed alcoholic Commander Syce They are both essentially comic figures, but also have a decency and kindness that we respect When Nurse Kettle makes it clear that his drinking is unacceptable, Commander Syce shows his love by giving it up But he does not ask her to marry him Instead, he says Give me six months To be sure It ll be all right Will you Nurse Kettle assured him that she would Instead of ending the book with the stereotypical young love, Marsh ends it with this unlikely pair, who break class barriers and expectations, and give an example of a mature relationship These two accept each other as whole people, and make a commitment while understanding their flaws hide spoiler

NGAIO MARSH



SCALES OF JUSTICE

'Excellent characterized,
Miss Marsh's best yet.'

OBSERVER

Description The quiet village of Swevenings seemed an English pastoral paradise, until the savagely beaten body of Colonel Cartarette was found near a tranquil stream Suddenly, the playground of British blue bloods has been soiled by murder and the lowest sort of intrigue But if anyone can clean it up, it s the famous Inspector Roderick Alleyn of Scotland Yard.<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bFXr0>Sometimes a Golden Age whodunnit is my only weakness.3 A Man Lay Dead Roderick Alleyn, 1 2 Enter a Murderer Roderick Alleyn, 2 3 The Nursing Home Murder Roderick Alleyn, 3 WL Death in Ecstasy Roderick Alleyn, 4 WL Vintage Murder Roderick Alleyn, 5 WL Artists in Crime Roderick Alleyn, 6 3 Death in a White Tie Roderick Alleyn, 7 4 Overture to Death Roderick Alleyn, 8 3 Death at the Bar Roderick Alleyn, 9 4 Death of a Peer Roderick Alleyn, 10 WL Death and the Dancing Footman Roderick Alleyn, 11 WL Colour Scheme Roderick Alleyn, 12 WL Died in the Wool Roderick Alleyn, 13 2 Final Curtain Roderick Alleyn, 14 WL A Wreath for Rivera Roderick Alleyn, 15 3 Night at the Vulcan Roderick Alleyn, 16 WL Spinsters in Jeopardy Roderick Alleyn, 17 3 Scales of Justice Roderick Alleyn, 18 3 Hand in Glove Roderick Alleyn, 22 3 Dead Water Roderick Alleyn, 23 3 When in Rome Roderick Alleyn, 26 3 A Grave Mistake Roderick Alleyn, 30 WL Clutch of Constables Roderick Alleyn, 25 ^FREE DOWNLOAD ? Scales of Justice ? The Quiet Village Of Swevenings Seemed An English Pastoral Paradise, Until The Savagely Beaten Body Of Colonel Cartarette Was Found Near A Tranquil Stream Suddenly, The Playground Of British Blue Bloods Has Been Soiled By Murder And The Lowest Sort Of Intrigue But If Anyone Can Clean It Up, It S The Famous Inspector Roderick Alleyn Of Scotland Yard

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