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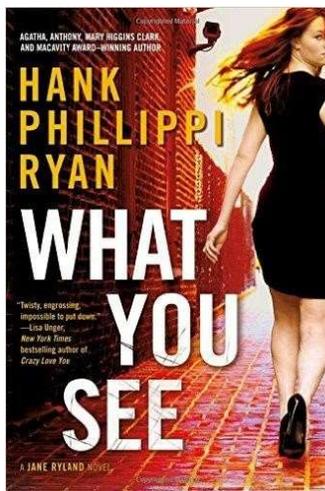
NEWSLETTER

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***What You See*, Hank Phillippi Ryan, Forge, \$25.99.**

Four books in, Hank Phillippi Ryan has hit a sweet spot with her latest Jane Ryland mystery. A perfect mix of plot, suspense, emotion and character, Ryan takes a crazily snarled few days in the lives of Jane and her boyfriend Detective Jake Brogan and makes you live through them right alongside the characters. She layers her story so that she shifts between what's happening to Jane and what's happening to Jake, often cutting away just as she's gotten to a reveal or plot twist, which only serves to sharpen the suspense.



This is a many faceted story. One thread concerns a stabbing in Boston's Curley Park; the chaotic aftermath leads the police to an alley where they find one man on the ground and one man holding him there. They send the one of the ground to the hospital – is he the stabber? – and the other one, who may be a witness or maybe more than that, is also

hauled to the police station for questioning.

Jane, in the course of a job interview at Channel 2 (yes folks, she might be headed back to TV after a visit to print journalism) is asked to step in as a freelancer on the park stabbing during her interview. She's handed a video camera and she's on her way, savoring the feeling of being back where she feels she belongs. Of course the park case belongs to Jake, which is complicated, and when Jane is approached by a young wanna-be photographer who says he has the incident on tape, it becomes more so. When the young man's camera is smashed by the man in the alley, the two plot threads become hopelessly intertwined.

Meanwhile Jane is anticipating the wedding of her sister Melissa and Melissa calls her frantically, saying her fiancé's nine year old daughter, Gracie, has disappeared. Jane is now torn: help her sister? Try and get a job? It's a conflict with her boyfriend's job (cops and reporters are not supposed to date) but she needs to work. On the other hand – *her sister*. Throughout, Ryan balances the ethics of protocol and legality with the right thing to do, not always the same thing. *All* of her characters are struggling with this central concept.

Few writers are as skilled as Ryan at portraying the hectic pace of a work day, and in this outing, Jane is not only trying to balance her work life, her romantic life with Jake and her family responsibilities as her sister seems genuinely frightened, trying without total success to have none of them be the loser. Choices must be made and none of them are simple ones. Jane reluctantly leaves the park scene telling her possible new boss she has a family conflict and rushes to her sister's side. Gracie's mother is alternately hysterical and then reassured, as Gracie's stepfather keeps calling in with updates. But the updates are

bizarre and something seems off about the whole thing.

Jane is pulled back and forth between the two crises and with barely more than a chance to nod at Jake, and neither really knows what the other is up to. Meanwhile there's another story thread involving a young woman, Tenley, who has a job monitoring the city via video (it's her summer job) and she's mindlessly bored by it until she notices something is actually happening on her video screen. Her ethical choice: to record what she sees, or not?

As Ryan layers Tenley's family story into the rest of the plot she has a large number of balls in the air which she then proceeds to juggle with author-ly perfection. With each snap and turn of this crisp plot, not only are you often surprised, you're emotionally engaged. This book had me in tears several times as Ryan explicates this complex story and the complex family relationships surrounding all of the incidents, not least the one involving Jane's own family. I had a breathless feeling myself as I flipped pages, trying to keep up with Jane and Jake as they went about their business; Ryan breathes reality and suspenseful tension into the whole novel. It's flawlessly done – one of the best and most resonant thrillers of the year.

Author Interview: Hank Phillippi Ryan

Hank Phillippi Ryan has been a part of the mystery community for several years now, racking up awards and praise for her Jane Ryland novels. Like Ryan herself, Jane is a reporter, and the real life edge the details of a reporter's life bring to Ryan's books really sets them apart. Hank herself is one of the nicest and most generous people in the mystery community, universally beloved for good reason!

Hank graciously agreed to answer a few questions.



Q: What do you think you have learned as a writer through now eight books, four with Jane, and four with Charlotte?

HANK: What have I learned? I really thought about this when you asked, because I wondered, too. And I guess two things: one, I have learned to write more quickly, in the first draft stage, to get myself through the story without worrying.

But I've also learned to write more slowly, thinking about each word, and each sentence, and each paragraph, and each scene. I am profoundly aware of how permanent a final manuscript is, a reflection of every careful choice I make. So "fine" is not enough, not at all, and I am consciously, actively, much more careful. I want it to be perfect, gorgeous, unusual, intriguing and the most surprising it can be.

That is hard work, harder than I ever predicted, and I revel in every bit of it. Usually.

Is it a paradox to say I have also learned to trust the process? I often tell myself: oh Hank, you know what you're doing. Just go on. It will all work out in the end.

Q: What kind of character arc do you have in mind for Jane moving forward?

HANK: Oh Robin, I have to laugh when you use the word plan. I have no idea what will happen to Jane. And I love that, because her life is like a real life, and of course we have no idea what will happen in our future. Sue Grafton once told me Kinsey Millhone reveals herself to Sue book by book, and that's exactly what happens with Jane.

People often ask me if Jane will get married? I have no idea. To Jake? I have no idea. Because they don't either. What fascinates me about this question is motivation. Why do people do what they do? Why do people make the decisions they make? A good novel of suspense is all about choices, and how a person behaves when faced with a big decision. So whatever happens to Jane, and Jake, they'll have to deal with it, separately and together.

I am so eager to find out myself! But plan? There is no plan. Should there be a plan? If there were a plan, it would change, right?

Q: I know your experience as a reporter adds to your writing - it gives it an added punch as it feels so "right". That's from a layman's point of view. What is mostly true, in terms of Jane's life as a reporter, and what is mostly fiction?

HANK: I can safely say my books are not only ripped from the headlines, but ripped from my own headlines! I have wired myself with cameras, confronted corrupt politicians, chased down criminals, and gone undercover and in disguise. I have battled with management, and with angry story subjects,

had my notes and raw video subpoenaed, been threatened and stalked and yelled at. In that sense, what happens to Jane is realistic and authentic and could happen to a real reporter. True, Jane's life is a little more dangerous than mine, that's the part that's fiction. But nothing happens to her that couldn't really happen.

What You See certainly comes from stories I have covered, about surveillance, and privacy, and child abduction, and a certain murder case in Boston where my husband defended a man who was accused of stabbing someone else near Faneuil Hall. You will recognize that scene on the book-- it is straight from real life, up to the point where my imagination took over.



But even though the stories are inspired by my investigations and my husband's work as an attorney, they are not fictionalized versions of a true story. They are a compilation of adrenaline-injected, polished and tweaked puzzle pieces that fit together, somehow, into a brand-new story.

Q: Is it true cops and reporters can't date?

HANK: Depends what you mean by "can't." It would be frowned upon, discouraged, and,

bottom line, incredibly difficult. And unworkable. I'm trying to think if I know any reporters who date police officers, and I don't think I do. It is an impossible journalistic situation and an impossible law enforcement situation... fraught with potential problems and hideously tangled in conflict.

Jane and Jake's dilemma is realistic, and the idea that they are hiding the relationship from the world is also definitely realistic. A reporter who is dating a police officer would have to reveal that, if they were assigned a story he or she was handling – because a reporter would never be allowed to cover story for which they have a personal interest.

My husband is an attorney, and there are many times when I have to recuse myself from getting anywhere near his newsworthy cases. And there are many times I know something I cannot tell.

Also, if a police officer were dating a reporter, and there was a leak in the Police Department, the officer would be the first to be blamed, whether he or she was guilty or not.

So it is a huge mess, and best to avoid it at all cost. But what about passion? That's what leaves Jane and Jake in their impossible situation. Both are so honorable in their professional lives, and it is very difficult for them to be so duplicitous in their personal lives. What will they do? I have no idea.

Q: How do you start with a plot? I read an interview with Ngaio Marsh where she said she created a group of characters, then imposed a plot on them. I think a thriller is kind of structured story first, and that is then imposed on the characters. I think you write thrillers, but you also have a recurring

character, so how do you balance plot and character?

HANK: That is such an interesting idea from Ngaio Marsh, but I think my experience is a little bit the opposite. When I began writing the Jake and Jane books, I actually started with the plot. I had read an article about Mark Sanford, the disgraced ex-governor of South Carolina who told everyone he was out hiking the Appalachian Trail when he was really off with the other woman. There was a quote in that story that said "you can choose your sin but you cannot choose your consequences." And I thought: my book my book my book!

Right then, and I get goosebumps remembering, I knew I wanted to write a big thriller about the consequences of being the other woman, and the pressures of politics, and the pressures of being a reporter covering such a story under a deadline. And for that I needed a new character, and then I realized I probably needed two, since it was such a textured story. And poof. (Ish.) There were Jane and Jake. And on day one of *The Other Woman* that's all I had.

Since then, each new novel has started with what I call the glorious gem of the one good idea, the irresistible core of the mystery.

I don't have an outline, so I don't know what's going to happen until the next word and the next sentence and the next paragraph and the next scene. The plot advances based on what the characters decide when faced with an obstacle or goal or conflict or pressure.

I give each character a starting point, and then I see what happens. Since I don't know where the story is going, I'm not shepherding them in any direction, I'm simply seeing what unfolds. In a strange way it's as if I set up the first domino in a row of dominoes--even though I

don't know what the other dominoes will be!

And then I push it over, and see what happens.

So people say to me--wow the end of *What You See* really surprised me! And I say yes, it surprised me, too.



Q: While I think you write thrillers your books seem to straddle traditional - with your traditional story structure - and thriller. Do you think that's one of the things that's helping you find such popularity as an author?

HANK: What a great thing to say! Thank you! And if you say so, then, well, sure. That label "traditional," or "thriller," or "mystery"--that's a tough one. My books are certainly thrillers, in that you will never see a phrase like "two weeks later," or "after a leisurely dinner" or "let me think about that for a couple of days." There is a relentless sense of a ticking clock through the whole thing. *What You See* takes place in less than 48 hours. So that's thriller-esque. Jake and Jane are always in some sort of conflict, or danger, or high-pressure, or high-stakes, or some

sort of critical decision-making. That's thriller too.

But you won't see oh, nuclear war, or terrorists, or an international ring of spies. My books are designed to feel as if they took place in your hometown, with people you might know, in situations that might really exist. (Situations where people get killed, of course.)

Maybe they are... Investigative thrillers? Like an investigative story that a journalist would do. Imagine that!

Q: Any writers that are influences? (I prefer this answer not be "Stephen King" or "Jane Austen" but if you must you must).

HANK: Definitely Edith Wharton, for her brilliant and insightful take on the spirit of the times, for wonderful dialogue, and her deeply human stories.

Tom Wolfe and Hunter Thompson, for their bravery in storytelling, and their fearlessness, they're incredible sense of voice and music. Sue Grafton, she's so---thoughtful. Agatha Christie---diabolical! Shakespeare, definitely, for theme and connection and throughlines and language. And even though I know you are cringing, you have to love Stephen King. There is no one who is a better storyteller, no one who gets voice- myriad voices in every book--so recognizably differentiated. (In 1980, I called in sick from work when I wasn't really sick, because I had to finish *The Stand*. I guess it's okay to confess that now.)

My favorite book of all time may be *Winter's Tale* by Mark Helprin. It is magical.

Q: What book was transformational for you? I think there's always some book in childhood or early adolescence that is never forgotten.

HANK: I grew up in really rural Indiana, and used to read up in the hayloft in the barn behind our house. I fell in love with Sherlock Holmes stories, devoured them, and remember when I understood the music and rhythm of Conan Doyle's writing, and the excitement of solving a puzzle.

Back then, I used to read books one after the other, as fast as I possibly could, but I remember reading *Black Beauty*, and when it was over, realizing I couldn't just pick up the next book. Gosh, I must've been how old, nine? And I remember very clearly thinking: there's more to this book than the story of the horse. I guess that was my introduction to theme.

The Edward Eager fantasy/mysteries. (I have a stash of them I hand out to any kids who come over.) And Jane Langton's *The Diamond in the Window*. Those books made it be okay to be smart and nerdy, and that doing good was valuable, and helped me understand there was more to the universe than we can easily understand. *Visit to the Mushroom Planet*, too. Later, in college, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, and *Look Homeward, Angel*.

Q: Any big surprises that came with writing mysteries?

HANK: I had been a reporter for 30-some years when I started writing mysteries, and I realized, when I sat down at the computer that first time, that for the first time in my life, I was about to make things up. And I wondered if my imagination would do that – create a new world that never existed before, rather than reporting on real life. What's surprised me, so gloriously, is how the walls fell away, and time ceased to exist. When I'm in the midst of telling a great story, there's nothing else but me and the characters. I have to say I never expected that.

Q: Finally, can you give us a teeny preview of what might be next for Jane?

HANK: I'm so excited about the new Jane and Jake book! It is called *Say No More* and will be out his time next year. It's about campus sexual assault, and witness intimidation, about when we decide to speak up, and when we don't, and why--and about the power of silence.

I'm almost finished, and now, because you know how I write, I cannot wait to see what happens in the end!

Bonus

A little "bonus" essay about the store I wrote a year or so ago.

A Life lived with Books 22 years ago, when my husband Jamie and I opened our mystery bookstore, I don't think we had any thought that we'd be around this long. As we were laying out the store and having it painted the painter joked "We want to do a good job so it still looks good in 20 years." Little did I imagine that we *would* still be in business, 20 years later. At first it was simply awfully convenient. When we opened the store we had a one year old (she is now 23) and I had another baby shortly thereafter. The bookstore provided a great deal of flexibility as Jamie and I shared out tasks. He ended up being our buyer and the curator and procurer of our used book section, which now contains around 20,000 volumes. He's also at the store more than I am as much of what I do can be done at home. I have ended up as the editor of our newsletter, check cutter, payroll person, book club hostess and events coordinator. Running your own business provides a great deal of variety in your job, and it teaches you to think on your feet.

Being around for as long as we have has also enabled us to build community contacts, make friends with customers - some of whom I have traveled with and shared meals

with - and make friends with and get to know many, many writers. Some of our favorites were newbies around the same time we were and it's been fun to see their careers grow

When we first opened it's true - we had a lot of time to read, and we both still read a lot today, but gone are the days (well, maybe in February) when we can relax behind the register with a book. There's too much else to do!

Meanwhile, the books themselves have been quietly replicating, and we find ourselves the temporary custodians of roughly 28,000 volumes. As one customer recently put it as he handed me a book he wanted to buy, "I'd like to transfer this from yours to mine."

And in 22 years we've seen authors crest, diminish, hold steady, or disappear. Through all our years our steady sellers have remained constant - we still sell a great many Agatha Christie, Conan Doyle, and Rex Stout titles. That makes me happy. In fact hardly anything makes me happier than selling a young person an Agatha Christie title as they work their way through the Poirot or Marple books for the first time.

With time has come a deep knowledge and real love of the mystery genre, one that started at a young age when like many other girls I devoured Nancy Drew books. When we opened the store, I was sure I had read almost everything and now I know that can never be true! I get tips from customers, from reviews, I even *write* reviews, but I never feel as though I will quite catch up. There's always more books to read, and if there's a more reassuring thought than that, I'm not sure what it might be.

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And in 22 years we've seen the book business go through seismic changes. The rise of chains, the death of Borders (a company founded here in Ann Arbor), the rise of e-books and Amazon, all kinds of competition everywhere. Independent bookstores seem to be settling back in for the long haul - at the moment - as many of our customers seems to appreciate our knowledge and passion, and many of them prefer to read an actual book printed on paper. You never quite know what's next, of course, but I do know for a fact people will continue to read, to want stories, and will want to talk about them. I'd like to continue being a part of that ongoing conversation.

