

Let's start with some honesty: for the past two months I have been in a reading rut. Getting beyond the first chapter of a book has felt impossible, even with titles I felt confident I would love. Every week at work, Laura would - very helpfully - come up with another recommendation to get me through this frustrating lull in reading. I picked up each of her recommended titles, and then quickly put it back down because every book I opened felt like a ginormous undertaking. This isn't to say that Laura's recommendations weren't inspiring; she is notoriously good at guiding people to awesome material -- I mean, we've all read her columns. This was a "me problem" that had to be navigated and fixed myself. Last week, during my annual family vacation in Maine, I made it my mission to expel the anti-reading demon that had sequestered itself in my brain. The best exercise, or "exorcise", if you'll grant me a pun, was to start and finish a book within two days. Spoiler, it took me the whole week, but after 60 or so days in a rut, I finally read an entire book front to back!

And what was the book that got me past the dark ages? The dark, twisted, and gut wrenching *Mystic River* (2001) by Dennis Lehane, of course. This book wouldn't necessarily be called an easy-breezy vacation read, but it was exactly what I needed. Lehane introduces the main characters, Jimmy, Sean, and Dave, as kids growing up together in the poorest neighborhood in Boston. After one of them is abducted and returned, they go their separate ways until tragedy brings them back together twenty years later. Gripping me from the very first page, this book has it all: mystery, suspense, a little bit of romance, an in-depth look at class discrepancies in Boston, and characters dealing with their own demons more serious than the trifling reading demon plaguing me. When I wasn't taking a stroll on the beach, watching baseball, or stuffing my face with fried seafood, I was reading *Mystic River*. The number of times I asked my family to not talk to me while I was reading this book got me booted to my bedroom for the majority of the week, which was exactly what I wanted.

Getting enveloped in a Dennis Lehane novel didn't surprise me. I really should have turned to him before my reading rut got ugly. For the past ten or so years, Lehane has become one of my favorite authors, and I believe that I've mentioned him a few times in previous newspaper entries. Nobody writes about Boston crime in better detail than Lehane. Maybe that's an overstatement, but nobody has ever made *me* feel as emotional about it, and I've never been to Boston nor have I experienced its complicated criminal history. One of my favorite of his novels, *The Given Day* (2008), is so detail oriented about the 1919 police strike that you would think that you were reading nonfiction if it weren't for the suspenseful story being told in the middle of it. After you finish this one, you will be pleasantly surprised to find out that it's the beginning of a trilogy and is followed by *Live By Night* (2012) and *A World Gone By* (2015).

If historical fiction isn't your thing, you should check out *Since We Fell* (2017), a romance with a twist, and *Shutter Island* (2003), a missing person's mystery with a twist. I am currently reading *Moonlight Mile* (2010), the sequel to *Gone Baby Gone* (1998), and I'm sure there will be another brilliant curveball before it's over. In April of this year, Lehane released his long anticipated *Small Mercies*, about a mother who is so desperate to find her missing daughter that she starts ruffling the feathers of the Irish mob, and I can't wait to give that one a read.

"Thanks, Dennis!" (2023)

by Dennis May

Dennis Lehane's novels aren't for everybody, but his oeuvre is so extensive that you would be hard pressed not to find at least one of his books intriguing. I will be forever grateful to him and his *Mystic River* for helping me get over my reading slump of 2023 that I honestly feared would never end. Thanks, Dennis!