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The author and his muse

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By REBECCA SCHWAB

OBSERVER Staff Writer

Chautauqua County resident William Fleeman recently published "The Plot to Kill Susan B. Anthony" with Transformation Enterprises, a mystery novel written in the tradition of such greats as Agatha Christie and Arthur Conan Doyle, but reflecting Fleeman's own values.

"I love those authors, the Victorian era, and its warmth and ambiance," Fleeman says. "I've probably read every one of those books, many more than once. But I don't like bodies piled up like cordwood to catch a reader's attention. I think there are better ways to do that."

"The Plot" stays true to that philosophy, being what Fleeman calls a "murderless mystery." The novel is set in 1891 and focuses on the crime-fighting duo MacDuff and Millie, who share the role of protagonist - though Millie narrates, and Fleeman admits she may be the "top dog" in their relationship. While the main action of the plot involves the protection of famous suffragette Susan B. Anthony, the text also examines important social issues, like addiction, prejudice and gender equality. The race against would-be assassins takes the two private detectives from New York City to Lily Dale, as they follow Anthony on a speaking tour across the state. Full of danger, suspense, and historically accurate details, this novel is sure to please readers with a variety of interests.

Fleeman started his writing career with Pathways to Peace, a non-profit organization that helps people with anger issues.

Fact Box

Writer profile

Author: William Fleeman

Book Title: "The Plot to Kill Susan B. Anthony"

Genre: Fiction, novel

"The program is for people who use anger like a drug," explains Fleeman. "It's like AA or NA, and is led by people who have overcome their own anger addictions."

He wrote several non-fiction self-help books before turning to fiction, but the transition was not a jarring one for Fleeman. He felt inspired as he worked on "The Plot," writing feverishly for four focused years.

"I began the novel in 2007 and wrote non-stop, all in longhand with a Waterman fountain pen; they came out in 1883," Fleeman remembers. "I wanted to get a feeling for the ambiance of the era, and for how a writer would have written a book in the 1890s. The typewriter was out then, but most writers still used a pen and



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paper."

But an affection for the Victorian era was not the only thing driving Fleeman to create his first novel. He also feels a constant and intense urge to work on his craft, and feels he must respect that impulse if he wishes to continue to be inspired.

"I believe that the muse gives me words and moves my hand. But for that to continue to happen, I need to keep producing. I feel like I'm a hollow tube, like the barrel of my pen, and the words come through me and flow through my pen and onto the paper. This is a useful and powerful belief that I use consciously," Fleeman says.

That muse is still at it, along with Fleeman himself. A new novel, "Robinhood of Central Park West," is in the works. While it's not completely finished yet, Fleeman knows that it will be set in New York City, but that the novel's story may wind its way back to Chautauqua County, much like "The Plot" did. He also knows that, in creating "Robinhood" and whatever comes after it, he will continue to write material that reflects his values and supports his personal mantra, which is to help as many people as possible find their clean and sober pathways to peace.

Fleeman lives locally with his wife, who also edits his books.

"She's merciless," Fleeman jokes. "But she's very good at what she does. She is an integral part of my success as a writer."

Fleeman's wife isn't the only one who has had a hand in the success of "The Plot." Dan O'Rourke, a friend of Fleeman's, loaned his copy of the novel to Tina Rausa, an author and actor, who loved the story and its characters. She is working on creating an audio recording of the novel, complete with sound effects and character voices, reminiscent of the realistic worlds created by pre-television radio shows.

"There will be the sound of wagon wheels on cobblestone streets," Fleeman says, "and (Rausa) will do all the characters' voices. So we have that to look forward to."

Fleeman doesn't plan on hanging up his pen after he finishes "Robinhood of Central Park West." In fact, "The Plot to Kill Susan B. Anthony" is just the first realized dream of many.

"I want to finish this second novel," Fleeman says. "And then write another one, and another one. I can see them. I can see their titles. I can't read them yet; they're blurry. But I can see them."

"The Plot to Kill Susan B. Anthony" is available locally at The Book Nook in Dunkirk, Shurfine Market in Cassadaga, Barbara Berry's Bookshop in Mayville, and the Kangaroo Cafe in Fredonia.

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