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TITLE INFORMATION

HIDDEN VARIABLES

Bill Delaney
Manuscript (363 pp.)

BOOK REVIEW

In Delaney's debut paranormal mystery novel, an unlikely private eye seeks to discover the truth behind a relative's disappearance.

Once a television reporter, Padraig O'Toole now covers the patio furniture industry for a blog called *Patios!*. Suffice it to say he's not happy in this line of work, so when his sister, Oona, calls him up and offers him a job helping her investigate the possible killing of her retired high school physics teacher husband, Ted Lesrner, he jumps at the chance. When he does an internet search on Denison, New York—the upstate town where a mysterious “incident” occurred, according to police who called Oona—he finds that it doesn't seem to exist. Nonetheless, after further investigation, Padraig and Oona do manage to find their way there eventually. It turns out that Denison is a town that the rest of the world forgot—and that act of forgetting has caused it to physically disappear. What's more, its lack of existence somehow allows the people there—including a media mogul, who doesn't get along with her sons—to achieve immortality. Does Padraig have the skills to sift through the quantum physics and dynastic intrigue to discover Ted's fate? Delaney's work recalls the work of Thomas Pynchon, and its greatest strength is his dialogue, which embodies the novel's jolting, unpredictable structure. Here, for instance, Padraig calls a Denison-area newspaperman looking for clues: “I am actually a, you know, a private investigator...And a journalist, a long time, you know, journalist, and I'm inquiring, Ben, and, you know, thanks for talking to me, actually. I'm inquiring about events in a neighboring town from you, in a place called, which I'm sure you must know about. Denison.” Delaney's enthusiasm for such conversation sometimes leads to recursive, Abbott and Costello–style back-and-forths that sometimes overstay their welcome. For the most part, though, the book is funny, inventive, and engagingly mysterious. It's a heady, absurd parable about the dying towns, media conglomerates, and dead-end freelance work that make up so much of the American landscape.

A cerebral and amusing novel that revolves around a quantum mystery.

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