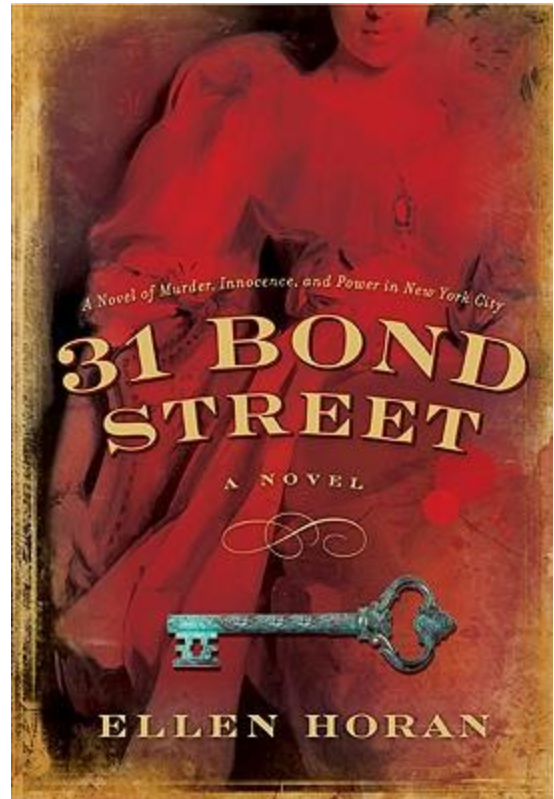


“31 Bond Street” by Ellen Horan
Harper Collins, 2010. \$25.99, 352 pages.

One cold winter morning in 1857, a young New Yorker named John Burchell reported to his job as an errand boy at 31 Bond Street. Upon arrival he was asked to check on his employer, Dr. Harvey Burdell, a well respected dentist, who had not yet come down for breakfast. To Burchell’s shock and horror, he found Burdell, not sleeping in, but murdered, his throat slashed and his body stabbed numerous times.

Suspicion quickly fell on Emma Cunningham, Burdell’s housekeeper and occasional mistress, when she produced a marriage certificate identifying herself as Burdell’s widow and therefore the heir to his fortune. She was arrested and put on trial, capturing the public’s attention as the press vilified her as a murderous black widow.

“31 Bond Street” is based on the real murder of Dr. Harvey Burdell and the subsequent arrest and trial of Emma Cunningham, the woman who claimed to be Burdell’s wife. Horan’s novel begins with the discovery of the body and follows along during the trial and aftermath, focusing much of its attention on Henry Clinton, Emma Cunningham’s defense attorney. Interspersed throughout are flashbacks that slowly tell the story of the relationship between Emma Cunningham and Dr. Burdell and the events that led to Burdell’s murder. As the narrative is gradually revealed and more details emerge, it becomes clear that this story is a complicated tale of greed, sex, murder and betrayal.



For fans of historical fiction, “31 Bond Street” is a good choice for immersing oneself in a time period. The attention to detail and the use of the actual facts of the case make the story come alive. While taking some artistic license by creating new characters and eliminating historical individuals, Horan nevertheless skillfully winds her story throughout the actual events, and the result is a thoroughly engaging and entertaining read.

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