

KIRKUS REVIEWS

TITLE INFORMATION

A PRE-EXISTING CONDITION

Gene Rontal

Camel Press (222 pp.)

\$13.99 paperback, \$5.99 e-book

ISBN: 978-1-60381-735-6

January 12, 2021

BOOK REVIEW

Every time a Detroit physician gets involved in a crime, something bad happens, and the suspicious death of a city employee is no exception.

In this latest installment of a mystery series, Benjamin Dailey, a doctor and police adjunct, agrees to see a woman who has been brought to the City Hospital emergency room. Sandra Wells, a staff assistant in the mayor's office, was found in a deserted building that had been set afire. She is not burned, but she is suffering from severe smoke inhalation. While she has Dailey's business card in her purse, he only vaguely remembers her. Despite not having privileges at the hospital, he risks legal action by executing a bronchoscopy. He is reprimanded by the staff physician, who accuses him of performing "rogue surgery," but after that doctor takes over, Wells dies. She is the first in a growing body count that includes Cal Finney, "the toughest sombitch" on the police force, who was friends with Wells. She gave him a spreadsheet to hold on to that she told Finney was "the key to the kingdom." Shortly thereafter, Finney was shot, and now the spreadsheet is missing. Someone thinks Dailey has it, resulting in the ransacking of his garage and the cautionary threat of a severed finger in his front seat. This is the fifth Dailey mystery. He's come a long way since a false malpractice accusation cost him his first marriage and his medical career and left him homeless. Now, the appealing protagonist has a son and a wife who longs to have a second child but is unable to get pregnant despite five years of fertility treatments. Like the surgeon he is, Rontal operates with precision in filling in newcomers to the enjoyable series. He is stronger with the medical stuff ("She had some swelling over the dorsum of her nose") than he is with the mystery. But he does manage a line or two that are a cut above ("Friends to the end, and this was the end").

Just what the doctor ordered for fans of this mystery series.

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