

The Department of Lost Dreams

by Katrina Dessavre

You would think that a department responsible for recovering readers from falling into the illusory realities of their books would merit an office in a less obvious state of disrepair. The exterior gives all the appearance of abandonment — letters disintegrating into nonsense, glass so hazy with grime that the more respectable brownstones across the street bear the smudged edges of a charcoal sketch.

If reading is a collective experience, there are some who pass through stories and others who get stuck in them, unable to distinguish between fact and fiction. It happens gradually, through no fault of their own except perhaps an unusually strong attachment to a word or phrase which steers them along a narrative thread too plausible not to explore.

Let them get lost, you might say, but the department would point out cases when the reader becomes a victim of his own curiosity. Just yesterday they had to clean up the mess of a man who got so absorbed in a murder mystery that he failed to anticipate, turning the last page, the knife in his back.

As you can imagine, these kinds of situations require discretion, so, in a way, it's convenient that no one in the department wants to bother with window cleaners and sign painters. Like many non-profits, the hierarchy is tangled at best and remains stuck in a strange loop of its own; those that seek a higher position inevitably end up where they started.

So how does department avoid the fate of their clients? It's the details — the peeling “R”, the clouds of mud encrusted on the glass — that lead them back, nine to five, until the weekend loosens their grip on reality in favor of more devious pursuits.

