

BOOKS

A tale of the imbalance of power

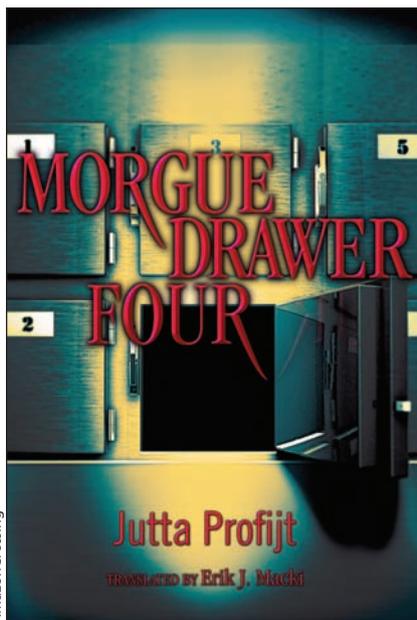
Morgue Drawer Four

Jutta Profijt (translation by Erik J. Macki)

AmazonCrossing; 2011

Bookstores these days abound with mashups, entertaining but largely artless books in which, for example, Elizabeth Bennett confronts the ambulatory deceased. But does one find these books in literature, or in sci-fi/fantasy? Given that there is not, so far as I know, a shelf in Chapters devoted to German Supernatural Forensic Buddy Comedies, where would Jutta Profijt's *Morgue Drawer Four* be found? Because it is a book that deserves to be found, although for a somewhat unexpected reason.

Briefly, it is the story, told in the posthumous first person, of Pascha, a low-life car thief who is murdered for reasons unknown and finds himself continuing to exist, unsatisfyingly, as a spirit. Because there's no physical evidence to suggest a crime, his death is quickly determined to be accidental. Pascha's ghost then does the only thing he can: he manipulates the sole living person who can perceive him, straight-laced forensic pathologist Martin Ganswein, into solving the crime. The uncomfortable partnership



between Pascha and Martin drives what follows.

In a bookstore, then, perhaps *Morgue Drawer Four* would be correctly placed in Health and Wellbeing, alongside patient narratives. While it is fiction, and fantastical fiction at that, it is essentially the story of a man with a health problem: he's dead. More than that, Pascha has to struggle to get the doctor with whom he's been saddled to take his concerns seriously.

Martin, the Felix of the pair, is entertainingly stuffy, but Pascha is the better drawn character. His appealingly cynical narrative voice reveals him to be self-interested, vulnerable, and, ultimately, dependent on Martin. Martin's best moments occur when he, perhaps hampered by an inexperience with patients who talk back, struggles to deal with Pascha's demands and intrusions.

As a murder mystery, *Morgue Drawer Four*, while lively, is pedestrian and perhaps even a little frivolous. But as a tale of the imbalance of power between the helpless and the helper, it is ironically substantive. Pascha often crosses whatever boundaries might exist in this unusual doctor-patient relationship out of pure desperation brought on by his immaterial condition. He haunts Martin because he is impotent to do anything else. The implausible premise, rather than making absurd escapism of *Morgue Drawer Four*, is its own important theme: Pascha is a patient who is literally impossible to deal with.

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