



This Enemy Town

By Marcia Talley
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Introduction

Hannah Ives is always ready to support others like herself who have been through the gauntlet of fear and uncertainty a diagnosis of cancer often brings. So when friend and struggling fellow survivor Dorothy Hart asks for help building sets for the Naval Academy's upcoming production of *Sweeney Todd*, Hannah readily agrees. But this means associating much too closely with an old foe -- a vindictive officer whose accusations once nearly destroyed Hannah's home life. And when one corpse too many appears during a dress rehearsal of the dark and bloody musical, Hannah finds herself accused of murder -- and enmeshed in a web of treachery and deception that rivals the one that damned the "Demon Barber." Caught up in a drama as sinister as any that has ever unfolded on stage, Hannah stands to lose everything unless she unmask a killer before the final curtain falls.

If you admire strong protagonists who are survivors, or if you love warm, soft-boiled mysteries centered around families, you'll fall in love with the wonderful world of Hannah Ives, and discover why

Laura Lippman says that Hannah is, "smart, brave, wonderfully human, the kind of woman you want for your new best friend."

Questions for Discussion

1. Hannah has come triumphantly through breast cancer and reconstructive surgery. What strengths has she gained, and how do they help her solve crimes? How does facing a life-threatening illness color one's outlook on life?
2. Secrets are hidden within secrets in *This Enemy Town*. As Hannah says of Emma, "I couldn't imagine living a double life like that." Are the characters justified in keeping their secrets? The admiral in hiding his affair? Hannah not sharing what she knows with the police? On page 36, Emma says of her sexual orientation, "They're not supposed to ask...but if they do, I'll lie through my teeth if I have to." And yet Midshipmen do not lie, cheat or steal. Discuss Emma's dilemma. Is the military's "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy justified?
3. Years ago Hannah felt betrayed by Paul. How does this affect her in the present? Has the admiral betrayed his country; the US Navy; his wife and family with his affair? Has Emma betrayed the Navy? Is breast cancer a betrayal by your own body?
4. *This Enemy Town* introduces some serious themes. Name them. Do Hannah's wry comments and humorous asides help mitigate the issues? Give an example. On page 132 Hannah says, "And I was already ahead of the cops because I knew I hadn't killed her." What is your favorite quip?
5. Can you find and list all the clues leading to the murderer? Did you figure out who it was? Did your suspicions shift and where?
6. Did Hannah do it? Come on. You know better. She's the heroine, but it does look bleak for Hannah. Trace the evidence against her. If you were a prosecuting attorney, would you feel you had a good case?
7. Discuss how Dorothy's misdiagnosis caused the tragedy of murder and the resultant chain of events. Are there any ways this could have been prevented?
8. Many books are written by insiders. Kathy Reichs is a forensic scientist, John Grisham is a lawyer. Marcia Talley worked four years at the Naval Academy and her husband directs music there. Do you think her inside knowledge gives *This Enemy Town* an air of authenticity? Cite examples that bring the Naval Academy to life.
9. A good book can immerse you in another time, place, or culture. Could you follow the story on road maps of Annapolis, Maryland, and suburban Washington D.C.? Did the local setting enhance the book for you? Have you resolved, I'm going to visit (or revisit) Annapolis?
10. "The play's the thing." Hamlet trapped his stepfather with a play within the play. *Sweeney Todd* was falsely accused by a judge with ulterior motives. Hannah was also falsely accused, and like Sweeney had to escape to prove her innocence, but Sweeney sought revenge. Do you feel Hannah found revenge? In *Sweeney Todd*, Sondheim makes us feel sympathy for Sweeney. How did Marcia Talley create sympathy for her murderer? Are you now planning to see *Sweeney Todd* or buy the CD?
11. Check out <http://www.defenselink.mil/contracts> where Hannah discovers the weird projects that the government is funding. What is your favorite? How do immediate needs in war conflict with the lengthy procurement process? Have you ever cut paperwork or corners because you felt you had to?

About the Author

Marcia Talley is the Agatha and Anthony award-winning author of four previous titles in the Hannah Ives mystery series: *Sing It to Her Bones*, *Unbreathed Memories*, *Occasion of Revenge* and *In Death's Shadow*. She is author/editor of two star-studded collaborative serial

novels, *Naked Came the Phoenix* and *I'd Kill for That*. Her prize-winning short stories appear in numerous collections.

Marcia lives in Annapolis, MD with her husband, Barry, a professor at the Naval Academy. When she isn't writing, she spends her time traveling or sailing.