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PREMIER ISSUE

Mary Higgins Clark

mystery

MAGAZINE

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New P.D. James Novella

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Ruth Rendell,
Walter Mosley,
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...and more

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Pulitzer Prize Winner

INSIDE THE MINDS OF

Tony Hillerman
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by Mary Higgins Clark

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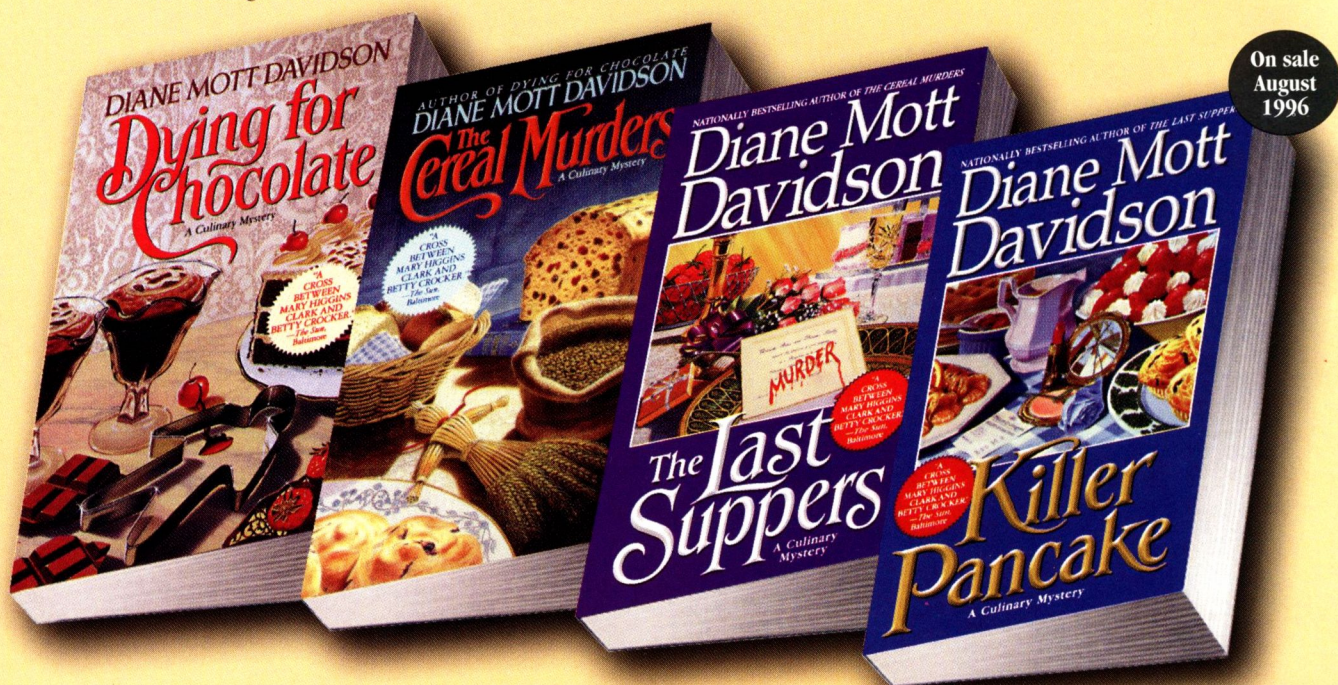
—*The Washington Times*

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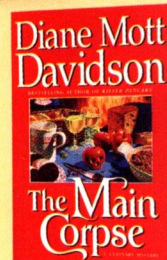
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in defense of suspense



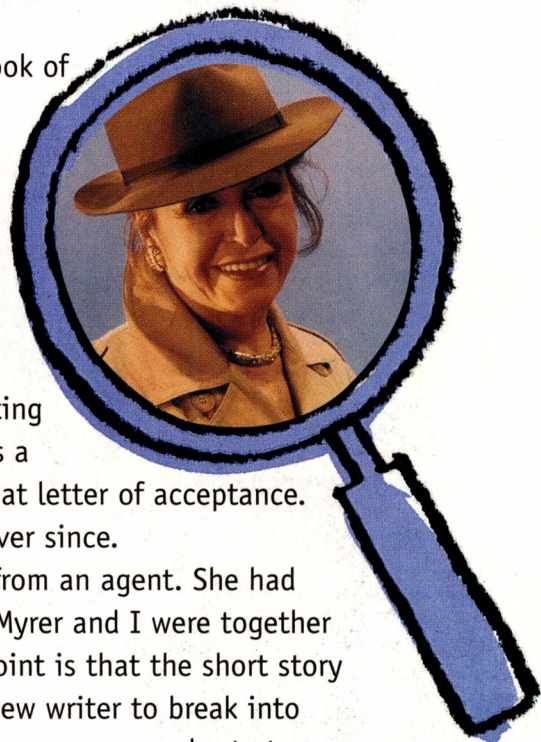
By the time I was in third grade I knew that my book of choice would always be a mystery. Creaking doors, footsteps in the night, whispering voices from a dark corner.... I shivered with delight, not realizing that I had been fortunate enough to join the good company of legions of devout mystery/suspense fans.

In our family, love of suspense is generational. My daughter Carol Higgins Clark has published three mysteries, and my 9- and 11-year-old granddaughters have begun writing their own stories. My first published story, "Stowaway," was a suspense tale, and I'll never forget the thrill of receiving that letter of acceptance. Lovingly framed, it's been gracing one of my bookshelves ever since.

When it was published, I received a call from an agent. She had read it and wanted to represent me! Pat Myrer and I were together for 30 years, until her retirement. The point is that the short story is often the best opportunity for a new writer to break into print and become noticed. Years ago, there were many short-story markets. Unfortunately, the picture has changed drastically. That was why, when *Family Circle* approached me with the concept of starting a new mystery magazine that could be a market for new as well as already published writers, I was delighted to become part of it.

In this issue there are stories by many of your favorite writers, as well as two by new writers selected from among the finalists in recent *Family Circle* Mystery/Suspense Contests. In the true spirit of the mystery genre, one of the authors, James Thorpe, had moved clear across the country since we'd last heard from him. We had to hire a private investigator to track him down!

Please enjoy reading this magazine as much as we enjoyed compiling it. It is our hope that this premier issue will be the first of many more to come.



Mary Higgins Clark



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Volume 22, Number 3

Mary Higgins Clark

mystery

MAGAZINE

The Inside Story



6

In Defense of Suspense 1

Why I love a mystery.
 by Mary Higgins Clark

Just the Facts, Ma'am 4

Crime by the numbers—the latest statistics on stickups, shakedowns and rubouts.
 Compiled by Nate Nickerson

5 Authors in Search of a Character 6

Inside the minds of five best-selling authors and their definitive detectives.
 by Cheryl Solimini

My Most Haunting Case 61

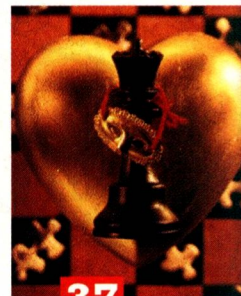
Where's Amy? A Pulitzer Prize-winning crime writer reports on the disappearance that has mystified her for more than 20 years.
 by Edna Buchanan

COVER: Photo by James Porto. Styled by Janet Rohan. Hair and makeup: Pascal Lewis. Coat, Aquascutum of London, 212-975-0250; hat, Hat Attack.



The Game's Afoot! 93

From party kits to CD-ROM's—the many ways mystery fans can play detective.
 by B. J. Rahn



37

The Beach-Chair Detective 94

Relax with a roundup of 12 hot novels, plus a poll of bookstore favorites.

Mysterious Sources 96

The who, what, where, when guide to criminal activities.

Murder You Write 99

Our contest invites you to put your most murderous thoughts on paper.

The Interrogation Room 100

Test your P.I. I.Q. with this quiz on crime classics.

Great Reads

The Mistletoe Murder 10

Death doesn't take a holiday, when some strange doings unite an estranged family in this cozy *howdunit*.
 by P. D. James

MINI-MYSTERY

The Case of the Crusty Bread

A stolen Stradivarius and a story that's hard to swallow. Follow the footprints starting on page 14 for clues to solving our mini-tale of deception.
 by Nate Nickerson



A Good Story 21

Leon thought he had the perfect setup, then *she* walked in.
by Donald E. Westlake

If You Can't Take the Heat 25

What are a couple of high-flying dames up to?
P.I. Sharon McCone investigates.
by Marcia Muller

The Case of the Missing Ham 30

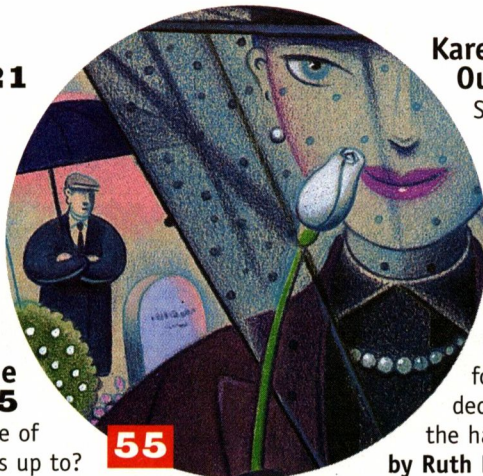
Gus Harlowe, soft-boiled detective, serves up a half-baked comic case.
by Liza Donnelly and Michael Maslin

The Profiteer 32

A misunderstanding and an outstanding debt lead to scandal at Henry Rathbone's exclusive men's club in London.
by Anne Perry

The Loving You Get 37

The spy who loved him had secrets of her own.
by John Gardner



55

Karen Makes Out 45

Suspense stalks a female Federal marshal who likes to flirt with danger.
by Elmore Leonard

Unacceptable Levels 53

His smoking was bad for his health, so she decided to help him kick the habit—for good.
by Ruth Rendell

Merry Widow 55

Eight husbands, eight funerals. It *could* just be a coincidence.
by Kate Wilhelm

Firebug 64

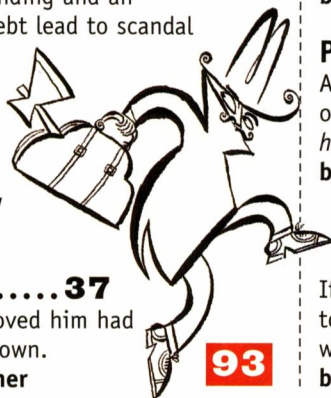
Meet Socrates Fortlow, an ex-con with a conscience—and some inside information.
by Walter Mosley

Phaedra 69

At an isolated, wind-swept cottage on the Cornish coast, the past *hauntingly* lives on.
by Chelsea Slaughter

I Left His Heart in San Francisco 73

If you have only a few months to live, why not try to get away with murder.
by James Thorpe



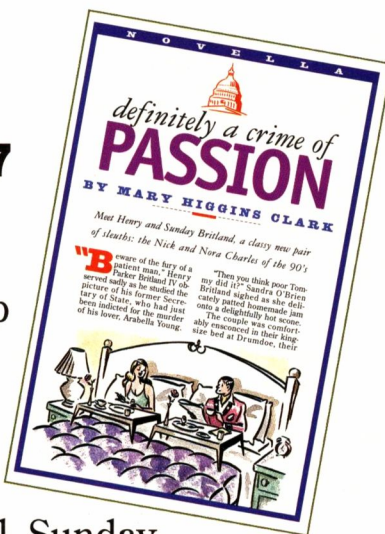
93

Bonus Thriller

Definitely a Crime of Passion 77

You can take it with you.... Pull out this juicy novella and slip it into your bag to savor the latest

adventure of two super sleuths: ex-President Henry Britland and his gal, Sunday.
by Mary Higgins Clark



"A KNOCKOUT"*

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*Publishers Weekly

*Stickups, blowups, shakedowns and shoot-outs.
There are a million stories in the naked city—
and even more statistics*

just the facts, ma'am

BY NATE NICKERSON

Annual number of arrests made in the U.S.: 14,036,300

Number made for murder: 23,400



Number of murders that involved a romantic triangle: 439; a coworker: 59

Number of household thefts committed while the victims were away: 2,130,584

While they were sleeping: 4,373,304

Number of highway robberies: 317,859



Chances that a homicide was committed using a firearm: 7 in 10

That it was committed using a knife: 1 in 8; using fists and/or feet: 1 in 20

Percentage of people who answered yes to the question, Do you happen to have any guns or revolvers in your home or garage?: 41



Percentage who say they store their firearms loaded and unlocked: 21

Mean medical expense of a gunshot wound (in 1990 dollars): \$8,725

Number of gunshot victims who received overnight hospital care: 33,420

Number who did not: 45,280

Median number of days a shooting victim was away from work: 30

Mean amount of pay lost by a gunshot victim: \$2,289

Number of assaults on federal officers: 766

Number on officers of the FBI: 24; the IRS: 10; the U.S. Postal Service: 25

Number of murders committed annually in a national park: 20

Number of hate crimes committed against someone who was either Catholic, Protestant, Jewish or Muslim: 1,275

Number committed against atheists: 3



Chances that a robbery occurred in a bank: 1 in 50

Chances that a person guilty of bank or finance fraud was not imprisoned: 1 in 3

Number of explosives incidents known to the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms: 4,862

Number that involved inactive hoax devices: 404

Number of bomb threats to U.S. Treasury Department facilities: 9

Number of bombing attempts in which the target was a nuclear facility: 1



Amount of damage done in that incident: \$100

Number of bombing attempts in which the target was a vending machine: 26

Average amount of damage done per incident: \$589

Number of bombs detected during airline passenger screening: 251

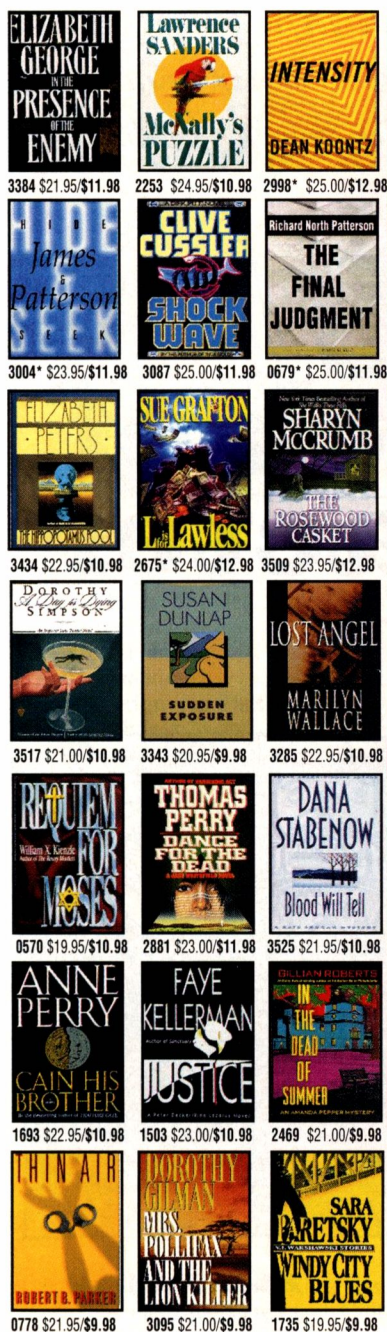
Number of firearms detected: 2,798

Number of people arrested for carrying bombs/firearms at an airport: 1,354

Number of seizures by U.S. Customs agents of ammunition: 879

Of intellectual property: 2,218





How to design the definitive detective? Fantasy and reality combine, as some well-known authors reveal clues to the creation of their even-better-known sleuths.

5 authors in search of a character

BY CHERYL SOLIMINI

P. D. James

Creating an ideal, and intimidating, inspector

To his fans, New Scotland Yard Commander Adam Dalgliesh is nearly as mysterious as the cases he investigates. The tall, dark and moody detective seems more comfortable talking about poetry than about what's in his heart.

"He's a very private person," confides his creator, P. D. James. This makes him fascinating to readers, but somewhat intimidating to his colleagues. "He's like a doctor," the author says. "You can't allow yourself to become involved with your suspects."

For Baroness James (who was made a life peer five years ago) the most important aspects of Dalgliesh's personality were fixed before she orchestrated his first appearance, in *Cover Her Face*, published in 1962: "I wanted him to have the qualities that were important to me in a man—intelligence, courage, generosity and sensitivity."

Combing the nine Dalgliesh novels for clues uncovers his fondness for architecture, wine and reading, particularly biography. And though readers may yearn for more intimate details of his life, with each book "he reveals himself more to me, really," muses James.

She drew on her own prejudices and interests to flesh out her character. "I didn't want to have to write too much about his love life, so I rather tidily killed off his wife and child [in childbirth] to make him a widower. Then I thought he should have some kind of artistic interest. I think he would like to have been a musician—but I really don't know enough about music. I do think I know something about the poetic impulse, so I decided to make him a poet."

An unlikely avocation for a cop? James dis-

agrees: "In some ways the poetry is the way he copes with the pain of the job."

James and Dalgliesh don't always see eye to eye. "In many ways, his thoughts are certainly my thoughts," admits James. "But I wouldn't do everything he does or react in all circumstances as he reacts. We're very alike in some respects in our response to events and people—an understanding of how human beings behave under stress."

In two of her books, *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman* and *The Skull Beneath the Skin*, James left all the detecting to her second recurring sleuth, private investigator Cordelia Gray. "I love writing about Cordelia!" James says enthusiastically. "It's very attractive to write about a woman detective for a change." (Her novella on page 10 is also Dalgliesh-less—though its title, "The Mistletoe Murder," nearly copies one found on a victim's bookshelf in James's most recent Dalgliesh case, *Original Sin*.)

Gray has been suggested as a romantic partner for Dalgliesh, but James backs off. "After the tragedy of his first wife, he finds it difficult to commit himself fully in an emotional or sexual relationship with a woman," she says. But she hints that it may be time for him to settle down. "The problem is, whomever I chose, there'd be a strong disagreement among my readers," James frets. "Half would think he was too good for the woman—the other half, that he was nothing like good enough!" □



Adam Dalgliesh

Age: middle-aged

Marital Status: widower

Occupation: Commander, New Scotland Yard

Home base: London

Preferred mode of transportation: his Jaguar

Faithful sidekick: none

Weapon of choice:

Metropolitan Police do not carry guns

Favorite beverage: claret

Last book read: *Gladstone*, by Roy Jenkins

Pet peeve: stupid questions

Fictional detective he'd most like to spend an evening with:

Inspector Morse

Would not be caught dead: fabricating evidence



Sara Paretsky

Struggling for success in a man's world

Private investigator V.I. Warshawski came to life for Sara Paretsky, then a marketing manager for a multinational insurance company in Chicago, as she sat in a business meeting in the mid-1970's. "These were the days," Paretsky recalls, "when it was very hard for women to start careers in management." As her male boss lectured her, Paretsky envisioned a character who, like herself and her women friends, was struggling to succeed in a man's world but, unlike them, felt free to speak her mind. "We didn't say what was in the 'thought balloons' over our heads, but V.I. would, because she didn't care if she got fired; she didn't care what people thought about her." So the tough-talking, no-nonsense Victoria Iphigenia Warshawski would do what Paretsky could not. "I'm such a cautious person," the writer says of herself.

Within months of that meeting, Paretsky had written 70 pages of what would become *Indemnity Only* (1982), P.I. V.I.'s public debut. "I'd read Raymond Chandler when I was in my early 20's," she says, "and was struck by how a woman who presents herself sexually is always the villain. That made me want to create a woman detective who, in a way, would turn the tables on Chandler."

But V.I. is not just "Philip Marlowe in drag," Paretsky points out. She's "a modern urban woman" dealing with the hard-edged issues like abusive relationships and street crime that concern Paretsky herself. "We live in troubled

times, in which we think it's acceptable to commit certain violent crimes, like attacks on abortion and family-planning clinics. I'm scared, and that comes out on the page."

Community service, not the insurance business, brought Paretsky to Chicago from Kansas in 1966, and she has passed her activism on to her character. Her last full-length novel, *Tunnel Vision*, had V.I. volunteering at a woman's shelter and trying to help a homeless family.

The Windy City's ethnic mix inspired V.I.'s Jewish-Italian-Polish background. And Paretsky finds herself exploring her own family history through the character of Dr. Lotty Herschel, who plays an important fictional role as V.I.'s friend and advisor. Lotty came to resemble Paretsky's paternal grandmother, a refugee from Lithuania and "a woman of extraordinary spirit," Paretsky says.

She admits that V.I.'s pit-dog personality can be wearing, even on her creator. Though she admires V.I.'s tenacity, loyalty and integrity, "I feel sorry for her a lot of times," Paretsky says, "because—you know—she's so cranky." In *Tunnel Vision*, she was very, very cranky!

That may be why Paretsky is taking a break from her well-known alter ego in her next book, a thriller tentatively titled *Voice Over*, which features a homeless opera singer. V.I.'s fans needn't worry, though. "I plan to stay with her as long as it's given me to write," Paretsky promises. "I never had a sister, so she's someone I can almost turn to like that. We don't always get along, but she's kind of the most important person in my life—next to my granddaughter. Oh, dear!" she says, laughing. "What does that say about me?"

Only that Paretsky keeps good company. □

V.I. Warshawski

Birth date: July 27, 1952

Marital status: divorced

Occupation: private eye

Home base: Chicago

Preferred mode of transportation: red Trans-Am

Faithful advisor:

Lotty Herschel, M.D.

Weapon of choice: an S&W

.38 and her sharp tongue

Favorite beverage: Johnny

Walker Black, neat

Last book read: *The Wages of*

Guilt, by Ian Buruma

Pet peeve: litterers

Fictional detective she'd

most like to spend an

evening with: Archie Goodwin

Would not be caught dead:

wearing an evening gown

with her Nikes

Walter Mosley

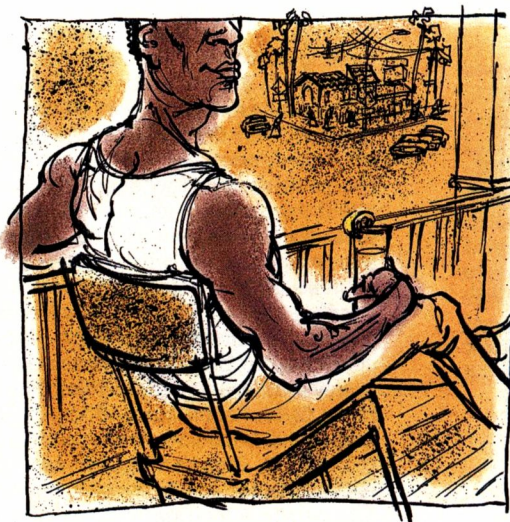
Taking the "Easy" way out

Ezekiel "Easy" Rawlins, Mosley's popular amateur sleuth and President Clinton's favorite, took a long time coming to life. To his creator, Easy seemed reluctant to make himself known. "[I was writing] a first-person narrative, but I didn't know who the 'first person' was," says Mosley, recalling the story he began in a writing class in 1988 that also introduced Raymond "Mouse" Alexander. It's Mouse who is described at the start of the story and who strolls in much later to say, "Well, hey, Easy, how you doin'?" finally giving Mosley's narrator a name.

While he worked by day as a computer programmer, Mosley developed Easy further in a novel, never published. Like that first short story, the novel was not detective fiction, but his next work was; and when *Devil in a Blue Dress* was published in 1990, it became an immediate success.

To create it, Mosley delved into his past. "The people I love and felt closest to my whole life were my family, who were from Texas and Louisiana," he explains. "They came to California after World War II. In being true to my heart, I began to tell the history of L.A. [where Mosley was born in 1952], and particularly the history of black people from the South moving to Los Angeles."

More than a little of this inspiration may have come from his father, who died in 1993. "There are some things from my father in Easy. But certainly not everything. I've tried ▶▶▶



Ezekiel "Easy" Rawlins

Age: born in 1920

Marital status:

divorced

Occupation:

custodial supervisor

and landlord

Home: West L. A.

Preferred trans-

portation: his legs

Favorite force of

nature: Raymond

"Mouse" Alexander

Weapon of choice:

his mind

Favorite beverage:

sour-mash whiskey,

but he's on the wagon

Last book read: *The*

Earth, by Emile Zola

Pet peeve: people who treat him

as if he weren't intelligent

Would like to spend an eve-

ning with: Socrates or Aristotle

Would not be caught dead:

striking his children

▶▶▶ to think where Easy came from. When my father read *Devil in a Blue Dress*, he said, 'Walter, I thought you said I was in this book somewhere.' I said, 'Yeah, Dad, can't you tell?' and he said, 'No.' In the end, Mosley feels, "Easy's a unique character—for me as well as for anyone else."

Unique, too, is Mosley's decision to place Easy in different eras. *Devil* was set in 1948; subsequent books jump to 1953, 1956 and then 1961. *A Little Yellow Dog*, to be published this summer, begins in 1963, after a period of optimism for blacks following John Kennedy's election as President. These time shifts allow Mosley to develop Easy against a backdrop of sociopolitical change. "Each time he's older," Mosley says, "and he also has different kinds of problems to work out in himself that are reflected in the society around him."

Does Mosley identify with Easy? "If we were friends," Mosley says, "I would be kind of frustrated with him, with his inability to do things. And then I'd be very proud of his ability to make changes in his life. For instance, he can't share his feelings in an honest way with people he's close to, especially women, because he came from a place where that is not acceptable. He's also been con-

ditioned to see actions by white people as always being informed by racism, which isn't true necessarily. So he's very often making wrong decisions based on his early conditioning. But one thing that's laudable about Easy, and also frightening, is that he takes action."

Mosley decided to give Easy a handicap no other hard-boiled detective has: children. (Easy unofficially adopted the now-teenaged Jesus in *A Red Death* and baby girl Feather in *White Butterfly*.) "In [Raymond Chandler's] *The Long Goodbye*," Mosley reminds us, "when Marlowe is thrown in jail because he won't give information, he says, 'I'll stay in jail.' For him that's not a very tough decision to make. Where is he going to go—back to his empty apartment? But what would you do if you had a five-year-old child at home?" Though having kids may make Easy's life harder, it's also a lot more full, Mosley points out.

The complex Easy is not Mosley's only recurring main character: Socrates Fortlow, a philosophical ex-con who's the conscience of his community, appears in several new short stories. (See "Firebug," page 64.) But even in his writings that feature neither Easy nor Socrates, Mosley tries to present a black male who, however flawed he may be, is nonetheless a hero. □



Thomas Lynley

Age: 36

Marital status: engaged

Occupation: Detective Inspector, New Scotland Yard

Home base: London

Preferred mode of transportation:

his silver Bentley

Faithful sidekick: Detective Sergeant Barbara Havers

Weapon of choice: his brain

Favorite beverage: whiskey

Last book read: *The Six Wives of Henry VIII*, by Antonia Fraser

Pet peeves: references to his upper-class title, Lord Asherton

Fictional detective he'd most like to spend an evening with: Elvis Cole

Would not be caught dead: wearing a new suit

Elizabeth George

Finding inspiration in the English countryside

The chill, damp countryside of England may be about as far as you can get from the sunny coast of California, where novelist Elizabeth George has lived and worked most of her life. But she sees nothing out of place in an American's writing about an aristocratic Scotland Yard detective who traipses around London and its environs investigating murders domestic and dastardly.

"I have a real connection to England, a sort of 'psychic connection' that allows me to understand when I've arrived at the right place to set a story," explains George, who first visited the country as a teenager. Now she makes about four trips a year to do research and scout the scenery, recounting everything she sees, hears and smells into a tape recorder.

Unlike other mystery writers with a featured, ongoing sleuth—in George's case, Detective Inspector Thomas Lynley—she gives almost equal time to the rest of her continuing cast: Lynley's colleague, Sgt. Barbara Havers; Lady Helen Clyde, his on-again/off-again fiancée; his best friend, Simon St. James, a forensic scientist; and St. James's wife, Deborah, a photographer. The ups and downs of their complicated interpersonal relationships are often as suspenseful as the author's psychologically complex plots. (George, a former English teacher, has a master's degree in counseling.)

The reserved St. James, a forensic scientist, was George's first choice as a crime solver. "My original intention many years ago was to create what Edgar Allan Poe established in C. Au-

guste Dupin—the formula detective, who was characterized by eccentricity, brilliance and the tendency toward isolation—and perfected by Arthur Conan Doyle in Sherlock Holmes." But it was the rich, titled Lynley—"created for my own amusement" to give St. James a problem to solve—who eventually took center stage.

At Lynley's side from the beginning has been the prickly young detective sergeant, Barbara Havers, who—however lacking in self-esteem—is not shy about upbraiding her sometimes self-righteous boss. "She's there so that the reader is allowed to dislike Lynley," George says, laughing. And the working-class sergeant is a welcome foil to the upper-class inspector. "I was trying to represent the different levels of British society," George explains.

A Great Deliverance, her first book, was published in 1988. At first, critics in Great Britain tended to dismiss George as a sort of interloper. "Whether it was my Brit-speak or whether they wanted to take me to task about my police procedures, they always found one little thing to set me straight on," she recalls. Since then, she has won both critical respect and a growing readership. Her newest, *In the Presence of the Enemy*, became an instant best seller this spring.

Even if she must be especially careful that the manners and speech of her characters are certifiably British, their personalities come from somewhere closer to home. "I think the introspection that is characteristic of St. James is very characteristic of me," George says. "Helen's self-doubt, Deborah's creative nature—which is oftentimes histrionic—and Lynley's passion, and his inability to control his passion, is very much a part of me. And Havers's irreverence is *certainly* me." □

Tony Hillerman

Coming home to his Southwestern roots, and bringing Leaphorn and Chee along

Having grown up with Potawatomi and Seminole neighbors and attended a Native American school, Tony Hillerman has no trouble entering the hearts and minds of his Navajo policemen, Joe Leaphorn and Jim Chee.

"I don't really think there are racial differences, but there are cultural differences, molded by landscape and economy," explains the Oklahoma-born Hillerman. "If you live in an impoverished and isolated circumstance where people are scarce and you're outdoors a lot, it affects the way your mind works."

Hillerman's understanding was formed by his childhood in the Depression-era Dust Bowl, and later as a journalist in Oklahoma, Texas and finally New Mexico, where his novels are set. While on convalescent leave from the Army during World War II, he hauled oil-field equipment to the Navajo reservations and watched part of a curing ceremony for Navajo marines, which figured 25 years later in *The Blessing Way*, his first book.

Hillerman started it just to see if he could write a mystery novel—a warm-up to what he hoped would be his next, more "important" book. In it, Navajo Tribal Police Lt. Leaphorn was a "throwaway," a friend and source of information for the main character, a white anthropologist. Even Leaphorn's name was an afterthought, inspired by a book not on Native American lore but a story in Greek mythology. "There's not a Navajo in the world with that

wasn't going into the serial-character business." But after it was finished, he still wasn't satisfied. "I'd met quite a few Navajos and I'd tried to make Leaphorn a more genuine product of that rural, strongly philosophical culture, but still I could see opportunities to do it better." A third Leaphorn book, *Listening Woman*, followed.

A desire to illuminate the beauties and complexities of Navajo beliefs led to *People of Darkness* and a new central character. Set on the so-called Checkerboard, on the eastern side of the reservation, the book deals with the clash of cultures. "There's a whole cluster of different tribes in that area, as well as the old-family Spanish-Americans and the oil-field people out of Texas and the fundamentalist preachers and everybody," Hillerman explains. "I wanted a younger, traditional Navajo looking at all this with interest and amazement. But by then, Leaphorn in my mind was too old and sophisticated to be impressed by it." And so Sgt. Jim Chee was born.

The romantic Chee—often torn between his police duties and his Navajo religion—worked alone in that book, and in the next two. Then Chee and Leaphorn joined forces in *Skinwalkers*; they've worked together ever since. In their most recent collaboration, *Sacred Clowns*, Chee is now second in command to Leaphorn in the Special Investigations Office.

The sometimes uneasy relationship between the pragmatic middle-aged lieutenant and idealistic 30-something sergeant gives Hillerman a chance to show the range of attitudes among modern Navajos, but also reveals something about himself. Chee is a composite of the young people Hillerman encountered in his 20 years as a journalism professor at the University of New Mexico, especially students of "those great yeasty days"—the late 60's and early 70's. "You loved to teach them, but, boy, they got on your nerves!" he says.

"Leaphorn's a lot like I am," Hillerman admits. "He's not one for being politically correct, and he follows a set of rules that aren't necessarily written down. He believes that you don't get an effect without a cause. He doesn't believe in coincidences, and neither do I."

In the book Hillerman is writing now, Leaphorn will retire, but his 71-year-old creator shows no sign of following suit. □



Joe Leaphorn

Age: 60's

Marital status: widowed

Occupation: Lieutenant, Navajo Tribal Police

Home base: Window Rock, New Mexico

Preferred mode of transportation: GMC Jimmy

Faithful sidekick:

Sgt. Jim Chee

Weapon of choice:

.38 pistol

Favorite beverage: coffee

Last book read: *Outline of History*, by H.G. Wells

Pet peeve: whites' ignorance of Navajo culture

Fictional detective he'd most like to spend an evening with:

Sherlock Holmes

Would not be caught dead: drinking alcohol

"Leaphorn's a lot like I am . . . he follows a set of rules that aren't necessarily written down."

name," Hillerman says now, laughing. "After that I was very meticulous—all the names are from families I know or from the Navajo community phone book."

When *The Blessing Way* was accepted for publication, with the proviso that he change the ending, Hillerman seized the opportunity to expand Leaphorn's role. "I had become enamored of this guy and the possibilities of him." The Leaphorn novel was published in 1970.

Next came his non-Navajo book, *The Fly on the Wall*, a suspense featuring a character closer to Hillerman, an Albuquerque journalist. "But as I was writing it, I kept thinking of all the opportunities I'd missed with Leaphorn," Hillerman remembers. "So then I produced *Dance Hall of the Dead* to do it right. I've been trying to get it right ever since."

Even with his second novel, "I never intended to use Leaphorn again," Hillerman says. "I

The Mistletoe Murder

BY P.D. JAMES

A Crime for Christmas

O

A delicious novella from Britain's reigning queen of crime, involving a manor house, feuding relatives—and a nasty family secret

NE OF THE MINOR HAZARDS of being a best-selling crime novelist is the ubiquitous question, "And have you ever been personally involved with a real-life murder investigation?" a question occasionally asked with a look and tone which suggest that the Murder Squad of the Metropolitan Police might with advantage dig up my back garden. I invariably reply "No," partly from reticence, partly because the truth would take too long to tell and my part in it, even after fifty years, is difficult to justify. But now, at seventy, the last survivor of that extraordinary Christmas of 1940, the story can surely safely be told if only for my own satisfaction.

I'll call it "The Mistletoe Murder." Mistletoe plays only a small part in the mystery, but I've always liked alliteration in my titles. I have changed the names. There is now no one living to be hurt in feelings or reputation, but I don't see why the dead should be denied a similar indulgence.

I was eighteen when it happened, a young war widow; my husband was killed two weeks after our marriage, one of the first RAF pilots to be shot down in single combat. I had joined the WAAF afterward, partly because I had convinced myself it would have pleased him, but primarily

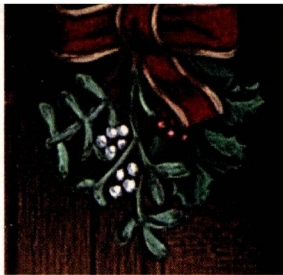
out of the need to assuage my grief by a new life, new responsibilities.

It didn't work. Bereavement is like a serious illness. One dies or one survives, and the medicine is time, not a change of scene. I went through my preliminary training in a mood of grim determination to see it through, but when my grandmother's invitation came, just six weeks before Christmas, I accepted with relief.

It solved a problem for me. I was an only child and my father, a doctor, had volunteered as a middle-aged recruit to the RAMC; my mother had taken herself off to America. A number of school friends, some also in the forces, wrote inviting me for Christmas, but I couldn't face even the subdued festivities of wartime and feared I should be a skeleton at their family feast.

I was curious, too, about my mother's childhood home. She had never got on with her mother and after her marriage the rift was complete. I had met my grandmother only once in childhood and remembered her as formidable, sharp-tongued and not particularly sympathetic to the young. But I was no longer young, except in years, and what her letter tactfully adumbrated—a warm house with plenty of wood fires, home cooking and good wine, peace and quiet—were





▶▶▶ just what I craved. There would be no other guests, but my cousin, Paul, hoped to be on leave for Christmas. I was curious to meet him.

He was my only surviving cousin, the younger son of my mother's brother and about six years older than I. We had never met, partly because of the family feud, partly because his mother was French and much of his childhood had been spent in that country.

His elder brother had died when I was at school. I had a vague childhood memory of some disreputable secret, whispered about but never explained. My grandmother, in her letter, assured me that, apart from the three of us, there would only be the butler, Seddon, and his wife. She had taken the trouble to find out the time of a country bus which would leave Victoria at 5 P.M. on Christmas Eve and take me as far as the nearest town, where Paul would meet me.

The horror of the murder, the concentration on every hour of that traumatic Boxing Day, has diminished my memory of the journey and arrival. I recall Christmas Eve in a series of images, like a gritty black-and-white film, disjointed, a little surreal. The bus, blacked out, crawling, lights dimmed, through the unlit waste of the countryside under a reeling moon; the tall figure of my cousin coming forward out of the darkness to greet me at the terminus; sitting beside him, rug-wrapped, in his sports car as we drove through darkened villages through a sudden swirl of snow.

But one image is clear and magical: my first sight of Stutleigh Manor. It loomed up out of the darkness, a stark shape against a gray sky pierced with a few high stars. And then the moon moved from behind a cloud and the house was revealed: beauty, symmetry and mystery bathed in white light.

Five minutes later I followed the small circle of light from Paul's torch through the porch with its country paraphernalia of walking sticks, brogues, rubber boots and umbrellas, under the blackout curtain and into the warmth and brightness of the square hall. I re-

member the huge log fire in the hearth, the family portraits, the air of shabby comfort, and the mixed bunches of holly and mistletoe above the pictures and doors, which were the only Christmas decoration. My grandmama came slowly down the wide wooden stairs to greet me, smaller than I had remembered, delicately boned and slightly shorter even than my five-foot-three. But her handshake was surprisingly firm and, looking into the sharp, intelligent eyes, at the set of the obstinate mouth, so like my mother's, I knew that she was still formidable.

I was glad I had come, glad to meet for the first time my only cousin, but my grandmother had in one respect misled me. There was to be a second guest, a distant relation of the family, who had driven from London earlier and arrived before me. I met Rowland Maybrick for the first time when we gathered for drinks before dinner in a sitting room to the left of the main hall. I disliked him on sight and was grateful to my grandmother for not having suggested that he should drive me from London. The crass insensitivity of his greeting—"You didn't tell me, Paul, that I was to meet a pretty young widow"—reinforced my initial prejudice against what, with the intolerance of youth, I thought of as a type.

He was in the uniform of a flight lieutenant but without wings—Wingless Wonders, we used to describe them—darkly handsome, full-mouthed under the thin moustache, his eyes amused and speculative, a man who fancied his chances. I had met his type before and hadn't expected to encounter it at the Manor.

I learned that in civilian life he was an antique dealer. Paul, perhaps sensing my disappointment at finding that I wasn't the only guest, explained that the family needed to sell some valuable coins. Rowland, who specialized in coinage, was to sort and price them with a view to finding a purchaser. And he wasn't only interested in coins. His gaze ranged over furniture, pictures, porcelain and bronze, his long fingers touched and caressed as if he were mentally pricing them for sale. I suspected that, given half a chance, he would have pawed me and

assessed my second-hand value.

My grandmother's butler and cook, indispensable small-part characters in any country house murder, were respectful and competent but defi-

"Hercule Poirot, a Belgian detective who became internationally famous, has died in England. His age is unknown."

—obituary on page 1,
The New York Times,
August 6, 1975

"Blood is certainly stickier than water."

—Superintendent Perry
Trethrowan, *Sheer Torture*, 1981,
by Robert Barnard

The Case of the Crusty Bread

A Mini-Tale Of Deception "Geez, it's almost midnight and still hot as Hades," grumbled Detective Gina Stromboli, sweltering as she waited on a Thursday night in front of the Parkside Towers. "I'd be cooler if I'd stayed working the ovens at my father's bakery, instead of joining the force."

BY NATE NICKERSON

cient in seasonal goodwill. My grandmother, if she gave the matter thought, would probably have described them as faithful and devoted retainers, but I had my doubts. Even in 1940 things were changing. Mrs. Seddon seemed to be both overworked and bored, a depressing combination, while her husband barely contained the lugubrious resentment of a man calculating how much more he could have earned as a war worker at the nearest RAF base.

I liked my room; the four-poster with its faded curtains, the comfortable low chair beside the fire, the elegant little writing desk, the prints and watercolors, fly-blown in their original frames. Before getting into bed I put out the bedside light and drew aside the blackout curtain. High stars and moonlight, a dangerous sky. But this was Christmas Eve. Surely they wouldn't fly tonight. And I thought of women all over Europe drawing aside their curtains and looking up in hope and fear at the menacing moon.

I woke early next morning, missing the jangle of Christmas bells, bells which in 1940 would have heralded invasion. Next day the police were to take me through every minute of that Christmas, and every detail remains clearly in memory fifty-two years later.

After breakfast we exchanged presents. My grandmother had obviously raided her jewel chest for her gift to me of a charming enamel and gold brooch, and I suspect that Paul's offering, a Victorian ring, a garnet surrounded with seed pearls, came from the same source.

I had come prepared. I parted with two of my personal treasures in the cause of family reconciliation, a first edition of *A Shropshire Lad* for Paul and an early edition of *Diary of a Nobody* for my grandmother. They were well received.

Rowland's contribution to the Christmas rations was three bottles of gin, packets of tea, coffee and sugar, and a pound of butter, probably filched from RAF stores. Just before midday the depleted local church choir arrived, sang half a dozen unaccompanied carols embarrassingly out of tune, were grudgingly rewarded by Mrs. Seddon with mulled wine and mince pies and, with obvious relief, slipped out again through the blackout curtains to their Christmas dinners.

After a traditional meal

Just then, a ten-year-old Chevy screeched to a halt, then backed into the nearest open space.

served at one o'clock, Paul asked me to go for a walk. I wasn't sure why he wanted my company. He was almost silent as we tramped doggedly over the frozen furrows of desolate fields and through birdless copses as joylessly as if on a route march. The snow had stopped falling but a thin crust lay crisp and white under a gun-metal sky.

As the light faded, we returned home and saw the back of the blacked-out manor, a gray L-shape against the whiteness. Suddenly, with an unexpected change of mood, Paul began scooping up the snow. No one receiving the icy slap of a snowball in the face can resist retaliation, and we spent twenty minutes or so like schoolchildren, laughing and hurling snow at each other and at the house, until the snow on the lawn and gravel path had been churned into slush.

The evening was spent in desultory talk in the sitting room, in dozing and reading. The supper was light, soup and herb omelettes—a welcome contrast to the heaviness of the goose and Christmas pudding—served very early, as was the custom, so that the Seddons could get away to spend the night with friends in the village.

After dinner we moved again to the ground-floor sitting room. Rowland put on the gramophone, then suddenly seized my hands and said, "Let's dance." The gramophone was the kind that automatically played a series of records and as one popular disc dropped after another—"Jeepers Creepers," "Beer Barrel Polka," "Tiger Rag," "Deep Purple"—we waltzed, tangoed, fox-trotted, quick-stepped round the sitting room and out into the hall.

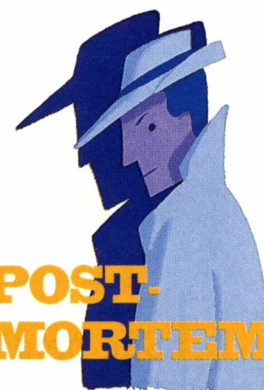
Rowland was a superb dancer. I hadn't danced since Alastair's death, but now, caught up in the exuberance of movement and rhythm, I forgot my antagonism and concentrated on following his increasingly complicated lead. The spell was broken when, breaking into a waltz across the hall and tightening his grasp, he said, "Our young hero seems a little subdued. Perhaps he's having second thoughts about this job he's volunteered for."

"What job?"

"Can't you guess? French mother, Sorbonne-educated, speaks French like a native, knows the country. He's a natural."

I didn't reply. I wondered how he knew, if he had a right to know. He went on, "There comes a moment when these gallant chaps realize that it isn't playacting anymore. From now on it's for real. Enemy territory

beneath you, not dear old Blighty; real ▶▶▶



1. The Electrostatic Detection Apparatus is used in forensic science to read indentations left on surfaces, such as a pad of paper, from the pressure of a writing implement. It is so sensitive it can pick up a message 15 to 20 sheets beneath the top one.

2. Paper bags are better than plastic for bagging weapons and other clues found at the scene of a crime: moisture can gather in plastic bags, tampering with the evidence.

3. One way a medical examiner can determine time of death is by taking the victim's liver temperature.

4. The scent of death attracts insects to a corpse. Forensic entomologists study the bugs' life cycles to establish time of death and whether a victim was killed indoors or out, in the day or night, in warm or cold, sun or shade.

5. Extremely obese people do not always develop rigor mortis after death.



▶▶▶ Germans, real bullets, real torture chambers and real pain.”

I thought: And real death, and slipped out of his arms hearing, as I reentered the sitting room, his low laugh at my back.

Shortly before ten o'clock my grandmother went up to bed, telling Rowland that she would get the coins out of the study safe and leave them with him. He was due to drive back to London the next day; it would be helpful if he could examine them tonight. He sprang up at once and they left the room together. Her final words to Paul were, "There's an Edgar Wallace play on the Home Service which I may listen to. It ends at eleven.

She held out her hand to me; the fingers were limp, the grasp different from her usual firm handshake.

Come to say good night then, if you will, Paul. Don't leave it any later."

As soon as they'd left, Paul said, "Let's have the music of the enemy," and replaced the dance records with Wagner. As I read, he got out a pack of cards from the small desk and played a game of patience, scowling at the cards with furious concentration while the Wagner, much too loud, beat against my ears. When the carriage clock on the mantelpiece struck eleven, heard in a lull in the music, he swept the cards together and said, "Time to say good night to Grandmama. Is there anything you want?"

"No," I said, a little surprised, "Nothing."

What I did want was the music a little less loud, and when he left the room I turned it down. He was back very quickly. When the police questioned me next day, I told them that I estimated that he was away for about three minutes. It certainly couldn't have been longer. He said calmly, "Grandmama wants to see you."

We left the sitting room together and crossed the hall. It was then that my senses, preternaturally acute, noticed two facts. One I told the police; the other I didn't. Six mistletoe berries had dropped from the mixed bunch of mistletoe and holly fixed to the lintel above the library door and lay like scattered pearls on the polished floor. And at the foot of the stairs there was a small puddle of water.

Seeing my glance, Paul took out his handkerchief and mopped it up. He said, "I should be able to take a drink up to Grandmama without spilling it."

She was propped up in bed under the canopy of the four-poster, looking diminished, no longer formidable, but a tired, very old woman. I saw with pleasure that she had been reading the book I'd given her. It lay open on the round bedside table beside the table

lamp, her wireless, the elegant little clock, the small half-full carafe of water with a glass resting over its rim, and a porcelain model of a hand rising from a frilled cuff on which she had placed her rings. She held out her hand to me; the fingers were limp, the hand cold and listless, the grasp very different from the firm handshake with which she had first greeted me. She said, "Just to say good night, my dear, and thank you for coming. In wartime, family feuds are an indulgence we can no longer afford."

On impulse I bent down and kissed her forehead. It was moist under my lips. The gesture was a mistake. Whatever it was she wanted from me, it wasn't affection.

We returned to the sitting room. Paul asked me if I drank whiskey. When I said that I disliked it, he fetched from the drinks cupboard a bottle for himself and a decanter of claret, then took up the pack of cards again, and suggested that he should teach me poker.

So that was how I spent Christmas night from about 11:10 until nearly two in the morning, playing endless games of cards, listening to Wagner and Beethoven, hearing the crackle and hiss of burning logs as I kept up the fire, watching my cousin drink steadily until the whiskey bottle was empty.

In the end I accepted a glass of claret. It seemed both churlish and censorious to let him drink alone. The carriage clock struck 1:45 before he roused himself and said, "Sorry, cousin. Rather drunk. Be glad of your shoulder. To bed, to sleep, perchance to dream."

We made slow progress up the stairs. I opened his door while he stood propped against the wall. The smell of whiskey was only faint on his breath. Then with my help he staggered over to the bed, crashed down and was still.

At eight o'clock next morning Mrs. Seddon brought in my tray of early-morning tea, switched on the electric fire and went quietly out with an expressionless, "Good morning, madam." Half awake, I reached over to pour the first cup when there was a hurried knock, the door opened, and Paul entered. He was already dressed and, to my surprise, showed no signs of a hangover.

"You haven't seen Maybrick this morning, have you?" he said.

"I've only just woken up."

"Mrs. Seddon told me his bed hadn't been slept in. I've just checked. He doesn't appear to be anywhere in the house. And the library door is locked."

Some of his urgency conveyed itself to me. He held out my dressing gown and I slipped into it and, after a second's thought, pushed my feet into my outdoor shoes, not my bedroom slippers. I said, "Where's the library key?"

Stromboli saw the parking pass for Monticello Raceway on the Chevy dashboard before focusing on the wild-haired, wizened man peering over the steering wheel.

He had been killed by a blow of immense force. . . the face of his heavy gold wristwatch smashed to glittering fragments.

"On the inside of the library door. We've only the one key."

The hall was dim, even when Paul switched on the light, and the fallen berries from the mistletoe over the study door still gleamed milk-white on the dark wooden floor. I tried the door and, leaning down, looked through the keyhole. Paul was right, the key was in the lock. He said, "We'll get in through the French windows. We may have to break the glass."

We went out by a door in the north wing. The air stung my face. The night had been frosty and the thin covering of snow was still crisp except where Paul and I had frolicked the previous day. Outside the library was a small patio about six feet in width leading to a gravel path bordering the lawn.

The double set of footprints were plain to see. Someone had entered the library by the French windows and then left by the same route. The footprints were large, a little amorphous, probably made, I thought, by a smooth-soled rubber boot, the first set partly overlaid by the second. Paul warned, "Don't disturb the prints. We'll edge our way close to the wall."

The door in the French windows was closed, but not locked. Paul, his back hard against the window, stretched out a hand to open it, slipped inside and drew aside first the blackout curtain and then the heavy brocade. I followed.

The room was dark except for the single green-shaded lamp on the desk. I moved slowly toward it in fascinated disbelief, my heart thudding, hearing behind me a rasp as Paul violently swung back the two sets of curtains. The room was suddenly filled with a clear morning light annihilating the green glow, making horribly visible the thing sprawled over the desk.

He had been killed by a blow of immense force which had crushed the top of his head. Both his arms were stretched out sideways, resting on the desk. His left shoulder sagged as if it, too, had been struck and the hand was a spiked mess of splintered bones in a pulp of congealed blood.

On the desktop the face of his heavy gold wristwatch had been smashed and tiny fragments of glass glittered like diamonds. Some of the coins had rolled onto the carpet and the rest littered the desk top, sent jangling and scattering by the force of the blows.

Looking up, I checked that the key was indeed in the lock. Paul was peering at the smashed wristwatch. He said: "Half-past ten. Either he was killed then or we're

meant to believe he was."

There was a telephone beside the door and I waited, not moving, while he got through to the exchange and called the police. Then he unlocked the door and we went out together. He turned to relock it—it turned

noiselessly as if recently oiled—and pocketed the key. It was then that I noticed that we had squashed some of the fallen mistletoe berries into pulp.

Inspector George Blandy arrived within thirty minutes. He was a solidly built countryman, his straw-colored hair so thick that it looked like thatch above the square, weather-mottled face. He spoke and moved with deliberation, whether from habit or because he was still recovering from an overindulgent Christmas it was impossible to say. He was followed soon afterward by the Chief Constable himself.

Paul had told me about him. Sir Rouse Armstrong was an ex-colonial governor, and one of the last of the old school of Chief Constables, obviously past normal retiring age. He was very tall with the face of a meditative eagle, who greeted my grandmother by her Christian name and followed her upstairs to her private sitting room with the grave conspiratorial air of a man called in to advise on some urgent and faintly embarrassing family business. I had the feeling that Inspector Blandy was slightly intimidated by his presence and I hadn't much doubt who would be effectively in charge of this investigation.

I expect you are thinking that this is typical Agatha Christie, and you are right; that's exactly how it struck me at the time. But one forgets, homicide rate excepted, how similar my mother's England was to Dame Agatha's Mayhem Parva. And it seems entirely appropriate that the body should have been discovered in the library, that most fatal room in popular British fiction.

The body couldn't be moved until the police surgeon arrived. He was at an amateur pantomime in the local town and it took some time to reach him. Dr. Bywaters was a rotund, short, self-important little man, red-haired and red-faced, whose natural irascibility would, I thought, have deteriorated into active ill humor if the crime had been less portentous than murder and the place less prestigious than the Manor.

Paul and I were tactfully excluded from the study while he made his examination. Grandmama had decided to remain upstairs in her sitting room. The Seddons, fortified by the consciousness of an unassailable alibi, were occupied making and serving sandwiches and endless cups of coffee and tea, and seemed for the first time to be enjoying themselves.

Rowland's Christmas offer- ▶▶▶

"You're the police? Thank goodness!" the man cried, as he jumped out of the car, pocketed his cellular phone and rushed to open the lobby door with his key. "I'm Vladimir Horrorwitts—thanks for agreeing to meet me here at this hour. I think my apartment's been burglarized!"





►►►ings were coming in useful and, to do him justice, I think the knowledge would have amused him a great deal. Heavy footsteps tramped backward and forward across the hall, cars

arrived and departed, telephone calls were made. The police measured, conferred, photographed.

The body was eventually taken away, shrouded on a stretcher and lifted into a sinister little black van while Paul and I watched from the sitting room window. Our fingerprints had been taken, the police explained, to exclude them from any found on the desk. It was an odd sensation to have my fingers gently held and pressed onto what I remember as a kind of inkpad.

We were, of course, questioned, separately and together. I can remember sitting opposite Inspector Blandy, his large frame filling one of the armchairs in the sitting

was rising from the chair. Weapon, a heavy blunt instrument. The skull was crushed but there was little bleeding—well, you saw for yourselves. I'd say he was a tall murderer, Maybrick was over six-foot-two. He came through the French windows and went out the same way.

"We can't get much from the footprints, too amorphous, but they're plain enough, the second set overlaying the first. Could have been a casual thief, perhaps a deserter, we've had one or two incidents lately. The blow could have been delivered with a rifle butt. It would be about right for reach and weight. The library door to the garden may have been left open.

"Your grandmother told Seddon she'd see to the locking up but asked Maybrick to check on the library before he went to bed. In the blackout the murderer wouldn't have known the library was occupied. Probably tried the door, went in, caught a gleam of the money and killed almost on impulse."

Paul asked, "Then why not steal the coins?"

"Saw that they weren't legal tender. Difficult to get rid of. Or he might have panicked

or thought he heard a noise."

"And the locked door into the hall?" Paul questioned.

"Murderer

The Chief Constable paused, and his face assumed a look of cunning. "How well did you know Maybrick?" he asked my cousin, Paul.

room, his heavy legs planted on the carpet, as conscientiously he went through every detail of Christmas Day. It was only then that I realized that I had spent almost every minute of it in the company of my cousin.

At 7:30 the police were still in the house. Paul invited the Chief Constable to dinner, but he declined, less, I thought, because of any reluctance to break bread with possible suspects than from a need to return to his grandchildren.

Before leaving he paid a prolonged visit to my grandmother in her room, then returned to the sitting room to report on the results of the day's activities.

I wondered whether he would have been as forthcoming if the victim had been a farm laborer and the place the local pub. He delivered his account with the staccato self-satisfaction of a man confident that he's done a good day's work.

"I'm not calling in the Yard. I did eight years ago when we had our last murder. Big mistake. All they did was upset the locals. The facts are plain enough. He was killed by a single blow delivered with great force from across the desk and while he

saw the key and turned it to prevent the body being discovered before he had a chance to get well away."

The Chief Constable paused and his face assumed a look of cunning which sat oddly on the aquiline, somewhat supercilious features. He said, "An alternative theory is that Maybrick locked himself in. Expected a secret visitor and didn't want to be disturbed. One question I have to ask you, my boy. Rather delicate. How well did you know Maybrick?"

Paul said, "Only slightly. He's a second cousin."

"You trusted him? Forgive my asking."

"We had no reason to distrust him. My grandmother wouldn't have asked him to sell the coins for her if she'd had any doubts. He is family. Distant, but still family."

"Of course. Family." He paused, then went on, "It did occur to me that this could have been a staged attack which went over the top. He could have arranged with an accomplice to steal the coins. We're asking the Yard to look at his London connections."

I was tempted to say that a faked attack which left the pretend victim with a pulped

**"Don't poke
your nose
through other
people's
keyholes. You
may get it
stuck."**

—Fergy, *Down
the Garden Path*, 1985,
by Dorothy Cannell

brain had gone spectacularly over the top, but I remained silent. The Chief Constable could hardly order me out of the sitting room—after all, I had been present at the discovery of the body—but I sensed his disapproval at my obvious interest. A young woman of proper feeling would have followed my grandmother's example and taken to her room.

Paul said, "Isn't there something odd about that smashed watch? The fatal blow to the head looked so deliberate. But then he strikes again and smashes the hand. Could that have been to establish the exact time of death? If so, why? Or could he have altered the watch before smashing it? Could Maybrick have been killed later?"

The Chief Constable was indulgent to this fancy. "A bit farfetched, my boy. I think we've established the time of death pretty accurately. Bywaters puts it at between ten and eleven, judging by the degree of rigor. And we can't be sure in what order the killer struck. He could have hit the hand and shoulder first, and then the head. Or he could have gone for the head, then hit out wildly in panic. Pity you didn't hear anything, though."

Paul said, "We had the gramophone on pretty loudly and the doors and walls are very solid. And I'm afraid that by eleven-thirty I wasn't in a state to notice much."

As Sir Rouse rose to go, Paul asked, "I'll be glad to have the use of the library if you've finished with it, or do you want to seal the door?"

"No, my boy, that's not necessary. We've done all we need to do. No prints, of course, but then we didn't expect to find them. They'll be on the weapon, no doubt, unless he wore gloves. But he's taken the weapon away with him."

The house seemed very quiet after the police had left. My grandmother, still in her room, had dinner on a tray, and Paul and I, perhaps unwilling to face that empty chair in the dining room, made do with soup and sandwiches in the sitting room.

I was restless, physically exhausted; I was also a little frightened. It would have helped if I could have spoken about the murder, but Paul said wearily, "Let's give it a rest. We've had enough of death for one day."

So we sat in silence. From 7:40 we listened to *Radio Vaudeville* on the Home Service. Billy Cotton and his Band, the BBC Symphony Orchestra with Adrian Boult.

After the nine o'clock news and the 9:20 War Commentary, Paul murmured that he'd better check with Seddon that he'd locked up.

It was then that, partly on impulse, I made my way across the hall to the library. I turned the door handle gently, as if I feared to see Rowland still sitting at the desk sorting through the coins with avaricious fingers.

The blackout was drawn, the room smelled of old books, not blood. The desk, its top clear, was an ordinary unfrightening piece of furniture, the chair neatly in place.

I stood at the door, convinced that this room held a clue to the mystery. Then, partly from curiosity, I moved over to the desk and pulled out the drawers.

On either side was a deep drawer with two shallower ones above it. The left was so crammed with papers and files that I had difficulty in opening it. The right-hand deep drawer was clear.

I opened the smaller drawer above it. It contained a collection of bills and receipts. Rifling among them I found a receipt for £3,200 from a London coin dealer listing the purchase and dated five weeks previously.

There was nothing else of interest. I closed the drawer and began pacing and measuring the distance from desk to the French windows. It was then that the door opened almost soundlessly and I saw my cousin.

Coming up quietly beside me, he said lightly, "What are you doing? Trying to exorcise the horror?"

I replied, "Something like that."

For a moment we stood in silence. Then he took my hand in his, drawing it through his arm. He said, "I'm sorry, Cousin, it's been a beastly day for you. And all we wanted was to give you a peaceful Christmas."

I didn't reply. I was aware of his nearness, the warmth of his body, his strength. As we moved together to the door I thought, but did not say, "Was that really what you wanted, to give me a peaceful Christmas? Was that all?"

I had found it difficult to sleep since my husband had been killed, and now I lay rigid under the canopy of the four-poster reliving the extraordinary day, piecing together the anomalies, the small incidents, the clues, to form a satisfying pattern, trying to impose order on disorder. I think that is what I've been wanting to do all my life. It was that night at Stutleigh that decided my whole career.

Rowland had been killed at half-past ten by a single blow delivered across the width of a three-foot-six desk. But at ►►►



The 12 Crimes Of Christmas

Forget peace on earth, goodwill to men. Yuletide is a popular season for murder and mayhem, as these Christmas crime classics attest.

The Mystery of Edwin Drood (1870), by Charles Dickens

Murder for Christmas (1939), by Agatha Christie

Christmas at Candleshoe (1953), by Michael Innes

The Finishing Stroke (1958), by Ellery Queen

Sadie When She Died (1972), by Ed McBain

Tied Up in Tinsel (1972), by Ngaio Marsh

No Holiday for Crime (1973), by Dell Shannon

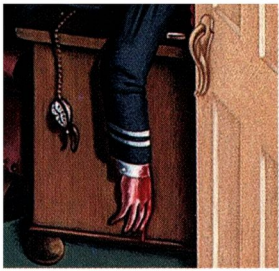
Red Christmas (1974), by Patrick Ruell

Maigret's Christmas (1977), by Georges Simenon

Rest You Merry (1978), by Charlotte MacLeod

Jerusalem Inn (1984), by Martha Grimes

Crime for Christmas (1984), by Lesley Egan



▶▶▶ half-past ten my cousin had been with me, had indeed been hardly out of my sight all day. I had provided an incontrovertible alibi.

But wasn't that precisely why I had been invited, cajoled to the house by the promise of peace, quiet, good food and wine, exactly what a young widow, recently recruited into the forces, would yearn for?

The victim, too, had been enticed to Stutleigh. His bait was the prospect of getting his hands on valuable coins and negotiating their sale. But the coins which I had been told must of necessity be valued and sold, had in fact been purchased only five weeks earlier, almost immediately after my acceptance of my grandmother's invitation.

For a moment I wondered why the receipt hadn't

A pattern was taking shape...In imagination I walked in the footsteps of a murderer. As is proper in a Christie-type crime, I called him X.

been destroyed, but the answer came quickly. The receipt was necessary so that the coins, their purpose now served, could be sold and the £3,200 recouped.

And if I had been used, so had other people. Christmas was the one day when the two servants could be certain to be absent all night. The police, too, could be relied upon to play their appointed part. The Inspector, honest and conscientious but not particularly intelligent, inhibited by respect for an old, established family and by the presence of his Chief Constable. The Chief Constable, past retirement age but kept on because of the war, inexperienced in dealing with murder, a friend of the family and the last person to suspect the local squire of a brutal murder.

A pattern was taking shape, was forming into a picture, a picture with a face. In imagination I walked in the footsteps of a murderer. As is proper in a Christie-type crime, I called him X.

Sometime during Christmas Eve the right-hand drawer of the study desk was cleared, the papers stuffed into the left-hand drawer, the Wellington boots placed ready. The weapon was hidden, perhaps in the drawer with the boots.

No, I reasoned, that wasn't possible; it would need to have been longer than that to reach across the desk. I decided to leave the question of the weapon until later.

And so to the fatal Christmas Day. At a quarter to ten my grandmother goes up to bed, telling Rowland that she will get the coins out of the library safe so that he can examine them before he leaves next day.

X can be certain that Rowland will be

there at half-past ten, sitting at the desk. He enters quietly, taking the key with him and locking the door quietly behind him. The weapon is in his hands, or hidden somewhere within reach in the room.

X kills his victim, smashes the watch to establish the time, exchanges his shoes for the Wellington boots, unlocks the door to the patio and opens it wide. Then he takes the longest possible run across the library and leaps into the darkness.

He would have to be young, healthy and athletic in order to clear the six feet of snow and land on the gravel path; but then he is young, healthy and athletic.

He need have no fear of footprints on the gravel. The snow has been scuffed by our afternoon snow-balling. He makes the first set of footsteps to the library door, closes it, then makes the second set, being careful partly to cover the first.

He need not worry about fingerprints on the door knob; his have every right to be there. And then he re-enters the house by a side door left unbolted, puts on his own shoes and returns the Wellington boots to their place in the front porch.

It is while he is crossing the hall that a piece of snow falls from the boots and melts into a puddle on the wooden floor. How else could that small pool of water have got there? Certainly my cousin had lied in suggesting that it came from the water carafe. The water carafe, half-full, had been by my grandmother's bed with the glass over the rim. Water could not have been spilled from it unless the carrier had stumbled and fallen.

And now, at last, I gave the murderer a name. But if my cousin had killed Rowland, how had it been done in the time? He had left me for no more than three minutes to say good night to our grandmother. Could there have been time to fetch the weapon, go to the library, kill Rowland, make the footprints, dispose of the weapon, cleaning from it any blood, and return to me so calmly to tell me that I was needed upstairs?

But suppose Dr. Bywaters was wrong, seduced into an over-hasty diagnosis by the watch. Suppose Paul had altered the watch before smashing it and the murder had taken place later than 10:30.

But the medical evidence was surely conclusive; it couldn't have been as late as half-past one. And even if it were, Paul had been too drunk to deliver that calculated blow.

But had he in fact been drunk? Had that, too, been a ploy? He had inquired whether I liked whiskey before bringing in the bottle, and I remembered how faint was the smell of the spirit on his breath.

But no; the timing was incontrovertible. It was impossible that Paul could have killed Rowland.

Leading Stromboli to the elevator, Horrorwitts explained that the building superintendent had phoned him at his summer home upstate to report his apartment door had been broken open. Horrorwitts then called the police.



But suppose he'd merely been an accomplice; that someone else had done the actual deed, perhaps a fellow officer whom he had secretly let into the house and concealed in one of its many rooms, someone who had stolen down at 10:30 and killed Maybrick while I gave Paul his alibi and the surging music of Wagner drowned the sound of the blows. Then, the deed done, he left the room with the weapon, hiding the key among the holly and mistletoe above the door, dislodging the bunch as he did so, so that the berries fell.

Paul had then come, taking the key from the ledge, being careful to tread over the fallen berries, locked the library door behind him leaving the key in place, then fabricated the footprints just as I'd earlier imagined.

Paul as the accomplice, not the actual murderer, raised a number of unanswered questions, but it was by no means impossible. An army accomplice would have had the necessary skill and the nerve. Perhaps, I thought bitterly, they had seen it as a training exercise.

By the time I tried to compose myself to sleep I had come to a decision. Tomorrow I would do more thoroughly what the police had done perfunctorily. I would search for the weapon.

Looking back, it seems to me that I felt no particular revulsion at the deed and certainly no compulsion to confide in the police. It wasn't just that I liked my cousin and had disliked Maybrick. I think the war had something to do with it. Good people were dying all over the world and the fact that one unlikable one had been killed seemed somehow less important.

I know now that I was wrong. Murder should never be excused or condoned. But I don't regret what I later did; no human being should die at the end of a rope.

I woke very early before it was light. I possessed myself in patience; there was no use in searching by artificial light and I didn't want to draw attention to myself. So I waited until Mrs. Seddon had brought up my early morning tea, bathed and dressed, and went down to breakfast just before nine.

My cousin wasn't there. Mrs. Seddon said that he had driven to the village to get the car serviced. This was the opportunity I needed.

My search ended in a small lumber room at the top of the house. It was so full that I had to climb over trunks, tin boxes and old

chests in order to search. There was a wooden chest containing rather battered cricket bats and balls, dusty, obviously unused since the grandsons last played in village matches. I touched a magnificent but shabby-looking horse and set it in vigorous creaking motion, got tangled in the piled tin track of a Hornby train set, cracked my ankle against a large Noah's Ark. Under the single window was a long

wooden box which I opened. Dust rose from a sheet of brown paper covering six croquet mallets with balls and hoops.

It struck me that a mallet, with its long handle, would have been an appropriate weapon, but these had obviously lain undisturbed for years. I replaced the lid and searched further.

In a corner were two golf bags and it was here I found what I was looking for. One of the clubs, the kind with a large wooden head, was different from its fellows. The head was shining clean.

It was then I heard a footstep and, looking round, saw my cousin. I know that guilt must have

been plain on my face but he seemed completely unworried. He asked, "Can I help you?"

No," I said. "No. I was just looking for something."

"And have you found it?"

"Yes," I said. "I think I have."

He came into the room and shut the door, leaned across it and said casually, "Did you like Rowland Maybrick?"

"No," I said. "No, I didn't like him. But not liking him isn't a reason for killing him."

He said easily, "No, it isn't, is it? But there's something I think you should know about him. He was responsible for the death of my elder brother."

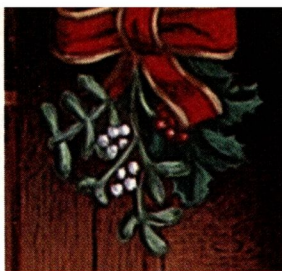
"You mean he murdered him?"

"Nothing as straightforward as that. He blackmailed him. Charles was a homosexual. Maybrick got to know and made him pay. Charles killed himself because he couldn't face a life of deceit, of being in Maybrick's power, of losing this place. He preferred the dignity of death."

Looking back on it I have to remind myself how different public attitudes were in the 1940's. Now it would seem extraordinary that anyone would kill ▶▶▶



"I drove straight here from Monticello—been there since my farewell concert last Sunday afternoon," Horrorwitts said, flexing his knobby fingers. "Can't keep playing the violin when you've arthritis this bad."



▶▶▶ himself for such a motive. Then I knew with desolate certainty that what he said was true.

I asked, "Does my grandmother know about the homosexuality?"

"Oh yes. There isn't much that her generation doesn't know, or guess. Grandmama adored Charles."

Looking back, it seems to me that I felt no particular revulsion at the deed, certainly no compulsion to confide in the police.

"I see. Thank you for telling me." After a moment I said, "I suppose if you'd gone on your first mission knowing Rowland Maybrick was alive and well, you'd have felt there was unfinished business."

He said, "How clever you are, Cousin. And how well you put things. That's exactly what I should have felt, that I'd left unfinished business." Then he added, "So what were you doing here?"

I took out my handkerchief and looked him in the face, the face so disconcertingly like my own. I said, "I was just dusting the tops of the golf clubs."

I left the house two days later. We never spoke of it again.

The investigation continued its fruitless course. I could have asked my cousin how he had done it, but I didn't.

For years I thought I should never really know. My cousin died in France, not, thank God, under Gestapo interrogation, but shot in an ambush. I wondered whether his army accomplice had survived the war or had died with him.

My grandmother lived on alone in the house, not dying until she was ninety-one, when she left the property to a charity for indigent gentlewomen, either to maintain as a home or to sell. It was the last charity I would have expected her to choose. The charity sold.

My grandmother's one bequest to me was the books in the library. Most of these I, too, sold, but I went down to the house to look them over and decide which volumes I wished to keep. Among them I found a photograph album wedged between two rather dull tomes of nineteenth-century sermons.

I sat at the same desk where Rowland had been murdered and turned the pages, smiling at the sepia photographs of high-bosomed ladies with their clinched waists and immense flowered hats. And then, suddenly, turning its stiff pages, I saw my grandmother as a young woman. She was wearing what seemed a ridiculous little cap like a jockey's and holding a golf club as confidently as if it were a parasol.

Beside the photograph was her name in careful script and underneath was written: "Ladies County Golf Champion 1898." ■

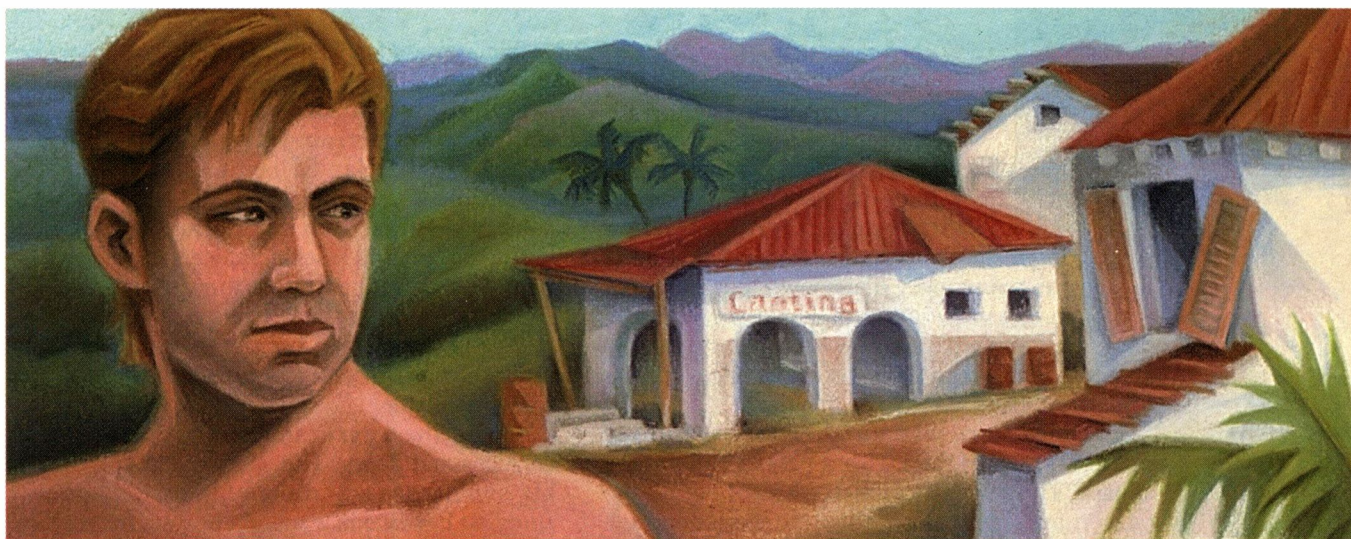
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

In writing "The Mistletoe Murder" P. D. James intended to evoke the atmosphere of an old-fashioned British Christmas in wartime—an era she knows well from her own life. A born storyteller, she entertained her two siblings from childhood with tales, but she waited for years for the time and opportunity to write novels. With her husband in ill health, she worked to help support her family; her fiction reflects the vast knowledge gained from a 30-year career in the British Civil Service. (She served in the National Health Service, in the Police Department—where she was concerned with the administration of the Forensic Science Service—and in the Criminal Law Department.)

To date, Phyllis Dorothy James has written 14 novels—the most recent is the best seller *Original Sin*. She holds honorary doctorates from four universities and has received many other honors and awards for her work. Her novels have been published throughout the world; many of them have been adapted for film and television. In 1983, she was awarded the Order of the British Empire; then in 1991 she was named a life peer of the United Kingdom and given the title Baroness James of Holland Park. She is currently a member of the House of Lords.



Photo: Nigel Parry



A
 He was pretty pleased with himself: easy job, great
 GOOD
 money, real future. So when this drop-dead blonde
 STORY
 turned up, he couldn't help bragging a little...

THE BIG SNAKE

moved in its cage, getting hungry. Flat eyes watched Leon walk through and out of the barn; Leon pretended not to notice. There'd been nothing in the mail today, so he was free. He walked past the cages and cotes, past the sawdust-smelling shed where the crates were hammered together, past the long, low main house, with its mutter of air-conditioning, and on down the dry dirt road into town, where he bought a beer in the cantina next to the church and stepped outside to enjoy the beautiful day.

The sun in the plaza was bright, the air clean and hot, and when he tilted the bottle and put his head back, the lukewarm beer foamed in his mouth. Stripped to the waist, T-shirt dangling from the back pocket of his cutoff jeans, moccasins padding on the baked brown earth, Leon strolled around the plaza, smiling up at the distant crown of the Andes.

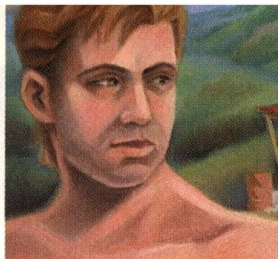
Slowly he sipped his beer, enjoying the sensations. This town was so high above sea level, the air so thin, that perspiration dried on him as soon as it appeared. Eight months ago, when he'd first come to Ixialta, Leon had found that creepy and disconcerting, but now he liked the dry crackle and tingle on his flesh, the accretion of salt that he could later brush off like talcum powder.

Eight months; no time at all. The work he did was easy and the money terrific, and the temptation to just drift along with it was very strong—that's what Jaime-Ortiz counted on, he knew that much—but he'd promised himself to give it no more than a year. Tops, one year. Go home rich and clean and twenty-four, with the world before him. Leon grinned, a tall, sloping boy with wiry arms and the hard-muscled legs of a jogger, and was still grinning when the car appeared.

Except for Jaime-Ortiz' six vehicles, cars were a rarity in Ixialta. The dirt road winding up the jungled mountainside was a mere spur from the trans-Andean highway, dead-ending in this public square surrounded by low stucco buildings.

In the past eight months, how many strangers had been here? A government tax man had come to talk with Jaime-Ortiz, had stopped for lunch and a bribe and had

BY DONALD E. WESTLAKE



▶▶▶ departed. A couple of close-mouthed Americans had brought up the new satellite dish, hooked it up and shown Jaime-Ortiz how it worked.

And who else? A pair of British girls working for the U.N. on some hunger survey; two sets of dopers searching for peyote, going away disappointed; a couple of American big-game hunters who'd stayed three days, shot one alpaca and contracted dysentery; and one or two more. Maybe seven interventions from the outside world in all this time.

And now here was number eight, a dusty maroon rental Honda with a pair of Americans aboard. The thirtyish woman who got out on the passenger side was an absolute drop-dead ice blonde. In khaki slacks, thonged sandals, pale-blue blouse and leather shoulder bag, she was some expensive designer's idea of a girl for-
eign correspondent. The big dark sunglasses, though, were an error; only Jackie O., in Leon's opinion, could wear Jackie O. sunglasses without loss of status. Still, this was a dream walking.

The man was something else. Wide-rumped in stiff new jeans, he wore office-style brown oxfords and a long-sleeved button-down shirt. He was an office worker, a professor of ancient languages, a bank teller, and he didn't belong on this mountain. Nor with that woman.

Leon approached, smiling, planning his opening remark, but the woman spoke first, frowning as though he were the doorman: "What place is this?"

Ruth drank, head tipped back, throat sweet and vulnerable. Leon wanted to nibble on it. The thought must have shown on his face.

"Ixialta," he told her.

"The high Ixi," she said, unexpectedly. There was a faint roughness in her voice, not at all unpleasant. "What's an Ixi?"

"Maybe a god." Leon had never thought to ask that question.

The man had draped himself with cameras. Blinking through clip-on sunglasses over his spectacles, he said, "Look at those cornices! Look at that door!"

"Yes, Frank," she said, uninterested, and pointed at Leon's beer. "That looks good."

"I'll get you one."

"And shade," she said, looking around.

"Table beside the cantina." He pointed. "In the shade, in the air, you can watch the world go by."

"Good." Setting off across the plaza, Leon beside her, the woman said, "Much of the world go by here?"

"You're it, so far."

Two small round white metal tables leaned on the cobblestones beside the cantina, furnished with teetery ice-cream-parlor chairs and shaded by the bulk of San Sebastian next door. The woman chose the table without a sleeping dog under it, while Leon went inside. The few customers in the dark and ill-smelling place stopped muttering when he walked by, as they always did, and sat looking at their thick hands or bare feet. Leon finished his beer and bought two more. Putting his T-shirt on, he paid and carried the bottles outside to the table.

Across the way, Frank was taking photos of cornices and doors. The woman had pushed her big sunglasses up on top of her head and was studying her face in a round compact mirror. She had good, level gray eyes, with something cool in them. Sitting across from her, he placed both bottles on the table and said, "I'm Leon."

"Ruth." She put the compact away and looked out at the empty plaza. "Lively spot."

"Come back on Sunday," Leon invited.

"What happens Sunday?"

"Paseo." Leon waved his arm in a great circle.

"The boys walk around that way, and the girls come the other way, give each other the eye. They come from all around the mountain here."

"The mating ritual," she said, picking up the bottle of beer.

Leon shrugged. "It's the way they do it. All the Indian boys and girls." Across the way, Frank sat in the sunny dust, taking a picture of a stone step.

Ruth drank, head tipped back, throat sweet and vulnerable. Leon wanted to nibble on it. The thought must have shown on his face because when she lowered the bottle, the smile she gave him was knowing but distanced. "You're no Indian," she said.

"I'm an Indian's secretary," he said and laughed at the joke.

"How does that work?"

"There's a rich man up here. Owns a lot of land, has everything he wants."

"And he lives here?" The skepticism was light, faintly mocking.

"This is where his money comes from."

"He's a farmer, then."

"He sells animals."

"Cattle?" Confusion was making her irritable, on the verge of boredom.

"No, no," Leon said, "wild animals. Jaime-Ortiz sells them to zoos, circuses, animal trainers all around the world. That's why he needs a secretary, somebody to write the letters in English, handle the business details."

She looked faintly repelled. "I see. What kind of animals?"

"All sorts. This whole range around here—Peru, Bolivia, Paraguay—it's one of the last great wildlife areas. We've got puma, jaguar, all kinds of monkeys, llamas, snakes—"

"Ugh," she said. "What kind of snakes?"

"Rattlers. Anaconda. Boa constrictor. We got a huge boa up in the barn now, all ready to go."

She drank beer and shivered. "Some way to make a living."

"Jaime-Ortiz does O.K.," Leon assured her and grinned at what he was leaving unsaid.

She seemed to sense there was more to the story. Watching herself move the bottle around on the scarred metal top, she said, "And you do O.K., too, I guess."

"Do I look like I'm complaining?"

She glanced at him sidelong. "No," she said, slow and thoughtful. "You look quite pleased with yourself."

Was she making fun? A bit defensive through the lightness, he said, "It's an interesting job here. More than you know."

"How'd you get it? Answer a want ad?"

Leon grinned, on surer ground. "Jaime-Ortiz doesn't put any want ads. He doesn't want some stranger poking around in his business."

"You already knew him, then."

"Family connection. Somebody in the business at the other end."

"An uncle," she said and smiled, showing all her teeth, as though he were a kid she didn't have to compose her face for.

"O.K., an uncle," he said, getting really annoyed now. "That doesn't make me just a nephew."

Looking contrite but still smiling, she reached out to touch the tips of two red fingernails to the back of his hand, the nails slightly indenting the flesh. "Don't be mad, Leon," she said. "Take a joke."

"There isn't a Customs man in the world gonna look to see what's inside a monkey inside a boa constrictor."

Frank and his cameras were still across the plaza. Leon turned his hand, closed it with gentle pressure on her fingers. "I like to joke," he said.

"The wild-animal trainer." She withdrew her hand. "I'd get bored, playing zoo."

"There's better stuff." Suddenly nervous, he gulped beer, and when he lowered the bottle, she was looking at him.

Some instinct of caution made him hesitate. But the English girls had been very impressed. And what difference did it make if he talked? The strangers came and went, forgetting the very name of Ixialta. Looking away toward the mountains, he said, "This is also where the coca bush grows. All around here."

"Cocaine," she said, getting it, but then frowned: "What about the law?"

"Around here? You're kidding."

"No, the States, when you smuggle it in."

"That's the beauty," he told her, grinning. "You take your white powder, you see? You put it in your glassine envelopes. You feed your envelopes to your monkey."

"Monkey? But he'll digest it; he'll—"

"No," Leon said. "Because then you feed your monkey to your boa constrictor."

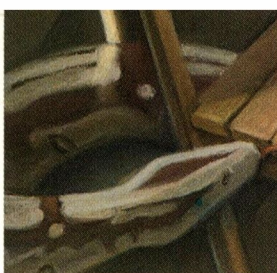
"Oh," she said.

"There isn't a Customs man in the world gonna look to see what's inside a monkey inside a boa constrictor."

"I wouldn't."

"The monkey has to go into the snake alive," Leon said, glad to see her eyes widen. "It takes the snake seven days to digest the monkey ►►►"





▶▶▶ but only two days to be flown to Wilkinson, the wild-animal dealer in Florida." It was such a good story that he laughed all over again every time he told it. "As the fella says, it's all in the packaging."

"Yes," she said, her expression suddenly enigmatic. She stood, turning away, calling, "Frank! Frank! Over here!"

Leon said, "Look, uh. . ."

"Just a minute." She was brisk and businesslike, utterly different.

Baffled, Leon got to his feet as Frank came trotting across the plaza, holding his cameras down with both hands. "Yeah?"

Nodding at Leon, Ruth said, "He's the one."

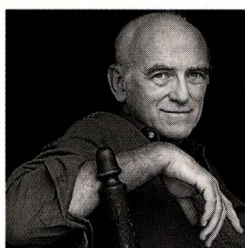
Frank looked surprised. "You sure?"

"He just told it to me."

"Well, that was quick," Frank said. His manner was suddenly also changed, less fussy, more self-assured. He walked toward Leon, making a fist. Leon was so bewildered he didn't even duck.

Someone pulled his hair. Leon jerked, trying to stand, but was held down, rough ropes holding him to a chair. He opened his eyes, and Jaime-Ortiz stood in front of him, along with Paco and a couple of the other workers. They were all in the big barn, where the air was always cool, rich with animal stink, the hard-packed-

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Donald E. Westlake admits there is a grain of truth to "A Good Story," but says it is best told as fiction. Known as a genius of the comedic caper, Westlake has entertained readers with more than 40 novels since

1960, under his own name, plus various pseudonyms, including Richard Stark and Tucker Coe. His first novel, *The Mercenaries*, was nominated for an Edgar Award as the best first novel of the year in 1960. Since then, Westlake has won three Edgar Awards, was nominated for an Oscar for his screenplay, *The Grifters*, in 1991 and was named Grand Master by the Mystery Writers of America in 1993. Born in Brooklyn, New York, he currently divides his time between Manhattan and upstate New York with his wife, writer Abby Adams. Westlake's latest novel, *Smoke*, was published in October 1995 by the Mysterious Press. His John Dortmunder character returns this October in *What's the Worst That Could Happen?*

earth floor crosshatched with broom lines from frequent sweepings.

Against the far wall, under the dim bulbs, stood the cages, only a few occupied. A red-furred howler monkey, big shouldered and half the size of a man, sat with its back to everybody, the hairless tip of its long tail curled negligently around a lower bar, while next door a golden guanaco pranced nervously, its delicate ears back and eyes rolling. Farther from the light, the big, skinny boa, pale brown with darker crossbars, its scaly head rearing up nearly three feet in the air, showed yellow underbelly as it stared through the bars and wire at everything that moved.

"Jaime?" Leon tugged at the hairy ropes, tasting old blood in his mouth, feeling the sharp slits around his puffy lips. "Jaime? What—"

"I got to be disappointed in you, Leon," Jaime-Ortiz said. He was a big, heavy man with a broad, round face and liquid-brown eyes that could look as soulful as that guanaco's—or as cold as stones. "You," he said, pointing a stubby finger at Leon. "You got to be one real disappointment to me." He shook his head, a fatalistic man.

"But what did I—What's—"

"Little stories going around," Jaime-Ortiz said. He wagged the fingers of both hands up above his head, like a man trying to describe birds in flight. "Somebody talking about our business, Leon. Yours and mine. Making trouble for us."

"Jaime, please—"

"All of a sudden," Jaime-Ortiz said, "these drug agents, they come to our friend Wilkinson, they get a paper from a judge."

"Oh, my God," Leon closed his eyes, licking his sore lips. The rope was tied very hard and tight; he could barely feel his hands and feet.

"Who would make trouble for you and me and Wilkinson, Leon? Who?"

Eyes shut, Leon shook his head back and forth. "I'm sorry, Jaime. I'm sorry."

"Friends in New York ask me this," Jaime-Ortiz said. "I say it's not me, it's not Leon, it's not Paco. We all got too much to lose. They say they send somebody down, walk around, see who likes to tell stories."

"Jaime, I'll never, never—"

"Oh, I know that," Jaime-Ortiz said. "You can't be around here no more, Leon. I got to send you back to the States."

Hope stirred in Leon. He stared up at Jaime-Ortiz. "Jaime, I promise, I won't say a word, I'll never—"

"That's right, Leon," Jaime-Ortiz said. "You will never say a word. Not the way you're going back to the States."

Leon didn't get it until he saw Paco come toward him with the glassine envelope in his hand. "Open wide," Paco said. ■

If You Can't Take The Heat



**P. I. Sharon McCone takes to the skies in her latest case—
tailing a couple of suspicious, glitzy, jet-setting babes**

BY MARCIA MULLER

the private investigation business has been glamorized to death by writers and filmmakers, but I can tell you firsthand that more often than not it's downright tedious. Even though I own a small agency and have three operatives to take on the scut work, I still conduct a fair number of surveillances while twisted into unnatural positions in the front seat of my car, or standing in the rain when any fool would go inside. Last month I leaped at the chance to take on a job with a little more pizzazz—and even then ended up to my neck in mud. Quite literally.

The job came to me from a contact at a small air-charter company—Wide Horizons—located at Oakland Airport's north field. I fly in and out of there frequently, both in the passenger's and the pilot's seat of my friend Hy Ripinsky's Citabria, and when you're around an airport a lot, you get to know people. When Wide Horizons' owner, Gordon Tillis, became nervous about a pair of

regular customers, he called me into his office.

"Here's the problem," he told me. "For three months now, Sam Delaney's been flying what he calls 'a couple of babes' to Calistoga, in the Napa Valley. Always on the same day—the last Wednesday. On the flight there they're tense, clutch at their briefcases, don't talk much. A limo picks them up, they're gone a few hours. And when they come back, it's a whole different story."

"How so?"

"Well, I heard this from the airport manager up there, and Sam confirms it. They're excited, giddy with relief. Once it was obvious they'd been drinking too much; another time they had new hairdos and new clothes. They call a lot of attention to themselves."

"Sounds to me like a couple of rich women who like to fly, shop and do some wine tasting—and who don't hold their alcohol too well."

"It would sound that way to me too except for two things: the initial nervousness and the fact



"Trouble is my business."

—Philip Marlowe,
"Trouble Is My
Business," 1939,
by Raymond Chandler

"Dig up an old grave, and you'll find maggots."

—Fergy,
Down the
Garden Path, 1985,
by Dorothy Cannell

▶▶▶ that they come back flush with cash."

"How do you know?"

"They pay cash for the charter, and one time I got a look into their briefcases.

Even after the plane rental and a big tip for Sam, there was plenty left."

The cash did put a different spin on it. "I assume you think they may be carrying some kind of illegal substance?"

Gordon nodded.

"So why don't you tell Sam to search their cases? The FAA gives him the authority to, as pilot in command."

Gordon got up and went to the window, opened the blinds and motioned at the field. "You see all those aircraft sitting idle? There're pilots sitting idle, too. Sam doesn't get paid when he doesn't fly; my overhead doesn't get paid while those planes are tied down. In this economy, neither of us can afford to lose paying customers."

"Security at the main terminal X-rays bags—"

"That's the main terminal; people expect it there. If Sam suddenly demands to go through those women's personal effects and word gets out, people might take their business elsewhere. If he does it in a way that embarrasses them—and, face it, Sam's not your most tactful guy—we're opening the door for a lawsuit."

"But you also don't want your planes used for illegal purposes. I see your problem."

In the end, Gordon and I worked out a plan where I would ride in the fourth seat of the Cessna that Sam would fly to Calistoga the next Wednesday. My cover story was that I was a new hire learning the ropes. I found myself looking forward to the job; it sounded a whole lot more interesting than

accounted for the weight Sam had gained in the year or so that I'd known him. He'd always had a round face under his mop of brown curls, but now it resembled a chipmunk's, and his body was growing round to match. Poor guy had probably hired on with Wide Horizons thinking to build up enough hours for a lucrative job with the airlines; now he wasn't flying enough to go to a decent restaurant.

here they come," he whispered to me. "Look at them—they make heads turn, especially when they've had a few pops of that Napa Valley vino."

The women were attractive, and a number of heads did turn as they crossed from the charter service. But people take notice of any woman tripping across the tarmac in high heels, her brightly colored silk dress blowing in the breeze. We women pilots are pretty much confined to athletic shoes, shirts and pants in cotton and denim—and the darker the color, the less the gas and oil and grease stains will show.

The woman Sam introduced as Melissa Wells had shoulder-length red hair and looked as though she could have used a few more hours' sleep; Angie Holbrook wore her dark hair close-cropped and spoke in a clipped manner that betrayed her tension. Neither had more to say than basic greetings, and they settled into the back seats quickly, refusing headsets. During the thirty-minute flight, Melissa sipped at a large container of coffee she'd brought along and Angie tapped her manicured fingernails against her expensive leather briefcase. Sam insisted on keeping up the fiction that I was a new Wide Horizons pilot by

chattering at me—even though over the noise of the engine the women couldn't hear a word we said through our linked earphones.

"Gordon's real strict about the paperwork. Plan's got to be on file, and complete. Weight-and-balance calculation, too. It's not difficult, though; each of us has got his own routes. Mine're the Napa and Sonoma Valleys. I'd like to get some of the longer trips, build up more hours that way, but I don't have enough seniority with the company. At least I get to look at some pretty scenery."

He certainly did. It was springtime, and the length of California's prime wine-growing valley was in its splen-

Was it possible Angie and Melissa were a couple of undercover narcs who were selling the drugs they confiscated?

the stakeout at a deadbeat dad's apartment that I had planned for the evening.

"They're babes, all right," Sam Delaney said, "but I'll let you judge for yourself." He grunted as he stowed his bag of take-out cartons in the back of the plane—his lunch, he'd informed me earlier. Business had been so bad recently that he couldn't even afford the relatively inexpensive airport diners.

Eating bad take-out food, I thought, probably

At the apartment, Stromboli noted the forced entry, then watched as Horrorwitts looked around the living room. "Ach! My TV and stereo are missing and . . . oh, no!"

dor. Gentle hills, looking as if someone had shaped bolt after bolt of green velvet to their contours; brilliant slashes of yellow where the wild mustard bloomed; orchards in pink and white flower. It made me want to snatch Sam's takeout and go on a picnic.

We touched down at Calistoga shortly before ten. The limo was there for Melissa and Angie, as was the rental car Wide Horizons had arranged for me. I waited till the limo cleared the parking lot, then jumped into the rental and followed, noting the other car's license number. It took the main road south for several miles, past wineries offering tours and tasting, then turned off onto a secondary road and drove into the hills to the west. I held back, allowing a sports car to get between us; the sports car put on its brakes abruptly as it whipped around a curve, and by the time I'd avoided a collision, the limo had turned through a pair of stone pillars flanking a steep driveway. The security gates closed, and the car snaked uphill and disappeared into the trees.

I pulled my rental into the shade of a scrub oak on the far side of the road and got out. It was very quiet there; I could hear only birds in a grove of acacia trees on the other side of the high stone wall. I walked its length, looking for something that would identify the owner of the heavily wooded property, but saw nothing and no way to gain access. Finally I went back to the car to wait it out.

Why did everything always seem to boil down to another stakeout?

And three hours later was when I found myself up to my neck in mud.

the limo had departed the estate in the hills and, after a few wine-tasting stops, deposited Melissa and Angie at the Serenata Spa in Calistoga. Calistoga is famed for its hot springs, and initially I'd fancied myself eavesdropping on the pair while floating in a tub of mineral water. But Calistoga is also famed for its mud baths, and in order to get close enough, I'd had to opt for my own private wallow. As I sunk into the gritty stuff—stifling a cry of disgust—I could clearly hear Angie's voice through the flimsy pink partition. In spite of the wine they'd sampled, she sounded as tense as before.

"Well, what do you think? Honestly?"

"They're high on it."

"But are they high enough?"

"They paid us, didn't they?"

"Yes, but..."

The musician hurried into the bedroom. The closet door was flung wide open. "My Stradivarius is gone! They must have picked the closet lock!" Horrorwitts sat heavily on the bed. "I feel a bit faint."

"Angie, it was the best we could come up with. And I thought it was damn good."

"It's getting more difficult to come up with the stuff without making it too obvious what we're doing. And this idea of yours about image—the charter flight cuts into our profits."

"So I'll pay for it out of my share from now on. I love to fly. Besides, it's good for Carlos's people to see us getting off a private plane. It establishes us as a cut above the competition."

Silence from Angie.

I couldn't believe what I was hearing—people getting high; difficulty coming up with the stuff; Carlos.... In the eighties, nine out of ten fictional arch villains dealing in terrorism and drugs had been named Carlos. Was I to assume that one had materialized in the Napa Valley?

"Angie," Melissa said impatiently, "what is with you this week?"

"I don't know. I'm really spooked about getting caught. Maybe it was the way Sarge looked at me last night when I told him we wouldn't be in to HQ today."

"He can't possibly suspect. He thinks we're out in the field, that's all."

"But all day, every fourth Wednesday? We're going to have to shift the deliveries around among our clients. If Sarge finds out we've been stealing—"

"Stop, already!"

Now what I couldn't believe was that they'd discuss such things in a public place. A sergeant, headquarters, being out in the field, deliveries, stealing... Was it possible that Angie and Melissa were a couple of undercover narcs who were selling the drugs they confiscated?

After a while one of them sighed. Melissa's voice said, "It's time."

"Yeah. Back to the ghetto."

"Listen, if you can't take the heat..."

"Funny. Very funny."

When we got back to Oakland I hung around Wide Horizons while Melissa paid for the flight in cash and gave Sam a two hundred dollar tip. Then I went to Gordon's office and made a verbal report, asking him to keep the information confidential until I'd collected concrete evidence. I'd have that for him, I said, before the women's next scheduled flight.

As I drove across the Bay Bridge to my offices at Pier 24½, one of the renovated structures along San Francisco's Embarcadero, I thought over what I'd heard at the mud baths. Something was wrong with ▶▶▶



Laughable Laws

Malice

Aforethought

● Pottstown, Pennsylvania, officials are required to check all fire hydrants one hour before a fire starts.

● Anyone driving a car into little Beanville, Vermont, and who "intends to rob a bank, or injure or murder someone, must first register with the Chief of Police or other pertinent legal authority."

● Arizona requires its citizens to register with the state before going into the business of selling cocaine, marijuana, heroin or other illegal drugs.

● In Georgia, "Those who shoot at friends for amusement ought to warn them first that it is mere sport."

● In Sullivan, Missouri, anyone other than the victim of the accident is prohibited from calling an ambulance in time of an emergency.



▶▶▶ the picture I'd formed. No specific detail, just the nagging sense that I'd overlooked an item of importance. I wanted to get my computer researcher, Mick Savage, started on the case as soon as possible.

The next morning, Mick began by accessing the Napa County property-tax assessor's records; he found that the estate in the hills belonged to Carlos Robles, a prominent vintner, whose wines even I—whose budget had only recently expanded to accommodate varieties with corks—had heard of. While Mick began tracking information on Robles in the periodicals indexes, I asked a contact on the SF-PD to check with the National Crime Information Center for criminal histories on the vintner, Angie Holbrook and Melissa Wells. They all came up clean.

Mick began downloading news stories and magazine articles on Robles and his winery, and soon they formed an imposing stack on my desk. I had other work to do, so I called in Rae Kelleher, my field investigator, and asked her to check with our contacts at Bay Area police departments for detectives answering to the women's names or matching their descriptions. At six o'clock I hauled the stack of information on Robles home to my brown-shingled

the various national competitions. Robles Vineyards hosted an elegant monthly wine, food and music event at their St. Helena Cellars, which was attended by prominent social and political figures, many of whom Carlos Robles counted among his close friends. I couldn't detect the slightest breath of scandal about his personal life; he'd been married to the same woman for thirty-three years, had four children and six grandchildren, and by all accounts was devoted to his family.

A paragon, if you believed his press...

as the next week passed, I dug deeper into the winemaker's life, but uncovered nothing significant, and I finally concluded that to get at the truth of the matter, I'd have to concentrate on the two women. Rae had turned up nothing through our PD contacts, so I asked Mick to do an area-wide search for their addresses—a lengthy and tedious process, as far as I was concerned, but he didn't seem to mind. Mick, who is also my nephew, has a relationship with his PowerBook that I, no fan of the infernal devices, sometimes find unnatural.

The search paid off, however: He turned up two Melissa Wellses and three Angela Holbrooks in various East Bay locations, from Berkeley to Danville. I narrowed it down by the usual method—surveillance.

The building I tailed Angie Holbrook to from her Berkeley apartment was vine-covered brick, set well back from the sidewalk on Shattuck Avenue, only two blocks from the famous Chez Panisse restaurant in the heart of what's come to be known as the Gourmet Ghetto. Polished brass lettering beside the front door said *HQ Magazine*. By the time I went inside and asked for Angie, I was putting it all together.

Two days before their next flight I figured out what it was; then I had to scramble fast to come up with the evidence.

cottage near the Glen Park district, curled up on the couch with my cats, and spent the evening reading.

If you believed Robles's press, he was a pillar of the Napa Valley community. His wines were considered excellent and frequently took gold medals at

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

On a rainy day last fall while Marcia Muller was taking flying lessons, several pilots were sitting around swapping stories. One of them mentioned a flight he'd been on where two passengers behaved so oddly he suspected they were up to no good. Muller used that casual remark as the springboard for her story, "If You Can't Take the Heat."

Ever since she was old enough to hold a pencil, Muller has loved to write. Born in Detroit, she received her undergraduate and master's degree in journalism from the University of Michigan. In 1967 she moved to northern California and has lived there ever since. Her first mystery novel, *Edwin of the Iron Shoes*, appeared in 1977.



Of her 25 titles, 17 feature the feisty private investigator Sharon McCone; her tenth McCone novel, *The Shape of Dread*, won the 1989 American Mystery Award for best private-eye novel of the year. In 1993 Muller was honored by the Private Eye Writers of America with their Life Achievement Award. In addition to her own writing, Muller has

co-edited 10 anthologies with her husband, the writer Bill Pronzini, as well as *1001 Midnights: The Aficionado's Guide to Mystery and Detective Fiction*, published by Arbor House in 1986. Her latest McCone mystery, *The Broken Promise Land*, was recently published in June by Mysterious Press.

And when she started to cry at the sight of my I.D., I knew I had it right.

But even after Angie, Melissa Wells and I sat down over a cappuccino at Chez Panisse and discussed the situation, something still nagged at me. It wasn't till the Monday before their next flight to Calistoga that I figured out what it was, and then I had to scramble fast to come up with the evidence.

"Open their briefcases," I said to Sam Delaney. We were gathered in the office at Wide Horizons—Sam, Gordon Tillis, Melissa, Angie and me.

Sam hesitated, glancing at Gordon.

"Go ahead," he prompted. "You're pilot in command; you've got the FAA in your corner."

He hesitated some more, then flipped the catch of Melissa's case and raised its lid. Staring down into it, he said to me, "But...you told Gordon we had big trouble. This is...just papers."

"Right. Recipes and pictures of food."

"I don't get it. I thought the babes were into drugs."

Unfortunate word choice; the "babes" and I glared at him.

"Ms. Wells and Ms. Holbrook," I said, "are chefs and food writers for a very prestigious magazine, *HQ*—short for *Home Quarterly*. Unfortunately, like many prestigious publications, it doesn't pay very well. About a year ago Melissa and Angie started moonlighting—which is strictly against the policy set by the publisher, Sarge Greenfield."

"What's this got to do with—"

"I'm getting to that. For the past six months Melissa and Angie have been creating the menus for Robles Vineyards' wine, food and music events, using recipes they originally developed for *HQ*. Recipes that Sarge Greenfield would consider stolen. Since they didn't want to risk their jobs by leaving a paper trail, they arranged for Robles and their other clients to pay them in cash, upon acceptance of the proposed menus. Naturally they're always somewhat tense before their presentations to the clients, but afterward they're relieved. Relieved enough to indulge in wine tasting and spending."

Sam's eyes narrowed. "You say these recipes are stolen?"

"I suppose Greenfield could make a case for that."

"Then why don't you have them arrested?"

"Actually, the matter's already been settled." Angie and Melissa had decided to admit what they'd been doing to their employer, who had promptly fired them. They had now established their own catering firm and, in my opinion, would eventually be better off.

Gordon Tillis cleared his throat. "This strikes me as a good example of how we all rely too heavily on appearances in forming our opinions of people. Not a good practice; it's too easy to jump to the wrong conclusion."

Sam looked down, shuffling his feet. "Uh, I hope you ladies won't hold this against me," he said after a moment. "I'd still like to fly you up to the valley."

"Fine with us," Angie replied.

"Speaking of that—" I glanced at my watch, "isn't it time you got going?"

Gordon and I walked out onto the field with them. The two men preflighting the Piper next to Sam's plane cast admiring glances at Angie and Melissa, and I was surprised when one of them winked at me. When we got to the Cessna, I snapped my fingers and said, "Oh, there's something I want to check, just out of curiosity. May I see the paperwork Sam gave you for this flight, Gordon?"

Sam frowned, but Gordon, as prearranged, handed the folder to me. I opened it to the weight-and-balance calculation that a pilot always works up in order to know the best way to arrange the passengers and their baggage.

"Uh-huh," I said, "fuel, pilot... Sam, you've really got to stop eating that junk food! Passengers one and two, plus purses and briefcases. Additional baggage stowed aft. Hmmm."

"Just get to the point," Sam said, glancing around nervously.

"In a minute." I slipped inside the Cessna and checked the rear compartment. One bag of takeout. One large bag of takeout.

Sam was leaning in, reaching for my arm.

"Golden Arches?" I asked.

"KFC. Leave it!"

I picked it up. Heavy KFC.

"Sam," I said, "you really ought to go on a diet."

After the DEA agents who had been hanging around the Piper with their warrant had opened the take-out containers full of cocaine and placed Sam under arrest, Gordon, Angie, Melissa and I slowly walked back to Wide Horizons in subdued silence.

"What I don't understand," Gordon finally said, "is why he always entered the stuff he was carrying on the weight-and-balance."

"To cover himself. He knew if you caught him stowing any package he hadn't entered, you'd start watching him. But why he put down the accurate weight for the bag is beyond me. Nobody would believe he could eat that much for lunch—even with his weight problem."

Gordon sighed. "And here I thought Sam was just getting fat because of a bad eating habits, when all the while he was eating too well on his profits from drug running."

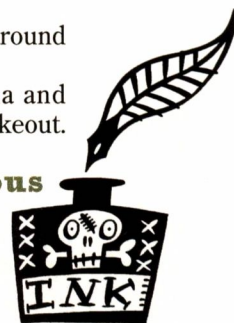
I grinned at him. "Widening his horizons at the expense of Wide Horizons," I said. ■

Felonious Firsts

Paul Revere was the first **forensic dentist**: He was called upon to identify a former patient's remains by his teeth.

Mark Twain was the first to write of using **fingerprints** to I.D. a criminal—in a 1883 short story and then in the novel *The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1894).

Edwin Balmer and William B. Macharg were the first writers to feature a **lie detector** in a detective story—"The Man Higher Up" (1930), in *Scientific Detective Monthly*.



THE SOFT-BOILED DETECTIVE

AND "THE CASE OF THE MISSING HAM"

BY LIZA DONNELLY AND MICHAEL MASLIN

FEATURING



GUS HARLOWE AS
THE SOFT-BOILED
DETECTIVE

SOMEWHERE IN THE GREATER METROPOLITAN AREA JUST BEFORE A DINNER PARTY IS TO BEGIN, THE HOSTS DISCOVER THEIR BAKED HAM

HAS **VANISHED!**

AMONG THE INVITED GUESTS IS GUS HARLOWE, THE SOFT-BOILED DETECTIVE.



IF ANYONE CAN FIND THAT HAM, IT'S YOU, GUS.

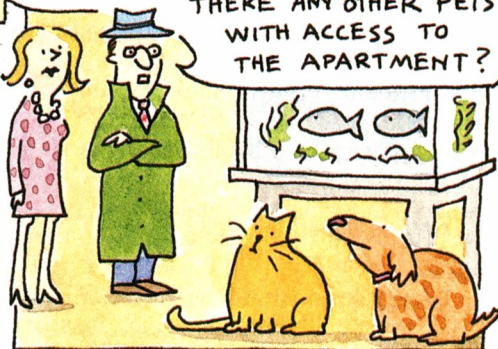
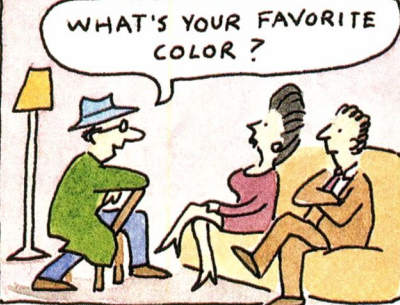
THANKS, NELL.

GUS GATHERS THE HOUSEHOLD STAFF AND THE GUESTS AND BEGINS HIS TRADE-MARK, LOW-KEY, NO-PRESSURE GRILLING...

WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE COLOR?

EVEN THE HOUSE PETS GET THE ONCE-OVER.

OTHER THAN THE CAT, THE DOG AND THE PIRANHAS, ARE THERE ANY OTHER PETS WITH ACCESS TO THE APARTMENT?



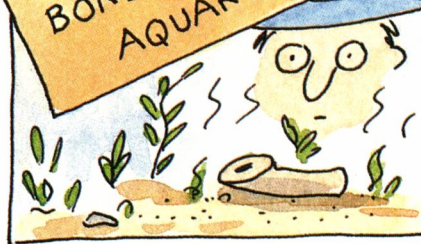
GUS TAKES THE COOK, THE MAID AND THE BUTLER ASIDE FOR QUESTIONING...

IS THERE SUCH A THING AS TOO MUCH PAPRIKA?

YOU DIDN'T DO IT, DID YOU?

WHAT'S BEST FOR REMOVING SCUFF MARKS?

A BREAK IN THE CASE COMES UNEXPECTEDLY, AS GUS FINDS A HAM BONE IN THE AQUARIUM!



JUST AS THE TIRED AND HUNGRY GUESTS BEGIN TO ASK FOR APPETIZERS, GUS HAS AN ANNOUNCEMENT:

SORRY TO DISAPPOINT ALL OF YOU, BUT... THE BUTLER DID IT.

UNBEKNOWNST TO YOUR HOSTS, DUDLEY, THE BUTLER, HAS RECENTLY CONVERTED TO VEGETARIANISM. TO PROTEST THE HAM DINNER, HE DECIDED TO STEAL THE HAM AND TOSS IT DOWN THE DUMBWAITER.

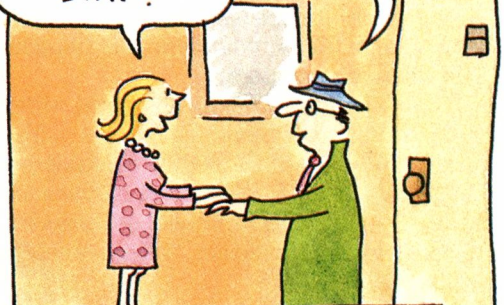
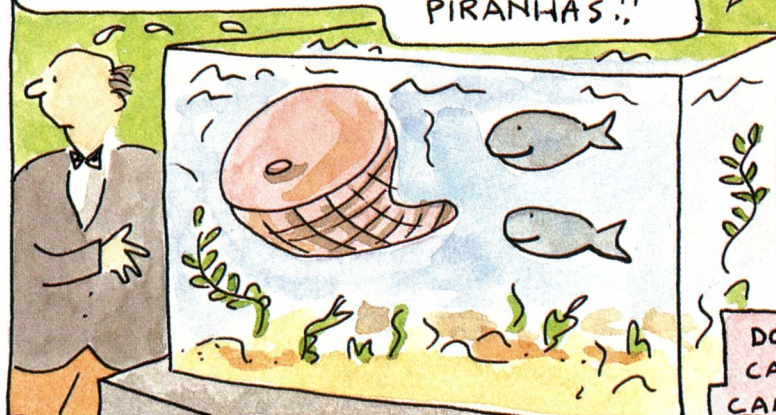
THERE WILL BE SOME CELERY STICKS IN A MOMENT, BUT FIRST, LET ME TELL YOU WHO DUNNIT.



BUT JUST AS HE WAS LEAVING THE KITCHEN, HE BUMPED INTO NELL. DUDLEY PANICKED AND TOSSED THE HAM INTO THE AQUARIUM, WHERE IT WAS DEVoured BY THE PIRANHAS!!

I'M THROWING SOME T.V. DINNERS INTO THE MICRO-WAVE, GUS - WON'T YOU STAY?

LOVE TO, NELL, BUT I'VE LOST MY APPETITE.



DONNELLY + MASLIN'S LATEST CARTOON COLLECTION IS CALL ME WHEN YOU REACH NIRVANA.

the Profiteer

BY ANNE PERRY

HENRY RATHBONE pulled the last weed from the border, then stepped back and surveyed it with satisfaction. He lit his pipe, which instantly went out. It did not matter in the slightest. He walked in quiet contentment toward the apple trees and the long hedge with its honeysuckle. It was already early evening, the light was deepening and the scent of flowers mixed with the richness of earth and cut grass. He did not see the butler until the man was at his elbow.

"Sorry to interrupt you, sir, but Mr. Crombie has called to see you, and appears to be much troubled. Will you come in, or may I ask him to join you here?"

"Perhaps I should come in." Henry looked reluctantly at his grubby hands and stained trousers where he had knelt on the ground. His shoes were anything but clean.

"I believe he would be quite happy to see you here, sir," the butler replied hastily, perhaps thinking of the carpets. Henry was appallingly absent-minded. "It is an exceptionally pleasant evening."

"Ask him, by all means," Henry agreed. He liked Crombie, although their paths did not often cross. Henry was a mathematician, Crombie an architect. He had always liked Crombie's courtesy and enthusiasm for things of beauty, and his fondness for animals. He would be sorry if he were in some kind of distress.

The butler hastened about his errand, and Henry ambled gently up the long lawn and round the bed of delphiniums. He had only a few moments to wait. Crombie was in his mid-forties, considerably younger than Henry, but already graying. He had lost his eldest son two years ago in the Crimean War. His features were ordinary enough, and yet his expression lent them great charm. However, today he looked deeply unhappy as he strode across the grass.

"My dear fellow, whatever has happened?" Henry said with some concern.

"I don't know!" Crombie answered with a tone of despair. "I can't understand it at all! It's...it's quite incomprehensible." He shrugged his shoulders and held out his hands helplessly. He looked momentarily beaten. "If it were not for the letter, I could not believe it."

Henry hid his confusion. "What letter? Do you have it with you?"

"No. I don't even know what I did with it."

"What did it say?"

"It was quite simple," Crombie replied. "The Albion Club regrets it cannot accept my application to join its membership. No reason was offered, of course." He

gave a derisive little laugh, which ended in a cough as his breath caught in his throat. "They never do. Anyone wishing to join any decent club in London takes great care to have his friends test the water before he allows his name to be put forward." He swallowed with difficulty. "To be rejected is a rebuff no reputation can survive. If you have committed some act fit to make yourself unacceptable, you are expected to know what it is! Tact requires that no gentleman remind you of it! But I have done nothing!"

Henry was appalled. He knew the consequences of such a refusal as well as Crombie did. He struggled for anything to say to ease the weight of the blow, and everything that came to his mind seemed purposeless. It was hardly any use asking if there could be an act misunderstood. Crombie would have thought of that. Staring at his stricken face, Henry could not believe him capable of duplicity. If he had indeed offended beyond forgiveness, then he was unaware of it.

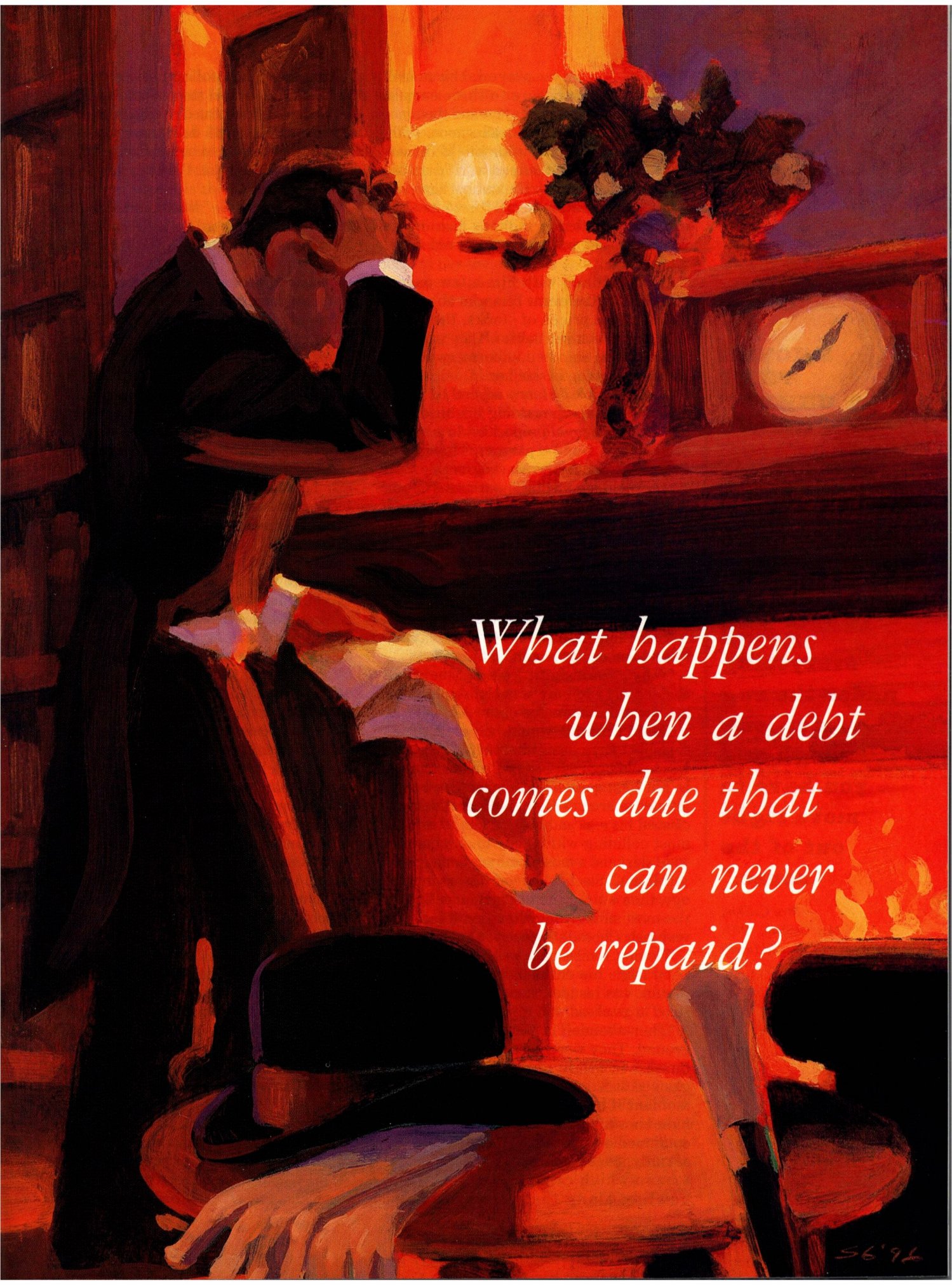
"I had such plans!" Crombie went on, composing himself a little. There was in his voice a bitter amusement rather than the panic of a few moments before. "I was going to buy that wretched block of tenements I told you of...in the Devil's Acre, hard by Westminster. I was going to tear it all down and build decent houses, with drains that work! But I had to borrow money for it. I needed all the credit I could find. With the Albion Club refusing me, that's all gone. It is so damnably unjust! And I cannot think why!"

It was not done to question the decision of the committee; indeed, Henry Rathbone himself might find he was no longer welcome if he were to do so. Some more roundabout method would have to be employed. It would be intolerable to let the matter stand, although he was painfully aware that he might discover something about Crombie he would greatly prefer not to know.

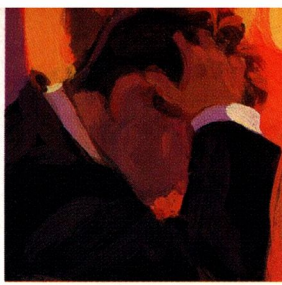
"You are quite sure?" he said slowly. "There is nothing they could have learned you would rather..."

"Nothing!" Crombie swore. "Before God, nothing!"

Afternoon, Stackfield," Henry said amiably. They were walking in the early afternoon sun in St. James's Park, Stackfield by chance, Henry by very careful design. The breeze was light, barely moving the trees, and in every direction were people taking their pleasure, children with kites, tops and hoops, young men and women arm in arm, elders sitting on benches deep in memory. In the distance a band

A painting in a dark, expressive style. A man in a dark suit stands on the left, his back to the viewer, looking towards a large, glowing yellow light source. To the right, a large, dark vase holds a bouquet of flowers. A clock with a white face and a black hand is visible on the wall. The overall color palette is dominated by dark reds, oranges, and yellows, creating a somber and dramatic atmosphere.

*What happens
when a debt
comes due that
can never
be repaid?*



▶▶▶ played, the music drifting to their ears in snatches now and then.

"Oh . . . afternoon, Rathbone." Stackfield turned and leaned a trifle on his cane. He was perhaps six-

ty, portly and ruddy-faced. His white side-whiskers bristled in military fashion, although he had, in fact, never served in the army.

Henry walked with him a few paces. They made irrelevant remarks about the weather, the prices of stocks, the sorry state of modern journalism. They passed a nursemaid in starched uniform, two small children skipping beside her.

"Irresponsible," Henry agreed to Stackfield's last remark, nodding his head. "By the way, got a good proposition in a matter of business. Need a partner. Thought of Crombie. Good fellow. Most agreeable."

Stackfield stopped in his tracks. "Crombie, did you say?"

"That's right, Robert Crombie. Do you know him?"

"Oh . . ." Stackfield looked confused. "Well . . . not to say 'know him.' Why don't you try young Havershott? He's got money to invest and he's sound. Know his father well."

"Something wrong with Crombie?" Henry said innocently, resuming his walk.

"Why . . . not that I know." Stackfield avoided his eyes. He was chairman of the membership committee of the Albion Club.

"Then Crombie would be perfectly acceptable," Henry said cheerfully. "I propose we should both put in some capital, naturally, but I am quite happy for mine to be the greater share...." He ceased as Stackfield clasped his arm and obliged him to stop, almost colliding with a lady in an absurdly wide skirt and a most flattering bonnet.

"Ma'am," Stackfield lifted his hat in apology, then swung round on Henry. "I urge you most strongly to reconsider. It could be very rash. Choose someone you know better!"

"I know Crombie quite well," Henry argued. "And I like his enthusiasm. Besides, the venture was his idea. It could be misunderstood to go ahead with it with someone else."

"Then abandon it!" Stackfield stood his ground. They were passed by a couple of hussars in bright uniform. One of them glanced at Stackfield, as if uncertain for a moment if he should have known him, then continued on his way, adroitly sidestepping a hoop which came bowling along the

path toward him, followed by a boy in a sailor suit. Stackfield stood a little straighter. "Abandon it," he repeated resolutely.

Henry smiled with deliberate vagueness. "Oh, I think he would be most disappointed if I were to do that. I gather he rather counts on me."

"My dear chap—" Stackfield shook his head— "take my word for it, Crombie is not sound! Not sound at all."

"In what way?" Henry raised his eyebrows in surprise. "I've never found him... unsatisfactory. What do you mean?"

Stackfield turned away and started to move forward again, kicking at the gravel a little with his feet. It was a gesture of faint irritation. "Just take my word for it, my dear fellow. Can't say. Honor, you know."

"Heard some unpleasant gossip?" Henry kept pace with him. He was determined not to give up. "Probably a misunderstanding. Daresay there's nothing in it. Can't drop a man because of a whisper."

"It is not a whisper!" Stackfield said angrily, the color rushing to his face. "Just . . . just believe me!"

Henry hesitated. He was not certain precisely how far he could push Stackfield without losing the balance between innocence and the hunger for knowledge. Stackfield's temper was well known and diligently avoided. Henry walked in silence for a while, hands in his pockets. He gave no indication whether he accepted Stackfield's judgment or not.

"It is not gossip!" Stackfield said explosively. "Dammit, man, do you think I would blacken a fellow's reputation unless I were sure of what I say?"

"Perhaps I misunderstood you," Henry said mildly. "What *did* you say?"

"The man is not honest!"

"You mean he stole?"

"No! Of course not! For heaven's sake, Rathbone! He borrowed money and did not return it."

"Perhaps he will yet?" Henry forced his voice to remain level. It was an unpleasant thought. He felt the first misgivings. "Perhaps Crombie had meant to repay, and let it lapse too long?"

"Hardly!" Stackfield said bitterly. "He wrote quite plainly that he would not. Made no bones about it. The poor beggar he owed it to could not meet his own debts, and shot

himself. So you see, Crombie is a total bounder, a complete outsider, Rathbone. You cannot have anything to do with him. Can't

"I'll get you some cold water," Stromboli said. She went quickly to the kitchen, filled a glass from the tap, then opened the freezer to get ice. The cubes were melted in the tray. "Great, the freezer's on the fritz," thought Stromboli.

"Money costs too much."

—Lew Archer,
The Goodbye Look, 1969,
by Ross MacDonald

"Sweep everything under the rug for long enough and you have to move right out of the house."

—Mrs. Caliban,
Mrs. Caliban, 1983,
by Rachel Ingalls

bring myself to speak to him, personally. Knew Iverson. Decent fellow. Left a widow and three children. Terrible thing.”

Henry felt stunned. He could remember Iverson’s death very clearly. It had been almost a year ago, in October 1854.

“Are you sure it is the same Crombie?” he said, feeling foolish, clutching at straws.

Stackfield looked at him irritably. “Of course I am. The letter was in the exact same hand.”

“The same hand as what?” Henry asked.

“As his letter requesting membership in the Albion Club,” Stackfield answered. “Protheroe felt obliged to show us the letter Crombie sent to Iverson, saying he would never repay his debt. Couldn’t let us consider him for membership. Felt dreadful about it, but honor compelled him.”

“How did he get such a letter?” Henry said curiously. He did not greatly care for Protheroe, although he could not have given a reason. There was a hardness in the man, an eagerness to profit, which seemed to drive him with an unwholesome zeal. Or perhaps it was simply his taste for silk handkerchiefs and overpolished boots?

“From Iverson’s widow, of course,” Stackfield replied. “He was a friend of the family’s and stepped in to be of what assistance he could. The poor creature was left in great distress.”

“Yes, of course,” Henry said softly. He tried to imagine it.

“Shocking,” Stackfield insisted. “Inexcusable thing to do, completely inexcusable.”

“When one is in despair...” Henry began, stabbed with pity.

“Crombie!” Stackfield snapped. “Wrote as bold as brass. ‘I shall never repay my debt to you.’ That was what tipped poor Iverson over the edge.”

“And you are sure it was sent at that time?” Henry made a last attempt.

Stackfield froze him with a glance. “Of course I am,” Stackfield replied. “Cool as you like. Mentioned the news of the day, latest word from the Crimea. Even spoke of the theater. Cold-blooded as a fish, damn him! Iverson was a decent man.” He kicked at the grass verge with pent-up frustration. “Not wise, perhaps, but decent! Considered Crombie a friend. Had him in the house. Dammit, had him to stay! Looked after him like a brother when his son was killed.”

It was so unlike the picture of Crombie in Henry’s mind that he could not accept it, and yet he could find no argument to deny what Stackfield told him.

“You could have misread the note?” he said desperately. “Or he could have written it at some other time?”

“He wrote about the news of the day,” Stackfield said, losing what was left of his patience. “Couldn’t have known about it before, and wouldn’t have bothered after Iverson was dead.” He shook his head. “Sorry, Rathbone, there’s no escaping it. As Protheroe pointed out, it was Crombie’s refusal to pay the debt that was the last straw for Iverson, poor devil.”

“Yes,” Henry said wretchedly. “Yes. I see. I’m sorry.”

“Not at all, old chap,” Stackfield said with sudden generosity. “No one wants to believe something like that about a friend. Come to the Albion and have a whisky.”

“Thank you,” Henry accepted. “Damned profiteer. Makes his money out of those shocking tenements in the Devil’s Acre!” He whacked his cane viciously at the overlong grass stems. “Did you see that piece in the *Times*? I was going to mention it to you the other day....”

Henry was profoundly unhappy with the situation, so much so that he went to see Crombie, compelled to face him with what he had learned from Stackfield.

The color fled from Crombie’s face and he stared at Henry with disbelief.

“That’s totally untrue!” he protested. “Certainly I wrote such a letter. I cannot remember exactly what I said, but I do know that I never borrowed money from Iverson, or anyone else!” He swallowed awkwardly. “The debt I referred to was simply one of friendship, given me at a time of great personal grief. Such a thing, by its very nature, is unrepayable.”

Henry wished to believe him, and yet there was nothing but his word, nothing whatever to substantiate it. If it were as he had said, why had Iverson fallen into such despair upon receiving it that he had taken his life?

Crombie saw the doubt and sadness. “I did not owe him more than a debt of kindness,” he said quietly. “Of that I swear.”

Henry did not answer. There was nothing further to say.

Iverson’s debts were matters of honor. They had died with him, and his widow still lived in considerable comfort in the house they had shared. Apparently upon her father’s recent death she had ►►►

BEFORE THEY TURNED TO CRIME

Rex Stout began writing in his late 40’s, after making a fortune from inventing a school banking system.

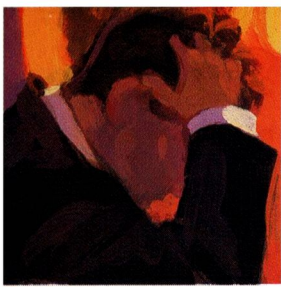
Raymond Chandler

began writing mysteries when he lost his job as an oil company executive.



As a Pinkerton detective, **Dashiell Hammett** was involved in the murder investigation surrounding silent-movie comedian Fatty Arbuckle, and was promoted after catching a man who had stolen a ferris wheel.

Horrorwitts had followed her into the room. She handed him the water. “Thanks. I haven’t eaten anything all day,” he said. “Would you mind handing me that Italian bread?”



▶▶▶ come into some means of her own. The house was outside the village of Bolton, half an hour's drive in a pony trap from the railway station, through narrow lanes, climbing a broad hill.

Mrs. Iverson, a handsome woman in her late thirties, received Henry with good-mannered surprise. "Mr. Henry Rathbone?" she questioned, standing in the charming drawing room with its bay windows and flowered curtains. A long lawn looked across over fields toward a copse of trees.

"I am sorry to intrude upon you, ma'am," he apologized. "But there is a matter concerning a friend of mine that is causing great distress, and I think it is just possible it may arise from a misunderstanding, which you may be able to correct."

"Indeed?" It was less than a year since her husband had died and she still wore black, with a fine mourning brooch at the throat of her gown. "Please tell me what I can do to help. May I offer you some refreshment? Perhaps some tea?"

"Thank you," Henry accepted. "That would be most welcome. The journey from London was hot."

"You have come all the way from London?" She reached for the bell rope and pulled it. "Please be comfortable." She indicated the arm chair. "Tell me this misunderstanding."

Henry waited until she had taken her own seat, then took his. "I believe you were most kind to a Mr. Robert Crombie, especially after the death of his son."

Her face hardened, her eyes chill. "So we were, Mr. Rathbone. Why do you ask?"

Henry's heart sank. Her expression was answer enough, and yet he could not now abandon his tale.

He was prevented from continuing immediately by the entrance of the butler. Mrs. Iverson did not turn to him, but remained with her attention upon Henry.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Anne Perry wrote "The Profiteer" because she wanted to use the Henry Rathbone character from her Inspector Monk novels in a short story. Since Rathbone is a mathematician, not a detective, she had to come up with a unique predicament to place him in. Without resorting to a violent crime, she created a case for him to solve.

Perry has always wanted to write. Her first efforts were historical novels, unpublished, but then she tried her hand at mysteries and achieved success. She has 22 books to her credit; the most recent is the Inspector Monk mystery **Pentecost Alley** (Fawcett). Her next title, **Weighed in the Balance**, will be out this fall.

Born in London, Perry now lives in the Scottish highlands.



"I believe your husband received a letter from him on the day of his death?" Henry said awkwardly.

"It was the cause of his death, Mr. Rathbone," she said bitterly. "There is no need for you to be so circumspect in your reference to it. It is plain enough, and I have no fear to mention it."

The butler coughed.

She turned to him. "Will you bring tea for Mr. Rathbone and myself, please, Wilkinson."

"Yes, ma'am, certainly. But if you will permit me to say so, ma'am, the letter cannot have come that day. It must have been the day before."

"No," Henry said quickly. "It cannot have been the day before. There were items of news mentioned that make that impossible!"

"Then it was the day after, sir," Wilkinson said with certainty. "There was no post on the day of Mr. Iverson's death. It was a very bad snowstorm, and nothing came up from the village at all. The only person who came here at all was Mr. Collingwood from the big house over the fields."

Mrs. Iverson looked startled. "Mr. Collingwood came? I didn't know that."

"Yes, ma'am. He came to see the master. It was over a matter of land he was going to purchase from him."

"Mr. Collingwood was going to buy land from Mr. Iverson?" Henry said in disbelief. It made nonsense of Iverson's debts' being beyond his means.

"No, sir," the butler shook his head. "He came to say that he had changed his mind. His own resources did not apparently meet the need." He turned to Mrs. Iverson. "I was in the room at the time, ma'am, pouring brandy for the gentlemen. I am truly sorry, ma'am, but there was no assistance or comfort I could offer. Mr. Iverson was a gentleman of the utmost honor." He left the rest unsaid; no explanation was necessary.

"But the letter was open!" Mrs. Iverson said. "I found it among George's things. It spoke of a debt. Crombie would not repay."

"I opened it, ma'am, when you asked me to deal with the correspondence to give to your legal advisor. It was not a debt of money, simply of kindness."

She turned slowly to Henry, the color deep in her cheeks. "I'm sorry. It appears I have misjudged Mr. Crombie. Is that what you wished to know?"

"Indeed, ma'am, it is what I hoped profoundly to learn. You are acquainted with Mr. Protheroe?"

"Yes, I am. He has been most helpful since my husband's death."

"I most sincerely advise you to reconsider his assistance, Mrs. Iverson. I fear it is given for many wrong reasons. I am sure you have better friends, and I think Mr. Crombie may well be among them." And then, over tea and cucumber sandwiches brought by a dutiful Wilkinson, he told her the story of Crombie and the Albion Club, concluding it with the ending he now believed it would reach. ■

THE Loving YOU GET

*He was a seasoned
agent runner.*

*She was his spy in
the field. Together
they were locked in a
deadly game of
secrets — and seduction*

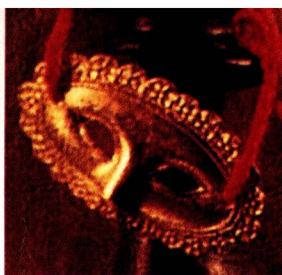
**BY
JOHN
GARDNER**

Early in the last decade of the Cold War, Godfrey Benyon returned to London unexpectedly from Berlin to find his wife of fifteen years in bed with a senior colleague. For policemen and spies there can often be a high turnover in marriages. Both professions place dreadful strains on the contract between man and woman. The jobs are dangerous and consume a person's time and passion, leaving little space for any normal relationships. Some grains of love and respect can grow into stout and unshakable unions. Others just do not hold up.

Benyon and his wife, Susan, had married relatively young and Godfrey had no reason to believe that Susan was anything else but happy and still in love with him. Certainly he still loved her and believed that she had come to terms with the lengthy periods when he was away from home, sometimes not even able to remain in touch.

There used to be a fallacy, commonly believed, that the family of an Intelligence or Security Service officer did not know what the husband or wife did in the way of government work. This, of course, is nonsense. Families always know, just as they know that they are quietly vetted from time to time in order to make sure they have not been suborned by some foreign espionage organization. This regular





▶▶▶ checking covers all branches of the Foreign Service and those in sensitive situations at the Home Office, not just members of the Secret Intelligence Service.

Ironically, the man with whom Susan Benyon had been committing adultery on a regular basis was the officer detailed to carry out the biannual in-depth examinations of her way of life.

His name was Saunders, commonly known to friends and enemies alike as "Soapy." To begin with, the seduction of Susan Benyon had been a ploy on Soapy's part to ascertain whether she put it about—as the jargon had it—thereby becoming a security risk.

However, after the first time, Saunders had enjoyed the delights of Susan Benyon's body so much that he made certain adjustments in his report and the pair became regular and consistent lovers.

Within a few months, Susan brought up the question of divorce from Godfrey and marriage to Saunders—something old Soapy did not want to happen. He had a decent and loving wife of his own and these extracurricular bouts of sex had livened up his own marriage. Susan had unwittingly assisted in turning Soapy's wilder fantasies into reality, and the result was that he eventually discovered hidden wonders in the sexual behavior of his own wife.

On the afternoon that Godfrey walked in on the lovers, he had naturally been tempted to violence and could easily have killed Saunders with one hand, for he was a trained field officer and knew all there was to know about the black arts of death by finger or hand. Happily, he was well disciplined, leaving the room and waiting downstairs for Soapy to leave.

There was no row, no soaring accusations. Godfrey Benyon, being a man of an unforgetting nature, simply told his wife that he would leave that night. She admitted to loving Saunders, yet offered to put him aside and try to make their marriage work. Susan was not a fool and had long realized that, to Saunders, she was merely a bit on the side, to use the common expression of the time.

Even her pleading tears could not move her husband. He was in the business of treachery and knew the price that men and women paid for it within his own sphere of activity. He packed some clothes and a cou-

ple of sentimental items, then left the house they had shared for one and a half decades. His last act was to hand her the keys.

On the following morning he contacted his solicitor, set the divorce in motion, then went over to the headquarters of the Secret Intelligence Service—in those days, Century House—and put in an incriminating report which he knew would get Saunders dismissed from the organization, almost certainly without a pension.

He did not enjoy these tasks, but his deep love for Susan ended at the moment he opened the bedroom door and saw, fleetingly, her body entwined with that of a man whom he had, until that second, respected without question.

Oddly, as he reported back for duty, putting off his leave for a few months, he recalled his father once saying to him, "As far as women are concerned, remember one thing. True and all-consuming love can kill. Sometimes it's not worth it." His parents' marriage had been far from ideal, but now he imagined that he knew what his father had been talking about. There was a coarser term he had heard from junior officers—"The loving you get ain't worth the loving you get." Only, they substituted another word for *loving*. This last summed up his feelings exactly, and with it came the anger. He felt a fool not to have detected his wife sooner. Part of his job, his livelihood and survival, had been to sense the danger signals, to put his finger on people and situations that were not quite right.

He did not realize it at the time, but the anger spawned a desire to take his revenge. Automatically he had wreaked havoc on Saunders's life, but the need for vengeance was now aimed at his soon-to-be ex-wife. While this requirement festered deep within his subconscious, Benyon got on with his professional life—though his colleagues later commented that Godfrey Benyon seemed to change into a hard and uncompromising man, something his superiors applauded. Benyon, they decided, would go a long way in the service.

They sent him back to Berlin, and in the next six months he crossed into the East on five separate occasions, servicing dead-letter drops and making contact with the one agent he ran—usually from afar—highly placed in the typing pool of the KGB facility at Karlshorst.

This agent, known as Brutus, was a twenty-five-year-old young woman, the daughter of a couple of doctors who lived and worked

"A bad situation can only get worse."

—an adage of police work, *Lightning*, 1984, by Ed McBain

"I think perhaps all of us go a little crazy at times."

—Norman Bates to Mary Crane, *Psycho*, 1956, by Robert Block

in the West. Her name was Karen Schmidt—"Such an ordinary name," one of his superiors had said when she first offered herself for active work and cooperation with the Secret Intelligence Service.

Karen's parents were medical P4's for the service: psychiatrists knowledgeable in the ways of what were often known as "deep debriefs"—a term that covered a number of things ranging from counseling of agents who had been through traumas in the field to the kind of interrogations that required the use of certain dangerous drugs allowing inquisitors to reach far into the subconscious of a suspect's mind, trawling for and plundering secrets.

The doctors Schmidt were skilled and respected by the service, their records were squeaky clean, and their work had given Karen her entrée into the world of secrets. She was educated at a private, highly regarded school and went on to Oxford, where she read foreign languages at St. Anthony's College—sometimes referred to as the spook prep school. Her parents tipped off the Foreign Office that she was interested in working in intelligence, so the contact was made and she took the one-year course at the place they kept in Wiltshire for training possible field officers.

Benyon had looked after her when they sent her over the Wall, and he had played her, normally at long distance, ever since. Now, at just around the time his divorce was becoming final, there was a reason to see her face-to-face again. A signal had made it plain that a meeting was essential, so he went over one evening in early June of 1986, and following the elaborate choreography necessary to this kind of thing, they wound up at a safe house not far from the Berliner Ensemble Theater.

His first surprise came when they made the initial contact on the street. He had seen her only once since she went over three years before. At that time they had given her the appearance of a mousy little thing, advising her about everything from a severe hairstyle, the kind of low-heeled shoes she should wear, to the nondescript clothes with which to equip her wardrobe. When she had gone over, Karen was a girl that no man would even look at twice. Now, her whole persona had changed. She was still the same girl, but the mouse had gone, leaving the most beautiful willowy young woman in its place.

She had let her hair grow, smooth, black, and soft, with such a sheen that Benyon

wanted to reach out and run splayed fingers through it. Her face was fuller, and you could see that the brown eyes glittered with humor, while her lips seemed to have become fuller and more enticing, the corners bracketed by little laugh lines. She wore a white dress, full skirted so that Benyon was aware of her thighs and body moving under the thin material. In short, the almost-ugly duckling had become the most attractive swan on the block.

His look must have been transparent, for Karen picked up on it immediately. "You've

A CRIME PRIMER

Any well-stocked mystery library should have these on its shelves—the first, the best, the most influential crime novels.

COZY / TRADITIONAL

- Tales of Mystery and Imagination (1845), by Edgar Allan Poe
- The Moonstone (1868), by Wilkie Collins
- The Complete Sherlock Holmes (1887-1927), by Arthur Conan Doyle
- Trent's Last Case (1913), by E.C. Bentley
- The Murder of Roger Ackroyd (1926), by Agatha Christie



POLICE PROCEDURAL

- V as in Victim (1945), by Lawrence Sanders
- Last Seen Wearing (1952), by Hillary Waugh
- Gideons' Day (1955), by J.J. Marric (John Creasey)
- Cop Hater (1956), by Ed McBain
- The New Centurions (1970), by Joseph Wambaugh



HARD-BOILED

- Red Harvest (1929), by Dashiell Hammett
- The Maltese Falcon (1929), by Dashiell Hammett
- The Postman Always Rings Twice (1934), by James M. Cain
- The Big Sleep (1939), by Raymond Chandler
- I, the Jury (1947), by Mickey Spillane



SUSPENSE / THRILLER

- The Circular Staircase (1908), by Mary Roberts Rinehart
- The Thirty-Nine Steps (1915), by John Buchan
- Rebecca (1938), by Daphne du Maurier
- Brighton Rock (1938), by Graham Greene
- A Coffin for Dimitrios (1939), by Eric Ambler



noticed the change." She smiled, showing that one of her front teeth was crooked. "It was inevitable. You know about the promotions over the past couple of years."

"So the Party insists that you become more glamorous as you move up the ladder?"

"You'd be surprised, but, yes. Yes, that's about it. I'm a supervisor now, and they expect supervisors to take care of their appearance. That was one of the things I had to see you about." Her voice had altered as well. The English was, of course, perfect, but the voice was more throaty than he remembered it.

They sat across from one another at the little wooden table. Benyon had ►►►



►►► brought food: bread, cold ham, potato salad and a bottle of wine, explaining it away at the checkpoint as a picnic that he and his girlfriend were going to eat before the performance at the Berliner Ensemble, who were doing

Brecht's *Threepenny Opera* that night. The girlfriend had been his backup—a young woman called Bridget Ransom, of whom the more caustic would say that a king's ransom could not buy the pathway to Bridget's secret garden. Maybe, but she was an incredibly good field officer with immaculate German and a Silesian accent, plus the ability to become invisible almost at will. On this occasion she watched Benyon's back during the sit-down with Brutus, and he could not have asked for anyone more professional.

So, in that bedraggled little apartment, not a stone's throw from the theater where Bert Brecht had built his fabled ensemble of actors, Benyon, the agent runner, listened to Brutus, his spy.

Over the years he had heard similar stories, but mainly from men: how, in the sensitive position in which they worked, an opportunity had presented itself which, if taken, would lead to a mother lode of hard intelligence. The opportunity always came in the form of a man or woman, depending on the sexual preference of the agent.

It was something Benyon had learned to treat and advise on with great care. An agent in the field was often the loneliest of people, constantly tested, tried, and a prey to every kind of temptation. The common

Benyon's own agent telling him that the colonel had invited her out to dinner on several occasions and had now proposed that she should become his mistress—with a later view to marriage.

Karen provided a wealth of detail about the man, and behind the music of her monologue, it was Benyon's job to see if he could detect gins, traps or snares being laid for his agent. Equally he listened for sounds that might tell him if there were other facts lying just beneath the surface of what she was telling him. Mainly he weighed what advantage they might make of this man should he tell Brutus to go forward, against the possible problems such an operation could cause. He also experienced the constant paranoia of the case officer—had his agent already been quietly turned?

He took his time, keeping the conversation on other matters, ignoring her prods and coaxing for an answer to her main problem—should she commit herself to Desnikoff and the information that would undoubtedly follow? Or should she give the colonel the brush-off?

Benyon, with only one part of his brain on her question, went through the standard drill. Had she detected any changes in attitude to her? Was she comfortable in the double role she was forced to play? Was she aware of any sudden rivalries which might cause her future chaos? These basic questions were important, as they gave him time to think through the right way to determine if Karen was being totally honest with him.

Finally he could put off the subject no longer.

"You fancy the colonel?" Watch her eyes and hands. Read the body language.

There was nothing to read as she shrugged. "He's a bit of a pig, actually. Not unattractive, but his manners are a little boorish."

"I have to ask you this. Even though he's boorish, are you in love with him?"

She gave a little laugh. "No

way. That's an absurd thought."

"But you're willing to sleep with him, feign love for him?"

"Isn't that part of the job? I know what I can get from him with pillow talk. The information he carries in his head is state-of-the-art stuff. He has the ear of the chairman of the KGB. He swaps information with the Stasi and the other heads of intelligence. I can tap into that stuff, but there's only one way, and that lies through sexual favors."

"The giving of favors is not your job. We train people in the art of seduction, Karen. It's not part of your brief. Now, are you sure you don't fancy him?"

She smiled, looked into his eyes, held the gaze for a moment, and then dropped her head. One hand reached

Stromboli pulled the loaf from a bag on top of the refrigerator and passed it to Horrorwitts, who tore off a large crusty piece. "It's from the shop around the corner," he muttered, gumming the bread. "Try it—it's delicious." He broke off another piece and offered it to her.

An agent in the field was often the loneliest of people, constantly tested, tried, a prey to every kind of temptation . . . and denied a normal life.

wisdom on field agents likened them to hermits, monks or nuns, living out their days in a hostile environment and denied a normal way of life.

Karen Schmidt's problem was a senior KGB officer, one of the main liaisons between the East German Intelligence and Security forces and Moscow Center. That this man, Colonel Viktor Desnikoff, had access to deeply hidden secrets was not in doubt. Back in London, Benyon had read his dossier many times. It was part of his job to keep an eye on Soviet and East German intelligence officers—their comings and goings, any particular strengths or weaknesses, their general profiles, and all the other litter of life so often used by an opposing intelligence service. Desnikoff was undoubtedly a prime target, and here was



out and brushed his hand. In a small voice she said, "Not like I fancy some people."

The meaning was perfectly clear to Benyon. She was telling him that she cared for him, and his mind and body reacted in diametrically opposed ways. It had been some time now since he had been with a woman, and he felt the hot stirrings in his groin.

Part of him rejected that wink of lust while another part yearned for a young woman as attractive as this one to hold him and tell him she loved him. It was at this moment, in a sudden quick flash, that he wondered if his emotions were motivated by a need for vengeance against his former wife. This he quickly dismissed as irrelevant.

The suspicious, professional side of his mind raised huge doubts. The wiles of women were myriad and complex. There was one of two reasons that Karen Schmidt, Brutus, might come on to him like this. One was what the psychiatrists call transference—where a patient begins to see the doctor as a love object. This same phenomenon was not uncommon among field agents and their case officers. The other reason was more ominous. To get her own way, a turned agent would stop at nothing to convince a case officer that she was right for a highly dubious job, and this included an act of seduction.

He thought—should she, shouldn't she? Will she, won't she? Will she join the dance? Aloud he asked her if she thought the colonel was on the level. "Is it, in your opinion, simply a bit of scalp hunting, or do you think he's serious?"

She thought for a moment. Then—"His reputation with the ladies is not high. I can only go by my intuition, and that tells me he's being honest. Yes, he has a lurch for me physically, but I sense it's more than that. He's talked to me about many things. It's a scatter effect, not just drawing a bead on my body. Behind the boorish behavior, the crude manner, the man has a sensitive side. He's been trying to show me that."

"And you really think you can pull this off?"

"I'm not a virgin. I can fake with the best of them. My first priority is to get my hands—my brain, really—on information. If this is the only way to get the really good stuff, then I'll do it."

"You'll do it willingly?"

"I'll do it because I see it as part of my job. I can give you so much, Charles. Much more than I've been able to supply so far." Charles was Benyon's crypto. She knew him only by that name, and as far as he was aware, she was completely ignorant of his real name.

The telephone rang. Only one person knew the number. It would be Bridget Ransom telling him that the performance at the Berliner Ensemble was about to finish. At the distant end Bridget simply said, "Ten minutes," in German just in case they had some kind of a check on the line.

To get her own way, a turned agent would stop at nothing to convince a case officer that she was right for a highly dubious job—even an act of seduction.

He had to give Karen some instruction. A yes or a no. He counted to ten, then nodded his head. "Do it," he said, and thought he detected fear in her eyes. Fear and a kind of pleading. A woman who hoped the man would make some move, say that he cared, that he wanted her, or even touch her—fondle her after the ways of men and women who are intimately bound to each other.

Benyon did none of these things. "Do it," he said, then added, "I'll come over again in a few weeks—a couple of months if we're getting good information. I think we should talk after you've set the ball rolling, so to speak." He told her to give him at least ten minutes' start before she left the little apartment, which smelled of wood rot, rising damp, and the antiseptic they used in safe houses in the East.

It took only three weeks for her first wedge of material to come in, sent as usual in a cryptic high-speed burst of electronic noise, caught in mid-air by the boys and girls at GCHQ in Cheltenham. GCHQ was Government Communications Headquarters, where they did everything from random-frequency sweeps to twenty-four-hour listening to recording reports sent at ultrahigh speed from many places in the world.

Other reports followed, and Benyon's senior officers in the SIS were more than pleased with the results. Brutus was sending them the pillow talk of Colonel Viktor Desnikoff, and the pillow talk was exceptional. Things long hidden were now revealed, and on occasion they were getting actual conversations between the KGB colonel and his masters in Moscow Center.

"Do we share any of this with the Americans?" Benyon's immediate superior asked of one of their policy-making deputy chiefs.

"Not on your life."

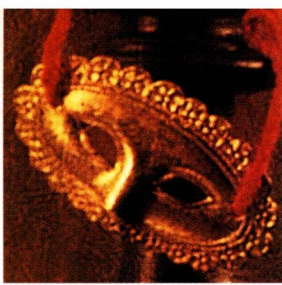
They knew when to share and when to keep quiet. What they were getting back from Brutus, while immediately useful, could also be kept in storage for exchange with the American service for some other secret. The heads of intelligence agencies can be like small boys at times, swapping information like kids swap cards.

Six weeks later, Benyon made another trip over the Wall and had a second face-to-face meeting with Karen Schmidt. This time she was more desirable than ever. She even hugged him and held him close for a good minute when they came together. More desirable, yes, but she was already showing the signs of strain.

When Benyon commented on ►►►

Stromboli took a bite and chewed appreciatively. "It's very good."





▶▶▶ it, she gave a rueful little smile and said something about maybe she had bitten off more than she could chew. "He's insatiable," she said. "But it opens his mouth."

"Can you keep it up?"

She gave a coarse laugh. "Well, he can, so I suppose I'll have to."

On this occasion, when they parted she looked into his eyes longingly and pulled him close, holding him as though she never wanted to let him go.

Back in London, Godfrey Benyon found that Karen the woman lingered too long in his mind. He worried about her and was concerned for her safety as an agent; after all, that was part of his profession. Yet his thoughts strayed to other things. She came to him in dreams, leaned over him naked in a way that was not merely an act of lust, but a ritual of profound love and care. She was present also in daydreams. He would think that he saw her, suddenly, in a crowd. On a few occasions he even hurried after this phantom Karen only to find, as he drew close, that the woman was not like her at all. There were times when he questioned his obsession with her, but finally he came to terms with the fact that he had fallen in love with his agent, who was now giving herself entirely to a Soviet colonel. Benyon began to feel the claws of jealousy cutting into his soul.

Automatically, it seemed, he also began to take more care in his appearance. He bought new clothes, became conscious of things like regular haircuts and unscuffed shoes. Occasionally he would stand in front of the mirror in the little apartment he rented in Chelsea, wondering how a young girl could possibly be interested in him outside his job. At forty-three, his hair was showing signs of gray at the temples, yet his face, like his body, remained lean and firm. He was six-foot-one in height and had a strong bone structure. He would age well, so perhaps a girl of Karen's age might just be interested in him from a physical aspect. Yet, she could know nothing of him as a man, for agent runners always held back their true personality, like actors playing the role expected of them.

The high-grade intelligence kept coming, but with it also came an undertow of strain, detectable not only by Benyon but also by those who ruled over him. Together they began to take precautions, setting up a

quick route, a black hole through which they could get Brutus out, should it become necessary.

Benyon knew that, inevitably, it would become necessary. It almost always did, particularly with a high-risk operation like this.

He met her in the following spring and thought she looked tired out, frazzled and jumpy, starting at shadows. Once more they embraced and this time—the first time ever—they kissed, not the air, or lips brushing a cheek, but mouth to mouth, tongue to tongue, body to body, so that each felt the other through their clothing.

Finally he pulled away, scorched with desire, faint with need and love. "There's no time." He sounded out of breath.

"My darling, we have to make time." She pulled him to her again and he drew away.

"This is far too dangerous. Listen, I have things to tell you ..." and he began to outline her escape route, which she immediately turned down.

"Charles, if I have to get out I'm not going to be treated like someone about to face the Inquisition." Her cheeks flushed. "This has been bloody difficult. Hell, in fact. If I do have to run, then I want you to run with me and I want to be left alone, with you, in some nice quiet place for a couple of weeks before they start pounding on my memory and forcing me to give them a blow-by-blow commentary...."

Benyon knew how she felt. He had seen it in others, the fear of an immediate interrogation—sometimes hostile—when they were still under the trauma of battle fatigue.

"It won't be that bad, my dearest." His heart was not really in it and he did not even believe himself. Interrogation of agents just in from the cold—as they now said, though the term had been filched from a novelist—was anything but amusing.

"No. Tell them from me that if the worst happens, I have to spend a couple of weeks with you before I speak to any of them. If they don't like it, they can forget about me coming over at all. I'll stick around and suffer the consequences." She reached up and twined her arms around his neck, pulled him close to her, and kissed him again, fiercely and with a violence that took his breath away.

"Just the two of us," she said. "A couple of weeks in the sun. It isn't much to ask after all I've done. It's my final offer, darling Charles, so get it for me."

In London they did not like it. This was going against all the laws of that jungle which is the world of secrets. When you pull someone out, you get at them while

Laughable Laws

Suspicious Behavior

● A woman shopping in St. Louis, Missouri, must purchase one dress for every six she tries on in any one store.

● In Mississippi, a person can be fined and jailed for simply playing the "Missouri Waltz" on a piano.

● Citizens in Rexburg, Idaho, are not allowed to walk down the street while "looking gloomy."

● Kola, Alaska, will arrest any local citizen "sticking out a tongue, or otherwise making mockery" of a person who has just caught a small fish.

● In Russellville, Arkansas, it's against the law for "a married or unmarried woman's body parts to quiver" as she walks down a street in that community.

they have it all fresh and straight in their minds. Yet, when Benyon laid out her threatened alternative, they finally caved in—if only because the grade-A, genuine-diamond information kept coming. What she was still giving them confirmed what they believed about certain aspects of the Soviet military, the political leaders and their future operational plans.

On the next trip over the Wall, Benyon was able to tell her that it was a done deal. He went through all the important moves, which were tricky and needed careful timing. “Once we get you in the West—” he smiled and gave her a long squeeze, “once you’re over, the pair of us get on a plane and fly to Bermuda. There’ll be min- ders, of course, but you won’t even see them. Two weeks in Bermuda can’t be bad.” “Right now, two weeks in Bermuda sounds like heaven.”

“You’re O.K. to go on at the moment?” he asked, concerned, for she had lost weight and had become more jumpy, while her eyes gave away the truth that she was under even greater strain than ever.

“He may suspect something.” She bit her lip. “I don’t know. I think I should go on a little longer. The stuff he’s giving me ...”

“Yes?”

“Does it still check out? Is it still good?” “The best.”

They kissed again before she left and he could feel her body pulsing urgently. Needing him, wanting him there and then.

The signal that she was in trouble came only two weeks later. A burst of what sounded like static, beamed directly into GCHQ. It contained the one word, *Overcast*.

Immediately a team went into action. Benyon was left out, as it was too dangerous for him to make the trip over the Wall. All he could do was sit and wait in the house they had prepared for Karen’s return to the West. Even at this late stage, the people who gave him his orders tried to renege on their agreement. She could do nothing about it, they argued. Once she is in the West we can whisk her out of sight.

Benyon said this was no time to begin playing games with her. “She’ll shut up like a clam and you’ll never get the full story,” he cautioned, knowing that the bureaucratic minds of those at the top of the SIS had to cross all their T’s and dot all their I’s.

So it was that Karen Schmidt was smuggled out of East Berlin and deposited in the West. Within an hour of her arrival, she was on a commercial flight to Paris, with

Benyon watching over her with all the tender and loving care he could muster.

She had brought nothing with her, but two of the young women from the West Berlin Resident’s office had been sent on a shopping spree armed with Karen’s measurements—which were current as from the last time Benyon had seen her. It was one of the more pleasurable jobs he had been given: a tying of every thread so that she would not come near naked into her new life.

From Paris they flew direct to Bermuda and there, in a pleasant little villa on the outskirts of St. George (they all felt that Hamilton was too risky), she overcame her fatigue and made love to Benyon in a way which surpassed any of his fantasies.

“Darling Charles,” she whispered again and again as she lay quietly in his arms.

“Not my real name, my dearest girl,” he said.

She gave him a slow and quaint smile which showed her one crooked tooth. “I know, but I don’t like the name Godfrey.”

He thought nothing of the last remark and they drifted off into a golden sleep, wrapped around one another like a pair of children.

In the days following, they became true lovers. Benyon caught only odd glimpses of the watchers assigned to them. He also took three telephone calls from the officer in charge of the team minding them. Apart from that, they took occasional walks down into St. George, eating twice in a very good restaurant, doing a little touristy shopping, and buying food which they took turns in cooking for one another. For the balance of the time they were lovers and proved all the pleasures. They even made plans for the future, talked seriously about life out of the service and what they could do once they were both released from the bondage of secrecy.

The island of Bermuda was the perfect place for them after all. Was this not the island of which Shakespeare wrote in *The Tempest*—the isle full of noises and rapture, with the great magician Prospero and the tangle of love lives within that play? Karen and Benyon appeared to be enraptured by the place, in thrall as though Prospero were still in control, weaving a delicious and intoxicating spell around them.

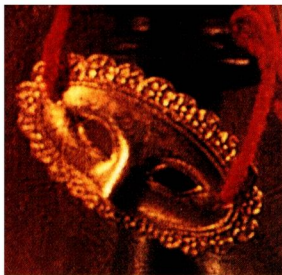
Three nights before they were due to be shipped back to the UK for that long and exhausting time which it would take to clean Karen out, as the interrogators ►►►



BUNGLED CRIMES

● A man wearing a ski mask robbed a 7-Eleven, then fled in a carefully concealed car. When the police asked the clerk to describe the robber, he said, “All I can tell you is he was wearing a ski mask and a blue maintenance uniform with ‘Cedar Wood’ on the back, and ‘Dwayne’ on the front.” Dwayne Carver, a maintenance man at the Cedar Wood Apartments, was arrested shortly thereafter.

● A safecracker arrived to rob a local business only to discover two video surveillance cameras in the building. He found a ladder, climbed up with his screwdriver and took the lens off each camera. While he worked diligently on the first one, he provided officers with the best close-up they’d ever seen, while the camera across the room provided a full-length view. With such a picture-perfect video, the safecracker was quickly caught.



▶▶▶ would phrase it, Karen realized that they had forgotten wine to drink with dinner.

Benyon left the charming little pink villa and walked down to King's Square, glimpsing the full-sized replica of the ship *Deliverance*,

built on the island to carry an already shipwrecked group of colonists on to America. It stood on Ordnance Island as a piece of living history with the statue of Sir George Somers, ill-fated leader of that expedition, arms raised as if he embraced this magic place. Benyon bought a bottle of Karen's favorite wine and slowly walked back. In all, he had been away for less than half an hour but knew that something was wrong as soon as he saw the villa.

A car stood by the gate leading to the small patch of garden in front of the house, and he recognized one of the watchers, the man's name popping into his head straightaway—Pete Cannon. He had not seen the man for a decade but knew him instantly, just as he knew something dreadful had occurred.

Inside, standing in the small living room, "Cheezy" Fowles, head of the watchers' unit, stood by the table with another of his men whom Benyon did not recognize.

"What . . . ?" he began.

"We lost her." Fowles, ramrod straight and very angry.

"Lost her? But . . ."

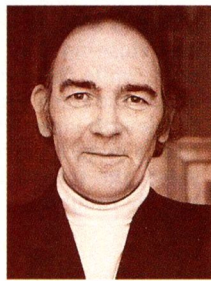
"But me no buts, Mr. Benyon. My people latched onto a couple of likely lads two days ago. I had one man at the back of the house. Now he's dead, and she was away before you were ten yards down the street."

"But I don't . . ."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John Gardner can't remember exactly how he heard about the incident that's the basis for "The Loving You Get," but he knows it's a true event, one he could never get out of his mind.

When he was eight years old, Gardner told his father he wanted to be a writer when he grew up, so his father bought him some notebooks and pencils



and said, "O.K., writer, write!" He has now published 42 novels, including 14 James Bond books (since Ian Fleming died), as well as several series of his own. His latest novel, *Confessor* (Otto Penzler Books/Scribners), and his upcoming one, *Absolution*,

are part of his Kruger series. A native of Great Britain, John Gardner now lives in Charlottesville, Virginia, with his wife, Margaret.

"I've got the island swarming with people, plus the local gendarmes, though I think it was done so quickly and professionally that she may even be far away by now. There are plenty of yachts and small boats off the coast, and we can't cover all of them."

"You mean she's been abducted?"

Slowly Fowles shook his head. "I think not. It would seem that she went of her own accord."

In the midst of the shock an old joke flashed through Benyon's head—"My wife's in the Caribbean." "Jamaica?" "No, she went of her own accord."

"Left you a little billet-doux and a package." He gestured to the table.

The package was neatly wrapped with the kind of paper you buy for wedding presents: all white with gold bells and horseshoes. Against it was an envelope.

Benyon hesitated for a moment, hovering between the envelope and the parcel. Finally he opened the parcel. Inside was a white box, around seven inches long and a couple of inches high. He raised the lid and lifted the contents from a crunch of thin tissue. It was an almost pornographic little statue.

It was fashioned out of that metal so popular in expensive tourist statues: dark and pitted by what appeared to be verdigris. The figures, arched together in the sexual act, were sticklike, elongated and wastingly thin, in the style of Giacometti.

There was a card with the gift, which simply read:

We are surely together for eternity now, my darling—Karen.

With a sense of terrible breathlessness, as though some soot-black shadow had crossed over him, Benyon slowly slit the envelope and unfolded the one sheet of pink paper. Karen had written:

I am sorry, my darling Charles, I do care for you. At least that was not a lie, but from the beginning I have worked for KGB. Poor Viktor has been working for the Americans for many years. KGB instructed me to get very close to him, and when I told you the tale, so did you. It is an irony that he was passing the same chicken feed to the Americans as I was passing to you. In all, it looked and sounded authentic because it simply told you what you wanted to hear. What none of us knew then was that Viktor is HIV-positive. Now he has full-blown AIDS and I am heading toward it rapidly. You will follow, and we will eventually be together. I shall be well cared for until the end, for KGB looks after its own. I hope the same applies in your organization. Much love until death brings us together again. Karen.

He heard the silent scream deep within him, knew he was a dead man, heard some words from *The Tempest*—"But I would fain die a dry death"—heard his father saying that true love sometimes killed, and lastly, as the truth swept over him, heard the old words: "The loving you get ain't worth the loving you get." ■

karen makes out

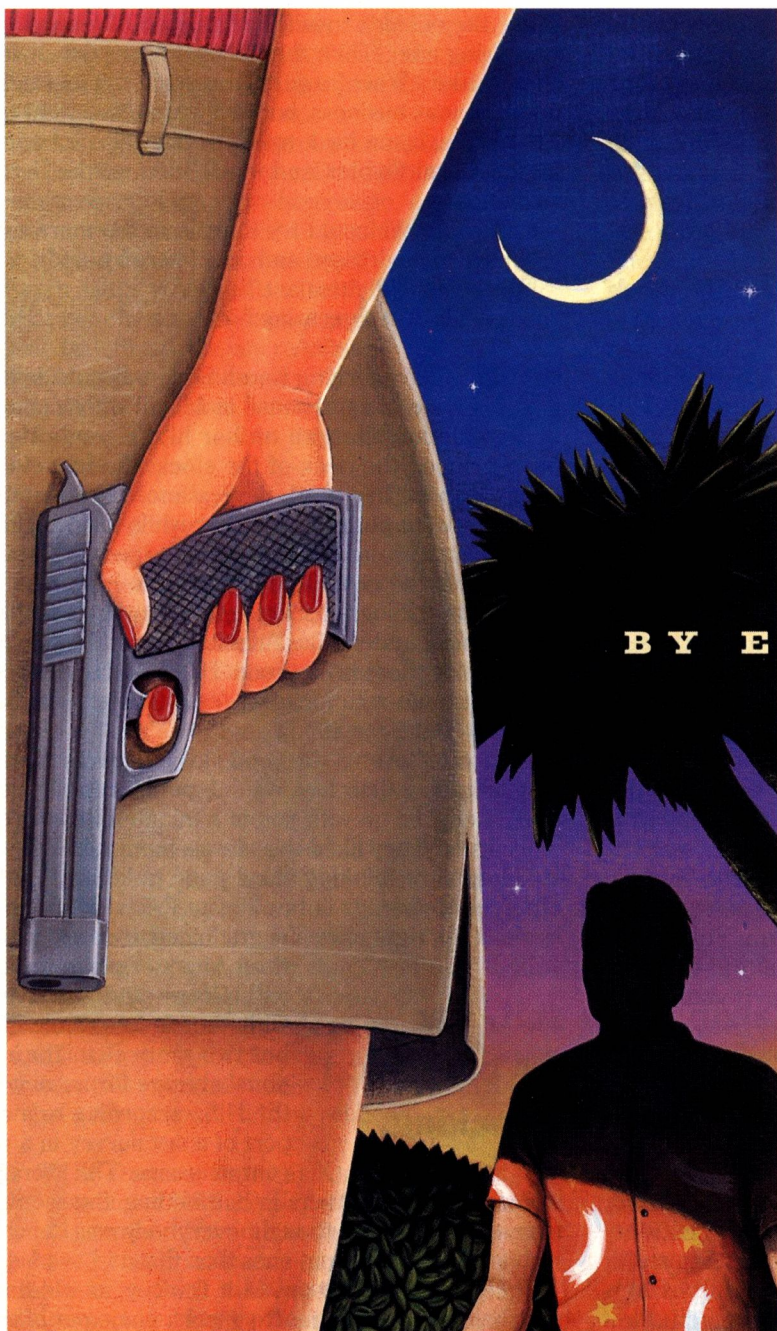
*From the best-selling author
of Get Shorty, a Federal
marshal who's as savvy as
she is good looking*

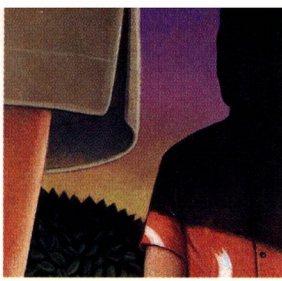
BY ELMORE LEONARD

They danced until Karen said she had to be up early tomorrow. No argument, he walked with her through the crowd outside Monaco, then along Ocean Drive in the dark to her car. He said, "Lady, you wore me out." He was in his forties, weathered but young-acting, natural, didn't come on with any singles-bar bull when buying her a drink, or comment when she said thank you, she'd have Jim Beam on the rocks. They had cooled off by the time they reached her Honda and he took her hand and gave her a peck on the cheek saying he hoped to see her again. In no hurry to make something happen. That was fine with Karen. He said "Ciao," and walked off.

Two nights later they left Monaco, came out of that pounding sound to a sidewalk cafe and drinks, and he became Carl Tillman, skipper of a charter deep-sea fishing boat out of American Marina, Bahia Mar. He was single, married seven years and divorced, no children; he lived in a ground-floor two-bedroom apartment in North Miami—one of the bedrooms full of fishing gear he didn't know where else to store. Carl said his boat was out of the water, getting ready to move it to Haulover Dock, closer to where he lived.

Karen liked his weathered, kind of shaggy look, the crow's-feet when he smiled. She liked his soft brown eyes that looked right at her when he was talking about





▶▶▶ making his living on the ocean, about hurricanes, the trendy scene here on South Beach, movies. He went to the movies every week and told Karen—raising his eyebrows in a vague, kind of stoned way—his favorite actor was Jack

Nicholson. Karen asked him if that was his Nicholson impression or was he doing Christian Slater doing Nicholson? He told her she had a keen eye, but couldn't understand why she thought Dennis Quaid was a hunk. That was O.K.

He said, "You're a social worker."

Karen said, "A social worker—"

"A teacher."

"What kind of teacher?"

"You teach psychology. College level." She shook her head.

"English lit."

"I'm not a teacher."

"Then why'd you ask what kind I thought you were?"

She said, "You want me to tell you what I do?"

"You're a lawyer. Wait. The Honda—you're a public defender." Karen shook her head and he said, "Don't tell me, I want to guess, even if it takes a while." He said, "If that's O.K. with you."

Fine. Some guys, she'd tell them what she did and they were turned off by it. Or they'd act surprised and then self-conscious and start asking dumb questions, like, "But how can a girl do that?"

That night in the bathroom brushing her teeth Karen stared at her reflection. She liked to look at herself in mirrors: touch her short blond hair, check out her fanny in profile, long legs in a straight skirt above her knees, Karen still a size six approaching thirty. She didn't think she looked like a social worker or a schoolteacher, even college level. A lawyer maybe, but not a public de-

said, "I can't wait. You think it'll be long?"

Karen said, "What're you doing Sunday?"

They kissed the moment he walked in and made love in the afternoon, sunlight flat on the window shades, the bed stripped down to a fresh white sheet. They made love in a hurry because they couldn't wait, had at each other and lay perspiring after. Then they made love again, saying things like "Wow," and "Oh, my God," it was so good, serious business, but really fun. They went out for a while, came back to her yellow stucco bungalow in Coral Gables and made love on the living room floor.

Carl said, "We could try it again in the morning."

"I have to be dressed and out of here by six."

"You're a flight attendant."

She said, "Keep guessing."

Monday morning Karen Sisco was outside the Federal courthouse in Miami with a pump-action shotgun on her hip. Karen's right hand gripped the neck of the stock, the barrel extending above her head. Several more U.S. deputy marshals were out here with her while inside, three Colombian nationals were being charged in District Court with the possession of cocaine in excess of five hundred kilograms. One of the marshals said he hoped the scudders like Atlanta, as they'd be doing thirty to life there pretty soon. He said, "Hey, Karen, you want to go with me, drop 'em off? I know a nice hotel we could stay at."

She looked over at the good-ole-boy marshals grinning, shuffling their feet, waiting for her reply. Karen said, "Gary, I'd go with you in a minute if it wasn't a mortal sin." They liked that. It was funny; she'd been standing here thinking she'd gone to bed with four different boyfriends in her life: an Eric at Florida Atlantic, a Bill right after she graduated, then a Greg—

three years of going to bed with Greg—and now Carl. Only four in her whole life, but two more than the national average for women in the U.S., according to a report of a sex survey in a recent magazine. The average

woman had two partners in her lifetime, the average man, six. Karen had thought everybody was doing it with a lot more different ones than that.

She saw her boss now, Milt Dancey, an old-time marshal in charge of court support, come out of the building to stand looking around, a pack of cigarettes in his hand. Milt looked this way and gave Karen a nod, but paused to light a cigarette before coming over. A guy from the Miami FBI office was with him. Milt said, "Karen, you know Daniel Burdon?"

Not Dan, not Danny, Daniel. Karen knew him, one of the younger black guys over there, tall and good-looking, confident, known to brag about how many women he'd had of all kinds and color. He'd flashed

She could wear her favorite Calvin Klein suit, her Sig Sauer .38 snug against the small of her back, and no one would think for a moment she was packing.

fender. Karen was low-key high style. She could wear her favorite Calvin Klein suit, the black one she'd bought at a discount house, her Sig Sauer .38 for evening wear snug against the small of her back, and no one would think for a moment she was packing.

Her new boyfriend called and stopped by her house in Coral Gables Friday evening in a white BMW convertible. They went to a movie and had supper and when he brought her home they kissed in the doorway, arms slipping around each other, holding, Karen thanking God he was a good kisser, comfortable with him, but not quite ready to take her clothes off. When she turned to the door he

his smile at Karen one time, hitting on her. Karen turned him down, saying, "You have two reasons you want to go out with me." Daniel, smiling, said he knew of one reason, what was the other one?

Karen said, "So you can tell your buddies you slept with a marshal." Daniel said, "Yeah, but you could use it too, girl. Brag on getting me in the sack." See? That's the kind of guy he was.

Milt said, "He wants to ask you about a Carl Tillman."

No flashing smile this time, Daniel Burdon had on a serious, sort of innocent expression, saying to her, "You know the man, Karen? Guy in his forties, sandy hair, goes about five-ten, one-sixty?"

Karen said, "What's this, a test? Do I know him?"

Milt reached for her shotgun. "Here, Karen, lemme take that while you're talking."

She turned a shoulder saying, "It's O.K., I'm not gonna shoot him," her fist tight on the neck of the twelve-gauge. She said to Daniel, "You have Carl under surveillance?"

"Since last Monday."

"You've seen us together—so what's this do-I-know-him stuff? You playing a game with me?"

"What I meant to ask, Karen, was how long have you known him."

"We met last week, Tuesday."

"And you saw him Thursday, Friday, spent Sunday with him, went to the beach, came back to your place. . . . What's he think about you being with the Marshals Service?"

"I haven't told him."

"How come?"

"He wants to guess what I do."

"Still working on it, huh? What you think, he a nice guy? Has a sporty car, has money, huh? He a pretty big spender?"

"Look," Karen said, "why don't you quit foolin' around and tell me what this is about, O.K.?"

"See, Karen, the situation's so unusual," Daniel said, still with the innocent expression, "I don't know how to put it, you know, delicately. Find out a U.S. marshal's sleeping with a bank robber."

Milt Dancey thought Karen was going to swing at Daniel with the shotgun. He took it from her this time and told the Bureau man to behave himself, watch his mouth if he wanted co-operation here. Stick to the facts. This Carl Tillman was a suspect in a bank robbery, he told her, a possible suspect in a half dozen more, all the robberies, judging from the bank videos, committed by the same guy. The FBI referred to him as "Slick," having nicknames for all their perps. They had prints off a teller's counter might be the guy's, but no match in their files and not enough evidence on Carl Edward Tillman—the name on his driver's license and car registration—to bring him in. He

"What I'd like you to do is snuggle up to the man, find out his secrets. You know what I'm saying—intimate things, like did he ever use another name."

appeared to be most recently cherry, just getting into a career of crime. His motivation, pissed off at banks because Florida Southern foreclosed on his note and sold his forty-eight-foot Hatteras for nonpayment.

It stopped Karen for a moment. He might've lied about his boat, telling her he was moving it to Haulover, but that didn't make him a bank robber. She said, "What've you got, a video picture, a teller identified him?"

Daniel said, "Since you mentioned it," taking a Bureau wanted flier from his inside coat pocket, the sheet folded once down the middle. He opened it and Karen was looking at four photos taken from bank video cameras of robberies in progress, the bandits framed in teller windows, three black guys, one white.

Karen said, "Which one?" and Daniel gave her a look before pointing to the white guy: a man with slicked-back hair, an earring, a full mustache and dark sunglasses. She said, "That's not Carl Tillman," and felt instant relief. There was no resemblance.

"Look at it good."

"What can I tell you? It's not him."

"Look at the nose."

"You serious?"

"That's your friend Carl's nose."

It was. Carl's slender, rather elegant nose. Or like his. Karen said, "You're going with a nose ID, that's all you've got?"

"A witness," Daniel said, "believes she saw this man—right after what would be the first robbery he pulled—run from the bank to a strip mall up the street and drive off in a white BMW convertible. The witness got a partial on the license number and that brought us to your friend Carl."

Karen said, "You ran his name and date of birth?"

"Looked him up in NCIC, FCIC and Warrant Information, drew a blank. That's why I think he's just getting his feet wet. Managed to pull off a few—two, three grand each—and found himself a new profession."

"What do you want me to do," Karen said, "get his prints on a beer can?"

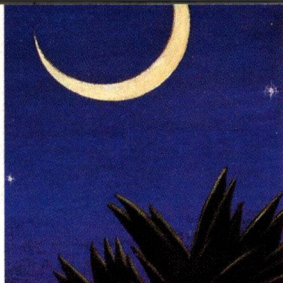
Daniel raised his eyebrows. "That would be a start. Might even be all we need. What I'd like you to do, Karen, is snuggle up to the man and find out his secrets. You know what I'm saying—intimate things, like did he ever use another name. . . ."

"Be your snitch," Karen said, knowing it was a mistake as soon as the words were out of her mouth.

It got Daniel's eyebrows raised again. He said, "That what it sounds like to you? I thought you were ►►►

"Now, about the violin," she continued, wiping the crumbs from her fingers. "It is insured, isn't it?"





▶▶▶ a Federal agent, Karen. Maybe you're too close to him—is that it? Don't want the man to think ill of you?"

Milt said, "That's enough," standing up for Karen as he would any of his people, not because she was a woman; he had learned not to open doors for her. The only time she wanted to be first through the door was on a fugitive warrant, this girl who scored higher with a handgun, more times than not, than any marshal in the Southern District of Florida.

Daniel was saying, "Man, I need to use her. Is she on our side or not?"

Milt handed Karen her shotgun. "Here, you want to shoot him, go ahead."

"Look," Daniel said, "Karen can get me a close read on the man, where he's lived before, if he ever went by other names, if he has any identifying marks on his body, scars, maybe a gunshot wound, tattoos, things only lovely Karen would see when the man has his clothes off."

Karen took a moment. She said, "You think I've seen him like that?"

"Well, if you haven't," Daniel said, "I know you could arrange it."

"I suppose," Karen said, "I could put a gun on him, tell him to strip."

Daniel Burdon grinned at Karen. He said, "Girl, if that's what you like to do, whatever turns you on."

Karen could handle "girl." Go either way. Girl, looking at herself in a mirror applying blush-on. Woman, well, that's what she was. Though until just a few years ago she only thought of women as old as her mother as women. Women getting together to form organizations of women, saying, Look, we're different than men. Isolating themselves in these groups instead of mixing it up with men and beating them at their own men's games. Men in general were stronger physically than women. Some men were stronger than other men and Karen was stronger than some too; so what did that prove? If she had to put a man on the ground, no matter how big or strong he was, she'd do it. One way or another. Up front, in his face.

What she couldn't see herself playing was this sneaky role. Trying to get the stuff on Carl, a guy she liked, a lot, would think of with tender feelings and miss him during the day and want to be with him. . . . Well, O.K., she'd play the game, but not undercover. She'd first let him know she was a

Federal officer and see what he thought about it.

Could Carl be a bank robber?

She'd reserve judgment. Assume almost anyone could at one time or another and go from there.

What Karen did, she came home and put a pot roast in the oven and left her bag on the kitchen table, open, the grip of a Beretta nine sticking out in plain sight.

Carl arrived, they kissed in the living room, Karen feeling it but barely looking at him. When he smelled the pot roast cooking Karen said, "Come on, you can make the drinks while I put the potatoes on." In the kitchen, then, she stood with the refrigerator door open, her back to Carl, giving him time to notice the pistol. Finally he said, "Jesus, you're a cop."

She had rehearsed this moment. The idea: turn saying, "You guessed," sounding surprised; then look at the pistol and say something like "Nuts, I gave it away." But she didn't. He said, "Jesus, you're a cop," and she turned from the refrigerator with an ice tray and said, "Federal. I'm a U.S. marshal."

"I would never've guessed," Carl said, "not in a million years."

Thinking about it before, she didn't know if he'd wig out or what. Looking at him now he seemed to be taking it O.K., even smiling a little.

He said, "But why?"

"Why what?"

"Are you a marshal?"

"Well, first of all, my dad has a company, Marshall Sisco Investigations. . . ."

"You mean because of his name, Marshall?"

"What I am—they're not spelled the same. No, but as soon as I learned to drive I started doing surveillance jobs for him. Like following some guy who was trying to screw his insurance company, a phony claim. I got the idea of going into law enforcement. So after a couple of years at Miami, I transferred to Florida Atlantic and got in their Criminal Justice program."

"I mean why not FBI, if you're gonna do it, or DEA?"

"Well, for one thing, I liked to smoke grass when I was younger, so DEA didn't appeal to me at all. Secret Service guys I met were so damn secretive, you ask them a question, they'd go, 'You'll have to check with Washington on that.' See, different Federal agents would come to school to give talks. I got to know a couple of mar-

**"Everybody
has something
to conceal."**

—Sam Spade,
The Maltese Falcon, 1929,
by Dashiell Hammett

**"Never sleep
with anyone
whose troubles
are worse than
your own."**

—Advice given to
Lew Archer,
Black Money, 1966,
by Ross MacDonald

shals—we'd go out after, have a few beers and I liked them. They're nice guys, condescending at first, naturally; but after a few years they got over it."

Carl was making drinks now, Early Times for Karen, Dewar's in his glass, both with a splash. Standing at the sink letting the faucet run, he said, "What do you do?"

"I'm on court security this week. My regular assignment is warrants. We go after fugitives, most of them parole violators."

Carl handed her a drink. "Murderers?" "If they were involved in a Federal crime when they did it. Usually drugs."

"Bank robbery, that's Federal, isn't it?"

"Yeah, some guys come out of corrections and go right back to work."

"You catch many?"

"Bank robbers?" Karen said, "Nine out of ten," looking right at him.

Carl raised his glass. "Cheers."

While they were having dinner at the kitchen table he said, "You're quiet this evening."

"I'm tired, I was on my feet all day, with a shotgun."

"I can't picture that," Carl said. "You don't look like a U.S. marshal, or any kind of cop."

"What do I look like?"

"A knockout. You're the best-looking girl I've ever been this close to. I got a pretty close look at Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio, when they were here shooting *Scarface*. But you're a lot better looking. I like your freckles."

"I used to be loaded with them."

"You have some gravy on your chin. Right here."

Karen touched it with her napkin. She said, "I'd like to see your boat."

He was chewing pot roast and had to wait before saying, "I told you it was out of the water?"

"Yeah?"

"I don't have the boat anymore. It was repossessed when I fell behind in my payments."

"The bank sold it?"

"Yeah, Florida Southern. I didn't want to tell you when we first met. Get off to a shaky start."

"But now that you can tell me I've got gravy on my chin . . ."

"I didn't want you to think I was some kind of loser."

"What've you been doing since?"

"Working as a mate, up at Haulover."

"You still have your place, your apartment?"

"Yeah, I get paid, I can swing that, no problem."

"I have a friend in the Marshals, lives in North Miami, on Alamanda off a Hundred and twenty-fifth."

Carl nodded. "That's not far from me."

"You want to go out after?"

"I thought you were tired."

"I am."

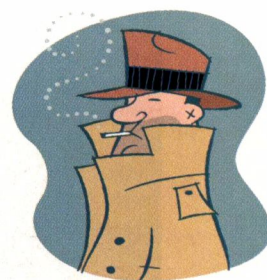
"Then why don't we stay home?" Carl smiled. "What do you think?"

"Fine."

They made love in the dark. He wanted to turn the lamp on, but Karen said no, leave it off.

Geraldine Regal, the first teller at Sun Federal on Kendall Drive, watched a man with slicked-back hair and sunglasses fishing in his inside coat pocket as he approached her window. It was 9:40 Tuesday morning. At first she thought the guy was Latin. Kind of cool, except that up close his hair looked shellacked, almost metallic. She wanted to ask him if it hurt. He brought papers, deposit slips and a blank check from his pocket, saying, "I'm gonna make this out for four thousand." Began filling out the check and said, "You hear about the woman trapeze artist, her husband's divorcing her?"

Geraldine said she didn't think so, smiling, because it was a little weird, a customer she'd never seen before telling her a joke. ▶▶▶



GUMSHOE GLOSSARY

Want to jaw just like Sam Spade, Philip Marlowe or any of the other hard-boiled dicks? Then give this the up-and-down. That's the crop.

bean-shooter: gun; also gat, heat, rod, roscow

bim: woman; also broad, chick, chippy, dame, doll, frail, girlie, moll (girlfriend), sister, skirt, twist

big house: jail; also caboose, can, hoosegow, pen stir

bird: guy; also cat, egg, gee, goose, hombre, jasper, jobbie, mug, palooka

blow down: kill; also bop, bump off, chill off, croak, cut down, knock off, poop, pop, rub out

boiler: car; also bucket, bus, crate, flivver (a Ford), heap, iron

box job: safe cracking

bulls: cops; also buttons, flat-foots, hammer and saws, johns, the law

burn powder: shoot; also clip, drill, fog, pump metal, squirt metal, throw lead

button: face; also map, pan, puss

cabbage: money; also berries, C's or centuries (hundreds), cush, fin (\$50), geetus, gink, grand (\$1,000), kale, jack, lettuce, mazuma, rhino, sawbuck (\$10), scratch, sugar, yard (\$100)

Chicago overcoat: death, also the big one, the big sleep, rub out

chiv: knife, also shiv

close your head: shut up

cool: to knock out

crab: figure out

dick: detective; also gumshoe, op, peeper, shamus, sleuth, snooper

go climb up your thumb: leave; also blow, breeze, dangle, dust, fade, take a Mickey Finn, take the run-out, screw, scam out, sneak, take a powder, take it on heel and toe, take the air

jake: O.K.; also jakeloo

jaw: talk; also barber, chin

kisser: face; also mug, mush, trap, yap

peach: to inform; also rat

rumble: the news; also wire

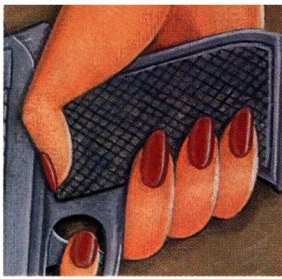
snap a cat: shout

that's the crop: that's all of it

tooting the wrong ringer: asking the wrong person

up-and-down: a look

yegg: cracker of cheap safes



▶▶▶ “They’re in court. The husband’s lawyer asks her, ‘Isn’t it true that on Monday, March the fifth, hanging from the trapeze upside down, without a net, you had sex with the ringmaster, the lion tamer, two clowns, and a dwarf?’”

Geraldine waited. The man paused, head down as he finished making out the check. Now he looked up.

“The woman trapeze artist thinks for a minute and says, ‘What was that date again?’”

Geraldine was laughing as he handed her the check, smiling as she saw it was a note written on a blank check, neatly printed in block letters that said:

**THIS IS NO JOKE
IT'S A STICKUP!
I WANT \$4000 NOW!**

Geraldine stopped smiling. The guy with the metallic hair was telling her he wanted it in hundreds, fifties and twenties, loose, no bank straps or rubber bands, no bait money, no dye packs, no bills off the bottom of the drawer, and he wanted his note back. Now.

The teller didn’t have four grand in her drawers,” Daniel Burdon said, “so the guy settled for twenty-eight hundred and was out of there. Slick, changing his style—we know it’s the same guy, with the shiny hair? Only now he’s the Joker. The trouble is, see, I ain’t Batman.”

Daniel and Karen Sisco were in the hallway outside the central courtroom on the second floor, Daniel resting his long frame against the railing, where you could look below at the atrium with its fountain and potted palms.

“No witness to see him hop in his BMW this time. The man coming to realize that was dumb, using his own car.”

Karen said, “Or it’s not Carl Tillman.”

“You see him last night?”

“He came over.”

“Yeah, how was it?”

Karen looked up at Daniel’s deadpan expression. “I told him I was a Federal agent and he didn’t freak.”

“So he’s cool, huh?”

“He’s a nice guy.”

“Cordial. Tells jokes robbing banks. I talked to the people at Florida Southern, where he had his boat loan? Found out he was seeing one of the tellers. Not at the main office, one of their branches, girl name Kathy Lopez. Big brown eyes, cute as a puppy, just started working there. She’s out with Tillman, she tells him about her job, what she does, how she’s counting

money all day. I asked was Tillman interested, want to know anything in particular? Oh, yeah, he wanted to know what she was supposed to do if the bank ever got robbed. So she tells him about dye packs, how they work, how she gets a two-hundred-dollar bonus if she’s ever robbed and can slip one in with the loot. The next time he’s in, cute little Kathy Lopez shows him one, explains how you walk out the door with a pack of fake twenties. A half minute later the tear gas blows and you have that red stuff all over you and the money you stole. I checked the reports on the other robberies he pulled? Every one of them he said to the teller, no dye packs, or that bait money with the registered serial numbers.”

“Making conversation,” Karen said, trying hard to maintain her composure. “People like to talk about what they do.”

Daniel smiled.

And Karen said, “Carl’s not your man.”

“Tell me why you’re so sure.”

“I know him. He’s a good guy.”

“Karen, you hear yourself? You’re telling me what you feel, not what you know. Tell me about him—you like the way he dances, what?”

Karen didn’t answer that one. She wanted Daniel to leave her alone.

He said, “O.K., you want to put a wager on it, you say Tillman’s clean?”

That brought her back, hooked her, and she said, “How much?”

“You lose, you go out dancing with me.”

“Great. And if I’m right, what do I get?”

“My undying respect,” Daniel said.

As soon as Karen got home she called her dad at Marshall Sisco Investigations and told him about Carl Tillman, the robbery suspect in her life, and about Daniel Burdon’s confident, condescending, irritating attitude.

Her dad said, “Is this guy colored?”

“Daniel?”

“I know he is. Friends of mine at Metro-Dade call him the white man’s Burdon, on account of he gets on their nerves always being right. I mean your guy. There’s a running back in the NFL named Tillman. I forget who he’s with.”

Karen said, “You’re not helping any.”

“The Tillman in the pros is colored—the reason I asked. I think he’s with Chicago.”

“Carl’s white.”

“O.K. and you say you’re crazy about him?”

“I like him, a lot.”

“But you aren’t sure he isn’t doing the banks.”

“I said I can’t believe he is.”

“Why don’t you ask him?”

“Come on—if he is, he’s not gonna tell me.”

“How do you know?”

She didn’t say anything and after a few moments her dad asked if she was still there.

“He’s coming over tonight,” Karen said.

Horrorwitts was indignant. “Of course. But it’s irreplaceable!”

"You want me to talk to him?"

"You're not serious."

"Then what'd you call me for?"

"I'm not sure what to do."

"Let the FBI work it."

"I'm supposed to be helping them."

"Yeah, but what good are you? You want to believe the guy's clean. Honey, the only way to find out if he is, you have to assume he isn't. You know what I'm saying? Why does a person rob banks? For money, yeah. But you have to be dumb, too, considering the odds against you, the security, cameras taking your picture. . . . So another reason could be the risk involved, it turns him on. The same reason he's playing around with you. . . ."

"He isn't playing around."

"I'm glad I didn't say, 'Sucking up to get information, see what you know.'"

"He's never mentioned banks." Karen paused. "Well, he might've once."

"You could bring it up, see how he reacts. He gets sweaty, call for backup. Look, whether he's playing around or loves you with all his heart, he's still risking twenty years. He doesn't know if you're onto him or not, and that heightens the risk. It's like he thinks he's Cary Grant stealing jewels from the broad's home where he's having dinner, in his tux. But your guy's still dumb if he robs banks. You know all that. Your frame of mind, you just don't want to accept it."

"You think I should draw him out. See if I can set him up."

"Actually," her dad said, "I think you should find another boyfriend."

Karen remembered Christopher Walken in *The Dogs of War* placing his gun on a table in the front hall—the doorbell ringing—and laying a newspaper over the gun before he opened the door. She remembered it because at one time she was in love with Christopher Walken, not even caring that he wore his pants so high.

Carl reminded her some of Christopher Walken, the way he smiled with his eyes. He came a little after seven. Karen had on khaki shorts and a T-shirt, tennis shoes without socks.

"I thought we were going out."

They kissed and she touched his face, moving her hand lightly over his skin, smelling his after-shave, feeling the spot where his right earlobe was pierced.

"I'm making drinks," Karen said. "Let's have one and then I'll get ready." She started for the kitchen.

"Can I help?"

"You've been working all day. Sit down, relax."

It took her a couple of minutes. Karen returned to the living room with a drink in each hand, her leather bag hanging from her shoulder. "This one's yours." Carl took it and she dipped her shoulder to let the bag slip off and drop to the coffee

table. Carl grinned.

"What've you got in there, a gun?"

"Two pounds of heavy metal. How was your day?"

They sat on the sofa and he told how it took almost four hours to land an eight-foot marlin, the leader wound around its bill. Carl said he worked his tail off hauling the fish aboard and the guy decided he didn't want it.

Karen said, "After you got back from Kendall?"

It gave him pause.

"Why do you think I was in Kendall?"

Carl had to wait while she sipped her drink.

"Didn't you stop by Florida Southern and withdraw twenty-eight hundred?"

That got him staring at her, but with no expression to speak of. Karen thinking, Tell me you were somewhere else and can prove it.

But he didn't; he kept staring.

"No dye packs, no bait money. Are you still seeing Kathy Lopez?"

Carl hunched over to



"You want to believe the guy's clean. Honey, the only way to find out if he is, you have to assume he isn't. You know what I'm saying?"

put his drink on the coffee table and sat like that, leaning on his thighs, not looking at her now as Karen studied his profile, his elegant nose. She looked at his glass, his prints all over it, and felt sorry for him.

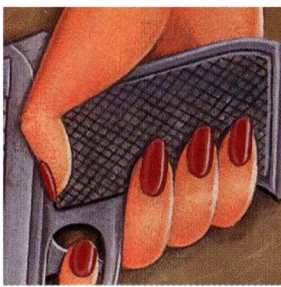
"Carl, you blew it."

He turned his head to look at her past his shoulder. He said, "I'm leaving," pushed up from the sofa and said, "If this is what you think of me . . ."

Karen said, "Carl, cut the crap," and put her drink down. Now, if he picked up her bag, that would cancel out any remaining doubts. She watched him pick up her bag. He got the Beretta out and let the bag drop.

"Carl, sit down. Will you, please?"





▶▶▶ “I’m leaving. I’m walking out and you’ll never see me again. But first . . .” He made her get a knife from the kitchen and cut the phone line in there and in the bedroom.

He was pretty dumb. In the living room again he said, “You know something? We could’ve made it.”

And he had seemed like such a cool guy. Karen watched him go to the front door and open it before turning to her again.

“How about letting me have five minutes? For old times’ sake.”

Karen said, “Yeah, well . . .” raised the pistol to rack the slide and cupped her left hand under the grip. She said, “You move to get in the car, I’ll shoot.”

It was becoming embarrassing, sad. She said, “Carl, don’t you understand? You’re under arrest.”

He said, “I don’t want to hurt you, Karen, so don’t try to stop me.” He went out the door.

Karen walked over to the chest where she dropped her car keys and mail coming in the house: a bombé chest by the front door, the door still open. She laid aside the folded copy of the *Herald* she’d placed there, over her Sig Sauer .38, picked up the pistol, and went out to the front stoop, into the yellow

low glow of the porch light. She saw Carl at his car now, its white shape pale against the dark street, only about forty feet away.

“Carl, don’t make it hard, O.K.?”

He had the car door open and half turned to look back. “I said I don’t want to hurt you.”

Karen said, “Yeah, well . . .” raised the pistol to rack the slide and cupped her left hand under the grip. She said, “You move to get in the car, I’ll shoot.”

Carl turned his head again with a sad, wistful expression. “No you won’t, sweetheart.”

Don’t say *ciao*, Karen thought. Please.

Carl said, “*Ciao*,” turned to get in the car, and she shot him. Fired a single round at his left thigh

and hit him where she’d aimed, in the fleshy part just below his butt. Carl howled and slumped inside against the seat and the steering wheel, his leg extended straight out, his hand gripping it, his eyes

raised with a bewildered frown as Karen approached. The poor dumb guy looking at twenty years, and maybe a limp.

Karen felt she should say something. After all, for a few days there they were as intimate as two people can get. She thought about it for several moments, Carl staring up at her with rheumy eyes. Finally Karen said, “Carl, I want you to know I had a pretty good time, considering.”

It was the best she could do. ■

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Award-winning novelist Elmore Leonard wrote this short story—his first in more than 30 years—to try out the character Karen Sisco, who makes her full-length debut in his forthcoming novel *Out of Sight* (Delacorte Press). Leonard, whose nickname, “Dutch,” was given to him when he was a schoolboy, says character names are terribly important: He spends a long time coming up with them, and admits that sometimes a character just doesn’t work until he changes the name.

Leonard’s earliest writing effort was a World War I play, inspired by a serialization of *All Quiet on the Western Front* and staged by his fifth-grade class. After serving in the Pacific in World War II, he graduated from college and worked in advertising. Meanwhile, he wrote Westerns, first stories and then novels. He quit his day job in 1961 and turned to crime in 1969 with *The Big Bounce*. He has published 30 novels, among them the cult favorites *Hombre*, *Fifty-two Pickup*, *Stick* and *La Brava*, and the best sellers *Glitz*, *Bandits*, *Touch*, *Freaky Deaky*, *Killshot*, *Get Shorty* (made into the 1995 film with John Travolta playing Chili Palmer), *Maximum Bob*, *Rum Punch*, *Pronto* and *Riding the Rap*. He has also written several screenplays. Leonard has five children and ten grandchildren. He currently lives with his wife, Christine, in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan.

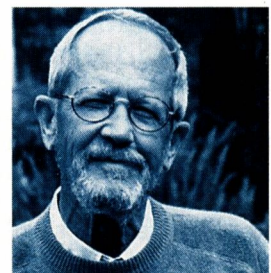
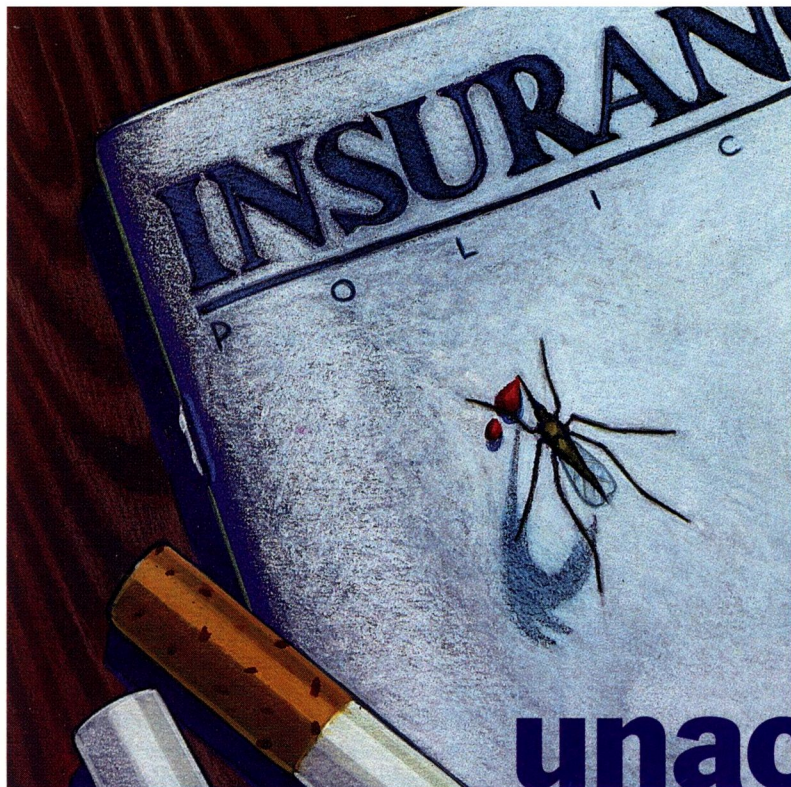


Photo © Linda Chen



*At last: a surefire way
to help her husband
break his annoying
habit — permanently!*

unacceptable levels

"You shouldn't scratch it. You've made it bleed."

"It itches. It's giving me hell. You don't react to mosquito bites the way I do."

"It's just where the belt on your jeans rubs. I think I'd better put a plaster on it."

"They're in the bathroom cabinet," he said.

"I know where they are."

She removed the plaster from its plastic packing and applied it to the small of his back. He reached for his cigarettes, put one in his mouth and lit it.

"I wonder if you're allergic to mosquito bites," she said. "I mean, I wonder if you should be taking antihistamine when you get bitten. You know, you should try one of those sprays that ease the itching."

"They don't do any good."

"How do you know if you don't try? I don't suppose smoking helps. Oh, yes, I know that sounds ridiculous to you, but smoking does affect your general health. I bet you didn't tell the doctor you had all these allergies

when you were examined for that life insurance you took out."

"What do you mean, 'all these allergies'? I don't have allergies. I have rather a strong reaction to mosquito bites."

"I bet you didn't tell them you smoked," she said.

"Of course I told them.

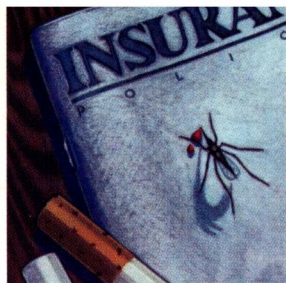
BY RUTH RENDELL

You don't mess about when you're taking out a hundred thousand pounds' worth of insurance on your life." He lit a cigarette from the stub of the last one. "Why d'you think I pay such high premiums?"

"I bet you didn't tell them you smoked forty a day."

"I said I was afraid I was a heavy smoker."

"You ought to give it up," she said. "Mind you, I'd like a thousand pounds for every time I've said that. I'd like a pound. You smokers don't know what it's like living with it. You don't know how you smell, your clothes, your hands, the lot. It gets in the



▶▶▶ curtains. You may laugh, but it's no joke."
"I'm going to bed," he said.

In the morning she had a shower. She made a cup of tea and took it up to him.

He stayed in bed smoking while he drank his tea. Then he had a shower.

"And wash your hair," she said. "It stinks of smoke."

He came back into the bedroom with a towel around him. "The plaster came off."

"I expect it did. I'll put another one on."

She took another plaster out of its pack.

"Did I make it bleed?"

"Of course you make it bleed when you scratch it. Here, keep still."

"You'd think it would stop itching after a couple of days, wouldn't you?"

"I told you, you should have used an anti-allergenic spray. You should have taken an antihistamine. You've got a very nasty sore place there, and you're going to have to keep it covered at least another forty-eight hours."

"Anything you say." He lit a cigarette.

In the evening they ate their meal outdoors. It was very warm. He smoked to keep the mosquitoes away.

"Any excuse," she said.

"One of those little buggers has just bitten me in the armpit."

"Oh, for God's sake. Just don't scratch this one."

"Do you really think I should have told the insurance people I'm allergic to mosquito bites?"

"I don't suppose it matters," she said. "I mean, how could anyone tell after you were dead?"

"Thanks very much," he said.

"Oh, don't be silly. You're much more likely to die of smoking than of a mosquito bite."

Before they went to bed she renewed the plaster on his back and, because he had scratched the new one, gave him another. He could put that one on himself. He had to get up in the night; the bites drove him mad and he couldn't just lie there. He walked about the house, smoking. In the morning he told her he didn't feel well.

"I don't suppose you do if you didn't get any sleep."

"I found a packet of nicotine patches in the kitchen," he said. "Nicorella or something. I suppose that's your latest ploy to stop me smoking."

She said nothing for a moment. Then, "Are you going to give it a go, then?"

"No, thanks very much. You've wasted your money. D'you know what it says in the instructions? 'While using the patches it is highly dangerous to smoke.' How about that?"

"Well, of course it is."

"Why is it?"

"You could have a heart attack. It would put unacceptable levels of nicotine into your blood."

"'Unacceptable levels'—you sound like a health minister on telly."

"The idea," she said, "is to stop smoking while using the patch. That's the point. The patch gives you enough nicotine to satisfy the craving without smoking."

"It wouldn't give me enough."

"No, I bet it wouldn't," she said, and she smiled.

He lit a cigarette. "I'm going to have my shower, and then perhaps you'll redo those plasters for me." ■

Laughable Laws

The Criminal Animal

● Rawlins, Wyoming, has made it illegal to walk an ugly dog down any public thoroughfare.



● Lawmakers in Seattle have decided: "It is unlawful to carry a goldfish on public

transportation unless that goldfish is lying down."

● No horse can be given a plug of chewing tobacco within the boundaries of Williston, North Dakota.

● Memphis, Tennessee, city fathers prohibit frogs from croaking after 11 p.m.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ruth Rendell, an ex-smoker who quit cold-turkey almost twenty years ago, was fascinated by the resemblance between nicotine patches and adhesive bandages, the first time she saw them—hence, the idea for "Unacceptable Levels." In 1965, Rendell published her first novel, *From Doon to Death*, introducing the character of Chief Inspector Reginald Wexford. Since then she has written over 47 books (16 featuring Wexford), both under her own name and the pseudonym Barbara Vine. Her ability to create



disturbing criminal characters and crime scenes, as well as to delve deeply into her characters' psyches, has earned her four Gold Dagger Awards from the Crime Writer's Association and three Edgar Awards. Her newest book is *Blood Lines*, a collection of short stories just published by Crown

Publishing. Coming this fall is *The Keys to the Street*, the latest novel by Barbara Vine. Born in London, Rendell now resides in Suffolk, England in a beautiful 16th-century home, far away from the dark world she evokes in her novels.

Meg Summers was summoned to the district attorney's office late on a rainy November afternoon; the district attorney was present, and his chief assistant, Ricky Betz. Homicide Captain Mal Cleves was slouched in a chair, scowling, and Detective Sergeant Don Ryerson sat as upright as a tree in another chair. They all looked very angry. Meg had met Folsum, the Texas lieutenant, earlier that day; he was standing at the window, a black shadow against the gray outdoors; even in silhouette he appeared angry. Cleves motioned toward a chair and she sat down warily, wondering why she was there at all. A detective for only four months, she was still in training.

"O.K., here's how it goes," Lt. Folsum said in a thick Texas accent. "Effie killed him." He made one-syllable words stretch out to two syllables: "*Kee-ild he-im*. And this time I intend to get her for it."

The district attorney was shaking his head. Folsum ignored him. He shifted a little; the rain on the windows behind him distorted the Portland city lights, creating a hallucinatory effect.

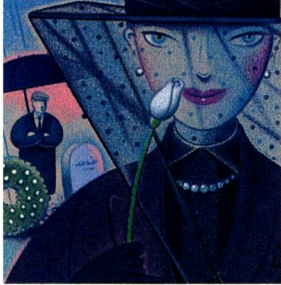
Meg sneaked a glance at her watch. Four-thirty, and Becky got out of preschool at five-fifteen. No way would Meg make it in time to pick her up. She had to call Clara, her backup, within the next fifteen minutes. Of course, the head of the school knew Meg's job sometimes kept her late, and they wouldn't turn



Effie had
buried eight
husbands—
no wonder
the police
were a bit
suspicious

merry widow

BY KATE WILHELM



▶▶▶ Becky out, but they had made it clear that they didn't appreciate keeping one of the teachers late. Overtime, the head had said solemnly—which was meaningless, since Meg had to pay for any overtime.

"Effie was in Hawaii and met your local boy, Rollo Yates," the lieutenant was saying. "His mother had died recently and left him a bundle, and his father was in his seventies, in bad health, with an even bigger bundle. Another wedding, four weeks ago. Another death, yesterday. Rollo was victim number eight, gentlemen... and Ms. Summers."

Meg blinked. Obviously Folsum had filled in the others in some detail, but this was the first she had heard that Effie Yates was being accused of multiple murders. For a time no one spoke. Finally, the district attorney said, "Rollo Yates died in an accident. No way can we make it anything but an accident."

"They all died in accidents," the lieutenant said harshly. "Well, one had an aneurysm. Close enough."

Meg looked at her watch again, pretending she was simply moving to ease a cramped muscle.

"Two possibilities," Lt. Folsum said savagely. "One, she hires a woman to impersonate her, to be someplace else while *she* dispatches the new husband." He paused, then said, "Or she has a lover or accomplice who does the guy in for her." He moved away from the window and jerked a chair around to

Meg blinked . . . this was the first she had heard that Effie Yates was being accused of multiple murders.

sit on it astraddle. Meg suspected he took his gun to bed with him.

"I don't care which scenario is right," Folsum said in a low mean voice. "I want that little lady."

Captain Cleves was looking at his watch almost as often as she was, Meg realized. To her relief he stood up and said, "This looks like it's going to take a little time to plan. Let's have a break, meet back here in ten minutes."

Folsum scowled at him but made no objection. The district attorney and his assistant huddled; the captain reached for the telephone, then apparently changed his mind and walked to the outer office, where he sat at an empty desk to use a phone. Don Ryerson walked out with Meg. She headed for another desk, another phone. He stayed too close until she was actually seated, then continued on toward the men's room.

He never touched her, never made a pass, never uttered a word out of line. He never had to do anything overt; he broadcast his thoughts with every glance, every motion. In another time, another place, before the term "sexual harassment" had been invented, it would have been a different story, she understood, but here and now he was careful not to

give her cause for a formal complaint. He was just always there, forty years old, six feet tall, a former football player running to fat now, with dissecting eyes and hands that came to life, opening, closing, while his eyes roamed over her. He gave her the creeps. Twice he had asked her to go out with him; now he simply looked.

She called Clara, who said no problem, she'd keep Becky until Meg showed up, give her some supper, bed her down if necessary.

Up here in the district attorney's office, the staff was closing down for the day. Not for the first time Meg felt envious of the secretaries and clerks who reported in at nine and left promptly at five. She saw Don Ryerson returning and hurried toward the ladies' room.

She couldn't have planned this one much in advance," Folsum said when they had all gathered again. "No one knew Rollo's old man was that sick, and Effie and Rollo caught the first flight out when they got the word. So, we'll want all phone calls from that moment until Rollo got it. A list of all the passengers on that flight, and check them all out. Her movements minute by minute from the time she stepped off the plane. She got in touch with her accomplice somehow. I want to find out when, how and who."

Captain Cleves was looking more and more unhappy as the list of what the lieutenant wanted stretched out. Finally he interrupted. "They arrived here within hours after the old man died. Two attorneys met them and took them to the hospital, and then to a hotel, and they went to bed. Early yesterday morning the lawyers had them in meetings, making funeral arrangements, and in the afternoon Effie went to get her hair done, and later on Rollo went to the parking garage to get something from the car, a rental car. And the trunk lid fell on him. She didn't have time to set up anything."

"I never said she wasn't smart," Folsum drawled softly. His eyes glittered. "Ryerson and Summers come with me to talk to the little lady, and you get started on some of that other stuff. Right?"

Captain Cleves shrugged and nodded. Meg didn't understand how it had come about that the lieutenant from Texas was ordering her captain in Portland, but apparently Folsum was in charge. Even more apparently, he had had a run-in with Effie Yates in the past. Meg made a great effort not to reveal her dismay at being paired with Don Ryerson, who was looking at her again.

Effie Yates had a suite on the seventh floor of the plush Hanover House Hotel. She opened the door for them. She was a small woman in her mid-thirties, and surprisingly pretty, with dimples, blue eyes, blond hair done in a windblown style that suggested great care had gone into arranging it. Dressed in flowing green silk pants with a gold sash and a white silk blouse, she could have been a Barbie model.

"This could be a break," Folsum told Meg. "It's why I picked you. Effie might like to talk to a female."

Her eyes widened when she saw Folsum. Then she dimpled and smiled. "For heaven's sake, it's the lone ranger himself! Well, come on in."

She put her hand on Folsum's arm, smiling broadly at him, and moved aside to let them all enter. Folsum jerked away from her. "Sergeant Ryerson, Detective Summers," he said, motioning with his thumb toward them. "We'd like to ask you a few questions."

"Well, of course." Effie held out her hand to Meg to shake. Her hand was warm and firm. Then she shook hands with Don Ryerson, who looked bewildered, as if suspects weren't supposed to do this. She led the way to a sitting room with wide windows, beautiful furniture and many vases of flowers.

Gesturing toward a couch and the chairs, she seated herself in a gold brocade-covered armchair. Folsum did not sit down. Don Ryerson started to, then, taking his cue from the lieutenant, continued to stand. Meg sat on the couch. Effie grinned at her.

"O.K.," Effie said. "Shoot."

Folsum's expression made it clear that he would like to do just that. He said, "I have a tape recorder. Do you have any objection to our using it for this interview?"

She shrugged. "Nope. If your memory is as lousy as mine, that's the only way."

He set a tape recorder on a coffee table, finally sat down opposite her, and started. Don Ryerson sat in a straight chair, listening intently, his eyes now fixed on Effie Yates. Meg sat and watched and listened, but there was nothing to hear, she concluded quickly. Effie and Rollo had been entertaining friends when the call came about his father's death. Two friends had gone with Effie to help her pack a few things; the women had been the governor's sister and a visiting senator. Folsum's eyes were glittering again as Effie recounted her actions, minute by minute. It was obvious that there had not been an opportunity for her to plan anything or to get in touch with an accomplice.

Then Effie said, "Lieutenant, I told you all about it back in Dallas. Don't you remember?" She smiled at him, then at Meg. "I have such a peculiar gift, you see. For some reason I can always tell if someone is going to die within the next few months, and I know how it will happen. Not something I asked for. I mean, how on earth would anyone phrase such a request? I didn't believe it myself for a long time, but it's true. I always tell the guys about it. Rollo knew. Or he didn't know, I guess, because no one ever believes me. But I

told him. And I told the lieutenant back in Dallas a few years ago."

Meg stared at her. Folsum cursed, not quite inaudibly, and Don Ryerson looked steely-eyed.

"Cut the crap, Effie!" Folsum said. He stood up. "We'll be checking out everything you said, everyone you saw and talked to, every phone call. Meanwhile, the body stays on ice. And you stay put."

Effie sighed mournfully. "In a city where I don't know a soul. No doubt my lawyer will be in touch with you tomorrow. I think we'll have a double funeral for Rollo and his father. That would be nice, wouldn't it?"

"Too bad you're so overwhelmed by shock and grief," Folsum muttered.

"Lieutenant, I hardly knew the man!"

Effie paused and looked at Meg appraisingly. Then she said, "Would you please stay and have dinner with me, Detective? I hate to eat alone in a hotel room, and it would look awfully funny if I went out and had a big meal, wouldn't it? But I am hungry. Besides, reporters are hanging around."

Swiftly Folsum said, "She'll stay. Come on, Ryerson, we have work to do."

Meg looked at her watch, then at Folsum, and she didn't say a word. It was fifteen minutes after seven. Becky would have to spend the night at Clara's house. And she would have to call to let Clara know.

"Well, good," Effie said. She got up and went to the door of an adjoining room. "I suppose you'll have a couple of things to discuss, so if you'll excuse me." She went into the next room and closed the door behind her.

"O.K.," Folsum said to Meg, "this could be a break. It's why I picked you to come with us. I thought she might like to talk to a female, someone young. She's a real talker. Just let her go on, and remember every word she says, her expression, things she skips over. No point in trying to pump her; she's an old pro at this, but she might let something slip. Since you don't know anything, you can ask the kind of questions that anyone would. Get a cab when you're done, and as soon as you're home, write a full report before you forget anything. Got that?"



Laughable Laws

● "Ten kisses," in front of other people, "undeniably equals a valid engagement," according to an old ordinance in Attleboro, Massachusetts.

● Indianapolis's aptly named "Anti-Jailbird-Flower-Senders-Ordinance" bans anyone from sending flowers to a person

Stop in the Name of Love

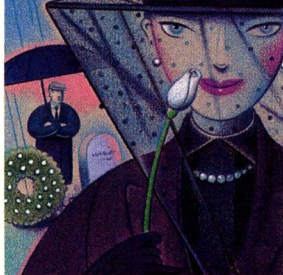
incarcerated in the city jail.

● In Lawton, Oklahoma, "No young woman shall sit on a man's lap without a cushion or a pillow under her."

● For love-struck Kentuckians, a statute warns: "A man shall not marry the grandmother of his wife."

● Husbands in Branchville, New Jersey, can't go fishing without taking their spouse along—unless they've been married for more than 12 months. The penalty: "Imprisonment in the city jail for not more than one week or by a fine of \$25 or both."





▶▶▶ After the two detectives left, Effie returned to the sitting room. She listened when Meg called Clara, and when she spoke to Becky. When Meg hung up, Effie said, "I'm sorry I

asked you to stay. Do you want to go now, be with your daughter?"

"I can't. Orders," Meg said. "It's O.K. It doesn't happen very often, and she loves her baby-sitter. It's O.K." She realized her tone was not as upbeat as her words, but she couldn't help it.

"Well, since it's a done deed, let's see what the room service menu has to offer. I've found that if you want something not listed, they usually can find it for you. I hope you like wine. I love wine, a good Rhone white, or chardonnay. I happen to have both on hand..." She went to a refrigerator and brought out two bottles. "You pick. I never touch the hard stuff, but a nice wine, that's different."

Meg shook her head. "I guess I'd better not. I think I'm still on duty."

"Nonsense. I'll pick and pour and put a glass at your elbow. By the time we eat and have coffee, you'll be sober again even if we both get a little bit tipsy first." She chatted as she opened the bottle and poured, chatted as she sipped her own wine and examined the menu, then handed it over to Meg. "At least taste the wine," she said. "If eating alone is bad, think how much worse drinking alone is."

Suddenly Meg laughed in spite of herself. Maybe Effie was a black widow who devoured one husband after another, but her friendliness was infectious. The wine was the best she had ever had. They ordered crab, and Meg listened in amusement as Effie added vegetables and salad, and steamed clams for starters, to be sent up

steamed clams and hot crusty bread, and more wine. As soon as he left again, Effie asked, "How on earth did you become a cop?" She took the lid off the bucket of clams and sniffed. "Oh, wow! Heaven! Dig in."

Going to the police academy together had been Jack's idea, Meg told her, digging in. The clams were as good as they smelled. Jack had flunked out and she had made it. At that point, Jack walked.

"It pays better than anything else I could do," Meg said. "The benefits are good—health insurance, sick leave, things like that. And I have a child to raise."

"Divorced, or just separated?" Effie asked. She dipped a piece of bread in the juice remaining in the bucket. "Try that," she said. "Good."

Meg tried it. Good. "Divorced," she said then.

"What I like to do is get up and move between courses," Effie said when the clams were gone, as well as all the juice. She went to the window. "Still raining." Then, facing out, she said softly, "I was crazy about Bobby, my first husband. I was twenty, he was twenty-three." At the table Meg stiffened, listening hard.

"I was still in college," Effie went on, "but he had graduated and had a job already. We didn't plan to get married yet. I mean, what for? We were living together already. Then one night we were watching TV, sitting on the floor eating popcorn, laughing, and all at once it was just like a memory flashed into my head. You know how you remember things: a little bit at first, then more and more. It was like that. In my memory flash I saw him walking, saw something big and dark falling on him, saw him die."

"Then I remembered more. We were looking in a shop window on a street that I never had seen before. I had on a wedding ring. It was hot and sunny. I had on sandals and shorts, a tank top. It was June tenth. He started to walk on, but I looked in the shop window again and called him to come back. He laughed. We were so broke we couldn't buy a thing. We were putting it all on a credit card, his first credit card. We didn't have a clue about how we'd pay it off, and we didn't really care. It was our honeymoon. Then the ice fell on his head."

There was a knock on the door, and this time two waiters appeared, one to bring food, one to clear away dirty dishes. No one spoke until they were gone. Effie came back to the table and began to remove cov-

"Never plead guilty."

—*Rumpole's motto,*
Rumpole and
the Learned
Friends, 1978,
by John Mortimer

"When in doubt, cook something and eat it."

—*Spenser's rule,*
Mortal Stakes, 1975,
by Robert Parker

Meg laughed in spite of herself. Maybe Effie *did* devour one husband after another, but her friendliness was infectious.

immediately, and another bottle of the Rhone wine.

"There," Effie said in satisfaction. "See, I never would have done that alone. Tell me about your daughter."

To her surprise, Meg found herself talking about Becky, who was five, about Jack, who had walked out three years earlier, about her parents, who lived on the coast and ran a motel.

A waiter came, rolling a cart with the

She had been devastated, in severe shock, suicidal even, and then someone had brought a lawyer around.

ers, exclaiming over the dishes. She poured more wine for them both and sat down.

"Let's eat."

Meg reached across the table and touched Effie's hand. "I'm sorry about Bobby," she said.

"Honey, that was a long time ago. Sixteen years. It's all right." As if to prove that it was all right, she continued to talk between bites. She had been shaken by the flash of premature memory, she said, but Bobby had thought it was funny. Just to thwart fate, he had said, they'd go ahead and get married right then, in April. She could miss school for a few days; he could get a few days off work, and they would have a short honeymoon. They had gotten married in April, but a crisis had come up at work, and he had not been able to leave then. By June, when they took a trip to Mexico, she had forgotten the premonitory dream. Until it happened exactly as she had seen it.

She had been devastated, in severe shock, suicidal even, and then someone had brought a lawyer around, and he had explained to her the economics of a tragedy like that and seen to it that she was compensated. "He fell for me," she said with a slight grin. "He was twenty years older than I was, and he fell for me. I didn't encourage him; it just happened. He was so kind and gentle, and kept insisting that I was not to blame, that I hadn't done anything wrong, that all my guilt was misplaced. I was very grateful.

"And one day at lunch with him, I touched his hand and it happened again. A flash of memory. I told him I had seen him on a sinking boat that had run into a rock, and he laughed, exactly as Bobby had. He said he was safe because he didn't own a boat, never went near a boat, and didn't intend to go near one." She shrugged. "Two weeks after we got married a client took him out on his yacht, and it happened exactly as I had predicted. A submerged rock tore up the yacht, and it sank."

She had gone to a psychiatrist in New York, Effie continued. They started dating, and after some months she told him he would drop dead while a patient was talking. "He told me no one as healthy as he was could possibly just drop dead. But he did, two months later, four weeks after our wed-

ding. I couldn't tell what killed him, of course. An aneurysm is pretty invisible. That's when the police got interested. They did an autopsy.

I guess they thought I'd poisoned him. After that there's been an autopsy every time, no matter what the cause of death was. His patient was cured, by the way," she added. "He thought he had shocked his psychiatrist to death with his personal revelations, and he went on a power trip and was cured!"

She cracked crab legs and picked out the meat as she talked, now and then sighing over the succulent fare. Meg listened with mounting skepticism but did not interrupt. The crab was delicious.

"I traveled a little then, trying to think what was happening. I had to believe it was really happening by then, of course. Now and then I met someone and advised him to get a whole lot of insurance fast. No one ever did; they all thought I was wacko because I'd lost three husbands in three years. Then I found myself in Palm Beach. Talk about money! The first few times the guys had to work for it, but down there, they grow it on trees, or dig it out of family cellars or something. Anyway, there was a guy, single, a little older than me, rolling in dough. And he planned to leave it to some dippy aunt who already owned Fort Knox. I told him about my odd gift, of course. And he laughed. We got married and a shark ate him."

Effie dipped an asparagus spear in hollandaise and ate it thoughtfully. "By then I had a plan, though. I have a gift, and I have to share it with people. But how? Wouldn't an insurance company love to hire me! Anyway, I can't go around touching people and saying you're O.K., but you're dead. My range seems to be about four months. So I decided to become a distribution agent. I would collect bundles of dough, I decided, and give half to charity."

Finally Meg asked a question. "How did you meet Lt. Folsum?"

"Oh, that was in Dallas. Oil money. Guys all seem to carry guns down there, did you know that? Anyway, the oil man was at his broker's office and someone came in shooting and popped him. I had told him, too. I always tell them." She shrugged. "And the lone ranger made it his lifelong duty to bring me to justice." She laughed.

Meg pushed her plate back an inch, surfeited. "Don't you care at all?" she asked then. "I mean, to marry someone who dies so suddenly, doesn't it mean anything to you?"



Would-be murderers can find **arsenic** in ceramics, enamels, paints, pesticides and wallpaper.

The quickly fatal **Barbados nut** contains seeds with a very pleasant taste—anyone who tastes one will instinctively want another.

Honey from bees that have fed on **azaleas, rhododendron, oleander or dwarf laurel** is poisonous.

The most violent poison available in plant form in the United States is **water hemlock**. Numerous poisonings have been reported from the plant being mistaken for parsnips, artichokes or other roots.

Cyanide—found in bitter almonds, and peach and apricots pits—can be counteracted with a dose of amyl nitrite within a half hour of poisoning.





▶▶▶ Effie eyed the last piece of asparagus, shook her head, and picked up her wine. "I cared a lot the first time, and I cared the next two times, in a different way. After that?" She shrugged. "They were going to die, no matter what I did

or didn't do. Others died, guys I didn't want any part of, and I knew they were going to. The ones I married had a lot of money, and I put it to good use. Half-and-half at first; now it's more like three-fourths to charities and the rest for me. That's better than any of them would have done with the dough. So I'm the highest paid whore in the world. I can live with that."

Meg ducked her head, embarrassed, because that was exactly what she had been thinking. Or would have been thinking, she corrected herself, if she believed a word of this. Effie poured more wine, emptying the second bottle. They drank silently.

Then Meg asked, "Does it work with women too?"

"Sure. You're O.K. I wouldn't have told you any of this if you hadn't been." Effie grinned reassuringly.

"Why did you tell me? It won't make a bit of difference if I believe you or not. Lt. Folsom is convinced you're a murderer. I couldn't change his mind."

For a moment Effie studied Meg. Then she said, "I don't want to use you, honey. I know what the lone ranger thinks. Forget him. The other one, though, what's his name?"

"Don Ryerson?"

"Yeah, the guy getting fat. I touched him and got my flash of memory. January sixth, a Saturday evening, six weeks from now. He's been sick in bed for three days with the mumps, and he's been married for three days. Too sick to do anything about it. He's alone watching television, and he gets really excited and jumps out of bed and goes to the window

to yell at his bride, who has gone out to buy juice for him, and he falls out. Tough."

"Don Ryerson," Meg whispered. "I don't believe it."

"No one ever does," Effie said, smiling. "I'm not done yet. Listen. The day of the wedding he shoots up a fever and takes to bed. The day before the wedding, he buys two lottery tickets and makes a big deal out of giving them to his bride-to-be for a wedding present. What excited him on Saturday was the announcement that one of the tickets had won big, real big, nine million big."

Meg put down her wine glass; her hand was shaking too hard to hold it. She was shaking all over. "That's crazy!" she cried. "If you know that, why don't you grab him?"

"Can't. Not in six weeks, not with the lone ranger breathing down my back, and fatso himself looking at me so steely-eyed. Besides, it would look bad to remarry that fast. But you could. I saw how he looked at you." She stood up. "I'll order some coffee now. And I have a box of chocolates that will make you think you're in heaven." She went to the phone, but before she lifted it, she said, "Anyway, I said I have to share this gift. Remember?"

It was nearly midnight when Meg got back to her apartment, where she managed to write her report. She rewrote it three times; in the final version she did not mention what Effie had said about Don Ryerson. The next morning she gathered clean clothes for Becky and drove to Clara's house to collect her daughter and take her to preschool.

Lt. Folsom put her through a two-hour debriefing that left her exhausted and him bitterly unhappy. When he said she could go, she paused at the door to ask, "Is it true that she gives away millions?"

"True," he muttered. "Trying to ease her guilty conscience. Buy her way into heaven."

That week Meg read the entire file on Effie Yates. She read about the double funeral, and studied the pictures of the widow.

The lieutenant went back to Texas, and Effie returned to Hawaii; a few days later Meg received a postcard from her. "My address. Come visit. Next time, you buy the wine."

The following Monday when she reported to work, Meg was assigned to partner with Don Ryerson, who was looking at her, his hands opening and closing. She stopped moving and asked, "Did you ever have mumps?"

He looked blank, then shook his head. "Hell of a question to ask."

She smiled at him. ■

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kate Wilhelm's tale about an extraordinarily cheerful widow evolved from a wish to create a detective story with no crime. She was born in Toledo, Ohio, and grew up in a family and neighborhood with strong storytelling traditions: Local kids would gather on the street corner and tell each other tales. Wilhelm started writing after her children were born, inspired by a story she thought was badly written. Her first short story was published in 1956; her first novel, 1963.

Best known for her award-winning science fiction, she's also created several series detectives, including Defense Attorney Barbara Holloway, the team of Charlie Meiklejohn and Constance Leidl and Judge Sarah Drexler. Her latest Barbara Holloway novel is called **Malice Prepense** (St. Martin's Press). Kate Wilhelm currently lives in Eugene, Oregon, with her husband, Damon Knight.



Photo: Richard B. Wilhelm

Some true stories are stranger than fiction, and more disturbing. Stalked and terrified, alone in the dark, Susan Billig tried to reason with the midnight caller. His cold voice, his obscenities and threats had disturbed her sleep for two decades as he eluded police. She pleaded with him, hoping and praying that he was telling the truth, that he had what she wanted most in the world: her missing daughter, Amy. I write mystery novels now, but at

could spot in a crowd a block away.

At noon on March 5, 1974, Amy left her parents' Coconut Grove, Florida, home to visit her father's art gallery a half mile away. Wearing a lilac blouse, a denim skirt and cork-soled clog sandals, she walked her happy walk into that sunny afternoon and vanished like a shadow. No one has ever been found who saw her again.

By suppertime that evening, Susan Billig knew that Amy was miss-

where the would-be extortionists—teenage twin boys from a wealthy family—were arrested. They did not have Amy.

The biker theory offered hope that Amy was alive, held captive, drugged, beaten, raped, perhaps dazed and suf-

My Most Haunting Case

A Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter recounts the most mystifying story she has ever covered

BY EDNA BUCHANAN

the time Amy disappeared I was a young reporter for *The Miami Herald*, and the case that has haunted my dreams for 22 years is real. I must have written three dozen stories about it, and even now, no day passes that I do not think of Amy. Her dental chart, still on my desk, is yellow with age. For years I dispatched photocopies to detectives and medical examiners wherever unidentified human remains were discovered. What I, too, want most in the world is to bring Amy home.

Seventeen and beautiful, she wrote poetry, kept journals and read Sylvia Plath. She was a practicing vegetarian, loved animals and small children. She dabbled in watercolors and excelled in both the flute and guitar. Slender, with thick, waist-length brown hair, she had a distinctive gait, a "happy" walk that her mother

ing. Police said not to panic until morning. She called them again, frantic, at dawn. Friends, neighbors and classmates mobilized with searches, posters and fund raisers. Police officers and newspaper editors moved more slowly. The first story appeared six days after Amy vanished.

Unconfirmed tips had Amy getting into a light-colored pickup truck, a beige van and other vehicles. Bikers had rumbled through the Grove that day, en route to annual races in Daytona. One of many tips generated by the news coverage came from a caller who identified herself as Susan Johnson. She claimed to be "a biker's girl" and said the Outlaws motorcycle gang had abducted Amy.

Other callers demanded a \$30,000 ransom. A shaken Sue Billig followed instructions and took the borrowed money to the Fontainebleu Hotel,

fering from amnesia, but alive. Sue embraced it. I was doubtful. After days passed, then weeks and months, it seemed clear that Amy must have fallen prey to some roving serial sex killer like a Ted Bundy. (Later, I even checked Bundy's whereabouts at the time. He had not taken Amy, but I knew there were others out there, roaming the country, stalking women.) Sue's obsession remained strong and contagious. Each time we spoke, I left her thinking, "My God! Amy is alive, and we have to find her!"

From the day she vanished, Ned and Sue Billig lived only to find their missing daughter, the beautiful child born after 10 years of marriage and four miscarriages. The search for Amy cost them their home and their business. They were victimized by extor-



▶▶▶ tionists, phony private investigators, fake psychics. Ned suffered in silence, but Sue became a tiger. She would do anything, endure anything, to find her child.

She once rode off with a stranger on the back of a motorcycle. He had promised to find her daughter. He didn't. She visited biker bars and an Outlaws clubhouse. She visited bikers in prison and conversed with convicted murderers and rapists. She learned more about the Pagans,

But the street number "Johnson" had given her did not exist. She ran up and down the street, weeping for her daughter. When he promised to deliver a lock of Amy's hair, Sue waited all night in a restaurant. He never came. And when Sue's mother died, and as Ned fought cancer, "Johnson" called to gloat. "You'll be alone soon," he warned her ominously.

Sue's long search led in 1985 to Mundy, Texas, and a battle with officials reluctant to exhume an unidenti-

"I see her bones scattered across the sand," the woman said. "Under water, scattered under water."

Rape was the motive, the psychic told me, adding that the murderer still lived in Miami, had never killed again and was tortured by the crime. He had disposed of the body while in a fugue state, she said, and was still trying to convince himself that it was only a bad dream—that he had not killed her, that Amy was still alive.

"You have to find the man who keeps calling Sue Billig," I urged the lead detective. "He may have killed Amy."

Most cops are not impressed by psychics. Neither am I. But her words made chilling sense. Yet despite police efforts, "Hal Johnson" continued to elude capture.

I left journalism for fiction, stories with a resolution, a final chapter, but Sue and I remained close.

"Johnson's" calls to Sue grew more frightening and obscene. "Ned's dead, isn't he?" he exulted after her husband's funeral in 1993. "You're alone now."

Meantime, Sue herself had been diagnosed with cancer. The caller told her that he and the other men using Amy for sex now desired a mother-daughter team. "We want you," he said. "Amy doesn't have long." Sue could save her daughter, he suggested, if she submitted to his sexual training.

Sue, 70 by now, agreed to meet him at midnight in the huge parking lot at Dadeland Mall. She kept the date, accompanied by an FBI agent. "Johnson" never showed up.

Two days later he called again.

People would see Amy's picture and nod, but when Sue tracked down the girl they'd seen, it was always somebody else's daughter.

Hell's Angels and Outlaws, and how they sold and abused women, than any mother should ever have to know. She followed leads all across the country, including Tulsa and Seattle. People would look at Amy's picture and nod, but when Sue tracked down the girl they had seen, it was always somebody else's daughter.

At home, many of the phone calls had ended, but others had begun. "I have her," one particular male voice told Sue. He offered no proof, but unlike the other cruel pranksters, he never stopped calling.

Sue could never totally dismiss him. He seemed to know so much. He said Amy had been sold into sexual slavery. He spouted ugly and perverted details. But, he said, she was alive. Oddly, he called himself "Hal Johnson," using the same last name as the "biker girl" who had pointed the finger of suspicion at the Outlaws, initiating Sue's nationwide odyssey.

Each time a lead dead-ended, shattering Sue's hopes, "Hal Johnson" would call again, still claiming to have Amy, describing in sordid detail what he and others were doing to her. He told her Amy had been sent to Canada, London and Saudi Arabia. He called six, seven times a night, keeping Sue hollow-eyed until dawn.

Despite years of police efforts, the elusive "Hal Johnson" remained an untraceable voice in the night. His calls became so persuasive that Sue began to believe him. When he said Amy was posing for an artist in Ft. Pierce, Florida, she made the trip, believing, "I'm coming home with Amy."

fied girl dead for 11 years. A stranger had walked into a Pennsylvania police station after seeing Amy's photo on a poster and said, "She isn't missing—she died in Texas." He left no name.

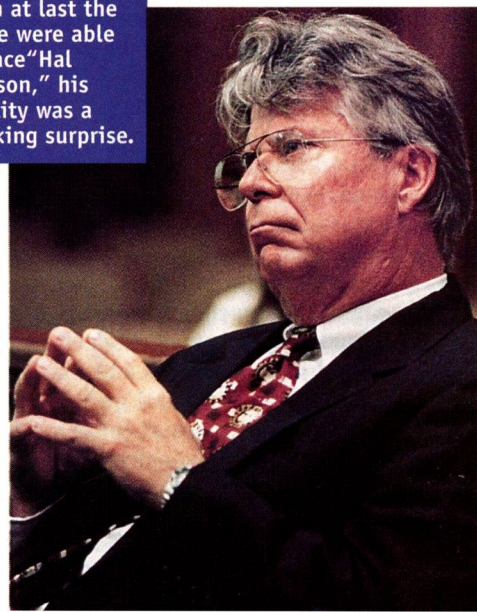
The grave was opened. Again, Sue wept for somebody else's daughter.

Then I saw a CNN news report. New Jersey fire fighters had extinguished a roadside blaze in a mountain of discarded tires dumped at the site in the mid-70's. The charred debris was then cleared, exposing a long-hidden secret: the skeletal remains of a teenage girl. A scrap of denim and a pair of cork-soled sandals were the only clues. Out of my chair, heart pounding, I was fumbling for the telephone before the newscast ended. It had to be Amy!

No. Somebody else's daughter. And "Johnson" continued to call, insisting that Amy was alive.

In 1987, while working on a story about another old, unsolved murder, I came to reconsider my serial-killer theory. A Nevada millionaire had gone home from a Miami Beach convention in a box after being garroted in a stairwell at a local hotel. Frustrated relatives had consulted a California psychic and were excited about what she said. I called the psychic and we discussed the case. And then I blurted out the question that I asked myself every day: "Where is Amy?"

When at last the police were able to trace "Hal Johnson," his identity was a shocking surprise.





Now 70, Sue Billig still hopes for Amy's return. A photograph of her daughter hangs prominently on a wall of her home.

of torment. Blair testified that the hundreds and hundreds of calls he had made were not his

fault. He blamed stress, drinking and "paraphilia," a psychiatric disorder characterized by intense sexual urges, which include making obscene and threatening calls. And he blamed Sue Billig for talking to him. "We're two obsessive people bouncing off each other," he said. "Maybe we should be locked up together."

In Florida, in order to convict him of felony stalking, the jurors would have to agree that Blair's

calls constituted a "credible threat" of physical harm. They did not agree. Instead, they convicted him on two lesser misdemeanor stalking counts, sparing him a state-prison term. They deadlocked on the third charge.

In March of this year Judge Alex Ferrer gave Blair the maximum sentence: two consecutive 365-day terms in the county jail. On the third charge, he was given five years' probation in exchange for a guilty plea.

"What I resent most is the time he

"Are you ready to give up everything?" he asked. Sue said she was.

Using new high-tech equipment, detectives traced the call to a cellular phone listed to a Miami company. A second generation of cops had finally been able to solve the mystery of the telephone terrorist.

The truth shocked them. The company was a mail drop, a front for a Government undercover operation. The man who had stalked Sue Billig for all those years was a Federal agent. The terrifying voice in the night belonged to U.S. Customs Agent Henry Johnson Blair, a pudgy, innocuous, middle-aged man everyone called Hank.

Arrested at his desk on three felony counts of aggravated stalking, Blair, 48, was quickly released on bond. He admitted making the calls. But he denied ever meeting Amy. Was he telling the truth?

The day Amy vanished, Blair was 27, married for just two weeks. He and his wife had been home from their honeymoon for only two days.

Blair had played the role of a "super narc" in those days, according to those who knew him. An undercover agent, he was given to disguises, secrecy and middle-of-the-night assignments. He had traveled to South America and the Caribbean. He drove two confiscated

vehicles U. S. Customs made available to him—a light-colored pickup truck and a beige van, which were often parked in his backyard. They fit some of the descriptions of vehicles tipsters had earlier given the police.

After Blair's arrest, Sue reread Amy's fading journals. This time a passage stunned her, as well as the detectives she showed it to: "Hank says as soon as I finish school he wants me to go to South America with him. I told him he's crazy."

At one time, he had played the role of "super narc"—an undercover agent given to disguises and secrecy.

Amy's teenage circle of friends had included no Hank Sue can recall. But could the journal's "Hank" and Hank Blair be the same man?

At his trial, Blair pleaded not guilty. His wife stood by him, along with their two daughters. Sue, her cancer in remission, testified about her long years

took away [from me] from searching for Amy," Sue said afterward. "Now," she added, "I can devote all my time to finding my child."

Police and FBI agents still ponder Blair's role, if any, in Amy's disappearance. Detectives have visited his former residences, considering the possibility of excavation. Some dismiss the disgraced agent as someone who got sexual kicks from making the obscene phone calls. One said, "Anybody who believes he never met Amy must also believe in the tooth fairy."

An FBI task force is now assigned to the case. Susan Billig is driven by a mother's abiding love and hope. But what about Henry Blair? Was his obsession rooted in guilt? Agents still hope to find out. Meantime, where is Amy? Will we ever know? ■

ABOUT THE AUTHOR A native of Paterson, New Jersey, Edna Buchanan joined **The Miami Herald** in 1970 and worked there as a journalist and crime reporter for many years. In 1986 she won a Pulitzer Prize for 10 of her police-beat stories. The following year she recorded some of her experiences in an autobiography, **The Corpse Had a Familiar Face**. In 1990, on leave from the paper, Buchanan published her first whodunit novel, **No-body Lives Forever**. Her next four novels all feature Britt Montero, an ace police reporter/sleuth in Miami. One, **Miami, It's Murder**, was nominated for an Edgar Award in 1994. The most recent, **Act of Betrayal**, was published in February by Hyperion Press.

FIRE BUG

BY
WALTER
MOSLEY

As an ex-con, Socco knew about guilt and innocence.

hat Thursday morning Socrates Fortlow met with Stony Wile, while Stony was on his coffee break from Avon Imports.

"Yeah, Folger live out on Winnant Terrace in Compton," Stony said.

"He still know a lotta cops?" Socrates asked.

"What is this, Socco?"

"What is what? All I wanna know is if Folger know some cops out there in the street."

"You don't talk to cops, Socco." Stony Wile was a stocky man, an ex-ship welder with salt-and-pepper hair and gray-brown skin. "You don't talk to them."

Stony glanced down the alley. His boss was looking out of the warehouse loading dock toward the two friends.

"Bono always think somebody stealin' if they meet somebody out here," Stony said.

"Gimme your cousin Folger's number," Socrates answered.

"O.K.," Stony said. "But..."

"But what?"

"This ain't gonna be no trouble now is it, Socco?"

"Trouble? What's that s'posed to mean, Stony? You think I'm the kinda man mess wit' folks?"

"I think you're serious, Mr. Fortlow. Damn serious. I don't want you goin' out to Folger if you on some kinda campaign."

"I ain't on nuthin', Stony. I need to know sumpin', an' maybe Folger could help, that's all."

"Forty-two years," Folger Wile was saying, seated with Socrates on his rickety front porch. "Forty-two years an' they put me out in the street. Don't even let me come back and sit around now and then. Too many rules, too many kids wit' guns an' badges, that's what it is. That's not how a police department should be run."

He was sixty-seven but looked fifteen years older. Teeth missing, skinny as a plucked bird. Folger's eyes didn't seem to focus on anything in particular.

"You know a good cop I could talk to?" Socrates asked after a long lecture on the ills of the L.A.P.D.

Dispatcher was the only job that Folger had ever

had. He had fallen apart in his retirement. The lawn was brown. The paint was peeling from his house.

"You hear 'bout them fires?" Folger asked. "One of 'em went up last night."

Everyone had been talking about them. The fires. Abandoned stores, abandoned houses.

"They say that dead man was a squatter," Folger said, a glimmer of glee in his distracted eyes. "Woman was his girlfriend. They was playin' house just like they had real jobs and a mortgage."

The first people killed in a dozen fires set.

"Some people sayin' that it's the fire department doin' arson for the white landlords' insurance policies." Folger could have talked on forever—all he needed was a warm body with ears to sit by and breathe. "I think it's the Koreans, myself. They wanna own all'a the black folks' homes. It's really what they call a peacetime invasion. Koreans gonna be all over here and they won't be no room for black people."

Socrates didn't mind the chatter. He was thinking about Ira Giles. About how Ira had all of his privileges taken away in an Indiana jail. They sentenced him to biscuits and water for sixty days.

On day sixty-one they gave him biscuits and water again—as a joke.

Ira set his mattress ablaze with his one last match. The cot caught and four guards came in to put out the fire. Ira stabbed two of them before they could tell what he was doing. He killed the third one, but number four, Harvey Schott, laid him low.

Socrates had always considered fire as an ally since that day, even though they executed Ira. He'd ordered biscuits and water for his last meal.

"...right, Mr. Fortlow?"

"Say what, Folger?"

"I said," Folger repeated patiently, "that nobody believe in a conspiracy if they gotta good job an' the people they know doin' O.K. Nobody seen conspiracy like you'n me have. They had you up in jail, right?"

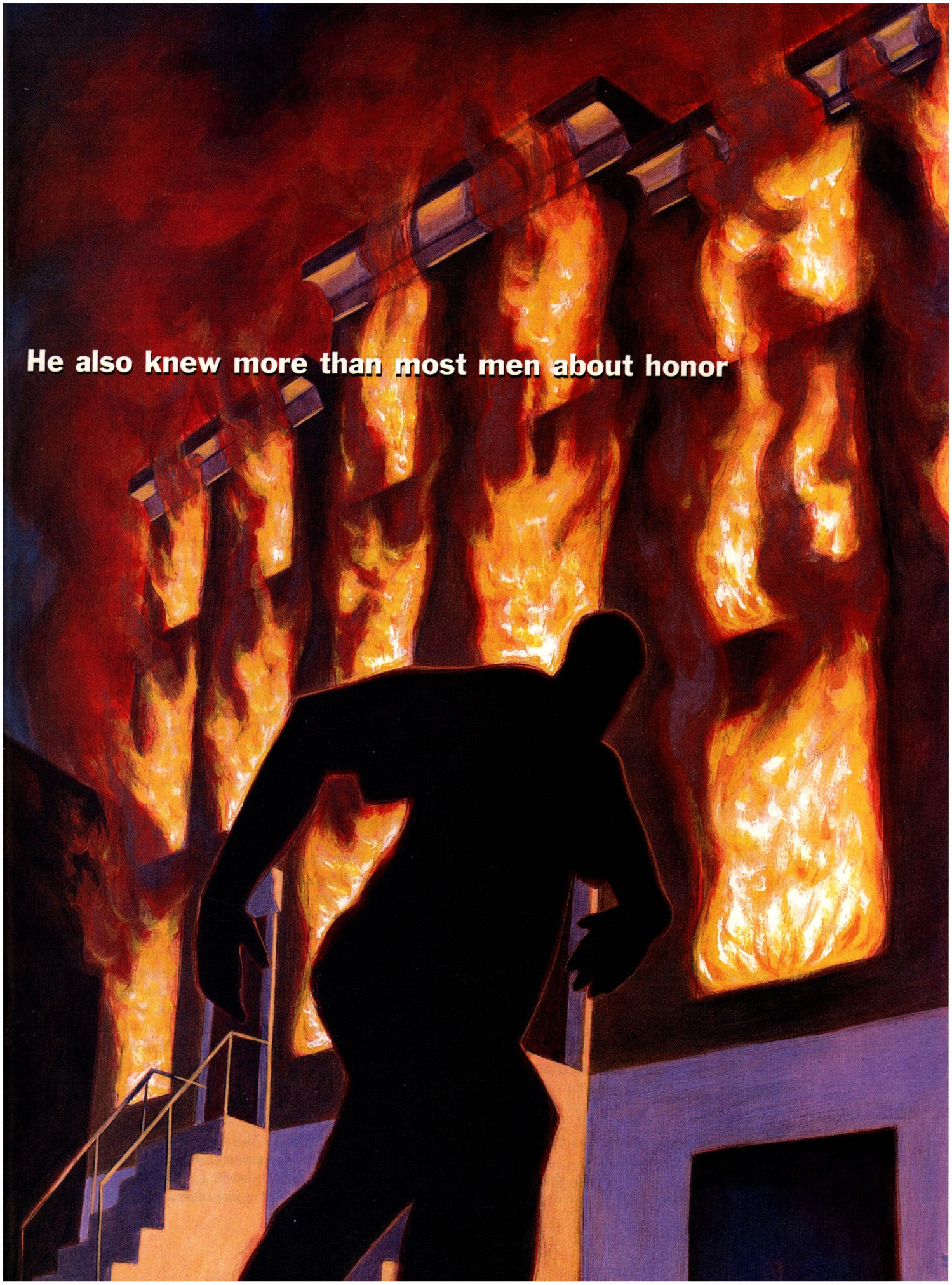
Socrates tried to catch Folger's eye but failed.

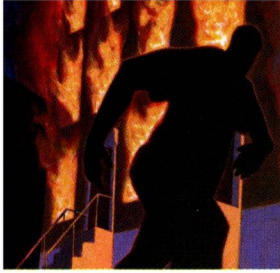
"What they jail you for?" Folger asked.

"Because I murdered. I killed innocent people."

"But was it right they had you in jail?" Folger

He also knew more than most men about honor





▶▶▶ asked. "They got white folks an' rich folks do worse every day, but they don't go to no jail cell. I seen it all the time in my dispatcher job. Units always callin' in an' sayin' it was so-and-so they caught, an' what should they do?"

"You know a cop I could talk to, Folger?" Socrates asked. "A black man still care 'bout his people?"

"Why?"

"Answer my question, Folger."

Socrates spent the afternoon boxing groceries and making deliveries around West Los Angeles and Beverly Hills. It was summer and hot outside, but Bounty Supermarket ran from cool at the checkout registers to cold over by freezer aisles.

Socrates was the oldest employee of the store. His surly appearance and incredible strength delighted the young black girls who worked the cash registers. And, for some reason, white ladies preferred him to the younger men to deliver their packages.

He worked extra hard that day, unloading a big shipment of canned goods from General Foods. He threw out double boxes so fast that the young men had to ask him to slow down.

"Cain't you keep up?" Socrates asked Bruce Tynan.

"Not wit' you, man. You crazy. It's hot out here."

It *was* hot, Socrates thought. But not as hot as those fires in Watts.

Denther's Bar and Grill was a cop cafe on Normandie. It had old-time metal venetian blinds and a cursive neon sign that said CAFE in blue and OPEN in red. Only cops, and the women who desired them, went to Denther's. You could smoke in there, kick back and relax. Anything you said was among cops, safe.

Nobody robbed Denther's. Nobody worried about building codes or closing hours—or drugs, or sex.

They had a juke box that was free and three young waitresses who wore hot pants and thigh-high patent-leather boots. Among the waitresses there was a white girl, a black one and a Latina.

Denther's was a cop paradise, or so Folger claimed.

Socrates entered at nine-thirty exactly. He was still wearing his Bounty blue and green T-shirt but that wasn't enough to fool those cops.

The juke box was playing disco but the conversation had nearly stopped. Socrates waded through the dense crowd of men, bulled his way through cautiously, not pushing hard enough to start a row.

At the bar he asked, "Kenneth Shreve in here?"

The bartender, a small man, didn't answer.

Socrates asked his question again.

"What do you want?" a white man seated at the bar asked Socrates.

"I want Kenneth Shreve."

"What for?"

"You his mother?" Socrates asked, almost pleasantly.

"You better watch it..." The word dangled at

the end of the white man's sentence. It was an integrated bar. Black and white cops patronized Denther's. You couldn't call a man a nigger 'less you were a nigger yourself.

The white man didn't use the word but he would have liked to use his fists.

Socrates wondered why he didn't feel afraid. "You know where I can find Kenneth Shreve?"

"I'm Shreve," a tall black man said. He had come up behind Socrates.

Socrates turned around. "Folger Wile sent me."

Kenneth Shreve was tall and wide. His shoulders could have borne Socrates's hefty two hundred and sixty-two pounds. His hands were small, but so—Socrates remembered—were Joe Louis's hands.

"What's that old fool want?" Kenneth asked. He could see the long history of felony trailing in Socrates's shadow but he didn't care.

"He want them to extend retirement age at the dispatcher's so that he could have somethin' to do," Socrates said.

That got a laugh out of Shreve.

"Come on," the cop said. "Let's sit over at that booth."

The booth had three black cops and two black women crammed on the bench. One woman had a hand in the lap of the man on either side of her. She was looking back and forth at them, wide-eyed. They broke up when Sgt. Shreve came by. He didn't even say anything. He just walked up and the men hustled the women out of the stall.

"Hey," one of the women said. "What's wrong?"

Shreve and Socrates sat down, and the quiet bartender brought over beers. Socrates downed his with one swallow.

"What's your name?"

"Socrates Fortlow." The ex-convict's jaw clamped shut after his name. He wanted to start talking but he found that he couldn't.

"Well?" Shreve asked. "What's Shorty want?"

"Excuse me?"

"Shorty. That's what we called Folger."

"Oh."

Socrates looked up into the crowded, smoky den. Shreve anticipated him and waved for another beer.

"I got things to do, man. So if you got somethin' for me from Shorty, let's hear it."

Socrates looked at Shreve until the beer came. The big cop wanted to move but he didn't. Socrates thought Shreve knew somehow that the most important thing in that room was what Socrates had to say.

"I been up in prison," Socrates said after downing the second brew.

"What for?" the sergeant asked. His face had gone blank. His eyes were all over Socrates.

"Homicide."

Shreve gave a slight nod to show that he'd already known the answer. "What you got to do wit' Folger?"

"I 'ont hardly know the man. I know his cousin."

I could talk about some things, Socrates would say to Stony a month later. I could talk about the weather, or you, or jail. I just couldn't open my mouth

to say what I was there for. What I had to do was talk about something else and hope my real message just slipped out by mistake.

"And what you want with me?" Shreve asked.

"I don't want ya," Socrates said. "Hell, man. I'm a jailbird. You know I was made in a prison cell. I don't talk to cops."

An evil grin formed on Shreve's face. He was a dark brown man with little scars on his forehead, neck and jaw. "Don't mess with me, Negro," he said.

"I'm just sayin' that I don't talk to cops. It's not easy bein' in this here room."

"This is the only place you're gonna see me," Shreve said. "Unless you wanna go back to a jail cell."

"That don't scare me," Socrates said. "Ain't nuthin' could happen to me that ain't already happened."

"What do you want, man?"

"Back in the joint, man didn't talk to no screw. They find you doin' that and there was a knife for you."

"You want to tell me something but you're scared?" Shreve asked.

"I'm way past scared," Socrates said. "Way past. I'm the one enforce the rules; I ain't never broke it."

"But you gonna break it now?" Shreve waved for two beers this time.

"Sometimes," Socrates said. "You might get to know a guard an' he ain't so bad. I mean, he could be there for you, you know what I mean?"

The beers came and Shreve pushed them both in front of the ex-con. Socrates emptied both of them in less than a minute.

"You want something?" Shreve asked.

"Yeah." There was a pleasant blank feeling at the back of Socrates's head. It really wasn't enough beer to get him high but he'd forgotten to eat that day. "I don't want your money, man," he said. "I don't want that. What I want is you."

"Say what?"

"A man is innocent until he's proven guilty," Socrates quoted. "Do you believe that?"

"If a man did a crime, then he's guilty," Shreve said. He took a deep breath and began looking around. "If he didn't, he's innocent. That's what I believe."

"But the law says that a man is innocent unless he is judged otherwise by a panel of his peers. I learnt that up in jail."

"Everybody was guilty up there because they were found guilty by a panel of their peers; didn't matter if they'd done the crime or not."

"Hey, Kenny." A drunken black man had staggered up to the booth. He was supported by a young woman under each arm. One of them had on a low-cut blouse. When she saw Socrates staring, she angled her body for him to get a better look.

"Kenny," the drunken man said again. "Let's go on upstairs." The man cocked his head and winked.

Shreve glanced at the two girls. "You go on," he said. "I'll be up in a little while."

"Ooooh," the women complained in unison.

As they were leaving, Shreve said, "You better cut this out and tell me what you got to say, brother."

"I was just sayin' did you believe that a man is innocent. . ."

"What man?" Shreve asked. "What man? What the hell are you talking about?"

Socrates's jaw snapped shut. His teeth ached from the pressure.

"Come on, Fortlow. Talk to me."

"Fire," Socrates whispered.

"Say what?"

"Fires. Fires."

Suddenly there was life in Shreve's eyes.

"Them fires," Socrates said; then the bottom fell out of his diaphragm, sucking his words back down with it.

"The fires in Watts?"

He could still nod.

"You know who's doin' 'em?"

"I don't know nuthin' for sure. Man's innocent..."

Shreve sat back and rubbed his scarred face.

"It's the reward, right?"

"What reward?"

"Come on, brother. You cain't pull that crap on me. They announced it this morning: fifteen thousand dollars for information leading to the arrest of—"

Socrates was up and out of his chair before Shreve could finish his sentence. He was moving fast toward the door; no *excuse me*'s, no being careful as he pushed people out of the way. Outside, he walked quickly down the street. "Uh-uh," he kept saying to himself. "No. They not gonna catch me with that."

"Fortlow!"

"Uh-uh. Uh-uh, no."

"Fortlow! Halt!"

The command took over the convict side of Socrates's brain, and stopped his legs.

"What's wrong with you, man?" Sgt. Shreve said, as he caught up with Socrates. "I've been ►►►

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Walter Mosley's collection of stories featuring Socrates Fortlow, the philosophical ex-convict, will be published early next year by W.W. Norton. Born in South Central Los Angeles, Mosley moved to New York



City after college. While working at a variety of jobs there, he enrolled in a university writing program. In 1990, at age 38, he published his first novel, *Devil in a Blue Dress*, featuring the character Easy

Rawlins. The book was nominated for an Edgar Award that year, and in 1995 was made into a motion picture starring Denzel Washington. Mosley has now written five books focusing on Easy Rawlins, and W.W. Norton has just published his latest, *A Little Yellow Dog*, which came out in June.



▶▶▶ calling you for three blocks.”
Socrates just shook his head.
“What’s wrong?” he asked again.
“No,” said Socrates as if it answered the question.
“No what? Do you know who the South Central firebug is?”

“You cain’t buy me, man,” Socrates said. “I ain’t your slave.”

“I don’t want the money, Fortlow. You could have it. All I want is the man. He’s out there killing people. That’s why you came here, right? You don’t want to turn in a man ‘cause you’re a con, but you still don’t want people to die.”

The flames in Socrates’s mind seemed to flare on that dark street. Ira Giles swinging his homemade knife while flames were crawling right up his back. *Screamin’ devil right outta hell*, somebody had said. They all laughed, said the guards should’ve known better than to give Ira biscuits and water for an extra day.

“Let’s go down to the station, Fortlow. Let’s make a report.”

“Wait up,” Socrates said. “Wait up.”

“What?”

“He’s innocent, right?”

“If he is, then why are you talking to me?”

“I want him treated like a man, officer. I want you—” Socrates jabbed his finger into Shreve’s chest, “to tell me you gonna go down there and make sure he’s treated like a man. I don’t want him beat, or cursed, or cheated. Folger told me you do a fair deal with Negroes and whites too. I want a fair deal for the man, or so help me God I’ll be out there in the streets burnin’ just like he done.”

Shreve didn’t say anything for a minute. “I’ll run the case—you can bet on that. And he’ll get as fair a deal as I can give.”

Socrates told Sgt. Shreve his story at the downtown police station, after signing a document that stated he was giving evidence about the South Central firebug. There wasn’t much to say.

Socrates had seen Ira Giles through his cell grate after Ira had stabbed those men. He’d been beaten and stomped. His right arm was raw from fire. But Ira was grinning. His face was slick with sweat, and his eyes were big enough to scare a wild animal. He was gibbering and laughing; he would have danced if the guards hadn’t kept punching him.

Two nights ago, Socrates had been out walking. He heard the fire engines and smelled the smoke. The overweight Negro who capered toward him didn’t even see Socrates. He was at his own little party.

“It was the smell at first,” Socrates told Shreve. “Then it was the way he was sayin’ words that didn’t make no sense. He was sweatin’ heavy too, but it was the dancin’ made me follow him home.”

“That’s all?” said Andrew Collins, Shreve’s patrol partner. “That’s what you got us down here for?”

Stromboli sighed. “Then it’s a good thing you still have it, Mr. Horrorwitts.”

Socrates didn’t say how he waited for Ponzelle Richmond to leave his house again. He didn’t say how he broke in and found all the clippings and Molotov cocktail preparations Richmond had used to set his fires. He didn’t tell them about the diary.

“Let’s check it out, Andy,” Shreve said to his white partner. “We’ll get back to you, Mr. Fortlow.”

I tried to talk to ‘em,” Socrates was telling Stony Wile after it was all over. “I thought maybe I could make a difference. You know, if I said I wouldn’t cooperate unless they promised to play fair?”

“They played it fair, Socco,” Stony said. They were sitting in Socrates’s house on a Monday afternoon, drinking from a bottle of Cold Duck. “How could they help it if the man sees ‘em comin’ an’ shoots himself? You cain’t blame the cops for ev’rything.”

They drank for a long time after that. And then they drank some more.

“Socco?”

“Yeah, Stony?”

“What about that money?”

“What money?”

“The reward. I know they keep them Crime Watchers’ names quiet, but if you turnt Ponzelle in, then you musta got somethin’.”

“Cops kept the reward ‘cept for a few hunnert dollars,” Socrates said. “I spent the first hunnert on the liquor you helpin’ me drink.”

Socrates lit a match and took a hundred-dollar bill from his pocket. He set fire to one corner of it and laid it across his palm. “Want it?” he asked Stony.

Stony grabbed the bill from Socrates’s hand and snubbed out the flame with his fingers. “What’s wrong wit’ you? This here’s a hundred dollars.”

“And it’s yours, Stony. That’s your share for helpin’ t’kill Ponzelle. All you had to do was grab for it.”

Socrates awoke in the night thinking about the hundred and forty-seven \$100 bills that were buried in his meager yard. Three feet down they rested in a plastic bag. And with them the diary of the firebug.

The cops had found maps, clippings, notes and paraphernalia enough to convince them that Ponzelle was their man. But Socrates had the diary.

He remembered one part by heart:

... if I could just get them to see that we got to burn down all this mess we done stacked up and hacked up and shacked up all around us. If they could see the torch of change, the burning of flames all around their eyes. We could come together in fire and steel and blood and love and make ourselves a home. Not this TV and church world. Not this jungle of dirty clothes and Christmas seals. Not ham on Sunday and grandma’s dead already and can’t even eat her piece. ...

Ponzelle Richmond never mentioned black or white in the sixty pages of his neat little block letters and words. And Socrates was sorry they never got to talk. ■

BY CHELSEA SLAUGHTER

Phaedra

She always found comfort in the presence of her loving guardian—and in the ancient seaside cottage where the past mysteriously lived on

The wind blew the salt smell in my face as I paused at the weather-worn gate to Phaedra's house. Five years away and it seemed nothing had changed. I'd been working in the States all that time, in Los Angeles, but research for a new film led me to Housesteads, near the Scottish border. That gave me the opportunity to take a few days between London and the North to visit Cornwall and the aunt who raised me after my mother's death.

The ginger cat sat on the lowest stone step of the house. In L.A. any house built before 1940 is considered old. This cottage had stood since the 1700's. It was built of rough gray stones quarried locally—a long low house with a deep, shaggy thatched roof, sturdy enough to take the storms that could come up so suddenly and lash the Cornish coast. You could always tell when you crossed the Tamar coming down from London, by the thatched roofs. Those in Devon were neat, tidy, with the confining wire over their trimmed edges looking for all the world like hairnets. But when you entered into Cornwall the nets were off, the edges shaggy, giving the illusion that, like Topsy, they “just grew.”

Phaedra's house had deep-set windows, wide to let in the sunshine, painted white against the gray stone walls. She tried to keep a proper garden, but the salt and the chalk soil fought back, and often the yard went wild. It maintained its own beauty with the sweet smell of sea pinks and the long, tough ocean-loving grasses moving in waves across the yard, to echo the real thing just beyond the dunes. There were bright touches of blood-red color from the poppies that dotted the grass and a trailing sort of a vine with delicate white horns of flowers that wove and twined throughout. And there



was Toby, in all his ginger splendor, sitting on that white-scrubbed bottom step before the brightly painted yellow door. Calmly lifting his paw and dunking it into the flower-sprigged blue china bowl that sat next to him, he would solemnly lick the milk off every orange hair and repeat the gesture till he'd finished. I smiled at the sight of him. Somehow I thought of Toby as a brother. That was how Aunt wrote of him in her frequent long, newsy letters that made me feel I was still a part of life in Cornwall. He was an enormous cat. Huge of face and feature, long-haired, with great enormous feet that took him racing over the sea grass through the dunes. He was fascinated by the water and spent a great deal of time at the end of the old wooden quay down where the ocean met the dunes.

I smiled and greeted him. “Hey, Toby, I'm back! Let's go find Phaedra.” I reached for my suitcases just as the door opened and there she was. Aunt Phaedra. She'd taken me, a sullen, frightened child, into this isolated seashore refuge after my parents had been killed one after the other by the civilized



▶▶▶ hazards of London. When my father had died, an innocent and unintended victim of an IRA bombing, I don't believe my mother wanted to live. I wasn't sufficient reason to go on with

Father gone, and I hated her for dying. I felt she had deliberately chosen to wrap her small green Austin around that lamppost on the embankment. I would have nothing of failed brakes—only a sense of betrayal.

"Life is the process of finding out, too late, everything that should have been obvious to you at the time."

—Narrator,
The Only Girl
in the Game,
1960,
by John D.
MacDonald

"You see, but you do not observe."

—Sherlock Holmes in
"A Scandal in Bohemia,"
1892, by Sir Arthur
Conan Doyle

Phaedra welcomed me then with heart and arms open, gradually healed the broken spirit and returned her sister, my mother, to me a whole and loving memory. Her house was always warm and seemed to be full of light, sunshine pouring through the open windows, firelight when the gales blew, oil lamps when the electricity failed, and Phaedra and Toby providing their own personal magic of light and warmth. Like a flower in the sunshine I grew and bloomed there. And now she stood again, framed in the doorway, with arms flung wide to embrace me.

"Phaedra!" I cried with joy and went into her arms and into the house.

"How long can you stay?" she asked.

"Only tonight," I replied, "for now. I couldn't wait a whole week to see you and Toby and home, but I've got to get up to Scotland before midweek and finish my research. Afterward we'll have time for a real visit. Weeks and weeks."

She looked disappointed. "But, dear one, you must stay. Jeanie Trelaney is coming to tea Sunday just to see you. She's up in London till then and can't come before. She's all you have left of your father's family. I know how you have missed one another."

"Well, Auntie, Cousin Jeanie will just have to wait till I return. Duty calls and I've already reserved passage on the Drogornan Ferry for Saturday and have arranged for a room in Colchester for Saturday night."

Phaedra bit her lip and furrowed her brows in a well-remembered expression.

"Let's not argue, Aunt. I just got here. Let me at least get my bags across the threshold before you start to rearrange my life!" I said with a laugh—I knew that stubborn look. "Jeanie can come next week."

"Don't laugh," Phaedra replied, "and don't go tomorrow. When you are my age, sometimes you feel things strongly, and I am afraid if you go Saturday I won't be here for you to return to."

A sudden chill blew across me from the still-open doorway. "Why, Aunt, are you un-

well? Is there something I should know?"

"Not yet," she said, her brow still furrowed, "not yet. Just please stay the weekend." She blinked and paused, and her face softened as she patted my shoulder and led me out of the doorway and into the house. "Whim of the old if you like, my dear. Just please stay till Monday."

"I'll call and change the reservations," I said with a smile.

The house was still the same inside, all chintz and flowers and sunshine. It was easy to grant Phaedra a few days' indulgence. I couldn't help worrying and searched her on the sly for signs of age or failing health, but was reassured. She hadn't changed any more than Toby—or the house itself. Five years couldn't touch her.

Phaedra kissed me softly on the cheek. "Welcome back, my dear, I'm so glad you've come. Toby and I have been looking forward to it all month. It's all we talk about. I'm sure the postman is quite bored with hearing of you." She laughed as we walked down the hall to my room.

It was a shrine to my childhood. The little girl who had seen too much change in so short a time would never have to face that fear in this place. Phaedra had seen to it. Nothing would change without my express permission. As long as it remained a permanent rock in the great sea of the world, I could face anything life threw at me. Phaedra would hold my refuge, safe and awaiting my need. The bookshelves still held my old companions, Robin Hood and Nancy Drew, Charles Dickens and Dorothy Sayers, the ancient bird's nest rescued from beneath the lilac bush after a storm, the rocks pocketed in long walks into the village or over to Jeanie Trelaney's, treasures scavenged from the flotsam and jetsam left by the storms along the beach. Once, beneath a stone outcrop, I found a fossil of a sea crinoid preserved for a million years waiting for me. Phaedra framed it and hung it above my bed like a portrait. "See," she said, "nothing ever truly goes away; something is always left behind." She understood my need for permanence. Nigel, my teddy, mohair worn off his cheek from a thousand desperate lonely kisses, awaited me in the center of the faded patchwork quilt. I was home.

As I unpacked my suitcases and settled in, Toby jumped up on the bed and settled down as if I had never left, his eyes half closed and his paws kneading in rhythm with his room-filling rumble of a purr. Phaedra helped me put my travel clothes away and we talked. I told her of my ever-changing work in L.A., how the glamour

and excitement of a career at the Hollywood studios was balanced out by the tedium and mundane aspects of the actual day-to-day work.

"Was it worth leaving for?" she asked.

"Oh, yes, as long as I know you're all here to return to," I answered, folding a heavy Irish fisherman's sweater and putting it into the drawer. "I had to bring this, I get so few opportunities to wear it. It's never cold in L.A.—I can't believe how close and humid it is here. Me and my sweater are very disappointed in you, Auntie," I joked as I mopped at my damp forehead. "I'd forgotten how dreary and oppressive the English heat can be."

"It's always like this before a storm, dear," she said. "I believe we shall have one by tomorrow night." I looked out the window at the blue sky and, catching my skeptical look, Phaedra added, "Old bones always know."

"Well, I wish it would get here and clear the air. Look at you, Aunt," I added enviously, "not a wisp of hair out of place, not even a fashionable, proper Victorian 'glow.' As cool as a cucumber, as if even the weather couldn't touch you." I reached over and brushed her cheek lightly with my fingers and she smiled.

Saturday afternoon it rained—a real Cornish gale. Phaedra was always right.

Early Sunday morning Phaedra slipped into my room carrying a familiar oil lamp. "I hope you don't mind, dear," she said. "Last night's storm seems to have taken the power out again."

"Serves me right for letting you talk me into staying. I could be enjoying the comforts of Colchester right now." I flashed her a smile from beneath the quilt, yawned and added, "I suppose the phones are down too. I meant to call L.A. last night and check my machine for messages. I knew I shouldn't have put it off."

"I always find those machines so disconcerting," Phaedra commented. "Never felt comfortable talking to one. I don't entirely trust them. Silly of me, I dare say."

"Not necessarily." I laughed. "This is a new one for me. In my job I can't live without one, and the wretched machine I had up and died on me about a month ago. It started swallowing messages and parts of messages. It was so frustrating. This one is perfectly reliable, though, or it would be if the phone here weren't

dead." I shrugged. In Cornwall we were always prepared to lose phones and electricity with every storm. My L.A. self found it very annoying, but part of me was pleased to be isolated here with Phaedra and the warm caress of childhood memories made cozier by the glow of oil lamps.

Sunday afternoon Jeanie came over, and the years once more rolled back. My gangly tomboy cousin had grown into a tall beautiful blond, polished and elegant. Her hair was neatly tamed in a crisp, short, behind-the-ears style. A very fashionable silk dress and elegant leather pumps betokened a sophistication that the twinkle in her eyes and her warm grin gave lie to. Within seconds of the door's opening we two worldly professionals were embracing, all giggles and schoolgirls again.

"Let me look at you!" she cried, pushing me back at arm's length, then drawing me in for a last friendly squeeze. "Oh, it's so good to have you here. I am so glad you could stay over. Phaedra told me you were going to go yesterday and make me wait a whole week to see you. How dare you!"

"I must have been mad," I answered with a warm smile and, linking arms, we went into Phaedra's parlor for tea and catching up. Phaedra had spent the morning baking scones and assembling tiny sandwiches of watercress and cucumber. Jeanie brought the local clotted cream fresh from the village. As the warm, fragrant black China tea steamed the windows where we sat and looked at the now-calm sea, I scooped a spoonful onto a warm scone, dropped on a dollop of homemade strawberry jam and bit. "Umhmm." I closed my eyes and sighed. "You just can't get this anywhere else, you know. They have some stuff they market in Los Angeles they call 'Devon cream,' but it just isn't even close."

"I know," Jeanie said, "it doesn't even taste the same in London. I guess you just have to breathe in the salt air to make it taste right."

Phaedra's eyes crinkled as she smiled at us. "It's so nice to have the two of you together here for tea again. It quite seems like old times." She lifted the heavy Royal Doulton teapot with its pattern of overblown English roses and poured again into the absurdly fragile matching teacups.

BUNGLED CRIMES

● Soon after a woman had her purse stolen, the police picked up a man who fit the robber's description. They told the suspect they were taking him back to the scene of the crime, and when they arrived he was to exit the vehicle and face the victim for a positive I.D. At the scene, the suspect stepped from the car, looked up at the victim, and blurted out, "Yeah, that's her . . . that's the woman I robbed."

● When two cops arrived to arrest a man for allegedly cashing a stolen check, the man denied the accusation. He asked why they thought it was him. "Well, sir," said one of the officers, holding up the cancelled check, "you forged the name the check was made out to on the front. But on the back, when you endorsed it, you signed your real name, then provided the teller with your driver's license, complete with your current address."

"Whatever do you mean, Detective?"
Horrorwitts said with feigned surprise.
Why did Stromboli think the violin
was not actually stolen?

☛ (Solution on page 75)





▶▶▶ “Things have changed though, Phaedra dear—you make us feel like company,” Jeanie said. “We never used to rate the Royal Doulton and the parlor and the best silver. It was always sturdy mugs and the old brown teapot at the

kitchen table for us in the old days. Makes me feel quite grown up and special,” she added.

I grinned back at her for a moment. Then my smile faded into polite resignation and I finally inquired, “So how is Thom? Is he on the island this week, or do I look forward to seeing him in London when I go up? How does he get the courage to leave a gorgeous thing like you unattended, or has he no longer got a jealous bone in his body?”

Jeanie drew back as if I had touched her on an open wound. “Thom was the fatal mistake of my life. Please . . .” She put up a hand to stop my apology before I could offer it, “please, let’s not even talk about it today, it’s too dreadful, and I want today to be wonderful. Next week we’ll talk,” she promised.

Afterward the three of us took a long walk, with Toby along as well. We followed the old Roman road back to the fields beyond Phaedra’s cottage. It had been a dry summer, and the outlines of ancient Roman buildings could be clearly seen in the fields of grain. We paused and looked over the stone fence. I closed my eyes for a moment and drank in the scent of the flowers from the nearby hedgerows.

“You’ve always been right about this place, Phaedra, you can feel the past here. I can almost hear the sounds of all the feet that went before. Old ones moving quietly through the night to worship at holy stones that still remain, and have remained for a thousand years. Roman soldiers marching to conquer and, in turn, being conquered by Saxons who, in their turn, fell to Viking raiders, and now us standing here. Nothing ever really goes away. It all manages to live on somehow in this place. It’s like magic. It meant a great deal to me to feel its power over time and death when I was a child.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A native Californian, Chelsea Slaughter fell under the spell of Cornwall, the windswept county on the southwestern coast of England, as a student in the University of Southern California summer writing program at Cambridge University. So she wrote a story set in that romantic spot. The haunting title character she says, is wholly imaginary. As for Toby, she admits to being cat-obsessed and simply wanted to include one. “Phaedra” was a finalist in Family Circle’s 1993 Mystery/Suspense Short Story Contest—and is Slaughter’s first published work. She is currently earning a teaching degree at Pasadena City College.



Phaedra raised her eyebrows. “It is too lovely a day to be so serious, my dear. Toby, let’s go back and see if there isn’t just a bit of cream left, and let the girls visit.” She turned and started back to the house, a solid figure against the fading wrack of last night’s storm.

“I love you, Aunt,” I called after her. Her moment’s pause was her only acknowledgment of hearing. Toby raced before her, chasing wind-scattered leaves up the road in an erratic progress homeward. That night I kissed Phaedra on her cheek on my way to bed and said, “I’m glad you talked me into staying. It was a wonderful day.”

I woke early the next morning. I could hear someone moving about down the hall in the parlor, dusting and tidying. I slipped into my robe and slippers and started toward the kitchen when the door opened and Betsy, the girl who “did” once a week for my aunt, walked out of the parlor, mop in one hand and bucket in the other. At the sight of me she stopped, dropped both and let out a scream.

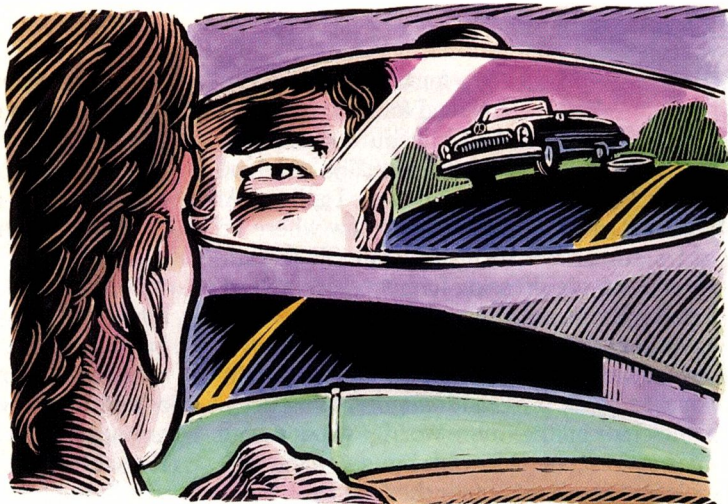
“Betsy! It’s only me. Where’s my aunt?”

“Oh, miss, what are you doing here? You gave me such a fright! How . . . When . . . How did you get here?” she stopped and blinked and suddenly repeated my last question, “Where’s your Aunt? . . . Oh, miss, didn’t you get my message, then? I just come by to keep things tidied up, like. I called your home in Los Angeles near a month back, it were, but I talked to one of them machines. Oh, miss, I knowed I shouldn’t of trusted no machine with such an important message, but . . . I didn’t want to be the one to tell you, and when that machine answered . . . well, it were like the answer to a prayer. I could just say it all fast and not have to say it to you direct-like. Oh, miss, I’m so sorry . . . your aunt died more than three weeks ago. Drowned, she were, trying to save that old cat o’hern. Toby were out hunting at the rotten end o’ the old quay when it started to go. She went after him, but the tide took both of ’em. Seems like they’s right what says these things comes in threes. First there were your aunt and then that poor Trelaney girl. Murdered, they said she was, and by her own husband, poor soul. You must have heard about it even in the States. A terrible thing it were, and wasn’t she some sort of cousin of yours, miss? All the folks down here seem to be related somehow. Why, you might have even had a relative on the ferry.”

“The . . . ferry?” I stammered in a daze.

“Why, yes, miss, the Drogornan Ferry! Bad things comes in threes! Your aunt, the Trelaney girl and then the Drogornan Ferry. Sank like a stone, she did, in Saturday’s storm, with all them people on her. Passengers and crew alike, miss, and nary a soul survived.”

In the brief moment as it all registered, I felt Phaedra’s feather-soft farewell kiss touch lightly across my cheek, and she was gone. ■



I Left His **Heart** in San Francisco

I always wanted to commit the **perfect crime**, and **time** was running out. This cross-country **caper** would be my **last big fling**

He didn't take his murder too personally, I hope. Because it wasn't. Personal, I mean—it definitely was murder, though. No mistake about that.

And I really can't blame the heat. Now that I think about it, I would have done the same thing if it'd been forty below. They say people do crazy things in the heat. If you ask me, people do crazy things twenty-four hours a day, three hundred and sixty-five days a year, rain or shine, no matter what the temperature is.

I guess what it all boils down to, then, is just a unique set of coincidences, chance planetary alignment, universal karma... or maybe just plain bad luck. Kind of ironic, don't you think? I mean, here was this guy who'd probably worked hard all his life, fought and struggled to make a career, married, maybe had a couple kids, and had his own dreams and hopes for the future. And then somebody like me comes along and, wham-bam-thank-you-ma'am, suddenly his only future is worm food. Ironic.

If I sound too cold and impersonal about all this, well, I apologize. I don't want to give you the impression that I'm some maniacal monster or something. Because I'm not. I'm just

an average guy. And maybe that's the scariest part of everything that happened.

Just an average guy, with an average job, in an average insurance company, with an average inoperable brain tumor growing inside my average skull.

Now, being in insurance, I'm used to dealing in averages. If you smoke a pack a day, I can tell you, on average, how many days you have left on this earth. If you drive under ten miles to and from work, I can average out how many years it'll be before you get a fender-bender. My doctor told me, based on my current physical condition and the progression of the tumor, that I had an average of three to four weeks left. So much for those twenty-year deferred mutuals. Irony strikes again.

Needless to say, I quit my job the next day. Said I had a better offer somewhere else. No wife, no kids, no girlfriend and no, I'm not gay. And as far as Ma goes, she lost her hearing the year after I put her in the home, and I didn't feel up to a game of charades. I could just see us now, "Tumor. One word. Two syllables. Sounds like..." No thanks. I just took her another box of books and kissed her good-bye

BY JAMES THORPE



**"Perverseness
is one of
the primitive
impulses of
the human
heart."**

—"The Black Cat,"
1845, by Edgar Allan Poe

▶▶▶ for the last time.

Now, I know what you're thinking, but I wasn't depressed. Actually, I felt kind of... relieved, I guess. At least now I knew where I'd be next month. Six feet under.

No more dressing for success in a dead-end job, no more wondering if Ms. Right would ever come along, no more stress over what kind of father I'd make, no more nightmares about pregnant daughters and drug-addicted sons, no more worries about saving for retirement. Relieved. I guess some people just aren't cut out for the long haul.

I could say I always loved to travel, but the truth is I never had the time. Now I did. Three to four weeks, maybe five, if I was lucky. Just enough time to drive cross-country. Just like the pioneers. Except the pioneers didn't have a rented forest-green Jaguar with a CD player and a sun roof. The next morning, I left San Diego with the roof open and the stereo blasting Barbra Streisand's *Broadway* album. Funny what impending mortality does to one's taste in music.

Two hours up the coast toward L.A., I pulled off for a good old-fashioned diner breakfast. The kind of greasy ham and eggs and home fries that triple bypasses are made of. That's where I first saw him.

I couldn't really miss him, seeing as how the only empty stool in the place was right beside him. He was a nice-looking guy, I guess. Neatly put together, in a casual kind of way, sort of like he fell off an L.L. Bean catalog cover. Granted, all this was gleaned out of the corner of my eye. I'm not the

type to turn and stare at a perfect stranger seated next to me. Bludgeon him to death, maybe, but not turn and stare.

I might have forgotten all about him right then and there if he hadn't asked me to pass the ketchup. Once again, irony rears its ugly head. If only he'd known his entire future, what little there was left of it, would turn on a bottle of pureed tomatoes. Certainly does put things in perspective, wouldn't you say?

From there it was a simple hop, skip and a jump to the weather, sports and the never-ending search for an honest mechanic. He said he was in advertising, I told him I was in the travel business, which in a sense was true. Nothing significant, nothing earth-shattering... just an average conversation. Then he paid his check, said good-bye and left. I finished up the last deliciously burned bits of my home fries and mentally checked off another breakfast. Only twenty-nine more left, at least in this lifetime. I left the waitress a tip and walked back to my car wondering if there were home fries in heaven.

Cruising up 101, past the large sprawling grayness on the right that was L.A., and up toward Ventura, Barbra Streisand had given way to Frank Sinatra. What can I say? A big breakfast always puts me in a mellow mood, and it's not like I was in a hurry to go anywhere. I veered off onto a back road that paralleled the main highway.

I remember when I was younger, I'd fantasize about what I'd do if someone told me I had two or three weeks left to live. I pictured myself dashing all over the world in a mad globe-trotting frenzy, trying to take in as many new sights and sounds and smells as I could before I died. It's funny, but when it really happened, when that nightmare fantasy came true, I actually slowed down. In fact, it was sort of like falling in love for the first time. Colors were brighter, smells were more intense, and I found myself listening, really listening, to the lyrics of songs on the radio. You know, the little things in life. Like clouds, like birds, like the feel of the wind on my face, like that guy pulled over on the side of the road with a flat. That guy...that advertising guy from the diner.

I remember my heart beat a little faster as I turned off onto the shoulder and backed up in front of his silver Mercedes convertible. One thing about driving a Jag, you become a car snob real quick. An old girlfriend of mine said that cars



were phallic symbols for guys, and that's why I got so upset whenever I got a flat. Hence the term, "old girlfriend."

My diner acquaintance was hunched over a jack and a spare and blinked up into the sunlight when he heard me approach. He had things under control but he appreciated my stopping by. I mumbled something like, "No problem," and my gaze fell on a shiny set of golf clubs in the back seat of the Mercedes. I looked down at the advertising man. I looked back at the clubs. Down at the advertising man. Back at the clubs. Down and back. Down and back. All the while chatting away, trying to force my brain in some other direction than it clearly wanted to go.

I could feel the wind in my face even as I scanned up and down the suddenly deserted highway. I could see the clouds billowing high overhead even as I reached for a hefty nine-iron. I could hear the birds in the trees even as I brought the club smashing down onto his head. I resisted the impulse to yell "Fore" as he slumped in a heap beside the spare tire.

I know, I know. You're saying to yourself, "What the hell is wrong with this guy?" Good question. Let me put it this way... haven't you ever wondered what it would be like to kill somebody? I mean actually take a weapon in your hands and really kill somebody. Dead. The trouble is, of course, who? The boss we hate, the girlfriend who jilted us, the guy who bags groceries and crushed our eggs last week?

And then what about afterward? Where to dispose of the body? How to resume a normal existence with the guilty knowledge that we'd taken another's life? What if, somehow, the police found out, and we were arrested, tried, convicted? Our face would be on the front page of all the newspapers. The in-laws would be shocked. To say nothing of the Wednesday night bowling league. No, it just wasn't practical, wasn't feasible.

Unless, of course, you were going to die in three weeks anyway. That puts a whole different spin on things. What did I have to lose? My conscience, my morals, my values... they'd all be gone with me before the next full moon.

And now I had killed somebody. The fact that I hardly knew him made it easier, I suppose. I don't think I ever could have done that to a close friend... I don't think. The most disturbing part was just how easy it actually was. One minute he's alive, the next he's dead. Black and white, simple.

So there I was. Just me, the clouds, the

birds and a dead guy. And the blood. So much blood. Who would've guessed we had all that red fluid inside us. You know the expression "pool of blood?" Boy, they aren't kidding.

Still quite calm, I looked down at the golf club in my hands. There was something vaguely gelatinous dangling on the end of it. I wiped it off on the grass and stuck it back in the bag. Now what to do? I could leave him there by the side of the road; I could roll him off into the bushes... no, neither of those seemed a very dignified way of dealing with the situation. No sense committing an aggressive act like murder and then just running away like some naughty puppy who's peed on the carpet.

Maybe I could make this the perfect crime. There would be a challenge... and the pressure would be off. I'd have no fear of getting caught. They certainly couldn't track me cross-country in less than three weeks.

So that's how it all started. It seemed a perfect match: I was traveling across three thousand miles of country and I had a body that needed disposing of. Now, conventional wisdom might dictate my dropping it off somewhere along the way and hope nobody found it until I was long gone. And that wasn't necessarily a bad idea, but I had a more creative one. A variation on a theme.

I backed my Jag into the bushes, dragged you-know-who over and loaded him into my trunk. As I took off down the road again, his Mercedes looked lonely and forlorn receding in my rearview mirror. I pulled into the first hick town I came to and stopped briefly at the local hardware store. A few minutes later, supplies in hand, I was on my way again, and James Taylor was singing about never dying young.

I won't go into details, but let's just say that by the end of the evening, my unlucky diner acquaintance was neatly packaged in about half a dozen different Hefty bags. All securely tied with that little yellow drawstring. I left him, all of him, in the trunk that first night. I didn't want the owner of the Cozy Coast Motel to start asking questions about my distinctive matching set of green plastic luggage.

At the time, this approach seemed entirely logical. The police might find a body if it was thrown in a ditch, but they'd never be able to piece together a body that was disassembled and scattered over three thousand miles of country. My plan was inspired. That night I slept soundly, lulled by the rumble of the ice machine outside my window.

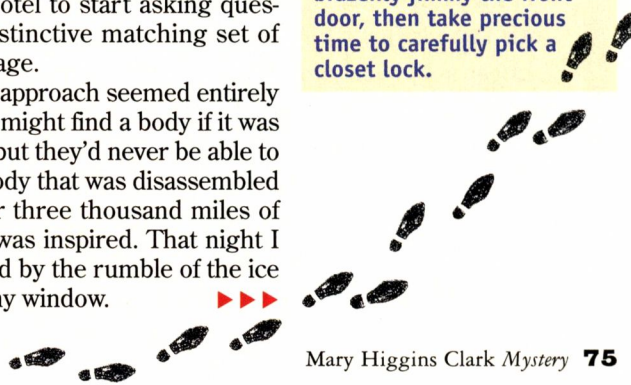
The Case of the Crusty Bread

Solution

Even if Detective Stromboli hadn't been the daughter of a baker, she could taste that the bread was fresh. Had Horrorwitts bought it before he left on Sunday and not been able to freeze it, it would have been hard as a rock by Thursday. Horrorwitts was obviously lying. He had already been to the apartment with the bread and had checked out the break-in.

As Stromboli soon learned, the call about the burglary had come on Horrorwitts's cellular phone as he was driving back from Monticello. He knew the violin hadn't been taken—he had left it upstate. He, in turn, had called the police from his car and asked them to meet him in two hours—plenty of time for him to go upstairs and fake the violin's theft.

Horrorwitts's gambling debts (Stromboli had noted the racetrack pass) and forced retirement would have left him strapped for cash in his old age—which the violin's insurance could have financed. Because of his arthritis, Horrorwitts couldn't attempt a similar forced entry, so he used his own key on the locked closet. Stromboli saw no reason why a thief would brazenly jimmy the front door, then take precious time to carefully pick a closet lock.





▶▶▶ The next morning was bright and sunny. Breakfast was great...three eggs and sausage and a waitress who called me "hon." Twenty-eight breakfasts left. I hit the road with a belly full of cholesterol and a trunk full of Hefty bags.

Bag number one was dropped off in a deep ravine just inside the Frisco city limits. I hadn't labeled the bags so I can't be sure, but it felt pretty much like the torso. From there, I headed inland on I-80 toward Sacramento and the Nevada border. I was finally going to see the Grand Canyon. I bypassed Sacramento and was just approaching Auburn when I noticed the flashing red lights in my mirror. My first reaction was to look around for the poor slob who was going to get pulled over for speeding. They ought to know better than to screw around with the California Highway Patrol. But the red lights didn't pass me. Son of a gun. I checked my mirror again and there he was. Right on my tail.

A quick glance at my speedometer told me I was right on the limit. What the hell was up? Then my heart jumped into my throat. I remembered what I had in the trunk.

I remembered the abandoned Mercedes, the blood by the roadside, the golf clubs... one of them slightly messy. But this was too soon. It just wasn't fair. I mean, I hadn't even got out of the state yet. How could they have figured it out already? And before I knew it my foot was inching the accelerator toward the floor—sixty, sixty-five, seventy miles an hour and counting. His siren suddenly screamed, and I felt as if I jumped a foot.

All right, I told myself. Just calm down. Maybe your muffler's dragging. Maybe you've got a busted tail light. Maybe he doesn't know you've got five-sixths of a body in the trunk. Let's just calm down. My foot eased up on the accelerator. I swung over to the side of the road and slowed reluctantly to a stop.

It seemed to take him a year to get out of his patrol

car. And why did he bother to put his hat on? Was he afraid of sunstroke? Was he going bald? Was he using my predicament to make a fashion statement? I powered down my window as he approached and turned to see my face reflected in his sunglasses.

Well, I was just fine, thank you, and how was he? Small talk. This is what he pulls me over for? Could he see my driver's license? O.K., now we were getting somewhere. I reached in my jacket pocket and came up empty. Someone had stolen my wallet. No, it couldn't be. I'd had it back at breakfast and hadn't used it since. I patted myself all over. He shifted his weight and sighed. Obviously, this was a familiar routine. I checked the floor. I checked the glove compartment. I checked the back seat. No wallet.

And then it hit me. The trunk.

It must've fallen out when I was unloading Hefty bag number one. Now, here was a spot. Oh, yes. I still wasn't sure what he wanted, but I sure as hell didn't want to tip my hand, either. I laughed at my own stupidity. The trunk, of course. Would he mind? I took the keys out of the ignition and slid out of the car. He followed me around back as I unlocked the trunk.

There it was. Wedged in between the Hefty bags. My wallet. I snatched it up—not too quickly, I hoped—and flashed my identification. With my other hand I reached up to close the trunk. But the patrolman's hand was faster.

What is it about a bunch of Hefty bags and a few blood stains in a guy's trunk that gets police all suspicious? I mean, what kind of people must they be used to dealing with? Anyway, you've seen the same movies I have. You can probably guess the rest.

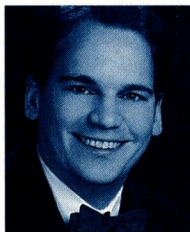
Through the bars of my cell, I can look out now to the squad room where he's typing up my report. If he ever gets through all the paperwork, he'll probably get promoted. Talk about dumb luck. Or chance planetary alignment. Or universal karma. Or maybe it's my stupid doctor's fault.

If my doctor hadn't mixed up my lab test results with someone else's, he wouldn't have misdiagnosed my brain tumor. If he hadn't felt so guilty and tried to track me down through my office and then the rental car agency, things would be a lot different now. If he hadn't persuaded the state police to put out a medical emergency bulletin on my license number, I'd probably be buying a bumper sticker at the Grand Canyon right now.

So, there he sits. Typing away. Today a patrolman, tomorrow a sergeant. All because of little old me. All because he was sent on a mission of mercy to tell some poor schmuck he wasn't going to die after all. That he didn't just have three or four weeks left—he had his whole life.... Does the word "irony" ring any bells? ■

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The inspiration for this story—a finalist in the 1993 Family Circle Mystery/Suspense Short Story Contest—came to James Thorpe when he overheard a child mangling the lyrics to "I Left My Heart in San Francisco." The phrase "I left *his* heart..." stayed with him. Thorpe has a natural link to the macabre: He grew up in an apartment above his father's funeral home in Ontario, Canada. He began his writing career in Philadelphia, doing advertising and promotion for CBS, and earned more than 40 awards, including two Emmys. Two years ago Thorpe moved with his wife, Suzanne Lyons, to Los Angeles to work in TV. His credits include *The X-Files*, *Outer Limits*, *Profit* and *Strange Luck*. He has a sitcom pilot in development and recently completed a screenplay for a romantic comedy.





definitely a crime of
PASSION

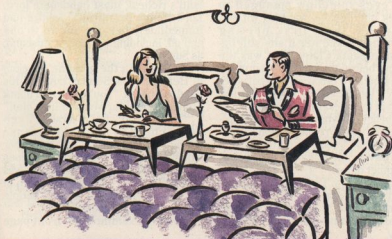
BY MARY HIGGINS CLARK

Meet Henry and Sunday Britland, a classy new pair of sleuths: the Nick and Nora Charles of the 90's

"Beware of the fury of a patient man," Henry Parker Britland IV observed sadly as he studied the picture of his former Secretary of State, who had just been indicted for the murder of his lover, Arabella Young.

"Then you think poor Tommy did it?" Sandra O'Brien Britland sighed as she delicately patted homemade jam onto a delightfully hot scone.

The couple was comfortably ensconced in their king-size bed at Drumdoe, their





country estate in Peapack, New Jersey. *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times* were scattered on the delicately flowered gossamer-soft quilt.

"I find it impossible to believe," Henry said slowly. "Tom always had such iron self-control. That's what made him such a fine Secretary of State. But ever since Constance died, he's not been himself and when he met Arabella there's no question that he fell madly in love with her."

"I do wish I'd known you when you were President," Sandra said ruefully. "But nine years ago when you were sworn in for the first time you'd have found me boring, I'm sure. How interesting could a law student be to the President of the United States? At least when you met me as a member of Congress, you thought of me with respect."

Henry turned and looked benevolently at his bride of eight months. Her hair, the color of winter wheat, was tousled. The expression in her intensely blue eyes somehow managed to convey intelligence, warmth, wit and humor. At their first meeting Henry had asked her if she still believed in Santa Claus. That was the evening before the inauguration of his successor. He'd thrown a cocktail party at the White House for the about-to-be sworn-in members of Congress.

"I believe in what Santa Claus represents, sir," she'd replied. "Don't you?"

At seven o'clock when the guests were leaving, he'd invited her to stay for a quiet dinner.

"I'm so sorry. I'm meeting my parents. I can't disappoint them."

Henry had thought of all the women who, at his invitation, changed

"It's a particularly vicious crime. The woman was shot three times with Tommy's gun in his library."

their plans in a second and realized that at last he'd found the girl of his dreams. They were married six weeks later.

The marriage of the country's most eligible bachelor, the forty-four-year-old ex-President, to

the beautiful young Congresswoman twelve years his junior had set off a media hype that threatened to be unending.

The fact that Sandra's father was a motorman on the New Jersey Central Railroad, that she had worked her way through Fordham Law School, spent two years as a public defender, and then in a stunning upset won the Congressional seat of the Jersey City longtime incumbent, earned her the cheers of womankind.

On their wedding day one tabloid had run the headline: LORD HENRY BRINTHROP MARRIES OUR GAL SUNDAY, a takeoff of the popular radio soap opera of the 1930's that five days a week had asked the question, "Can a girl from a mining town in the West find happiness as the wife of England's richest, most handsome lord, Lord Henry Brinthrop?" Sandra had immediately become known to one and all, including her doting husband, as Sunday.

Now seeing the genuine concern in Henry's eyes, Sunday covered his hand with hers. "You're worried about Tommy. What can we do to help him?"

"Not very much, I'm afraid. I'll certainly check to see if the defense lawyer he hired is good. But no matter whom he gets, it's a particularly vicious crime. Think about it. The woman was shot three times with Tommy's gun in his library right after he told people that she had broken up with him."

Sunday examined the front-page

picture of a beaming Thomas Shipman, his arm around the dazzling thirty-year-old who had helped to dry his tears after his wife's death. "How old is Tommy?" Sunday asked.

"Sixty-five, give or take a year," Henry said.

Together they soberly studied the photograph. Tommy was a trim, lean man with thinning gray hair and a scholarly face. Arabella Young's wildly teased tresses fell around her shoulders. She'd had a boldly pretty face and the kind of curves found on *Playboy* covers.

"May and December," Sunday commented.

"They probably say that about us."

"Oh, Henry, be quiet. And don't try to pretend that you aren't really upset."

"I am," Henry said softly. "I can't imagine what I'd have done when I found myself sitting in the Oval Office after only one term in the Senate without Tommy at my side. He's a gentleman through and through—honest, smart, loyal."

"But he's also a man who must have been aware that people were joking about his relationship with Arabella and how smitten he was with her. Then when she finally wanted out, he lost it," Sunday observed. "That's pretty much the way you see it, isn't it?"

"Yes. Temporary insanity." Henry picked up his breakfast tray and put it on the night table. "Nevertheless, he was always there for me and I'm going to be there for him. He's been allowed to post bond. I'm going to see him."

"I'm coming too," Sunday said. "Give me ten minutes in the Jacuzzi and I'll be ready."

Henry watched his wife's long legs



as she slid out of bed.

"The Jacuzzi. What a splendid ideal!"

Thomas Acker Shipman tried to ignore the media camped outside. The events of the day finally hit him and he visibly slumped. "I think a Scotch is in order," he said quietly.

Defense attorney Leonard Hart looked at him sympathetically. "I'd say you deserved one. I just want to reassure you that if you insist, we'll go ahead with a plea bargain. But I do think we could put together a very strong temporary-insanity defense, and I wish you'd agree to go to trial. You went through the agony of losing a beloved wife, then fell in love with a young woman who accepted many gifts from you and then spurned you."

Hart's voice became as passionate as though he were addressing a jury. "You asked her to come here and talk it over, and then when she arrived you lost your head and killed her. The gun was out only because you planned to kill yourself."



The former Secretary of State looked puzzled. "That's how you see it?"

Hart seemed surprised at the question. "Of course. It will be a little hard to explain how you could simply leave Miss Young bleeding on the floor, go upstairs to bed, and sleep so soundly that the next morning you didn't even hear your housekeeper scream when she saw the body. But at a trial we'd contend that you were in shock."

"Would you?" Shipman asked wearily. "I wasn't in shock. In fact, after that martini I barely remember what Arabella and I said to each other, never mind recall shooting her."

Leonard Hart looked pained. "I think, sir, that I must beg you not to make statements like that to anyone. And may I suggest that from now on you go easy on the Scotch?"

From behind the drapery, Thomas Shipman watched as his rotund attorney was charged by the media as he left. The house felt quiet and lonely. Shipman's mind began to slip back to the day he and Constance had bought the house thirty years ago. They'd driven up to have lunch at Bear Mountain and on a leisurely drive back to Manhattan, they impulsively wandered through the local streets in Tarrytown. There they'd come across a FOR SALE sign in front of the turn-of-the-century residence overlooking the Hudson River and the Palisades.

And for the next twenty-eight years we lived here happily ever after, Shipman thought as—deciding against the Scotch—he wandered into the kitchen and reached for the percolator. Even when he served as Secretary of State they managed occasional weekends here, enough of them to restore their souls. Until one morning two years ago when Constance said, "Tom, I don't feel so well." And a moment later she was gone.

Working twenty hours a day helped to numb the pain. Henry and I did a lot of good, he thought. We left Washington and the country in better shape than it's been in years.

Shipman measured coffee into the filter, snapped on the switch, and poured water enough for four cups. Enter Arabella, he thought. So ready with comfort, so alluring. And now so dead.

What had they said to each other in the library? He vaguely remembered how angry he had become. How had he been driven to such an act of violence? How could he have left her alone, bleeding, and stumbled up to bed?

The phone rang. Shipman didn't answer it. Instead he walked over to it, turned the ringer to "off," and disconnected the answering device.

When the coffee was ready, he poured a cup and with slightly trembling hands carried it into the living room. Normally he'd have settled in his big leather chair in the library, but now he wondered if he'd ever be able to enter that room again.

From outside he heard shouting. The former President of the United States was on the scene to offer aid and comfort.

The Secret Service men tried to hold the media back. His arm protectively around his wife, Henry voluntarily made a statement. "As always in this great country, a man is innocent until proven guilty. Thomas Shipman was a truly great Secretary of State and remains our close friend. Sunday and I are here in friendship."

As the former President reached the porch, Shipman unlocked and opened the door. It was only when it had closed behind the Britlands and he felt himself embraced in a warm



bear hug that Thomas Shipman began to sob.

Sunday insisted on preparing some lunch for the three of them. "You'll feel a lot better when you have something hot in your stomach, Tom," she said.

Shipman had regained his composure. Somehow the presence of Henry gave him the sense that he could handle whatever he had to face. And Sunday's brisk, sure movements at the chopping board brought back a more recent memory of Palm Beach and watching someone else prepare a salad and dreaming dreams about a future that now could never be.

Glancing out the window, he realized that the shade was raised and if somebody managed to sneak around to the back of the house, there was a perfect opportunity to take a picture of the three of them. Shipman got up and drew the shade to the windowsill.

"You know," he said, "pulling down this shade made me think of how last year some salesman talked me into putting an electric setup on the draperies in all the other rooms. They did something wrong in the library and when you click to open or close the draperies, you'd swear someone had fired a gun. You've heard about coming events casting their shadows before? Ah, well."

He sat across the table from Henry, thinking of the many times they'd faced each other across the desk in the Oval Office. Now he found the courage to say steadily, "Mr. President . . ."

"Tommy, will you knock it off."

"All right, Henry. We're both lawyers."

"So is Sunday," Henry reminded him. "And she worked as a public de-

They watched as their friend stared unseeingly ahead. "You understand," he said, "I took the life of a young woman."

fender before she ran for office."

Shipman smiled wanly. "Then I suggest she's our resident expert. Sunday, did you ever launch a defense where your client was dead drunk and not only shot his . . . friend . . . three times, but left her to bleed to death while he slept off a hangover?"

"I defended a number of people who were so high on drugs they didn't remember committing a crime."

"They were found guilty, of course."

"They had the book thrown at them," she admitted.

"Exactly. My attorney, Len Hart, is a capable fellow, but as I see it, my only course is to plea bargain in the hope that in exchange for a guilty plea the state will not seek the death penalty."

Henry and Sunday watched as their friend stared unseeingly ahead. "You understand," Shipman continued, "that I took the life of a young woman who ought to have enjoyed perhaps fifty more years on this planet. If I go to prison, the confinement may help to expiate this awful guilt before I am called to meet my Maker."

They were all silent as Sunday finished making omelettes. She slid the first one onto a heated plate and placed it in front of Shipman. "Eat," she commanded. Then she added quietly, "Tommy, there have got to be some extenuating circumstances that will help you. We understand that Arabella had broken up with you, but why was she here that night?"

Shipman did not answer immediately. "She dropped in," he said evasively.

"You weren't expecting her?" Sunday asked quickly.

"Er, no, I wasn't."

Henry leaned forward. "Tom, as



Will Rogers said, 'All I know is just what I read in the papers.' According to the media, you had phoned Arabella and begged her to talk to you. She came over that evening around nine."

"That's right. She came over around nine."

Henry and Sunday exchanged glances. Clearly there was something Tom was not telling them.

"Tom, we want to help you," Henry said gently.

Shipman sighed. "Arabella had been phoning me," he explained. "I returned her last call and we agreed it was important to sit down and talk things out. However, we made no specific date. I did not expect her the night of the tragedy."

"Where did you keep the gun?" Henry asked. "Quite frankly, I was surprised that you had one registered."

"I'd totally forgotten I'd had it in my safe," Shipman said tonelessly. "It came up that there's going to be an-

other drive to turn in guns for toys and I remembered it, so I took it out and left the bullets beside it, planning to drop it off at the police station in the morning."

"What were you doing before Arabella came in?" Henry asked.

They watched as Shipman considered and then answered, "I had been at the annual stockholders' meeting of American Micro. It was an exhausting day. I had a dreadful cold. My housekeeper prepared dinner at seven-thirty. I ate a little and went upstairs immediately afterward. I was suffering from chills and took a long, hot shower, then got into bed. I hadn't slept well for several nights and took a sleeping pill. I was in a sound sleep when Lillian knocked at the door and

said Arabella was downstairs. Lillian, I might add, was just about to leave."

"You came back downstairs?" Henry asked.

"Yes. Lillian left. Arabella was in the library. . . . I was not pleased to see her. I was so groggy from the sleeping pill I could hardly keep my eyes open. I was angry that she had simply

come without warning. As you may remember, there's a bar in the library. Arabella had already prepared a martini for each of us."

"Tom, why would you even think of drinking a martini on top of a sleeping pill?" Sunday prodded.

"Because I'm a fool," Shipman snapped. "Because I was so sick of Arabella's loud voice and cackling laugh that I thought I'd go mad if I didn't drown it out."





Henry and Sunday stared at their friend. "I thought you were crazy about her," Henry said.

"I was the one who broke it off," Shipman told him. "As a gentleman, I thought it proper to tell people it had been her decision. Anyone looking at the disparity in our ages and personalities would certainly have believed that. The truth was that I had finally—temporarily, as it turns out—come to my senses. She was phoning me in the middle of the night, every hour on the hour. I warned her that it could not go on. She pleaded for a meeting and I agreed to see her in the near future, but not that night."

"Tom, why haven't you told this to the police? Everyone thinks it was a crime of passion."

"I think in the end it probably was. That last night Arabella told me that she was getting in touch with one of the tabloids and would sell them a story about wild parties during your administration which you and I allegedly gave together."

"That's ridiculous," Henry sputtered.

"Blackmail," Sunday breathed.

"Exactly. Do you think telling that story would help my case? At least there's some dignity to being punished for murdering a woman because I loved her too much to lose her. Dignity for her and, perhaps, even a modicum of dignity for me."

Sunday insisted on cleaning up the kitchen. Henry insisted on escorting Shipman upstairs to rest. "Tommy, I wish there was someone here with you," he said. "I hate to leave you alone."

"I don't feel alone after your visit, Henry."

"Arabella told me she was going to sell the tabloids a story about wild parties in your administration."

Henry's beeper sounded. It was Jack Collins, the head of his Secret Service detail. "Mr. President, William Osborne, the next-door neighbor, is insisting that Mr. Shipman must be given a message. He says Countess Condazzi is calling

from Palm Beach and can't get through. She's distraught trying to reach him. The Countess insists that Mr. Shipman be notified that she is expecting his call."

"Thanks, Jack. I'll tell Secretary Shipman at once. And Sunday and I will be leaving in a few minutes."

"Right, sir."

Countess Condazzi, Henry thought. How interesting. Who can that be?

His interest was further piqued when, on being informed of the call, Thomas Acker Shipman's eyes brightened and a smile hovered on his lips. "Betsy phoned. How dear of her!" But then the brightness disappeared from his eyes and the smile vanished and he said, "The Osbornes know Betsy from Florida. They play golf together. That's why she called them."

"Are you going to call the Countess back?" Henry asked.

Shipman shook his head. "Absolutely not. Betsy must not be dragged into this mess."

A few minutes later, as Henry and Sunday were being hustled past the media, a Lexus pulled into the driveway beside them. A woman in her fifties, with a coronet of braids, used the diversion caused by the former President to slip up to the front door and let herself in. Henry and Sunday both noticed her.



"That has to be the housekeeper," Sunday decided. "She had a key in her hand. At least Tom won't be alone."

"He must be paying her well," Henry observed. "That car is expensive."

On the drive home Henry told Sunday about the mysterious phone call from Palm Beach. He could see from the way her head tilted to one side and her forehead puckered that she was both disturbed and thinking deeply.

They were riding in an eight-year-old black Chevy, one of the several specially equipped, secondhand cars Henry delighted in using to avoid recognition. The two Secret Service agents, one driving, one riding shotgun, were separated from overhearing them by a glass divider.

"Henry," Sunday said, "there's something wrong about this case. You can sense that."

Henry nodded. "Oh, that's obvious. I thought it might be that the details are so gruesome that Tommy has to deny them to himself." Then he paused. "But none of this is like him," he exclaimed. No matter what the provocation I cannot accept that, even laced up on a sleeping pill and a martini, Tommy went so out of control that he killed a woman! Just seeing him today made me realize how extraordinary all this is. Sunday, you know he was devoted to Constance, yet his composure when she died was remarkable. Tommy simply isn't the kind of man who flips out, no matter what the provocation."

"His composure may have been remarkable when his wife died," Sunday said, "but falling hook, line and sinker for Arabella Young so quickly says a lot, doesn't it?"

"Rebound? Denial?"

"Exactly," she added. "Sometimes people fall in love immediately and it works, but more often it doesn't."

"You're probably right," Henry agreed. "The very fact that Tommy never married Arabella after giving her an engagement ring nearly two years ago says to me that all along he knew it was a mistake."

"What did you really think of Arabella?" Sunday asked.

"Never speak ill of the dead," he replied, "but I found her boisterous and vulgar. She had a shrewd mind, but she talked incessantly, and when she laughed I thought the chandelier would shatter."

"Henry, if Arabella was stooping to blackmail, is it possible she's tried it before with someone else?" Sunday asked. "Between the sleeping pill and the martini, Henry passed out. Suppose someone else came in, someone who followed Arabella and saw an opportunity to get rid of her and let Henry take the blame?"

"And then carried Tommy upstairs and tucked him into bed?" Henry raised an eyebrow.

The car turned onto the approach to the Garden State Parkway. Sunday stared pensively at the trees with their copper and gold and cardinal-red leaves. "I love autumn," she said. "And it hurts to think that in the late autumn of his life, Tommy should be going through this. Let's try another scenario. Suppose Tommy is angry, even furious, but so groggy he can't think straight. What would you have done if you were in his position that night?"

"What Tommy and I both did when we were at summit meetings. Sense that we're too tired or too angry to think straight and go to bed."



On the drive home, Henry told Sunday about the mysterious phone call from Palm Beach.

Sunday clasped Henry's hand. "That's exactly my point. Suppose Tommy staggered upstairs to bed and left Arabella there. Suppose someone else she had threatened had followed her over to Tommy's. Nine o'clock's a peculiar time to just show up. We have to find out who Arabella might have been with earlier in the evening. And we should talk to Tommy's housekeeper, Lillian West. She left shortly after Arabella arrived. Maybe there was a car parked on the street that she noticed. And what about the Countess from Palm Beach who so urgently wanted to talk to Tommy? We've got to contact her."

"Agreed," Henry said admiringly. "As usual we're on the same wavelength, but you're farther along than I. I wasn't thinking about talking to the Countess." He put his arm around Sunday and pulled her closer. "I have not kissed you since 11:10 this morning," he said.

Sunday caressed his lips with the tip of her index finger.

"Then it's more than my steel-trap mind that appeals to you?"

"You've noticed." Henry kissed her fingertips, then pushed his lips insistently against hers.

The next morning, Henry got up at sunrise for an early morning ride with the estate manager. At 8:30, Sunday joined him in the charming breakfast room overlooking the classic English garden.

"Congress goes into session next week," she reminded him. "Whatever I can do to help Tommy, I have to start working on right now. My suggestion is that I find out everything I can

about Arabella. Did Marvin get a complete background check on her?"

Marvin was in charge of Henry's office, which was situated in the former carriage house of their two-thousand-acre property.

"Right here," Henry said. "I just read it. The late Arabella managed to bury her background quite successfully. It took Marvin's people to learn that she had a previous marriage in which she took her ex-husband to the cleaners and that her long time, off-again, on-again boyfriend, Alfred Barker, was sent to prison for bribing athletes."

"Really! Is he out of prison now?"

"Not only that, dear. He had dinner with Arabella the night she died." Sunday's jaw dropped. "Darling, how did Marvin ever discover that?"

"How does Marvin ever discover anything? He has his sources. Alfred Barker lives in Yonkers, which as you probably know is not far from Tarrytown. Her ex-husband is remarried happily and not in the area."

"Marvin learned this overnight?" Sunday's eyes snapped with excitement.

Henry nodded as Sims, the butler, hovered the coffeepot over his cup. "Thank you, Sims. Yes," he continued, "and he also learned that Alfred Barker was still very fond of Arabella."

"What does Alfred Barker do now?" Sunday asked.

"Technically, he owns a plumbing supply store. It's a front for his numbers racket. And the kicker is that he's known to have a violent temper when double-crossed."

"And he had dinner with Arabella the night she barged in on Tommy."

"Exactly."

"I knew this was a crime of pas-



sion," Sunday said excitedly. "The thing is that the passion wasn't on Tommy's part. I'll see Barker today, as well as Tommy's housekeeper."

"And I'll fly down to Palm Beach and meet with the Countess Condazzi. I'll be home for dinner. Remember, this Alfred Barker is obviously an unsavory character. I don't want you giving your Secret Service guys the slip."

"Okay."

"I mean it, Sunday," Henry said in the quiet tone that could make his cabinet members quake in their boots.

"You're one tough hombre." Sunday smiled. "I'll stick to them like glue." She kissed the top of his head and left the breakfast room humming "Hail to the Chief."

Four hours later Henry, having piloted his jet to West Palm Beach airport, was driving up to the Spanish-style mansion which was the home of Countess Condazzi. "Wait outside," he instructed his Secret Service detail.

The Countess was a woman in her mid-sixties. Slender and small with exquisite features and calm gray eyes, she greeted him with cordial warmth. "I was so glad to get your call, Mr. President," she said. "Tommy won't speak to me and I know how much he's suffering. He didn't commit this crime. We've been friends since we were children and there never was a moment that he lost control of himself."

"That's exactly the same way I see it," Henry agreed. "You grew up with him?"

"Across the street from each other. We dated all through college, but then he met Constance and I married Eduardo Condazzi. A year later, my husband's older brother died. Eduardo inherited the title and the vineyards and we moved to Spain. He passed

away three years ago. My son is now the count and I felt it was time for me to come home. After all these years I bumped into Tommy when he was visiting our mutual friends, the Osbornes, for a golfing weekend."

And a young love sparked again, Henry thought. "Countess..."

"Betsy."

"All right, Betsy, I have to be blunt. Were you and Tommy starting to pick up where you left off years ago?"

"Yes and no," Betsy said slowly. "You see, Tommy didn't give himself a chance to grieve for Constance. We've talked a lot about that. It's obvious that his involvement with Arabella Young was his way of trying to escape the grieving process. I advised him to drop Arabella, then give himself a period of mourning. But I told him that after six months, a year at the most, he had to call me again and finally take me to a prom."

Betsy Condazzi's smile was nostalgic, her eyes filled with memories.

"Did he agree?" Henry asked.

"Not completely. He said that he was selling his house and moving down here permanently. He said that he'd be ready long before six months were up to take me out."

Henry studied her, then slowly asked, "If Arabella Young had given a story to a tabloid purporting that during my administration and even before his wife's death, Tommy and I had thrown wild parties in the White House, what would your reaction be?"

"I'd know it wasn't true," she said simply. "And Tommy knows me well enough to be sure of that."

Henry let his pilot fly the jet back to Newark airport. He spent the time deep in thought. Tommy was obviously aware that the future had promised a second chance at happiness, and that he didn't have to kill to safeguard



that chance. Henry wondered if Sunday was having any better luck in finding a possible motive for Arabella's death.

Alfred Barker was not a man who invited instinctive liking. Sunday thought as she sat across from him in the office of the plumbing supply store that she knew was a cover-up for nefarious activities. At times she chafed at the presence of her Secret Service men, but at this moment, in this squalid room with this hostile man, she was glad to know they were outside the partially open door.

She had introduced herself as Sandra O'Brien, and it was obvious that Alfred Barker did not have a clue that the rest of her name was Britland.

"Why do ya wanna talk to me about Arabella?" Barker asked as he lit a cigar.

"I want to start by saying that I'm very sorry about her death," Sunday told him sincerely. "I understand you and she were very close. But I know Mr. Shipman." She paused, then explained, "My husband at one time worked with him. There seems to be a conflicting version of who broke up his relationship with Ms. Young."

"Arabella was probably sick of the old creep," Barker told her. "Arabella always liked me."

"But she got engaged to Thomas Shipman," Sunday protested.

"Yeah. I knew that would never last. But he had a fat wallet."

"Mr. Barker, according to Secretary Shipman, he was the one breaking off the relationship with Arabella."

"Yeah. So what?"

"Then why would he kill her?"

Barker's face flushed. His hand slammed on the desk. "I warned Arabella not to threaten him with the tabloid routine. But she got away with

**Barker's hand
slammed down
on the desk.
"I warned her
not to threaten
him!" he said.**

it before and wouldn't listen to me."

"She got away with it before!" Sunday exclaimed, remembering this was exactly what she had suggested to Henry. "Who else did she try to blackmail?"

"Some guy she worked with. I don't know his name. But it's never a good idea to mess around with a guy with the kind of clout Shipman had. Remember how he flushed Castro down the toilet?"

"How much did she talk about blackmailing him?"

"Only to me. She figured it would be worth a couple bucks."

"You had dinner with her the night she died."

"Yeah."

"Did you drop her off at the Shipman house?"

"I put her in a cab. She was planning to borrow his car to get home." Barker shook his head. "She wasn't planning to return it. She was sure he'd give her anything to keep her from spilling muck to the tabloids. Instead, look what he did to her."

Barker stood up. His face turned ugly. "I hope they fry him."

Sunday got to her feet. "The death penalty in New York State is administered by lethal injection. Mr. Barker, what did you do after you put Arabella in a cab?"

"I went to my mother's and took her to the movies," he said. "I do that once a month. I was at her house by a quarter of nine and buying tickets at two minutes of nine. The ticket guy knows me. The kid who sells popcorn knows me. The woman who was sitting next to me is Mama's best friend and she knows I was there for the whole show."



Barker thumped his fist on the desk. "You wanna help Shipman? Decorate his cell."

Sandra's Secret Service men were suddenly beside her. They stared down at Barker. "I wouldn't pound the desk in this lady's presence," one of them suggested to Barker coldly.

**Minutes later
Henry had the
dossier he'd
requested—and
the subject's
employment
records.**

Thomas Acker Shipman once again peered out from behind a tiny opening in the drawn drapery. His housekeeper had arrived promptly at eight o'clock this morning. He had put on the safety chain, but when her key did not gain entrance, she had firmly pushed the doorbell and called his name until he let her in.

"You need taking care of," she'd said sharply, brushing aside his objection that he'd actually prefer to be alone.

Lillian West was a handsome woman, an excellent housekeeper and cordon bleu cook, but she had bossy tendencies that made Shipman wistfully remember Dora, his previous housekeeper of twenty years, who had sometimes burned the bacon, but had always been a pleasant fixture in his home.

Realizing the necessity of receiving phone calls from his lawyer, Shipman had reluctantly turned on the answering machine, so that when a call came from Sunday he picked up the phone.

"Tommy, I'm in the car on my way from Yonkers," Sunday explained. "I want to talk to your housekeeper. Is she in today and if not, where can I reach her?"

"Lillian is here."

"Wonderful. Don't let her go until I have a chance to see her."

"I can't imagine what she'll tell you that the police haven't already heard," Shipman said.

"Tommy, I've just talked to Arabella's boyfriend. He knew of the plan to extort money from you, and from what he said I'd gather that

Arabella did that before to at least one other person. We've got to find out who that person was. Maybe someone followed her to your house and when Lillian left, she saw a car and thought it was Arabella's. The police never really investigated any other possible suspects. This ain't over till it's over."

Shipman hung up and turned to see Lillian at the door to his study. Obviously she had been listening to the conversation. Even so, he smiled at her pleasantly. "Mrs. Britland is on her way to talk to you," he said. "She and the President apparently think that after all I may not be guilty of Arabella's death. They have a theory that might be very helpful to me."

"That's wonderful," she said coldly. "I can't wait to talk to her."

Sunday's next call was to Henry's plane. They exchanged reports on the Countess and Alfred Barker. After Sunday's revelation about Arabella's habit of blackmailing the men she dated, she added, "The only problem is that no matter who else might have wanted to kill Arabella, proving that person walked into Tommy's home, picked up his gun and pulled the trigger is going to be quite difficult."

"Difficult, but not impossible," Henry tried to reassure her.

"I'll get Marvin to check on Arabella's last places of employment and find out who she might have been involved with at them."

When Henry finished saying



good-bye, a sudden uneasiness overcame him about something Sunday had said. It was her observation about trying to prove that some other person had walked into Tommy's home, loaded the gun and pulled the trigger.

That was it. There was one person who could have done that, who knew that Tommy was both sick and overwhelmingly tired, who knew that Arabella was there, who in fact had let her in. The housekeeper. She was relatively new. Had anyone checked her out?

Swiftly Henry phoned Countess Condazzi. Let her still be home, he prayed. When her now-familiar voice answered, he wasted no time. "Betsy, did Tommy ever say anything to you about his new housekeeper?"

She hesitated. "Well, jokingly."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, you know how it is. There are so many women in their fifties and sixties and so few men. When I spoke to Tommy the very day that girl was killed, I said I had a dozen friends who are widows or divorced and would be jealous of me. He said that except for me he intended to steer clear of unattached women; that he'd just had a most unpleasant experience. Apparently he'd told his new housekeeper that he was putting his house on the market and moving to Palm Beach. She seemed shocked that he wouldn't be bringing her with him. He'd confided to her that he was finished with Arabella because someone else had become important to him. He thinks the housekeeper got the crazy idea he meant her."

"Good God," Henry said, "Betsy, I'll get back to you." Swiftly he dialed Marvin Klein. "Marvin," he said, "I've got a hunch about Secretary Shipman's housekeeper, Lillian West. Do a complete check on her immediately."

Marvin Klein didn't like to break

the law by penetrating the computer records of others, but he knew when his boss said "immediately" the matter was urgent.

Seven minutes later he had a dossier on fifty-six-year-old Lillian West, including her employment record. Marvin frowned as he began to read. West was a college graduate, had an M.A., had taught home economics at a number of colleges, and after leaving the last one six years ago had taken a job as a housekeeper.

To date she'd had four positions. Her references praised her punctuality, work and cooking. Good, but not enthusiastic, Marvin thought. He decided to check on them himself.

Fifteen minutes later he dialed Henry's plane. "Sir, Lillian West had a long history of troubled relationships with her superiors in colleges. After she left her last job, she went to work for a widower in Vermont. He died ten months later, presumably of a heart attack. She then went to work for a divorced executive who unfortunately died within the year. Her third employer was an eighty-year-old millionaire who fired her but gave her a good reference. I spoke to him. While Ms. West was an excellent housekeeper and cook, she was also presumptuous, and when he realized she was intent on marrying him, he showed her the door."

"Did he ever have any health problems?" Henry asked quietly as he absorbed the possibilities that Lillian West's history opened.

"I knew you'd want to know that, sir. His health is now robust but during the last several weeks of Ms. West's employment, specifically after he had given her notice, he became very ill with fatigue and then pneumonia."



Tommy had talked about a heavy cold and overwhelming fatigue. Henry's hand gripped the phone. "Good job, Marvin."

"Sir, there's more. I spoke to the president of her last college. Ms. West was forced to resign. She had shown symptoms of being deeply disturbed and absolutely refused counseling."

Sunday was on her way to see Lillian West. She would unwittingly alert West that they were looking into the possibility that someone else had murdered Arabella Young. Henry's hand had never shook at summit meetings, but now his fingers could barely punch the numbers of Sunday's car phone.

Secret Service agent Jack Collins answered. "We're at Secretary Shipman's place, sir. Mrs. Britland is inside."

"Get her," Henry snapped. "Tell her I must speak to her."

"Right away, sir."

Five minutes passed, then Collins was back on the phone. "Sir, there may be a problem. We've rung repeatedly but no one is answering the door."

Sunday and Tommy sat side by side on the leather couch in the den, staring into the muzzle of a revolver. Opposite them, Lillian West sat erect and calm as she held the gun. The pealing of the doorbell did not seem to distract her.

"Your palace guard," she said sarcastically.

The woman's crazy, Sunday thought, as she stared into the housekeeper's enlarged pupils. She's crazy and she's desperate. She knows she has nothing to lose by killing us.

Sunday's face loomed in Henry's mind. He wanted to push the plane faster, order up the army. He never felt so helpless.

The Secret Service men, Jack Collins and Clint Carr, were with her today. What would they do when no one answered the door? They'd force their way in. And when they do, she'll shoot us. I know she will.

"You have everything, Mrs. Britland," Lillian West said suddenly, her

voice low and angry. "You're beautiful, you're young, you're in Congress and you married a rich and attractive man. I hope you've enjoyed your time with him."

"Yes, I have," Sunday said quietly. "And I want more time with him."

"But that's not going to happen and it's your fault. What's the difference if he"—West's eyes scornfully glanced at Tommy—"if he went to prison. He tricked me, promised to take me to Florida. He was going to marry me. He isn't as rich as the others, but he has enough. I've gone through his desk, so I know." A smile played on her lips. "And he's nicer than the others. We could have been very happy."

"Lillian, I didn't lie to you," Tommy said quietly. "I think you need help. I want to see that you get it. I promise that both Sunday and I will do everything we can for you."

"Get me another housekeeping job?" West snapped. "Cleaning, cooking, shopping. I traded teaching silly girls for this kind of work because I thought that somebody would finally appreciate me, want to take care of me. And after I waited on all of them, they still treated me like dirt."

The pealing of the doorbell had stopped. Sunday knew that the Secret Service would find a way to get in. Then she froze. When West let her in, she'd reset the alarm. "Don't want



some reporter trying to sneak in," she'd explained.

If Jack or Clint try to open a window, the siren will go off, Sunday thought. She felt Tommy's hand brush hers. He's thinking the same thing. My God, what can we do?

Tommy's hand was closed over hers. His index finger was insistently racing down the back of her hand. He was trying to signal her. What did he want her to do?

Henry stayed on the line. Collins was speaking from his cellular phone. "Sir, all the draperies are drawn. We've contacted the local police. They're on the way. Clint is climbing a tree in the back that has branches near some windows. We might be able to get in up there. Problem is we have no way of knowing where they are in the house."

My God, Henry thought. It would take at least an hour to get the special cameras and motion detectors over there. Sunday's face loomed in his mind. Sunday. Sunday. He wanted to get out and push the plane faster. He wanted to order up the army. He had never felt so helpless. Then he heard Jack Collins swear furiously.

"What is it?" he shouted.

"Sir, the draperies of the right front room just opened and there are shots being fired inside."

"That stupid woman gave me my opportunity," Lillian West was saying. "I didn't have time to kill you slowly, and this way I not only punished you but that dreadful woman as well."

"You did kill Arabella," Tommy said.

"Of course I did. It was so easy. I didn't leave. I just showed her into this room, woke you up, shut the door and hid in the study. I heard it all. I knew the gun was there. When you stag-

gered upstairs, I knew it was a matter of minutes before you lost consciousness. My sleeping pills are much better than the ones you were used to. They have special ingredients." West smiled. "Why do you think your cold improved so much in these ten days since that night? Because I'm not giving it a reason to go into pneumonia."

"You were poisoning Tommy?" Sunday exclaimed.

"I was punishing him. I went back into the library. Arabella was just getting ready to leave. She



even asked me where your car keys were. She said that you weren't feeling well and she'd be back in the morning. I told her I'd get them for her in a minute. Then I pointed to your gun and said I'd promised to take it with me and turn it in to the police station. The poor fool watched me pick it up and load it. Her last words were, 'Isn't it dangerous to load it? I'm sure Mr. Shipman didn't intend that.'"

West began to laugh, a high-pitched, hysterical laugh. Tears ran from her eyes, but she kept the gun trained on them.

"Isn't it dangerous to load it?"



West repeated, mimicking a loud, raucous voice. She rested the gun hand on her left arm, steadying it. The laughter ended.

"Would you consider opening the draperies?" Shipman asked. "I'd like to see the sunlight once more."

West's smile was mirthless. "You're about to see the shining light at the end of the tunnel," she told him.

The draperies, Sunday thought. That was what Tommy was trying to tell her. Yesterday when he'd lowered the shades in the kitchen, he'd mentioned that the electronic device that worked the draperies in this room sounded like a gunshot when it was used. The clicker for it was on the armrest of the couch. It was their only chance.

Sunday pressed Tommy's hand to show him she understood. Then, breathing a silent prayer, with a lightning-like movement, she pressed the button that opened the draperies.

The explosive sound made West whirl her head around. In that instant Tommy and Sunday leapt from the couch. Tommy threw himself at West,

but it was Sunday who slammed her hand upward as the housekeeper began to shoot. A bullet whistled past Tommy's ear. Sunday felt a burning sensation on her left sleeve. She could not force the gun from West, but she threw herself on top of the woman and forced the chair to topple over with both of them on it as shattering glass signaled the welcome sound of her Secret Service detail arriving.

Ten minutes later, the surface wound on her arm wrapped in a handkerchief, Sunday was on the phone with the totally unnerved former President of the United States.

"I'm fine," she said for the fifteenth time. "Tommy is fine. Lillian West is in a straitjacket. Stop worrying."

"You could have been killed." Henry didn't want to let his wife stop talking. He didn't ever want to think that someday he might not be able to hear her voice.

"But I wasn't," Sunday said briskly. "And Henry, darling, we were both right. It was definitely a crime of passion. It was just we were a little slow figuring out whose passion was causing the problem." ■

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



As a tribute to the radio series in the late 1930's and 1940's called "Our Gal Sunday," Mary Higgins Clark decided to update the characters and turn their attention to solving crimes. As a young widow, Clark would get up at 5 A.M. every day to write before getting her five

children ready for school. She now has 16 best sellers to her credit, from her earliest, **Where Are the Children?**, to her latest, **Moonlight Becomes You**. She also holds 12 honorary doctorates. A new collection of Henry and Sunday stories, to be called **My Gal Sunday**, will be published by Simon and Schuster this October.

From party games
to CD-ROM's,
mystery fans have
found ways to
play detective for
nearly 70 years

the game's afoot!

BY B.J. RAHN

SOLVING A MAKE-BELIEVE CRIME

is the natural next step for those who enjoy pitting their wits against those of a fictional sleuth. Elsa Maxwell, a celebrated hostess of the 1920's and 1930's, claimed to have introduced the first murder game at a London dinner party. (The game even inspired Ngaio Marsh's first detective novel, *A Man Lay Dead*, published in 1934.)

The rules: One guest is secretly given a token, such as a slip of paper, naming him as the villain. At a signal, the lights go out and the other guests scramble to hide while the culprit seeks a "victim," choosing him by a tap on the shoulder. The victim must play dead until the lights switch back on and the body is "discovered." Then a guest detective interrogates the players; all except the "murderer" must truthfully answer questions about their movements until the sleuth and the guests decide who has had the opportunity to commit the crime.

These days, you can play more elaborate versions of this party game. *How to Host a Murder* (Decipher, Inc.) and *Murder à la Carte* (BePuzzled) are just two of several packaged kits that provide a cassette tape of a mystery story, plus a cast list, factual clues, physical evidence, invitations and costume suggestions. Some even have recipes. Guests try to solve the crime by examining clues, interviewing one another,

and in certain cases reconstructing the crime. Companies like *Murder on the Menu*, in Oakland, California, will actually create a custom script for your corporate conference or charity fund-raiser.

Many restaurants have gotten in on the fun, offering their patrons a mystery play between, or during, courses. Usually, professional actors mingle with the diners; a make-believe murder could be committed at your table at the drop of a fedora. A "detective" grills the principal characters, and patrons are questioned as witnesses. At the end of the evening, everyone gets a chance to offer a solution, with prizes given to whoever figures out who "done" it. If you can't get enough mayhem in one night, some hotels, railroad lines and cruise-ship companies build the suspense for a weekend or longer. (See "Mysterious Sources," page 96 for some companies that plan these events.)

More sedentary types can still find refuge—and subterfuge—in board games. That perennial favorite, *Clue* (Parker Brothers), was invented in England in 1947 and quickly became popular on both sides of the Atlantic. Since then, millions of people have delighted in trapping Colonel Mustard red-handed

in the drawing room, or in revealing Professor Plum's perfidy in the library. For the game *13 Dead End Drive* (Milton

Bradley), the playing board is a two-dimensional cardboard model of a mansion, with cut-out characters located in various rooms. Players gather at the death bed of a wealthy relative, plotting to do away with one another so as to reduce the number of claims on the estate, and increase their own legacy. Two other popular board games, *221 B Baker Street* (John Hansen) and *Scotland Yard* (Ravensburger Games) take players around London by map, following Holmesian clues in search of a malefactor. Ready to tax your "little grey cells," as Hercule Poirot would say? The more

than 500 conundrums concocted for *MindTrap* (MindTrapGames, Inc.), to be puzzled over in teams or on your own, will test your powers of logic and deduction. (See below.)

Computer games allow a lone sleuth to collect evidence, interview suspects and form hy-

potheses, all via CD-ROM disk. These games are exercises in "virtual reality"—with sound and action to keep you guessing. For instance, *Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe Private Eye* (Brooklyn Multimedia, co-published with Simon & Schuster Interactive) re-creates a hard-boiled mystery, as jazz plays in the background. For this and other CD-ROM's, each choice you make decides your next set of options—and the ending of the story. It is possible at almost any stage to right an earlier wrong, but some choices lead inevitably to defeat. Computer clue hounds can pick from police procedurals, courtroom dramas and traditional whodunits.

However you choose to satisfy your craving for a hands-on mystery-suspense experience, happy sleuthing! ■

BRAIN TEASER

Mrs. Shady is lying dead on a bed. On the floor nearby is a pair of scissors. The scissors were instrumental in her death, yet there is no trace of blood. Mrs. Shady's body reveals no signs of any cuts or bruises. How could she have been murdered with the scissors?

ANSWER: Mrs. Shady slept on a waterbed. Her assailant used the scissors to cut the bed open and drowned her.

B.J. Rahn is a professor of English at Hunter College in New York City.





the beach-chair detective

At your leisure, relax with 12 of the hottest new reads this summer

BY CHERYL SOLIMINI

Just in time for vacation: Here are the latest page-turners from some favorite authors, plus collections of crime shorts and a new medical thriller to see you through while *ER* is in reruns.

Start with a stay at **Hotel Paradise**, by Martha Grimes (*Alfred A. Knopf, May, \$24*). The inn of the title is no English pub, so fans of Inspector Richard Jury will have to be patient. Though Grimes stays on this side of the Atlantic, she explores familiar territory—the faded resort town that was the setting of her 1992 *The End of the Pier*. The novel is a lot like its 12-year-old narrator, Emma Graham: preoccupied with food, given to digression and charmingly insightful. Soon after Emma decides to investigate a long-ago drowning “accident” of another 12-year-old, a woman is found dead in a nearby marsh. Only Emma thinks to look for a connection—and finds it, 40 years in the past. By book’s end, only one nagging mystery remains: What is the secret ingredient in her mother’s Chocolate Feather Cake?

The chills begin right from the first page of Mary Higgins Clark’s **Moonlight Becomes You** (*Simon & Schuster, May, \$24*)—with a premature burial. Then the clock is turned back just a few weeks, as Manhattan photographer Maggie Holloway unexpectedly meets her much-loved former stepmother and accepts her invitation to ritzy Newport, Rhode Island. A brutal murder upsets the happy reunion, and the suspense climbs along with the death toll at a local

nursing-home. But even an eerie visit to a funeral museum does not deter another of Clark’s plucky heroines from getting to the bottom of a killer’s devious dealings.

Elmore Leonard, too, knows how to create a heroine who’s **Out of Sight** (*Delacorte, Sept., \$22.95*). Karen Sisco—cool, blonde and a sucker for bank robbers—happens to be in the right place at the wrong time when holdup man Jack Foley stages a double-crossing jail break and she gets taken for a ride. The cat-and-mouse game that ensues between this female Federal marshal and Foley is as sexy as it is suspenseful. (*For a sneak peak at Sisco, see “Karen Makes Out,” page 45.*)

Distaff detectives also get their due in **Women on the Case** (*Delacorte Press, June, \$21.95*), original stories by 26 of the best contemporary crime writers, who just happen to be female. Edited by Sara Paretsky, the collection showcases both well-established and up-and-coming authors, spanning the globe from Algeria to Australia. What binds them together is skillful storytelling. Noteworthy newcomers: Andrea Smith, whose feisty creation, black police-woman Ariel Lawrence, gets “A Lesson in Murder”; and Nevada Barr, park ranger turned writer, who reveals the poignant truth buried “Beneath the Lilacs.”

Eleven Ruth Rendell stories, short and long, are gathered in **Blood Lines** (*Crown, June, \$23*). All probe the deceptions and denials in family relationships and show off Rendell’s range: from a more conventional Inspector Wexford case to a psychological sketch of a com-

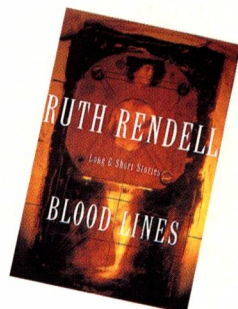
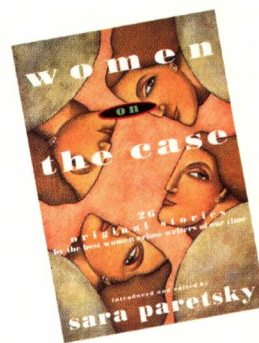
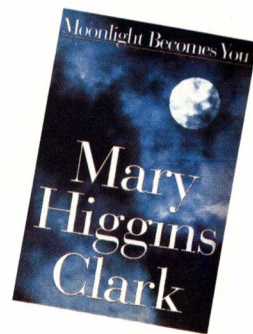


Illustration by Tom Bachtell.

Easy does it—so do Spenser and McCone

pulsive shopper. (One of these stories, "Unacceptable Levels," appears on page 53.)

Family secrets also plague San Francisco sleuth Sharon McCone in **The Broken Promise Land**, by Marcia Muller (*Mysterious Press, June, \$22.95*). When her brother-in-law, country-music superstar Ricky Savage, becomes the victim of a stalker, McCone knows she must delve into his past—and may not like what she finds. Divided loyalties complicate the case and lead to a climactic conclusion on a concert stage.

A classic McCone is the final selection in **The Oxford Book of American Detective Stories** (*Oxford University Press, April, \$25*), edited by Tony Hillerman and Rosemary Herbert. This anthology of 33 short pieces begins with Poe's "Murders in the Rue Morgue." Each succeeding story—from such writers as Mary Roberts Rinehart, Ed McBain, Rex Stout, Sue Grafton—shows the evolution of crime fiction in America. In stories set far from the manor houses of the traditional English mystery, these authors have made character as important as the puzzle.

A distinctly American voice is the hallmark of Southern writer Sharyn McCrumb, who places her novels in the Appalachian hills. In her latest, **The Rosewood Casket** (*Dutton, May, \$23.95*), she calls on a ghost, a guardian angel and even Daniel Boone to lend a mystical touch to this tale of four brothers who come together to build their dying father's coffin. In the process, they discover a 60-year-old murder and reconnect to the farm where they grew up.

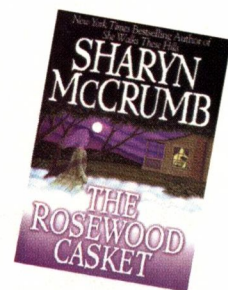
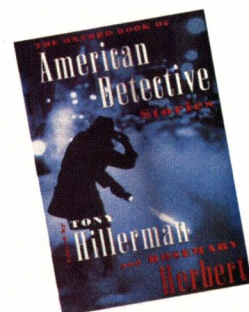
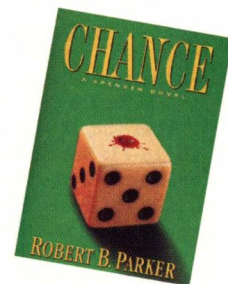
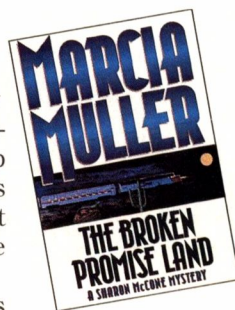
The cagey canine in **A Little Yellow Dog**, by Walter Mosley (*W.W. Norton, June, \$23*), is like the handsome corpse found on the grounds of Sojourner Truth Junior High—both are unwelcome intruders in the life of Easy Rawlins. Easy has no choice

but to find the owner of the dog and the identity of the corpse or risk his job as the school's supervising custodian. When he tries to enlist the help of his best friend, "Mouse" Alexander, Easy finds that Mouse has gone straight. Few fans will want to believe it—or the ending, which will leave them gasping, "Say it ain't so!"

Robert B. Parker's Spenser suspects his crime-boss client isn't coming clean when he's asked to track down the gangster's go-between. Still, the Boston-based P.I. takes a **Chance** (*G.P. Putnam, May, \$21.95*). Spenser and his sidekick, Hawk, not only find their missing man but also his murdered missus; then they misplace his mistress, and the mayhem mounts. Readers may need a scorecard to keep track of who's two-timing whom, but as always, the real treat of a Parker novel is the banter, especially between Spenser and the stone-faced wise guys who'd rather spar with their fists than with words. So sit back and listen in.

Surgeon-in-residence Abby DiMatteo bucks the hospital higher-ups to get a teenage boy a new heart in **Harvest**, by Tess Gerritsen (*Pocket Books, Sept., \$22*). That decision triggers threats to her medical career as well as her life, as she uncovers a grisly black market in transplant organs. Real-life M.D. Gerritsen brings us inside the operating room for this *literally* heart-stopping tale.

In the introduction to his new collection, **The Habit of Widowhood** (*Scribner, Sept., \$21*), British author Robert Barnard extols the virtues of the short story, where "every word has to be made to tell." He then proves his point delightfully with his 15 compact crimes, including a dog's-eye view of murder, a practical joke from the grave and even a sinister sequel to *Jane Eyre*. In each, the reader may find the "supreme bliss" that's hinted at within the title story. ■



BOOKSELLERS' BEST BETS

Today's sleeper can become tomorrow's best seller—with a little help. Here, owners of mystery bookstores recommend some of their old and new favorites. By Jonna Gallo

Booked to Die, by John Dunning—Bonnie Claeson and Joseph Guglielmelli of *The Black Orchid Bookshop* in New York City

Tropical Depression, by Laurence Shames—Christine Burke, Pat Davis and Charlene Taylor, *Clues Unlimited*, Tucson, Ariz.

No Way Home, by Andrew Coburn—Kate Mattes, *Kate's Mystery Books*, Cambridge, Mass.

Dangerous by Moonlight, by Leslie Thomas—Jill Hinckley and Carolyn Lane, *Murder by the Book*, Portland, Ore.

Vanishing Act, by Thomas Perry—Jay Pearsall, *Murder Ink*, New York City

Breakheart Hill, by Thomas Cook—Otto Penzler, *Mysterious Bookshop*, New York City

Deadly Drink of Wine, by Kate Charles—Bob Nissenbaum, *Mystery Books*, Bryn Mawr, Pa.

The Debt to Pleasure, by John Lanchester—Barbara Friedman and Susan Morgan, *MysteryBooks*, Washington, D.C.

The Hippopotamus Pool, by Elizabeth Peters—Jean McMillen, *Mystery Bookshop*, Bethesda, Md.

Tularosa, by Michael McGarrity; **Give Us a Kiss**, by Daniel Woodrell—Barbara Peters, *The Poisoned Pen*, Scottsdale, Ariz.

Two for the Dough, by Janet Evanovich; **Mother Love**, by L.R. Wright—Linda Wiken, *Prime Crime*, Ottawa, Canada

A Bootlegger's Daughter, by Margaret Maron; **Seneca Falls Inheritance**, by Miriam Grace Monfredo—Mary Lou Wright and Pat Kehde, *The Raven Bookstore*, Lawrence, Kans.

Any novel by Nevada Barr—Tom and Enid Schantz, *The Rue Morgue*, Boulder, Colo.

Any novel by Michael Connelly—Bruce Taylor, *San Francisco Mystery Bookstore*, San Francisco, Calif.

Venus Throw, by Steven Saylor—J.D. Singh and Marian Misters, *Sleuth of Baker Street*, Toronto, Canada

Secret Admirer, by Patricia MacDonald; **Pacific Blues**, by Stephen Smoke—Art Bourgeau, *Whodunit?*, Philadelphia, Pa.

mysterious sources

The Who, What, Where, When Guide



GATHERINGS

July 12-14: Cluefest '96, Dallas Guests of Honor: Robert Crais, Carolyn G. Hart, Jay Settliff. Toastmaster: Marlys Millhiser. Contact: Barry and Terry Philips, The Book Tree, 702 University Village SC, Richardson, TX 75081; 214-437-4337.

July 18-21: Book Passage Mystery Writers' Conference, Corte Madera, Calif. Writing classes; discussions with crime specialists. Keynote speakers: Martin Cruz Smith, Elizabeth George. Contact: Cecilia McGuire, 415-927-0973.

Oct. 9-13: Bouchercon 27 World Mystery Convention, St. Paul Guest of honor: Mary Higgins Clark. Contact: Bouchercon 27, Dennis Armstrong, 4400 Upton Ave. S., #408, Minneapolis, MN 55405; 612-926-1086; fax: 612-927-7271.

Oct. 25-27: Magna Cum Murder III, Muncie, Ind. Guest of honor: Sara Paretsky. Contact: Kathryn Kennison, E.B. Ball Center, Ball State University, Muncie, IN 47306; 317-285-8975.

Nov. 8-10: Mid-Atlantic Mystery Book Fair and Convention, Philadelphia Panels, workshops, signings and parties. Contact: Deen Kogan, Detecto Misterioso Books, 507 S. 8th St., Philadelphia, PA 19147; 215-923-0211.

Feb. 14-17, 1997: Left Coast Crime VII, Seattle Contact online: A.Scheter@genie.geis.com

March 13-16, 1997: Sleuthfest '97, Fort Lauderdale, Fla. Lectures, panels, writers conference, agent/editor appointments. Contact: Dianne Ell, 1432 S.E. 8th St., Deerfield Beach, FL 33441; 954-429-1735; fax: 954-429-0908.

Oct. 1997: Bouchercon 28 World Mystery Convention, Monterey, Calif. Guest of honor: Sara Paretsky. Contact: Bouchercon 28, P.O. Box 6202, Hayward, CA 94502.

CATALOGS/DIRECTORIES

Deadly Serious Directory Comprehensive listing of mystery events, bookstores, events planners, publications, organizations, Web sites and more. \$15. P.O. Box 1045, Cooper Station, New York, NY 10276-1045.

Femmes Fatales Mail-order mystery-themed gifts, from jewelry to tees. P.O. Box 3457, Lakewood, CA 90712-3457; 1-800-596-DEAD; 310-924-6711; fax: 310-809-1892.

MYSTERY PLANNERS

Bogie's Mystery Tours, 328 W. 86th St., #4A, New York, NY 10024; 212-362-7569. Web site: <http://www.concentric.net/~Bogies1/>

Mohonk Mystery Weekends, Mohonk Mountain House, New Paltz, NY 12561; 914-255-1000.

Murder on the Menu, 166 Beau Forest Drive, Oakland, CA 94611; 510-339-2800.

Murder by Design, 1341 Duke Way, San Jose, CA 95125; 408-266-7194.

Mystery Party Kits, P.O. Box 4052, Nooksack, WA 98276; 360-966-4297.

The Mystery Shop, 551 Sundance Ct., Carol Stream, IL 60188; 708-690-1105.

CruiseWorks, 7033 Sunset Blvd., #214, Hollywood, CA 90028; 800-876-6664.

ORGANIZATIONS

Margery Allingham Society, c/o Barry Pike, 42 Scarborough Rd., Leytonstone, London E11 4AL England.

Mystery Readers Journal/Mystery Readers International, P.O. Box 8116, Berkeley, CA 94707-8116; 510-339-2800. Web site: <http://www.slip.net/~whodunit/MRJ.html>

Mystery Writers of America, 17 E. 47th St., 6th Floor, New York, NY 10017; 212-888-8171; fax: 212-888-8107.

The Saint Club, Ian Dickerson, Shandy Street, Stepney, London E1 4ST, England.

Sisters in Crime, P.O. Box 442124, Lawrence, KS 66044; 913-842-1325; E-mail: SINC@Genie.com

Wolfe Pack, P.O. Box 822, Ansonia Station, New York, NY 10023.

WEB SITES

ClueLass Homepage News, events and links for writers and fans. <http://www.slip.net/~clueless/>

Mysterious Homepage Links to all things mysterious. <http://www.db.dk/a/jbs/homepage.htm>

The Mystery Zone On-line magazine. <http://www.mindspring.com/~walter/>

Just the Facts Ma'am (page 4) Sources: *Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics*, 1994, U.S. Dept. of Justice, 1995; *Criminal Victimization in the United States*, 1992, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1993; U.S. Customs Annual Report, FY 1994, U.S. Customs Service, 1995; *Statistical Handbook on Violence in America*, Adam Dolmin, Brian Niersema, Colin Leftin and David McDowall, eds., The Oryx Press, 1996.

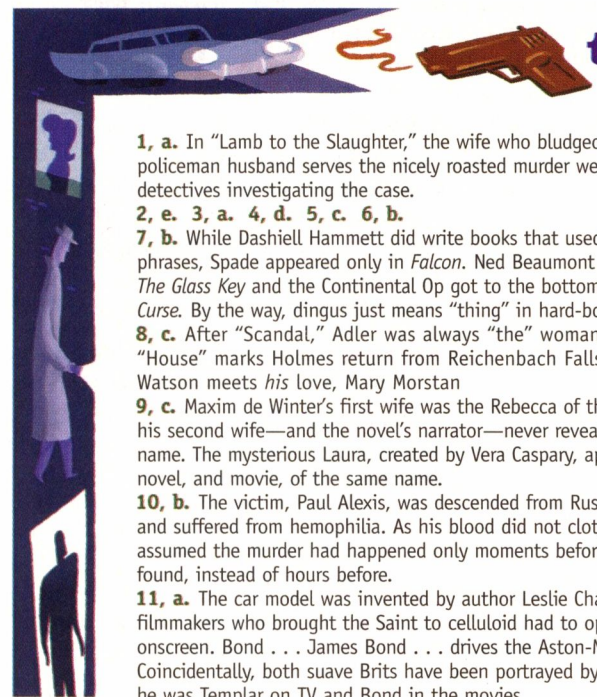
the interrogation room solutions to our quiz on page 100

- 1, a. In "Lamb to the Slaughter," the wife who bludgeons her policeman husband serves the nicely roasted murder weapon to the detectives investigating the case.
- 2, e. 3, a. 4, d. 5, c. 6, b.
- 7, b. While Dashiell Hammett did write books that used these three phrases, Spade appeared only in *Falcon*. Ned Beaumont was the hero of *The Glass Key* and the Continental Op got to the bottom of *The Dain Curse*. By the way, dingus just means "thing" in hard-boiled slang.
- 8, c. After "Scandal," Adler was always "the" woman to Holmes. "House" marks Holmes return from Reichenbach Falls, and in *Sign*, Watson meets his love, Mary Morstan.
- 9, c. Maxim de Winter's first wife was the Rebecca of the book's title; his second wife—and the novel's narrator—never reveals her given name. The mysterious Laura, created by Vera Caspary, appears in the novel, and movie, of the same name.
- 10, b. The victim, Paul Alexis, was descended from Russian nobility and suffered from hemophilia. As his blood did not clot, it was assumed the murder had happened only moments before his body was found, instead of hours before.
- 11, a. The car model was invented by author Leslie Charteris; filmmakers who brought the Saint to celluloid had to opt for a Jaguar onscreen. Bond . . . James Bond . . . drives the Aston-Martin. Coincidentally, both suave Brits have been portrayed by Roger Moore—he was Templar on TV and Bond in the movies.

- 12, b. The monkey did it, and C. Auguste Dupin figured it out.
- 13, b. Wolfe tips the scales at nearly 300 pounds. Cool, created by A.A. Fair (aka Erle Stanley Gardner), is a dainty 200; John Dickson Carr's Dr. Fell, a mere 250.
- 14, c. Maigret's wife, Louise, prefers his last name to his first, Jules. In kind, he calls her "Madame Maigret."
- 15, b. Yep, the hard-boiled author took a dramatic turn as his own fictional detective. Keach starred in the 1980's Hammer TV series, and Meeker in the 1955 Hammer movie *Kiss Me Deadly*.
- 16, c. 17, d. 18, b. 19, a.
20. Kenneth Millar began his Lew Archer series under the pseudonym John Macdonald, then changed to John Ross Macdonald (both to the dismay of the real John D. MacDonald) and finally settled on **Ross Macdonald**. He had originally switched monikers to avoid confusion with his wife, the mystery writer Margaret Millar. But what's in a name?

SCORING

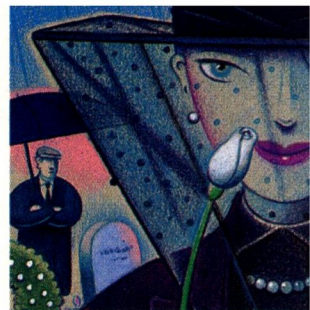
- 16+:** A tip of the Fedora to you! As a P.I., you're O.K.—you should be charging by the hour, plus expenses.
- 7-15:** You're a little soft-boiled, but maybe after more time on the street, you'll be upgraded to detective.
- 0-6:** You're clueless, so put that trench coat on layaway and don't quit your day job.



Dear Reader,

Please take a few minutes to answer our questionnaire. We want to learn more about you so that we can better fill your needs in upcoming issues of MARY HIGGINS CLARK MYSTERY MAGAZINE. If you like, you may include any other comments on a separate sheet of paper.

—Thank you in advance!



1996 mystery magazine READER SURVEY

1. On an overall basis, would you say you found this issue of MARY HIGGINS CLARK MYSTERY MAGAZINE to be:

Very satisfying ☐ Fairly satisfying ☐ Slightly satisfying ☐ Not at all satisfying ☐

2. How much did each writer listed on the cover affect your interest in purchasing this copy of MARY HIGGINS CLARK MYSTERY MAGAZINE?

	Increased Greatly	Increased Somewhat	Neither Increased nor Decreased	Decreased Somewhat	Decreased Greatly
Edna Buchanan	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mary Higgins Clark	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Elizabeth George	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tony Hillerman	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P. D. James	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Elmore Leonard	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Walter Mosley	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Anne Perry	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ruth Rendell	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Donald E. Westlake	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

3. Please indicate how much each cover line affected your interest in purchasing this copy of MARY HIGGINS CLARK MYSTERY MAGAZINE.

	Increased Greatly	Increased Somewhat	Neither Increased nor Decreased	Decreased Somewhat	Decreased Greatly
Whodunit? New P. D. James Novella	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14 Great Suspense Stories by Elmore Leonard, Ruth Rendell, Walter Mosley, Donald E. Westlake, Anne Perry . . . and more	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My Most Haunting Case by Edna Buchanan, Pulitzer Prize Winner	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Free Bonus Thriller by Mary Higgins Clark	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Inside the Minds of Tony Hillerman, Sara Paretsky, Elizabeth George	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please mail by September 9, 1996, to:
Family Circle
Mary Higgins Clark
Mystery Magazine
P.O. Box 9013
Rockville Centre, NY 11571-9013

4. How important is each of the following to you when deciding to buy an issue of MARY HIGGINS CLARK MYSTERY MAGAZINE?

	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Too Important	Not At All Important
Price	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cover lines	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A particular article listed on the cover	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Topic/subject	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The FAMILY CIRCLE name	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The name Mary Higgins Clark	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The inclusion of marginalia	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The inclusion of the pullout-and-read Mary Higgins Clark novella	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Artwork accompanying the stories	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

5. Which of the following do you think should have more coverage, same coverage or less coverage in the next issue of MARY HIGGINS CLARK MYSTERY MAGAZINE?

	More Coverage	Same Coverage	Less Coverage
Cozy/traditional stories	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hard-boiled stories	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Suspense/thriller stories	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Short stories by best-selling authors	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Author interviews	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Marginalia ("Quotable Quotes," "Laughable Laws," etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Book reviews	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mini-mysteries	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
New writers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Games/puzzles	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Contests	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

6. Please "X" the magazines you have bought at a supermarket or newsstand in the past 12 months.

<i>Ellery Queen Mystery</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<i>FC Weight-Loss Guide</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<i>FC Easy Gardening</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Armchair Detective</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<i>FC Holiday Crafts</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>New Mystery</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<i>FC Personal Planner</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Better Homes & Gardens</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Good Housekeeping</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Woman's Day</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Ladies' Home Journal</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Family Circle (FC)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<i>McCall's</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>FC Christmas Helps</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Redbook</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>

7. How did you obtain this copy of MARY HIGGINS CLARK MYSTERY MAGAZINE?

Newsstand/supermarket	<input type="checkbox"/>	Was given to me	<input type="checkbox"/>
Read in public place (doctor's office)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Bookstore	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Other	<input type="checkbox"/>

8. Would you consider purchasing/reading an issue of MARY HIGGINS CLARK MYSTERY MAGAZINE...

Every month	<input type="checkbox"/>	Every 6 months	<input type="checkbox"/>
Every 3 months	<input type="checkbox"/>	Every year	<input type="checkbox"/>

9. When compared to other fiction books or magazines that you may purchase, would you say that MARY HIGGINS CLARK MYSTERY MAGAZINE is...

An excellent value for the money	<input type="checkbox"/>	A fair value for the money	<input type="checkbox"/>
		A poor value for the money	<input type="checkbox"/>
A good value for the money	<input type="checkbox"/>		

10. Please indicate how long you expect to keep this issue of MARY HIGGINS CLARK MYSTERY MAGAZINE.

Less than 1 month	<input type="checkbox"/>	7 months to 1 year	<input type="checkbox"/>
1 to 3 months	<input type="checkbox"/>	More than a year	<input type="checkbox"/>
4 to 6 months	<input type="checkbox"/>		

11. Would the association of FAMILY CIRCLE and Mary Higgins Clark increase, decrease or have no effect in your decision to purchase a future copy of MARY HIGGINS CLARK MYSTERY MAGAZINE?

Increase ☐ Decrease ☐ No effect ☐

12. How often do you buy mystery books?

Always ☐ Sometimes ☐
Frequently ☐ Rarely ☐

13. How many MARY HIGGINS CLARK books have you purchased in the last 12 months?

_____ No. of MARY HIGGINS CLARK books purchased

14. Do you regularly buy or subscribe to FAMILY CIRCLE?

Buy at newsstand/supermarket ☐ Other ☐
Subscribe ☐ Don't read it ☐

15. On average, how many of the last 4 issues of FAMILY CIRCLE have you read or looked into?

4 out of 4 issues ☐ 1 out of 4 issues ☐
3 out of 4 issues ☐ None out of 4 issues ☐
2 out of 4 issues ☐ Recent reader, haven't yet obtained 4 issues ☐

16. Please indicate the number of adults, excluding yourself, who have looked through or whom you expect to look through this issue of MARY HIGGINS CLARK MYSTERY MAGAZINE, including your spouse, adult children 18 years or older, friends and relatives:

_____ No. of adult females _____ No. of adult males

17. I am: Female ☐ Male ☐

18. Please "X" the group that best describes your age.

18 to 24 ☐ 35 to 39 ☐ 50 to 54 ☐ 65 or older ☐
25 to 29 ☐ 40 to 44 ☐ 55 to 59 ☐
30 to 34 ☐ 45 to 49 ☐ 60 to 64 ☐

19. What is your marital status?

Single (never married) ☐ Divorced ☐
Married ☐ Separated ☐
Widowed ☐

20. Please write the number of children under 18 you have living at home. If you do not have any children living at home, please write "0."

_____ No. of children

21. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

Some high school or less ☐ Graduated from college ☐
Graduated from high school ☐ Postgraduate study ☐
Some college ☐ or more ☐

22. You are currently:

Employed full time (30 hours or more per week) ☐
Part time (less than 30 hours per week) ☐
Not employed ☐ Working at home ☐ Retired ☐

23. Please "X" the box that best describes your total estimated household income before taxes in 1996 for all family members. (Please include your own income as well as that of all other household members. Income from all sources, such as wages, bonuses, profits, dividends, rental, interest, etc., should be included.)

Less than \$25,000 ☐ \$50,000 to \$59,999 ☐
\$25,000 to \$29,999 ☐ \$60,000 to \$74,999 ☐
\$30,000 to \$39,000 ☐ \$75,000 to \$99,000 ☐
\$40,000 to \$49,999 ☐ \$100,000 or more ☐

Enter the FAMILY CIRCLE • Mary Higgins Clark Mystery/Suspense Short Story Contest

"murder MYSTERY you write" 1996



CONTEST RULES

1. The purpose of this contest is to recognize and reward mastery of the short story form by writers whose fiction has never appeared in a major publication.

2. The contest is open to writers 18 years of age or older at time of entry who have not previously published, or had accepted for publication, fiction in a commercially published book or in a magazine with a circulation of more than 25,000.

3. The story must be fiction, must be an original, previously unpublished work and must be no longer than 3,500 words. It must be typed, double-spaced, on 8½" by 11" paper, no more than 14 pages, no more than 25 lines to a page. Longer stories will be disqualified.

4. Each contestant may submit only one story.

5. The author's name, permanent address and telephone number must appear in the upper

right-hand corner of the first page. All subsequent pages must be numbered in the top right-hand corner and include the author's last name.

6. The finalists will be selected by a panel of consulting editors appointed by FAMILY CIRCLE. The winners will be chosen by Mary Higgins Clark, whose decision will be final. All winners will be notified by May 1, 1997.

Your Deadline: November 1, 1996

7. The first prize is \$1,000; the second prize is \$500. In addition, the first-prize story will be published in a subsequent issue of the magazine.

8. By entering, contestants grant FAMILY CIRCLE the exclusive right for a period of six months after entry deadline to publish in the Mary Higgins Clark Mystery magazine any story entered in competition. If published, authors will be paid at the magazine's standard rates.

9. FAMILY CIRCLE will not be responsible for lost, late, misdirected or otherwise undeliverable mail, or for the return of any contest entry or its condition. No correspondence or telephone

inquiries can be answered.

10. Employees or relatives of employees of G+J USA Publishing, its subsidiaries and affiliates, including FAMILY CIRCLE magazine, are not eligible to enter the contest.

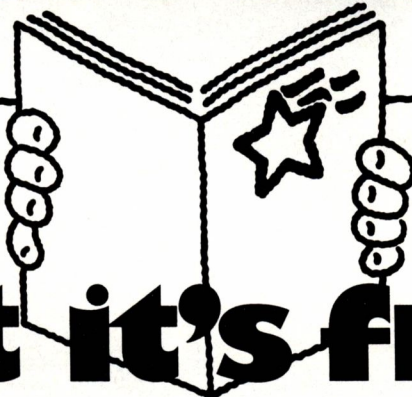
11. Before receiving a prize, a winner will be required to sign a statement that she or he is the author of the prize-winning story, that it is original, has never been published

in any form, does not violate the rights of any third party, and that she or he meets all the eligibility requirements as stated in the preceding contest rules. Winners are responsible for all taxes.

12. Entries must be postmarked by November 1, 1996, and be received by FAMILY CIRCLE no later than November 15, 1996. Send submissions to: Mary Higgins Clark Mystery/Suspense Short Story Contest, P.O. Box 4948, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163.

13. The contest is void where prohibited by law. All Federal, state and local laws and regulations governing the contest apply.

This could be a best seller.



But it's free.

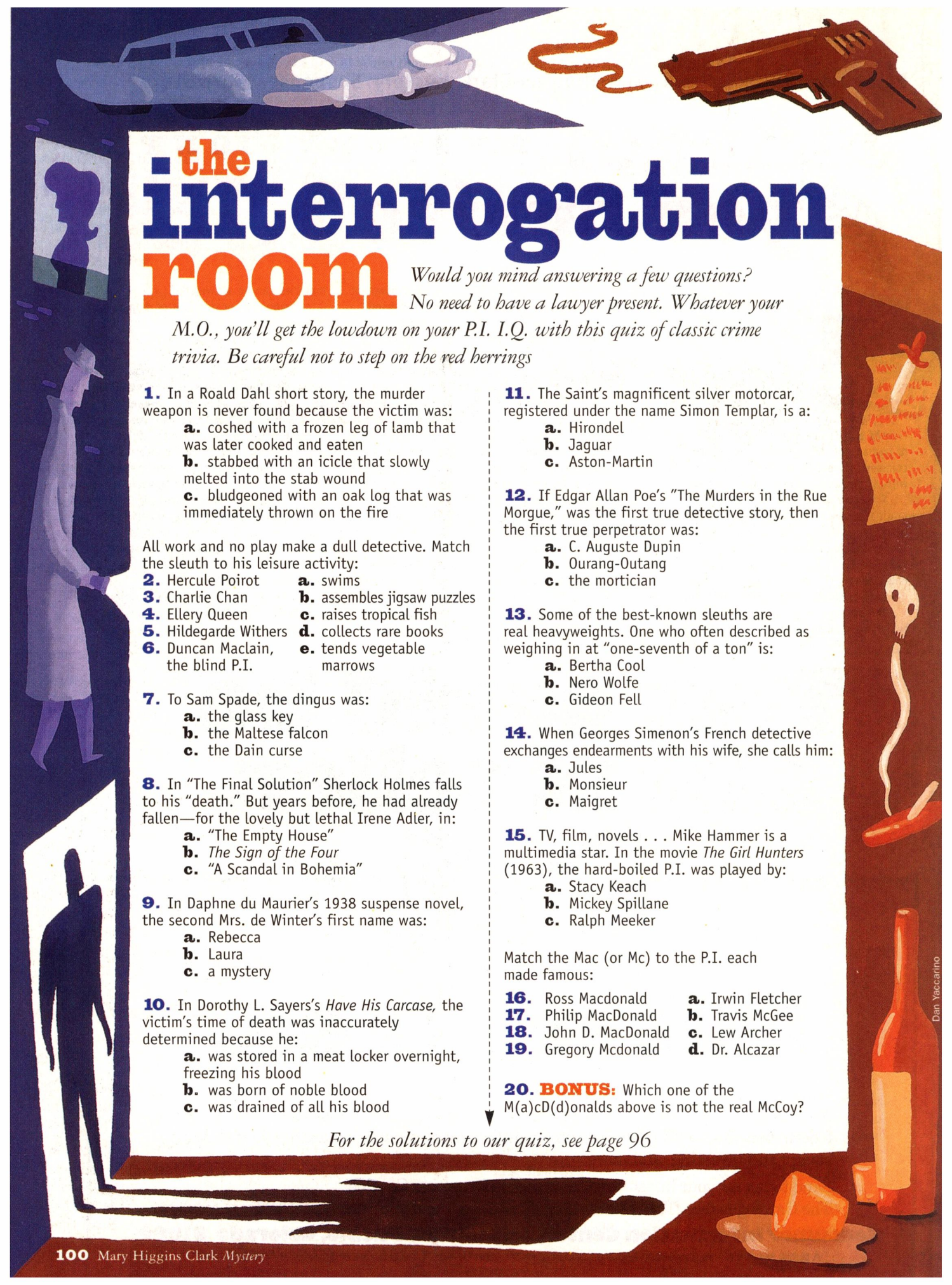
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the interrogation room

Would you mind answering a few questions?

No need to have a lawyer present. Whatever your M.O., you'll get the lowdown on your P.I. I.Q. with this quiz of classic crime trivia. Be careful not to step on the red herrings

1. In a Roald Dahl short story, the murder weapon is never found because the victim was:

- a. coshed with a frozen leg of lamb that was later cooked and eaten
- b. stabbed with an icicle that slowly melted into the stab wound
- c. bludgeoned with an oak log that was immediately thrown on the fire

All work and no play make a dull detective. Match the sleuth to his leisure activity:

- | | |
|--|-----------------------------|
| 2. Hercule Poirot | a. swims |
| 3. Charlie Chan | b. assembles jigsaw puzzles |
| 4. Ellery Queen | c. raises tropical fish |
| 5. Hildegard Withers | d. collects rare books |
| 6. Duncan Maclain, the blind P.I. | e. tends vegetable marrows |

7. To Sam Spade, the dingus was:

- a. the glass key
- b. the Maltese falcon
- c. the Dain curse

8. In "The Final Solution" Sherlock Holmes falls to his "death." But years before, he had already fallen—for the lovely but lethal Irene Adler, in:

- a. "The Empty House"
- b. *The Sign of the Four*
- c. "A Scandal in Bohemia"

9. In Daphne du Maurier's 1938 suspense novel, the second Mrs. de Winter's first name was:

- a. Rebecca
- b. Laura
- c. a mystery

10. In Dorothy L. Sayers's *Have His Carcase*, the victim's time of death was inaccurately determined because he:

- a. was stored in a meat locker overnight, freezing his blood
- b. was born of noble blood
- c. was drained of all his blood

11. The Saint's magnificent silver motorcar, registered under the name Simon Templar, is a:

- a. Hiron del
- b. Jaguar
- c. Aston-Martin

12. If Edgar Allan Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," was the first true detective story, then the first true perpetrator was:

- a. C. Auguste Dupin
- b. Ourang-Outang
- c. the mortician

13. Some of the best-known sleuths are real heavyweights. One who often described as weighing in at "one-seventh of a ton" is:

- a. Bertha Cool
- b. Nero Wolfe
- c. Gideon Fell

14. When Georges Simenon's French detective exchanges endearments with his wife, she calls him:

- a. Jules
- b. Monsieur
- c. Maigret

15. TV, film, novels . . . Mike Hammer is a multimedia star. In the movie *The Girl Hunters* (1963), the hard-boiled P.I. was played by:

- a. Stacy Keach
- b. Mickey Spillane
- c. Ralph Meeker

Match the Mac (or Mc) to the P.I. each made famous:

- | | |
|------------------------------|-------------------|
| 16. Ross Macdonald | a. Irwin Fletcher |
| 17. Philip MacDonald | b. Travis McGee |
| 18. John D. MacDonald | c. Lew Archer |
| 19. Gregory Mcdonald | d. Dr. Alcazar |

20. BONUS: Which one of the M(a)cD(d)onalds above is not the real McCoy?

For the solutions to our quiz, see page 96

To 30 million people,
one name means suspense...

Mary Higgins Clark



Photo: Bernard Vidal

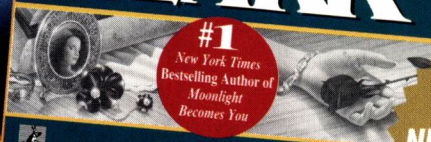
Moonlight Becomes You

INSTANT #1
NEW YORK TIMES
HARDCOVER
BESTSELLER

Mary
Higgins
Clark

AMERICA'S QUEEN OF SUSPENSE

MARY
HIGGINS
CLARK



#1
New York Times
Bestselling Author of
Moonlight
Becomes You

LET ME
CALL YOU
SWEETHEART

INSTANT #1
NEW YORK TIMES
PAPERBACK
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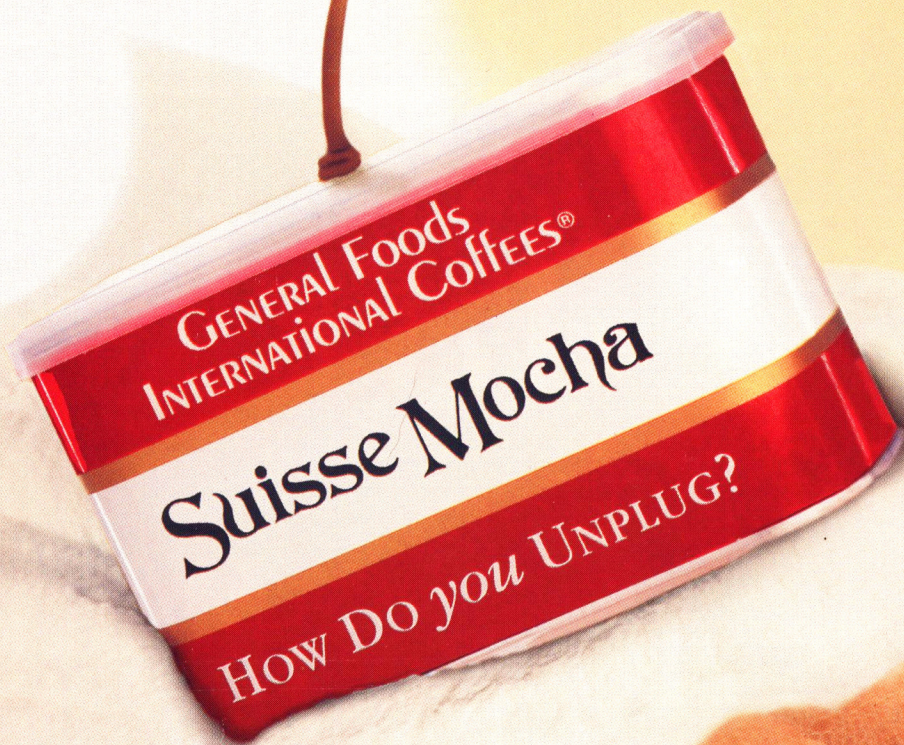
Recipe for relaxation:

1. Plug in your blender.

*2. Add 2 cups milk, 1 cup softened ice cream, and
1/3 cup **General Foods International Coffees**. Cover and blend.*

3. Unplug yourself.

Makes two (12-ounce) servings.



Summer Mocha Shakes from
GENERAL FOODS INTERNATIONAL COFFEES®