

*Suspense, Mystery, Horror and Thriller Fiction*

# SUSPENSE MAGAZINE

**SUMMER 2018**

*What's So Bad About Good Notes?*

**DENNIS PALUMBO**

*Are We Returning to the Moon?*

**ALAN JACOBSON**

*Get a Sneak Peek With*

**KELLI CLARE**

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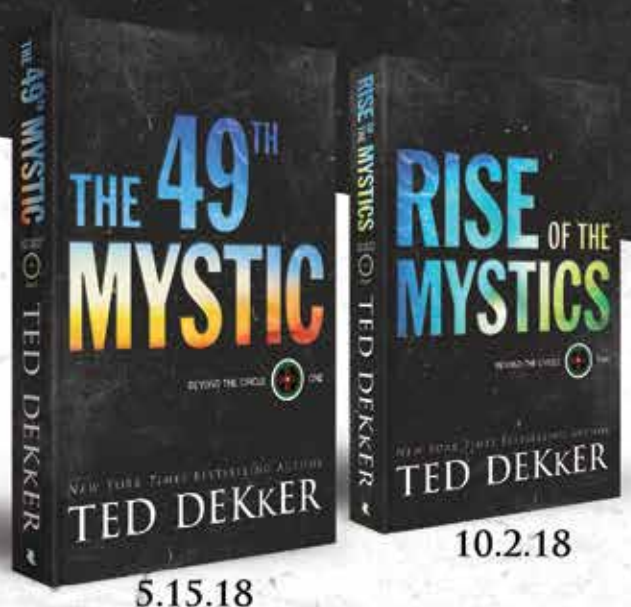
# FIVE HIDDEN SEALS. TWO WORLDS IN DARKNESS. ONE GIRL TO SAVE THEM ALL.

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Writing is an art form, just like painting or sculpting. Details matter within every art form, because without the details you have chaos.

One thing that we see a great deal of are writers not taking “words” seriously. Words are much more than just letters on a page arranged in a certain order. Think about this sentence: “Jill took the bat and hit Bob in the head.” Now, you would automatically assume that Jill picked up a *baseball* bat;

however, this could also be interpreted as the creepy mammal.

Wouldn’t the scene be better if it was written like this? “Jill picked up the black, wooden baseball bat from the floor. Pulling the bat back with purpose, she swung it at Bob, hitting him in the skull.” Now that it’s clear, you could continue from there explaining, perhaps, the volume of the cracking sound as it struck bone. Then... How did Jill react to it? What happened to Bob? You see, if you don’t give the readers the third dimension in your story—those *details* that eliminate chaos—you aren’t giving them the entire story.

Many of the stories and manuscripts we read have sentences like the first one stated. I’ve told many writers: “Okay, I get the basics, but something is missing. Where is the passion? Where is the emotion?” Great writers give the reader that. When you walk into a room, the great writers make you think you are actually *in* the room. You can almost smell the old furniture polish used inside the Victorian mansion; or, you can almost see that deep red bloodstain on the floor.

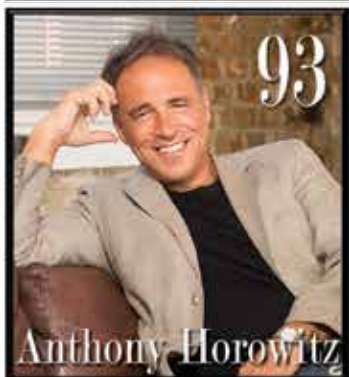
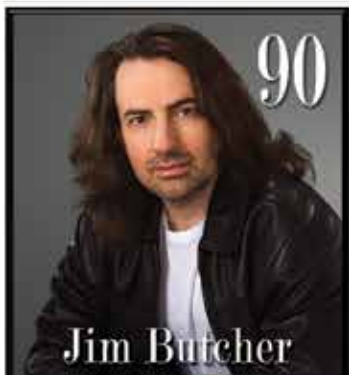
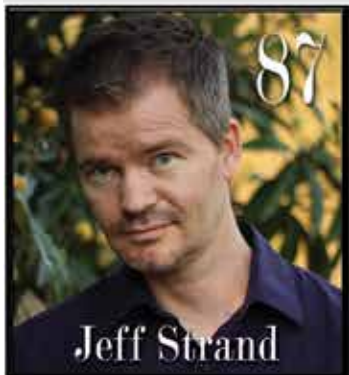
Words *do* matter. Words should mean something more than just letters on a page. So it’s your job to take your art form to the next level. When you go to a museum and look at the paintings, take a good, long look at the details. Witness the little things that make the painting a true masterpiece. Then take those details and incorporate them into your writing. To be great, to have your story stick in the minds of readers, make sure you give it the details it deserves.

John Raab  
CEO/Publisher  
Suspense Magazine ■



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# ARE WE RETURNING TO THE MOON?

*Or has that (space)ship sailed?*

By Alan Jacobson

Press Photo Credit: Provided by Author



FORTY-SIX YEARS AGO, APOLLO 17 LIFTED OFF from the lunar surface along with a couple hundred pounds of rock and a knowledge base of information NASA had spent over a dozen years cultivating. It was an extraordinary achievement for humankind, and specifically the United States—which had been locked in a Cold War space race with the Soviet Union.

At the time we were leaving our last footprints in the lunar soil, NASA's planned Apollo 18, 19, and 20 missions were in doubt. And as Earth-based needs surged, the prospect of spending six hundred million dollars (\$3.5 *trillion* today) going back to a place we'd already visited six times was a hard sell to Congress—and the American people, who had grown bored with the Moon landings.

With the cancellation of the remaining Apollo missions, the US space program imploded into itself: focus turned to low-Earth orbit endeavors like Skylab and development of the Space Shuttle, and robotic probes to Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, and the solar system. All were important—but none carried the allure of landing on another planetary-type body and exploring its hidden mysteries.

While researching and writing “Dark Side of the Moon” (the fourth book in my covert ops *OPSIG Team Black* series), I had the opportunity to work closely with rocket scientists and engineers at NASA, SpaceX, Aerojet Rocketdyne, and Lockheed-Martin, as well as planetary scientists, nuclear physicists, lunar geologists, Space Shuttle astronauts, and robotics professors at Carnegie Mellon. The plot of “Dark Side of the Moon” involves a special forces mission to the Moon necessitated by something that occurred during Apollo 17. My characters don't live in a science fiction universe and I'm not a rocket scientist, so diving into this entirely new topic with two feet was necessary—and an education all its own.

Part of what I learned was that in the wake of a retired space shuttle program, small-scale, targeted robotic missions to Mars, and involvement in the multi-country International Space Station, NASA spent years engineering a powerful new rocket and spacecraft to replace the ancient Saturn V and Apollo vehicles. Dubbed the Space Launch System, it's a revamp of what started out as the Constellation program—which President Obama canceled because he believed our resources were better spent on Earth. Meanwhile, our space program shrunk and atrophied while China, Russia, and the EU began pumping theirs full of steroids. As a result, the US arguably lost its qualitative (and quantitative) edge. China sent research ships and “soft landers” to the Moon (hard landers are deliberately smashed into the surface after conducting orbit-based research) and Russia began plotting manned missions to the lunar surface—with designs on establishing a Moon base.

But the very recent discovery of the building blocks of life on Mars brought to the forefront, once again, the question of whether or not the US should, or would, return to the lunar surface—or if those financial and engineering resources were



better spent on journeying to the Red Planet.

So what if the US misses out on this Sino-Russian wave of lunar exploration? To understand the impact this would have, it's important to realize that its significance extends beyond curiosity and the innate human need to explore. While the Apollo program resulted in its space-related technology being applied to Earth-based life, the converse is happening relative to our present-day space program. The technologies developed on Earth have greatly simplified exploratory endeavors: autonomous robotic vehicles enable longer term daily (or even round-the-clock) missions to map, sample, and discover. More significantly, 3D printing allows us to use the raw materials found on the Moon to build structures necessary for living as we construct a base. This greatly lowers the cost of doing so from astronomical (i.e., impossible) to very affordable, even for smaller space programs—like India's and Japan's.

Great, so we can build a less expensive Moon base. Even spending “only” a couple of billion dollars on this requires deep thought as to why would we do this. Moon bases can be used as staging for other excursions, like future efforts to colonize Mars—something that, without question, is on the US agenda. As I learned while researching “Dark Side of the Moon,” China has many other soft landing Moon missions on the drawing board planned for the very near future. The European Union and Russia are likewise looking to return to the Moon with manned missions. The reasons for doing so vary, but one of the most prominent is to excavate minerals and raw materials that would enable Mars colonization: by building a Moon base, you can overcome one of the major obstacles of going to other planets.

One of the first things I learned for “Dark Side of the Moon” came from a series of discussions I had with an engineer at NASA's JPL (Jet Propulsion Laboratory): a great deal of rocket power—and fuel—is required to lift the tremendous weight of astronauts, equipment, and supplies for any mission that must blast through Low Earth Orbit. This engineer, who works on the Mars project, explained that the mass required for a nine-month Mars journey, not to mention the living quarters you need to bring along and erect once there, is enormous—and it's made exponentially worse by having to escape Earth's gravity. But since the Moon has very little gravity, if you transport all these materials to the Moon in a series of separate, small launches—or mine some of it from the Moon itself—you only need a fraction of the amount of fuel and rocket power to lift it off the lunar surface. All the surplus fuel and weight can be reserved for the journey to, and settlement on, Mars.

Building a Moon base isn't the only way to get to Mars, but it's one that the Chinese, Russians, and EU have favored. The US lacking a base on the Moon—or claiming the raw materials there (current treaties notwithstanding)—leaves us limited in our options and potentially left out. The current administration has reversed course and again put a return to the Moon back on NASA's plate. For its part, as noted in “Dark Side of the Moon,” the US has been working on the multi-use, multi-purpose spaceship and rocket (SLS/Orion) to get us to other planetary bodies, including our moon.

Finally, another reason for returning to the Moon has military implications. Maintaining US superiority in space is vital to our land-based armed forces—if nothing else because our satellite operations direct everything we do in terms of monitoring foreign powers, enabling US troop movements and other military logistics and communications. In short, it's vital to protecting America and American interests abroad. The Chinese and Russians have been working on ways to take out our military and communications satellites, from space, to cripple our defenses. As a result, we need to maintain a robust space program to keep pace with the world. A Moon base allows us to stage operations outside of the Earth's limiting gravitational atmosphere—including powerful, space-based lasers. To be sure, the US Space Corps has pondered the military implications of such a base of operations.

All this feeds the opening question: Will the US be returning to the Moon? It's an issue with a great deal more complexity than meets the eye. It is a debate that will rage on in the near future.

For an excerpt of the first few chapters of “Dark Side of the Moon,” scroll to the next page. ■

*During his twenty-four-year career in publishing, award-winning and USA Today bestselling author Alan Jacobson has learned a thing or two about writing engaging stories and creating characters we care about. Jacobson has embedded himself with law enforcement officers across a range of agencies, including the FBI's Behavioral Analysis Unit; the DEA, US Marshals Service, ATF, NYPD, SWAT, and the US military. Nelson DeMille, James Patterson, and Michael Connelly have called his series protagonist, FBI profiler Karen Vail, one of the most compelling heroes in suspense fiction. Likewise, his OPSIG Team Black series has been lauded by real-life Navy SEALs. For more on his novels, visit [www.AlanJacobson.com](http://www.AlanJacobson.com).*

## DARK SIDE OF THE MOON

By Alan Jacobson

Jacobson writes one of his best books to date with this tale of spies, biological weapons, and a Moon shot.

Apollo 17 came back from the Moon with a secret element, and someone in NASA has leaked the properties of this element called caesium to enemies of the United States. The potential harm it can cause turns into a race back to the Moon to retrieve more of this element for nefarious purposes.

OPSIG members Hector DeSantos and Aaron Uziel are recruited on the fast track to become astronauts and go to the Moon to stop the Russians from taking caesium and bringing it back. FBI profiler Karen Vail has the task of trying to find the NASA mole, but when one of her colleagues' fathers gets taken, it quickly becomes personal.

Jacobson has crafted a fast-paced and engagingly scientific thriller.

Reviewed by Jeff Ayers, a professional librarian, book reviewer, and panel master and the author of several books, the most recent being the YA mystery “The Fourth Lion” (with Kevin Lauderdale) for *Suspense Magazine*. ■



## SPECIAL PREVIEW FROM ALAN JACOBSON

# DARK SIDE OF THE MOON

By Alan Jacobson

**APOLLO 17 LANDING SITE  
TAURUS-LITTROW VALLEY  
MARE SERENITATIS  
THE MOON  
DECEMBER 13, 1972**

"HOUSTON, WE'RE GETTING SOME unusual radiation readings here."

"Say again? Where are you and what kind of readings are you getting?"

Apollo 17 commander Gene Cernan kept his gaze fixed on the Geiger counter. "We're on the southeast side of Bear Mountain and—"

"You're supposed to be on your way back to base," said flight director Denny Driscoll.

"Uh, this is Jack," geologist Harrison "Jack" Schmitt said. "This could be an important find. I think we should stretch our safety margin and stay out here a bit longer to—"

"Negative, Seventeen. You two told us ten minutes ago you were drop-dead exhausted from three days of climbing and digging—not to mention hauling Moon rocks for six hours today. You said your hands were tired and chafed raw from wearing those gloves and you were returning to Challenger."

"This is a once in a lifetime opportunity," Schmitt said. "Who knows when we'll get back here?"

In fact, they all knew it was going to be awhile—a long while. President Kennedy's very public challenge for Americans to land on the Moon before the Soviets had been accomplished—and on time. With budgets strained and the public's enthusiasm for the space program waning, Apollo 18, 19, and 20 were canceled. The writing was in NASA's budget—and as good as etched in the basalt of Moon rock: the agency was turning its attention to Skylab and something else they had been discussing: a low Earth orbit space shuttle.

There was a long moment of silence. Cernan figured

Driscoll and his mission control specialists were discussing, if not debating, the timing of all they had left to do before liftoff.

Then: "Uh, Seventeen, what readings are you getting?"

Cernan looked to Schmitt. As the only scientist to walk the Moon's surface, this was his argument to make.

"Exceptionally high CPM on the Geiger. Everything here, so far, is the tan-gray subfloor gabbro that I've seen. But the rover's shadow is making it impossible to see. I think the rock I'm getting the radiation reading from is darker, slicker, graphite-colored."

"Apollo 14 found uranium and thorium."

"This is not that." Schmitt carefully leaned forward, his left hand keeping the heavy pressure suit from tipping him over as he tried to get a better look through his glass helmet visor. "This is...different. And I'm starting to think that maybe the gray, relatively nonvesicular subfloor may be the deeper fraction."

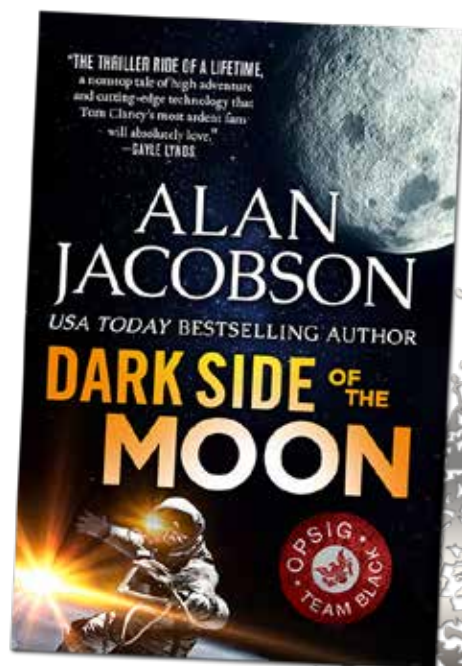
"Boy," Cernan said, glancing around beyond them to his left and right, "these rock fields are something else."

"Dandy," Driscoll said. "That's terrific, Seventeen. And I'm glad you're enjoying the view, Geno. But we're short on time so tell me about those radiation readings. Can you explain what you're getting, Jack?"

"I can't, Houston. I—I um, I don't know what to make of it."

"I'm gonna get a picture," Cernan said as he maneuvered the Hasselblad camera into position and snapped off several exposures. "Got it, I think."

"Seventeen, Houston. We want you to collect a small, representative rock sample, record its location, and lock it away in the lead-lined box when you get back to the LM," he said, pronouncing it "lem" and referring to the lunar module. "We'll analyze it back here."





"But—"

"You've had twenty-two hours of EVAs the past three days," Driscoll said, using the acronym for extravehicular activities. "But time's up. You need to park the rover and get your weight balanced for liftoff. Full checklist ahead of you. Go directly back to Challenger and get to it. Houston out."

Schmitt sighed, the moisture causing a slight fogging of his helmet visor. "A geologist's dream. And I—"

"You've lived the dream, Jack. The only scientist in human history to land on another planetary body. Get your hammer out. Let's chisel off a piece, take a core sample directly below it, and head back."

After securing the specimens, they got back in the rover and drove toward the Challenger. Upon arriving, they off-loaded the cases of rocks they had collected, taking care to use the radiation shielded container as directed. They weighed each box and placed them in precise locations to ensure that the ascent stage—which would deliver them into orbit to rendezvous with the command service module—was properly balanced. Every ounce had to be accounted for so they could be certain the engines had enough thrust to lift them off the surface.

"You good with this?" Cernan asked. "I need to go park the rover."

"Yeah," Schmitt said. "I've got some cleaning to do. This Moon dust is like cat hair—it's everywhere."

Cernan drove the LRV, or lunar roving vehicle, several hundred feet from the lunar module and turned in a circle, orienting the front so that it faced the spacecraft. He checked the movie camera mount to be certain it was framing the shot properly. Mission control wanted to film the liftoff, and this distance would give them a good view and enough perspective relative to the surface—as well as a safety margin to prevent the equipment from being incinerated by the rocket engine's burn.

Cernan climbed out of the rover and stood there a moment, pondering the fact that they had stayed on the Moon longer, and traveled farther, than any other crew had.

He knelt beside the rover and, scraping the stiff right index finger of his glove against the lunar soil, carved the initials TDC, after his daughter. He chuckled, knowing that with the Apollo program now ending, his inscription would remain undisturbed for many decades to come...perhaps for eternity.

He hopped and bounced back to Challenger—the lunar module's call sign—marveling at what he and Schmitt, and the hundreds of engineers at NASA and its contractors, had accomplished.

Upon reaching Challenger, he grabbed the handles to hoist himself up the ladder. This moment had haunted him for weeks. He had wanted to prepare remarks to read but he never had the time to formalize something. Just as Neil Armstrong's words of mankind's first steps on the lunar surface had become famous, the last man making his final boot prints on the Moon might likewise be remembered.

He had jotted down some notes on his sleeve over the past three days, but now, as he stood there, found that he did not need them. Instead, he spoke from the heart.

"As we leave the Moon and Taurus-Littrow, we leave as we came, and God willing, as we shall return, with peace and hope for all mankind. As I take these last steps from the surface for some time to come, I'd just like to record that America's challenge of today has forged man's destiny of tomorrow. Godspeed the crew of Apollo 17."

He lifted his left foot from the soil and climbed aboard Challenger.

AFTER ASCENDING THE TEN steps into the lunar module, Cernan was informed that they were over their weight limit by 210 pounds. They had anticipated this would be the case, and like some of the Apollo missions before them, they pulled out a fish scale and began weighing items they no longer needed.

Out the door went a bevy of expensive equipment: lab instruments, pouches of uneaten food, unneeded pairs of extravehicular activity/EVA gloves, two PLSS primary life support system backpacks, a Leica camera, and, last, the handheld scale.

They finished going through their written checklists and reported in to Denny Driscoll in Houston.

"We're just about on schedule," Cernan said.

"Roger, Geno. All systems are go."

"I'm gonna miss this place," Schmitt said. He sat back in his couch. "Someday, some way, mankind has to find its way back here."

"Roger that," Driscoll said. "Someday, some way, I'm sure we will."

1

**NASA  
NEUTRAL BUOYANCY LAB  
UNDERWATER TRAINING FACILITY  
HOUSTON, TEXAS  
PRESENT DAY**

THE TWO FORMER NAVY SEALs broke through the surface of the 40-foot deep, 200- by 100-foot 6 million-gallon pool that NASA used for training astronauts. Although neutral buoyancy diving did not perfectly duplicate the effects of a zero gravity environment, it provided the best way to simulate weightlessness for EVAs, or extravehicular activities, in space or on a planetary surface.

Astronauts who had trained at the Neutral Buoyancy Lab, or NBL, as it was known, and then went on to do EVAs outside the shuttle or International Space Station reported that it was effective in helping them prepare.

Standing on the edge of the expansive pool were FBI director Douglas Knox and secretary of defense Richard McNamara.

As the metal platform rose out of the water, two astronauts wearing modified pressure suits with leg weights strapped to their ankles stood rigidly, back to back.

Harris Welding rotated his head inside the large helmet and waited for the assistant dive operations training officer to help him out of his gear.

Two training support personnel began removing the breathing apparatus from Welding's partner, Darren Norris, while another unhooked the tank that supplied nitrox.

Once their helmets were detached from the suit, Secretary McNamara stepped forward, remaining behind the yellow and black striped safety line at the pool's edge. "You're both doing exceptionally well. We want to personally congratulate you on your progress."

Welding laughed. "Thank you, sir. But all due respect, the two of you didn't fly out to Houston just to give us a pat on the back."

"No," Director Knox said. "I know it takes forever to get out of those suits, but meet us in the briefing room in forty-five minutes. We've got some classified information to share regarding your mis—"

"Daddy! Daddy!"

Three children, two girls and a boy, came running toward Knox and McNamara, with a woman in her late thirties trailing twenty feet behind them.

"Wesley-Ann and Nicki," their mother shouted. "Stop. Michael, get your little sister!"

Knox stuck out his right arm and corralled the children. "Whoa, it's dangerous by the edge of the p—"

"Hi Daddy," the older girl, about seven, said.

A broad grin spread over Welding's lips. "Hey sweetie. What are you doing here?"

"You're s'posed to eat dinner with us, remember?"

"Oh. Uh, yeah, sweet pea. But you're way early," Welding was still sheathed in his suit and standing rigidly on the platform with a few inches of water from the humongous pool sloshing violently at his boot tops.

The woman reached Knox and gathered up her kids. "Sorry. They get so excited visiting Harris. He's been training all over the country for a year and a half, so when he's right in our backyard we try to spend as much time as possible with him." She held the three children with her left arm and stuck out her right hand. "Tanya Welding."

"Douglas Knox. You have great kids. They're adorable."

"Thank you. Are you—I know your name. But...sorry, I can't place it."

"No apologies necessary." The corners of Knox's mouth lifted ever so slightly. "I'm with the FBI. I try to stay out of the news as much as possible. It's not always possible."

"Sir," Welding said. "Mind if I take a little time with my family?"

"Absolutely," Knox said. "Take whatever you need. Just be in the briefing room in forty-five minutes."

DRESSED IN NASA T-SHIRTS and cargo pants, Welding and Norris sat down at the oval table. Joining Knox and McNamara were CIA assistant director Denard Ford and Brig. Gen. Klaus Eisenbach from USSTRATCOM, the United States Strategic Command.

"The time has come," Ford said, "to brief you on certain classified aspects of your mission." He turned to Eisenbach. "General."

Eisenbach's uniform was heavily decorated. He tugged it into place as he rose and walked over to the tabletop podium.

"Are Carson and Stroud getting this briefing too?" Welding asked.

"They are," Eisenbach said. "But you two are not due back at Vandenberg for a couple of weeks and it couldn't wait."

Welding and Norris shared a look, then leaned forward in their seats.

"You've spent time studying the Apollo missions," Knox said, "because they served as the basis for how you'll be approaching your op."

Eisenbach picked up the remote control from the table. "The knowledge we gained, the data we collected, the technology we developed, rank among the most important scientific achievements of humankind. But there's something that came out of Apollo that's never been publicized or published. Anywhere. Seventeen was the last Apollo, but the first to include a scientist, geologist Jack Schmitt."

"If I remember right, they brought back hundreds of pounds of lunar rock," Norris said.

"Yes. Including some odd orange, titanium-laced soil from Shorty Crater that contained the radioactive elements thorium and uranium, which are also found on Earth." Eisenbach clicked the controller, and the screen behind him lit up with a chemical diagram. "But they also found a new element. Like thorium, it's radioactive. But we believe it goes far beyond thorium's capabilities."

"How so?" Welding asked.

"We only had a few micrograms to work with so we couldn't be sure of what we were seeing. We couldn't produce it in the lab so a lot of our analysis required extrapolation and, more recently, computer modeling. I don't want to get into molecular physics—I'm not an expert so it'd be a short conversation—but this is one of the heaviest elements to be discovered, at the far reaches of the periodic table. Typically such elements are very unstable and highly radioactive. Elements heavier than uranium aren't usually found in nature. They're manufactured, so to speak, in linear accelerators in a laboratory. They only exist for thousandths of a second."

"What's it called?" Norris said. "This new element."

Eisenbach cocked his head. "Like everything in science, there are naming conventions and protocols. The name's unofficial since, to the rest of the scientific world, this element doesn't exist. But because it could be a great deal more powerful—and dangerous—than anything we've discovered on Earth, we've named it caesarium after Rome's emperors for



the potential dominance it can provide a country that has it.”

“You mentioned dominance,” Norris said. “Can you be a little more specific?”

“It increases the yield of a nuclear explosion by almost a factor of ten. There are lots of variables with nuclear weapons—the two biggest being how large the warhead is and the height at which it’s detonated. But if you’re looking to cause maximum mayhem and civilian and economic devastation, anything that improves the explosion’s strength and radius by such a magnitude is a major concern.”

“It gives new meaning to the term weapon of mass destruction,” McNamara added.

Eisenbach flicked a speck of dust off his uniform. “It could take out an entire major metropolitan city in the United States with a single nuclear-tipped ballistic missile, the kind Iran and North Korea have been testing. And if they launch multiple warheads and we’re able to neutralize all but one or two—which is likely to be the case—major American cities will cease to exist. And they’ll remain uninhabitable for decades.”

Knox folded his hands on the desk in front of him. “They hit DC? The seat of our government—as well as the strategic planning nerve center of our armed forces—will be gone. Think about that.”

They did.

Welding had a wife and three young children; Norris, ten-year-old twins. Knox knew this factored into their calculus as the seconds of silence passed.

“So what’s our mission?” Welding finally asked.

“We have some HUMINT,” Ford said, referring to human intelligence—spy work. “China is training for a Moon shot. From what we can ascertain—and some of this is unconfirmed—they’re planning to send up a robotic lander and rover to collect rock samples.”

Norris sat forward in his seat. “Are they looking to bring back caesarium?”

“We don’t know. Not yet. We’re working to find out. But we have to assume they are. Even if they’re not, they may find it. We can’t take that chance.”

“So that’s why we’re going up?” Welding said. “I don’t see how—”

“For now,” Knox said, “that’s all you need to know. Once we have more information, we’ll lay down a specific mission plan and explain in more detail what your objectives are.”

Norris held out both hands, palms up. “I can’t believe no one’s ever thought of this being a problem. Isn’t there some sort of agreement that prevents the mining of another planet?”

“They have and there is,” Eisenbach said. “The Outer Space Treaty was adopted in 1967. It basically says that the exploration and use of outer space—including the Moon—is for the benefit of all countries. It’s the province of all mankind. If China’s not planning to share their samples with everyone, their mission would be a clear violation of that treaty. That’s the US position. Of course, if they do bring caesarium back, we wouldn’t want them to share it with anyone. Except us.”

“So it’s a no-win scenario. Once they have it—”

“That’s not all,” Ford said. “The Republic of China ratified the treaty before the United Nations General Assembly’s vote to transfer China’s UN seat to the People’s Republic of China in 1971. The People’s Republic of China described the defunct Republic of China’s treaty ratification as illegal, but the US considers China to be bound by its former government’s obligations. So far, China’s agreed to adhere to the treaty’s requirements.”

“There’s also the Moon Treaty,” Knox said.

“Which no space-faring country ever signed,” Eisenbach said. “Its purpose was to prevent the militarization and resource mining of the Moon without sharing all findings with the international community, through the UN. Like the sea floor treaty.”

“And then there’s the SPACE Act of 2015,” Eisenbach said, “which muddled the water because it gave US citizens the right to commercially explore and exploit space resources, including water and minerals. The only thing excluded was biological life. It specifically states that America is not asserting sovereignty or jurisdiction over any celestial body. But some have argued that the US recognizing ownership of space resources is an act of sovereignty that violates the Outer Space Treaty.”

“So nothing’s really clear,” Ford said. “It also hasn’t been tested—although it sure looks like that’s on the verge of changing.”

“But if China’s getting ready to launch a Moon shot,” Norris said, “and if they’re going there to bring back caesarium, the bell’s been rung. No way to unring it. Regardless of whatever treaties exist.”

“That’s pretty much it in a nutshell,” Knox said. “Which is one reason why you’ve been training for this mission.”

“The other reasons?” Welding asked.

“Reasons two, three, four, and five,” McNamara said with a steely stare, “are...because those are your orders.”

“We’ll give you more as soon as we’re able to.” Ford folded his hands in front of him. “That’s all we’ve got for you, gentlemen. The possibility exists that we’ll be launching sooner rather than later. We just wanted you to be mentally prepared. The rocket was moved to the launch pad several weeks ago and is being prepped. Just in case.”

“Questions?” Knox asked.

“Just one,” Norris said with a shrug. “How will us going to the Moon stop China from launching their mission?”

“That’ll be addressed at the appropriate time,” Eisenbach said. “Anything else?”

A moment later, McNamara rose from his chair. “Dismissed.”

FORD CAME UP BEHIND the men as they entered the suit room to prepare for the afternoon dive.

“Sir,” Norris said. “Something we can help you find?”

“No, no. I just—I think you two are the best of the best and

we owe you a better explanation of what's going on than just the standard need-to-know bullshit."

"Appreciate that," Welding said.

"For what it's worth, I was in favor of telling you more, but there's considerable...debate about how to move forward. So even if we laid out the approach, things could change. If China forces our hand, I personally don't think there's a choice, but for the moment, it's classified. I know that's not what you want to hear."

"I always butted heads with my CO," Welding said with a chuckle. "I wanted all the info we had so I could be thinking about it, working it through. Just how my brain works. Getting piecemeal info, it's inefficient. For me, at least. I can be a creative part of the solution, not just a lethal tool who can execute a mission plan."

Ford laughed. "Then you should've stayed in the SEALs and worked your way up to—"

That was the last any of them heard as a powerful explosion rocked the room and the cinder block walls tumbled down on top of them.

## 2

### **NASA JOHNSON SPACE CENTER MISSION CONTROL HOUSTON, TEXAS 4:49 AM**

THE MISSION CONTROL SPECIALIST leaned forward and studied his screen. "Hey Sam, check this out."

Sam blinked his eyes clear and reseated his headset. His oversize coffee mug was empty and he had been caught napping at his station. He glanced at Jamie, who was hunched over his keyboard a few seats to his left in the expansive high-tech monitoring center. Thankfully, Jamie was focused on his station instrumentation. "Whaddya got?"

Jamie made eye contact with Sam. "I'm putting it on the main screen right now."

An aerial view of what appeared to be a massive rocket filled the wall-size display, an intense magnesium-bright flame trailing beneath it.

"Where's this coming from?" Jamie asked as he studied the trajectory.

"China, Sichuan province. From what I remember, they've got a launch center there, so that makes sense."

"Switching satellites to get us a better look," Jamie said. He pushed a button and a three-quarter angle came up alongside the other view.

"Heavy lift vehicle of some kind," Sam said. "Four liquid boosters mounted to the first stage." He watched the image another few seconds as the startlingly white flame below the rocket turned orange. "I'd say something on the order of..." He scrawled a stylus across his monitor, finished his calculations,

and brought his gaze back up to the screen. "Holy shit."

"That's one big mother," Jamie said.

"Big isn't the word. If I'm right, that thing is 6 million pounds. About 7 million pounds of thrust. Almost as big as the Saturn V." Saturn V, the powerful multistage rocket that sent the Apollo astronauts to the Moon, was one of the largest ever to successfully fly.

"Even if you've missed the mark by 20 percent..." Jamie's voice trailed off.

"If I had to guess, it's bigger than their Long March 3B/E."

"But China doesn't have a rocket bigger than the 3B/E."

Sam swallowed. "Obviously they do."

"We need to report this."

"Agreed."

Jamie got up from his terminal and walked briskly to the back of the large mission control center. He knocked on the glass window of his superior's office, assistant chief of operations, Zenzō Aoki. Aoki looked up from his desk and waved Jamie in.

He stepped inside, his hands now clammy. Jamie had been assigned to ops only three months ago, but he had worked at NASA for fourteen years. When he requested the transfer, his colleagues told him he was crazy because the work tended to be tedious in between launches. He was about to make them eat their words.

"Sir, we've got something you need to see. Main screen." Jamie cocked his head toward the front of the room.

Aoki craned his neck, then gave up and walked over to the windowed wall behind Jamie. Together they watched the rocket continue its ascent.

"Who?" Aoki said. "Where?"

"Chinese. Sichuan province."

Aoki crinkled his brow as he processed that. "Mass?"

"Six million pounds."

Aoki's left eye twitched.

"It's bigger than the Long March 3B/E. They were rumored to be developing something called Chang Zheng 5, but I didn't know they built it, let alone tested it."

Aoki's gaze was fixed on the screen. "Yeah."

"And a vehicle that large would be sitting on the pad for days, if not weeks. How could our satellites have missed something that big?"

"Unless China hid it," Aoki said under his breath. "Okay, Jamie. I'll take it from here. Go back to your station. Keep monitoring it until further notice. And get me a trajectory."

"Yes sir."

As Jamie put his hand on the doorknob to leave, he turned back and saw Aoki lift the red telephone handset.

"This is Assistant Chief Aoki." He looked up and locked gazes with Jamie's reflection off the window. "Get me the Pentagon." ■

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# Tail of the Dragon

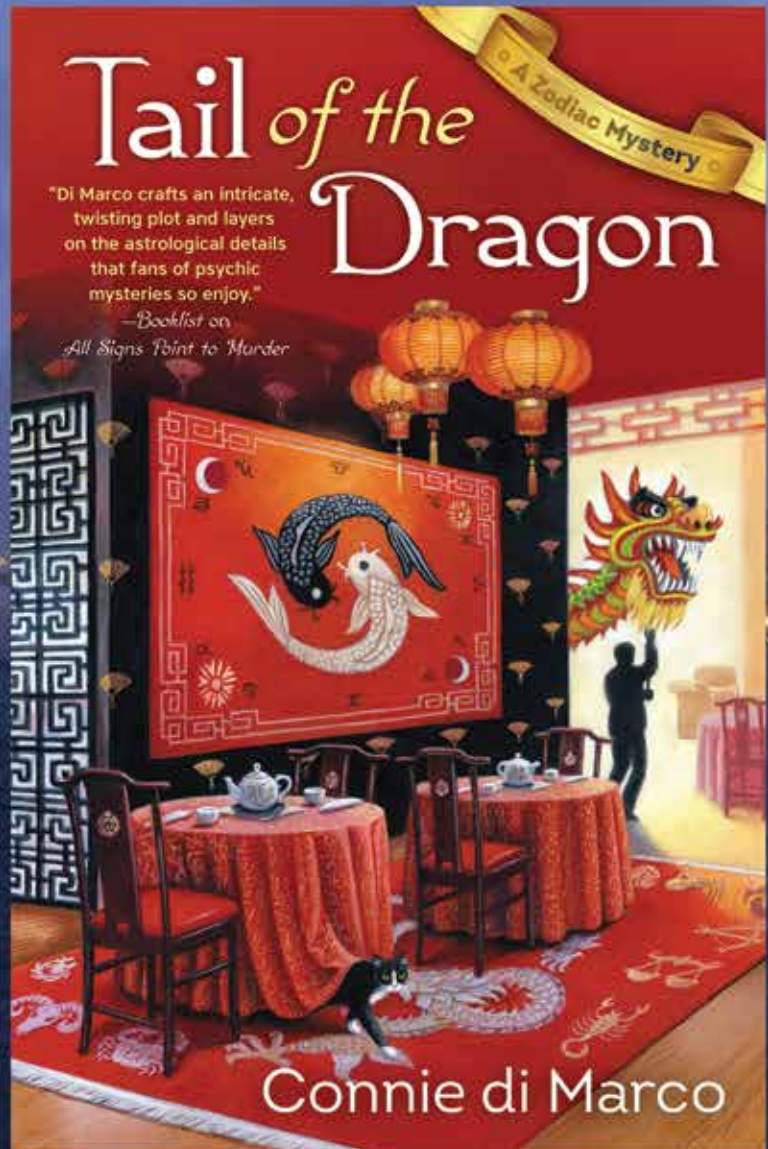
A Zodiac Mystery

by Connie di Marco

"A great read is in the stars! With the Zodiac Mysteries, Connie di Marco gives us a bright and interesting heroine and a mystery with plenty of twists and turns. Lots of action and well-written suspense equal good fortune for readers."  
— Casey Daniels, author of  
The Pepper Martin Mysteries

"di Marco crafts an intricate, twisting plot and layers on the astrological details that fans of psychic mysteries so enjoy."  
— Booklist

ISBN: 978-0-7387-5106-1  
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Available through your favorite bookseller.  
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San Francisco astrologer Julia Bonatti never thought murder would be part of her practice, but when her former boss and current client asks for help she agrees to go undercover at his law firm.

Three people have received death threats and the only common denominator between them is a case long settled — the infamous Bank of San Francisco fire. Julia's astrological expertise provides clues but no one wants to listen.

Before she can solve the mystery, two people are dead and her own life is in danger. Julia must unmask the killer before he, or she, takes another life.

# CRIME *and* SCIENCE RADIO

WITH AWARD WINNING AUTHORS

D.P. LYLE, M.D. & JAN BURKE

## MARCIA CLARK

### *Judging Evidence*

Interview by D.P. Lyle, MD and Jan Burke

Press Photo Credit: Provided by Authors



Former Prosecutor Marcia Clark is a person most people know. Whether you are an avid reader of thrillers and have been enjoying Marcia's fantastic character, Rachel Knight; or you are one who is interested in the world of crime and punishment; or even if you are one who loves sitting in front of TruTV to watch high-profile cases play out in the courtroom, Marcia Clark has become a household name in one way or another.

Recently, Marcia sat down with Jan Burke, host of *Crime & Science Radio*, to have an in-depth discussion regarding all areas of law and order. From the rules of evidence to some of the ways forensic science is used in the plots of her riveting legal thrillers, everything is covered.

Jan Burke (J.B.): Thank you for joining us, Marcia. Today we're going to talk about some of your experiences as an attorney, your books, and the perceptions and misperceptions people have about the law, evidence, and science in the courtroom. To begin, how old were you when you decided to become an attorney?

Marcia Clark (M.C.): *I did not start out to be one, actually. I took Poli Sci as an undergrad and soon found out the degree was basically worthless...*

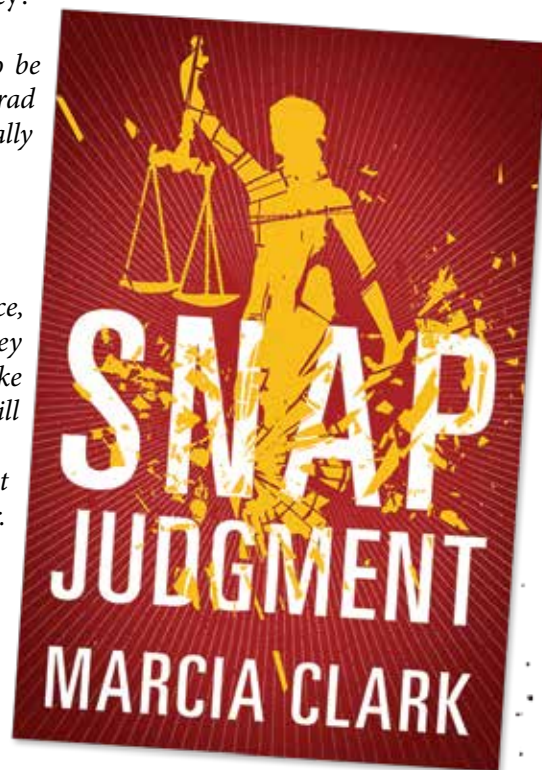
J.B.: I majored in the lucrative field of history, so I completely understand.

M.C.: *I thought I was going to work in the State Department in the foreign office, which is what I wanted to do. And because I spoke various languages, I thought they would find that useful. Instead, they asked me if I could type. They really don't like girls. I know a woman who works in the State Department now who says they still don't like girls, so that's interesting...*

*I floated around for a year or two and wound up saying: "Lawyer. I think that works." And I applied at the last minute to law school and took the LSAT, hung over. I wasn't exactly your most devoted fan of the law, but I became one.*

J.B.: So you weren't one of those people who in second grade stood up and said, "Objection!" to their teachers?

M.C.: *I said all kinds of things to my teachers, actually, but not that one. That*





would have been a nicer one. But that's a story for another day, Jan. When I was a kid I wanted to write. I liked writing, I liked acting, but I didn't have faith in my ability to earn money doing either one of those, so...

J.B.: Which law school did you attend?

M.C.: Southwestern, here in Los Angeles.

J.B.: And ended up working in defense?

M.C.: Yes, I started out as a criminal defense attorney. No way was I going to work for "THE MAN." The thought of being a prosecutor never even entered my head. I clerked for a defense firm for about two years and then I worked as an associate for about a year and a half. When it came to the point where it seemed I was always defending violent criminals, I realized that I'd rather prosecute. In fact, I felt like I did not want to practice law anymore at all unless I was a prosecutor. So when I went in for my interview, the D.A. at the time was John Van de Kamp, I told him that I thought I was done with law if I couldn't be a prosecutor.

J.B.: So, you've worked in this field for quite a while and created Rachel Knight in your books. In what ways does the real life of a D.A. differ from what you see in books and on the screen?

M.C.: One thing for sure, is when it comes to books or TV, we all cut out the boring parts. Writing motions, doing research... not really sure how you could take that and make it exciting. Reading. Yeah, she's still reading.... Typing. Yeah, she's still typing.... We cut out all of the necessary but boring routine stuff.

A D.A. is out in the field more, especially when speaking of the special trials unit. The thing with special trials is that we pick up the case the day the body is found, which means we're out on the streets with the cops and detectives a lot. We interview all witnesses on every case. I never took a case to trial without talking to all witnesses first—outside; where they were—especially at crime scenes if I could, so they could walk me through, show me what they saw, where they saw it from, etc. That usually put me in a better position in court.

J.B.: That is a whole different level, the special trials unit for the L.A. County D.A.'s Office. I'm assuming this is a division that not every jurisdiction has?

M.C.: Or even every prosecutor. In L.A., the thing unique about special trials is we do that kind of vertical prosecution from the bottom up. Because they handle all the high-profile, complex cases, they need that time to go out in the field and get that information. Most prosecutors get the ordinary cases very shortly before the jury trial commences, which counts

for the pressures that are most common. Other jurisdictions do it differently. I've heard New York actually does have, as a matter of routine, the prosecutors going out in the field with the detectives. I don't know that's true, but since everyone does things differently I would imagine the bigger offices where there is more crime would have less opportunity to do that. Because it would require an office with a lot of prosecutors to be able to do this kind of prosecution. The D.A.'s office in L.A. is the biggest in the world. Makes sense, the county is huge. If it were a state it would be the 7<sup>th</sup> largest in the U.S.

J.B.: What would make it a special trials case? Would it be based on the high-profile and complexity of the case?

M.C.: Cases that will attract a lot of media attention. The Menendez brothers, for example, was a special trials case. Phil Spector. Those are the kinds of things that rate being a special trials case.

J.B.: We all have seen everything from L.A. Law to Law & Order, not to mention reading the legal thrillers out there. Can you name a few of the errors and clichés in those that make you go nuts. Such as, watching a legal drama where everyone in the room is riveted, yet you break out laughing because of the blatant error?

M.C.: You know what you and I have laughed most about is the forensic stuff they do. Like finding an eyelash in a field that can be traced to just one person. And I say, "Really? Out there in the field with the alfalfa you found an eyelash? Wow!"

They will also have those prosecutors arguing with the judge about what piece of evidence should or should not come in. You don't really get to do that. They also strut around the courtroom which in real life most judges would never allow you to do. (Although some will, as we know.) There's a certain level of showmanship for the sake of drama where an attorney will argue with a judge, whereas in real life the judge would say settle down. Not to mention the rulings. Judges offer rulings on TV that I wish in my wildest dreams I could get in.

J.B.: One of the things I've noticed with both the forensic science shows and courtroom dramas is the amazing amount of science that has not passed any rule of evidence I know about, getting in. I don't even know if most people are aware of the rules of evidence. Not to mention the rules about what you can do to an arrestee to get a confession.

M.C.: Exactly. You really aren't allowed to beat them with phone books. That cracks me up on TV, having cops out there beating the suspect up and getting a statement that will later nail him in court and all will be fine. Which, of course, would never happen; that is the anomaly. Cops, by and large, do not do things like that and do not get away with them if they do. You need to read them their rights, you need to get a valid

waiver because you can't get the statement in without it. And on TV the statements always come in so clean. The suspect admits or denies. Easy. But in real life, if you get the statement, a confession is a "yes, but..." An approach avoidance. "I did this but I didn't do that." Which means the best thing for the prosecutor is not to use it at all. Unless you think you can't prove the case without it. They don't show reality and I think if they did, and what the prosecutor has to do to overcome, it would make for a better story.

Then there's the other thing you were talking about, the rules of scientific evidence. You don't just get to put in scientific evidence because you want to. It has to pass muster. You usually have to have a hearing if it's something new in the field. In the very beginning, when DNA was new, you had to have these incredibly long hearings where you had to show that the DNA testing methods were accepted in the scientific community. It was no easy thing to prove. So there are quite a few hoops to jump through before this stuff gets into evidence.

J.B.: The person in a show who has discovered some new way of processing something, like photo-manipulations, really drives me crazy. The court certainly wouldn't like you bringing in doctored photos.

M.C.: And they won't let you. Not to mention, the defense will object. Even if it's just a blowup, the defense can and will look at it to see if it's distorted in some way. You don't just get to do whatever you want.

J.B.: In the real world there are these tests that must be done on evidence, so the judge is going to ask you to bring in experts. I assume the defense gets to bring in their experts to say something is not reliable or accepted?

M.C.: Yes, each side gets to bring in their experts and the judge must make a ruling; basically saying it is or is not reliable, or accepted by the community, or meets the standard for admission into evidence, which requires testimony from both sides before a ruling can be made. Towards the end of DNA acceptance, the defense was more and more getting into the position of, "Never mind calling the witness, it's not worth it. It will just come in." And they would just kind of make a record by cross-examining the prosecution's expert. We're at the point now when the DNA evidence does all come in, but there will be new methods of DNA testing that will require the same expert testimony before its allowed in, in the future. PCR testing was relatively new when we were working on Simpson and that required all kinds of hearings: you were allowed to use it to exclude people but not to identify.

J.B.: I think this week in the news they were talking about the third trial of some individual and how they had an expert at "touch DNA" who has apparently testified sixty times. That may sound like a lot, but when you look at the whole country,

that's not many trials. I think that is one of those areas when we speak about DNA and how small of an amount you actually need. I think a lot of people don't understand forensic science. Things change. You can always find yourself feeling very sure about something in one decade, and yet a decade later it changes. I know the FBI goes through this with everything from hair evidence to bite marks; they even once thought fingerprints could be challenged?

M.C.: They don't get too far with that, however, because proving two people have identical fingerprints is quite a reach. And fingerprinting has been around so long that if we really had a problem with people having identical fingerprints, we would have seen this happen by now. The fingerprint databases are so huge; they're vast, in fact, and we aren't finding people with the same fingerprints.

But with DNA being so new and the databases not nearly as vast, although they're growing every day, the biggest challenge used to be that the databases were so small you could not justify that no two people could have the same DNA. Of course, as time moves forward, I think we are becoming certain of that fact. But the databases are still not nearly as big as the fingerprint databases.

J.B.: I think a lot of people have, for better or worse, watched trials on TV and probably noticed that there will be experts that contradict each other. How do you choose your forensic expert, or do you live with the guy the lab sends over to you?

M.C.: Usually you have to live with the guy they send over to you. LAPD has a crime lab and the one who is assigned to you is the one you get. The only time you might get to choose outside that box is when their tech has a problem, can't testify, or it's a heavy-duty case. Not necessarily a high-profile case, but one that offers serious charges like murder. In that case, they might let you find another expert to back up what you have already done. Typically evidence goes straight to LAPD, especially now that they have a crime lab with a DNA lab up and running. Back when I began, before Simpson, we had to use Cellmark because the LAPD did not have a crime lab and were not set up to do DNA testing. Because there was such a big challenge in the Simpson case, we ended up sending our samples to not only Cellmark but also the Department of Justice. At one point, even before that, I wanted to agree to let the defense expert, Ed Blake, do the testing. I knew he was a good guy and we could share all of these results. But the defense didn't want to share these results...

J.B.: Mmm. How funny...

M.C.: Typically, though, your jurisdiction has their own place. I think in the south part of California, in Riverside, they use Biotech. But whether it's a private lab or one associated with the police station, you can reach outside that and get other



experts—but only in very unique cases.

J.B.: When we see defendants in courtroom dramas, they are quite often suave, well-behaved, in suits. But I would assume they are not people who represent the “average bear” brought to trial. Tell us, in your experience, the criminal mind and demeanor of the types of people who came before you, more often than not.

M.C.: *I love that, too, that they always have the cool, charming types. Not to say that type of defendant doesn't appear, but it's rare. That kind of defendant is normally a sociopath. They are not necessarily a serial killer, but they commit crimes for pleasure, fun, and sometimes for profit. That kind of defendant is more in control of the instrument than your typical defendant. Typical defendant is: Johnny tells Eddie, let's go rob that liquor store, and then they grab someone's gun and go do it. And then, BOOM! They get locked up immediately because they're idiots and wind up in court. Typical of these defendants is poor impulse control, and that poor impulse frequently finds its way into the courtroom. They'll give hard looks to witnesses, pop off and say things in front of the jury, yell at their lawyers, and basically do things that are bad for them.*

J.B.: In a book or on TV you have to create a worthy antagonist. Not much of a story if it's the Johnny and Eddie type.

M.C.: *People ask me all the time about my books, “Are these the cases you handled?” I always say that if I told you the real story of real cases the book would be over in two pages. They went to rob a liquor store. BOOM! Story over.*

J.B.: Let's talk about legal terms. People hear words that have legal meaning that they misunderstand sometimes. (For writers out there, I recommend getting yourself a great legal dictionary.) For example, I see a lot of confusion between homicide and murder and between murder and manslaughter.

M.C.: *And that is a really common one. Homicide means that you have an indication of criminal agency. Somebody died at the hands of another, but whether what they did falls under first degree, second degree, or homicide is a separate issue. Homicide just means that a criminal agency is involved in the murder; someone is dead and didn't get there naturally. If this is not true, then it's deemed a suicide. If it is a homicide, you then move to the question of what kind/type of crime it was. Was it murder? First degree means it was a premeditated murder; there was some planning before the act was done. But as the jury instructions will tell you, planning does not require any particular length of time. If I pick up a gun and say, “I'm going to shoot you,” and then do it, that's premeditation. In that one breath, that's enough; first degree is an intentional killing and doesn't require any particular length of time.*

*Second degree can be a rash impulse. The kind of murder that occurs in the course of a fight or argument, which is not premeditated. Then you have manslaughter. Voluntary manslaughter is a killing where there is some type of mitigating influence. By that I mean, something that makes it less than murder. We are all familiar with killing in the heat of passion. For example: If you are in a bar fight and someone throws a bottle at you and you hit him over the head with a bottle and kill him, that's most likely involuntary manslaughter. The other way you can receive manslaughter is if you believe, even if that belief is unreasonable, that you must defend yourself. Such as the George Zimmerman case. The theory behind this form of manslaughter is someone is threatening you and you honestly believe you need to defend yourself with force. But if it's not a reasonable belief; there is no justification. This is called unreasonable belief in the need for self-defense. That, too, can get you manslaughter. Now if you have reasonable belief, that's a complete excuse and you are not guilty of anything.*

J.B.: And will you be the one collecting the evidence and coming to that conclusion? Who determines the charges to be filed?

M.C.: *The decision on what to file is also something specific to the special trials unit. The ordinary cases go through what is called the “Complaints Division” downtown. In branch court, they're called filing deputies. All they do is when the cops bring in their reports and say, “I want to file charges against Joe Smith,” the filing deputies look at the reports and decide what they have there and decide what charges to file. When you are in a specific unit, like special trials, the detectives come right to me and say what they want to file against Joe Smith, such as, we think he's good for murder. I review the reports, what we have, and I decide whether or not I agree with the detectives and then file whatever charges I see.*

J.B.: I'm assuming this can lead to tension? When the cops believe they have a case every time?

M.C.: *Not all of them. Some are reasonable. They will come in and say it's a little skinny now but review the reports and tell me what you think I'm missing. Frequently, in those situations, I do a reject pending. Which means I reject the case pending further investigation, but that means it's not really rejected. I'm just saying go out and get more stuff. If you're working with reasonable police officers and you're reasonable, it's fine.*

*On some occasions you will have someone chomping at the bit, snorting fire out of his nose, etc., who states: “I have Joe Smith for murder and you have to file this.” I have gotten into it on one or two occasions with detectives. Once they even went over my head and went to the big honcho and said, “I think we've got it and she's wrong.” They backed me but, needless to say, it was a very uncomfortable time and a lot of tension and anger. They come in believing in their case and they should! Unless*

they come in and say they just need to show they're working with a D.A. and looking for a reject pending which they're fine with, that's another story. But if they come in really believing there should be a specific filing, then they ought to be behind their own case. That's why you need checks and balances. You can't just have one person making all the decisions which is why it's good to have a prosecutor on the outside saying, "Look, if I take this to trial the defense is going to say you're missing x, y, and z." For example, your eyewitness isn't strong. Or he's a gangbanger from the rival gang of the defendant who will say anything to nail the defendant, etc. Then they need to go find me corroboration.

J.B.: Getting back to some of those terms. What does reasonable doubt really mean? I think we've reached a point where people think anything can be proven with physical evidence. And that this evidence is always available, testing is available, and if you're not bringing it in then you didn't look hard enough for it.

M.C.: You're right, it is a very big problem. You have these cases that get highly publicized with tons of evidence. There's hair, blood, DNA, saliva—everything you can imagine and you have it all. That's cool. But it is not common. First, not all crimes provide evidence; a burglary very seldom leaves you more than fingerprints and you rarely get those. Or you're relying on an eye witness living down the street who got a glimpse of someone...good luck with that one. Juries have a skewed look at things. They believe we should always have DNA and a wealth of physical evidence. And maybe someday we will. Maybe one day evidence collection will reach the point where we will be able to get electro-static footprints out of dust, and all that cool stuff, but we're not there yet. Most cases don't provide such things and as a result juries wind up equating lack of physical evidence with reasonable doubt.

But, here's the thing, Jan. I handle criminal appeals across the state of California from the northern tip to the southern tip now, so I have a better chance to see, overall, what juries are doing than I ever did before. I see them convicting without physical evidence all the time. But in other cases, juries may come in and decide they simply like a defendant more than they like the prosecution or the victim. I just handled a case, which was quite interesting, where they charged three defendants with murder and the three defendants came off better than the victims did. The jury ended up acquitting two and convicting the third on manslaughter. Ordinarily, a case like that where the victim is unarmed and the defendant went and got the weapon used, would have led to murder convictions across the board. But this jury did not cotton to the victim and it went the other way. That wasn't about physical evidence or lack thereof at all.

That's why reasonable doubt bothers me because it is a very elastic term. The problem is a jury can say reasonable doubt when really, objectively speaking, isn't what they're

doing. What they are doing is converting "reasonable doubt" to "reason to doubt." People find a reason to doubt that the sun is going to rise tomorrow. Apocalypse tonight and the sun doesn't rise. That's a reason to doubt. But is it reasonable? No. But that's what happens with juries which is sometimes why you end up with odd verdicts. They come out and say there's reasonable doubt and the people watching say, "What? There was a reason." Well, you're right, but the jury found a reason to doubt.

J.B.: Now, what does circumstantial evidence mean?

M.C.: Keeping it simple, circumstantial evidence is, say, a fingerprint. Why? Because you have to deduce from the fingerprint that the person who left that print is guilty of the crime. You didn't see him do it, because that would be direct evidence, so that's the short version of it.

J.B.: Which means most all evidence is circumstantial?

M.C.: Yes. Anything short of the defendant saying, "I did it," or an eyewitness picking them out of a line-up is circumstantial.

J.B.: Here's another one I believe people don't quite understand: Legally insane.

M.C.: Here's the thing. It is a very high standard to prove someone is legally insane. You have to prove they did not understand the nature or quality of their act, and that they could not control their behavior. Basically, they did not know what they were doing. You're talking about a person walking into a bar, shooting three people, but actually believing that he was spraying flowers with insecticide. You know what I mean. It's that level of disorientation or lack of reality in what he's doing and very, very few criminals can meet that test. It is very rare. Legally insane really does mean a person who does not understand or appreciate the nature and quality of his act. And who does that really fit?

J.B.: So those sitting at home saying you must be crazy to want to take someone's life...that's not the standard.

M.C.: And if it were, you would have to rule everybody legally insane because what sane, rational person decides they have to kill somebody. No matter what that person might have done to you, do you really have to kill the person? We used to have a test in California a long time ago called "Irresistible Impulse." That was where they said, if a defendant had an irresistible impulse and could not control himself and stop himself from committing the crime then he was legally insane. But the problem with that test is, was it really an irresistible impulse or was it just an impulse they didn't resist? Well, isn't that all crime? An impulse you didn't resist?



J.B.: I am waiting for the day neuro-science brings us to a whole new understanding of how the brain works. We're starting to see it now, in fact.

M.C.: *True. They are doing some interesting testing now with the psychopath and showing the empathy center in their brain is inactive. There is really a physical difference between them and "normal" people that you can see.*

J.B.: And they respond differently to various violent images, even differently from other criminals, even those criminals who committed violent crimes.

M.C.: *Yes, people seldom appreciate that the psychopath is only 2 to 5 percent of the population. Very small; you would even call it statistically insignificant. The majority of criminals are not psychopaths. They're messed up, don't get me wrong, I'm not saying they're the picture of mental health, but they're not psychopaths.*

J.B.: Just a couple left on my list. What about hearsay? People don't understand that a lot of times.

M.C.: *Lawyers don't understand that one a lot of times, either. Hearsay requires its own study. Simply defined, it is a statement made out of court offered for the truth of the matter asserted. Even if you're on the witness stand and you want to testify as to something you said to someone else during a crime; that can be hearsay. If you are not offering a statement to prove what you're saying is true, then it's not hearsay. For example: If you asked me, "Marcia, what are you doing?" That is not hearsay; that is a question. What truth are you asserting? There is nothing you're proving with that statement. It might do other things, but what it is not is hearsay.*

Generally speaking, we do have exceptions which is where the confusion comes into play. For example: If I am the prosecutor and a defendant made a statement during a crime like, "Lay down or I'll shoot you in the head," I am allowed to put his statement on. The witness is going to say that the defendant said, blah, blah, blah. And you are going to say that what the defendant said to the witness is hearsay so how can the witness testify to it? He can because it is a party admission. Under section 1220 of the Evidence Code, that statement comes in if the prosecution is proving it. The defendant cannot do that. If he wants to put in his own statements, he has to take the stand and find a way to put it in. He cannot elicit his own hearsay; only the prosecution can do it. So that's where it gets confusing because you have all these exceptions where this side can bring it in and this side can't, etc. That's why there are a lot of arguments about it. There is no hard and fast rule when it comes to the hearsay rule.

J.B.: Another thing...plea bargains. People don't often understand why attorneys go for plea bargains rather than

trials. As taxpayers they should understand, but maybe you could explain a bit about why plea bargains are necessary to the system.

M.C.: *Well, I believe that if we didn't have plea bargains, the system would collapse. There is just no possible way to have the resources to take all cases to trial. I mean, there are thousands and thousands of cases. It boggles the mind just to think of how many are in the system in L.A. County, alone. Now, defendants want plea bargains because it limits their exposure. If they go to trial they face the maximum sentence possible for all of the charges they get convicted of. If that amounts to, say, 99 years to life, and the prosecutor says I'll give you 25 to life, then yeah, he's going to save himself the grief of going to trial and risking the (what we call) twelve-headed monster convicting him of everything.*

We wish to thank Marcia Clark for taking time out of her busy schedule to do this in-depth interview. For those who wish to check out more about "Killer Ambition," head to [www.suspensemagazine.com](http://www.suspensemagazine.com). And take a moment to check out [www.suspensemagazine.com/CrimeandScienceRadio.html](http://www.suspensemagazine.com/CrimeandScienceRadio.html) where Marcia and Jan posted additional links. ■

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Jan Burke is a New York Times and USA Today bestselling author. She has won the Edgar for Best Novel, and the Agatha, the Macavity, and the Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine Readers Award for Best Short Story, among other honors. Her books have been published internationally and have been optioned for film and television. Jan is the author of over thirty short stories. Her work in nonfiction includes serving as the associate editor (with Sue Grafton) for MWA's Handbook, "Writing Mysteries." Her forensic science and criminal justice columns appear in Sisters in Crime's InSinC Quarterly.

A nationally recognized advocate for the improvement of forensic science, she has led efforts that resulted in new laws to aid in identifying remains and better funding for labs. She has spoken before the National Institute of Justice, the American Academy of Forensic Sciences, the American Society of Crime Lab Directors, and other organizations. She is a member of the advisory board of the California Forensic Science Institute. She has coordinated forensic science programming at several mystery conventions. She co-hosted the podcast Crime and Science Radio with Doug Lyle.

Jan has taught at the UCLA Extension, Book Passage, and at numerous conferences and conventions. For more information, check out her website at [www.janburke.com](http://www.janburke.com).



# HIDDEN

By Kelli Clare  
Press Photo Credit: Carli Felix

In my dream, I watch my fate play out like some gothic horror movie. I see my own green eyes, filling with terror and tears as I fall to my knees, submitting to the command of invincible blue eyes. Those eyes rage with fiery madness, and his face twists into something else, something evil. He thrusts his arm high above his head, a deadly blade in his cruel grip. He is going to take my life. I wake, screaming, to find those same blue eyes—now attentive and worried—staring into mine.

## ONE

The first time I saw Will Hastings's handsome face was in late July after the annual Blessing of the Fleet. His bold gaze burned into mine from the opposite side of Water Street. The highland band, piping loud and marching through the center, drew the post-ceremony procession to a close, granting me an unobstructed view. A slow smile touched his lips, and despite the stifling summer heat, it drove a sensual shiver through me.

He was magnificent, the kind of man you would never find living in small-town New England. He could have just stepped right off the cover of *GQ Magazine*. I'd never seen a man so tall, with shoulders so broad it made me wonder if he had to have his shirts custom tailored. His taut, cut biceps emerged from the sleeves of a beautifully faded indigo T-shirt tucked into close-fitting jeans. Most women would pay a fortune for the highlights that seemed to flow naturally through the waves of his dark blond hair. His jawline was strong and commanding, reminding me of paintings I'd studied in college of ancient Roman gladiators.

The parade had ended, but Jess and I hadn't moved from the curb. My best friend released her wavy red hair from its loose bun and lifted her face to the late-morning sun, and I stared at him. She opened her eyes to drink from her raspberry mimosa and elbowed me.

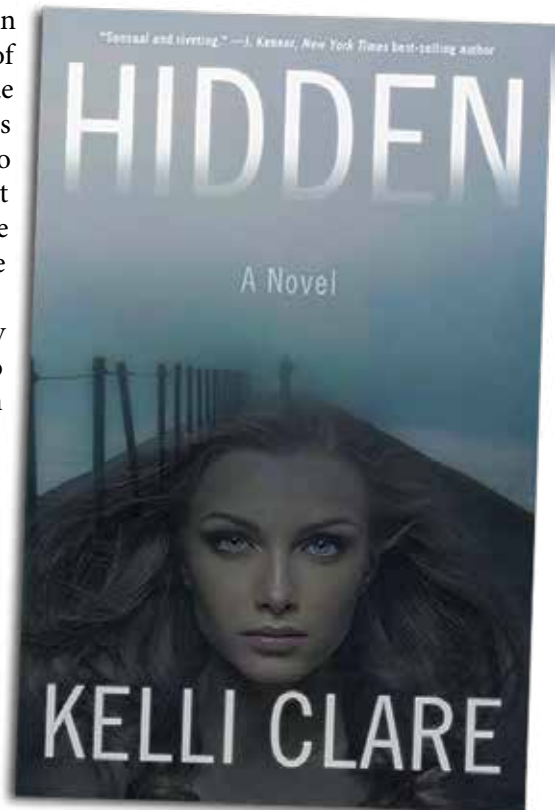
"Who's he and why are you staring at each other? Wait—is he . . . ?"

My eyes skipped to Jess to deliver a dirty look. "The guy who followed me home the other night. Yes, I think so. Maybe I'm wrong. Maybe he's staying nearby." When I refocused across the street, he was gone.

"And maybe you should say something to someone, report it to the police."

"You know, paranoia is my sister's thing, not mine. I'm not sure I feel threatened. Besides, aren't you always saying I should be more open to meeting new people?"

"I haven't seen you outwardly curious in a while, and yeah, you do need to get out of your artsy little head. Just be careful. If it happens again, promise





you'll do something about it."

"I will. Promise."

I struggled with reconciling his presence in town and the sense that he watched me. After all, it was summertime. Stonington was a historically rich town, a cultural treasure, and the only one in Connecticut to face the open Atlantic waters. It attracted countless visitors. It was common to see tourists milling around town taking photos or wandering the streets at night, unaware most businesses closed long before ten. Stonington was also a colonial fishing town, and outsiders came from far and wide to work for the commercial fleet. This wasn't the first time a man from one of the crews or a tourist had looked my way.

The next day, after the last of my noisy day campers had gone, I locked the art studio door and headed for the fishing pier to sketch. It was either that or listen to another of Jess's lectures. She'd go on about how I wallowed in self-imposed loneliness and how it left her alone to test the waters in the pool of datable men. The pool was small—it was blue-plastic-toddler-swimming-pool small—and I didn't need to dip a toe to know there was nothing left in it for me.

The pier was a respite from my grandmother's and sister's intrusiveness as well. Gran and Isobel were all I had, and they meant well. Trysts with my art kept me sane, human.

I looked out over the harbor and spotted *Neptune* trudging her way in. The sailboats beyond paled in her presence. I don't know what it was about the old girl, but I loved that fishing boat. Her emerald-green hull had become chalky over time, and the once black and white hoists and booms were covered in rust, but she was still glorious against the backdrop of the sea. I sat and lost myself in the sketch.

No more than ten minutes had passed when the pier thrummed with the pounding steps of the lumping crew as they made their way to the dock. With a soft curse, I pulled the cover over my drawing and watched the deckhands secure *Neptune's* lines.

"Hello."

My shoulders jerked. I arched my neck back and blinked at the man looming above.

"Didn't mean to startle you," he said. I don't know which was more surprising—his deep, thunderous tone or the English accent. A rich, masculine scent rolled down his corded arm and circled my head when he offered his hand.

I stood without taking it and dusted off my backside. Even when standing, I had to lift my chin to meet his eyes. I was five and a half feet tall, and he towered a foot above me. I stared at him and explored those eyes. They were gunmetal blue, his gaze invincible.

"Hi. It's . . . you—from the street. You were staring."

He offered no apology. Instead, he extended his arm to offer his hand again, palm facing up this time. "Will Hastings." A seductive smile played with the corners of his mouth, one side curving higher than the other. His commanding presence saturated the space around me. Power. He was power.

I bit my lip and presented my hand, distantly aware I'd edged closer. "Ellie James."

With a firm grasp, he held my fingers as he studied me. "Christ, you're lovely."

The gravel texture layered in the sound of his deep voice captivated me, as did his choice of words. My pulse sped. No words came to me. I dropped my eyes, but they were drawn back to his in an instant.

Will Hastings pressed his lips to my knuckles before releasing me. "I'll see you again." After taking a few steps back, he turned and strode away, joining the rest of the crew to unload *Neptune's* catch.

"But . . . wait," I called through the heat of my blush. He tossed back one confident word. "Soon."

It was impossible not to glance once more in his direction before heading up the pier. He watched me over his shoulder with powerful arms raised high, prepared to lift the next teeming crate from its moving hook.

I reminded myself to breathe and exhaled, withdrawing from my daze.

That night, when I couldn't sleep, I pulled out my pad and finished the drawing from memory, coercing life into the old fishing boat on paper. I flipped the page and continued, allowing my mind to create whatever it wanted to see in the moment. It wasn't long before Will's eyes stared back at me. I held up the sketch and angled it left and right, considering the penciled likeness. It jumped out at me then—his gaze revealed something more than I'd realized at the pier. Something dark.

That darkness drew me to him, even on paper. But there was something more, an alluring energy, and it drove images into my head of tangled sheets and sweating, entwined bodies.

I shook my head to clear it, deciding to go to the family cottage soon. No one else used the place anymore. It was quaint and private, no fishermen, no tourists, no onlookers. I missed the beach there and needed to step into the sea. An empty feeling, a profound void caused by the lack of a genuine soul-deep connection lingered in my spirit. The Atlantic soothed me, filling that void with comforting messages from a faraway land I imagined reaching out for me.

I walked the pier several times over the next few days and visited *Neptune's* dock, hoping to run into Will. He wasn't

there, but that was hardly surprising. He was too polished, too smooth. It was clear he was more than a longshoreman in for the season. Our paths never crossed. Still, the ache low in my abdomen assured me of his presence.

My curiosity became a preoccupation, and it haunted me. I wanted nothing more than to know why I was drawn to him. I searched the streets for him. Needed to see his eyes again to resolve what my mind had shown me only on paper.

By the time Thursday finally rolled around, I'd grown irritable, frustration grabbing hold and biting hard. God, I needed to get a grip. I was getting ready for my shift at Nick's, still preoccupied, finding it difficult to focus on anything other than getting to work, when Jess texted to let me know she was running late. Jess and I tended bar there in addition to our day jobs—mine, teaching and selling art, and hers, perioperative nursing. It was the night of the annual event celebrating the restaurant's long run in the community, and it would draw people for miles throughout New London County. Locals, fishermen, and tourists alike.

If my gut was right, and Will Hastings was still around town, I would see him there. Maybe then the possessed mood that kept me from sleeping would subside.

I pulled the red T-shirt with the restaurant's logo over my head, tucking it into cutoff jean shorts, and brushed through my long brunette layers once more. Another touch of shimmering nude lipstick, and then I slipped out the front door and headed down the sidewalk toward Nick's.

Josh Mendes insisted on getting in the way of my mission. One of Ed Sheeran's songs followed him in from the restaurant's rear patio where the twenty- and thirtysomethings hung out. He stood in silence, staring as I mixed and poured cocktails.

"I'm a bit busy, Josh. Do you want another beer?"

"Yeah." He grabbed my hand when I reached for his empty. "Come back to me, Ellie. We could be good together if you'd give it another shot. Let's try again."

We had dated on and off in the three years since I'd come home from UConn, and never got it right. He was a good man, a lieutenant with the local police department. I wanted to love him, but it never came to me—that collision of fiery emotional and physical bliss I refused to live without. Josh needed consistent encouragement, and I'd grown tired of managing the intimacy between us.

I pulled my hand back and grabbed a clean glass, filling it with Guinness. "Please don't. I can't do this conversation again. Nothing has changed. I'm sorry."

"If there's something I can do to change your mind, you know I'll do it."

"I know." I offered his beer with a friendly smile before turning away. When I glanced at the wall of mirrors to see if he'd moved on, I found Will staring back at me. Every part of me tensed, my pulse quickening from the intensity of his focused eyes. I spun and scanned the crowd. I couldn't let him get away.

We locked stares again. I searched for the dark, menacing trait that had nagged at my subconscious. It was there, but it didn't frighten me. It filled my senses and fueled my curiosity. This man would never need encouraging. He canted his head, signaling for me to follow him out the rear exit.

"Cover me for a bit, Jess. I need to do something."

"What are you up to, Ells?"

"I'll be out on the patio for a few minutes."

She bumped her hip against mine as she passed. "Got it."

The terrace was crowded, though Will was easy to find. He leaned against the building's brick wall with his arms crossed over his chest and feet spread wide. I pushed my way through the sweating mob of drinking and dancing revelers, staying close to the wall, but lost sight of him when someone grabbed me and pulled me into the mix. The guy who'd snatched my arms released me abruptly and stepped back. Will was behind me. "Turn round, Ellie James," he said close to my ear. The warmth of his breath on my neck caused goose bumps.

His words held no hint of intonation. It was a command.

I turned to meet his eyes.

He flashed his brows and rubbed his chin, a glimmer from one of the sun's last rays bouncing off his platinum Patek Philippe watch.

I ignored the odd fluttering in my stomach and waited.

He stepped closer, compelling me back against the wall. One of his hands rested against the bricks near my head. His eyes never left mine.

"Who are you?"

"I told you my name."

"Yes, but why are you here in Stonington?"

"Business. I have a job to do."



"At the pier?"

A smirk dominated his lips, his face. "No, not at the pier."

That assuming smile made him impossibly more handsome, and almost unmade me. I wiped my sweaty palms on my hips. "Why did you introduce yourself to me?"

He shrugged but never broke eye contact. "Have you followed me?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"You should talk to your sister about that. I'd rather she filled you in."

"What does that mean? Do you know my sister?"

"Not personally."

"You're making no sense."

Another shrug. As he glanced at my mouth, his eyes grew possessive, and I was mesmerized. I wanted to reach up and touch his five-o'clock shadow. His virile scent intoxicated me. It was sensual and earthy at once, like sandalwood and peat. Peat—he was a scotch drinker.

He cocked his head and flashed a satisfied smile. "Where can I find you?"

His smile dissolved, and his eyes burned deeper into mine. "Stop looking for me."

I matched his determined stare. "Stop following me."

"You don't have to look for me. . . . I'll find you again, Ellie. Just talk to your sister."

Neither of us moved. Was I breathing? Finally, he dropped his arm and stepped back.

"It's getting dark. You should go inside."

My body submitted to his suggestion before my brain could catch it. I stopped and looked back after several steps. He was still there, watching me with his arms folded against his massive chest. Our eyes connected again. He'd be back.

When I reached the door, I glanced over my shoulder one last time, but he was gone. I spent the rest of my shift trapped inside my head, confused by what had happened on the patio. Only one thing was clear—I wanted to see Will again.

I shot a quick text message to Isobel, asking if she knew him and if she planned to meet me at closing as she typically did, but my sister never replied.

Jess gripped my shoulders and shook me, causing the beer in my hand to spill. "Ellie, did you hear me? I have to go. The emergency department needs all surgical staff at the hospital STAT. There's been some kind of street fight on the north side of town. Josh was dispatched to the scene. It's about time to close anyway. You'll wait for Isobel?"

The street and the house were quiet as usual. I waved goodbye as I turned the key, unlocking the front door. Josh had sent one of the rookies to drive me home from the bar. He gave a nod and accelerated. The patrol car sped down the street, heading north with its flashing red and blue emergency lights engaged, back into the odd chaos of the night.

There were no lights on.

There was no aromatic bouquet from Gran's evening chamomile to greet me.

There was no one around to witness my terror when I stepped inside and found my sister and grandmother lying on the floor, holding hands in an ever-widening pool of deep red. The cross of Saint George drawn in blood sullied their beautiful faces. They'd been shot.

Gran was already gone.

Isobel blinked her hazel eyes and tried to tell me something. She tugged on the scrap of paper sticking out of her front pocket until her strength was exhausted, her arm dropping to the floor. A fading whisper floated away on one of her final breaths. "Find Lissie. Get out. . . ."

I screamed at her, screamed for her to stay with me, and then fell to my knees between my dead grandmother and dying sister, clutching their combined hands in mine.

Then they were both gone.

Blood soaked my bare legs as I rocked back and forth. I gagged on the coppery scent filling the foyer. Stinging tears flooded my eyes. Pain-filled moments that felt like an eternity dragged on until Gran's old clock chimed eleven times, forcing me to dismiss the pain. Fear for my life and Lissie's took its place. I had to find her.

I grabbed the crumpled paper hanging from my sister's jeans. It wasn't a scrap at all but a thick sheet, and when I unfolded it, Will Hastings's eyes stared back at me. Something senseless, something I couldn't rationalize that was neither right nor wrong skipped through my mind and banged around inside my skull.

Isobel had taken my drawing. Beneath his picture, she'd written a name—Ethan—and some numbers. Ethan? I

shoved it into my pocket and jumped up, causing myself to slip in blood, righting myself briefly only to stumble and crash into the center table. I anchored there for a moment to catch my breath. My hands trembled, my mind reeling, unable to compose complete thoughts. *Run.* I ran up the old Victorian staircase and called out for Lissie.

Her bedroom was at the back of the house, and when I got there, the door was open. I burst through and pounded the side of my fist against the light switch.

The room spun. I reached for the doorframe and pulled in a deep breath to combat the sickening rush of adrenaline. I called out again. "Lissie, are you here?"

There was no reply—no sound at all. No sign of her even after searching beneath the bed and in her closet. I hit the hallway and headed to Isobel's room, but Lissie wasn't there either. My own room was just as empty.

A sob pushed upward into the back of my throat as I raced to the last bedroom. It was there, in Gran's room, where I heard a thump against the wall. Everything in me froze. Then it came again—another soft thump against the far wall.

I sprinted across the room to the walk-in. Lissie screamed. She was crouched in the corner of the secret room at the back of the closet. Her hands covered her head. She hid in the same little room where Isobel and I had hosted clandestine tea parties with our dolls when we were children. I didn't know my sister had shown Lissie our hiding place but thanked God she had.

"Lissie, sweetheart—" I lowered myself in front of her, peeled her hands from her head, and lifted her chin so she could see me. She lunged like a wild animal and wrapped both arms so tightly around my neck I had to loosen them to breathe.

We were in danger—the rolling in my gut was proof. The best course of action would've been to get out of the house, but for several moments, I couldn't move. I could do nothing more than hold my trembling niece.

Isobel's last words were instructions. Find her daughter and run.

I needed to move.

I listened carefully for sounds anomalous to the old house. There was nothing more than the soft whistling from the air ducts. "I need to call for help, then we're going to leave," I whispered. "But you must stay here while I get my phone. Understand? Do not move. I won't leave without you." I didn't want her to see, didn't want the image of her mother's lifeless body burned into her memory.

I pressed Lissie into the corner and exited the secret room. My fingers dragged along the top of the door casing until finding the key I used to open the large trunk tucked in one corner of the closet. I opened a black box and removed Pearl, and then rummaged through the trunk until finding a loaded magazine with six rounds and jammed it into the gun.

Pearl was a pretty little twenty-five-caliber automatic pistol. A gift to my mother from my father, so I had been told. It had engraved nickel plating and a mother-of-pearl stock. Natural patina added beauty to the piece. I wasn't unfamiliar with the gun despite the fact I'd never before carried it. Gran tried to give it to me several times, though I'd refused her each time. Isobel would have taken it—had she not already had two of her own.

My sister was prepared for all unknowns as if Earth's destruction were coming. Not only had she owned guns, but she'd also practiced weekly at the local shooting range. "Why can't you listen for once? Take it, and after you learn how to use it, we'll get you something more useful. Do it, Ellie. Take the gun," she'd insisted after our grandmother tattled on me.

We celebrated her thirtieth birthday two weeks earlier. The three years that separated Isobel and me seemed like three decades. We couldn't have been more different.

I stuffed the gun into the waistband of my shorts at the small of my back and tiptoed out of the closet, pulling the door shut and listening before I entered the hallway. In Lissie's room, I made quick work of stuffing a backpack with some of her things before creeping to mine where I added my phone charger and car keys.

My cell phone was downstairs in the foyer. I sidled down the wooden stair treads with my eyes focused upward on the wrought iron and crystal chandelier. It was on the floor near their bodies, so I crawled past the ornate twin entry doors but kept my head turned away. Vomit burned my throat as I beat it back down. I reached out and fumbled until making contact with the phone. Once it was in my grip, I hung my head and fought my body's overwhelming urge to faint.

I needed to get up, get us out.

It was too late. A floorboard creaked behind me. The pounding of my heart flooded my ears. Someone was in the house. I'd screwed up—we shouldn't have still been there.

"You shouldn't be here," the intruder's voice echoed. ■

*Kelli Clare is a former human resource executive and contributing writer for a Forbes- and TIME-recognized online publication for women. She has been a progressive voice for a global coalition of bloggers focused on issues involving women, children, and world hunger. Critics have called her award-winning debut novel elegant, gripping, and provocative. Kelli is an active member of the Women's Fiction Writers Association, Romance Writers of America, and the Mystery/Suspense Chapter of Romance Writers of America.*





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# SUSPENSE MAGAZINE BOOK REVIEWS INSIDE THE PAGES

## THE DARKLING BRIDE

By Laura Andersen

A true path that allows readers to leap from generation to generation, "The Darkling Bride" is one spellbinder that people will never forget.

Her name is Lady Jenny Gallagher. She is young, only twenty-three years of age, but she has lost her life while at home. Deeprath Castle is the location of this "accidental death." A stunning Gothic homestead, so to speak, located in the lush green Irish country. The Lady lost her life in 1883... but the death will echo within the walls for a long time to come.

Fast forward to the year 1992. Lily and her husband Cillian Gallagher are also found dead within the castle. Whether it was a murder/suicide or something even worse, remains to be seen. Now, we come to 2015, and Carragh Ryan travels to this castle for a job. She is to inventory the library inside Deeprath which is a huge job, yet Carragh just so happens to be more in love with books than anything else in the world...so far. Upon going to Deeprath, she finds herself in the midst of a historical collection that would cause any book lovers' eyes to fall out, as well as in the company of a man by the name of Aidan Gallagher who has family issues to say the least lurking in his past. He also holds a secret that, if Carragh uncovers, may just lead to yet another life lost in this breathtaking setting.

'Nuff said? Oh, yeah. There is so much within this book, from history to romance to suspense to downright awe-inspiring scenery that every reader will have an absolute ball on this author's incredible journey.

Reviewed by Amy Lignor, author of "The Double-Edged Sword" published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■



## A SOUFFLÉ OF SUSPICION

By Daryl Wood Gerber

This is the second serving of the newest series by Gerber called, the *French Bistro Mysteries*, and it is just as delicious as the first.

Readers go back to this fun place of frivolity and incredible food. Unfortunately, the fun and happiness is tested by something extremely sinister this time around.

In Nouvelle Vie, "Crush Week" is upon everyone. Tourists are filling the town, the shops and Mimi's Bistro and Maison Rousseau, partaking in the events that come along with the pressing of the world-renowned grapes that thrive in the Napa Valley. Mimi and the gang are busy beyond belief and she's even putting together a "Sweet Treats Festival" for the visitors so they can enjoy everything from cakes to croissants to the ultimate soufflés created by the masters who live in the area.

Mimi does have help, of course. In fact, it is Renee, the sister of Chef Camille, who is shouting out orders and turning into somewhat of a tyrant while taking the reins and ruling over the festival. Not only is her attitude a problem, but all may fall to ruin when Renee is found murdered in the chef's kitchen.

Mimi is a woman still making a name for herself in the industry and building her clientele so that her business will thrive. Murder is the last thing she needs on her plate, so she immediately begins to investigate to try and solve things before they get too far out of hand to manage. Trouble is, because of the way Renee acted towards everyone, the list of suspects who had something against her is quite long.

When it comes to the word "appetizing" you automatically think of food. But when it comes to the literary scene, this series is well beyond appetizing. Not only are the foods incredible (make sure to check out the awesome recipes provided), but the characters and plot are equally superb.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of *The Write Companion* ■

## THE TRIAL AND EXECUTION OF THE TRAITOR GEORGE WASHINGTON

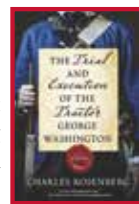
By Charles Rosenberg

Alternate history novels almost always are intriguing just for the possibilities of what might have happened if things occurred differently. Rosenberg takes the historical fact of a kidnapping plot involving General George Washington during the Revolutionary War and crafts a historical novel that takes it a step further. What if Washington was captured and forced back to London to stand trial for his crimes? What would have happened with the war effort? Would Washington have been more successful as a martyr?

Jeremiah Black, a colonel in the King's Guard, is given the task of kidnapping Washington. What happens next and the changes that occur is fascinating and a look at another side of the man who became the first President of the United States.

The ambiguous ending is a bit disappointing, but it might just be evidence that a sequel is coming. This is a fun novel for thriller and history buffs.

Reviewed by Jeff Ayers, a professional librarian, book reviewer, and panel master and the author of several books, the most recent being the YA mystery "The Fourth Lion" (with Kevin Lauderdale) for *Suspense Magazine* ■



## HOW FAR SHE'S COME

By Holly Brown

Cheyenne Florian is twenty-four years old and at the point where all her dreams are about to come true. What this means for Cheyenne has nothing to do with some magical wedding day; she is a broadcast journalist who has been recruited to be the new correspondent on a brand new network called the Independent News Network (INN).

Unlike other news networks that have been around for a while, INN is one of those "fresh" ideas where they are all about being innovative and not working like the others do. They want independent thinking and they tout the fact that their appeal will come from being "out of the box" and allow people to change their views and be able to see stories from all sides. Trouble is, it does not take long for the "dream job" to turn into a whole lot of hot air for Cheyenne, when she realizes that INN is about as normal as normal can get.

Men are everywhere and...in charge. Cheyenne even has a problem with female workers who don't believe she should have been pushed up the proverbial ladder so fast. Things become even stranger when a diary from 1991 is left for her that was written by a female broadcaster named Elyse. A note comes along with it that tells Cheyenne to learn from the past. Whether this is a gift, a historical document that will inspire her to do a better job, or an outright threat remains to be seen.

She soon finds that she is a lot like Elyse, whose destiny is not something that Cheyenne wants for herself, and as this thrilling cat-and-mouse type plot unfolds, readers will be hooked.

Author Holly Brown has created another thrilling ride while taking the all-too-familiar male versus female power struggle and making it into an irresistible read.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of *The Write Companion* ■



## READ HERRING HUNT

By V.M. Burns

It's difficult to know if a series is going to continue on after reading only one book. But when it comes to this, the *Mystery Bookshop* series, this follow-up to the amazing premiere is just as fantastically written!

Samantha Washington is a mystery writer and the owner of the Market Street Mysteries Bookstore located in North Harbor, Michigan. Sam has already experienced the world of a sleuth, so to speak, up close and personal. This time around, however, a crime is committed that's even closer to home.

Heroic MISU quarterback, Dawson Alexander, is known throughout town. To Sam, he's as close to her as any son could be. He also just happens to be her tenant. Unfortunately for Dawson, some of the gilding has flaked off his golden crown in the eyes of the local police. His ex-girlfriend has been found murdered and Dawson (to the law) is the prime suspect. Thankfully, Sam has a sister who's also a lawyer, and Jenna is called in to build a case that will prove Dawson is completely innocent.

Also coming in to help are the ladies of the Sleuthing Senior Book Club who want more than anything to work with Sam and her grandmother, Nana Jo, to return the golden crown to the QB they believe in. Not only must Sam concentrate on finding clues that will help unveil the real killer, but she must delve into her world of mystery writing and head back to England to create and solve a murder attempt against the one and only Wallis Simpson; the divorced American who upset the British throne when Edward VIII left his own crown behind in order to be with her.

As good as any Jessica Fletcher story could be, Burns has a way with words and her characters are absolutely riveting. There is no doubt this is one series that will continue for a good, long time to come.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of *The Write Companion*

## BROKEN PLACES

By Tracy Clark

It's always exciting to see a debut novel, and this was not only exciting to see, it was amazing to read. This first *Chicago Mystery* focuses on a former policewoman by the name of Cass Raines, and is being touted as the first of three.

Cass loves the Windy City but decided she could alleviate some of the stress in her life if she walked the path of a P.I. instead of her ultra-tense role as a cop. Her decision also came about because of the bullet she had to take when a colleague completely botched a confrontation with an armed suspect.

Affected badly, Cass resigned and is actually having a far easier life being a self-employed woman who, although she still searches for justice, only has to rely on herself to get the job done and done correctly. The rest of the hours in her day are filled with watching over friends and tenants in her apartment building in Hyde Park, and playing chess with Father Ray Heaton who is a truly supportive parental figure for Cass.

She cares for him so much that Cass doesn't think twice when Father Ray asks her to help him find out who has been vandalizing his church. Seems like an easy one to solve, but unfortunately for Cass, she walks into the church only to find a murder victim in the confessional and the dead body of a known gangbanger close by.

Cass knows this area around Saint Brendan's and is not quick to jump on board with the lead detective's belief that this was simply a burglary gone wrong, so Cass sets out on a determined path to unearth the real killer and solve the crime herself.

The author, Tracy Clark, has done a great job with Cass. The woman is a spitball of fire, as my own grandmother used to say, and one character that readers will follow whether this turns out to be three books or twenty.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of *The Write Companion* ■



## WHAT SHE DOESN'T KNOW

By Andrew E. Kaufman

Released back into society after ten years in a psychiatric hospital, Riley Harper finds most people still see her as being guilty of her daughter's murder—a charge that was never substantiated—but she has been found guilty in the court of public opinion.

Her sister, Erin, a kick-ass prosecution attorney, does everything she can to help Riley fall back into something of a life; everything but let her sister know if she, too, feels she's guilty, or not. Bullied by the people in her neighborhood, Riley has few friends and is subjected to a life of isolation, other than the attacks on her well-being, which range from break-ins to her car being vandalized. Her neighbors know how to give her a welcome back fit for the murderess they all know she is.

Looking for a fresh start in life, Riley spies on, stalks and eventually worms herself into a relationship with an unsuspecting lady in an adjacent building. A friend from the world of affluence and freedom, not the same Section 8 block of flats she is relegated to reside in. However, as the title so aptly points out, there is one thing that Riley doesn't know, and it could cost her the one thing she has left: her life.

Kaufman has written a creepy little novel that won't let you stop reading. I devoured it in four hours, so if you're looking for the perfect in-flight read or have an evening to spare, read it all. You may have a hard time falling to sleep afterwards, but you won't be disappointed.

Reviewed by Mark P. Sadler, author of "Kettle of Vultures" ■

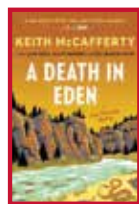


## A DEATH IN EDEN

By Keith McCafferty

Fans of the *Sean Stranahan* mysteries will be thrilled with this newest title!

We begin with a child named Mary Louise. She and her family are sleeping at one of the designated campsites along the Smith River. Needing to go to the loo in the middle of the night, she and her mother head out into this bear-infested territory, and end up seeing something far more frightening than any bear.



What the little girl reports to State Investigator Harold Little Feather is that she was chased by a scarecrow. Although this seems a bit odd, it starts to make sense when many people spot scarecrow-like effigies placed all along the river. Not only that, but there are words of warning posted in regards to a location called Smith Mine. Someone, some group perhaps, wants to use menacing words to stop a proposed copper-mining project that, if allowed, will harm the purity of the water in Smith River and destroy this crown jewel of trout streams.

But what seems like an ecological attack at first turns bloody when a decapitated body is found in the river. Harold finds himself going back through the past in order to solve the crimes that are occurring in the present.

However, Harold is not the only one "sailing" this waterway. Sean Stranahan has been hired to be a guide for a strange group: the manager of this supposed copper-mine project, and the president of the grass roots organization devoted to stopping the project. This odd duo is together because they are working on a documentary that will show their two completely different views on this matter... and what they're both willing to do in order to succeed.

Readers will gasp as they watch these two tales come together and a dangerous moment play out within these canyon walls. Yet again, Keith McCafferty has hit a home run!

Reviewed by Amy Lignor, author of "The Double-Edged Sword" published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■



## A RUMORED FORTUNE

By Joanna Davidson Politano

It is a whole lot of fun to visit this, Trevelyan Castle, and meet the woman who is truly the poorest heiress in all of Victorian England.

The woman sitting on this fortune is Tressa Harlow. The reason she is, in fact, poor, is because she was sired by a man who simply did not trust banks or financial institutions in any way, shape or form. Of course, he also had no trust for members of his family that were beyond greedy. It is said that Tressa's father hid his wealth somewhere on his estate. However, before he could pass along the secret location, he up and died, leaving Tressa and her ailing mother with a large house, an enormous vineyard, and no ability whatsoever to pay the employees or the debts owed.

Rumors and gossip grow, causing the wolves to appear who wish to search for the buried treasure using their condolences and fake grief as a mask. Tressa, thankfully, is one tough cookie, but these fortune hunters simply won't stop. Luckily, she meets up with a man by the name of Donegan Vance. He worked for her father and wishes to make a deal with Tressa. He will help her locate the money if she will help him work in the vineyards.

Tressa's mother has her own ideas. She believes that for her daughter to have a wealthy future, Tressa must marry a suitor with money to burn by the name of Andrew James Carrington, III. Tressa is pulled in all directions. She finds herself falling for Donegan, dealing with her mother's choice, working the vineyards, and trying her best to not anger the other employees and cause them to riot. All the while, she must try and discover her father's fortune before someone beats her to it.

The author has done a great job, offering up a plot filled with wit, charm, action, and a lot of female strength. Reviewed by Amy Lignor, author of "The Double-Edged Sword" published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■

## AFTERMATH

By Kelley Armstrong

It's been three painful years since the world shattered for young Skye Gilchrist. Three years since her world was rocked from its foundation. Not that she's complaining—she isn't. And she's not looking for compassion either, because you can't ask for that when it was your own brother who was involved in the school shooting that killed several students and ripped a community apart.

Skye and her mother slipped away like thieves in the night after the tragedy; a horror that no one would have ever guessed sixteen-year-old Luka would have participated in. Now Skye has returned, and while she's saved from going to school in the actual building where the shooting took place, she's going to be face-to-face with everyone she and her mother originally ran from. And, suffice to say, no one is rolling out the welcome mat.

Three years ago, Jesse Mandal was an altogether different boy. Academically focused, he was a good kid with a clear future and a growing crush on his best friend, Skye. But on that fateful day, Jesse lost more than his best friend, he lost his brother and he lost himself.

Skye's return is an opportunity for some who see her as an easy target, and she's used to it. It's not as if she's new to being bullied, but when sticks-and-stones intimidation escalates to being locked in a burning room, things are clearly more serious than Skye can handle on her own. Someone with an agenda and link to the past wants her gone. But where do you turn when no one believes you?

I was hooked. "Aftermath" is told with a balanced sensitivity to its subject matter while the pace and storyline expertly speed along. With characters that offer both heartbreak and hope, Armstrong has written a compelling story that will stay with you long after you've finished reading.

Reviewed by Shannon Raab ■



## OBSCURA

By Joe Hart

Before I began to read "Obscura," I was a bit skeptical. "Oh, another medical thriller," I thought. Boy, was I wrong! From the first page, Joe Hart hits you with three G's of literary force. Instantly, you're glued to the chair, your eyes wide, your palms sweaty. Every word of this novel has been carefully crafted and is essential to the reader. "Obscura" is a tour-de-force of a thriller.

When it opens (in the future), we meet Gillian Ryan, a lab tech, happily married and a soon to be mom. From normal conversation, she picks up on her husband's stark reality: he has become mentally ill, suffering from an array of symptoms known as Losian's disease. A disease that slowly takes away your short term memory, brings on bouts of paranoia and eventually fits of violence before it takes your life.

We next meet Gillian eight years later, she is now a doctor of neuroscience and the mother of a seven-year-old, who like her father, is a victim of Losian's. When NASA presents her the opportunity to help find a cure, she's skeptical due to having to conduct her research on the Space Station. Reluctantly, she agrees, knowing it's the only way to help her daughter. Thus begins a story so mind-blowing that I guarantee you will read "Obscura" in one sitting and that it will keep you up nights wondering about the 'what ifs.'

What appears on the surface to be a medical/science-based thriller quickly becomes so much more. It is a stark reminder that the physical nature of who we are is nothing when compared to the emotional aspect of who we are.

With "Obscura," Joe Hart has vaulted himself into the stratosphere of thriller writers.

Reviewed by J.M. LeDuc, author of *The Kiche Chronicles* ■

## DEATH AL FRESCO

By Leslie Karst

Sally Solari is back in this third book of the *Sally Solari Mysteries*, and this time it's her very own family she's fighting to save.

The Solari family restaurant has a strong name and is well-respected. Right now, the autumn days in Santa Cruz are absolutely lovely; the weather is fantastic and Sally has decided to attend an open-air painting class so she can educate herself more about Paul Gauguin. He was the initial reason behind creating the restaurant Sally has just inherited, and she loves the fact that she will learn even more about her own heritage and why Gauguin was such an inspiration to her family.

You can't get a better life than walking along the stunning coastline of Monterey Bay, soaking up the sun, and enjoying your career. Which means, of course, that something has to come along to ruin it. Sally's world goes a bit mad when her dog Buster uncovers a corpse tangled within the kelp during their walk.

The dead man is a local fisherman that everyone knew as Gino. Sally knew him well, being that Gino was a local at the restaurant before he mysteriously vanished just a few nights before. Other diners claim that when Gino left the restaurant that night he was falling down drunk, although the waitress serving him states that he was just fine and only drank a couple of beers. As the voices grow louder, law enforcement comes down upon Sally's father for allowing a completely drunk customer to walk home alone, basically claiming that because of his negligence, Gino ended up dead.

As Sally goes on the hunt to clear her father's name, she soon realizes that there are many secrets being hidden by the people of this town, and some of those secrets led to murder. Author Leslie Karst continues to provide colorful characters in this beautiful location, and it is always fun to see what Sally Solari will get up to next.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of *The Write Companion* ■





## THE FAIRFAX INCIDENT

By Terrence McCauley

It is 1933 in "The Big Apple" and Charlie Doherty is a private detective who has been speaking with an elderly lady in regards to how her husband, Walter Fairfax, died. This new client wants Detective Doherty to prove that her husband was murdered, even though the original consensus was that he committed suicide. After all, that's what it "looked" like. But looks can be deceiving and according to Mrs. Fairfax, Walter would not and could not have taken his own life. With that being said, Doherty has a new job; a job that includes dangers he certainly didn't see coming.

Trying to uncover if the Fairfax marriage was a happy one, Charlie does ask the widow if there is any one place he should start his investigation. In response, Mrs. Fairfax gives Charlie an envelope containing the names of Walter's known associates; all powerful men, they are also more than a bit sinister. Taking this, as well as a nice retainer check with him, Charlie is ushered out the door by the butler and his investigation begins.

As Charlie takes on tasks and meets up with these associates, readers will be glued to the pages. Detective Doherty is a great character to follow on his mission, as the complexities and the twists and turns commence. It is also a great background/location to have, as the author does a wonderful job recreating the trying times and wealthy habits that both played large parts in making 1930's New York City an unforgettable time period and what some call, "the Gotham of yesteryear."

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of *The Write Companion* ■

## KAPPY KING AND THE PICKLE KAPER

By Amy Lillard

This is absolutely one of the most fun and entertaining Amish cozy mysteries you could possibly get your hands on. Great main character, Kappy King, first came into reader's lives in the "Puppy Kaper." But now the "Pickle Kaper" has her once again living a single, happy life in her hometown of Blue Sky, Pennsylvania. A calm life, until a young woman by the name of Sally June Esh leaves this world in a tragic way.

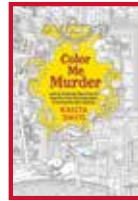
This is not murder... or, at least, it doesn't look like it at first to the people in the Amish community. Just like Kappy creates and sells her special caps (*kapps*) that the local women use to cover their hair, the Esh family make and sell their own pickles that everyone loves. This one day, however, while delivering, their horse and buggy is run off the road by a car.

Edie is Kappy's friend. Although she is an ex-Amish who has been shunned by the community, Kappy is also seen as a bit odd because she's still unmarried. But she and Edie get along quite well. And when Edie shows her the texts she is receiving that literally state that Sally's death was no accident, this duo teams up to make sure that the killer or killers are found immediately.

Secrets arise that include everything from Sally's own brother going outside the community and getting an English girlfriend; to new people in town who have started to produce and sell their own brand of pickles. As more sleuthing occurs between Kappy and Edie, more twists and turns occur that make for a fantastic mystery that holds your attention right up until the very end.

Kappy is one of those "breaths of fresh air" in the cozy world. And after her first two, it will be exciting to see what "kaper" she gets into next.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of *The Write Companion* ■



## COLOR ME MURDER

By Krista Davis

Florrie Fox, manager of the Color Me Read bookstore by day and creator of intricate coloring books for adults by night, has a housing problem. For years she's rented an apartment in Reston, Virginia, but the commute is terrible. She's been on the hunt for new digs in Georgetown but, alas, the rents are beyond her budget. Then a miracle happens, thanks to the largesse of Professor John Maxwell, Florrie's boss. He offers her the opportunity to live in the carriage house adjacent to his own magnificent digs, rent-free.

There's a catch. Florrie has to move all her belongings into the house by 6:00 that evening, because his sister has been pressuring him to let her son, Delbert, live there. The professor detests his nephew, and in the brief encounter Florrie has with Delbert, she understands why.

On her first night, Florrie wakens to hear someone trying the handle of the French doors, and calls Maxwell and his majordomo, the very proper Mr. Dubois, to come to her rescue. When the professor's sister calls the next morning, hysterical that Delbert didn't come home the previous night, Florrie can't help but wonder if he was her late-night intruder. Although she dislikes Delbert, she's not prepared to find his dead body hidden in the bookstore.

Things go from bad to worse when Professor Maxwell is arrested for murder. And the police, including the very handsome Sergeant Jonquille, feel that Florrie knows more than she realizes. Doodling clues in her sketchbook, Florrie begins to consider other colorful characters who've been involved in Delbert's life, all with a motive for murder. And she's shocked to discover that she should add her sister, Veronica, to the list.

"Color Me Murder" is the first title in the *Pen & Ink Mystery* series by the prolific Krista Davis. It's a terrific start to what promises to be a clever series. I'm looking forward to more adventures with Florrie Fox and her pals.

Reviewed by Susan Santangelo, author of "In-Laws Can Be Murder," published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■

## BLEEDING TARTS

By Kirsten Weiss

For those who missed falling head-over-heels in love with Kirsten Weiss's characters when they premiered in Book One of the *Pie Town Mystery* series, "The Quiche and the Dead," this one will absolutely earn your loyalty in seconds.

You are in the Old West... sort of, and Valentine Harris returns to provide her scrumptious pies for an upcoming pie-eating contest that's being held at the Bar X. This just happens to be a cool (fake) ghost town set on the border of Silicon Valley that's rented out for private events. Valentine is working her butt off to make great pies in order to bring in more customers to her Pie Town shop; while also striving to make the owner of the Bar X so happy with her product that she becomes their regular supplier from here on out.

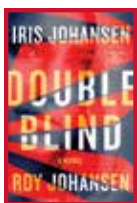
Oddly enough, this is one pie-eating contest that is not filled with fun and frivolity. In fact, directly upon her arrival a bullet shoots the cherry pie that Valentine is carrying. So much for a fake ghost town, seeing as that murder is afoot. No, not the cherry pie, but the Bar X bartender who has been shot dead in an alley.

Try being a pie baker who now is on the hunt to solve a murder in a ghost town that's not even real. Valentine deals with a little bit of everything in this great story, including her own friend and pie crust specialist, Charlese, who urges Valentine to bring down the bad guy who is apparently roaming the Old West of Silicon Valley.

Weiss has provided a follow-up that earns this series a gold star. Not only that, but she also offers up the most delicious pie recipes you could possibly imagine. It will be easy to savor every bite of both story and treat!

Reviewed by Amy Lignor, author of "The Double-Edged Sword" published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■





## DOUBLE BLIND

By Iris Johansen and Roy Johansen

These two incredible writers are bestsellers all by themselves, but when writing together, this mother/son team has also produced some of the very best suspense fiction to be found. This time around, hired gun for both the CIA and the FBI (not to mention, a fan favorite character from this writing team), Kendra Michaels, is back in the limelight.

For those who know Kendra, they know her odd backstory. After all, you don't often come across a once blind person who can now shoot the eyes out of a rooster, so to speak, from hundreds of yards away. Not only is her aim extremely good but her powers of observation are even better, which is why law enforcement counts on her to get more than her required job done.

A body has been found only a few blocks from where Kendra lives. Even worse, the corpse was in possession of an envelope with Kendra's name written on it. Inside said envelope is what one would call a generic video of a wedding reception. There are no assassin's names or terrorist threats that come along with it, and no matter how many people watch it, they can find absolutely no reason why this woman would have been murdered while trying to deliver the tape.

As the scenes progress and the confusion starts to turn from hazy to clear, readers will be introduced to a killer whose plan is set in stone. Money is involved, as well as a law firm holding on to secrets and a billion dollar corporation that has its own dark corners that need to be explored.

Kendra, as always, is a great character to follow. When she joins up with P.I. Jessie Mercado and her gun-for-hire mentality also combines with agent-for-hire Adam Lynch's skills, this story goes from 0 to 60 in seconds. This book once again shows why the name "Johansen" is synonymous with perfection.

Reviewed by Amy Lignor, author of "The Double-Edged Sword" published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■

## ANTIQUE BLUES

By Jane K. Cleland

Josie Prescott has finally said yes to long-time beau Ty Alvarez, the former police chief of the small New Hampshire town of Rocky Point. Both have very demanding jobs—Josie is the owner of a highly successful antiques business, and Ty is Homeland Security's Regional Director of Training. The pair are finding it's tough to squeeze wedding planning into their packed schedules, especially when they can't agree on what kind of wedding they want.

When good friend Mo Shannon asks Josie to appraise a woodblock print she has purchased by Utagawa Hiroshige, one of Japan's most revered nineteenth century artists, Josie takes on the challenge. At the same time, Mo's father asks her to appraise his vintage Martin guitar, allegedly once the property of Robert Johnson, the great American blues artist. Wedding planning will have to wait. Then, Mo is murdered.

It doesn't take long for Josie to zero in on who might be responsible for Mo's death: Mo's sister Lydia's violent boyfriend, Cal. The Shannon family already suspects that Lydia is a domestic violence victim, although she denies it. Plus, Cal is the person who sold Mo the Japanese print, presented a possibly fake bill of sale, and now has conveniently disappeared. Coincidence? Josie thinks otherwise.

In her quest to find Cal, Josie turns to her pals in the antiques network, befriends the owner of her town's underground high-end casino, and uncovers long hidden affairs. But even Josie is surprised when Cal's dead body is discovered; another murder victim. So much for Josie's number one suspect.

I always enjoy a visit to Rocky Point. It's fun to say hello to Cleland's characters and find out what they've been doing. But this time, the author kept me guessing as to who—and why—Mo was killed. And slimy Cal. I almost (but not quite) felt sorry for him. "Antique Blues" is a great read from its opening chapter to its final page. Highly recommended.

Reviewed by Susan Santangelo, author of "In-Laws Can Be Murder," published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■



## THE ARMORED SAINT

By Myke Cole

In his first of the *Sacred Thrones* trilogy, Cole leads us to Hammersdown, the hamlet where Heloise and her father live. On the road they are stopped by the Pilgrims, members of the Order, who ensure the laws of the land are kept. Their leader, the Sojourner, scours the countryside searching for wizards and those who provide shelter to wizards, as they are an affront to the Emperor.

Heloise is a head-strong youth whose attitude catches the attention of the Sojourner. She brings grief to her father, and the village's inhabitants are subjected to a raid from the Pilgrims. Many of the villagers don't hold with the Emperor's will and a battle is fought, as Heloise hides from the brigands but is forced into action to save the clan.

Debuting the war-machine armor one of the craftsman has created, she takes on evil to save the village from certain peril, even if it means her own death.

Because the heroine is a teenage girl this has a feel of YA to it, though the story is strong, detailed and entertaining for adults, too. A brutal, dark, fantasy novel with a female Celtic warrior that feels like the second coming of Boudicca, and a strong debut from a cerebral author.

Reviewed by Mark P. Sadler, author of "Kettle of Vultures" ■

## THREE STRIKES, YOU'RE DEAD

By Elena Hartwell

When the words "private investigator" are used, readers have a familiar type of person they see in their own minds; whether that involves the familiar pipe of Sherlock Holmes or the harsh mouth of V.I. Warshawski (written by Sara Paretsky). Eddie Shoes, however, is her own special type of P.I., and one that readers have latched on to.

When this story begins, Eddie is all about having fun. She's about to throw herself into a mother-daughter weekend with her mom, Chava, at a posh resort so they can celebrate Mom's new job at a casino. (Mom is a card-counter, by the way.)

Unfortunately, the happiness of the situation dims when on the very first day, Eddie takes a calming hike by herself and ends up coming upon a campsite where an extremely injured man is lying. If that's not enough, a forest fire breaks out and Eddie must struggle to help this man onto his legs so that they can both be free of the flames. Too far gone, the man simply hands Eddie what turns out to be a valuable rosary and tells her that his own daughter has gone missing. Right before passing away, he begs the P.I. to find her.

Waking up in the local hospital, barely surviving the fire, Eddie sits with her mother and mob-connected father while she tells her story to the local police, who begin their search for a girl they simply cannot find. But Eddie made a promise to a dead man. Problem is, except for the photo of this missing girl and a rosary in hand, Eddie has no more clues to go on.

A colorful character with a colorful family, it will be fun to see where this series goes next. It is not a surprise that Eddie has turned into a new "wanna read" P.I. in the mystery world.

Reviewed by Amy Lignor, author of "The Double-Edged Sword" published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■



## CITY OF SHARKS

By Kelli Stanley

Private Investigator Miranda Corbie has solved crimes, thus far, in “The City of Ghosts,” “The City of Secrets,” and “The City of Dragons.” So it only seems fitting to find Miranda back in action in the 1940’s, exploring her beloved city of San Francisco and taking on sharks...an island of them, in fact.

One day, Louise Crowley, the assistant to a San Francisco publisher, enters Miranda’s office and tells the P.I. how frightening her life is right now. She talks to Miranda about some horrible occurrences that include receiving evil letters, a box of candy that has been poisoned, and even being shoved from behind into the path of an oncoming streetcar. She needs Miranda’s help getting to the bottom of who, she believes, is trying to kill her.

Now, Miranda has her own problems at the moment. She’s in a very emotional time period seeing as that she’s about to close up shop and travel to war-torn Britain. But she decides to take this on as the last case she will attempt to solve in San Francisco, and soon finds out that perhaps a blitzkrieged country would have been easier to deal with.

While investigating, Miranda stumbles into the path of a murder that brings her deep into the heart of the publishing game and leads her straight to the island of sharks, better known as Alcatraz.

Not only is the crime, the victim, the characters...all fantastic, but the author has done what she’s done in the past with this series and brought 1940’s San Francisco into focus. There is an emotional depth to this P.I.’s life that allows the reader to journey with her as she meets up with John Steinbeck, and explores everything from the colorful Chinatown to the famous Nob Hill. It’s going to be extremely difficult to ‘wait and see’ where Miranda will end up solving her next crime.

Reviewed by Amy Lignor, author of “The Double-Edged Sword” published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■

## BELIEVE ME

By JP Delaney

It’s difficult to be an out-of-work actress. In fact, most of the time all you can do is wait tables until you’re discovered. But for one by the name of Claire, waitressing is most definitely not going to be enough. You see, Claire not only needs money to pay the rent and other bills, but she also needs to find a way to get a green card in order to stay in America.

The occupation she lands is far from what she was expecting. To save her from having to go back home and give up on her career is a law firm. This firm specializes in divorce cases, and they “utilize” pretty girls to entrap men and get their promiscuous advances and propositions on tape. That way they can walk into court with their clients, the broken-hearted wives, and win—destroying their cheating husbands and taking their money right out from under them. However, these men turn from run-of-the-mill jerks into something far more frightening.

There is a murderer on the loose and the police suspect a man for killing his wife, and perhaps even more women. What they need Claire to do is act as the decoy in order to get this man to confess on tape. But if he’s gotten away with murder all this time, it is certain that he knows exactly what to do in order to escape conviction. Claire will definitely have to pull out all her acting skills in order to trick this one. And if she’s not careful, she could just end up being his next victim.

JP Delaney has always been a master at psychological thrillers and the games that dark minds play, and this amazing book is no different. The action never stops and the ending, trying to determine which character is the predator and which are his prey, is a mind-blowing experience.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of *The Write Companion* ■



## IN THE VINES

By Shannon Kirk



Talk about awesome Gothic horror, Kirk has delivered some of the coolest characters and a plot of pure psychological thrills and chills that will cause any book lover to read into the night.

The woman’s name is “Mop,” short for Mary Olivia Pentecost. Mop is one of those people who have a dark backstory; born into a truly wealthy family, Mop has been a product of secrets and a member of a clan that has done all they can to keep the outside world from getting too close to them.

It has been two years since Mop lost her mother to a mysterious death. All she wants is to try to bring closure to the situation so that she can move on with her life and make the future a great deal brighter than the murky past. Heading back to the New England estate that houses her friend and confidante, Auntie Liv, Mop finds herself within a location that, if the walls could talk, would be able to tell her the truths behind the lies, as well as share with her the clues that could help her solve the puzzle of her family’s history.

But the more Mop tries to uncover, the more frightening things become. There was a reason why her beloved Auntie Liv became cloistered within this estate, and if Mop keeps digging, she may just end up being a victim herself.

The author has done a stunning job when it comes to plot, location, and character, but her real talent lies within the emotions she brings to the pages. Readers root for Mop, as they get just as scared over the twists and turns that come to pass. This is one book that causes the mind to spin, in a good way, making it a true keeper for your own collection.

Reviewed by Amy Lignor, author of “The Double-Edged Sword” published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■

## DEATH AND A POT OF CHOWDER

By Cornelia Kidd

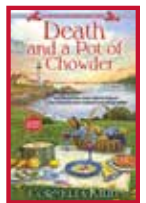
Anna Winslow, her husband, Burt, and their fourteen-year-old son, Jake, have lived on tiny Quarry Island, off the coast of Maine, their entire lives. As have Anna’s mother, grandmother, and all of Burt’s family, including his brother, Carl. Burt and Carl are lobstermen, like their father before them. Needless to say, on an island this small, if Anna and Burt aren’t related to another island resident, they know them very well. At least, that’s how it appears on the surface.

When Anna gets an unexpected letter, her whole life is turned upside down. The letter is from Izzie Jordan, a younger half-sister Anna never knew she had, who wants to meet her. Anna is excited, but on the same day she drives to pick her up, Carl’s lobster boat is found abandoned and adrift. Later that evening, his body is found, but the police determine right away that he didn’t die from drowning. He was shot.

There’s no doubt Carl was murdered, and suspicion falls on Carl’s most recent girlfriend, whom he dumped. Hint: Carl was one busy boy with a very complicated love life. It turns out that money went through Carl’s hands like water, and Burt recently cleaned out the family bank account to help. When witnesses report that they had a big fight the day Carl died, and Burt’s rifle is determined to be the murder weapon, Burt is put in jail. As her world is falling down around her—including a son who starts skipping school and fighting with his friend—Anna turns to her newly found sister for help. With surprising results.

“Death and a Pot of Chowder” is the first in the *Maine Murder Mystery* series written by Cornelia Kidd, the nom de plume of Maine author Lea Wait. I enjoyed the deft plotting and the cast of characters, especially Anna and Izzie, a formidable team I look forward to knowing better in future books.

Reviewed by Susan Santangelo, author of “In-Laws Can Be Murder,” published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■



## A DOUBLE LIFE

By Flynn Berry

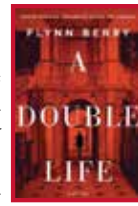
This is a terrific book from beginning to end, as the reader is first asked: “What would it be like to be the daughter of a notorious criminal who fled the country when you were eight years old and was never seen again?” A girl who is forced to live under an assumed identity after her family and their evil deeds create tabloid headlines.

Claire and her brother were children sleeping upstairs in their home when brutality entered their lives. A crime was committed right below them thirty years ago and their father basically up and disappeared. Although his car was found the next morning beside the English Channel, with front seats stained with blood, his body has yet to surface. Claire’s mother has stated forever that she had seen him in the house that horrific night, yet the man’s friends claim he wasn’t there and that he, himself, is a victim. So... who do you believe?

Thirty years later Claire is living a peaceful life in London, even though she just happens to be the daughter of a truly notorious murderer... or so the world believes. But when she is told that her father has finally resurfaced, Claire must decide which side she’s on. Was the man a victim who fled from someone trying to hurt him back then; or was he, himself, the killer everyone believes him to be?

Inspired by a very real, unsolved case where a British Lord attacked his wife, killed his children’s nanny and disappeared without a trace, Berry has taken facts and used her own brilliance to create a book that is impossible to put down.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of *The Write Companion* ■



## THE DISAPPEARED

By C.J. Box

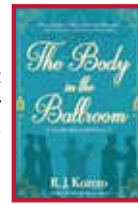
The well-known game warden of Wyoming, Joe Pickett, is back and dealing with a man by the name of Colter Allen who has just become the brand spankin’ new Governor of Wyoming.

For those who know Joe, they know that the last Governor in office asked him to do a great deal of investigative work on the hush-hush. And although Joe didn’t like the last man, he did respect him. Which is not the case when it comes to Colter Allen. There are questions surrounding Allen about everything from his finances to his net worth. He is flashy, loves to smile, and yet acts as fake as he looks. Unfortunately for Joe, the new man in charge needs a favor.

Joe is being sent to conduct an investigation that involves a wealthy British woman who has come up missing while staying at a high-end ranch. The assigned game warden in that area has recently quit his job, and Pickett has to go there and act as if he is the “temporary” man assigned to the job in order to solve this high-profile case. What Joe finds, however, is not one missing person, but three.

It’s a help to Joe that his own daughter works at the Silver Creek Ranch where this powerful CEO disappeared. So perhaps she can help him find out what happened between the time she left the ranch and the time she was supposed to board her outgoing flight in Denver. Not only is the woman gone, but her car hasn’t been seen either. Add to this another federal crime that hits far closer to home, the killing of several bald and golden eagles that Joe is called on to investigate, and you have a book with nonstop action that fans will go crazy over.

All the familiar supporting cast is back as C.J. Box once again delivers Pickett into a web of secrets, lies and murder. Reviewed by Amy Lignor, author of “The Double-Edged Sword” published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■



## THE BODY IN THE BALLROOM

By R.J. Korte

These *Alice Roosevelt Mysteries* have already been called “A Promising Series,” and that is most assuredly an understatement. With this newest title, people are back with Alice, the daughter of President Theodore Roosevelt, to see what she’s up to next. And this one will be even more surprising.

A lavish ball is planned; one that Alice has been invited to. This amateur sleuth certainly is excited about it. After all, she needs a bit of a break considering she already dealt with an assassin’s bullet in order to solve her first crime and uncover the perpetrator. Of course, this gala will be a whole lot more than just snooty rich people downing wine.

A poisonous concoction appears in one glass that makes this gala the last for one interesting partygoer. But, no fear, Alice is on the case. And she is automatically not “in line” with the law who believes that a mechanic is the one whodunit. This specific man being accused just so happens to be a very good friend of Secret Service Agent Joseph St. Clair. Thus, Alice and Joseph team up to prove that there is a snake among the wealthy guests that took a person out for his own reasons... and it certainly wasn’t the mechanic who threw the deadly wrench into the works.

As with most high-society issues, there is a monetary reason (along with a secret romance) that has brought this murder to fruition. But the deeper St. Clair and Alice get into this web of intrigue, the closer they get to losing their own lives.

A series that began with the incredible, “Alice and the Assassin” continues with this great tale that is the perfect combination of history and suspense. This is one new “star” that readers hope will continue to solve crimes and influence people for many books to come.

Reviewed by Amy Lignor, author of “The Double-Edged Sword” published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■



## PAPER GHOSTS

By Julia Heaberlin

From the word ‘go’ this book feels like you’re racing to win that Triple Crown. Not because the action blows you out of the water. Although that does occur, the real reason is because this author knows how to make the blood run cold as she introduces chilling characters, a frightening plot, and true psychological studies that delve into the darkest corners of the human mind.

Readers immediately meet up with this unknown person, a narrator who goes without a name; all that is known is she’s twenty-four years of age and has lived with an obsession for half of her life. A horrible crime was committed when this woman was only twelve years old. Her sister, Rachel, disappeared from her world in the great state of Texas and she has spent almost every waking hour since attempting to find out what happened.

There is a prime suspect when it comes to the crime. This woman believes that an older man by the name of Carl Louis Feldman is to blame. His job is being a documentary photographer. He also is a man who once stood in front of a judge when he was tried for a girl’s murder. The narrator sees a link to ten other missing girls within this man’s eerie photos and she is determined to bring him down even if law enforcement cannot.

Carl, now at the age of sixty-one, is dealing with dementia and claims that he has no knowledge of his past. Not one to be stopped, this woman makes a plan, takes on the role of his long-lost daughter, and takes Carl from his halfway house on a road trip where she’s determined to have him reveal the truth.

The emotion is amazing. The scenes and characters are both so strong and so believable that at times it’s difficult to know who, exactly, is the pathological liar and serial killer sitting in that car. Get ready to be terrified!

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of *The Write Companion* ■



## ONLY SKEIN DEEP

By Maggie Sefton

Knitting is all the rage when it comes to cozy mysteries lately, but the Sefton *Knitting Mysteries* have been going for a while now and they are still at the very top of any reader's list.

We get back together with Kelly Flynn, an accountant from the East Coast who has proven to be a very motivated amateur detective, and her true love, Steve Townsend. They are at an amazing time in their lives, waiting for their little boy to be born.

Kelly is loving life and especially loves the support she receives from her friends and masters of their craft, The Lambspun Knitters. These pals are working on making all the booties, hats and blankets that the child will need when he arrives in this world. And, as always when this group gets together, the knitting goes hand-in-hand with the gossip that's going around Fort Connor, Colorado.

You have to understand, this is not your ordinary group of spinners. You have Mother Mimi who owns the House of Lambspun shop; a retired detective by the name of Burt Parker who spins like there's no tomorrow; as well as sisters, Hilda and Lizzie von Steuben, just to name a few. The topic of conversation is a woman named Giselle. She's newly married to a local "high-brow" in the banking community and spends her time climbing those social ladders that all wealthy locations have set in place. Apparently, she's been trying too hard and stepped on someone's toes, because Giselle has just been found dead on the greens of the posh country club, and the knitters are worried that the killer may be too close to home.

Sefton continues creating great mysteries for this fun crew to solve, and also gifts the reader with not only a recipe to enjoy but a knitting pattern so that your new babe can don their very own "Sweetheart Baby Hat." This is definitely one to enjoy!

Reviewed by Amy Lignor, author of "The Double-Edged Sword" published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■

## PERIL & PRAYER

By Olivia Matthews

This series began with a fantastic mystery called, "Mayhem & Mass." For those who missed out on meeting the Sisters of St. Hermione of Ephesus the first time around, make sure you pick up this, book two, because these *Sister Lou Mysteries* are already proving to be page turners.

Readers are back with that fireball of a sleuth, Sister Lou, who has clearly received a gift from the "Higher-Up" when it comes to solving crimes. This time around, the entire congregation of Sisters are headed for their annual Advent retreat which will be held at the Briar Coast Cabin Resorts in New York State. Everyone is excited about this and looking forward to going. One, however, is a true test for the others when it comes to putting up with her angry ways. Sister Marianna likes to debate. In fact, she does so quite recklessly, especially when it comes to the retreat and what she believes the resort's co-owner, Autumn Tassler, is not doing correctly. Thankfully for everyone Lou is there to calm things down.

Unfortunately, it was the calm before the storm. Lou and others are shocked when Autumn is found dead in her office, strangled by an unknown perpetrator. But because of Sister Marianna's complaints, and the fact that her scarf may be the murder weapon, the law believes that this is a nun who most definitely went the way of the devil. Sister Lou's gut feeling, however, causes her to believe that a frame-up is happening, and she decides to go back to the ones she believes in (AKA: her nephew, as well as a female reporter named Shari) to help her uncover the truth and save a fellow Sister from a life behind bars.

A great follow-up to a memorable debut, this is one convent that would be a whole lot of fun to join! Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of *The Write Companion* ■



## IN THIS GRAVE HOUR

By Jacqueline Winspear

The latest *Maisie Dobbs* novel begins as Neville Chamberlain declares war with Germany and London starts gearing up with air raid siren tests, allocation of gas masks, and night blackouts. Maisie is hurrying to her friend's house to hear the anticipated announcement on the radio. War is, of course, unwelcome, as they all remember the last one and everyone has suffered some sort of loss. But, as they remind themselves, they came through it.

A phone call comes for Maisie from an acquaintance who wants to give her some investigation business. The caller, Dr. Francesca Thomas, is calling from inside Maisie's flat, which she locked when she left.

The business has to do with some happenings during the last war, when Great Britain accepted over a quarter of a million Belgian refugees fleeing from German invasion. Most returned home after the war, but not all. Several thousand stayed, married, took jobs, and some even changed their names. Dr. Thomas, herself, is Belgian and tells Maisie that one of the former refugees has been murdered—shot in the back of the head. Scotland Yard doesn't have the personnel to investigate his death and is treating it as a robbery gone wrong. Maisie suspects that Francesca isn't being completely open with her, especially when another former Belgian is murdered. Maisie must follow the delicate threads from the past that connect the men, hoping her friend Francesca isn't responsible for some of the deaths.

Meanwhile, children are being evacuated from London in anticipation of the bombing that happened in WWI and some need a place to stay. One girl, brought to the family country estate, has arrived alone and is mute and dark-skinned. No one knows who she is or who her people are. Maisie is drawn to her, maybe dangerously so.

There is much detail here on wartime England and the people who lived through that dark period. History buffs and Maisie fans will love this.

Reviewed by Kaye George, author of *Ella and the Ball* in "Once Upon a Fact" ■

## SKYJACK

By K.J. Howe

When readers first met up with Thea Paris in the first book of this series, "The Freedom Broker," they were introduced to the only female out of twenty-five elite professionals whose job calls for them to travel undercover to the most frightening places in the world to bring hostages back home.

Thea brings to the table something the males cannot, her gift of intuition. And now this international expert is assigned to be the escort for two former child soldiers. She must board a plane with them that's headed from an orphanage in Kanzi, Africa, to the home of their newly adoptive parents living in London. What should be a somewhat simple process turns into a nightmare when the plane is hijacked and taken to a mysterious place located in the remote Libyan desert.

Thea not only has to put her negotiating skills into play, but she must take the reins and get control of the plane in order to save the boys she swore to protect. Unfortunately, it's going to take more than she bargained for when she finds out that the brains behind the skyjacking is a villain she already knows all too well.

This Sicilian mobster is after something specific on that jet and when negotiations come to a close, it's Thea who ends up being the pawn of a cold-hearted man who will utilize her to go against everything she believes in, even if it means breaking international law to get him what he wants.

Readers will be thrilled to journey with Thea, Rif, and the rest of the Quantum team again, as the author offers page after page of breathtaking action and a complex conspiracy plot that leads to a stunning end.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of *The Write Companion* ■







## LAST CALL

By Allyson K. Abbott

All the fans following this particular series will love to walk through the doors of Mack's Bar again and join up with those "barstool detectives" to solve yet another whodunit.

Her name is Mackenzie Dalton but everyone knows her as Mack. She owns her bar, she's friends with everyone, and her "regulars" do far more than just sit around and gossip; they paw through cold cases and find answers. But this time, things are different. Mack is going through some inner turmoil from the last crime that involved her. She's shaken, but Duncan Albright is hard to resist.

Duncan works for the Milwaukee police department and he needs help. A shooting has occurred and Duncan knows that Mack's talents for observation along with her knack for "sensing" clues will aid him far better than anyone else could. So he asks for her help to solve the puzzle of why a businessman was shot and killed. Of course, there are a slew of prime suspects considering the man was not exactly a stand-up guy.

The problems increase when it's known that one of their own friends, Mal, was investigating the guy before he was shot, and now Mal has disappeared. So not only do they need to bring in a perpetrator, they need to find their friend and get some answers. Mack's already dealing with trust issues and now she wonders if another person who she believed in could possibly have tricked her all this time. Could Mal be a killer on the loose? You'll have to read to find out.

Mack's Bar has always been a place of friendship and cool crime solving, and this latest installment is no different. And don't forget those great drink recipes that come along with the great mystery. There's no better day than sitting down with that glass of "Twisted Sister" and following Mack and the gang. Just be careful... those drinks can sneak up on you!

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of *The Write Companion* ■

## MURDER, SHE KNIT

By Peggy Ehrhart

This is one of those great cozies that's the premiere of what looks like it will be a great series full of fun characters, wit and charm. It even sports an adorable name you will not forget: *The Knit & Nibble Mysteries*.

Pamela Paterson is the "star" of this show. A widow living in Arborville, New Jersey, she has raised a loving daughter who has currently left for college. This is a hard time for any mom which is why Pamela fills her days by being the associate editor of a craft magazine and founder of the Knit & Nibble Knitting Club in her small town.

Pamela is getting ready to host the upcoming Knit & Nibble meeting and is working with her friend, Amy Morgan, to create a fun-filled evening for everyone. Amy and Pam have known each other for a while and now Amy has moved to Arborville and become the newest member of the club. On the night of this party, however, Amy is nowhere to be found. Pamela is more than a little worried about her pal, and things go from bad to worse when she discovers her dead body outside. Amy has been stabbed with a knitting needle through her handmade sweater and someone has taken off with her knitting bag. Only Pamela has the skills to spot the clues that are left behind.

But when another corpse is found, Pamela's amateur sleuthing puts her in the path of a killer that may just end Pamela's new "career" before she can even bring her first predator to justice.

Ehrhart has done a great job creating a complex mystery, as well as a new "detective" who is all heart. Not only do you receive an intriguing whodunit, but readers will also be given a delicious recipe and knitting tips from a master of the craft.

Reviewed by Amy Lignor, author of "The Double-Edged Sword" published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■



## TUSHHOG

By Jeffery Hess

What began in yet another interesting-titled book by Jeffery Hess called, "Beachhead," continues in this new story starring Navy-prison parolee, Scotland Ross.

The first time around, Scotland fell into a life of crime while living on Florida's Gulf Coast. Everything from his sister's life to his own gambling debts led him to face-off against a gangster whose own plan was to become big in the world of politics.

The year is now 1981. Scotland is living in Fort Myers, Florida, and not much in his life has changed when it comes to downing alcohol. What has changed is the fact that he has decided to never get into trouble again. And although it's a good rule to make, life usually gets in the way.

On the day the Pope gets shot, Scotland is in a dark place, sitting at the tavern and drinking away his heartbreak over his dead infant son. This is also a day when the owner of the bar is looking for someone to help him and calls on Scotland to do just that. Even though the man swore not to get into trouble ever again, Scotland soon finds himself in the midst of everything from a clan of rednecks to a Cuban gang. It's hard to know who to trust; even the bar owner who he was initially trying to help turns dark. As things go from bad to worse, Scotland's own girlfriend gets into harm's way. Now he must sober up, find a way to clear his name (yet again), save the woman he loves, and somehow find a person who will believe the story he has to tell.

There are times while being in the world of Scotland Ross where things simply make no sense. He's a man who wrestles with compulsion. He can fall easily, but there are times when he shows readers that his heart still remains strong even when the world is completely against him.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of *The Write Companion* ■

## DEATH BY DUMPLING

By Vivien Chien

Cozy fans rejoice! Here we have the first in a brand new series with the fetching name, *Noodle Shop Mysteries*. And it is an honor to state that author Vivien Chien has done a fantastic job with both characters and plot.

The setting for this tale is the Ho-Lee Noodle House where the soy sauce is flowing and you are literally dying to jump into the pages to nab some sweet and sour chicken and a wonton. It is also the place owned by Lana Lee's family; a place that she never thought she'd see again.

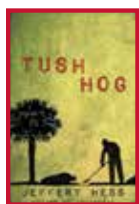
For Lana Lee, however, there are not a lot of choices now. She has gone through a horrible split with her significant other, and lost a job after quite a flashy walk-out, so going back to the place she knows all too well and delivering food to customers is about all she can think to do in order to start fresh. Problem is, Lana also has to deal with a mother who will stop at nothing to find her the appropriate husband.

The spotlight moves off of Lana when the property manager of the Ho-Lee Noodle House turns up dead as a doornail right after a Ho-Lee delivery of shrimp dumplings. Mr. Feng is gone, but it definitely is no accident. After all, this man had a severe allergy to shellfish which every worker at Ho-Lee knew about. So, who would possibly deliver him these dumplings?

The family is scrutinized by the press and questioned by the cops and it's up to Lana to figure everything out and bring a killer to justice.

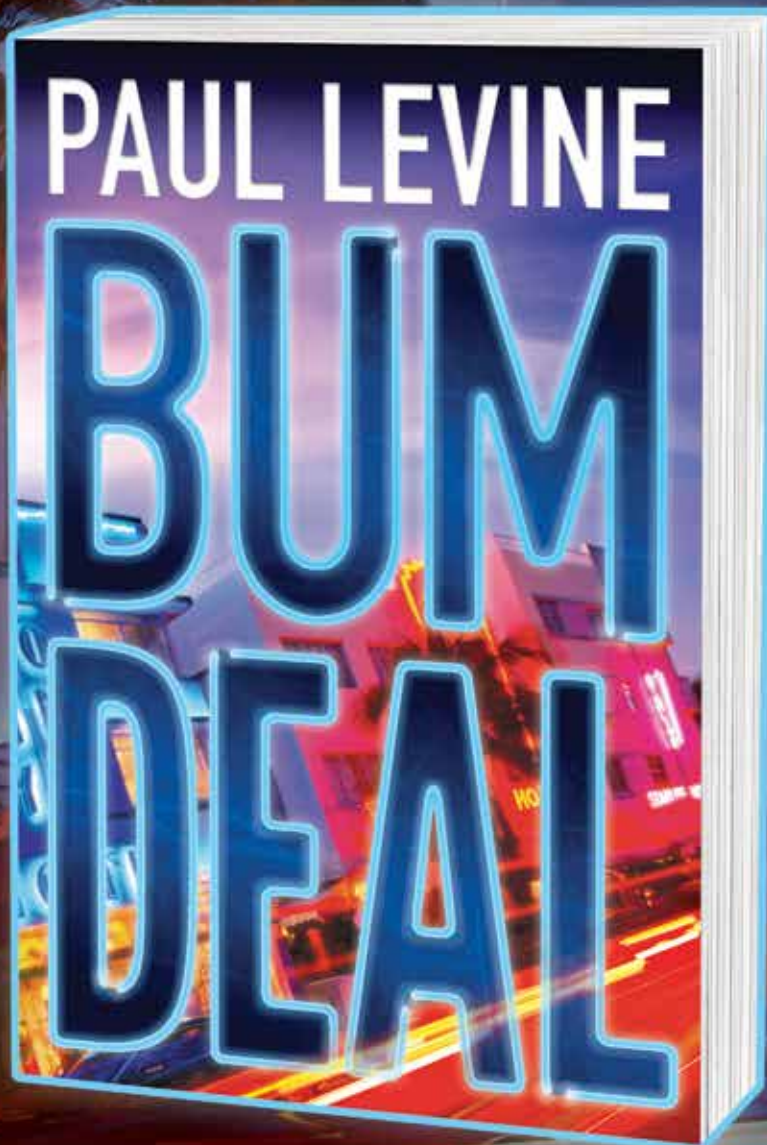
The Lee family is so superb and fun to be around that it will make you long for the next course that Vivien Chien serves up.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of *The Write Companion* ■



# JAKE LASSITER: THE FINAL CHAPTER

Will a traumatic brain injury end the career — and life —  
of the linebacker-turned-lawyer?



"Any book with  
Jake Lassiter is a  
drop-everything,  
read-it-now for  
me—and this one has  
Solomon & Lord, too.  
BUM DEAL is fantastic."

—LEE CHILD, #1  
Bestselling Author of the  
"Jack Reacher" series





## CALLED TO PROTECT

By Lynette Eason

The *Blue Justice* series started off with a real bang in “Oath of Honor.” Now, with this second story, Eason has set these incredible characters in stone and allows readers to learn even more about them, while falling even more in love with the real “star,” a German shepherd named Hank.

Chloe St. John and her K-9 partner, Hank, work well together. Hank is also a great part of Chloe's life and training with him helps her get through some of the pain she's feeling. Her fiancé threw Chloe aside for another woman, which makes Hank the only male that she can put up with. (Not a surprise, considering loyalty is Hank's best feature.)

Keeping her focus on her job and her partner, Chloe finds herself suddenly wrapped up in a case that involves her own family. Human trafficking is the crime being investigated and her cousin, who recently disappeared, may be in the midst of these evil people.

Another girl disappears and she just so happens to be the beloved daughter of U.S. Marshal Blake MacCallum. He's been given orders, however, on how he can see his daughter again. All Blake has to do is take out the high-brow judge he's currently protecting and not tell anyone about his daughter being kidnapped. If he fails to do either of these things, the Marshal is assured that his daughter will be killed.

Chloe starts to feel a little too much for the man who seems down and desperate, but she promised herself she would keep romance at a distance. Not to mention, this man with secrets is not exactly someone she can trust, but she doesn't know it yet. Protecting herself, Chloe makes sure that she and Hank play an integral part in the task force that is assigned to destroy the traffickers and, hopefully, save her cousin.

Lynette Eason continues to be great at what she does and, yes... Hank retains the ability to steal any scene.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of *The Write Companion* ■

## MURDER AT OCHRE COURT

By Alyssa Maxwell

In the summer of 1898, reporter Emma Cross has made a big decision—to leave NYC and a disappointing stint as a society columnist for the *Herald* and come home to Newport, Rhode Island. Emma's tired of reporting on the hijinks of wealthy relatives like her cousins, the Vanderbilts. She wants to write real news stories like her idol, famed newspaperwoman Nellie Bly.

Instead, her first assignment is to cover the coming-out party for debutante Cleo Cooper-Smith, the social event of the season at one of Newport's “summer cottages” overlooking the ocean, Ochre Court. Cleo will be presented in a unique manner; garbed as Cleopatra, she'll be the star of an elaborate living tableau, and her throne will be lit by recently installed modern electricity. As Cleo ascends to her throne, the ballroom is plunged into darkness. When the lights come back on, Cleo still sits on her throne, electrocuted to death.

The authorities quickly establish that the wiring on the throne was tampered with, and blame a local electrician for the death. But Emma thinks otherwise. And the array of eligible suspects is as numerous as the sand on Newport's beach, ranging from a shady real estate developer who claims to be Cleo's fiancée to Cleo's neglected sister to the mother of a spurned suitor.

Emma is fortunate to have the trust of a member of Newport's police force, her childhood friend Jesse Whyte, who asks Emma to use her unique connections to help. Emma senses this story could be her big break into reporting real news, and eagerly accepts. When an incendiary device is thrown through the window of her home and starts a fire, Emma realizes she's getting very close. But at what cost to those she loves?

“Murder At Ochre Court” is the sixth in Alyssa Maxwell's *Gilded Newport Mystery* series. A satisfying and intelligent story peppered with real characters and settings. Great reading, especially for history buffs like me.

Reviewed by Susan Santangelo, author of “In-Laws Can Be Murder,” published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■



## THREE DAYS MISSING

By Kimberly Belle

This is one of those tales that hits close to home and can hurt the heart in so many ways. Here, a child disappears and the investigation that ensues is both riveting and hard to take.

Kat Jenkins is a mom stuck in a nightmare. It begins when she's awoken by the sound of her own doorbell and opens it to see men in uniform on the doorstep. They are there to relay information that causes Kat's life to turn upside down in the blink of an eye. Ethan, her nine-year-old son, has gone missing while on a class trip. He and his classmates had traveled to a campground and stayed overnight in a cabin, but when Kat speeds to the location in order to find her boy, she is told by law enforcement that they lost any sign of him while following his trail through the forest.

But Kat is not the only parent that this book involves. Stef Huntington is another mom from the same school who is the complete opposite of Kat. Whereas Kat has had to deal with rumors and gossip in regard to her past, Stef is a woman with a loving husband, a son who is extremely popular with the rest of the students, and has money and respect from the town residents that Kat will never receive.

This tragedy, however, brings these two parents together in a strange way. As the law continues to investigate, things go from bad to worse as these two women find themselves unveiling the evil souls that live inside the people that supposedly love them the most.

A story that is constantly moving, this author has created an unforgettable thriller with danger lurking around every single corner.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of *The Write Companion* ■



## ISLAND OF THE MAD

By Laurie R. King

Get ready for those super fun sleuths, Mary Russell and Sherlock Holmes, as they come together once more to investigate a truly memorable mystery.

It is the summer of 1925, and our story begins with Mary and Sherlock taking a walk on the Downs when a friend contacts them out of the blue. He needs them to help find his elderly aunt who has not returned from a well-supervised outing.

In recent months, Mary's life has been littered with oddities, murders, loss, and even information out of the blue in regard to Sherlock. She is more than a bit tired, so the case is not easy to just take on. Especially seeing as that the lady who is currently missing is what one would call “whacky.”

You see, the Lady Vivian Beaconsfield has been calling various asylums home for many years, although recently it has been stated that she's made progress and seemed more on the side of sanity. But she's now vanished and her own family believes that she has taken the family jewels along with her. Are they more worried about the woman...or is this a greedy bunch who will not rest until the purloined gems are returned?

As always, the journey Mary and Sherlock take brings them to amazing locations. In this, their scenery stems from the dark, twisted asylum to a stunning lagoon, and injects into the tale everyone from a crazy lady who may be up to no good to the one and only Cole Porter.

As fun as all the rest, author Laurie King brings her always amazing imagination to the page to enthrall readers, as only she can do.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of *The Write Companion* ■



## DEATH RIDES THE FERRY

By Patricia Skalka

Washington Island in August is a beautiful location where the citizens of Wisconsin's Door County are having a whole lot of fun; they are especially excited to hear the sounds of the stringed instruments floating on the breeze. This is occurring after forty years of silence; silence that came from the Viola de Gamba Festival closing up shop after a violent murder occurred on the isle.

Residents will never forget that time, decades earlier, when a soul was taken along with a valuable 16<sup>th</sup> century viola that became a piece of fabled history, never to be seen again. But now, forty years later, it seems that normalcy has returned with the Festival and Sheriff Dave Cubiak is but one of the locals who's extremely happy to see it all restored.

The ferry with visitors is making its way in, sailboats are decorating the waters, and the sheriff gets a well-deserved day off watching both tourists and a documentary film crew take part in the activities by hovering around the musicians who're creating the stunning sounds. This is the last place anyone would want history to repeat itself but, unfortunately, that is exactly what occurs.

Murder once again takes place and everything from mistaken identity to kidnapping sends Dave Cubiak on a search that will show how these two tragedies, done so far apart time-wise, have something highly important in common. A ruthless killer is in the midst of the sheriff, as well as his family and friends, and he finds himself exploring the northern reaches of Lake Michigan in order to stop more bloodshed from happening.

This is the fourth book in the *Dave Cubiak Door County Mystery* series, and readers will not be surprised to learn that they just keep getting better and better with age!

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of *The Write Companion*

## SECRETS, LIES & CRAWFISH PIES

By Abby L. Vandiver

Romaine Wilder is beyond funny and has a fabulous backstory. Being the medical examiner for a grandiose city, Romaine comes from a small town. Although she's gotten used to big city ways, her job has been downsized which means Romaine finds herself traveling back to her tiny hometown in order to begin again.

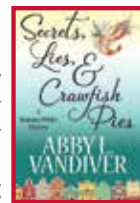
Although the citizens of Robel in East Texas are well-known to Romaine, she's already missing the man she was dating. She is also upset that she had to run from a life she'd worked her butt off to build. Thankfully, Romaine has family that are "in her business," so to speak. Suzanne Babet Derbinay is not only Romaine's Aunt Zanne, but she is also the owner of the Ball Funeral Home. Zanne is quite the character, too. This Louisiana woman keeps busy by running the funeral home, and being a member of various clubs that put her in charge of the Tri-County Annual Crawfish Boil and Music Festival.

When the main course in this small town suddenly becomes murder, things go from quiet to chaotic. The funeral home even receives a dead guy that's been dumped there with no clues as to who did the dumping.

Auntie Zanne, while trying to help Romaine find love and feel better about her life, teams up with her niece to solve this odd crime. Not only do they want to see justice done, but they want to lend a hand to the brand new sheriff, Pogue Folsom, who just happens to be Romaine's cousin.

The plot is fiery, fun, and fast. You have everything that Texas provides, from scenery to Stetsons, and that French Creole Auntie who you will absolutely adore. This may be just the first in this new series, but because it was so well done it will be extremely hard to wait for the second installment of the *Romaine Wilder Mysteries* to appear.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of *The Write Companion*



## THE DIVA COOKS UP A STORM

By Krista Davis



Domestic diva, Sophie Winston, is known all over Old Town Alexandria, Virginia, for the skill she owns to whip up a meal guaranteed to please even the pickiest of palates. But even Sophie deserves a night out of the kitchen and a chance to sample someone else's cuisine. So when her best friend and neighbor, Nina Reid Norwood, invites her to a local "popup" dinner party (one where guests are told the location of the dinner at the last minute, and the menu remains top-secret until it's actually served), Sophie is thrilled to go.

The celebrity chef, the haute cuisine, and the high-profile guests are all unexpected, but the biggest surprise comes before the dinner is served. Local attorney, Hollis Haberman, tells Sophie that he thinks someone is trying to poison him and asks if she can test some food samples to see if he's correct. A most unusual request, to be sure, but it really rocks Sophie, especially when she factors in Hollis's recent divorce and quick remarriage to a very young trophy wife.

When Sophie discovers Hollis dying in front of his house less than twelve hours after the dinner, it looks like Hollis was right. But all the food samples he'd given to Sophie show no traces of poison. Suspicion immediately falls on Kelsey, the wife, even though she seems to be suffering from a milder version of what killed her husband. Kelsey turns to Sophie for help, and when Sophie does some online research, she discovers that the young bride has murder in her past.

"The Diva Cooks Up a Storm" is the eleventh title in the *Domestic Diva Mystery* series penned by Krista Davis, and all the characters readers love are back and in top form, including Sophie's ex-husband Mars, local funeral parlor entrepreneur, Humphrey Brown, and arbiter (in her mind) of all things that are in good taste, Natasha. It's a delicious mystery, and I loved it!

Reviewed by Susan Santangelo, author of "Dieting Can Be Murder," published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine*

## TWISTED PREY

By John Sandford

No matter what month it is, it always feels like Christmas when the next *Prey* gift is received. This is the 28<sup>th</sup> book in the much-loved series, if you can believe it, and Lucas Davenport, a name all suspense readers know and love, returns to match wits with an old ... friend.

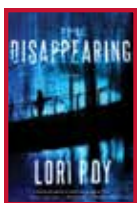
Of course, there is no friendship here. Taryn Grant is her name and she became a big name when she ran for a seat in the U.S. Senate and was hugely successful. When it comes to the way Davenport thinks of her, being in the usually cruel world of politics is definitely the right place for Taryn to call home. However, as far as Davenport is concerned, she is also a wealthy woman who is a pure and utter psychopath.

Even if the rest of the world might not believe him, he is absolutely convinced that Taryn is responsible for three dead bodies; she is a murderer through and through, even though Davenport has no proof to show that she is a cold-hearted killer.

Now that Lucas is a Federal Marshal he, too, sits in a seat of power that allows more doors to be open to him. He has learned all about the next steps that the senator has been taking, such as gaining a seat on the Senate Intelligence Committee, and what her position means when it comes to building her own inventory of contacts that could help this psychopath kill again.

This is one of those *Prey* thrillers where the dialogue is fast, the action is continuing, and a cat-and-mouse game ensues that will keep you interested until the very end. Lucas Davenport remains a "must-read" character, making fans feel a lot like Christmas has come once again.

Reviewed by Amy Lignor, author of "The Double-Edged Sword" published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine*



## THE DISAPPEARING

By Lori Roy

Lane Wallace's life has not been an easy one. Her father was once the director of a local boys' reform school and has frightening, evil things in his past—things that Lane, herself, paid greatly for.

Escaping from this town while she was in high school, Lane never thought she'd have to return to this hell on earth and again live in Fielding Plantation with her parents. A historical site now, this house sits beside the reform school and is littered with broken statues and crumbling buildings dating back to the time when white men ruled.

One day while Lane is working at Rowland's Tavern, a man stumbles through the door. Untrusting of any new face, Lane never knows if this is an enemy coming back to punish her father for his crimes, or perhaps even a reporter looking for more gossip from the past. She starts to call her friend, Sheriff Mark Ellenton, just in case this stranger is up to no good, but decides against it when others come into the building and she's no longer alone.

Lane is a bit nervous, and has every right to be. It was only ten days ago that a young woman disappeared. Her name was Susannah Bauer, and she was actually working at the plantation at the time of her disappearance.

As old wounds reopen and Waddell returns to the news, Lane's life is turned upside down. There are men who continue to claim that they were beaten by her father while at the reform school, and Lane has her own abduction in the past that led to the murder of a young man. But even more horror is coming.

Roy has created a town with a frightening past that just keeps getting worse. You get the chills just reading her hypnotic tale, which makes this four in a row when it comes to fantastic books written by Lori Roy.

Reviewed by Amy Lignor, author of "The Double-Edged Sword" published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■

## THE CHILDREN'S GAME

By Max Karpov

From the moment the first chapter begins, readers will understand why this is such a highly recommended geo-political thriller. Here, you have something for everyone that seems to go hand-in-hand with what's appearing on the TV news stations in 2018.

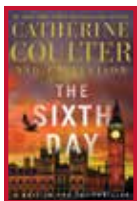
A Russian cyberattack on America is imminent. Perhaps, America believes, it has actually begun. Being given the code name, "The Children's Game," this attack is supposed to mimic a chess strategy that results in Russia achieving checkmate in only four moves. This is a plan created by Andrei Turov, a Russian billionaire and former FBS officer who recruited an operative by the name of Ivan Delkoff to organize the attack. As these various "moves" are being played out, informants will spread misinformation and televise a breaking news event; while the world is looking one way, hackers will then commit the attack.

One thing the Kremlin did not account for, however, as they attempt to twist and turn the truth and confuse the media in order to make Russia great once again, is the fact that the U.S. of A. has a way to stop the attack from happening, in the form of Christopher Niles.

Now retired from the CIA, Niles is enjoying his vacation with his significant other, U.S. Senator Anna Carpenter, when he is suddenly called back to work and sent to talk to an informant in London. Retirement now kaput, Niles and Anna join forces with a journalist who happens to be Niles' half-brother to uncover this scheme and stop it in its tracks.

Espionage, thrills, chills and, perhaps, a little too close to home, this is one book that you should not miss. Writer Max Karpov's ultimate talent stems from being able to explain all the intricacies of cyberwarfare while making sure to always keep the pace fast and the action nonstop.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of *The Write Companion* ■



## THE SIXTH DAY

By Catherine Coulter and J.T. Ellison

It is difficult to think of anything more exciting than "The Covert Eyes Team" that writers Coulter and Ellison have created. And after delving into this newest title in *A Brit in the FBI* series, that fact goes from difficult to virtually impossible.

People in the higher echelon of the political arena are dying, one right after the other. But it is only when the German Vice Chancellor loses his pulse, and a drone is seen hovering over the scene, that panic starts to arise and special agents Nicholas Drummond and Michaela Caine are called in to stop what looks to be a serious serial killer.

Utilizing the skills of Dr. Isabella Marin (who just so happens to be an expert when it comes to the twin languages of the indecipherable Voynich Manuscript and cryptophasia), the special agents find themselves focusing on one, Roman Ardelean. This is a man who already has an interesting past, to say the least. He is a direct descendant of Vlad Dracul III, an infamous man who became known as Dracula. Turns out that Roman believes somewhere lurking in the words of this Voynich Manuscript is the key to showing him how to stop his twin brother from dying. But not only does he wish to murder anyone who gets in his way, he also has a list of people he believes have betrayed him and will do anything he can to take them down, even if it means blowing up all of London to do just that.

The agents, the doctor, and MI5 must stop this man in his tracks, and with Coulter and Ellison once again pairing up to create this tension-filled, thrilling plot, readers will be hooked until they come to the ultimate, unforgettable conclusion. One day feels too long to wait for another *Brit in the FBI* mystery.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of *The Write Companion* ■

## MISS JULIA RAISES THE ROOF

By Ann B. Ross

A reader favorite, Miss Julia has weathered quite a bit during her days, and she continues to delight with this latest release in the series.

With her husband on a trip to Europe, Miss Julia has more than a bit of time on her hands and tries to focus on helping her neighbors. Now, living in the peaceful town of Abbotsville, the one thing that can be counted on is the fact that gossip is always crossing over the neighbor's fences. The latest news to hit Miss Julia's ears comes in the form of a group home that is supposedly going to be set up next to her friend Hazel Marie's house.

The people working on this project are locals, Pastor Rucker and a woman deemed to be a nosy do-gooder named Madge. This is to be a home for wayward boys, something that may scare the neighborhood and cause them to stop the project from happening, which is the only reason that Miss Julia can think of for why these two people are trying to keep their project a secret from everyone.

But as Julia and Hazel delve further into this plan, information starts to surface that is far darker than just placing a boy's home in the historic district of town. There is a scheme in place, and Miss Julia and Hazel feel the need to raise their voices. In return, however, they come under verbal attack by those who live in the gated communities who state that Miss Julia, who has been a real do-gooder all her life, is nothing but an un-Christian NIMBY Scrooge. Now, not only will Miss Julia fight to clean her sullied name, but she also will not rest until she uncovers and reveals the evidence that proves there's evil afoot.

As always with Miss Julia and her friends, Abbotsville remains one of the most entertaining places you can possibly visit.

Reviewed by Amy Lignor, author of "The Double-Edged Sword" published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■

## BEAR WITNESS TO MURDER

By Meg Macy

As any cozy fan will tell you, it is always an absolute delight to return to Silver Hollow and the people that frequent the streets there. It is only in Silver Hollow that we get to visit the Silver Bear Shop and Factory which is so much fun.

This time around, the manager of the aforementioned business, Sasha Silverman, is heading into the fall season, getting ready for the hustle and bustle of the holidays by putting on the Cranberry Tea Party for the village. This party is held by the entire town and all who visit, serving as the opening event for the Silver Hollow *Oktobear Fest*. (Adorable!)

The only difficulty in Sasha's personal life at the moment is dealing with the new toy store in town run by her rival from high school named Holly. Holly Parker has come back home and made sure to throw yet another wrench into Sasha's life by opening a competing business. Not to mention harming Sasha's cousin in the process, who runs her very own bookstore that must now compete with Holly's new business.

Things look even worse for Holly when her assistant is found dead by Sasha. The victim, who once had an affair with Sasha's own now ex-husband while they were still married, has a well of suspects that could have plunged the knife into her back. So on top of the party to be thrown, Sasha must also deal with the past while attempting to prove who did what to whom before she becomes the next person to be taken out.

As it was in the beginning with Silver Hollow, it remains a fact that the characters, the company, the plot and the village, itself, is an entertaining mixture that readers do not want to miss out on.

Reviewed by Amy Lignor, author of "The Double-Edged Sword" published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■

## THE POPE OF PALM BEACH

By Tim Dorsey

You gotta love an author who knows how to deliver humor and wit along with a riveting mystery that keeps you from putting the book down until the very end. That is just what Tim Dorsey and his enigmatic lead character, Serge A. Storms, do best.

Back in Florida, the state that Serge A. Storms is quite literally in love with, he and his pal Coleman are hitting the road. They are headed back to their past; Riviera Beach is the small, seaside town where these particular boys "grew into men."

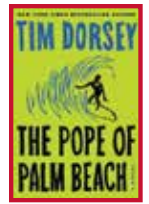
The reason for their return comes from tales told in the past. The "Legend of Riviera Beach" is one that has been engaging the minds of the residents for years, including Serge. The tale surrounds a welder by the name of Darby who loved to surf and became a well-known name because of it. He was a good person and everyone from politicians to other surfers called him a friend. But that is not the only legend that was told amongst the townies. There was another tale that focused on a supposed crazy man who lived like a recluse in a "jungle compound" that was situated on the Loxahatchee River. An area that was too creepy for anyone to actually explore.

Serge and Coleman have lived their lives elsewhere, but now, while on this "literary" adventure, they explore these legends just a little bit more, bringing them closer to a group of bad guys that they don't even know about.

This is a true odyssey for Serge, yet a laugh-out-loud, action-packed, sometimes violent trek for readers. The author goes back and forth between the past and present and brings extra storylines in that only he can create and Serge can pull off.

Much like the film world claims Tim Burton, the literary world claims and loves the twisted imagination of Tim Dorsey. An author who has *still* never let the book lover down.

Reviewed by Amy Lignor, author of "The Double-Edged Sword" published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■



## SHATTERED MIRROR

By Iris Johansen



Fans of this author will always agree that going back into her character, Eve Duncan's, life is a whole lot of fun. After all, Eve is one suspense gal who has been operating for a long time, always solving spell-binding stories along with her web-like supporting cast who add extra danger and adventure at every turn.

This time out, Forensic Sculptor Eve Duncan is getting involved in a game of pure intrigue. As per usual, this new danger begins with Eve reconstructing a new skull, trying to place a "face" on the bones that are all that's left of this particular life. What is not "per usual" is the fact that this skull comes to her in a package that is more than cryptic, seeing as that Eve has no idea who sent it. Also, the skull is not in the package all by itself; also included is a two-sided mirror that makes Eve want to solve this puzzle even more.

As she works, a woman appears before her. But the creepiness factor rises when Eve finds herself standing in front of this dead woman's twin sister. We are talking about a true "mirror image" here, and a story that will have Eve and her team traveling to various locations to stop a killer who seems to be intent on taking people out in order to get exactly what they want.

Murder, intrigue, danger...these are certainly things that Eve has dealt with before. However, this could end up being the puzzle that leaves this famous sculptor as nothing more than a pile of bones.

Bravo again to Iris Johansen. She remains an author who never runs out of ideas that are absolutely unforgettable.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of *The Write Companion* ■

## THE FRAMINGHAM FIEND

By Gregory Harris

This latest mystery starring Colin Pendragon is yet another book that author Gregory Harris can pat himself on the back for writing.

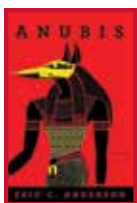
Although the Ripper has gone silent in Victorian London, a new crime has been committed that hits far too close to home; it mirrors the horrors that came from the, thus far unsolved, crimes the Ripper is being held responsible for. The house is on Framingham Street in the East End of London. It is inside that a young prostitute has been murdered...slaughtered, more like it. And even though this is certainly not a new "sight" to behold for Scotland Yard, they are hoping with the aid of Colin Pendragon and his highly loyal and intelligent partner, Ethan Pruitt, that someone will finally be caught and hung for the devastating crime.

Although there is no proof that the Ripper, himself, has begun his terrorizing once again, because of the similarities all of London has once again become fearful of the night. A wave of panic spreads at a fast pace as two women fall victim and then, a third. Colin and Ethan feel very much like they're on the heels of the already infamous killer with a name but no face. Even if they do not care for the journey, their exploration leads them into the core of the first crime scenes through Whitechapel. Opium dens, slaves, the morgue...each step has them sinking deeper into these horrific times. And when one corner is taken, Colin Pendragon finds himself even more emotionally invested and closer to death.

Pendragon and partner Pruitt have been a thrill to read each and every time they take up a case. The dialogue is smart, witty, and the plots are memorable with each book. The Ripper seems to be a subject that never goes out of style and Gregory Harris has offered yet another look into that horrible but hard to forget time and place.

Reviewed by Amy Lignor, author of "The Double-Edged Sword" published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■





## ANUBIS

By Eric C. Anderson

Eric C. Anderson began this heart-stopping trilogy with “OSIRIS,” which, if looking at name alone, would have readers believing they were delving into the ancient world to deal with gods, both good and bad. When, in fact, Anderson was creating the *New Caliphate Trilogy* which certainly deals with “gods” but mostly focuses on the power-hungry, very *real* human beings who believe themselves to be gods, and end up taking the lives of many.

Last time around readers were introduced to a Marine and an Army officer who were about as brittle as they could be. They’d seen it all and had to team up with spies and a cyber-warrior in order to stop ISIS from succeeding at creating a new caliphate where they would be the gods.

Now, with this second installment, ISIS continues. Although they took out thousands of U.S. citizens in Baghdad, they most definitely have not attained ultimate success. The world is still a mess, with spies, political scum, and more who have to come together in order to save a world that is falling apart on a daily basis.

Our favorite Marine, Master Gunnery Sergeant More, and our heroic Army officer, U.S. Army Special Forces Major Faheem, are still side by side as they search for a way to forever stop these hideous terrorists. The U.S. president is dead and the man hated by most U.S. citizens is about to take the reins of the country. Every newspaper shouts about ISIS attacks and people debate whether or not America should simply turn their backs and withdraw from the Middle East for good. The American duo who have fought hard for a long time have to give a great deal of power to the cyber-warrior, ODIN, this time around, and Anderson offers up more powerful, frightening scenes than ever before.

Gut-wrenching, to say the least, this is one trilogy that people in the real world are scared to see come true. Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of *The Write Companion* ■

## WICKED RIVER

By Jenny Milchman

If you’ve ever taken a river voyage, or even ridden *Splash Mountain* at a Disney theme park, you’ve felt your adrenaline soar. Your palms start to sweat, your core temperature starts to rise, and your heart beats faster as you near the white water rapids. Well, that’s the same feeling you’ll experience from page one straight to the end of “Wicked River,” because author Jenny Milchman has crafted a seamless thriller.

Natalie Abbott and Doug Larson, two twenty-something Manhattanites, are getting married in an idyllic wedding in the mountains of Upstate New York, and they have chosen to take a peaceful canoe trip down river for a remote, romantic honeymoon. From the time she reaches the Blooming Garden Inn, Natalie is filled with both excitement and trepidation—two emotions common to both a bride-to-be as she prepares to walk down the aisle, and to someone who first pushes off shore and steps into a canoe. Natalie is about to do both.

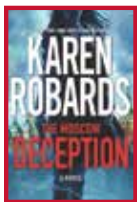
Jenny Milchman pulls us into the lives and worlds of not only Natalie and Doug, but also their families and friends. During their trip, we delve into a story that is a stunning portrayal of life, love and relationships—the factors in this world that are truly important to all of us.

The analogies in “Wicked River” are many, but at the core of this incredible thriller is a microcosm on relationships and trust. You know when you pick up this book that you’re in for a thrill ride, but what you get is so much more. You will ride the emotional juggernaut from love to hate, from sympathy to empathy, and from trust to betrayal, to the moment when....

*You didn’t think I was actually going to give away the ending, did you?*

All that needs to be known is that this is a story filled with anxiety, angst, and adrenaline; an emotional steamroller that will leave you begging for the next Jenny Milchman thriller to be released.

Reviewed by J.M. LeDuc, author of *The Kiche Chronicles* ■



## THE MOSCOW DECEPTION

By Karen Robards

Karen Robards and great reads go hand-in-hand. This latest release, book two in *The Guardian* series, becomes yet another “must read” for those who are truly engaged by Robards’ writing and the action-packed world of international spy thrillers.

Bianca St. Ives is extremely smart. She uses her wealth of gifts to remain the highly talented con-woman and thief she’s become. It’s not often that someone this smart finds themselves in trouble, but the unveiling of a secret from her past has led Bianca to become more than stunned. When a thief is off their game, that’s when the predators come calling, which is exactly what’s happening to Bianca now. She has become the prime target of a group of assassins that will do anything to bring her down.

Engaging her brain and trying to overcome the surprise of her life, she attempts to come up with a plan to stay alive. But just as this all comes to pass, Bianca must also deal with her own father and a job he’s involved in.

Father and daughter, while trying to evade a posse of trigger-happy killers, go on the hunt to recover a treasure that was stolen by the Russians during WWII. These priceless artifacts that once belonged to royalty by the name of King Priam, must be unearthed and returned to Germany. Why would Bianca throw herself into a heist of such mammoth proportions when her own life is on the line? Because information comes along with this treasure; intel that may just be the only thing that will stop Bianca’s pursuers from claiming victory.

Karen Robards never fails. Author of over forty books, she has earned the awards and accolades she’s achieved. This is one lady who never seems to run out of thrilling ideas and characters, so make sure not to miss this fast-paced series.

Reviewed by Amy Lignor, author of “The Double-Edged Sword” published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■

## WORTH KILLING FOR

By Jane Haseldine

Julia Gooden, crime reporter, works the streets of Detroit. The cases she comes across remind her of some of the hideous trials that she, personally, survived while growing up. Although her backstory is extremely dark, a childhood that includes a highly negligent parent, her present day life is one of happiness. She raises two sons that she truly loves and dotes on, while enjoying her sturdy relationship with the man she loves, Detective Raymond Navarro. Trouble is, just as she’s experiencing all good things, one bad apple suddenly reappears.

It’s been thirty years since Julia last had to deal with her father, Duke Gooden, who lived life as a conman before disappearing completely when she was only seven years old. Not only that, but Julia lost her older brother Ben very soon after Duke went AWOL, and became a cold case that no one has found answers to. Although Duke’s reappearance may just “warm up” Ben’s case, Julia also has to deal with the fact that there are those out there who want her father to pay for all the sins he committed in the past.

Things suddenly come together as Julia investigates the death of a city councilman’s young nephew. There are links between this boy’s demise and her own brother’s disappearance that lead Julia to drop everything and renew her obsession to find Ben.

This complex plot involves killers, her own father’s lies and secrets unveiled and more, as she finds herself at times arguing with Detroit law enforcement, including the love of her life, in order to solve crimes from the past and present.

For those who have not read the first two tales of Julia Gooden, I recommend going back and starting with book one. Not because you will fail to understand this outstanding read, but just because you will not want to miss what is, in fact, every second of an incredible series.

Reviewed by Mary Lignor, Professional Librarian and Co-Owner of *The Write Companion* ■

## THE PUNISHMENT SHE DESERVES

By Elizabeth George

When it comes to Elizabeth George, most people will state that her books are like those fine wines that you cherish for as long as humanly possible. With this latest release, that “feeling” grows even stronger.

Readers are taken to the quaintest town imaginable: Ludlow. Cozy, lush scenery, residents who act more like a close-knit family than anything else, Ludlow is one of those places all people would enjoy. Of course, even in the happiest of towns, bad things can occur. And Ludlow is no different.

Ian Druitt, one of Ludlow’s well-respected citizens, is accused of committing a violent crime. What’s worse, however, is that once this local deacon is taken into police custody, he is soon found dead himself. Enter Detective Sergeant Barbara Havers and Detective Inspector Thomas Lynley, a team that must explore the ins and outs of this historic medieval village in order to bring a killer to light.

This is a truly intricate case. Even though Havers and Lynley see the clues that are leading law enforcement to rule Ian’s death a suicide, Havers remains unconvinced. She has that detective “gut” feeling that leads her to investigate further. While questioning people that range from senior citizens who have been a part of Ludlow’s history for generations; to college students who seem upfront and amiable, the duo soon begins to see a pattern. It seems that each and every person in Ludlow has something to hide, and Havers will not stop until the truth is revealed and she clears the name of what may be a completely innocent dead man.

Elizabeth George has created journeys for Havers and Lynley before and this, yet again, falls among the “must reads” in the suspense world. For new readers getting onboard and for those who have loved these characters for a while now, this book is one you do not want to miss.

Reviewed by Amy Lignor, author of “The Double-Edged Sword” published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■

## THE PHARAOH KEY

By Preston & Child

This is one writing team, as we all know, that causes the adrenaline to race every time they release a new book. Their incredible characters, from Aloysius (“Xavier”) Pendergast to Gideon Crew, make all book lovers drool.

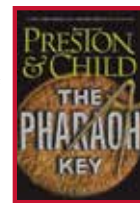
This time, it is Gideon Crew who is back to entertain and intrigue. Just as brilliant as ever, this thief/adventurer/scientist is the one who is highly surprised when this book first begins. Eli Glinn, a former employer of Gideon’s, has literally disappeared and no one has a clue as to where he could be. In addition, the man’s lab, Effective Engineering Solutions, has also shut down with no warning or word to anyone as to why it went dark almost overnight.

Gideon soon finds out from a former coworker named Manuel that EES was working on something highly secretive; something that could, possibly, change the world. We are talking about a tablet that was the property of an undiscovered civilization: The Phaistos Disk. (For those who are into the truly historical, this Disk happens to be real. Created from fired clay and discovered at the Minoan palace of Phaistos on the island of Crete, it’s still surrounded by mystery.) With markings and pictures on both sides of this odd-looking coin, it may just hold a key to unleashing the power that could save Gideon’s life.

With only months to live, this may just be the last bastion of hope Gideon has to find a cure for his own body’s predator, while also solving a puzzle that has stumped the scientific community since, perhaps, the Bronze Age.

As always with this team, Preston & Child have done their homework and taken a very interesting relic in order to produce, once again, a story that will have readers thrilled and excited and begging (still) for more of their creations to come as fast as possible.

Reviewed by Amy Lignor, author of “The Double-Edged Sword” published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■



## THE REAL MICHAEL SWANN

By Bryan Reardon

Julia and Michael Swann have a wonderful life together, but when Michael goes to NYC for a job interview, their lives take a horrible turn.

He calls her on his way home to inform her that something is going on with the tracks and the subway is having issues. In the middle of the call, he gets cut off. She wonders what happened when shortly after she sees the news reports of a bomb going off in Penn Station.

She does not have much time to grieve since the authorities investigating think that he was the bomber. Then the evidence starts to come in that he might have faked his death as well.

How well did Julia know her husband? What seems like a straightforward story of a bombing and doubts surrounding loved ones becomes much more in the hands of Reardon. Surprises on many levels and genuine thrills are abundant in this engrossing thriller.

Reviewed by Jeff Ayers, a professional librarian, book reviewer, and panel master and the author of several books, the most recent being the YA mystery “The Fourth Lion” (with Kevin Lauderdale) for *Suspense Magazine* ■

## THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST

By Rhys Bowen

Although it’s Christmas in 1906 New York City, Molly Murphy Sullivan, who’s exchanged her detective hat to become a wife and mother, isn’t in the holiday spirit. Sadly, Molly’s suffering from depression, the result of a miscarriage following her recent trip to San Francisco. The trip coincided with a major earthquake where she and her husband, police Captain Daniel Sullivan, nearly died.

When Molly, Daniel, their son, Daniel’s mother, and their young ward, Bridie, are invited to celebrate Christmas at a mansion on the Hudson, the family gratefully accepts expecting a wonderful holiday. As soon as they arrive, however, they begin to feel an undercurrent of tension, even menace, in the house. There seems to be a terrible strain between their hosts, Winnie and Cedric Van Aiken. Molly soon discovers that a decade ago, on Christmas Eve, the Van Aikens’ three-year-old daughter wandered out in the snow and disappeared.

Molly can certainly identify with Winnie’s pain, and wants to help the poor woman. But there was no ransom note, no clue was ever found, and a massive search at the time of the disappearance yielded absolutely no answers. Daniel says there’s nothing more that can be done, but Molly slowly begins to suspect that the occupants of the house know more than they’re letting on. And why does Cedric’s elderly great aunt keep calling Daniel by another name?

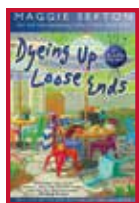
When Christmas Eve arrives, there’s a knock on the door and a young girl stands on the threshold. “I’m Charlotte,” she says. “I’ve come home.” Winnie is overjoyed at the sudden appearance of her child, but Cedric is wary. He enlists Daniel to check into the child’s flimsy story to see if she really is Charlotte.

“The Ghost of Christmas Past” is a well-crafted, satisfying mystery with intricate plotting and a cast of characters readers will fall in love with. I certainly did! A perfect read, no matter what the season.

Reviewed by Susan Santangelo, author of “Dieting Can Be Murder,” published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■







## DYEING UP LOOSE ENDS

By Maggie Sefton

Who knew knitting could be such an action-packed hobby? Kelly Flynn is back and is enjoying a perfectly wonderful time in her life; a time where she gets to enjoy being a mom and not have to delve into the trials of death.

Kelly has a routine, even though most of it is taken up by four-year-old Jack who makes sure to never let Mom sit down. But there are times, thankfully, when Jack goes off to preschool and Kelly finds herself holding that much-needed coffee cup at Pete's Porch Café. It is here that Kelly visits with Julie, her server who is attempting to become an accountant one day, just like Kelly. After coffee, Kelly does find time to congregate with the other knitters at Lambspun. She shares all the up-to-date actions and events happening in Jack's world, while the other women speak a great deal about all the work Kelly has done over the years catching criminals and solving crimes.

Things hit far too close to home, however, when it is Julie who turns up dead. And when it's Kelly's friend who falls victim, the need to know is magnified. Kelly goes out, talks to everyone, asks questions, and is basically on a mission to make sure the culprit is brought to justice. Unfortunately, Julie has no enemies whatsoever...at least, none that can be found. So...was it just a case of being in the wrong place at the wrong time? Mistaken identity, perhaps? It will take a lot of work for the knitters to pull the truth from the darkness, and when they do, they may just be shocked at what they find out.

These *Knitting Mysteries* have been entertaining suspense lovers for a long time now. And with this title being among some of the absolute best, it looks like author Sefton has (thankfully) a whole lot more to say.

Reviewed by Amy Lignor, author of "The Double-Edged Sword" published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■

## FEAR ITSELF

By James Swallow

*Star Trek Discovery's* breakout character is without a doubt the Kelpien first officer, Saru. His species continually live in fear, and that constant trepidation leads every decision they make. What would have been a fascinating exploration of his origins and life on the planet with horrible predators is, instead, a story told around four years before the events of Burnham's mutiny (pilot episode of *Star Trek: Discovery*).

A rescue mission goes awry, and Saru and Burnham clash. A story set with these characters and especially Saru is always welcome, but it also feels like a missed opportunity. It is fun to watch a character who acts as if every move he makes will kill him try to command and be a negotiator when things go wrong.

Reviewed by Jeff Ayers, a professional librarian, book reviewer, and panel master and the author of several books, the most recent being the YA mystery "The Fourth Lion" (with Kevin Lauderdale) for *Suspense Magazine* ■



## THE LAST TIME I LIED

By Riley Sager

Camp Nightingale is the most elite summer camp you can possibly send your children to. A once-in-a-lifetime moment allows a girl by the name of Emma to come here. Turns out, it was the last summer the camp was ever open. Reason being, Emma watched the three older girls who shared her cabin walk out in the middle of the night, and never return. An investigation ensued, but Emma could tell the law nothing, and the camp was immediately shut down.

Fast forward 15 years. Emma is now grown up and has become an artist. Her huge paintings are currently hanging in a gallery with people purchasing them left and right. Emma is obsessed with what happened long ago and her work proves that. She has done a series that actually has a secret: under all the browns and thick greens of the wooded scenes are three girls looking just like they did the night they disappeared.

Emma runs into Mrs. Harris White (AKA: Franny) at the gallery. It is her rich family that owns the camp. She tells Emma that they are planning a grand re-opening. They want to put the horror in the past and want Emma, along with others from back then, to join them. Although she should run away from this offer, Emma knows this is the chance she's been waiting for to return to the scene and find out the truth of what happened.

When she arrives, however, things go from odd to frightening. As Emma investigates the past, she finds everything from a hidden camera to a piece of paper from 15 years earlier that unveils the history of the camp and the greed, lies and murder it is built upon.

No review will do this book justice. The author has done a fantastic job creating a tale that leaves you breathless. If not a fan yet, read this and you will be one for life!

Reviewed by Amy Lignor, author of "The Double-Edged Sword" published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■

## GARY WILLIAMS & VICKY KNERLY "WE DEMAND MORE FROM THIS DYNAMIC DUO—AND SOON."

—Rosa St. Claire, *Miami Examiner* on *Indisputable Proof*,  
Named one of the Best Fiction Books of 2012



## TURNING THE TIDE

By Edith Maxwell



Emotions are running high the first week of November in 1888. It's time for Americans to elect a new president: American *men*, that is. The Women's Suffrage Association in the small Massachusetts town of Amesbury, under the leadership of local attorney Rowena Felch, is planning a major demonstration for the morning of Election Day: they will demand that women be given the right to vote. Rowena calls a meeting of the group the Saturday night before the election, and members of the huge crowd in attendance are all eager to wear the yellow sash, identifying them as a suffragist.

One of the women at the meeting is Quaker midwife Rose Carroll, a longtime supporter of the women's movement. As a midwife, Rose is used to handling all sorts of medical emergencies, but nothing prepared her for finding the body of Rowena Felch hidden under a bush in front of her home the morning after the meeting concluded. Rose can't help wanting to know who committed the murder, and begins to ask questions about the dead woman. Unfortunately, she quickly discovers many people who had a motive for wanting Rowena dead. At the top of the list is Rowena's controlling husband, a prominent doctor who conveniently was "out of town at a medical convention" when the crime was committed. Also, Rowena's recent promotion at her law firm cost a male colleague his job, allowing yet another suspect to be focused upon. After Rose's own life is threatened, identifying the killer as quickly as possible becomes more than just a mission; it is now a matter of personal safety for herself and her family.

"Turning the Tide" is the third in Edith Maxwell's *Quaker Midwife Mystery* series. Not only is it a satisfying whodunit, but it's also an excellent, well-researched look at life in the United States in the late nineteenth century. Highly recommended. Reviewed by Susan Santangelo, author of "Dieting Can Be Murder," published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of *Suspense Magazine* ■



By Jeff Ayers

## READY PLAYER ONE 2018

Genre – Action/Adventure/Sci-Fi (PG-13)

Steven Spielberg takes the favorite novel by Ernest Cline and turns it into a compelling and engaging feast for the eyes. A world in chaos has many of the inhabitants finding peace and salvation in another world called the OASIS. The creator of this virtual world has created a treasure hunt, with the control of the realm at stake.

Those who grew up in the 90s will find this to be a treasure trove of nostalgia and an exciting story. The fact that a considerable chunk of the film is essentially watching someone else play a video game, and it works, is a testament to the story and the filmmaking genius of Spielberg. ■



## AVENGERS: INFINITY WAR 2018

Genre – Action/Adventure/Fantasy (PG-13)

Marvel films have been building up to this event for ten years and it pays off. With the huge cast and the fate of the galaxy at stake, this story and film could have quickly gone off the rails. Shout out to everyone involved, since this not only lives up to the enormous hype, but plays with expectations as well.

The evil Thanos needs six infinity stones to reset the universe (which he sees as a good thing). Most of the Marvel universe cavalcade of characters want to see him fail. The story does not fall into one giant battle that lasts over 2 hours, thankfully. *Infinity War* takes the time to give everyone a moment to shine. Familiarity with what has come before will help immensely, but not truly necessary to see how cool this adventure shines. The assumed final *Avengers* film cannot come fast enough. ■



## DEADPOOL 2 2018

Genre – Action/Adventure/Comedy (R)

The sarcastic hero returns in another hilarious and extremely R-rated story. After experiencing a tragedy, Wade Wilson (*Deadpool*) has problems coping and even contemplates suicide. His friends help by getting him to join the X-Men to heal and for the emotional support.

A man named Cable from the future arrives to murder a



young boy who he claims will grow up to be a horrible tyrant responsible for the murder of thousands, including Cable's family. The chaos and madness fly at a rapid rate from that point, and never let up even through the end credits. Like its predecessor, *Deadpool 2* is a blast. ■

## SOLO: A STAR WARS STORY

### 2018

Genre – Action/Adventure/Fantasy (PG-13)



The first *Star Wars* film to not generate much buzz is a rollercoaster that is a fun ride while watching, but it will be forgotten the minute one steps off.

The story covers the origins of Han Solo, including how he became a rogue smuggler and his relationship with Chewbacca. It also explores the fate of his first love. What makes this story not work is the difficulty of caring for anyone involved. While it is beautiful to look at, and the special effects are stellar, it is impossible to care on an emotional level for any of the characters with the possible exception of Lando. Donald Glover does a fantastic job with his interpretation of the schemer initially played by Billy Dee Williams. ■

## INCREDIBLES 2

### 2018

Genre – Animation/Action/Adventure (PG)

The classic movie about a superhero family has been beloved for over fourteen years, and came out before the Marvel and DC universe films. With comic characters commonplace on the big screen now, did Pixar wait too long to create this sequel? The answer is no. What is on display is an exhilarating and fantastic feast of visuals and heart.

Being a superhero is against the law, and when an opportunity for Helen Parr (Elasticgirl) to make appearances stopping crime and bringing public opinion to repeal the law, she can't refuse. What follows is a story that brings to light contemporary issues of government interference in our lives along with what it truly means to be a family. Weighty matters for an animated film for sure, but it works. The baby steals the movie, and hopefully it won't be that long of a wait for the next one. Prediction: Oscar winner for animated film at next year's award ceremony. ■

*Jeff Ayers co-hosts Beyond the Cover with John Raab, and is a freelance reviewer for the Associated Press, Library Journal, and Booklist. He is the author of several books in the worlds of both fiction and non-fiction, including "Voyages of Imagination: The Star Trek Fiction Companion" and the thriller "Long Overdue."*





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# SUSPENSE *That* KILLS...

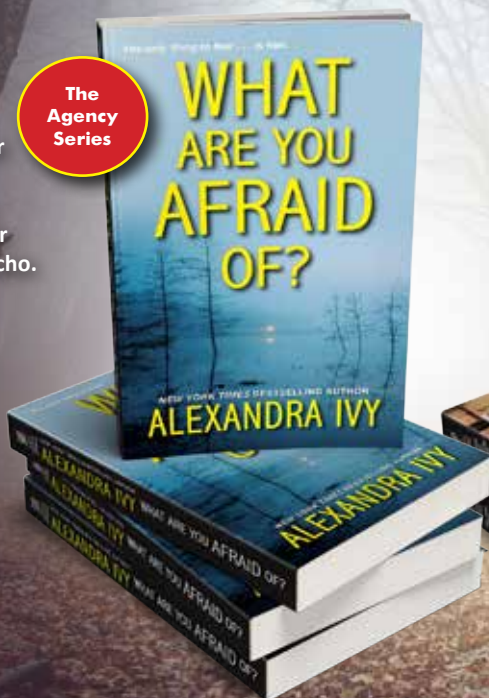
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**bone-chilling  
thriller.**



# Featured Artist

Interview by Amy Lignor for *Suspense Magazine*

A person with short hair, seen from behind, stands on a cobblestone floor facing a tall, dark, ornate wooden door. The door has multiple panels and a small, bright light source is visible through a crack in the upper part of the door. The room is dimly lit, with a hazy, atmospheric background. The overall mood is mysterious and contemplative.

# LORA VYSOTSKAYA

*Opening the Doors to an  
Enlightened mind*

**ESCAPE**

Lora Vysotskaya is a name on DeviantArt that is all about creativity and bringing support and enjoyment to others. Her works range from darkness to light, fantasy to suspense, and even involve some of the most famous characters known to us all.

Her power to enlighten the senses with her use of color, shadows and a wide range of artistic techniques knows no bounds, which makes her not only a “must-view” when it comes to the art world, but also makes her a true “gift” that the Ukraine can be proud of. Lora was able to talk with *Suspense Magazine* about her passion, her beginnings, and even offer up works that definitely delight and inspire.

*Suspense Magazine* (S. MAG.): Let us begin with your wide range of creations. They are so unique, but you also do truly beloved, famous characters originating from things like, “The Addams Family” and “Algernon.” Do you have a specific style favorite? And if you had to choose, can you name one work that has never left your mind?

Lora Vysotskaya (L.V.): *Thank you for the compliment. Yes, you guessed, I love my characters: I couldn't create them without loving. I read a lot, and love good movies. And when I look for ideas, this is natural if my associative memory gives me hints in the form of some familiar and favorite heroes. “On the Edge” is one of my early works, and I love it very much. I think this blade-bridge and the girl between “to be” and “not to be” is one of my best finds. I often return to it in my mind.*

S. MAG.: Are there any particular well-known characters you long to create that you have not yet attempted?

L.V.: *I love Tim Burton's style, he's so unique and inspiring! I'm thinking about creating Sweeney Todd, although he will not be so cruel and bloodthirsty, rather unhappy and tired.*

S. MAG.: Where do the inspirations come from? For some, it's something they see or hear and others seem to have ideas just “appear” out of the blue.

L.V.: *I'm a visual by perception type, and most often I get ideas from something seen. I can see a model and immediately come up with a story for her/him. Sometimes, when I lack inspiration, I look through art of other artists hoping to get a push for my brain. Another way are contests held in DeviantArt—sometimes themes proposed there also perfectly stimulate the imagination.*

S. MAG.: How did you first begin your career?

L.V.: *I drew a little, when I was a child. I didn't learn drawing, but I loved to copy illustrations from books and photos that appeared in magazines about cinema.*

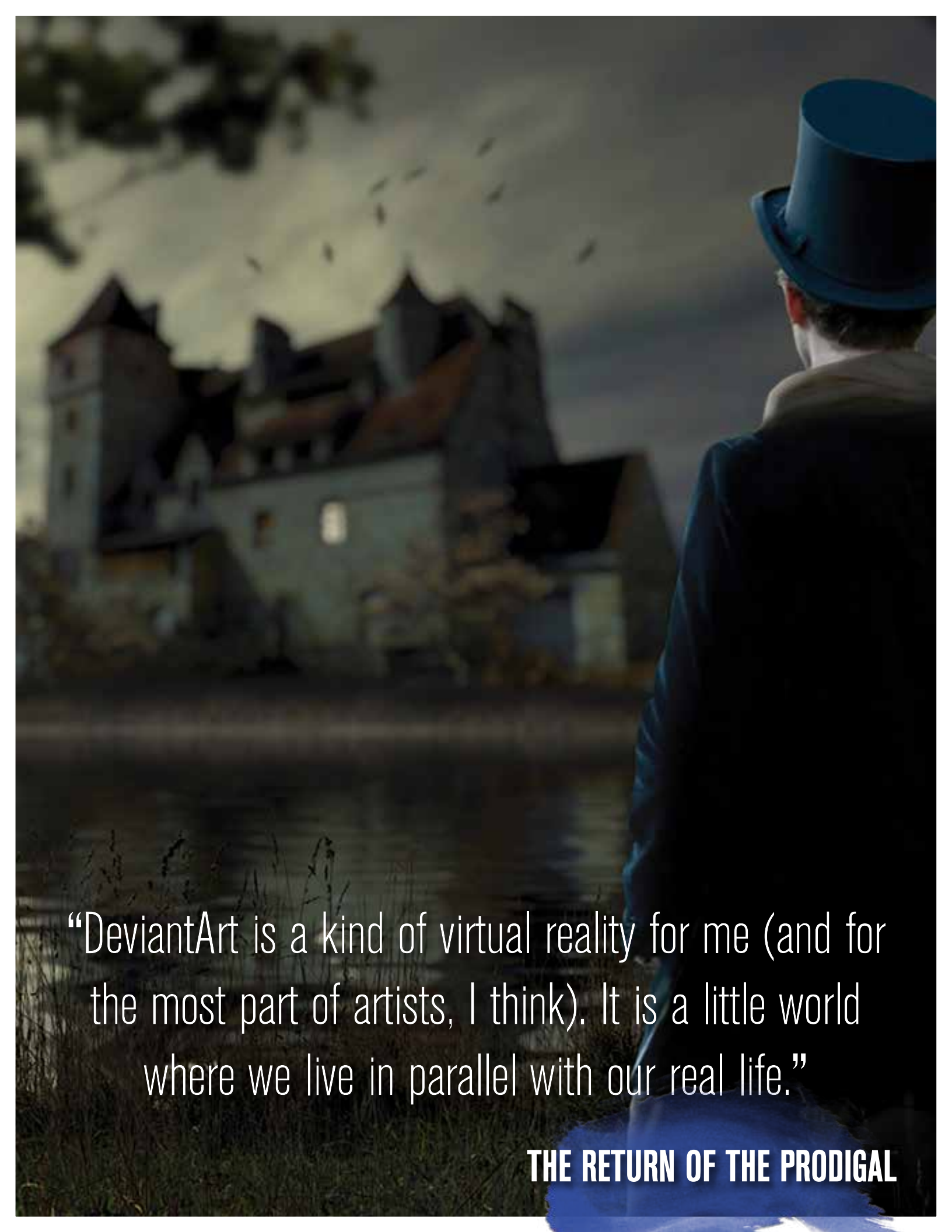
*After that short period in youth, I didn't do anything creative until I accidentally opened the world of photomanipulation four*



ON THE EDGE



TIME TO SCOOT!

A man wearing a dark blue top hat and a dark coat is seen from the back, looking towards a large, multi-towered castle or fortress. The scene is set at dusk or dawn, with a cloudy sky and some birds flying in the distance. The foreground is a grassy field. The overall mood is contemplative and artistic.

“DeviantArt is a kind of virtual reality for me (and for the most part of artists, I think). It is a little world where we live in parallel with our real life.”

**THE RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL**



years ago. It happened when my husband asked me to make a couple of collages for his work. At that time I had an iPad mini, and I used Bazaart (a pretty simple app for IOS) to make those collages. This process so captivated me that I can't stop to this day. (LOL) My first manips were quite simple, but my imagination just gushed, I could create 4-5 manips in a day! Now I release 1-2 photomanipulations per month and sometimes I miss that time. Well...that's how I became an artist.

Except for a short period last year, when I tried to make friends with Photoshop, I create all manipulations on my iPad 9.7-inch just with my fingers. Now I use Affinity Photo for iPad; a fantastic app, this is almost as good as Photoshop.



S. MAG.: You talk about “preferring to create with your fingers” and not rely so heavily on Photoshop. Can you explain to readers a little more about what you like as well as dislike when it comes to Photoshop and other apps/programs such as that?

L.V.: Probably it's just a habit. I hadn't had a computer and I worked on the iPad with several primitive apps for three years, dreaming about Photoshop. But when I finally started to use it, I couldn't get used to creating art works with the mouse and keyboard. Then, at the end of last year, I knew about Affinity Photo for iPad and my dreams came true: I got an app with all the advantages of Photoshop where I can work just with my fingers. This app absolutely satisfies my requests as an artist.

S. MAG.: Living in the Ukraine, can you tell us more in regards to the location; the scenery there; the people, etc.? Is your area a big source of inspiration for you?

L.V.: Yes, there are many lovely places here: rivers, seas,

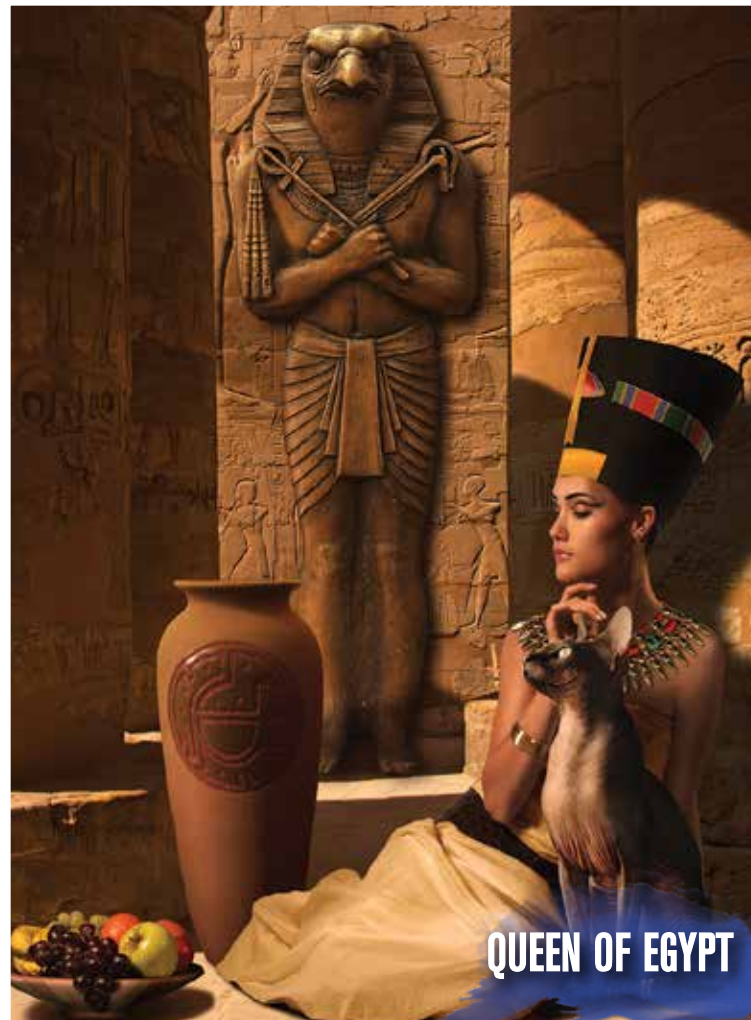


THE THROUGH TRAIN



BOOKSBURG





**QUEEN OF EGYPT**



**SWEET REVENGE**

*mountains... My city is located on both sides of the river, it's very beautiful. And they say that Ukrainian women are also one of the most beautiful in the world ;). I wouldn't say that my country is a source of inspiration, I'm not a master of landscapes. But I love it.*

S. MAG.: Can you tell us a bit about your working background? Have you worked in other industries before and “made your way” into the art world?

L.V.: *I'm an engineer and a logistician, but I left my work nine years ago when my youngest daughter was born. So, I was just a desperate housewife when photomanipulation became my hobby. I create my “masterpieces” half-lying on the couch with the tablet in my hands. (LOL)*

S. MAG.: Social media is quite a big marketing tool for artists, writers, and many others. How does DeviantArt help you in your work and extending that exposure to people out there on the Internet?

L.V.: *I'm not trying to make money on my art. DeviantArt is a kind of virtual reality for me (and for the most part of artists, I think). It is a little world where we live in parallel with our real life. We get inspiration from each other and have a great ability to share our art (read: our souls) with a lot of people.*

S. MAG.: In addition, you are part of a variety of groups. You spoke above about the collaboration and support from DeviantArt. For those interested in becoming a part of that “realm,” can you speak a little more about that path?

L.V.: *DeviantArt is that little world, and the numerous groups are like little countries, cities, districts...with their own laws and rules. And, of course, if a city has a good “mayor” who takes care of his/her inhabitants, such a place can be a great additional supporting community.*

*Besides creation of photomanipulation, I have another hobby: Coming up with contests and organizing them on DeviantArt. This can be incredibly interesting, so I do it in my groups and truly enjoy this.*

S. MAG.: What comes next for you? Are there any current projects you're working on at the moment?

L.V.: *I just finished a new work titled, “Sweet Revenge.” I haven't begun anything new, but I have several ideas in my head, so keep your eyes open!*

Which is exactly what all fans and readers will do. The artwork created by the combination of Lora's incredible mind and creative fingers is a true delight to view, and it will be extremely fun to see Sweeney Todd and many more appear in the future. To view even more of Lora's imagination, you can catch up with her at <https://lora-vysotskaya.deviantart.com/>. ■



# Dianne Freeman Guides the Reader to Murder

Interview by Amy Lignor for *Suspense Magazine*  
Press Photo Credit: Lindsay Halicki

Dianne Freeman's well-researched debut places her in a very unique category. Not only do her characters live in the upstairs/downstairs world of the Victorian age, but they are also extremely fun "whodunits" that readers can sink their teeth into and have an entertaining ride while being awed by the historical 'sleuthing' set against true Victorian scenery.

Tinkering with writing most of her adult life while her career path focused on the financial industry, Dianne came upon retirement and her hobby of telling tales (thankfully, for readers) turned into something far more. Taking time out to sit down with *Suspense Magazine*, Dianne spoke about her debut title, the series that is being spun, as well as how she transitioned from the avid reader to the delighted full-time writer.

*Suspense Magazine* (S. MAG.): Let us begin with you telling readers exactly what draws you to writing historical mysteries? Have you always been partial to "whodunits"? And why is the Victorian era so fascinating to you?

Dianne Freeman (D.F.): *History is all about people, and people are fascinating. We all have the same basic needs and desires, but the era dictates how we go about fulfilling them. I've always loved learning how people lived in different eras and trying to put myself in their shoes. Socially, people tended to follow the examples of their leaders and the Victorian era was a little confusing. The queen had a strong moral code and strict social rules, but her son ran with a fast crowd and was a lot more fun. That's why I think life among the upper class in the Victorian era lends itself to mystery: under society's watchful eye, everyone is the model of good behavior, but in private, they're up to something.*

S. MAG.: Your plotline and characters are a whole lot of fun to read; in fact, they will remind many of the beloved Agatha Christie. So...tell us all about your debut, "A Lady's Guide to Etiquette and Murder," and how it came into being?

D.F.: *First, thank you for the lovely compliment! The story is about Frances Wynn, Countess of Harleigh, whose mother got caught up in the American heiress craze and traded her daughter for the prestige of gaining title in the family. Nine years have passed and Frances is now a widow yearning for independence. With her young daughter, she moves away from the family home to live on her own for the first time in her life. From that point, everything that can go wrong, does—including a shortage of funds, a series of burglaries, a visit from her marriage mad sister, and a murder. Though she has no idea what she's doing, Frances faces*



these problems with aplomb, calling on all her resources—including gossip friends and a handsome neighbor—to flush out the killer.

Writing has always been a hobby for me. Once I retired, I decided to try my hand at a novel. As I mentioned, the Victorian era is a favorite of mine and the American heiress concept came from reading Edith Wharton's "The Buccaneers" long ago. Further research showed me the real women in Wharton's world didn't all meet with such wretched ends. I liked the idea of a more upbeat version where my heiress pushes some boundaries. And because I love a good mystery, I thought I'd give her a knack for solving crimes.

S. MAG.: Will this be a series? If so, what was it about these particular characters and/or location that made you want to explore them further?

D.F.: "A Lady's Guide to Etiquette and Murder" is the first in the Countess of Harleigh series. I'm working on the third book now, and I've really enjoyed exploring Frances' growth. She was born to a privileged family and the price she paid was duty to that family. She married the man her mother chose, she learned how to be the grand lady of the house and shouldered all the responsibility that entailed. At twenty-seven she thinks she's paid her dues, and with her husband's death, she sees a chance for independence; a chance to be her own woman.

I love watching her grow into that role. She still has to live by the strict rules of society. Her outward behavior must be above reproach, but with a little ingenuity, she can work her way around the rules. She's become creative and cunning, but ever watchful of her reputation.

S. MAG.: Do you have personal favorites in regards to authors who write in this genre? Is there one who you wish you could sit down with and talk to? If so, who would it be and what, above all, would you want to know about them and their career?

D.F.: I'm lucky to have two wonderful mystery-centric bookstores nearby—Aunt Agatha's Mystery Bookshop when I'm in Michigan, and The Poisoned Pen when I'm in Arizona, so I do have the chance to talk with some of my favorite mystery authors. Since I began writing, my questions tend to involve balancing work and life. I write every day, and it can be difficult to pull my head out of the 1890s and pay attention to the here and now.

S. MAG.: You speak on your website about attending writers' conferences. Can you tell readers how they help and what they add to your writing journey?

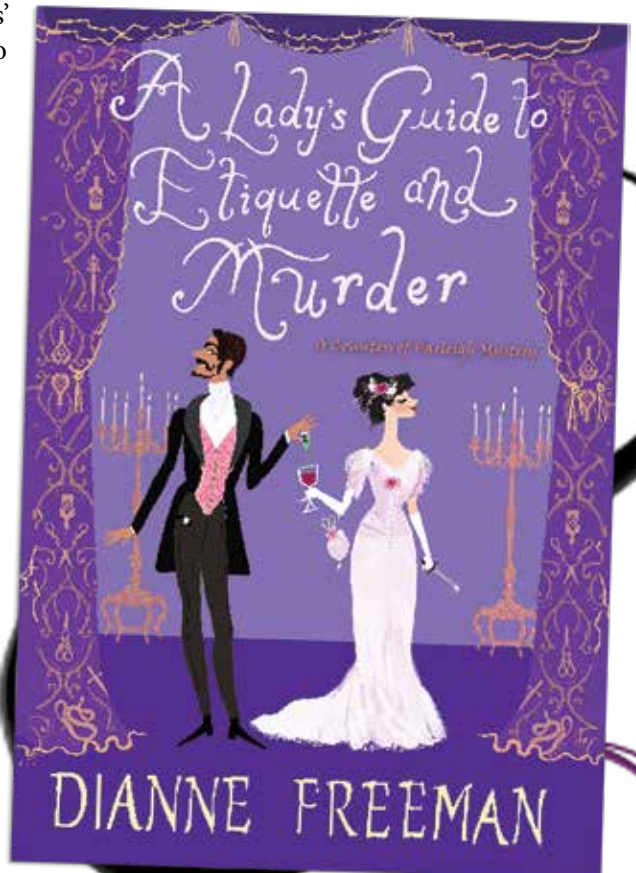
D.F.: Writers' conferences are a great opportunity to learn more about our craft and the business of publishing: What can an agent do for you? What should you put in a query letter? What are editors looking for? But the best part of a conference is time spent in the company of other writers. Whether they're published, in the query trenches, or just starting out, it's both a joy and a relief to talk with people who completely get you and your need to write.

S. MAG.: What made you get back into writing and decide that now was the perfect time to put your pen to paper (or, rather, your fingers on the keyboard)?

D.F.: This is an easy answer—I retired. I know many writers who have full-time jobs, are raising children, and still manage to write, but I don't know how they do it. I could never find the time to write on a regular basis until I retired. As soon as that time became available, I knew exactly what I wanted to do with it.

S. MAG.: Besides conferences, are there other things you do that help you learn and grow as a writer that you would recommend to others?

D.F.: I read—as much as possible. Both in and out of my genre. I also





"The latest Tallent & Lowery book from celebrated novelist Amy Lignor is the best yet, an exciting and colorful suspense story with every element we love."

—Night Owl Reviews

# THE DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD

TALLEN & LOWERY  
BOOK FIVE

AMY  
LIGNOR

SUSPENSE  
PUBLISHING

*work with two critique partners. It's amazing how much I learn by helping another writer with a manuscript. I find it so much easier to find a problem (and often a solution) in someone else's work, and once I do, I can bring that clarity to my own edits. The reverse is also true. Having their eyes on my manuscript is invaluable.*

S. MAG.: Along those lines, what advice would you give to the up-and-comers who are struggling to begin a writing career: something you think they absolutely should do, as well as one thing you hope they absolutely will not do?

D.F.: *I'd advise anyone who wants to make writing a career to seek out other writers, not only for the purpose of critique, but for support and advice. If there are no writers' groups in your area, get online. With all the writers' Facebook groups and the Twitter writing community, this does not have to be a solitary pursuit.*

*Something a writer should never do is a little more difficult because everyone works differently, but I think this is good advice for most of us—don't agonize over your first draft. First drafts are for getting the story down and are not meant for anyone's eyes but your own, which leads me to a "don't" that should apply to everyone. Never submit a first draft to an agent or editor.*

S. MAG.: Are you the type of writer who "schedules" a certain amount of hours that you will work on a book per day, or are you one of those who sits down and writes when the feeling strikes them? With your books being set in the Victorian era, do you spend a lot of time researching facts so that your backdrop—from fashions worn to what locations looked like back then—are as real as possible?

D.F.: *I don't actually schedule my writing time but I do try to write every day—anywhere from two hours to several, depending on whether the words are flowing or dribbling. And I love research. I can lose myself in the newspaper archives for hours researching crimes, policing, and the court system. Since I use very specific time periods, it's also good to know if any major events took place that the characters should be aware of, as well as what technology was available and in use by the average person. I tend to go overboard and dig up details I'm unlikely to use, but the more I immerse myself in the history, the better I can convey a sense of the era to readers.*

S. MAG.: What projects are you currently working on?

D.F.: *I'm currently working on the third book in the Countess of Harleigh series, tentatively titled "A Lady's Guide to Weddings and Murder," where a dozen relatives of the bride and groom are gathered at a country house party that turns deadly.*

After reading the first title, meeting up with the colorful Countess of Harleigh, and delving into what is sure to be an incredible series, readers everywhere will be extremely pleased that Dianne Freeman never let go of that desire and passion to tell a fantastic story. This is one example of "retirement" that we can all benefit from. For more information on upcoming events and titles, check in with Dianne at [www.DiFreeman.com](http://www.DiFreeman.com). ■

# JOSEPH SOUZA

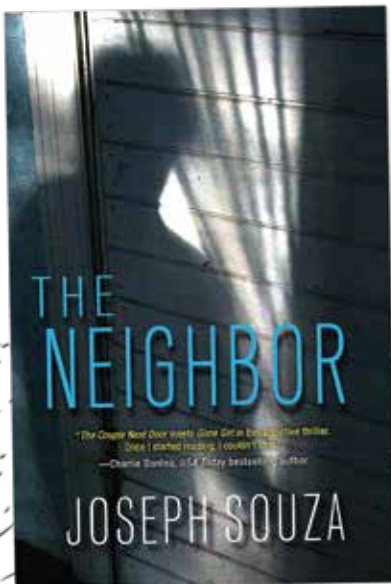
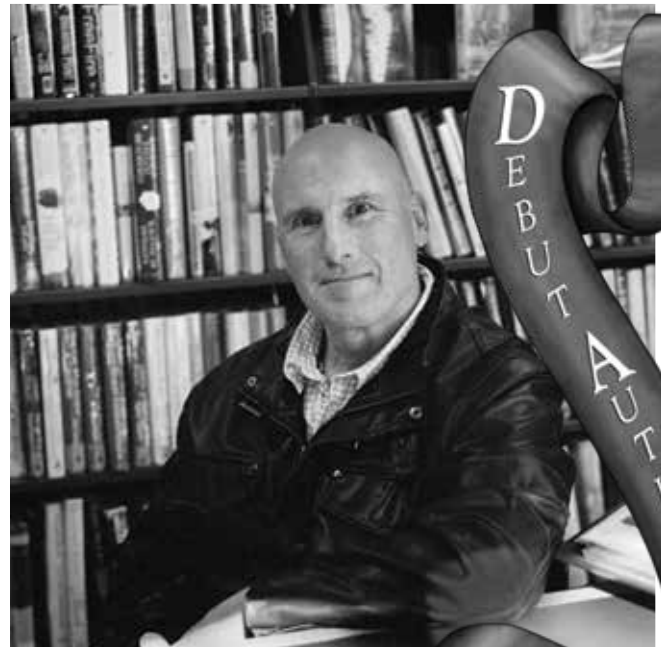
## Asks "Do you Know Your Neighbor?"

Interview by Amy Lignor for *Suspense Magazine*  
Press Photo Credit: Provided by Publicist

Creating a taut psychological thriller is a difficult task. There are familiar names in the writing world that can do it well and have done it for a good, long time. When it comes to Joseph Souza, readers will see that with his debut novel, "The Neighbor," he is well on his way to joining those ranks and becoming a true "fan favorite."

Having a background that includes working as an intelligence analyst for the Drug Enforcement Agency (Organized Crime Unit) in Washington, D.C., Joseph Souza was an integral part of teams that delved into the darkest recesses of this world, facing criminal minds and corporate evil as they worked to bring them down. Here, Joseph Souza offers a look at how his transition from "writer" to "author" began, who his mentors were along the way, and talks candidly about the good, the bad, and the roadblocks that should be avoided by other writers in order to get their works on paper.

*Suspense Magazine* (S. MAG.): Can you give readers a brief overview of your writing journey, from when you first decided you wanted to be a writer, and in regards to the essays and short stories you have created along the way?



Joseph Souza (J.S.): I've always been a writer. Even as a young boy I wrote essays and stories. Writing has always been a fantastic outlet for me and a way to express my opinions and creativity. In fact, I'd been a writer for a long time before I morphed into an author. I've always differentiated the term "writer" from "author." They're related, yet at the same time two very distinct animals. It took me a long time to realize the difference between the two. A "writer" writes whatever he or she desires, operates on no timeline, and has no financial constraints. I did this a long time before I realized that I wanted to be an "author"; someone who sets deadlines, is professional, and is disciplined about the type of writing they need to be doing, and plans to go through all the proper channels in order to be traditionally published.

I worked in the criminal justice field and studied criminology in college, and because of that, writing mysteries seemed a natural extension of my fascination with the underbelly of American society. My first paid short story was a revelation and proved to me that I could be successful in this genre. Then my second short story won runner-up for the Al Blanchard Award and was awarded at Crimebake. From there it took me a good deal of time before



*I learned the ins and outs of getting my novel traditionally published. Now here I am with my domestic thriller, "The Neighbor," published by the wonderful, Kensington Books.*

S. MAG.: What made you decide that this was the time to produce your first novel?

J.S.: *Most authors have books sitting in their drawers that have never seen the light of day. I'm no different. Let me answer your question this way: There have been books I've read that have inspired and motivated me to write my own novel. Way back, when I was a college student, it was a historical suspense novel called "Back Bay" by William Martin. Now, not too many people have heard of that novel, but for me it was a revelation and a total page turner. I remember thinking how much I admired it and how I would like to write something similarly engrossing and entertaining. Later, Martin Amis's London Fields series and Robert Parker's Spenser novels had the same effect on me. But admiring these authors also had consequences. My writing voice had not yet fully developed and so I started aping the style of the masters because I hadn't discovered my own unique style.*

*I was a writer back then and not yet an author. I was learning the craft, teaching myself as I went along, and making rookie mistakes along the way as I tried to find my own voice. But I loved writing and I kept learning, persevering, studying the craft, and reading new authors. I'd always loved novels about domestic life and enjoyed reading Updike, Cheever and Anne Tyler. When I started reading domestic thrillers, I realized I found my two loves. Then "Gone Girl" by Gillian Flynn was published and her writing blew my mind. Personally, I think Flynn is a brilliant writer and one of the best in the business. It's a shame they don't give Pulitzer Prizes to crime writers because she would most certainly get my vote. And so would have George V. Higgins, the talented author of "The Friends of Eddie Coyle."*

S. MAG.: Can you offer us a sneak peek at "The Neighbor"? How, exactly, did this idea come into being? And how difficult was it to go from short stories into a full-length novel?

J.S.: *(LOL!) I can't tell you the exact reason this novel came about because then I would give the plot of my novel away. But let's just say it was a "Eureka!" moment. I've always been a little obsessed about what my neighbors are up to, and so it made sense to write a story about this obsession of mine. And in this day and age, where neighbors are doing all sorts of bizarre things out of sight, it has become quite an issue. There was the story about the family keeping all their malnourished children hostage and not letting them out of the house. There was also one about the terrorists living next door, their house filled with weapons, and how the neighbors were too afraid to get involved.*

*In many ways, writing a novel has many advantages over*

*writing a short story. Writing short stories is hard work. You need to be succinct and get to the point. There's much subtlety involved and you need to let the words do a lot of the heavy lifting. For me, a person with a family and busy schedule, my writing time is limited. So penning short stories offers little financial reward. Still, I love writing them. I just finished one and am waiting anxiously to see if the journal will accept it.*

*"The Neighbor" is told by a husband and wife in alternate chapters, and this is very hard to do in the short story form. I wanted to explore family and racial relations in an age where technology has isolated us even more from our fellow citizens. The trick was to set it up in the genre of a domestic thriller. The flawed main character in "The Neighbor" is Leah. She spies on her neighbors because she is isolated and lonely, and because of the circumstances of her past. I don't want to give away too much of the plot, but needless to say, my goal was to create a page turner that the reader would not want to put down.*

S. MAG.: Were suspense/psychological thrillers something you were always interested in? Is there another genre you are drawn to as well that you may tackle in the future?

J.S.: *As I've mentioned, I studied criminology and worked in law enforcement and the criminal justice field. I've always loved crime books and am still fascinated with anything related to organized crime—that includes everything from La Cosa Nostra to corporate crimes. I spent a lot of time in the North End of Boston and Southie in the eighties; two places where organized crime flourished.*

*I do get a little uncomfortable with crime books in a series, but that's just a personal preference. Many are great, but some tend to become stale and formulaic. Of course, fans of these series tend to love the recurring setting and characters. I suppose this is just my personal taste. For example, I loved "The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo" but found the next two in the series not anywhere near as good as the first. I love Parker, but that's because he was a great chronicler of Boston, my hometown. As for my books, I like to think up different plots, settings and characters for each novel. That's just my writing and reading preference. I'd never rule anything out, but for now I enjoy the newness of every standalone mystery I set out to write. I find crime novels to be the same quality level, if not better, than those highbrow literary novels.*

S. MAG.: You have an extremely interesting background. Can you speak more about the time when you worked as an intelligence analyst for the Drug Enforcement Agency (Organized Crime Unit) in Washington, D.C.?

J.S.: *I worked for a year in the headquarters of the DEA and it was a lot of computer and paperwork, analyzing data that came in from field offices all around the world, meetings and phone calls. It was interesting work because we were trying to prosecute La Cosa Nostra and Pablo Escobar. I was once*

assigned to compile a list of threats against DEA agents and many were chilling in their detailed descriptions of violence. I got to know a lot of the agents, many who were hard-nosed veterans who liked to go out and drink, and tell vivid stories about their undercover work.

Much of my experience with real crime figures came from my years working on the waterfront in South Boston. This was in the age of Whitey Bulger. Back in those days, the streets of Southie were filled with colorful and shady characters. I lived this life off and on for seven years and it still makes an impression on me today. Looking back, I had no idea how dangerous those South Boston streets really were.

S. MAG.: Tell us how you feel about the internet, blogs, Facebook, etc., and how important you feel these are in making or breaking the career of a writer? Do you feel it is a must for writers to learn how to use technology in order to brand and/or market themselves?

J.S.: Technology is a must for any author working today. I'm decent with it, but I also have a lot of room for improvement. It helps to hire people to build your website, especially if you're busy writing and marketing. Of course, social media will do an author no good if they write a bad book. Yes, online marketing can certainly be a great advantage to a writer, but make sure you write a great book first before you advertise it over the internet. Because if you write a bad book, technology can also have a negative effect on your work as well, resulting in bad reviews and low sales.

S. MAG.: There have been a couple of movies based on cases you worked during your career, but is there one that hits a personal note with you that you would love to turn into a book at some point? If so, what would that be?

J.S.: I worked on the case that became the made-for-TV-movie "Drug Wars: The Enrique Camarena Story." And I worked as a paralegal exclusively on the case that became the award-winning book and movie, "A Civil Action," starring John Travolta. If anything, I felt sympathetic toward the parents in "A Civil Action." Large corporations polluted the wells in Woburn, Massachusetts, and a number of kids in town came down with cancer. Many died in what the lawyers described as random leukemia clusters. But they weren't random. These faceless corporations represented true evil—and I was helping defend them. I remember the first time I saw photos of the large trench dug by our client, W.R. Grace, and filled with corroded barrels of Trichloroethylene. It was why I didn't attend law school, even though I'd been admitted. I couldn't see myself defending corporate polluters and profiting off their negligence, knowing they contributed to the deaths of innocent children.

S. MAG.: Name an author who you feel has been a mentor and/or muse for you along the way. If you could ask this

person a question, what would it be?

J.S.: Martin Amis has been an inspiration because of his dazzling, fierce prose. George V. Higgins for his brilliant, dialogue-centric crime novels set in Boston. Robert Parker for his memorable Boston-based characters, and Gillian Flynn for her twisted, dark plots and unique prose. If anything, I'd love to ask these authors about their writing process, whether they're pantsers or plotters. I'm a little obsessed about other author's writing processes and always asking my author friends about it. Everyone prepares a little differently and I'm always amazed at how novelists set out to write their stories. So I guess I'd ask them all that question. And if anyone asks me, I tell them I'm more of a panster.

S. MAG.: What is the one "huge lesson" you've learned when it comes to the publishing industry? Could you give a word of advice to other authors who are working hard to create their first novel?

J.S.: Read LOTS of the books that you find yourself enjoying. Study what's hot in the current market, because if you think you're going to publish that thousand page book about a feisty whale, think again. Get into a good writer's group and willingly accept their criticism, no matter how much it hurts. Learn to accept writing a bad first draft—then totally embrace the long and arduous process of editing. Work on perfecting a query letter, which is an art unto itself. Your agent will be your best friend. I know I couldn't have gotten to this point without my great agent, Evan Marshall. And above all, grow a skin thicker than a crocodile if you hope to survive in this crazy industry. Oh, and forget about getting rich. And when all gets you down, start writing again, because that's where it all started.

S. MAG.: Tell readers what they can expect next from Joseph Souza.

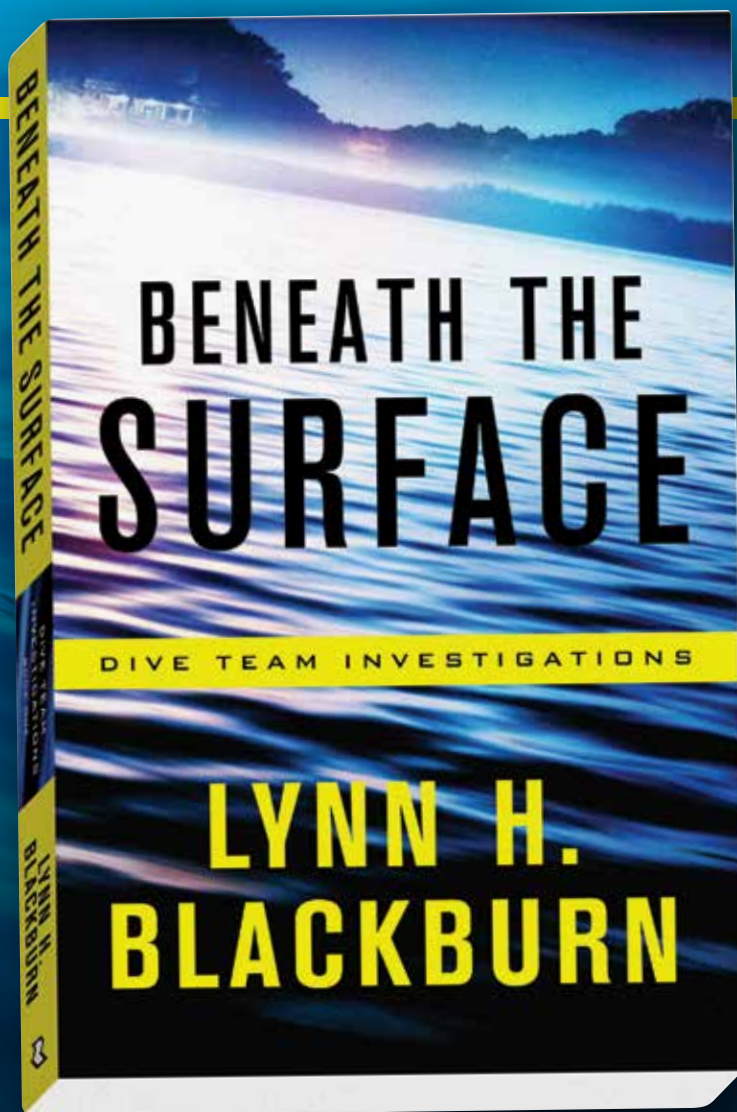
J.S.: My next book is called "Pray for the Girl" and I'm very excited about this one. It will be published by Kensington in May, 2019. My editor at Kensington, John Scognamiglio, really helped me with his fantastic edits. It's about a damaged woman returning to her small mill town after many years away, and discovering that an immigrant Muslim girl has been stoned to death. This book has some serious twists that I hope will surprise readers. I can't wait for fans to get their hands on this one. Returning to one's childhood home will never seem the same after reading this domestic thriller.

And when it comes to reading the fast-paced, suspense filled words of Joseph Souza, books will never seem the same again either. Souza's work, his passion for creating, and his ability to offer up unforgettable stories definitely makes him a "must read" package. Check in on what comes next for this author at [www.JosephSouza.net](http://www.JosephSouza.net). ■



Award-winning author Lynn H. Blackburn grabs readers by the throat and doesn't let go until the final

# HEART-POUNDING — PAGE. —



Leigh Weston thought she'd left a troubled past behind when she moved back home to Carrington, North Carolina. But when dive team investigator Ryan Parker finds a body in the lake near her home, she fears the past hasn't stayed where it belongs. Can Ryan find a way to protect her, and maybe win her heart in the process?

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# TRACY CLARK

## Debuts “Broken Places”

Interview by Amy Lignor for *Suspense Magazine*  
Press Photo Credit: Jovanka Novakovic Bauwerks Photography Studio Chicago

Born in Chicago, Tracy Clark has worked as an editor for twenty-two years at the Tribune Company. This career “gifts” Tracy with the knowledge (and the obsession) to turn in “clean” manuscripts, and allows her passion for writing to grow even stronger, penning a series set within the confines of the city she knows inside and out.

This new *Chicago Mystery* series begins with the release of “Broken Places,” and not only introduces a strong, independent ex-cop turned P.I. by the name of Cass Raines, but also quite literally brings to life the ethnic diversity of “The Windy City.” Taking time out of her busy schedule, Tracy entertained *Suspense Magazine* with her humor and spoke a bit about this incredible debut, her passion and love for Chicago (and *Game of Thrones*), while sharing information about how P.I. Cass Raines came into being.



*Suspense Magazine* (S. MAG.): Please begin by telling readers all about your debut novel, “Broken Places.” Can you give everyone a “sneak peek” into the characters and plot?

Tracy Clark (T.C.): When “Broken Places” opens, we meet Detective Cass Raines of the Chicago Police Department. She and her partner, Detective Ben Mickerson, have finally cornered the murder suspect they’ve been chasing all summer long and they’re going in for the arrest when something goes horribly wrong. An inept detective, Jim Farraday, eager for the bragging rights the arrest will give him, escalates a tense standoff on a rooftop. There’s an exchange of gunfire. Cass is shot. Her bullet is the one that strikes the fatal blow that brings the suspect down. It’s a heavy weight she’s left to carry. Fed up with the department, which quickly rules the incident a “clean shoot,” and awards the detectives, including Farraday, commendations for their heroic actions, Cass turns in her badge and goes private. She’s now the owner and soul operative for Raines Investigations, though the shooting and her near-death experience still haunt her.

Enter Father Raymond Heaton, activist priest and Cass’s surrogate father. She calls him Pop because he helped raise her when her mother died and her father took off. When Pop asks Cass to look into acts of vandalism that have taken place around



his church, she drops everything and goes to help.

When she later discovers Pop dead, his body slumped over in a confessional, and the body of a Hispanic gang member sprawled on the altar steps in a pool of his own blood, Cass's simple case of vandalism becomes something far more sinister...and personal.

Cass is mortified to learn that the detective in charge of Pop's case is the one cop in the entire city she knows for a fact can't handle it: Detective James Farraday.

Farraday, eager for the easy solve, and just as inept as Cass remembers him, quickly determines that he's dealing with a clear case of murder-suicide. The gangbanger broke into the church to rob it, he reasons, and the priest surprised him in the act. A struggle for the gangbanger's gun resulted in the kid being shot. The priest then, overtaken by remorse and guilt, stumbled into the confessional and killed himself. Open and shut. But there's nothing open and shut about it for Cass. She knew Pop; he'd never take a life, not even his. She and Farraday, with old scores to settle and new ones brewing, square off. And despite his warnings for her to steer clear of his case, Cass races to find the real killer and clear Pop's name before Detective Farraday makes another costly mistake.

S. MAG.: Now, this is the beginning of a series, correct? Did you know before beginning the writing that this would be a series and not a standalone novel, or is that something that came about after you had been working on it for a while?

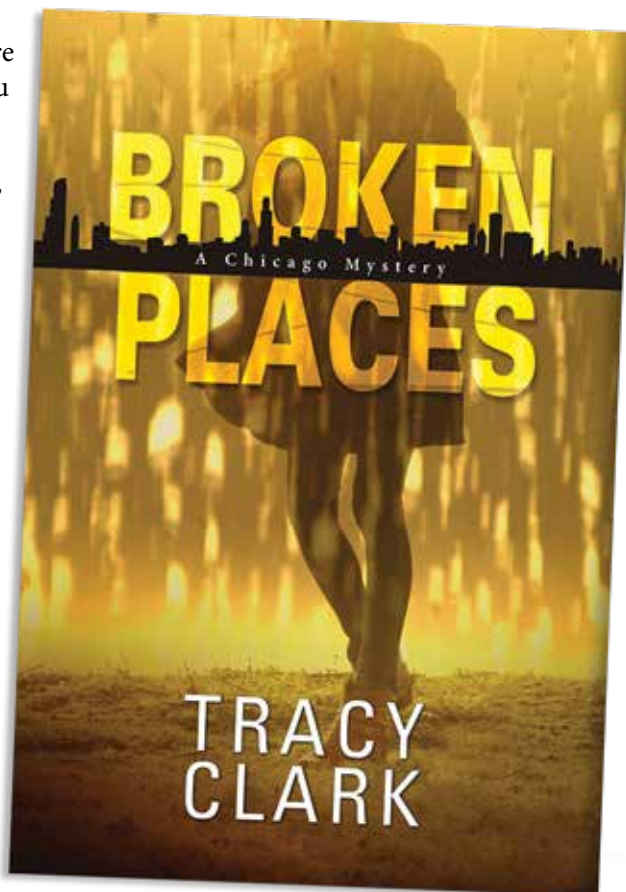
T.C.: Yes, I always knew I wanted to write a series. Of course, you never really know what you've got until you've written it, but I entered into the process believing I could make Cass Raines a recurring character. I think that's why I spent so much time piecing her together. If it all went well, I wanted to make sure she was someone I could get along with for an extended length of time. It helped also that she wouldn't allow herself to be ignored. Cass popped into my head at the weirdest times and simply would not shut up.

After I finished the first book and couldn't sell it, I figured...what the heck? If this is a series, at least in my own mind at that point, I may as well keep going with it. So I did. I wrote another Cass Raines novel. Nobody wanted that one either, but I was deep into it by then. I wrote the third book just to prove I could. I was on the outside of everything anyway. No one was paying any attention to what I was doing, so what did I have to lose? By the time I got good enough for anyone in publishing to take notice, I had three novels staring up at me. All three sold as a package deal. Good thing it all worked out or I'd be feeling really stupid right about now.

S. MAG.: What made you choose suspense/crime fiction as the genre you wanted to write in? Is there another genre (or genres) that you wish to tackle one day?

T.C.: I followed that old writing advice: write the kind of book you enjoy reading. I love suspense/crime fiction. I love a good mystery, period—especially PI novels. There's something about that lone avenger righting wrongs, taking up for the little guy, and working from his or her own personal code of justice. These gumshoes are outside of the mainstream, often on the fringe of society in a lot of respects, but also very much in the mix. It's a weird tightrope they walk. I don't think I'm cut out to write cozies where the killer poisons some old lady's crumpet, though I do enjoy reading books like that. I'm far more comfortable with leather saps, darkened alleys, arm-breaking goons and Molotov cocktails. Fictionally speaking, that is. I'd prefer not to experience any of those things in real life.

S. MAG.: Your biography states that you loved Nancy Drew books and had been drawn to one day writing a very strong female lead. In today's world, with the social issues we have at the moment, do you wish there could be more female heroes? In addition, are there specific characters out there who you personally call favorites that make you run to the bookstore or head to the library to get the new book ASAP?



T.C.: Yes, it was all about Nancy Drew when I was a kid. Nancy was smart, independent, completely indefatigable...and she saved herself, halleluiah! She didn't wait around like a damsel in distress for some guy to show up with bolt cutters. When I started writing, I wanted to create a character just as smart, just as tenacious, just as self-reliant. I do wish there were more strong female heroes, but the good thing is there are more and more of them showing up every day, and they come in all shapes and sizes and ethnicities. There are so many talented writers out there, so many wonderful characters and stories to discover.

From Nancy, I moved on to Agatha Christie and then to awesome writers, such as, Sara Paretsky and Sue Grafton. V.I. Warshawski and Kinsey Millhone were groundbreaking characters. Anything Paretsky writes ends up on my TBR pile. No questions asked. No indecision. Her latest, "Shell Game," releases in October. I've already pre-ordered it. I also enjoy Eve Dallas from Nora Roberts' In Death series. Complicated character. Nobody steps in to save her...and lives to tell about it. Tess Gerritsen's Rizzoli & Isles series is a lot of fun, too. The list could go on forever. How much time do you have? I also like Janet Evanovich, Patricia Cornwell, Lisa Jackson, Karin Slaughter, Marcia Muller, James Patterson, David Baldacci, Lee Childs, and many others. Then I'm learning about so many wonderful writers of color that I now cannot get enough of, like Kellye Garrett, Rachel Howzell Hall, Danny Gardner. So many books, so little time and, again, even a couple of cozy writers thrown in just to spice it up—V.M. Burns, Delia Pitts.

S. MAG.: Being a Chicagoan, can you share with readers the love you have for your city and how that adds to the creation of your stories?

T.C.: Chicago's pretty fantastic. I was born and raised here and can't imagine living anywhere else, even though I fantasize about Antarctica when the heat and humidity spikes in August. Even the occasional blizzard hasn't managed to put me off the place. A Chicago winter builds character. You haven't lived until you've tried chipping your car out from under twelve inches of hard-packed snow and ice. Of course, you then have all the things we're known for, like Chicago-style hotdogs and deep-dish pizza, municipal corruption, mobsters, union toughies, potholes, wicked wind. (Crossing the Michigan Avenue Bridge when the wind is at its worst is not advised. Been there, done that, almost got blown into the lake.) But we Chicagoans take all that in stride. We're resilient and cocky, real straight-shooters, nice, friendly...mostly. I like that about us. And I use every bit of the city in my books, right down to the blinking streetlights and the river rats.

S. MAG.: Being that *Game of Thrones* is a particular love of yours (LOL), can you tell us if that time period is one that will ever appear as a backdrop for one of your tales? And, if so, what about that period of time are you drawn to?

T.C.: I do love GOT, but the time period wouldn't work in any of my Cass Raines books. The books are firmly locked into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and as close to what's happening now as I can get them. And honestly, initially, nothing about GOT's time period appealed to me. The show was a slow build and confusing as all get-out—horses, swords, knights and squires, c'mon! I'm a modern-day gal; I don't do horses. But the characters slowly grew on me and the familial rivalries, the blood-letting, the deviousness, the sheer originality of the deaths and the storytelling eventually kept me glued to my seat. It's like Macbeth on steroids. And that Ice Wall literally gives me chills just thinking about it. Side note: I don't think it's very sporting that we have to wait so long between seasons. I think that should really be classified as viewer abuse. Who's with me? Show of hands? And kudos to Diana Rigg as Olenna Tyrell for that masterful death scene. There's no way I would have taken that goblet of poison. Jamie Lannister would have had to chase me down and pour it down my throat. Too much? (LOL)

S. MAG.: If you had to pick one thing, what do you hope readers will take away from your books?

T.C.: A good time! I'm no Dostoevsky or Tolstoy; I'm not writing "Crime and Punishment" or "War and Peace." I set out to create an engaging cast of characters that readers would want to revisit time and time again. These characters will grow and stretch a little from book to book, and the problems they confront will change, but at the core, the stories will be very much about Cass and those who share her world...and complicate her life. I have a special soft spot for Pouch, the monochromatically dressed pickpocket. I don't know where he came from, but he cracks me up. I toss him into the books now just to amuse myself.

S. MAG.: Are there specific authors who have been personal mentors during your lifetime? If you could meet one and be able to sit down and speak with them, who would that be and why, and name a question you'd ask that you would love for them to answer?



# JACK FERRELL RETURNS

07.24.2018



**"Nikkel is a true master of the thriller."**

—Bestselling Author  
Shane Gericke,  
"The Fury"

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T.C.: I was lucky enough to have the late Eleanor Taylor Bland, author of the Marti MacAlister series, as a mentor early on. Eleanor was so generous with her time, so free with her advice, encouragement and razor-focused critiques. She really took me under her wing and kept me moving in the right direction. She was fantastic. I can still hear her voice in my head urging me to **KEEP WRITING!** She even introduced me to Walter Mosley! I think I made a fool of myself, but I didn't care. It was freaking **WALTER MOSLEY!** She also deposited me in front of Sara Paretsky once, and then disappeared smiling, and I know for a fact I made a fool of myself then. I couldn't speak. I just grinned at the woman. Not my most artful moment.

I also had the privilege of sharpening my writing skills at the Writer's Loft in Chicago under the excellent tutelage of Mary Carter, author of the Irish Village mysteries. I consider Mary a mentor and a friend. She can spot BS on a page faster than anyone I know, and she has no problem calling you on it. She cut a scene from my first book that I absolutely loved. That scene was perfect in every way. Not a wasted word anywhere. I loved that scene. After she cut it, and I whimpered a little, I reread the chapter, then read it again, then cursed a little. She was absolutely right. The scene didn't fit. It was perfect, a thing of beauty, but it wasn't needed. I still tease her about it. She has told me to get over it already, but I don't think I ever will. (LOL)

If I had the chance to meet any writer, I'd go for one I have no chance of ever meeting: Agatha Christie. I think I'd ask her about poisons and whether or not she found that people were a little wary about having dinner with her given the fact that she knew how to dispatch a person without leaving that much of a trace. She was likely a very nice person; harmless, even on a personal level, but still...those books came from somewhere.

S. MAG.: You work in the newspaper industry as an editor. Being an editor, are you one of those authors (who publishers absolutely love) that turn in a novel that is beyond "clean"? In other words, is editing a cape that you constantly wear, even when it comes to your own writing? If so, does that make writing easier or add difficulty if you try to edit as you go?

T.C.: (LOL) I don't know if they absolutely love me, but I do try and turn in a clean manuscript. I've been an editor for more than twenty years, so at this point it's not like I can switch it off with my own writing. I edit as I go. If I misspell "banana" or something, it is physically impossible for me to leave it. This is not the way you're supposed to do it, I know. You're supposed to write with wild abandon, at least for your first draft. The idea is just to get the story down on the page, leaving the mistakes where they land to be cleaned up later. I've tried. Can't do it. It's a thing. And, yes, it slows the writing down somewhat. Rationally, I know I will never turn in a completely error-free manuscript, but that's not going to stop me from going for it. (And if I misspelled anything in this answer, do not point it out to me. It'll only haunt my every waking moment...for a time.)

S. MAG.: Readers have to know: What's next for Tracy Clark?

T.C.: As I write this, I'm thinking about lunch. Maybe a salad? Writing wise, I've handed in book two entitled "Borrowed Time," which will come out next year about this time, and I'm knee-deep in rewrites for book three, tentatively titled "Media Darling." What happens after that is up to Cass. I follow where she leads me.

With this debut, readers have been led to one of those writers whose books will all land in our TBR piles. The writing is great, the character of Cass is a memorable one, and the voice behind it all is one of the wittiest, sharpest females working in the industry today. (And for the one person reading this who may be dying to know...there were *no* errors in any of your answers. Sleep well!) To keep up with the newest titles and what's in store for Cass Raines and Tracy Clark, head to [www.tracyclarkbooks.com](http://www.tracyclarkbooks.com). ■

# Cynthia Swanson

## Designing Incredible Thrillers With an Architect's Eye

Interview by Amy Lignor for *Suspense Magazine*

Press Photo Credit: Glenda Cebrian Photography



Cynthia Swanson defines her “first love” as being creative writing. Although her belief that she needed a practical career one day had her choosing to major in Architecture in college, her love of writing never waned.

Beginning with her debut novel, “The Bookseller,” Cynthia has now released the incredible tale, “The Glass Forest.” Both led her to achieve success by bringing readers a beautiful package that combines her passion for detail and design with her writing. It is a truth that Cynthia is able to “construct” her scenes as an architect would do with building projects and blueprints. Each line, every angle of her characters brings the story to life on every page. Taking time out to sit with *Suspense Magazine*, Cynthia spoke about both realms, and how she feels about first drafts, the excitement of research, and where her ideas come from.

*Suspense Magazine* (S. MAG.): Delving into your latest release, readers will truly be able to experience (and appreciate) the exquisite detail when it comes to your story. Can you give a bit of information on how you honed that talent? Does the area you live in help to create such animated locations that feel as “alive” as your human characters?

Cynthia Swanson (C.S.): *I’ve seen “The Bookseller,” my debut novel, referred to as a “love story for the city of Denver.” That’s quite flattering, but my feeling is that every novel should be a love story for its setting. As a reader, I admire stories that transport me to a different place (and sometimes a different era) and include atmospheric elements that*

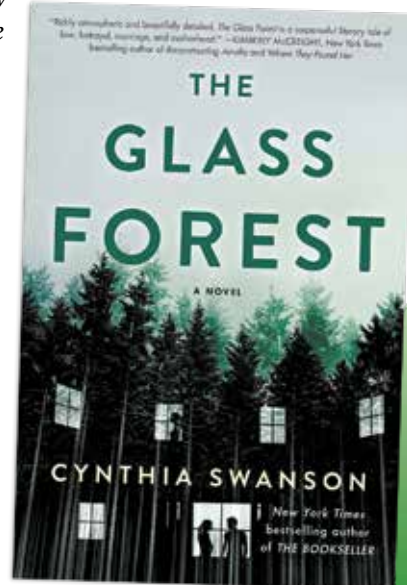
*make me feel as if I’m right there with the characters. Creating this type of setting was my objective for both “The Bookseller” and my second novel, “The Glass Forest,” which takes place partially in a fictional upstate New York town and partially in Door County, Wisconsin.*

S. MAG.: Are there any facets of design/architecture that play a role in your writing? Is home design a personal hobby of yours?

C.S.: *Home design, and in particular midcentury modern design, is absolutely a hobby of mine. I was an Architecture major for two years in college, and while I ended up getting an English degree, I never lost my love of design. I prefer clean, uncluttered spaces...and I feel that way about writing, too. Sometimes authors need to remove “word clutter” in order to get to the heart of the story.*

S. MAG.: Please tell readers about your newest title, “The Glass Forest.” (Perhaps give a sneak peek that cannot be found on the inside cover?)

C.S.: *“The Glass Forest” was a long time in the making. I actually had the concept for it*





before I wrote *"The Bookseller,"* but *"The Glass Forest"* features a complex plot and when I initially thought of the premise, I wasn't in the right space to tackle it. Still, the basic idea stayed with me: what would it be like to find yourself residing in the home of a missing person? How could you (especially if you were a somewhat naïve young woman) resist hunting for clues around every corner? Pulling in the atmospheric details of the 1950s/1960s, as well as the backstory of the missing woman and her enigmatic teenage daughter, brought it all together for me.

S. MAG.: You work with writers as a manuscript consultant. Could you explain what that entails and how writers can contact you about that service?

C.S.: I've worked with writers at all stages of manuscript development, but I've found that my passion as a consultant is in helping writers during that "final push"—when they've been working on their manuscript for a long time, have revised and polished it, but need a fresh set of professional eyes on it before submitting to agents or editors. I work on only one such project at a time, allowing me to focus on that project and still maintain time for my own books. For more information, writers can visit, <http://cynthiaswansonauthor.com/for-writers/>.

S. MAG.: You certainly are a master at the psychological thriller. Is that your favorite genre? Is there one you wish to try one day, and why?

C.S.: Thank you! I love writing (and reading) stories that combine well-paced suspense with strong literary elements, such as well-developed characters and solid language. I truly enjoy research, so I love bringing in historical elements as well. I have a number of other book ideas that follow these themes, which should keep me busy for a while without tackling other genres. But you never know!

S. MAG.: You have a list of events on your website. Can you share a little about the benefits that come from those who help you in your writing journey? Does it add excitement or enjoyment when meeting and greeting others and speaking to them about writing as a career?

C.S.: I'm introverted by nature, so when I first started doing events, I was nervous and thought I'd be terrible at it. What I found is that when I have the opportunity to talk with writers and readers about books—mine, theirs, and other books we love—the discussion flows easily. It's truly one of the most rewarding aspects of being a published author. I had no idea I'd enjoy it as much as I do.

S. MAG.: Do you have a particular moment, whether it be odd or beneficial, where you met a writer or a person at an event that made a definite long-lasting impression?

C.S.: I haven't met her in person yet, but when my editor and I were asking authors to possibly write advance praise for *"The Glass Forest,"* my editor reached out to Mary Kubica. While the timing didn't work out for Mary to review *"The Glass Forest,"* she responded to my editor that she wished she could, because she'd loved *"The Bookseller."* When I saw that, I thought: "Wow, Mary Kubica read my debut novel...and not even because someone asked her to? Okay, totally fangirling over here..."

S. MAG.: There is always advice given to authors on what they should do to make a career in writing. What would be a piece of advice you would offer to another writer in regards to what they should not do, or a pitfall they should avoid when taking up writing as a career?

C.S.: Don't let the perfect become the enemy of the good. In other words, don't try to write a perfect page before you go on to the next page, because most writers working that way will stop long before they have a finished story. I'm a big believer in what Anne Lamott calls "shi\*\*y first drafts." My first drafts are terrible, but I forgive myself for that and get on with the excitement of revising and improving the story. For me, that's when the best work happens.

S. MAG.: What is a "Day in the Writing Life of Cynthia Swanson" like? Do you have specific times you write? Do you have any quirks or routines set in place that need to occur before the writing can begin?

C.S.: On an ideal day, I write in the morning, then take a break to get some exercise, then go back to the writing. I'm a very antisocial exerciser, because I generally use that time to mentally process whatever I'm working on. I often solve writing conundrums when the adrenaline is flowing. I try to stay off social media until later in the day. It doesn't always happen that way, but that's the ideal.

S. MAG.: What's up next for readers to look forward to? Are you currently working on a new project?

C.S.: My third, in-progress novel is about a complex family during the early years of international adoption. I'm deep into research and revisions, and I'm learning so much. It's eye-opening and instructive, and I love the direction the book is going. Stay tuned!

Readers will definitely "stay tuned" for that book to appear. As Cynthia dives into the research and brings both the historical and fictional elements of her novels to fruition, her ability to "design" unforgettable works of art on paper and her attention to detail would have made even the famous architect, Frank Lloyd Wright, proud. To catch up on the latest happenings in Cynthia Swanson's world, visit [www.cynthiaswansonauthor.com](http://www.cynthiaswansonauthor.com). ■

# FAMILY TREASON:

Lis Wiehl on “Hunting Charles Manson”

Interview by John B. Valeri for *Suspense Magazine*  
Press Photo Credit: Provided by Author



LIS WIEHL IS ONE OF THE COUNTRY’S MOST PROMINENT trial lawyers and well respected legal commentators. She served as a federal prosecutor in the United States Attorney’s office and was a tenured professor of law at the University of Washington. Wiehl earned her Juris Doctor degree from Harvard Law School and her MA in Literature from the University of Queensland. She also served as a legal analyst for Fox News, The O’Reilly Factor, NBC News, and NPR’s All Things Considered; additionally, she has appeared regularly on Your World with Neil Cavuto, Lou Dobbs Tonight, and the Imus morning shows, and was the host of the Wiehl of Justice podcast. Currently, Wiehl is a weekly host on Dan Abrams’s Law & Crime Network and just launched a new podcast, “Pursuit of Justice.”

Also a bestselling crime novelist, Wiehl has most recently collaborated with Caitlin Rother on a work of non-fiction, “Hunting Charles Manson: The Quest for Justice in the Days of Helter Skelter” (Thomas Nelson)—a painstaking reexamination of the notorious Manson family crimes and their cultural context. Bestselling author and former Sex Crimes prosecutor Linda Fairstein enthused: “‘Hunting Charles Manson’ is the best true crime book you will ever read....Lock your doors, keep the night lights on, and read

this book.” This title is the first in a new series chronicling the pursuit of justice in the aftermath of some of the country’s most sensational crimes.

Now, Lis Wiehl reveals how she endeavored to resurrect history, and why the past resonates in the present...

John B. Valeri (J.B.V.): Charles Manson and his crimes are infamous. What drew you to this particular topic to begin with—and, given the unparalleled notoriety, how did you endeavor to find an entry point to your own exploration?

Lis Wiehl (L.W.): *WHY MANSON? Even after his recent death, the name Charles Manson remains etched in the conscience of American culture. Who he was and what he and his “Family” did chipped away at our country’s innocence at a very critical time in our nascent history.*

*Who was this head of a murderous “Family” who flaunted this self-made swastika tattoo on his forehead, who somehow persuaded young women to kill and torture for him in the late 1960’s? His actions, his person, his “Family” changed American culture forever.*

*I wanted to explore how this happened. And, perhaps, how it could be prevented from happening again.*



**“Whether I’m writing about fictitious murders, or prosecuting someone for a very real murder, I’m trying to convince someone of the truth.”**

J.B.V.: You have the ability to conceptualize stories as both a trial lawyer and a crime novelist. In what ways does this unique background inform your own storytelling sensibilities—and what do you believe are the advantages of approaching non-fiction as you might a thriller?

L.W.: *Storytelling is key to success in either of these occupations. You gotta love to spin a yarn, tell a story!*

*I’m always thinking about where and how I’m going to tell my next story, and what kind of motives and means I’ll be ascribing to different characters in my next novel.*

*Just the other day, I was driving with my now grown up son for a Memorial Day weekend holiday beach ride, and, as we passed by some dunes on the way to our designated point to meet friends, I peered out the window and commented to him, “That would be a great place for a murder plot to begin.” Mind you, this was a sunny day in late May. My son, totally unperturbed said, “Oh, Mom, you’re always coming up with murder plots.” Well, I do write murder mysteries.*

*But whether I’m writing about fictitious murders, or prosecuting someone for a very real murder, I’m trying to convince someone of the truth. In the courtroom, I’ll convince a jury by telling them the story of what happened to the victim through the evidence I present—letting the witnesses and documents tell the story for me. Writing novels is easier than presenting evidence in a courtroom because the rules of evidence don’t hold me back, but staring at a blank page and so called “writer’s block” have sometimes made me wish for the good old days of a cranky judge. No course is obstacle free.*

*But I love bringing what I’ve learned in the courtroom to inform my storytelling and keep my thrillers thrilling!*

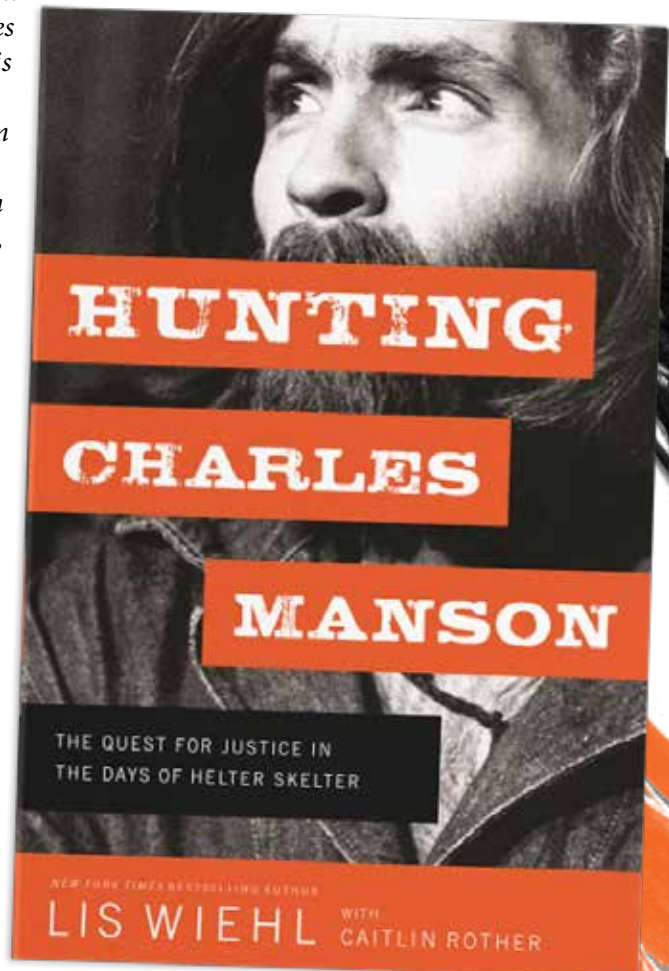
*“Hunting Charles Manson” is told as a fast-paced, nonfiction thriller. So, I hope that readers will read the book almost as a novel, with the awareness that the stories really did happen.*

*My transition from the courtroom to the publishing world wasn’t much of one at all because my novels were all based on stories I covered as a journalist or prosecuted as a lawyer. I take bits and pieces of reality and make up a fictional world. In writing “Hunting Charles Manson,” I followed leads so I could document and source material.*

J.B.V.: “Hunting Charles Manson” is not simply a rehashing of history but a full reexamination. How did you balance archival research with original reporting—and what are some of the fresh elements that you are able to bring to a seemingly familiar story?

L.W.: *One of my purposes in writing this book was to advance the story. With my experience in newsrooms, both print and broadcast, I felt it was important to bring readers to the present day with as much new information as possible. I wanted to avoid a rehash of the prosecution’s narrative as relayed by the prosecution in Vincent Bugliosi’s “Helter Skelter.”*

*So, I used “Helter Skelter,” then, only for cross-referencing and fact checking, and focused on identifying primary source material.*



*That was a daunting task, as you might imagine with a nearly fifty-year-old case, and many defendants. Charles Manson may have been the primary defendant, but he was not the only one.*

*Researching a fifty-year-old case, with social histories of defendants that go back an additional twenty or more years, posed formidable challenges. I had the amazing experience of being the only member from the press that was allowed access into the latest parole hearing of Charles “Tex” Watson, Manson’s self-proclaimed right hand man, and the man who actually wielded the knife in many of the murders. It was a fascinating experience to view evil so close up.*

*Looking for new material was invigorating. But, for me, what truly inspired me was my personal contact with members of the victims’ families who showed up at the various parole hearings of the convicted defendants. Even after all these years, and all their pain, these victims’ memories are kept alive by these family members who are resolute in their message that Manson, and now the remaining co-defendants should not be released from prison. Their passion and stamina are inspiring.*

J.B.V.: The advent of internet opened a proverbial Pandora’s Box. Tell us about the pros and cons of such technology as it pertains to this case—and how it specifically informed your research for the book.

L.W.: *In researching the book, I was aided by websites and groups in social media that follow Charles Manson and the “Family.” Many of the people who followed Manson also followed the parole hearings of the other Family members, and Internet postings by the inmates themselves made following them that much easier.*

*Tex Watson, for example, wrote a book while in prison. In addition to getting married and fathering children, Watson had a website. The Internet was a friend to Manson and broadened his reach while in prison.*

*I think, too, that America forty-nine years ago was a much more innocent place to live. Kids played in their neighborhoods unsupervised. The term “Playdate” hadn’t been invented. People often didn’t lock the doors to their homes, unless going away for the weekend. It was a more innocent time in terms of crime at home. Until Manson and his Family hit Los Angeles. The murders were so savage, and so highly publicized, and so apocalyptically charged. And they came at such a volatile time in our nation’s history that they really robbed a piece of our collective innocence.*

*And I believe part of our fascination with Manson is a wanting to understand more about that piece of our history. And how we can learn from it.*

J.B.V.: Though purported to be the mastermind behind the Tate and LaBianca murders (among others), you can argue that Manson’s role was inflated for a multitude of reasons. In your opinion, where does the truth of his culpability lie—and how does demonization help to shape the public consciousness?

L.W.: *Many of the people who still believe Manson was wrongly convicted don’t seem to understand conspiracy law, that if you are part of a conspiracy that results in murder, then you are all guilty, even if you weren’t at the scene of that specific crime. Manson was clever that way—he not only convinced his Family members that it was their idea to carry out his wishes and that they were acting on their own accord, he also had Tex Watson train them how to kill, how to insert and twist a knife to cause as much tissue damage as possible. As a result, some case buffs today place all the responsibility on Tex because he gave the orders at the Tate house. But it was Manson who told Tex and the ‘girls’ to do something “witchy” and had set up the plans for Helter Skelter. Tex and the other followers knew exactly what was expected of them.*

J.B.V.: You develop a strong sense of the cultural context throughout the narrative. In what ways might this enhance a reader’s understanding of what happened—and how do you view it in relation to our contemporary climate?

L.W.: *The cultural context is important especially because of how the community, including law enforcement, responded.*

*The investigation, how can I say this nicely, was bungled. First, had parole officers been keeping tabs on Manson the way they should have, the murders likely would not have taken place. But, in the culture that defined the late 1960s, Manson and his clan seemed untouchable. True, Manson was conniving and manipulative, but, in my experience, most convicts are, so shame on those parole officers.*

*Second, had the different police departments investigating the cases, including the LAPD and LA County Sheriff, shared more information and had evidence not been mishandled, Manson would have been arrested much earlier than he was. Again, sadly, there’s nothing special about the way law enforcement handled—or mishandled—this case. The case was high profile – but the jurisdictional squabbling between different law enforcement precincts was (and is) positively pedestrian. We saw the same issues at the federal level after 9/11 when it was revealed that the FBI and the CIA failed to share crucial information regarding the planned terrorist attacks.*



*It is also important to note that Manson's tactics of manipulation are being used today. Keith Raniere, founder of the "sex cult" Nxivm, is a modern day Manson, using Manson's methods of preying upon girls' insecurities. Manson manipulated those insecurities to bring young women into the Family, using recruiting methods strikingly similar to those of Nxivm, which among other consequences has led to Smallville actress Allison Mack being charged with sex-trafficking. Keith Raniere, like Manson, used young women's insecurities to bring them into his circle, then used humiliation, sexual abuse, and deprivation to keep them under his spell.*

*It is chilling to see how effective Manson's techniques continue to be.*

J.B.V.: Only in retrospect do we see the (seeming) totality of the Manson Family's crimes. What factors contributed to law enforcement's mishandling of the initial investigation(s)—and how do you see that in relation to how the legal system operates presently?

L.W.: *Law enforcement bungled this case on so many different levels. Manson should have been tracked on parole so much more closely. Maybe if he had been tracked while on parole, he never would have had the opportunity to dream up Helter Skelter, much less put his plan in motion.*

*After the murders, there remain huge blind spots and holes in the investigations conducted by various law enforcement agencies involved in this case. They had overlapping jurisdictions, but little or no willingness to share information with each other, even between teams in the same agency until months of public fear and panic had gone by.*

*This is a problem that still plagues our overburdened court systems and law enforcement. Probation officers with too many probationers to look after may let some cases slide, especially relatively low level crooks like Manson was (before the murders). Manson, too, knew how to turn on the charm. Although, probation officers should be trained to see right through that baloney.*

*And some law enforcement agencies continue to wage jurisdictional battles amongst each other. The time worn result when those battles are fought is that the public—we the people—are the losers, not the victors.*

J.B.V.: Tell us about your collaboration with Caitlin Rother. What did you each bring to the project—and how does the resultant book benefit from that partnership?

L.W.: *Caitlin brought with her a wealth of experience as both a print reporter, and a crime writer. She understood how painstaking the research for a book like this had to be, and how exacting the task was going to be. And yet even Caitlin was surprised by how hard it was to amass all the material that was necessary to have a full and a complete understanding of this case, let alone find new evidence of our own. It was truly a Herculean effort.*

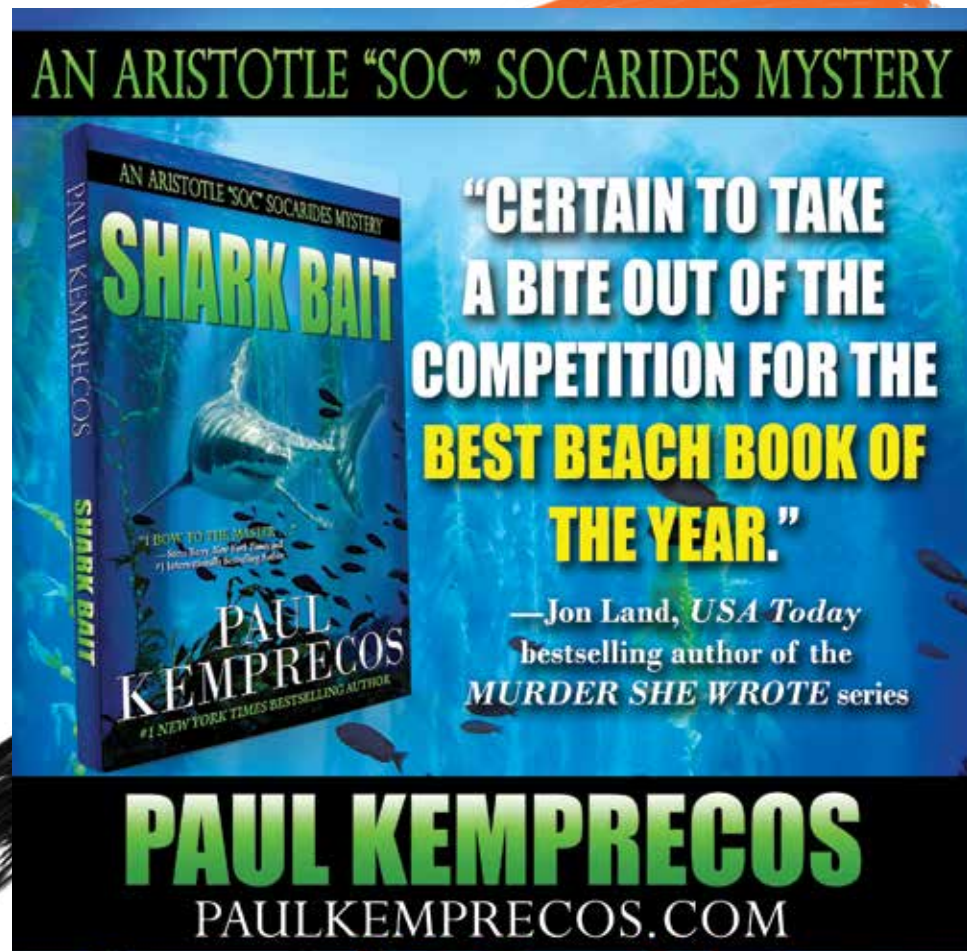
*Caitlin was also an amazing sounding board throughout this process. She and I had countless conversations about the status of various points in the manuscript, and at every turn Caitlin had sound advice about which direction I should take.*

*Post production of the manuscript, Caitlin was absolutely instrumental in connecting me with "Stoner" in L.A. who gave me a guided tour of the Spahn Ranch and other Manson highlights (or lowlights) in LA.*

*And of course we continue to be in touch.*

We'd like to thank Lis for spending time sharing her latest book with us. To see what's on the horizon for her, stop by [www.liswihlbooks.com](http://www.liswihlbooks.com). ■

*\*A modified version of this interview was originally published on [Criminal Element](http://CriminalElement.com).*



# LORI RADER-DAY

## Takes Readers “Under A Dark Sky”

Interview by Amy Lignor for *Suspense Magazine*  
Press Photo Credit: Iden Ford



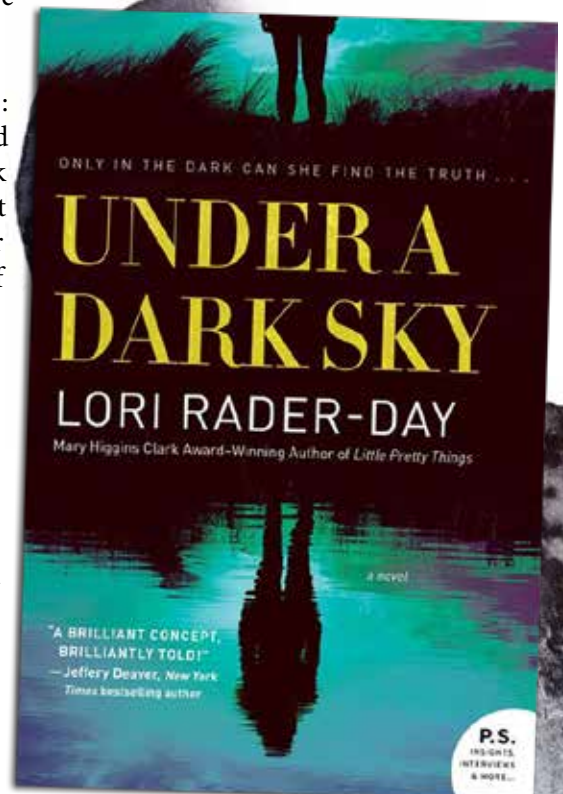
Lori Rader-Day may live in the big city of Chicago, yet her backstory originates in a small town. When living in those areas, one can always count on the fact that the local library will be there to open the doors to worlds frequented by Agatha Christie’s beloved detectives, Mary Higgins Clark’s memorable crimes, and so much more. Which is exactly what growing up in central Indiana did for this author. Fans are thankful for that, considering Lori’s extraordinary imagination just keeps on going.

No stranger to writing extremely popular books, she continues with her next title, “Under a Dark Sky,” which is a masterful suspense tale that readers won’t soon forget. Taking a moment out of her busy schedule, she met up with *Suspense Publishing* to talk about her love for writing, her passion for reading, and the words of mentors who’ve helped her along the way.

*Suspense Magazine* (S. MAG.):  
Let’s begin with your brand new book, “Under a Dark Sky.” It has been stated to be “set

in the chilling confines of a Michigan dark sky park...” You *must* give our readers a sneak peek at that one, and perhaps throw us just a few nuggets of information about this exciting whodunit!

Lori Rader-Day (L.R.D.): Happy to! “Under a Dark Sky” is about Eden Wallace, a young widow who has found in her husband’s effects a reservation to visit a dark sky park, which is a place without intrusive man-made lights, set aside so that visitors can see the night sky the way nature intended. And even though she’s developed a fear of the dark, she decides to go, to get over the fear and get back to the living. When she gets there, the house she thought she had to herself is full of twenty-somethings, friends from college having a reunion of sorts. She plans to leave the next day but during the night one of the friends is murdered—and so Eden is forced into their company, even as strange things—maybe accidents, maybe not—keep happening. Someone called it, “And Then There Were None” meets “The Big Chill,” and I like that.







S. MAG.: Being that this is following your hit from last year, “The Day I Died,” can you speak about how difficult it is or how the difficulty level rises when you write that next book? Is there more pressure you put on yourself when creating the next title after such a popular hit?

L.R.D.: *You have nailed it! There’s pressure and I’m probably the one putting it on myself. My goals are for each book to be different and for my skills to improve each time out. That’s important to me. The pressure I feel from outside, from readers, is to do all this faster—that’s flattering, but the books take the time they take. I’d rather take more time and write a book I can be proud of. I saw Michael Koryta speak recently, and he said, “Write the book you want to write, or get a different job,” and I feel that way, too.*

S. MAG.: You state that Chicago is a great place to be a mystery writer. Can you tell us a bit about Chicago and what the city holds that inspires you to write?

L.R.D.: *I won’t give you the tour of Chicago except to tell you that Chicago is full of writers, just chock-a-block full of them, so that’s nice for literary events happening every week, for meeting up with some of your friends in between conferences, for having other mystery writers to commiserate with. Chicago is especially a good town for crime writers. No shortage of crime to inspire us. Chicago is also just a great place for stories, with so much history and so many great independent bookstores. Chicagoans are readers, and they love a story about their city.*

S. MAG.: How does it feel to get those accolades you’ve deservedly received, such as the Anthony Award for Best First Novel for “The Black Hour”? (Just to name one of many.) And were you surprised that your debut (again, deservedly) became so popular?

L.R.D.: *Award nominations are a great cherry on top of the satisfaction that comes from telling a story that you wanted to tell and being a part of the mystery community. Writing is its own reward, but still, I won’t lie: Rewards like an Anthony Award are so encouraging. Nothing kills writerly doubt, ever, but award nominations encourage you to think that maybe you’re in the right place. All of the accolades have been a pleasant surprise, the ones for “The Black Hour,” since I was all brand new to it, and for “The Day I Died,” because that book had such a long origin story that I wasn’t sure it would be received well.*

S. MAG.: Growing up in Indiana, what were your hobbies or interests that led you to want to dive into the writing world?

L.R.D.: *Reading. Writing. Abject nerdiness. I’m not sure there’s any other hobby that leads to writing, truthfully. If I had been a sporty child, I don’t think I would have chosen to sit down and write about it. I have rarely had any other interests than reading*

and writing, talking about reading and writing, or writing about reading and writing. I'm not very well-rounded.

*I did participate in 4-H when I was a kid. For you city dwellers, 4-H is a sort of prairie skills program for country kids who can't drive themselves to movies. In my handful of years in 4-H, I sewed some things (badly) and cooked some things (not so great), but where I really shined was in a category called Personality, where you read a booklet, wrote answers to some questions (much like this interview, by the way), and then made a presentation board on the topics in the booklet. I got a Reserve Grand Champion ribbon my first year out. I have a Reserve Grand Champion personality. It's the reserve that makes it funny.*

S. MAG.: What is the one piece of advice you would give to an author just starting out in regards to what they should NOT do or what to avoid in order to have a writing career? Is there a piece of advice that you received from a mentor that you have never forgotten?

*L.R.D.: Don't isolate yourself. There's an image of the writer as the lone genius weaving words up in his or her garret, but if you try to work that way, the whole business is that much more difficult. It must be lonely to work that way, from drafting to promotion.*

*The best two pieces of advice I got were both from Clare O'Donohue, who told me to get involved with the mystery writing associations and also that being a writer was a small business and I should treat it like one.*

S. MAG.: Is there a specific author(s) when you were a young adult that you felt had the "it" factor and delivered that truly memorable story? If you could meet him/her, what would be the one thing you would love to ask them?

*L.R.D.: My first favorite was Beverly Cleary. I hold out hope that I will somehow get to meet her but she's 102 at this writing. Hi, Beverly! Call me! One of my other childhood favorites was Lois Duncan, and I did get to meet Lois before she died. I met her at the Edgar Awards when she was being made a Grand Master and I was there for my first Mary Higgins Clark Award nomination. I didn't ask her anything; I only thanked her and told her how much her books had meant to me. I've also met Mary Higgins Clark. I heard her speak once and she answered the question I should have asked in her speech: Do you sometimes doubt yourself? Is it normal? She said she thinks, for every book, "...this is the book I won't be able to finish." If Mary Higgins Clark fights through her self-doubt, I think we all can. I've met a lot of my favorite writers by now. It's still thrilling.*

S. MAG.: How do you feel about the world of social media? Are you a "constant" when it comes to groups, Facebook, etc.? Do you believe that social media is a help to authors or a hindrance?

*L.R.D.: I spend far too much time on social media, probably, but I enjoy it. It's a fantastic tool for self-promotion...and procrastination. I think social media is good for authors to keep in front of their readers and to keep connected to other writers. Does it sell books? No one really knows, but I tend to think of self-promotion as a cumulative process. But if I hated it the way some people seem to, I would do it less.*

S. MAG.: Over your career, your stories have appeared in magazines. What do you like about doing that as opposed to writing book-length fiction? Would you recommend new authors write short stories to help gain experience?

*L.R.D.: I wrote short stories first because it was a way to finish something, to get feedback from it, to learn, and then to move on to something else. To say that I chose that path would be a little disingenuous. I did that because it came naturally—probably because it's faster to finish a short story. Writing short and complete pieces is an excellent way to become a better writer, I think, so of course I would encourage others to try their hand at them. Now that I write novels, I find it incredibly difficult to remember how to write so concisely. It's a very different muscle than writing a novel, and difficult to keep both muscles strong.*

S. MAG.: Our readers have to know...what comes next? Are you currently working on a new project?

*L.R.D.: I'm writing what will be my fifth book now. It's a little early in its life to say much, but I will say that it has a true crime element to it (though it's still fiction) and that I got the idea from talking to my new neighbor one day—and she had a backstory that I just had to borrow. Don't worry: she knows.*

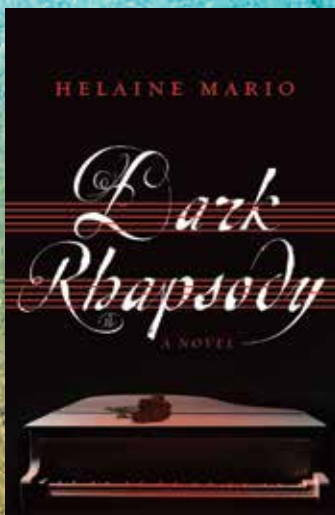
And what the rest of us now know is something the 4-H apparently observed long ago: Lori Rader-Day is one "personality" that has the writing talent, the charisma, and the passion for her craft that earn her a "Grand Champion" award from readers on a daily basis. To keep up with Lori's latest projects, news and events, you can find her at, <https://loriraderday.com>. ■





**WE'RE EXCITED TO ANNOUNCE** that our **2018 THRILLER LEGENDS** are **PATRICIA AND BOB GUSSIN** from **OCEANVIEW PUBLISHING** for their unparalleled contributions to the crime fiction world, the writers, and the art of the thrill. We look forward to honoring these giants in the genre at the banquet on the Saturday evening of ThrillerFest."

—**KIMBERLEY HOWE**  
President of International Thriller Writers



**"MARIO WRITES  
WITH THE SOUL  
OF A POET."**

—**GAYLE LYNDS**  
*New York Times*  
best-selling author



**"A PASSPORT TO  
A WORLD MOST  
THRILLER READERS  
HAVEN'T SEEN  
BEFORE."**

—**JOSEPH FINDER**  
*New York Times*  
best-selling author



**"HAUNTING,  
ATMOSPHERIC,  
AND GRIPPING."**

—**JOHN CONNOLLY**  
*New York Times*  
best-selling author

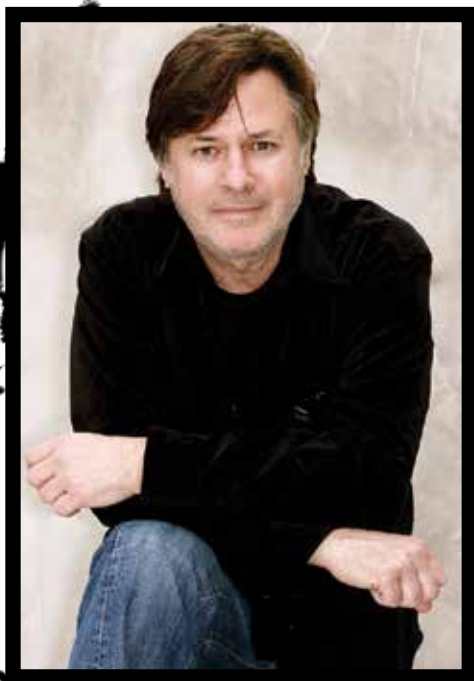
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# MEET THE FOURTH GUNMAN AUTHOR JOHN LANSING

Interview by Patrick Whitehurst for *Suspense Magazine*  
Press Photo Credit: Kara Fox



Believe it or not, John Lansing never dreamed of becoming a best-selling crime novelist; he thought he'd live and die an actor. Having worked on both Broadway and in Hollywood, it certainly seemed his career was headed that way. John played the beloved part of Danny Zuko on Broadway's "Grease" and subsequently played a lead role in the 1979 George Lucas film *More American Graffiti*. When he took a course at UCLA in directing, however, he discovered a taste for screenwriting, which led to a fifteen-year career in the industry.

John's imagination turned to literature in 2010, when he co-authored the true crime book "Good Cop, Bad Money" with former NYPD Inspector Glen Morisano. That instinct for solid suspense writing evolved into his *Jack Bertolino* series, beginning in 2012 with "The Devil's Necktie," followed by "Blond Cargo" and "Dead is Dead." Book four, "The Fourth Gunman," was released earlier this year. With his new book now in the hands of readers, John took a break to sit down with *Suspense Magazine* to talk about his incredible path leading him to the writing world.

*Suspense Magazine* (S. MAG.): Let's talk about the shift from screenwriting to novel writing. How did it happen?

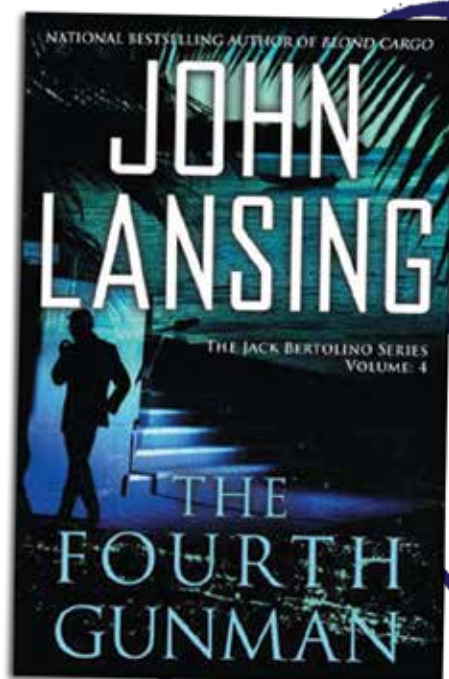
John Lansing (J.L.): While I was studying directing I'd committed to shooting a short film. Spencer Eastman, a good friend, and successful screenwriter, offered to write the script. A serious illness forced him to leave the project and I decided to give it a shot and write the script myself. It was during that process I discovered my passion for writing and the joy of getting in the zone and creating a project.

When things slowed down, I switched gears and moved from working in front of the camera to behind. I got lucky and started booking television jobs with my talented writing partner, Bruce Cervi. All of the television and film scripts I was involved in over a fifteen-year period were co-written with Bruce.

It was exciting to step onto a set and watch the cast and crew bring life to a script I had co-written. The move from interpreting characters to creating characters opened a new creative outlet for me. It was an unexpected career move and an incredible experience.

My acting career helped inform the characters I wrote about in my television work. The craft of acting helped me understand the emotional roadmap I needed to flesh out complex characters, characters that would hopefully be compelling enough to maintain a readers, or viewers, interest. It also gave me an ear for dialogue that rings true.

Series television work taught me discipline, writing on a schedule, and collaboration. It hammered home the type of characters I enjoyed creating, characters I wanted to spend time with. It was a perfect tutorial for my next career move, writing crime thrillers. The greatest challenge I faced writing novels was writing alone for the first time.





S. MAG.: Tell me about your series: What led to the creation of your Jack Bertolino character?

J.L.: *As great a gig as it was writing for network television, it was often creatively constricting. We wrote a character that wore a white hat. There was little nuance. It was a formula that was wildly successful and that was our edict, don't reinvent the wheel.*

*After I left the show, I spent a year researching the life of a decorated NYPD cop before writing his memoir, "Good Cop, Bad Money." It was first-hand schooling in police procedure. I came out of that experience with an idea for my own detective...and a simple question that became the impetus for my first novel: How does a cop, who's spent twenty-five years of his life taking down drug dealers, money launderers, killers, and thieves, retire? Bad guys have long memories. I thought there was a good chance there'd be retribution. And then there was the possibility of mind-numbing boredom.*

*My protagonist is an ex-cop who still has "the sickness." He's so caught up in the adrenaline rush of the job, he chooses career over family, friends, and his own personal safety.*

*Jack started his career as an undercover narcotics detective and worked his way up the political ladder. He ran a group of Narco Rangers responsible for putting multi-ton quantities of cocaine on the table, millions of dollars of laundered cash, and shutting down major cartel kingpins. If it wasn't for a violent on-the-job injury he'd still be carrying a badge. After three unsuccessful operations and months of painful rehab, he promised never to go under the knife again.*

*Jack was a man standing at the crossroads. Shooting pains ran down his six-foot-three frame on a daily basis. He was damaged goods, recovering from a contentious divorce, and self-medicating chronic back pain with a daily cocktail of Vicodin and Excedrin. He decided to leave his hometown of Staten Island and move west to reinvent himself.*

*I've always been drawn to flawed characters—in fiction and in real life. Men and women, fighting demons, who were hell-bent on reinventing themselves. Well, men make plans and God laughs. Twenty-five years of taking down bad guys came back to bite Jack and shook up his newfound state of bliss in Marina del Rey, California.*

*Karen Hunter was the publisher of the memoir. She had a deal set up at Simon & Schuster and asked if I wanted to come along and write, well...anything I wanted. She didn't have to ask twice. I write what I love to read. Crime fiction.*

S. MAG.: Can you give readers a look at your day-to-day routine?

J.L.: *When I'm working on a first draft it's a 24/7 experience. It's impossible for me to shut it off at the end of the day. I go to bed trying to problem solve, wake up in the middle of the night thinking about the story, and jump out of bed in the morning with an answer, or at least an approach that might lead to the answer. I'll sketch out those thoughts longhand on a yellow pad. Then I'll meditate, feed and walk the dog, eat some breakfast, and get back to writing, transferring my first ideas of the day to the computer, rewriting as I go, for maybe an hour or two. When I hit save, and the computer beeps, my dog runs over and lets me know it's time for another walk.*

*I pretty much keep cranking it out the same way, every day, until I'm finished with a rough first draft. I'm very goal oriented and don't really relax until I deliver the final manuscript to my publisher.*

S. MAG.: Do you do anything special to get inspired?

J.L.: *I'm always on the lookout for the next Jack Bertolino story. It has to be an event, a case, a murder, something wild that my cast of characters can work into organically. I have a folder filled with articles I've collected through the years—news and current events that have caught my interest. Stories pulled from newspapers, magazines, television and personal conversations. I never know what I'm going to spark to, but I recognize it when I see it. Sometimes it's a simple premise or a situation that I know will create conflict for Jack Bertolino and draw him out of his comfort zone and onto a case. I'll write a chapter or two and then go over the work. If it grabs me in the first five pages, I'll be inspired to keep writing.*

S. MAG.: Speaking of conflict for Jack, what's next for him?

J.L.: *I'm in the process of writing the fifth book in my series, entitled, "The Unseen." I went to a Mystery Writers of America lunch for an afternoon discussion of an anthology titled, "Anatomy of Innocence." The "Innocence Project" is a great organization that re-litigates cold cases and works to exonerate death row inmates who were falsely accused, convicted, and imprisoned for most of their adult lives.*

*By the end of lunch that afternoon I had the beginning of an idea and an exciting way into the next Jack Bertolino book...*

Which is one book readers cannot wait to find out about. If you wish to explore the world of Jack Bertolino and his creator, John Lansing, head to [www.johnlansing.net](http://www.johnlansing.net). ■



**SPECIAL PREVIEW FROM E. C. FREY**

# ENTANGLED MOON

By E. C. Frey

Press Photo Credit: Provided by Author

## 1 The Apartment

He had been following the bird's husband all day. He wanted evidence. A foot in the door. A chance to say to her all the things he had been rehearsing in his head for years.

In the end, he had known where her husband was going. He had waited for him outside his mistress's apartment, where he had found a well-concealed and well-used hole in the bushes that bordered the parking lot's chain link fence. He imagined the bird's husband had left work without a care—imagined how his tousled hair and carefree whistle would have proclaimed it to the world. And now her husband had arrived.

He smiled to himself. He felt like he was back in a time when his life had meant something; a sense of renewal fluttered at the fringes of his heart.

Taking three steps at a time, the bird's husband climbed the stained and crumbling concrete steps to the second-floor apartment in the rundown complex. It was the kind of day when the thinnest of cottons sticks like sweat-shredded tissue. A row of drooping flower heads hung from a sagging flowerbox at the apartment's window.

He pulled his clammy shirt from his chest, and then his boxers from his thighs, which clung defiantly to the seat of his pants. He had killed most of the day waiting, and now the time was at hand. All he had to do was stay there until her husband emerged and he would take a series of pictures. He could imagine every little moment—each one framed, each one a moment of betrayal. How would she react? He could not give up now, no matter how tired and uncomfortable he was.

Retrieving a tiny camera from his pocket, he checked its settings. Next, he pulled a well-used, crumpled bag from his waistband and checked its contents. Needle, spoon, lighter, tiny white rock. His hands shook, but he touched each item reverently.

He leaned back, closed his eyes, and sat tight as the minutes turned into an hour.

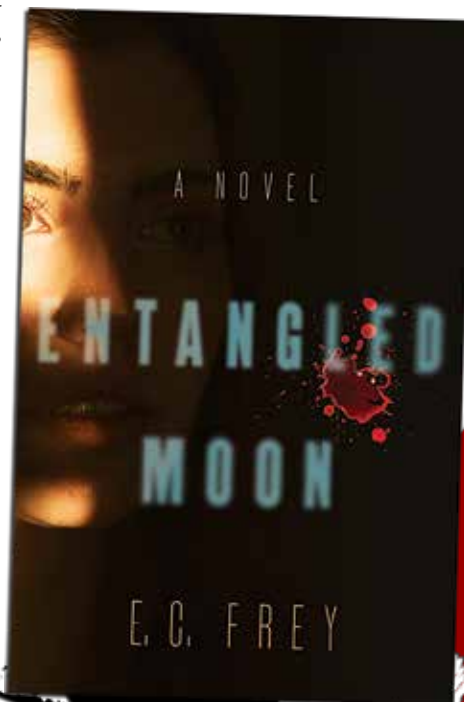
He almost missed the bird's husband leaving. He opened his eyes in time to see him coming down the stairs, but his opportunity to snap pictures died before he could turn on the camera.

He rubbed his eyes. A haze had seeped in, was lending an orange hue to his surroundings. The halo from the outside apartment light lent a pall to the impending night and a low rumble in the distance promised a break from the day's heat.

Unfurling his aching joints, he rose to follow, but his mark was younger and quicker than he was—the bird's husband vanished before he could get out of his observation spot.

He was still standing there when a black car with tinted windows pulled quietly into the empty space. Sleek and expensive, the engine cut noiselessly. He moved to sit, but tin cans and bottles clanked and he froze mid-movement, lest he was found out. He watched as two men emerged from the car. One, in an elegant trench coat that fell crisply to his shins, led, glancing around him as he took the battered steps to the woman's apartment. The other, sheathed in black leather, followed, his head bent with purpose.

\* \* \*





Tanya paced, her steps following the same worn pattern in the carpet the string of previous occupants had left. Her loins still throbbed and her heart raced; she tingled with the love she felt for her man. Her man had promised he would leave his wife. He would take care of her and the baby—their baby. She gathered her arms around herself, caressed her belly, imagining its hardness, and smiled. Everything was falling into place.

He had a good job, but she still needed hers back. She needed to bide her time until he could disentangle himself from his loveless marriage. Until then, she needed to work. But how could she convince her boss to let her back in? She would not grovel. No! It was unbelievable the way he had treated her. She wasn't trash he could just kick to the curb. She had worked hard to get to her position and all she had wanted was a promotion. Instead, he had come up with some bullshit excuse to fire her for lack of performance, and that stupid witch in human resources had signed off on it.

She knew where the bitch lived. She could go and show her some old-fashioned revenge from the 'hood. She gnawed on her lip. Only she couldn't—not really. That had never really been her life. That was a life from which she had run. She had to get her job back. She couldn't go back to that life. She had worked hard to get out of her New Haven neighborhood, far from the snickers, far from her fear and want. Even though she was trapped here for now, she couldn't go down from here. Her man would save her. She just had to hang on for a little while.

Her boss would relent. He would have to. After all, she knew everything, and that knowledge was worth a lot. He was a lousy lover and a lousy boss and an even lousier human being. She could start with exposing him for sexual harassment. A hint of what she was capable of, in case he didn't take her seriously. And she could save her trump card, the dirty truth about the company's dealings overseas—*his* dirty dealings. So many people dead, and even more dying still. He knew it too. He was a bastard willing to sacrifice everything—and for what? For his selfish pride? So the stockholders and board would laud him for their short-term gains? They didn't have to know about the dead. Out of sight, out of mind. But she had copies of everything. She could expose them all to the world. All she wanted was her job back, and the promotion she deserved. She wanted a life like the one her coworkers who went home to something more than peeling bathtubs, worn carpets, and barred windows had. Damn it! She wasn't asking for anything she didn't deserve.

The soft knocking at the door interrupted her thoughts. She crept to the peephole. Maybe he couldn't leave her after all. She smiled and her heart skipped a beat. She would make sure he never left again. She would make him throw caution to the wind. Make him dump his two-bit, whiny mouse of a wife to the gutter. Her heart softened. But she would love the woman's daughter like her own, and they would have more. After all, the little girl was half of him, and she would cherish whatever there was of him in this world.

She lifted the peephole cover.

The prism morphed the two men outside into an unpleasant blob, but she recognized one of them: it was her boss.

Her joy seized into ice. She was not in the mood for his sick sex games. No doubt this was his way of turning the tables and letting her know he was still in control. If it got her the things she wanted, though, then it was all the same. She would still be in control anyway. She held the cards and he knew it. She had seen it on his face when she threatened to expose their affair to his boss.

She pulled her robe around her and quickly removed any evidence that someone else had been there. Quietly, she put the dirty wineglasses into a cabinet—she would have to wash them later—but the sleeve of her robe caught the cabinet knob and ripped as she moved. A tiny thread clung to the metal.

"Shit."

He knocked again. She sensed the impatience this time. She opened the door and both men waltzed in and brushed her aside. The stranger grabbed the door from her and shut it. He put a leather-sheathed finger to his lips. "What are you doing here?" she asked. "It's a little late and I need to be in early tomorrow. I have someone I have to talk to."

"We need to discuss our little . . . disagreement."

"What's there to discuss? I deserve my job back, *with* a promotion."

She thought she saw a smile, but that only increased her sense of rising hysteria. She clenched her teeth; it did nothing to calm her.

The stranger moved to the window, peered out the threadbare curtains, and pulled them shut. She wondered if they knew no one would pay them any mind anyway. Her neighbors were notorious for "not hearing or seeing anything," even when it occurred under their nose. But wasn't she just as guilty?

"That's a little bold. I'm not sleeping with you both tonight." She hated the catch in her voice. He would think her weak. Men like him could always smell fear.

"Of course not," her boss said. "You've already done that . . . sleeping with that imbecile from Origin Sourcing Corp. Tell me. What do you see in him? Georgetown doesn't have a thing on Harvard." He snickered. "Of course, it has plenty on Southern Connecticut, doesn't it, sweetheart? It must have taken a lot for you to crawl out of that slum you called home."

He caught her slap mid-air, then squeezed her arm until the tears dimmed her vision. "You *will* give me all the information you stole from the office." Each enunciated word sliced like a knife.

Tanya shook her head.

"Don't shake your head. I know you have it. Angela caught you making copies." He pulled her closer. "Hand it over now and there's a chance you'll get out of this," he spat. "You might not have your job, but you'll have something worth even more."

Tanya pulled back. "I don't know what you're talking about. I suggested I might go to your boss and the board

and tell them you've been sleeping with me. It's only a case of sexual harassment. I don't know about anything else."

He grabbed her again. "Bitch!" His spittle landed on her cheek and burned. "Do you think you can deceive me? Soon I'll be CEO, and no whore from the gutter is going to stop me."

He pushed her into the arms of the stranger. Tanya's robe opened to reveal her nakedness.

"I don't care what you do with her," he said. "Just make it quick. I have no use for her anymore. She's used goods and too much of a liability."

Turning his back to her, he rummaged for the contraband file. She tried to close her robe, but the stranger grabbed her hand and slipped his leather fingers into her easily, finding the lingering evidence of her lover. She squirmed. He pulled his fingers out and rolled his wet leather fingertips together. Fire rose and prickled at her face.

Her boss straightened and looked. She knew he would have to watch. Like he always did. He sneered. "What did I tell you? Fuck her at your own risk."

The stranger pushed her over the sofa and, pulling a rubber from his pocket, rolled it on with the quickness of habit. He ripped the robe from her, covered her mouth, and penetrated her backside. He tore at her with each thrust. His cruelty was too much to bear.

Her boss watched as he continued to search. He found her briefcase leaning behind the old credenza she had found at a garage sale. It was her first piece of furniture; she had bought it with her first paycheck. She remembered it had been a beautiful day—a day full of promise. She tried to go there, but it felt distant and apart from her. Like maybe there had never been anything but humiliation, and she had been a fool to believe otherwise.

And then he found it. He pulled the file from her briefcase, sifted through the tidy pile, and smacked it against the palm of his hand. She should've done a better job of hiding it. But she had never imagined this as a possibility. She should've known better. She felt her leverage slipping from her.

She squeezed her eyes shut, but tears slipped through anyway. The disappointment and hurt fused into one, and she thought her heart might break and she would die.

Her boss nodded to the stranger, who slipped out before he was done—except that he wasn't. He threw her up against the wall and penetrated her from the front. The brutality of it made her cry out. He slapped her and thrust harder. He stayed that way, a grotesque grimace smeared across his face. She felt the blood flow between her legs. Ruined. She was ruined. Her baby destroyed. She watched as her boss's crotch bulged, but he didn't move to take part. He nodded again to the stranger, who finished his task.

The stranger smiled as he hiked up his pants. He retrieved a pistol from his pocket. Wrapping his black leather-sheathed hand around hers, he forced her index finger into the trigger hole.

"What, what're you doing?" If only she could stop the thumping in her ears. She couldn't hear. She couldn't

anticipate what would happen next so she couldn't figure out a move to escape. The noise was maddening.

"You're going to kill yourself. Your lover came. You quarreled. He forced you to have sex. Then he left you for his wife. It was too much to bear."

"You're crazy. No one will believe it."

"They will when they read the note you leave behind." He raised the piece of paper. Her signature swirled at the bottom.

"I didn't sign that."

He laughed. "Angela has many gifts—and she's loyal."

She needed time. Time to grasp the situation. Time to make him see that this wasn't necessary. "I don't understand. I thought you cared about me. I care about you. I promise I won't say a word about anything to anyone." Tears streamed down her face. She hated the way he looked at her. Like it meant nothing. Like she meant nothing. Surely they had meant something to each other. Surely her life meant something. "Please. I love you."

But he only smiled and scanned her broken, naked body. His eyes shimmered. He had turned the tables on her. She tried to cover herself, like that was possible. There would never again be anything capable of hiding her shame.

She watched as he smoothed the suicide note on her dining room table and then nodded to her tormenter.

It was a slow nod.

She thought of her mother. All the hours she had worked to give her only child a ticket out of the 'hood. Mostly, she thought of the moments with her when she had just sat and plaited her hair, humming tunes of her own childhood, her hands caressing her every moment. Her hands were callused from work, but her touch was so gentle that it reminded Tanya of the underside of a cat's belly—like the one that would meow at her window until she opened it and let the cat sneak into her bed. She could still feel the softness as she rubbed her face along its exposed undercarriage. Her heart pounded, and she could swear she heard its purr silencing the sounds of chaos out on the streets.

She thought of her room in her old neighborhood and was surprised to realize that she could only remember it as a refuge now. They had always been safe in her room. Even now, she could smell the cotton of the well-worn quilts that her mama's mama had sewn by hand from cast-off pieces of fabric down in Georgia. She had once thought of her room as a prison, but it had only ever protected her from the carnage outside the window.

She heard the thunder grumble in the distance—a beautiful and exciting sound. It sounded clearer than it ever had. Sharp. Insistent. She had always loved storms. She would miss the electric air that held the promise of roiling clouds, wild lightning streaks, and rain—rain that would wash away all the heat and bestiality of the day. She smelled it. Water and green leaves and clean earth and clear skies. It was like the smell of basil and grass and lavender as one. She thought of the dogs that barked and drove the neighbors nuts but also nuzzled her hand as she walked home and sat expectantly, tails wagging, waiting for her to scratch and hug



their guileless little bodies. Mostly, she thought about all the little things she had taken for granted. She hoped she had lived her life in a way that would have pleased her mama's God.

There had been a few transgressions lately. She had allowed herself to be uppity. Maybe that was why God had left her. She begged His forgiveness now. She asked that He comfort her mama. She would need it. She was her only child; it might be too much for her to bear. She had already suffered so many losses in her life.

Last, Tanya thought of her baby. A life barely imagined who would never see the beauty of the world.

She thought all these things in that brief moment. In some ways, she knew it was the most beautiful moment she would ever have.

She screamed, but the gunshot slammed through her temple and cut the sound cold.

\* \* \*

He let her drop and neatly posed her hand next to her temple. He removed a hankie from his pocket and wiped the blood from his face, then methodically folded the cloth and slipped it into his pocket. He knew how to start early so there was no trace of his presence.

He took a quick look around, but there was no evidence that they had been there. Nothing was out of place. It felt oddly wrong. He retrieved a pair of folding scissors and a snack bag from his other pocket. Precisely and with a skill that could only come with habit, he snipped off a large tuft of her hair, carefully avoiding the scalp. It was the only clue he would leave, and he knew the police investigation would hinge on it. He smiled. His favorite targets were randomized to make the real ones, the ones for which he was paid, appear similar. In fact, the real ones were just part of the job. As a little boy, he pulled the wings from butterflies and marveled at their helplessness—the way they flopped around until they finally succumbed. Easy. It was the same with his human victims—the way they begged for their lives, thrashing helplessly until they surrendered to the inevitable. There was more pleasure when money was not involved. It was the random targets that made him feel alive.

He stepped to the door, avoiding the blood splatter and brain matter.

Before exiting the apartment, he cocked his head and stared at her open eyes. He could still see the moment of surprise lingering in the hollowness of her death. It was like that flash in the moment when a light is turned on and then quickly extinguished. He often thought of taking a picture afterwards, but that would be reckless. The last thing he wanted was there to be definitive proof. No, it was far better to simply remember, to allow the imprint on his brain to sustain him. Besides, he had her hair. Once he had it safely hidden away, stored under dehumidified conditions, it would not fade or decay in his lifetime.

He shut the door quietly and joined his employer in the hall.

Together, the two men descended the worn steps.

He watched as his companion stopped at the bushes, pulled his zipper down, closed his eyes, and stroked himself until his hardness wasted itself, then smiled and pissed long and hard into the thicket.

Thunder grumbled closer.

He laughed. "Shall I get you a cigarette?"

The other man smiled, and they both slid into the car and drove away.

\* \* \*

He stirred in his hiding spot. The smell of hot piss mingled with the wetness of the air. Everywhere, the stench of urine and wet earth mixed until he thought he would throw up. He was getting soft. He wondered whether the bird's husband had anything to do with the gunshot that had brought out a sole neighbor, who quickly shut her door after opening it. The husband was long gone, but the men who left must have been hot on his heels to get to her apartment so soon afterwards.

He needed to get far away. No bushes could hide him when the police arrived.

He crouched and ran through the streets until he was clear. A flash of light, followed by a crack of thunder, split the air. He listened to the sirens in the distance. They were closing in.

He continued through the trees until his sides burned. Then he found a dark corner of the park and unsheathed his needle and syringe. Another flash of light and another crack stirred the air and he felt the hairs on his skin lift.

Deep darkness descended.

His hands trembled as he set up the old spoon, lit the lighter, and melted the rock. A strong storm was brewing, and he didn't want to be caught out in the open.

He thought of his bird. Heather. He would have to tell her the truth of the woman's death. Her husband had betrayed her, but that was his only sin. Someone else had pulled the trigger.

"Heather," he whispered to himself. He would have to find her.

Yes. He would have to tell her.

He slid under a musty, ragged-edged picnic table and found soft ground. He let the liquid slide through his veins until it found his place of forgetting, and he let his head and eyes roll back. The storm would have its way.

He let go. ■

*Elizabeth Campbell Frey has worked in Fortune 500 companies in positions dealing with systems analysis/project management, human resources, employee relations, and affirmative action. After surviving cancer, she switched gears and, during her studies for a master's in history and non-Western cultures, she focused on water rights and resources and completed a thesis on the Doctrine of Discovery and land issues in Indian country. Born in the Philippines to chronic expat parents, she has lived in too many places to name, but now lives in Texas Hill Country with her husband, 2 gypsy-hearted kids, dogs, cows, chickens, a horse, and a swarm of transient kamakaze hummingbirds.*

# *The Author*

By Stephen Maitland-Lewis  
Press Photo Credit: Nathan Sternfeld



Bronwyn Tasker, flanked by Princeton's librarian emeritus and her literary agent, was escorted by a young summer intern along the long narrow corridor on the twenty-seventh floor to the book-lined conference room of Larkin & Forrest's Manhattan office. She took her time, pausing frequently to stare at the portraits of the firm's Nobel- and Pulitzer Prize-winning authors. Finally she found the one for which she had been searching. Arnold Lincoln. The brass plaque on the frame stated his name and the years 1879–1950. At ninety-six, she was now exactly twenty-five years older than Lincoln had been when he died. The young intern interrupted her thoughts. "Mr. Larkin is waiting for you, Ms. Tasker." She continued to stare at the portrait for several seconds before moving on. Her only thought, as

she was being rushed, was that he had a kind expression.

They entered the conference room. Mr. Theodore Larkin did not stand to greet them. With him were three colleagues, two dour and expressionless middle-aged women and a young man who bore a distinctive resemblance to the elderly Mr. Larkin, maybe a grandson, she speculated. They remained seated, two of them continuing to sip from their elegant coffee cups, barely giving her a glance. No coffee was offered to either Professor Tasker or to her two companions.

"Ms. Tasker, I haven't much time so let's get to the point. I'll be frank. I only agreed to meet with you because of Lloyd Cape, here. As a Princeton man myself, I have known of Lloyd for many years. He has a well-deserved reputation as one of the country's most eminent librarians. How he comes to be involved with you made me curious. And as for your agent"—Larkin paused to stare at Hyman Shapiro—"we have never published any of your authors and I doubt we are going to make an exception in the case of Ms. Tasker." He pushed his cup aside.

Fixing her with a cold stare, he continued, "Larkin and Forrest has never in its hundred and forty-three years published anything written by a convicted criminal, so why have you come to see us?"

"Mr. Larkin. I want someone to write my biography. I'm ninety-six. I cannot write my own autobiography. If someone writes my story, I may not live to see it published. I need a successful biographer to take this on. Someone skilled. It cannot be third-rate and trite. I want a major author. Someone like Kitty Kelley."

"Oh really," Mr. Larkin sniggered. His three sycophants joined in with a cacophony of giggles and guffaws.

When the mirth evaporated, Mr. Larkin spoke. "And what makes you think the world's preeminent biographer would want to give you the time of day, Ms. Tasker?"



"Because what I have to say will be the biggest bombshell in publishing in centuries."

More sniggers.

"I have a nonnegotiable demand."

"And what is that?"

"I need to generate one and a half million dollars from this book. The full amount is to go to Princeton's library, not one dime to me. Revenues over this can go to you and the writer as you determine. As long as Princeton gets one and a half million dollars."

Mr. Larkin looked at his watch. Then at his colleagues. After a few seconds, he broke into a grin and laughed. His shoulders shook. "I am beginning to enjoy this nonsense, Ms. Tasker. Before you start, however, I want you to make your own case for your book. There is no need for your agent, whose name I've already happily erased from my mind, to remain. Similarly, I'm not sure that Mr. Cape wishes to besmirch his good reputation by being present. After all, he is not pitching the merits of this questionable opus."

He paused. "I suggest the two of you wait in our reception area. This won't take long, I assure you."

One of the women stood to refresh her and Mr. Larkin's coffee. The other one escorted Mr. Cape and Mr. Shapiro back to the reception area.

"Now," said Mr. Larkin, "I have approximately ten minutes to spare, so go on—please. Amuse me."

"I assure you, Mr. Larkin, your attitude will be different when you have heard my story."

"You have ten minutes. Not one minute more."

"I graduated from the University of Aberdeen in Scotland."

"I know where Aberdeen is, Ms. Tasker. Please make this quick."

"I graduated in 1949. My studies were interrupted by the Second World War. I graduated in zoology, but during my studies I developed an interest in puffins and decided to research for a doctorate. The university awarded me a scholarship to study puffins and to spend a year photographing and observing them for my thesis. This necessitated a move to the Faroe Islands."

"Puffins?"

The table again broke into lampooning laughter and sneers.

"Yes, Mr. Larkin. Puffins. So I went to the Faroe Islands, which, as you may know, are to the northwest of Scotland halfway between Norway and Iceland. The islands are an autonomous country within Denmark with a population of around fifty thousand. Very rugged, windy, and wet. It's a wonderful place to study puffins. I settled in a small village, Hosvik, barely three hundred inhabitants."

"Get to the point."

"It was there that I met Gerald Mustell."

"Our author, Gerald Mustell? The Nobel Prize winner for literature?"

"Yes, that Gerald Mustell."

"Go on."

"His mother was Danish, as I'm sure you know. That's why he settled in the Faroe Islands. He spoke the language fluently. After you published his first book and it became a huge success, he became reclusive and moved to Hosvik, where he lived in a modest cottage. It was remote. No telephone. No neighbors nearby. And there he wrote, never having to deal with interviews, book signings, and all the other things that successful writers have to do. He lived totally alone, never saw a soul. Just him, his writing, and his model airplanes. Did you know he built model airplanes?"

"So you met him and then what?"

"I met him one day at the general store in Hosvik. We had a lively conversation about puffins and the trials and tribulations of living such a solitary existence. We began to take daily walks together along the coastline and to neighboring villages. I used to go to his cottage and cook for him from time to time. And he fell in love with me. He was much older, but that was never an issue between us. After a time he asked me to move in with him. I did."

She paused.

"So you were his muse?" Mr. Larkin raised an eyebrow.

"You can call me what you like. Muse. Girlfriend. Mistress. We made each other happy. We lived together until he died."

"He died in Stockholm when he went to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature."

"I was with him, Mr. Larkin. He died in my arms at the hotel when we were getting ready to leave for the award ceremony."

He refilled his coffee cup. "And you're telling me your life in the Faroe Islands was exceptional somehow? Book-worthy?"

"It was simple. Every day after breakfast, including Saturdays and Sundays, Gerald would disappear into his office until

around one o'clock. The only sound I heard was of him banging away on his typewriter.

"Meanwhile, I'd converted a small room off the landing into my office. It had no window, as it had been a storage closet. It was in that tiny cubbyhole that I worked on my doctorate.

"We would meet up in the kitchen around one, have soup and a chunk of bread I'd warmed up, and then we'd go for a long walk. Sometimes we'd walk for two or three hours. Less in the winter months, as we wanted to be home before it got dark. We'd have simple dinners, usually stews, listen to classical music on the radio, and then go to bed. As I said, we were happy. That is, until Gerald was notified that he'd been awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. At that moment, he changed. Life became hell. What should have been a most joyful moment in our lives became an absolute misery."

"In what way?"

"He started to drink heavily. We always had a vodka before dinner, but an entire bottle every evening became the norm for Gerald, with me just sticking to one small glass. He would walk a mile to the only shop in the village that sold liquor and buy as many bottles as he could carry home. God knows what they thought."

"Do you know what triggered this?"

"Yes, he was scared stiff. He'd been out of the public glare for so long, suddenly being thrust into the spotlight filled him with panic. Frequent vomiting, sudden rages, insomnia. He even lashed out at me and blamed me, for goodness sake. Why did he blame me? For helping him get the most distinguished prize in literature. It was madness."

"I agree."

"First he wanted to decline the award. I used every argument under the sun to persuade him to accept. Finally he agreed. Then he refused to travel to Stockholm to be honored. And that created more rows and violent scenes. Every day, I had to put two empty bottles into the trash."

A secretary came into the room with a fresh pot of coffee. No one indicated wanting more.

"Then the speech. I reminded him that he needed to make an acceptance speech. I thought war had broken out. Shouting, screaming, more abuse. He even struck me. I fell onto the kitchen floor. And he kicked me mercilessly. Oh how I wished we had neighbors, but we lived well over a mile from the closest."

"Did you help him with the speech?"

"I offered but he refused. Whenever I asked how he was getting on with it, it led to more screaming and shouting. I asked to see the speech countless times but he always refused. It was a nightmare living with him during those weeks, believe me."

Mr. Larkin looked at his watch.

"We flew to Stockholm and someone came to the hotel to fit him for formal attire for the award ceremony. Gerald gave me money to buy a dress suitable for the occasion. After all, I never had a reason to wear a formal evening gown in Hosvik. It was long, black, and most elegant. I've never worn it again, not after that evening.

"We were two days in Stockholm before the night of the ceremony. We never left the hotel suite. It was as if he'd lost his voice. He wouldn't speak. He walked around in a daze. After all the hell I'd been through with him since he was notified of the prize, I guess I should have been relieved. But it was scary. He was so different."

"Did he appear ill?"

"Not physically, but obviously there was something wrong with his mental condition. The afternoon of the ceremony, Johannes came to give us the final instructions and to say that he would pick us up at six o'clock. Johannes had a position with the Nobel organization."

"Johannes Svensson? The man you murdered?"

"Yes. He deserved to die."

He repeated words he had used several times, but now with less impatience. His was a coaxing tone as he said, "Go on, Ms. Tasker."

She watched as he sipped his coffee. She craved some herself.

"Johannes arrived on time, at six. We were ready to leave with him. We were dressed, and if I may say it myself, we looked good. Elegant, he in his white tie and tails and me in my new black evening gown. Gerald said he needed to go to the bathroom before we left. That was no surprise. He'd been having prostate problems and had to go frequently. We stood waiting for him. We heard a loud thud. He'd obviously slipped. We rushed into the bathroom and there he was on the floor. I bent down beside him and cradled his head in my arms. Seconds later, he drew his last breath."

"Quite a shock?"

"Johannes ran back into the living room and called for a doctor. Then I heard him talk to someone else but I couldn't understand Swedish and I had no idea who was at the other end of the line.

"Some medics arrived as well as the hotel manager and God knows who else. The room suddenly became hectic. Poor



Gerald's body lay on the bathroom floor and I couldn't hold back my tears. No one spared me any notice."

"And then?"

"Well, when Gerald fell onto the floor, and I took his head in my hands, I noticed a piece of paper, folded in half, slip out from the inside pocket of his tails. I guessed—correctly, as it turned out—it was the speech he was due to give."

"And what did you do with it?"

"Something told me to keep it. If Gerald wasn't going to deliver it, no one else would. I took it from his pocket and slipped it under the bathmat. Seconds later, three people came into the bathroom to take Gerald's body away. Just like that. They left me on the floor, crying. Ten minutes later, everyone had left. The doctor had asked me a few perfunctory questions and said that a coroner might have other questions for me but that it seemed to him, at first examination, that Gerald had had a heart attack."

"And that was later confirmed, was it not?"

She nodded. "Imagine the callousness of everyone. They had left me alone. I got up from the cold tiled floor and walked into the empty living room in a state of shock. The next morning, I read in the English-language newspaper that someone had given a speech to honor Gerald and announce his death. There was no one to either receive the award or give the acceptance speech. I then remembered the paper under the bathmat. I went to retrieve it. When I read it, I was stunned."

Mr. Larkin stretched to pick up a telephone on a side table. "Hold all calls," he ordered the operator.

"Johannes arrived to present me with Gerald's award around ten that morning. I was still in my evening dress from the night before. Johannes knew that Gerald had no family and that he and I had been together for close to thirty years. He assumed—incorrectly, as it turned out—I was his only heir. He asked me if Gerald had a speech prepared for the award ceremony. I lied and said no. The last thing I wanted was for him to see Gerald's typewritten speech. But there it was lying next to me on the sofa.

" 'What's that?' he demanded. I hesitated. Again, he shouted, 'What's that?' He ordered me to give it to him so that he could release it to the press. That was the last thing I wanted. 'Well at least read it to me,' he ordered. I hesitated still. He shouted again, and in my vulnerable and shaken state, I feared he would strike me. So I read him the speech. He looked at me in disbelief. He said he would come back later to discuss this with me but in the meantime I was not to say a word to anyone. Well, he didn't come back later that day, or the next. It made no sense for me to remain any longer in Stockholm, so I flew back to Scotland. I took the ferry the next morning to get on with my life in Hosvik."

"Did you go to Gerald's funeral at least?"

"No, Mr. Larkin. As you know the Nobel people notified Gerald's agent, who got in touch with his attorney here in New York. He had Gerald's will. He wanted to be cremated and his ashes dropped into the sea. Any sea. He was an atheist so there was no religious service. I was a beneficiary and within a short time I began to receive a substantial monthly check out of the estate."

"What about your PhD? Did you continue with your research on puffins?"

This time no one sniggered at the mention of puffins.

"Yes, I had been awarded my doctorate years before but had done nothing with it. After Gerald's death, I returned to the workplace. I moved to London and joined the faculty of King's College.

"Then one evening, after I'd been living in London for about six months, out of the blue, the doorbell rang at my Bloomsbury apartment. It was Johannes Svensson. At first he was pleasant, but after about an hour, he began to blackmail me. He demanded money. Fifty thousand dollars. I should have refused but I didn't. I asked him to give me a few days to arrange this, which I did. This became a pattern. Every six months, he flew to London to demand money. Each time he came, he demanded more. First it was fifty thousand, then seventy-five thousand, and then one hundred thousand. He became more and more unpleasant and abusive. Finally, I couldn't stand it anymore. My nerves were shattered, so I went to my bedroom to get my gun. I came back into the living room and shot him. I have no regrets. None whatsoever."

"How come you had a gun?"

"I'd had one since the day I went to the Faroe Islands. With the wildlife there, it was prudent to have one for my own protection living in an isolated place as a young single girl."

"So you had just shot him."

"A neighbor heard the shots. There were two. She called the police. I was taken off in handcuffs to the police station. I was charged with murder. I pleaded guilty."

"Why didn't you tell the court that you were being blackmailed?"

"I didn't need to. Blackmailed over what? I wasn't ready to deal with that. Anyway, it wasn't necessary. Prior to me firing the shots, he'd hit me, broken my nose and my jaw and given me a black eye. It was a clear case of self-defense. I was sentenced

to twelve years imprisonment for manslaughter. I was released after seven for good behavior.”

“And then you moved to the United States. How were you able, with your criminal background as a murderess, to obtain a visa to come here, let alone settle permanently?”

“That was no problem, Mr. Larkin. I’m an American citizen. I was born in New York.”

“Oh.”

No one spoke for at least a minute.

“And you think that your life story, interesting as it is, merits the attention of a major author like Ms. Kelley?”

“Yes, I do.”

Again, silence. One of the two dour women rose from her chair to whisper something to Mr. Larkin.

“Quite. Quite,” he murmured. “Tell me, Ms. Tasker, about Gerald Mustell’s acceptance speech. Where is it?”

“I have it here in my purse.”

“Please, may I see it?”

“I will be happy to read it to you.”

“Please.”

She opened her purse and took it from an envelope. She began in a firm voice that displayed no emotion.

“Your Majesty, Mr. President of The Nobel Committee, Ladies & Gentlemen.

“This is a great honor but not one that I can accept. My life has been one big fraud. Please allow me to give this short speech and then disappear into oblivion for the remainder of my years. After I graduated from college, I took a summer job with the great writer Arnold Lincoln, working as his general factotum and helping him with his research. That summer job lasted fifteen years. He paid me well, and I enjoyed my life with him at his home in Connecticut. He died suddenly. Before I left his household, I stole seven of his completed and unpublished manuscripts that he had written between 1910 and 1922, many years before he became famous. I knew that they were good. I moved to Hosvik and began to retype the manuscripts. I submitted them, one every few years, under my own name, and I gave them new titles. They became best sellers. Apart from the title changes, every single word had been written by Arnold Lincoln. I am a thief and an imposter. Simple as that. Arnold left his entire estate to Princeton University. I have bequeathed my estate to Princeton too in honor of the man who should be here today to receive this award. My only request is that a generous allowance be granted for her lifetime to my muse, Bronwyn Tasker, who knows nothing of my criminal activities and whose love for me, I know, will be forever lost as a result of this confession. Please forgive me. Good night.”

“Good God,” Mr. Larkin said, a look of bewilderment crossing his ashen face.

Practically in unison his colleagues echoed similar sentiments.

“Now, you will understand why I want Princeton to get one and a half million dollars. Any earnings above that are for the author.”

“Now may I see the speech?”

“Yes.”

Mr. Larkin rose, crossed the room, and stood behind Ms. Tasker to study the speech. “And you mentioned not being his only heir?”

She gave a wistful shrug. “Gerald was a mystery.”

He walked back to the telephone and asked for someone called Candida, whom Ms. Tasker presumed was his secretary.

“Tell the chef Professor Tasker and her friends are staying for lunch. Meanwhile bring in a couple of bottles of champagne. And get Ms. Kitty Kelley on the telephone.” ■

*Stephen Maitland-Lewis is an award-winning author, a British attorney, and a former international investment banker. He has held senior executive positions in London, Kuwait and on Wall Street prior to moving to California in 1991. He has owned a luxury hotel and a world-renowned restaurant and was also Director of Marketing of a Los Angeles daily newspaper. Maitland-Lewis is a jazz aficionado and a Board Trustee of the Louis Armstrong House Museum in New York. In 2014, he received the Museum’s prestigious Louie Award. A member of PEN and the Author’s Guild, Maitland-Lewis is also on the Executive Committee of the International Mystery Writers Festival. His novel “Hero on Three Continents” has received numerous accolades, and “Emeralds Never Fade” won the 2012 Benjamin Franklin Award for Historical Fiction and the 2011 Written Arts Award for Best Fiction. His novel “Ambition” was a 2013 USA Best Book Awards finalist and won first place for General Fiction in the 2013 Rebecca’s Reads Choice Awards. Maitland-Lewis’ most recent novel “Botticelli’s Bastard” was a 2014 USA Best Book Awards finalist in three categories and won the Bronze Award in Best Regional Fiction (Europe) at the 2015 Independent Publisher Book Awards. In January of 2016, Maitland-Lewis was sworn in as a Freeman of the City of London and admitted as a Liveryman of the Worshipful Company of City Solicitors. In April of 2016, he became a Fellow of The Royal Geographical Society (FRGS). Maitland-Lewis and his wife, Joni Berry, divide their time between their homes in Beverly Hills and New Orleans.*



# Where the Cats Will Not Follow

By Stephen Stromp  
Press Photo Credit: Provided by Author



My feet poking outside the covers made me feel even more vulnerable. Yet I didn't dare reach for the blanket. Not that my stillness mattered all that much. I knew what hid in the corners could smell me. Could see in the darkness. Could hear my heartbeat. To them, the simple functioning of my organs—my heart beating, my lungs rising and falling—must've sounded like thundering convulsions.

I scanned the room lit dimly by the moon. The pale light allowed me to view the sinister faces hidden in the pattern of the faux wood paneling. Some had sloped, vacant eyes. Others had twisted, melted skin. And then there were the ones with sharp teeth and thick horns protruding from the sides of their heads. But the cheap paneling wasn't the cause of my fear. It was the thought that these macabre portraits were merely impressions of what had escaped the wall, what had materialized into flesh and become whole. They could've been anywhere. The fields. The woods. Even within the swelling shadows. Watching. Waiting for the perfect moment to pull me off the bed and swallow me whole.

I desperately wanted to call out to Everett across the hall. He wouldn't have been afraid. He would've protected me. But I couldn't call out to him. My voice wouldn't allow it. If I shouted his name, I just knew it would've come out a whisper. If I screamed, it would've come out a muted shriek. And I knew if I had tried, and my voice had failed to reach his ears, it would've been worse than movement. It would've compelled them to instantly rush upon me. No, paralyzed silence was my best hope for survival.

Yet the longer I remained still, the more I became a ball of unreleasable energy. My neck ached. My legs boiled under the covers. And in the center of my stomach sprouted the most unbearable itch. I clenched my hands into tight fists, fighting against the temptation to scratch. But my concentration only made it more intense. No longer able to withstand the agony, cautiously, I inched my hand beneath the covers. My movements were so slow, so careful, that the blanket barely moved. When I had at last reached my stomach, I dug my nails into my skin with fervor. I had my relief. But what was more, I had moved—and hadn't been attacked.

Released from my immobile prison, I looked down to see the hair on my chest—and a spark of awareness came over me. It was a peculiar sensation, realizing that although I was in my parents' house, in the small twin bed of my childhood, I was in my adult twenty-six-year-old body. I was not the child I had once been sleeping in that room, living in that house. Why then was I stuck, helpless, with Everett being the only one who could save me?

Brashly, I flung the covers to the floor. Warm air rushed over my legs and torso. In a flash, I scooted to the end of the bed, stood upon my electrified legs, and grabbed the doorknob. Yet before I left, I took one final look to the room behind me. It was then I realized my self-assuredness was premature. No matter what age my body was, I was still as vulnerable as a child. The shadows had grown into a single mass enveloping half the room. Darkness as black as oil oozed over the edge of the bed and inched



near my feet. I hurriedly slipped through the door and pulled it tight behind me.

In the hall, I stood before Everett's door. I gently placed my hand on it, and it creaked open slightly. I pulled away without looking inside, not wanting to know. Frightened he wouldn't be there. Frightened to confirm I was alone.

I headed down the open stairway. A low wind must've picked up because the enormous blue spruces relentlessly scraped against the side of the house. They scratched not with violence, but with the slow persistence of a pendulum swinging without a force to stop it. Yet the more I listened, the less it sounded like pine needles at all. It was more like pointy fingernails poking through the window screens and tapping on the panes. So polite they were, as if asking permission to be let in. As I crept across the living room, a low growl overlapped with the taps that I hoped was nothing more than a sudden gust of air forced between the needles.

As I entered the dining room, I pleaded under my breath for the noises to stop. The pines pressed against the row of windows overlooking the table. Outside, the night was still. There was barely a breeze. No leaves dashed through the yard. And the pines—stood motionless. Yet *something* was ripping through the screens and incessantly tapping on the windows. And *something* outside was growling. The long row of windows was designed to let in light. Yet it was darkness that wanted to be let in that night. I rushed down the line, slapping shut the slats and latching every wooden blind. My stirring activity caused whatever was outside to become even more insistent. Tap! Tap! Tap!

Dizzy with terror, I tugged on the front door and then the side door by the basement steps to ensure they were secure. But the thought of checking the sliding glass door in the sunroom made me the most uneasy. In front of the wall of glass, they would see me. And clearly, I would see them. Yet as I took one timid step into the room, I could only see my reflection in the glass. There was nothing but blackness on the other side. The stars that had shown themselves on so many nights had been snuffed out by the thick Michigan clouds.

Before I could test the lock, the sound of stairs creaking held me back. Our house had been built over a hundred years before, and you could always hear when a person made their way down the stairs, even from the other end of the house. My mind raced thinking of places to hide. But hiding would've been futile. What had escaped from my bedroom walls already knew all the hiding places. It dwelled in the hiding places. So I stood right where I was, deciding to finally face what pursued me. And into the sunroom, with his hands kept coolly in the pockets of his jeans, stepped—Everett. Everett, whose imposing stature alone could scare away demons. Everett, my protector.

"You're home!" I shouted. It wasn't a surprise that in his presence I could actually speak.

He smirked at me looking so frantic in my underwear. "What're you doing up?" he asked.

"You know," I replied gravely. I knew he did. He lowered his eyebrows, seemingly disappointed I wasn't keeping up my half of the charade. "I wasn't sure you'd be here."

"I just came down for a drink." He continued to play along with it all, yet at the same time threw me a quick wink.

I was just glad he was there. I wanted him close until it was over, until the terrible night had ended. I pushed on his broad shoulders like a needy child, insisting he be the one to check the door. It wasn't like him to turn down a challenge. But Everett wouldn't budge. And that's when I remembered. It wasn't as if he didn't want to help. He couldn't. Wasn't allowed. So instead, in a reversal of roles, he gently grabbed *my* shoulders and positioned me in front of him, at arm's length, facing the glass door. I looked upon my reflection and took a deep, uneasy breath. "Remember the cats," he whispered.

He understood my degree of fear to bring up the cats. They were the furthest thing from my mind that night. But because of Everett, I *did* think of them. I thought of them circling me like they were performing a ritualistic dance. Momentarily, I was transported to the wonderful scene. The sun was a soft yellow, making the coats of the felines shimmer. I held my hand out to touch them. Their fur was soft. Such large cats. Healthy and muscular. They were perfect. I smiled. On the night I never thought I would've been able to, I smiled.

Everett released me. Alone, I stepped forward imagining the cats circling my body like a shield. While their faces remained hidden, as I approached the door, I could see their hands crowding the window. Their wet fingertips squeaked across the glass. Pressing. Sliding. Smearing. Their fingers were green, moldy green with black fingertips. The tips didn't appear to be nails, but rather bones, sharpened to a point, poking through the ends of their fingers. My face warped and twisted as the glass strained from the pressure.

They were under the floodlights. I flipped the switch and was elated to see that even against the oppressing darkness surrounding the house, the bulbs had actually worked. Glorious light burst upon them. It shot over the patio and stretched into the garden. At last, the monsters were exposed.

It was the horned ones, at least a dozen of them. They were no more than four feet tall. The skin on the rest of their body was as moldy green as the skin of their fingers. And just like their impressions on the wall, bulky black horns protruded from the sides of their heads in the shape of shark fins turned sideways. Their red pupils had difficulty adjusting to the light, yet they dared stay beneath it. In fact, they seemed to relish the exposure no matter how painful it was. They opened their



oversize jaws and bared their long, sharp teeth. They smashed their faces against the window, smearing it with their juices.

In the reflection, I could see Everett behind me. He looked on with his arms folded across his chest. Saddened. Powerless. They saw him too, and his presence made them furious. They rammed their horns against the glass. It shook and began to splinter.

I rushed to the dining room, petrified. In a final, desperate panic, I grabbed the edge of the table. As I managed to topple it over, the vase that sat upon it, filled with freshly-cut lilac blossoms, rolled to the floor. The lavender blooms were crushed as I dragged the table into the sunroom. Their sweet scent permeated the air. I frantically propped the table on its side and shoved it against the door. The monsters crowded near me, licking the other side of the cracking glass. As soon as I had the table in position, the door finally gave way, showering me with broken glass. I stumbled backward. The monsters chewed on the shards, letting the broken pieces slice their lips and tongues. They grinned with delight as their teeth dripped green blood.

Drained, defeated, and as if a magnet had pinned me there, I surrendered by laying on the dining room floor. I looked up to see Everett towering over me. I couldn't see his face at first, just the bristles on his neck and chin. When he finally brought himself to look upon me, I saw tears welling in his eyes. One slid down his cheek. I closed my eyes and waited for it to land on my face, but I didn't feel it. Perhaps he had caught it? Everett was the one who watched them shred the table. He was the one who saw their small, haunting bodies creep into the house and crowd around me.

I felt their bony fingers all over my body. On my chest and in my mouth. I felt their hot breath on my stomach. They liked my stomach most. They went for it first. It was like being tickled too hard when they tore into it. They used their pointy fingers to take the pieces they wanted and crammed their heads in to slurp up the rest. It didn't hurt so bad. I wanted to tell Everett that it hardly hurt at all. I wanted to tell him there was pleasure being devoured by these demons. Pleasure, finally submitting and being released from their torture. It may have made him feel better. But they were crawling all over my body, and I couldn't communicate. I could only smell the powerful lilacs.

I woke to the overwhelming scent of lilacs. Phillip sat on an old wooden stool a few feet from the side of the bed. For a moment, I imagined it was Everett on that stool. It wasn't hard to do. I'd often find Everett waiting bedside for me to wake. He'd spend entire nights watching me sleep, wondering, I imagined, like Phillip, which world I was in.

Thinking of Everett, I was still hiding, in a way, from Phillip. It took his voice to make me focus. "Good morning." He looked exhausted, but somehow forced a measure of cheerfulness in his greeting. It was apparent he had stayed up all night anticipating the moment I'd wake. He leaned forward, eager to hear what I had discovered for him. I didn't want to open my mouth. Didn't want to admit I had failed him. Instead, I began to rationalize, to defend myself in my mind. *I had no need to feel ashamed! He was the one who dragged me, literally, to wherever we were! I was the victim!* Yet as much as I tried convincing myself, I didn't *feel* like Phillip's victim—even with my hands tied to the bed.

I kicked off the covers and swiveled toward the headboard. My wrists, tied to the wooden dowels, had turned a reddish purple. "You were jerking like crazy," he shrugged. He grabbed a pocketknife off the nightstand and sliced the rope. Freed, I swung my legs over the side of the bed and let the warm breeze blow against my face and dry my hair.

"Where are we?" He moved to the door without giving an answer. "I'm not going to run, Phillip." I looked to the view out the window. "How *could* I run?" I said quietly. We were in the middle of what appeared to be an endless field. Bugs hovered above the dewy ground. Queen Anne's lace and milkweed swayed in the breeze intermixed with other weeds and tall grasses. The lilacs that must've grown nearby all but overpowered the faint fragrance of pine trees. "We're up north, aren't we? Still in Michigan, right?" I scooted to the end of the bed. "Whose cabin is this?"

Leaning against the door, he set his eyes on mine. I tingled with apprehension. I knew the moment I dreaded had come. "Did you see her?" he asked flatly.

"No." I was stunned by his bluntness and stunned by my own blunt reply.

"Then as far as you're concerned, we're nowhere." He brought his face to mine. "Nowhere!" He charged to the window and pulled down the shade. The tattered thing leaked light through its many holes. Tiny circles and gashes of light freckled the aged floral carpeting. "We're not in Michigan! We're not in America! We're not even on this planet until—" He stopped short, finishing only with deep breaths.

His tone made me sick to my stomach. "It was just one night," I said timidly. "I can try again." ■

Stephen Stromp is the author of fantasy horror novel: "Where the Cats Will Not Follow," mystery/suspense/horror novel: "In the Graveyard Antemortem," and dark fantasy: "Cracking Grace."

Stephen loves stories you can't quite put your finger on, stories that may start in a familiar reality, but begin to cross the line a bit into the whimsical and surreal. He's often drawn to darker themes and likes to dabble in horror, although he also likes to mix different genres depending on where the story takes him. Find out more and sign up for release alerts at [www.stephenstromp.com](http://www.stephenstromp.com).



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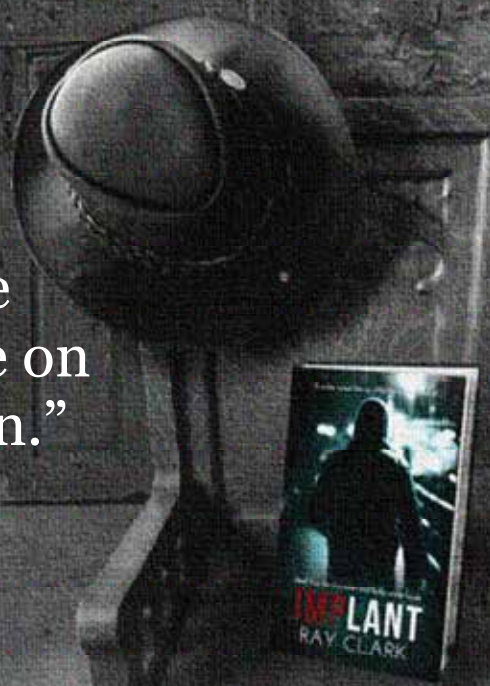
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# Sara Shepard

## DOESN'T TELL US "PRETTY LITTLE LIES"

Interview by Amy Lignor for *Suspense Magazine*  
Press Photo Credit: Danielle Shields



When the name of author Sara Shepard comes up in conversation, the first thing most people think of is the bestselling, fan-favorite YA series, *Pretty Little Liars*. Not only did this series shoot to the top of the charts, so to speak, it also inspired the ABC Family TV series by the same name.

Although Sara entered the adult fiction realm previously, her new captivating tale, "The Elizas," is the first time she has embarked on an adult journey into the suspense/thriller category. This genre debut is one that will have readers staying up all night, unable to set the book aside. Recently speaking with *Suspense Magazine*, Sara talked about a variety of issues throughout her career, from becoming a royal name in the YA world to

seeing her work appear on the small screen to how her transition into the world of adult thrillers first began.

*Suspense Magazine* (S. MAG.): Sara, it's certainly a fact that everyone knows about the various series you've penned in the YA realm, from the phenomenon they've become. Can you tell readers what made you want to move into the adult thriller category?

Sara Shepard (S.S.): *Although I have written two adult novels in the past: "The Visibles" in 2009, and "Everything We Ever Wanted" in 2011, those were quieter, more introspective novels—not thrillers. It didn't even occur to me to write a thriller for adults while writing Pretty Little Liars, The Lying Game, or The Perfectionists series, but after reading such fantastic fiction in the genre by Mary Kubica, Ruth Ware, and Gillian Flynn (to name a few), I thought it would be interesting to try something twisty and a little bit more sophisticated with an aged-up narrator.*

S. MAG.: What are the differences you can share with readers (negatives and positives) between writing YA versus adult fiction?

S.S.: *I will always love writing for YA because you can go big with your emotions—so much during that time is a "first"—whether it's first love, first big schism from your parents, first friendship breakup, whatever. You're also going through an evolution of your identity that isn't as prevalent in full-fledged adults. So it's sad, sometimes, to have that piece missing in adult fiction, but by no means does that restrict an adult character from going through transformations.*

“The interesting thing about younger writers is that they hold us accountable for what we write—I think the prevalence of social media has perpetuated that.”

*The big pro about writing for adults is that you can get a little daring with your subject matter—what people are dealing with as they get older is a little more mature and sophisticated, which is refreshing to explore as an author. Also, sometimes when I write YA I feel like I have to be a guiding voice: I don't want to create characters who are wholly unlikeable, or who are jerks, or who encourage kids to make poor choices. With adult fiction, the characters can be total messes, and we as authors know (hopefully) that readers won't emulate their behavior. In “The Elizas,” Eliza Fontaine is a disaster in a lot of ways. I'm not sure I could have written her in the YA world. But in adult fiction, I had some more leeway in who she could be and how I could develop her.*

S. MAG.: Is there another genre that you have always had an inkling to one day attempt? If so, what would that be and why?

S.S.: *I would love to write a literary romance—not a bodice-ripper, as I don't think I have the skills for that (I am squeamish at writing sex scenes, because I always picture my mother reading them). Something sweet and thoughtful, but also funny. I would also love to move more into comedy writing. “The Elizas” has been described by some as darkly funny. I'm not a straight-up witty person, but I like dark comedy a lot.*

S. MAG.: Now is the time... Can you give us a ‘sneak peek’ in regards to “The Elizas” that cannot be found in a press release?

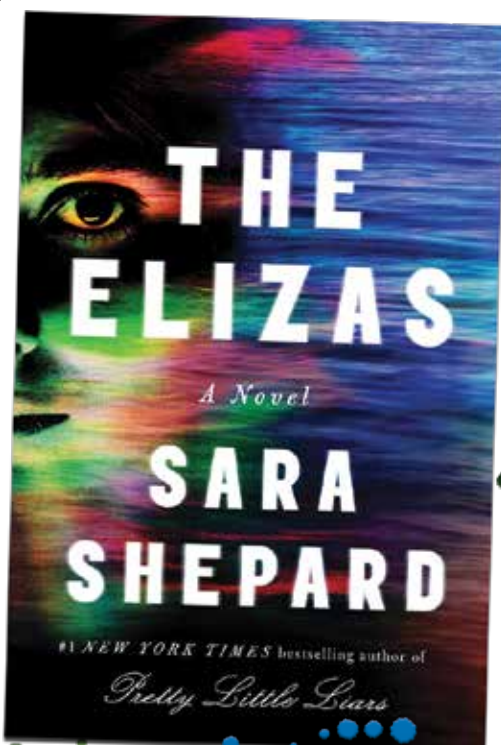
S.S.: *Hmm...I don't want to give too much away, but I will say that all of the pieces of “The Elizas”—the book inside the book, her disjointed memories—all add up in the end. It's also funny...when I first started writing the book, I didn't think it would have another book inside it whatsoever. That came gradually—I don't even remember how—and suddenly I was like, “Oh yes. Of course!”*

S. MAG.: How do you get your original plot ideas for the most part? Are you a ‘rip from the headlines’ sort of person, or more of ‘an idea strikes you’ type? Once the idea is there, do you create outlines, etc., or simply get to work?

S.S.: *I occasionally rip from the headlines, and in another project I'm working on, I based a few characters on a story I'd heard in a certain podcast I love. There's an element I like in “The Elizas”—let's just call it a medical condition—that I've been obsessed with for a long time and knew, someday, I'd use in a book; I just didn't know how. I often squirrel ideas away to use at later times, though it has to be the right fit. With my YA novels, I have tight outlines, but with my adult novels, it's more that I have a general idea and start writing. And then when I have a sense of where it's going, I write a very loose outline...which, of course, often gets dismantled as I go through drafts. Often I have the whole framework of the book figured out before I get to certain scenes, and sometimes I'm quite lazy about actually writing out the scenes—I really have to push myself to write a book's middle. Writing is as much drudgery as it is inspiration, but it's that drudgework that gets you to the finish line.*

S. MAG.: Who, out of all the characters you have written, is the one who shares the most commonalities with you? Is there one you wish was alive and well that you would have as a best friend or perhaps writing partner?

S.S.: *Well, Eliza is a writer, and she's quirky and strange and honest and a hot mess, so I would think she'd probably be my friend and, hopefully, writing partner. In Pretty Little Liars, I always said I had the most in common with Aria Montgomery—I was the girl in high school who just wanted to get away and*

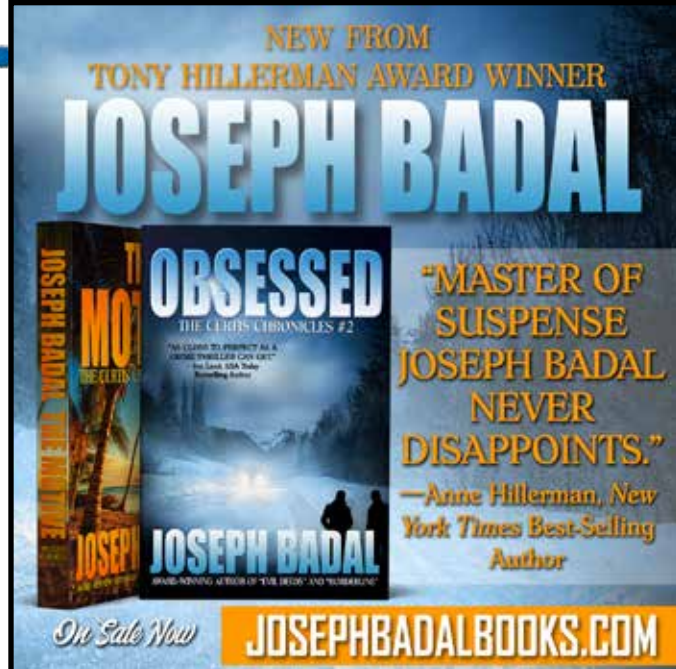




thought she was more “worldly” than everyone else. Also, in the books, Aria isn’t sure who she is in high school—she tries on a lot of identities. I was like that as well.

S. MAG.: Along those same lines, can you share with readers your favorite villain of all time, whether that be one created by you or another author, and why?

S.S.: *I rather like the villain I created in another mystery series of mine, The Amateurs, because readers don’t see it coming, and then in later books you get chapters in this character’s voice. I wish I could write my villains’ POVs into all of my novels! As for villains I’ve loved in fiction...Stephen King is always masterful when it comes to writing truly horrible antagonists. Brady in the Mr. Mercedes trilogy is the most recent who comes to mind, but really, pick up any of his novels or short story collections and you’re going to find some really, really dark, complicated characters within the pages.*



S. MAG.: You must receive a great deal of mail from younger readers. Can you give us your outlook on writers coming up from the next generation? And also share with newer authors how difficult it may be to keep a younger person in this busy world entranced with characters and plotlines?

S.S.: *The interesting thing about younger writers is that they hold us accountable for what we write—I think the prevalence of social media has perpetuated that. For instance, if you are writing about a unique experience (an illness, for example), you’d better do your research, because if it’s not authentic, readers will call you out on it. I think it raises the game for authors and makes all of us strive to do better and really produce a polished, well-thought-out finished product. As far as holding a reader’s attention, that’s tough. Not only are people more distracted by their phones and all of the competing content in the world these days, but there’s so much good fiction out right now, and so many interesting ways to consume fiction (self-publishing, podcasts, fan fiction sites, etc.) that it’s hard to compete. I would just say write your best, most original book you can. Cliffhangers at the end of chapters don’t hurt, either!*

S. MAG.: You’ve seen your characters on screen. Can you talk a bit about that “moment,” and also offer a bit of advice when it comes to accepting a deal in the TV/film industry? Does the writer have ‘say’ when it comes to the process?

S.S.: *The day I saw the PLL pilot was pretty unreal. The unique thing about that pilot was that lines from the book were peppered throughout the episode, so I really felt like the books were ingrained within the show—I’m not sure that always happens in the books-to-TV transition. For PLL, The Lying Game, and The Perfectionists, I wasn’t really part of the TV writing process—the material was optioned, brilliant minds in Hollywood ran with it, and I just visited the set to see how everything was going. I was working on four books a year at that time—there was no way I could also write/produce for TV as well. However, it doesn’t always have to be that way; a writer can ask to have a larger role in developing their material for TV and film. “The Elizas” was just optioned by AGBO (the people behind Arrested Development, among other things) and I hope to have more involvement in bringing it to the small screen. It just depends on what you as a writer want to focus on and what you have time for.*

S. MAG.: What comes next for you? Are you currently working on another adult fiction title at the moment?

S.S.: *I’m working on a few things! Another adult thriller, a more contemporary adult story, and even a YA book that’s pretty different from the other YA I’ve written in the past. I like to have a bunch of things going at once. That way I never get bored!*

And as all her fans will agree, this is one author who most definitely never bores her readers. From the YA series to her first adult thriller, “The Elizas,” the creative and busy mind of Sara Shepard continues to be awe-inspiring and proves to others who wish to one day be “in her shoes” that it can be done. Events, new titles, and more can be found at [www.saracshepard.com](http://www.saracshepard.com). ■

# JEFF STRAND

## THE MARRIAGE OF HUMOR AND HORROR

Interview by Weldon Burge for *Suspense Magazine*  
Press Photo Credit: Provided by Author



If you're looking for a unique (if not twisted) blend of humor and horror, Jeff Strand is the man. Nominated four times for the coveted Bram Stoker Award, Jeff has more than 40 books under his belt, and apparently has many more yet to spring from his tilted brain. Just the titles of some of his books tell you much about the man—"Dead Clown Barbecue," "Blister," "A Bad Day for Voodoo," "Everything Has Teeth," "The Sinister Mr. Corpse," and "The Severed Nose," just to name a few. He has been the Master of Ceremonies of the Bram Stoker Awards banquet for years, and is a familiar face in horror circles.

Jeff became a full-time writer in 2015, and would probably write even more if he wasn't so addicted to videogames and Spider-Man comics. But he did find time to talk with us about...well, stuff.

Weldon Burge (W.B.): You're trapped in a cave with Jason Voorhees, Michael Myers, Freddy Krueger, Pinhead, and Chucky. Is it party time or dying time?

Jeff Strand (J.S.): *Dying time. I could fend off Jason, Michael, Freddy, and Pinhead, but Chucky pushes it over the top. Avenge me.*

W.B.: I always believed horror and humor are kissing cousins. You apparently share that opinion. Why do you think that lip-locking works so well?

J.S.: *A lot of perfectly innocent jokes involve really horrible things. (DOCTOR: "I've got good news and bad news. The good news is that you've got three days to live." PATIENT: "That's the good news? What's the bad news?" DOCTOR: "We've been trying to call you for the past two days.") Horror/comedy just takes that one step further.*

W.B.: Speaking of humor in horror, your *Andrew Mayhem* series is a hoot. The titles alone are...um...unique ("Graverobbers Wanted (No Experience Necessary)," "Single White Psychopath Seeks Same," "Casket for Sale (Only Used Once)," "Lost Homicidal Maniac (Answers to 'Shirley')." So, how much (if at all) of Andrew Mayhem is Jeff Strand?

J.S.: *Almost none. In fact, when I first created the character, the most important element to me was that he had two young children that he was responsible for when he was off doing dangerous things, and I don't have kids. The other key factor was that he was a guy in his thirties who didn't really know what he wanted to do with his life, which was never the case with me. I've always been laser-focused on the whole "I wanna be a writer!" thing. He's a fun character to write and I love the guy, but he's definitely not a stand-in for me.*

W.B.: Wile E. Coyote or Yosemite Sam?



J.S.: Yosemite Sam having a temper tantrum is one of the funniest things animation has ever produced.

W.B.: What, in your opinion, was your “break-out” novel?

J.S.: “Pressure.” I was worried about it at the time because I’d established myself as the horror/comedy guy and now I was publishing a “serious” novel. I thought readers might shout “Stick to the jokes, Funny-Boy!” But it ended up being my most popular book by far, and got me my first Bram Stoker Award nomination and my first mass-market release. “Dweller” was my second “serious” novel, but some later books blurred the line to the point where I wasn’t sure how to categorize them.

W.B.: Do you work from an outline or just wing it?

J.S.: I prefer to mostly wing it with a very loose plan for where things are headed. I don’t always have a choice; novels like “Dweller,” “Wolf Hunt,” and “The Greatest Zombie Movie Ever,” which were written for “big” publishing houses, were outlined beforehand because the editors made me do it before they would give me any money. But, in general, I like to know the ending and a few steps along the way while leaving myself open to whatever ideas pop up as I’m writing.

W.B.: Jean-Claude Van Damme or Chuck Norris?

J.S.: Who would I invite over for cookies and tea? Van Damme, I guess.

W.B.: What has been your greatest challenge as a freelance writer?

J.S.: I’m lucky enough to do this full time, but no one book generates enough income that I can ever sit back and relax. As soon as I finish a book, the financial clock starts ticking again and I need to dive into the next one. It would be nice to say, “Woo-hoo! I just finished a novel! Time to celebrate with a couple days of video games and Netflix!” but ... nope.

W.B.: If you could go back in time and start over, what would you have done differently?

J.S.: Hmmm. I have to weigh the amount of fun I had playing with my Star Wars figures versus how much they’d be worth if I’d kept them in their original packaging. I had Boba Fett, dude! You know what, I have too many fond memories of creating adventures for those guys. So I guess I’d still play with my Star Wars figures. Beyond that...it’s tough to say which forks in the road would’ve led to a better outcome.

W.B.: The Three Stooges or the Marx Brothers?

J.S.: I have nothing against the Three Stooges, but Marx Brothers all the way. As a kid, I’m not sure there was a movie I watched more times than Animal Crackers.

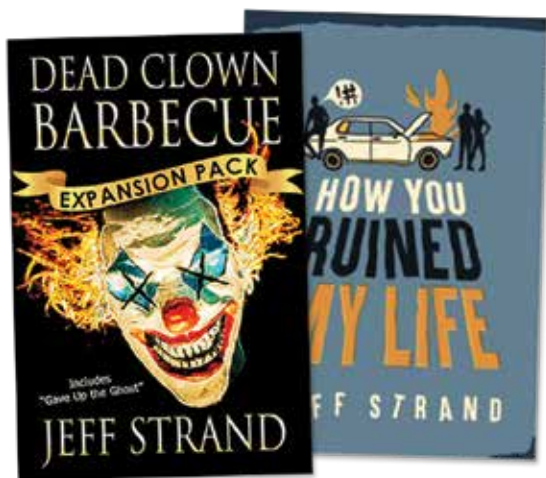
W.B.: Maybe you deem this a cliché, but do you see your work as cathartic—for yourself and/or your readers?

J.S.: For me, no, there’s not much in the way of exorcising personal demons in my work. Even on the rare occasions when I pull from a real-life event (the infamous “contact lens” scene in “Sick House”) it’s not really cathartic. On the readers’ side, I do sometimes get fan mail from people who say that my books helped them get through a tough time—usually because of the entertainment value, but occasionally they’ll point to a specific element. But “writing as therapy” doesn’t really apply to me.

W.B.: Beyond adult horror, you’ve written YA novels. Do you find it difficult to shift gears, or do you just tap your inner child?

J.S.: I find it very easy to shift gears. Part of what keeps writers’ block away for me is being able to work on different types of projects at the same time. In my adult horror, I’ll write from the perspective of a depressed widower,





a devoted mother you don't want to mess with, a savage serial killer, a socially inept customer service representative, etc. so it's not jarring at all to switch to a teenage boy.

W.B.: Clowns. Werewolves. Barbecued clowns. What's the next trope you want to skewer?

J.S.: Clowns again? I've obviously got the short story collection "Dead Clown Barbecue," and a clown costume plays a key role in my novel "Blister," and in the four-author collaboration "Draculas," I was responsible for the sections from the POV of Benny the (Vampire) Clown. But I've never done an all-out scary clown novel. I've got the title but somebody will swipe it if I blab it here. It's also time for me to tackle a giant monster novel.

W.B.: You've written a ton of short stories. Your short story "The Fierce Stabbing and Subsequent Post-Death Vengeance of Scooter Brown" is included in the upcoming Smart Rhino Publications anthology "A Plague of Shadows." What do you find most satisfying about writing short fiction?

J.S.: I can do experimental things with the narrative that I wouldn't want to do at novel-length. "Rough Draft," for example, is a story where the real story is in the side notes that the (fictional) author is making to himself. The joke in "Deformed Son" is the completely unsatisfying nature of the big reveal. In short stories, I can be darker, weirder, and sillier, because I only have to carry the premise through a few pages instead of 300. Oh, I still prefer writing novels, but I think some of my strongest work is in short story form.

W.B.: What advice would you offer writers concerning marketing their books?

J.S.: Since social media plays such a large role these days, it's important to provide content beyond "Buy my book!" If you follow me on Twitter, you'll certainly see "Buy my book!" but there are far fewer of those than jokes that have nothing to do with self-promotion. Obviously there are writers who reach a success level where people are following them just to hear book news, but those writers aren't getting marketing advice from an interview with somebody like me.

W.B.: I agree, online self-promotion should go beyond "Buy my book." It would be nice to see more subtlety in the marketing. On another note, what's your advice for working with editors?

J.S.: Don't be precious about your material. Sometimes you'll agree with the changes and sometimes you won't, but it's important to choose your battles. In my novel "Stranger Things Have Happened" I was asked to cut out an entire chapter, and almost all the jokes out of another. I cringed and shed a metaphorical tear as I complied, but after I had some distance from the heartbreak I agreed that, yes, this was the right choice. The editor isn't always right (I've been the victim of "This is how I'd write the book!") but neither is the author.

W.B.: When it comes to writing, what's on your bucket list?

J.S.: I'd love to write an epic. A big-ass, 1000+ page doorstop of a novel. If somebody wants to cover my living expenses for a couple of years, I'll get right on it.

W.B.: One last question, just for fun. What is the most stupendously stupid horror movie you're ashamed to admit you enjoyed?

J.S.: In the crowd I hang with, there's no shame in enjoying a stupid horror movie!

True. I have a strange fondness for *Basket Case*—the stop-animation alone is truly horrendous and hilarious! We'd like to thank, Jeff for sitting down with us. We're all looking forward to his next book. Check out Jeff's website, "Gleefully Macabre," at <https://jeffstrand.wordpress.com>. You can also find him on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/JeffStrandAuthor>. ■



# JIM BUTCHER

A Self-Proclaimed Nerd & We *Love* It!

Interview by *Suspense Magazine*  
Press Photo Credit: Portrait Gallery Photography by  
Karen Hacker



To not know author, Jim Butcher, and his amazing universe found within the best-selling, incredibly popular series, *The Dresden Files*, seems an impossibility. But that is not the “only thing” Jim has in his repertoire. Being the visionary behind the fantasy series, *Codex Alera*, as well as the steampunk series, *The Cinder Spires*, this is one imagination that continues to expand.

Recently, Jim did *Suspense Magazine* the honor of sitting down and talking about his newest release, an anthology of stories from *The Dresden Files* entitled, “Brief Cases.” In addition, he answered the questions fans truly want to know about; from whether or not the TV series has a chance of being resurrected, to the unforgettable story behind how the idea for the long-running fiction series first came into being. So sit back and have a good time, as Jim reveals some little known facts about his background, how and why he classifies himself as a true “nerd,” and what the future holds.

*Suspense Magazine* (S. MAG.): We wish to thank you, Jim, for joining us today. Let us jump right into the book. Tell us a little bit about “Brief Cases” and its inception.

Jim Butcher (J.B.): *I have to say, at the end of the day, I am just a giant nerd. And as we all know, the defining trait of nerds is unbridled enthusiasm. I am an absolute nerd when it comes to writing, so when other writers come up to me and state that they have this idea and they’re thinking about doing a short story collection, and they’ll say, “What do you think about writing one for us?” I will definitely geek out and respond, “That sounds fantastic! Let’s do a story!”*

*I’ll get all these stories written and get to write the viewpoints of other characters and so on, but then these stories end up spread out over a dozen or so anthologies. And not everyone has enough money to go buy all that. Such as, I have students who are readers and so on and can’t afford to purchase all of these things. So I like to get these stories collected in one place, produce one book, and be able to give it to the fans. You know, like telling them, here are some various stories that they might have missed from The Dresden Files universe. And for all those who did buy all the various anthologies out there, I add an extra novella published for the first time, so at least they get something new as well.*

*As far as the short stories, the inspirations for those can come from just about anywhere, but usually they're things that are too short to go into a novel, or they are a little too complex to make into a novel. When I have an idea like that, I know it needs a novella or short story of its very own.*

S. MAG.: As fans, we definitely appreciate the fact that you collect them, and the extra novella is a great bonus. I do wish to ask you about *The Dresden Files* TV show. I thought the talent was remarkable and the stories were fantastic. Is there any hope at all for resurrection when it comes to the show?

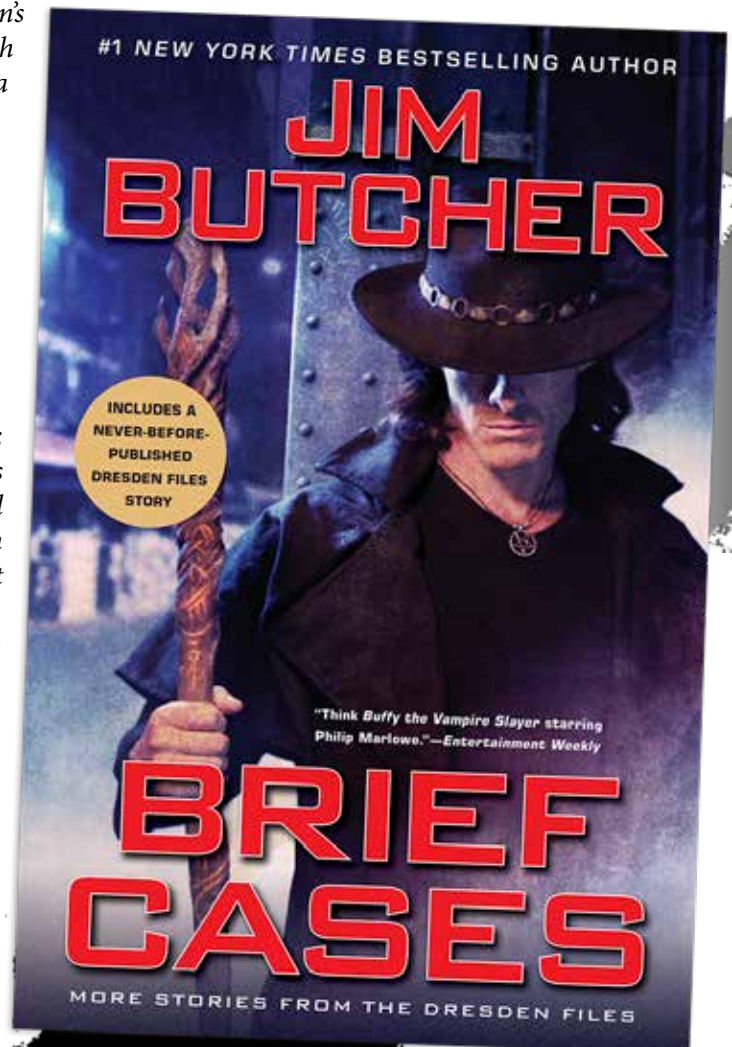
J.B.: *I don't think there's any hope for resurrection, but I do believe there may be hope for reincarnation. What I mean by that is we could see it as something else. Either as a longer, more serialized story that would take a network like HBO or Netflix in order to do it properly; or, I have to say I think it would be a great animated series. Not like a kid series, mind you, but like a proper adult animated series. I'm not sure if you have seen the recent *Suicide Squad* movie that just came out, but it was very well done. And for *Dresden*, that could be a lot of fun to create. Not only that, but if that direction was taken we could perhaps get James Marsters to do the voice of Harry Dresden, which would be so cool. Can you imagine that? Kevin Conroy as Nicodemus...Clancy Brown as John Marcone...you know? That would be so cool.*

S. MAG.: When it comes to "Brief Cases," I would like you to look at this from the consumer or fan's point of view. Which story in the anthology would be the first you'd want to read?

J.B.: *For me, this is an unfair question (LOL). Because for me, it's personal. Like when I wrote, "Jury Duty," it was written when I was sent to jury duty and we were all sitting around waiting to see if we would be selected. I was furious; I thought it was just a huge waste of time. So then I thought, don't make it a waste of time, start taking notes and build a story out of all this. Therefore, it's more personal for me than anyone else. That said, however, I love the novella. I have to say I think it's one of the best things I've ever done. It's called "Zoo Day" and it's a story of Harry Dresden's first day with his daughter. It doesn't have very much to do with the greater overall universe of *The Dresden Files*; it's really a personal story about him and the family he's trying to build.*

S. MAG.: They tell beginning writers that they need to "know" what genre they write in. I still don't really classify or know what exact genre Jim Butcher falls under, and I love that. I'm wondering if you could define the differences between say, fantasy, dark fantasy, and steampunk, and how you label the genre in which you currently write?

J.B.: *Well, in the first place, to me, genres are not for writers; they are really for bookstores and then for readers. As far as writers go, writers write because if they didn't they would probably lose their minds. I really think that's the motivation for why they do it. You know there's a story within you and it has gotta get out, and it doesn't care about genre conventions. The only consideration for genres I take when I'm writing is when I think about how I'm going to market the book to an editor. For example: with *The Cinder Spires* I would say it's a steampunk story but it has fantasy elements to it. At the same time, however, I have to consider how I will talk about this, or present this, to the fans. I believe that *The Cinder Spires* is like a steampunk opera. A space opera meets steampunk. But there is no actual section for a "steam opera" in the bookstore. I know it will land in science fiction and we'll call it steampunk. But what I really rely on is the fan. It is their word of mouth that makes the story. Those fans out there are the ones that are on your side and the best marketing, I believe, you can*





have. Which makes the genre conventions not really applicable. That said, *The Dresden Files* is classified as urban fantasy, which is good enough to get people started. You introduce them to the world and then they look around for themselves and make their own decisions.

S. MAG.: When you finished “Brief Cases,” and stepped back from the finished product, which character, besides Harry Dresden, resonated with you? Do you have one where you wish to expand on them further in the future?

J.B.: Oh, sure. That happens all the time, with many of the characters, actually. Like Molly, for instance. When I wrote about Molly, immediately two dozen Molly stories popped up in my head.

Take Marcone, as well. Looking back, I realized that he isn't quite the guy I originally thought he was. I mean he is this fairly horrible person who does run the gangs in Chicago, but there's also this code of honor there. He's really less of a mob boss and more of a medieval baron who happened to find himself in charge of a mob.

The strongest character when it comes to this book was probably Anastasia Luccio. For her story, I teamed her up with Wyatt Earp. At the start of the story, she's pursuing this “man in black” across the desert. He's a warlock, but as she catches up to him, she realizes that he's only a lackey for Kemmler—one of the big, bad necromancers of the story. He's not involved in the current story but he is this dark shadow from the past. And I suddenly realized I could write this story about her pursuing Kemmler back and forth across the west with Wyatt Earp and Doc Holliday... I don't know if I could ever do the research needed in order to do the story justice, but, man, it would be a good time!

S. MAG.: When you began *The Dresden Files*, did you have an end game in mind? And if you did, has that ever changed as you moved forward with the series?

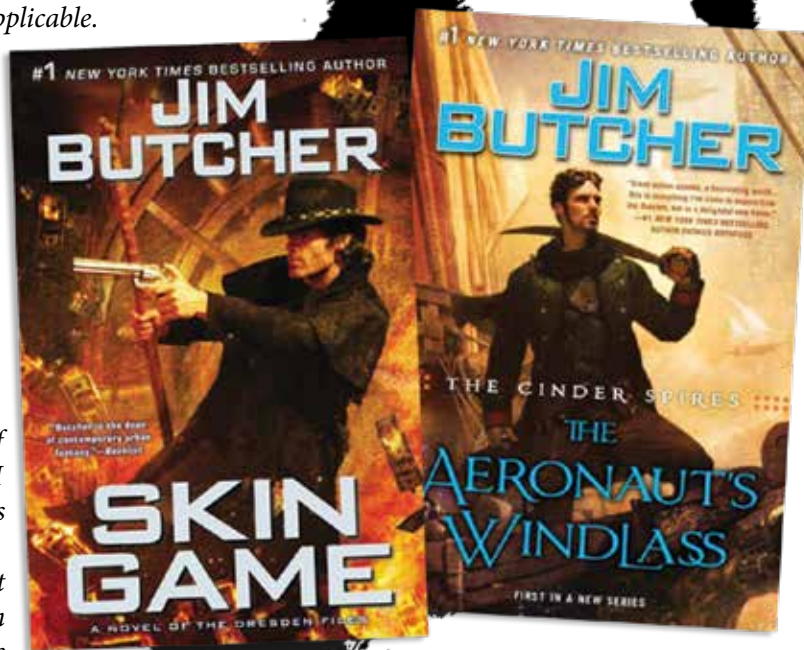
J.B.: Actually, you should know that I wrote *The Dresden Files* to prove to my writing teacher how wrong she was about writing. She had been giving me good advice for a long time, so I thought I would teach her a lesson by following that advice to the letter and showing how wrong she actually was. She would be able to see the horrible result. But when I turned in the first couple of chapters, she said: “You did it!” She wasn't sure if it would be the first I ever published, but she commended it as a “professional quality” piece and thought I would have no trouble selling it. Then she told me to go home and write up an outline for the rest of it. Of course...she meant an outline for the novel.

Well, I came back with an outline for a 20-book series with this three book trilogy at the end of it all. I was all excited about it and I just remember the look on her face. She didn't want to tell me that there was no way an unpublished author was going to sell a 20-book series, but she didn't want to discourage me either. And because she didn't tell me, I kind of went out and did it because I didn't actually know it was impossible.

I have pretty much stuck to that outline the whole way through. I might need 21 instead of 20 books before I hit the trilogy at the end, but I have never altered my “plan” since writing that outline when I was 25. I believe that's the reason it has done so well. Because I know the end game, I can scale the story up appropriately and keep raising the stakes as I write. I can build and introduce new, more dangerous people and monsters to go up against, and I keep finding those complex moral battles that Harry has to face.

In addition, I think I'm at that point where I'm just superstitious of changing anything around. If it's not broke, why should I attempt to fix it? So what I'm doing is sticking to the outline and just trying to make sure that every installment is the best it possibly can be.

All readers and fans will tell you that Jim Butcher has done just that! Collectively, we should also send a big “thank you” to that writing teacher of his for keeping the word “impossible” to herself. To find out more about Jim, check out [www.jim-butch.com](http://www.jim-butch.com). ■



*Cerebral Crime & Punishment:*

# ANTHONY HOROWITZ

## on “The Word is Murder”

Interview by John B. Valeri for *Suspense Magazine*  
Press Photo Credit: Jon Cartwright



**A**nthony Horowitz is one of the most prolific and celebrated writers working today. The author of last year’s megahit, “Magpie Murders,” his impressive oeuvre also includes the *New York Times* bestseller “Moriarty” and the internationally bestselling “The House of Silk”—two new Sherlock Holmes novels commissioned by the Conan Doyle Estate—as well as the venerable *Alex Rider* series for young adults. As a television screenwriter, Horowitz created *Midsomer Murders* and the BAFTA-winning *Foyle’s War*, both of which were featured on PBS’s *Masterpiece Mystery*; further, he penned episodes of several popular TV crime

series, including *Poirot*, *Murder in Mind*, and *Murder Most Horrid*. Horowitz regularly contributes to a wide variety of national newspapers and magazines, and in January 2014 was appointed an Officer of the Order of the British Empire for his services to literature. He makes his home in London.

Horowitz’s new novel, “The Word is Murder,” is the first book in a prospective series from Harper in which the author himself (or a somewhat fictionalized version) plays the Watson-like narrator to disgraced police detective Daniel Hawthorne. Their first case involves the baffling death of Diana Cowper, who was strangled in her home six hours after having visited a funeral parlor to plan her own services. The title is one of the most anticipated of summer, and has received starred reviews from *Booklist*, *Kirkus*, and *Publishers Weekly*; *Booklist* praised: “Actually, the word is not murder, it’s ingenious....a masterful meta-mystery.”

Now, Anthony Horowitz reveals the origins of this cerebral crime caper...

John B. Valeri (J.B.V.): “The Word is Murder” immediately strikes as both fresh and familiar. In what ways did you intend for the book to pay homage to the “golden age” of detective fiction while also maintaining a contemporary vibe—and how is this reflective of your own reading tastes?

Anthony Horowitz (A.H.): Thank you for your kind comment! The sort of detective fiction I like veers much more



towards what you might call the cerebral—Agatha Christie, Conan Doyle, John Dickson Carr, etc. I'm less interested in police procedure and forensics. For me, the perfect whodunit should move at a more gentle pace than modern life perhaps allows. If you get your information instantly, via your cell phone or whatever, you lose some of the pleasure that comes with the cool consideration of a crime. That said, TWIM is very much set in modern times and tries to reflect modern attitudes. So I suppose I'm trying to have the best of both worlds.

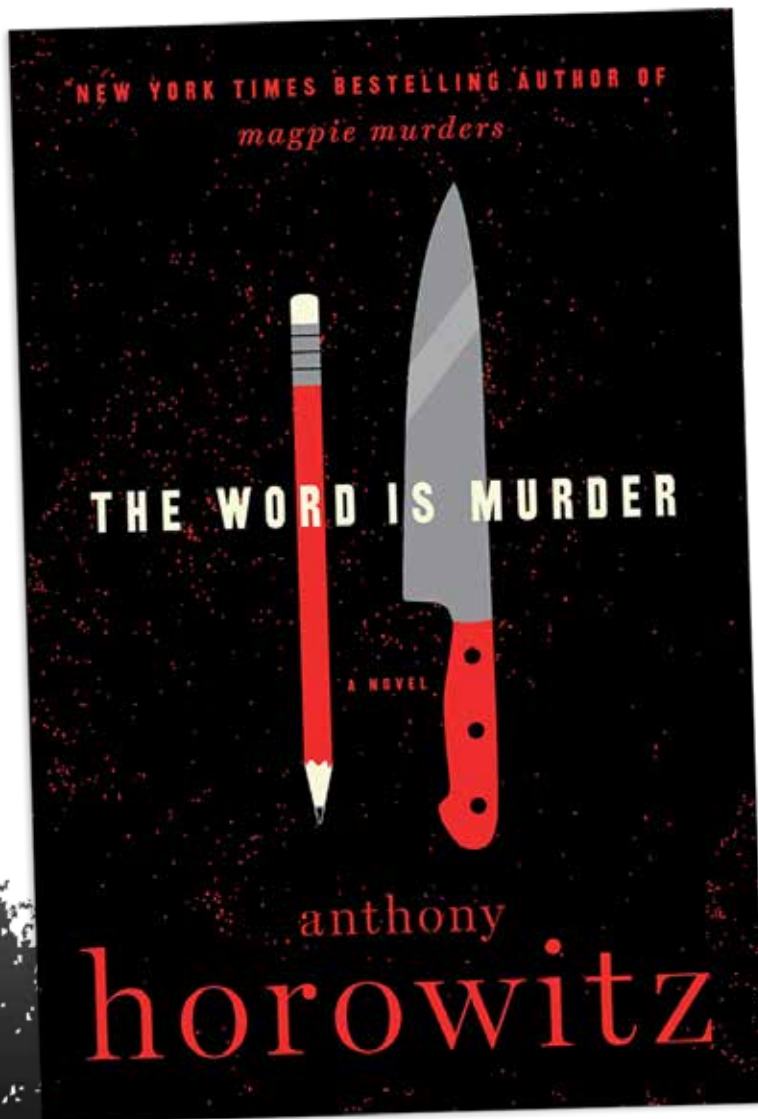
J.B.V.: You are a “reluctant” character within the story. What appealed to you about melding the facts of your life and career within a fictitious creative canvas—and why do you think that an essence of truth often appeals to readers more than a literal (non-fiction) truth?

A.H.: I love the whodunit format but when I started thinking about a new series, my first thought was that I wanted to do something completely new. It suddenly occurred to me that by making myself the narrator, I would be turning everything on its head. Normally, the author stands on a mountain with a view of everything that is going on. But being inside the novel, I know nothing. Worse than that, I'm entirely dependant on my detective, Hawthorne, to provide a solution or I won't have a novel at all.

It also allowed me to do something which has tempted me for years: to write about writing. I've always loved William Goldman's "Adventures in the Screen Trade" and Stephen King's "On Writing." In a way, this is my version. There's very little of my private life in the book (it's not about me) but there are quite a few thoughts on the life of the writer.

As to your question of truth, all fiction depends on it whatever form it may take. If readers feel they're being lied to, they will very quickly disconnect.

J.B.V.: Daniel Hawthorne is, arguably, the Sherlock Holmes to your Watson. In what ways did you envision the characters as counterbalances to one another—and how does the mystery of Hawthorne amplify the story's overall suspense?



A.H.: As I sit here now (April, London) I'm hoping that TWIM is the first of a ten or eleven book series—and what makes that exciting, for me, is that it will give me the opportunity to investigate Daniel Hawthorne and to discover what forces have turned him into the rather difficult human being he has become. It's a case of the sidekick, the Watson, becoming a detective in his own right.

TWIM was inspired, to an extent, by the relationship between Holmes and Doyle. Here you have a brilliant writer who creates the greatest detective in the world. But what does he do? He gets annoyed and throws his creation off the Reichenbach Falls! I find it so bizarre that Doyle really did not like his character, but then Fleming had serious misgivings about Bond, so it's not unique. From the very start, I knew that Hawthorne and I would not exactly get along. I'll be interested to see if that dynamic changes.

J.B.V.: Beyond the whodunit/whydunit elements of the narrative, you subtly satirize the publishing industry. How similar are “fake” Tony's experiences and emotions to your own—and what notions of the author as a glamorous being did you want to dispel?

A.H. Since the book was published in the UK, many readers have told me that they've gone to Google and Wikipedia to work out what's true and what isn't. But since you ask, I will tell you that pretty much everything I write about myself is based on fact...at least, to an extent. The life of the 21<sup>st</sup> century writer is so bizarre in so many

## THE WORD IS MURDER

By Anthony Horowitz

This very real and highly successful author is now back in his own new crime, becoming an integral part of yet another murder that he shares (thankfully) with fans everywhere.

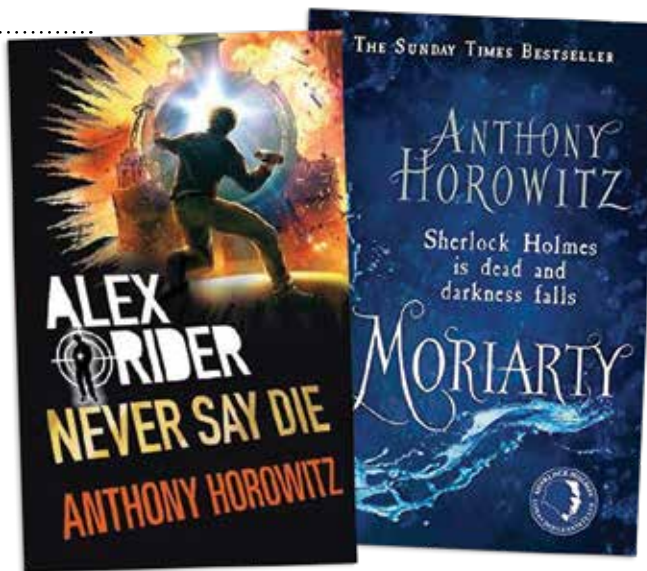
You never know when you're going to die. For one woman, she heads out one day to a funeral parlor in order to set up what will be her own funeral service when her time on earth has come to a close. Of course, she probably didn't assume that the day of her murder would coincide with her day of planning. But, unfortunately, it does.

Daniel Hawthorne is a detective. Yes, a bit disgraced, but it also doesn't help that his quick wit tends to flow from his sarcastic lips before thinking. Brusque, more than a bit annoying at times, this case has landed in Hawthorne's lap. He must try to figure out why this corpse was strangled with a curtain cord in her own home, and whether her funeral plans had anything to do with it, or if God just simply had a sense of irony that day.

Hawthorne can be a pain, yet when Horowitz enters the scene, people can be even more put off by their team. This novelist is always looking for fodder for his new crime books. But this search starts to make him wonder whether the detective may know far more about this specific crime and corpse than he's letting on. Could Hawthorne have a secret he's trying to hide from the world? And, if so, could Horowitz become a victim rather than a teammate? Readers will love finding out.

Horowitz is a true writer, yet he makes a fantastic character as well. From being a screenwriter for TV to authoring the bestselling YA series, *Alex Rider*, this is one man who has proven to be as brilliant as the characters he places on the page.

Reviewed by Amy Lignor, author of "The Double-Edged Sword" published by Suspense Publishing, an imprint of Suspense Magazine ■



ways that I'm delighted to be able to go backstage, as it were, and show the reality, at least in so far as I've experienced it. Glamour? Of course we have our moments and I'm not for one minute complaining. But it's also a very odd way to earn a living.

Oh—and referring back to your question, I hate being called Tony.

J.B.V.: In addition to novels, you write for television and film. What is transferable between these disciplines, and how do they differ? Also, have you found that writing in one format can be influential in how you approach the other?

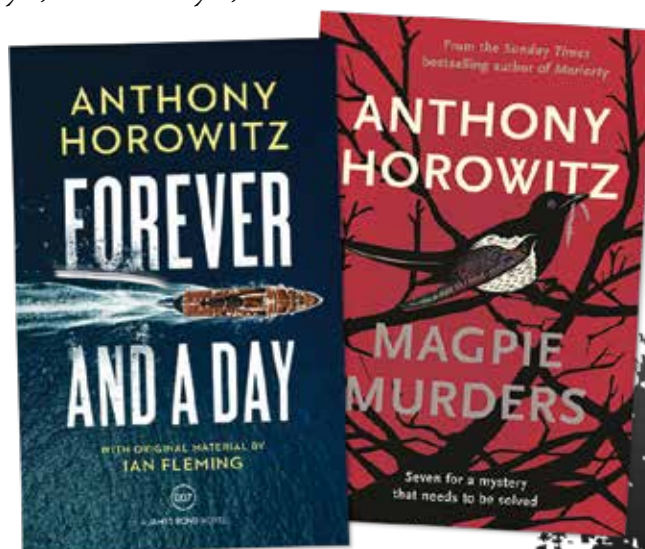
A.H.: Basically, I write stories and these transfer easily between different genres. When an idea comes into my head, my first job is to decide: is it a novel, a short story, a play, a film? I don't put on different hats for different sorts of writing. Some of the rules may be different but the basic impulse is the same. I love the sweep of narrative, the surprises that hide behind corners, the rush towards the climax.

It is true that one format does influence another. I personally believe that although I grew up in a literary world, my audience today is much more visual and cinematic. In a way, the opening paragraph of TWIM is actually a camera shot. We start high up, watching Diana Cowper, crossing the road. We zoom in for a close up, looking at the rings on her fingers. Then there's a reverse angle to show where she's heading. Christopher Isherwood got it in one: I am a camera.

J.B.V.: Leave us with a teaser: What comes next?

A.H.: I'm already on Chapter 7 of "Another Word for Murder." You may remember the English divorce lawyer, Richard Pryce, who was beaten to death with a bottle of wine that turned out to be worth \$2,500. And he was a teetotaler! It was against my better judgement to get involved but I never seem to learn...

To learn more about this incredible talent, check out his website at [www.anthonhorowitz.com](http://www.anthonhorowitz.com). ■





# Joyce Carol Oates

## WISDOM SPANNING THE DECADES

Interview by Amy Lignor for *Suspense Magazine*

Press Photo Credit: Nancy Crampton



Bestseller. Award-Winner. Prolific. Classic American Writer. “The Best of the Best.” There are numerous ways to describe the unbelievably amazing author, Joyce Carol Oates, but there is not one that fully portrays the talent and imagination she possesses. Publishing her very first book in 1962, this is a woman who has since gone on to publish 40+ books. Not to mention, a plethora of novellas, volume upon volume of short stories, masterful poetry... and the list goes on.

The catalog of awards and honors given to Joyce Carol Oates over her long, successful career are, as well, far too numerous to list. Whether it be reader, fan or fellow author, this woman is held in great esteem. And, thankfully, she continues to engage and intrigue to this day. With the release of her latest fiction collection, “Night-Gaunts and Other Tales of Suspense,” Joyce Carol Oates spoke to *Suspense Magazine* about a career achieved during decades that garnered headlines, her ideas on the world of social media, her look at both the positive and negative changes that have occurred in the industry, and so much more...

*Suspense Magazine* (S. MAG.): It is such an honor “speaking” to you today; you are truly an author who has been a mentor to me...without you even knowing it. I would like to begin with the various “times” during which you have written, and the biggest differences you see in the industry between those early years and this “branding, technological” realm we live in today. If you had to choose, what do you feel has been the worst change and the best change to occur in the literary world?

Joyce Carol Oates (J.C.O.): *Certainly one of the very best changes in the literary world has been the radical opening-up of perspectives since the 1960s—initially, women’s voices; Black voices; “ethnic-minority” voices of every (wonderful) kind; Gay Literature, gay/lesbian/trans literature. One of the worst changes is the phenomenon of viral success—magna-success—that dwarfs the efforts of lesser-read but equally deserving writers.*

S. MAG.: Is there a specific genre that you have never delved into before that you perhaps would like to? In addition, is there a specific book of yours that you would say is your personal favorite, and why?

J.C.O.: *Actually, I am interested in relatively few genres. Gothic horror/psychological horror/psychological suspense/mystery/“speculative fiction”—these are about the extent of my interest in genres as a writer. However, I love to read widely and*

can become totally immersed in “police procedurals”—for instance—a subgenre in which I cannot imagine writing, myself. (I am also an avid reader of biography, another genre into which I would never venture.)

S. MAG.: Can you speak to readers about your new fiction collection, “Night-Gaunts and Other Tales of Suspense,” what it is about and, perhaps, tell us how this particular idea came into being?

J.C.O.: *Having said that biography intrigues me as a reader, but not as a writer, I should quickly add that, from a fiction-writer’s perspective, the lives of other, historical individuals can be utterly fascinating. In my collection of surreal-but-based-on-“real people” tales titled “Wild Nights!” my aim was to illuminate the last, revealing days in the lives of American classical authors Poe, Dickinson, Twain, James and Hemingway, in a simulation of their own voices; in my collection “Lovely, Dark and Deep,” an interviewer undertakes a tumultuous interview with Robert Frost in the title story; and in “Night-Gaunts,” the inner, obsessive, and haunted life of H.P. Lovecraft is explored in prose meant to emulate Lovecraft’s prose. Of course, Lovecraft had another, more extraverted life, and was even married for a while to a strong-willed Jewish woman, herself a writer. He had an astonishingly wide circle of correspondents. (But my novella focuses upon what I would call the essential Lovecraft who never really outgrew adolescence and was fixated upon just a few individuals in his life, primarily his parents.)*

*The other stories are thematically related to “Night-Gaunts” but are not explorations of actual persons. (Though there is a definite Shirley Jackson aura about “The Long-Legged Girl.” Not so much the story itself, as the personality of the protagonist and the nature of her unhappy marriage.) “The Experimental Subject”—which seems to have offended some reviewers already—is a not so very far-fetched exploration of an attempt to mate a human female with the sperm of a chimpanzee, with an emphasis upon the experimental procedure. (Since my husband is a neuroscientist, I have become aware of and intrigued by the astonishingly inventive and imaginative scientific experiments undertaken now and in the past.)*

S. MAG.: I read that your first novel was actually penned at the age of only 15 years old. Can you tell us about that? In addition, is it true that it was rejected by publishers because of the subject matter being “too depressing for teenage audiences?” If so, was that a point in your life that made you even more eager to become a writer?

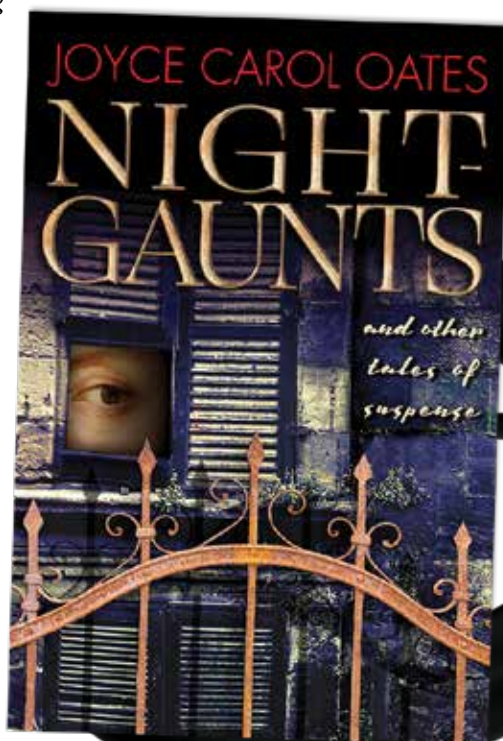
J.C.O.: *This novel was an attempt at a YA that may have been “ahead of its time”—daring to deal with drug addiction (heroin)—(no, I had no first-hand knowledge of heroin, or of any drug, but have always loved research conducted in libraries—libraries are among my favorite places.) As I recall, in the novel, a boy from an urban world comes to live in a rural area not unlike my own in upstate New York, and finds a new, redeeming life through an association with a horse... Though we did not own horses, I’d always fantasized about owning and riding a horse, and visited horses at adjoining farms often.*

S. MAG.: I’m sure you have many, but if you could pick one of the “best things” to have happened over the span of your writing career, one that is incredibly memorable, what would that be, and why?

J.C.O.: *One of the “best things”... I suppose there have been many, though they might not have seemed so at the time. For example, coming to live in Detroit, Michigan in 1963, after having spent most of my life in a rural setting. Living in this great American city at the time of its economic boom—experiencing then the trauma of the July 1967 “urban unrest”—“black protest” against white police brutality, by another name—definitely changed my life and channeled my writerly interests in an entirely new direction.*

S. MAG.: Your novels are truly descriptive; you hold nothing back when it comes to all areas of human emotion, whether that be violence or romance or anger, emptiness, etc. Do these plots just ‘appear’ in your mind; or, perhaps, do you have a muse that causes you to address certain situations?

J.C.O.: *This is difficult to answer since each story or novel is singular to me. The*





*“plots” are expressions of the characters—as they come together, a story (plot) emerges from their interactions that could not have occurred otherwise and take them to places they could not have imagined.*

*Descriptively, I am hoping to evoke a vivid, viscerally “real” place populated with “real” people. In evoking Detroit in numerous novels and stories, notably them, I was probably suffused with the sort of manic intensity and energy that fueled James Joyce through years of recreating Dublin, June 16, 1904, in “Ulysses.”*

*The stories of “Night-Gaunts” are similarly set in places real to me, like Bennington, VT (“Long-Legged Girl”) and Berkeley, CA (“The Experimental Subject”)—the tall building containing several “classified” floors is on the Berkeley campus, not far from one of my classrooms; I would visit it often last year, intrigued by what might possibly be going on in those restricted laboratories on higher floors). “Night-Gaunts” is set in Providence, RI in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.*

S. MAG.: Tell us about a “day of writing” in your house. Do you have a specific place/locale to work in that causes the ideas to flow; music playing in the background, perhaps?

J.C.O.: *My most inspiring times are actually not while writing but when I am running or walking—alone—all sorts of ideas come to me and a sort of video plays in my mind—not a “vision” exactly, but it might have visual qualities. This is a dramatization of the chapter or story I am writing when I return home. Then I take notes, usually in long hand; eventually, these are moved to the computer and I begin trying to write the chapter or story, revising often, rearranging material in a sort of mosaic. The word processor allows for radical experimentation at all times, especially with structure. Of course, writers always managed to write, though probably with more effort than we do now.*

*On a typical day I begin as early as possible, perhaps 7 AM.*

S. MAG.: You’ve seen many things and spoken with many people over time; if there was a piece of advice you would give to up-and-coming authors out there—one thing they should do and one thing they should stay away from—what would those be?

J.C.O.: *Henry David Thoreau said, memorably: “I am almost thirty years old and have yet to hear one syllable of valuable, or even earnest advice from my elders”—(more or less Thoreau’s words)—so I am usually hesitant to give advice. However, for the writer, nothing is more important than reading—widely, voraciously, uncritically. Reading begets writing. (I am sure that Thoreau would not disagree, since one of the writers they should be reading is Thoreau.)*

S. MAG.: Do you feel that writing about social issues, the overall social consciousness, as well as the evil that can (and does) come hand-in-hand with life, is cathartic for you? And what do you wish or hope readers take away from your work?

J.C.O.: *Obviously I am holding a mirror up to my time, or perhaps administering a litmus test, though my abiding interest is probably with the mystery of human personality—a bottomless subject of conjecture that leaves us stunned with rapture at times—at others, horror. Some of my novels are more explicitly sociological/political than others (“A Book of American Martyrs”); others are more interior, psychological in scope (“Daddy Love,” “Jack of Spades,” “A Fair Maiden.”)*

S. MAG.: Is there one author you wish you could’ve met from the past whose work entertained or enlightened you during your career? Is there an author today who stands out for you, one who you believe has that powerful voice which resonates with readers?

J.C.O.: *Yes, I think I would have made a very good, unassuming, undemanding next-door neighbor/girl friend of Emily Dickinson. We might have grown up together—shared books and poems—eventually, each other’s poems. Emily Dickinson would have introduced me to Byron’s poetry, and I would have introduced her to the Brontës. Or the other way around.*

*Today there are many writers with whom I am friendly and with whom I correspond; too many for me to single out just one.*

Those writers most certainly know they are corresponding with a mentor and/or muse who cannot be matched. To close out an interview and put a proverbial “period” at the end of a conversation with such a captivating person is likely impossible, seeing as that you wish the conversation would continue. Being such an integral part of the literary world for so long, Joyce Carol Oates is one of those rare authors whose work, drive, ambition, charm and ability to depict the world over the decades has inspired writers for a long time, and will continue to do so. For more of her words, as well as wisdom, you can follow her at [twitter.com/JoyceCarolOates](https://twitter.com/JoyceCarolOates). ■



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# WHAT'S SO BAD ABOUT GOOD NOTES?



By Dennis Palumbo  
Press Photo Credit: Provided by Author

When I was a screenwriter in Hollywood, I hated getting notes from producers, directors, or studio execs—even if they were good, cogent and likely to improve the script. No, *especially* if they were good, cogent and likely to improve the script.

Now, as the author of five novels in the *Daniel Rinaldi Mystery* series, I feel pretty much the same way about my editor's good, thoughtful and helpful notes: my heart sinks.

After 28 years working as a therapist with writers, I've learned that this seemingly contradictory attitude is not unique. For many of my patients, receiving "good" notes on a piece of writing—whether from an agent, editor, or trusted colleague—doesn't necessarily elicit better feelings than getting insipid, exasperating, beside-the-point notes. Which doesn't, on the surface, seem to make sense.

Or does it? Let's back up. For most professional writers, a good novel is the result of total immersion in the "world" of the story: the narrative, characters and thematic aspects seem all of a piece. At some point in the writing, these elements begin to have a kind of inevitability, an internal logic and trajectory beyond the control of the writer.

As with the fabled "runner's high," this is a situation familiar to most writers and a welcome indication that the writing is coming together well. The downside of this is that, when finished, the draft has a sense of completeness. It's not just what it is; it seems to be exactly what it *should* be.

This isn't mere hubris on the writer's part: she legitimately feels she's been on an intellectual and emotional journey; that she's gone somewhere and back. And that this piece of work is the result.

Then the project gets handed in. To the editor, the agent, the trusted colleague. After which come the dreaded notes. Which means, now the real work begins.

Let's say the notes from the editor or agent (or, God forbid, your old writing mentor) are bad: i.e., totally trashing the material and/or coming up with alternative ideas that take the story far afield from anything interesting or meaningful to you. We've all been there. And as bad as this feels, as frustrating and disheartening as the experience can be, at least there's the sense that you're fighting the good fight. You're trying to write well, but, unfortunately, you're dealing with people who *just don't get it*.

On the other hand, let's say the notes are good: i.e., the editor or agent responds positively to the material, truly understands the narrative and theme, and seems to be a genuine fan of the writing. But here, to your utter dismay, comes a list of suggestions that actually, if followed, would make the story better! And, as mentioned above, your heart sinks.

Why? Because, if you're a good writer, you have to acknowledge the *wisdom* of these suggestions. They do, in fact, clarify the conflict, or deepen the characters, or improve the pacing. The professional part of you can't ignore the aesthetic or pragmatic logic of these notes.

Which means you have to take a deep breath, squint hard at what you believed was the "finished" project, and figure out a way to once again enter its internal world. If the story and characters felt at all organic and inevitable as you were writing them, nothing is harder than deconstructing them and turning them into something else.

First of all, what Faulkner called a writer's "precious darlings"—those cherished lines of dialogue, or scene descriptions,

Remember that creativity happens in the **here-and-now**.

As more than one artist has pointed out, projects are never finished—they're abandoned.

or surprise twists—often have to go. Plus, the moment you start exploding, reshaping or eliminating one segment of the novel, this automatically affects all the *other* elements of the material, often necessitating losing really good stuff in the process.

Finally, you have to muster the will and emotional involvement to put yourself in the open, creative space to inhabit the story's world again. In other words, you have to take another journey there and back, while suppressing the feeling that you're invalidating the initial journey you took. Your *brain* says these new ideas will make the project better. Your heart says, "Been there, done that."

So how does a writer deal with this dilemma? One way to look at it is to remember that creativity happens in the here-and-now. That the experience you had writing the earlier draft, regardless of your belief in the finished product, took place in the past. This new draft is a totally different experience. You aren't, in fact, making the same journey, but rather embarking on a new one. One that includes, inevitably, your feelings about and loyalty to the first journey, but that now has the potential to strike new creative chords in you.

Because, in the final analysis, creative work is never "done." As more than one artist has pointed out, projects are never finished—they're abandoned. They're taken to a particular end-stage. Then, if revisited by the artist, taken to a new stage. The artist, too, has changed in the interim and can possibly bring this newness to the next step in the process.

From my perspective, this is the best way to accept and appreciate the "good" in good notes. Hell, it might be the only way! ■

Formerly a Hollywood screenwriter (*My Favorite Year*; *Welcome Back, Kotter*, etc.), Dennis Palumbo is a licensed psychotherapist and author of *Writing From the Inside Out* (John Wiley). His mystery fiction has appeared in *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, *The Strand* and elsewhere, and is collected in *"From Crime to Crime"* (Tallfellow Press). His series of mystery thrillers (*"Mirror Image," "Fever Dream," "Night Terrors," "Phantom Limb,"* and the latest, *"Head Wounds,"* all from *Poisoned Pen Press*), feature psychologist Daniel Rinaldi, a trauma expert who consults with the Pittsburgh Police.

For more info, visit [www.dennispalumbo.com](http://www.dennispalumbo.com).

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## *Every Wife Has A Story*

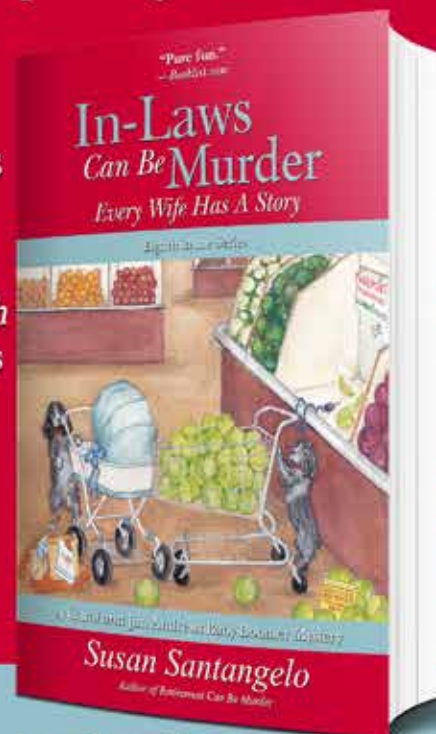
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# FOUR MALTESE FALCONS

*The Case of the*

By Andrew MacRae

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*(Warning: There be spoilers ahead. This article compares the novel, "The Maltese Falcon," and three film versions. Of necessity, this requires discussion of the plot and characters, how they are similar, and how they differ from the film version with which we are most familiar. If you have not read the novel, nor seen the version starring Humphrey Bogart, please stop reading now, and watch it. You are in for a treat.)*

It took Warner Brothers three swings at Dashiell Hammett's novel before they not only got a hit, they knocked it out of the ballpark. John Huston's script and his directorial debut captured to near perfection Hammett's setting, story, and characters. So much so that readers not knowing the chronology could easily believe the book to be

a novelization of the movie.

The two previous film versions, released in 1931 and 1936, unable to compete with their younger sibling, have become 'check-off' movies. Fortunately, for those of us who enjoy movies that are a bit obscure, DVD's are available from Warner Brothers, including a box set with all three films.

###

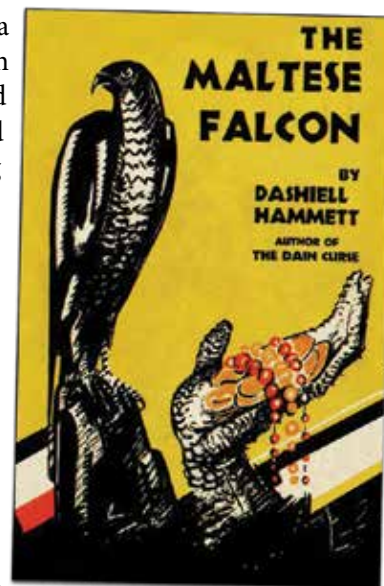
Dashiell Hammett was already a successful writer of pulp stories when he wrote *The Maltese Falcon*. Previous stories featuring The Continental Op had brought a gritty realism to crime fiction. That made sense, as Hammett had worked as a private detective (or *operative*) for Pinkerton's nationwide detective agency.

In Samuel Spade, Hammett created the archetypal hard-boiled private investigator, a character that has become ingrained in our popular fiction.

*The Maltese Falcon* was originally published as a five-part serial that ran from September 1929 through January 1930, in *Black Mask*, a top-selling pulp magazine. Serialization was common for popular fiction prior to the rise of mass-market paperback books. An additional advantage to an author in releasing a novel first as a serial was the opportunity to tweak their stories, based on the reactions of readers, as installments were published. Alfred A. Knopf published the novel in hardback in 1930.

Hammett's story was a success both as a serial and a novel, and Warner Brothers quickly scooped up the film rights.

###



The first film version of *The Maltese Falcon* was released in June 1931, and it enjoyed good reviews and box office success. The movie is played in a breezy style, with then popular stars Ricardo Cortez as Samuel Spade and Bebe Daniels as Brigid O'Shaughnessy.

Part of the fun in watching this film is noticing the many differences in everyday life of 1931, glimpsed in the sets, costumes, and props, from what we see in the 1941 version. The lingering influence of the Edwardian Age can still be detected in the older film, in hair and clothing styles. This was still in the era of detachable shirt collars and spats, and women's dresses had more in common with the 1910s than the fashions of the mid-to-late 1930s. Cars and telephones and other devices are decidedly antique to our eyes.

The 1931 version is a pre-code film and therefore not bound by the moralistic rules imposed by Hays Code enforcer, Joseph Breen, beginning in July, 1934. Cortez's Spade is an unabashed womanizer, to a degree modern audiences might find uncomfortable, but this is truer to the novel than the later versions. The screenwriters even gave him another bedmate, though we only catch a glimpse of her as she adjusts her stockings and slips discreetly out of Sam's office. Sam picks a pillow up from the floor and replaces it on a sofa. Later in the story, Eva, his late partner's widow, throws a fit when she spots Brigid in Sam's apartment wearing one of Eva's negligees. These are innuendos unthinkable in a movie after 1934.

The story only veers significantly from the novel at the end, when a scene was added in which Sam visits Brigid in prison after her conviction for murder. Strangely, they left out Spade's now-famous speech where he explains why he turned her in. ("When a man's partner is killed, he's supposed to do something about it.") As a viewer already familiar with the story, we keep waiting for Sam to deliver the lines. While his scene with Brigid is effective and opportune, the speech never arrives. It's as though the scene was written to highlight it, and then the speech itself was nixed.

Ricardo Cortez performs the role with a great deal of energy and charm, though you wonder if the film wasn't sponsored by Brilliantine. He plays the part as someone who can laugh at whatever life throws at him. Ice Cream Blonde Thelma Todd plays Eva Archer as a brunette. Casper Gutman is played by Dudley Digges, an actor easily one-quarter the mass of Sydney Greenstreet. His shirt collars are fitted tightly to create an illusion of rolls of fat, and he tries mightily to play a large, overweight man, but they don't even bother calling him 'The Fat Man.' Joel Castro becomes Dr. Castro, and is called Joe by his sometimes partners-in-crime. Wilmer is capably played by Dwight Frye, with an uncanny likeness to Elisha Wood Jr. Audiences had seen him in Universal's *Dracula* only a few months earlier as poor, doomed Renfield. Spade's adoring secretary, Effie, is played by a very cute and bubbly Una Merkel.

In general, this first film adaptation of *The Maltese Falcon* has a much lighter tone and style than Huston's. Why it works is due in no small part to the energy Cortez brings to the part.

###

Five years later, Warner Brothers released a second film version of *The Maltese Falcon*. They had wanted to re-release the Ricardo Cortez version to capitalize on the enormous success of rival studio MGM, with their film of another Hammett novel, *The Thin Man*, in 1934, but that was nixed for reasons mentioned above. And so, Warner's decided to remake the story.

Perhaps because *The Thin Man* was a fast-talking, mystery-comedy, Warner's, in their corporate wisdom, turned *The Maltese Falcon* into a fast-talking, mystery-comedy, too. For those familiar with the 1941 version, it can be disconcerting to hear lines tossed off as light banter, where we are used to them being growled by Humphrey Bogart.

Nor was that the end of the changes.

In perhaps the oddest change, the *Maltese Falcon*—the black bird, itself—has been transformed into the Horn of Roland, an equally mythic relic.

The ending is changed in this version, too. William Warren delivers Spade's heartfelt speech, but it's stepped on by Bette Davis' laughing farewell as she is led away in handcuffs. Even the title was changed to *Satan Met a Lady*, recognizing Davis' featured, built-up role as Brigid, and referencing Hammett's description of Spade as "a blonde Satan."

Continuing the alterations, all the characters' names are changed, too. Sam Spade has become Ted Shane. Brigid O'Shaughnessy has become Valerie Purvis, and Effie, Miss Murgatroyd. For purpose of sanity, this





article will use the canonical names. The plot remains basically the same, though it starts with Sam blowing into town, and dropping in on his old partner, Archer. William Warren plays Spade. He was a popular leading man in the early and mid-thirties. He had played Julius Caesar to Claudette Colbert's *Cleopatra* two years before. Joel Cairo has grown into a tall, lanky Englishman played by a remarkably young Arthur Treacher. Instead of gay, he's presented as comedically polite, something much more acceptable under the Hayes Code.

Perhaps the most interesting casting transformation is Casper Gutman becoming Madame Barabbas. She is a sinister, older woman with an aristocratic bearing, possibly a member of the disposed Russian nobility. She and Spade are already acquainted in this version of the story.

*Satan Met a Lady* comes off as a "Bizarro World" replica of *The Maltese Falcon*. The film performed poorly at the box office and the reviews were scathing. Bette Davis was so disappointed in the script that she went on strike for better films, and on to major stardom.

###

John Huston had sold several scripts by the time he wrote and directed Warner's third attempt at *The Maltese Falcon*. Given the mountain of books, essays, and papers written about the movie, these notes about this film version will be brief.

Perhaps it was a case of genius born of inexperience, but Huston as director captured the narrative voice of Hammett's novel to a degree rarely seen in screen adaptations of books. Huston understood how to use light and shadow, dialog and action, tension and release—all of the elements that make up the language of cinema. In doing so, he created one of the first forays into a new film genre that would soon be called *film noir*.

But Huston's film is not a slavish adherence to the original text either, the downfall of many well-intentioned movie versions of cherished novels. Much as Francis Ford Coppola improved upon the potboiler prose of Puzo's, *The Godfather*, so did Huston. For example: Huston, like his predecessors, eliminates the character of Rhea, Casper Gutman's self-cutting daughter.

###

The idea of watching three film adaptations of the same novel may not appeal to many people. But those who give it a shot will experience something akin to a time machine. Present day 1931 blends into contemporary 1935, and then into 1941. Same story, characters, and settings, mostly, but with three actors portraying each role. And for those with an anthropological bent, the films capture the years of the Great Depression remarkably well.

So, there it is. Read the book. Watch the movies. Have fun! ■

#### "The Maltese Falcon"

Serialized, *Black Mask* 1929 – 1930

Novel published by Alfred A. Knopf, 1930

#### ***The Maltese Falcon* (Warner Brothers, 1931)**

Starring Ricardo Cortez, Bebe Daniels, Thelma Todd.

Directed by Ron Del Ruth.

Screenplay by Maude Fulton and Brown Holmes.

#### ***Satan Met a Lady* (Warner Brothers, 1936)**

Starring William Warren and Bette Davis.

Directed by William Dieterle.

Screenplay by Brown Holmes.

#### ***The Maltese Falcon* (Warner Brothers, 1941)**

Starring Humphrey Bogart, Mary Astor, Sydney Greenstreet, Peter Lorre, and Elisha Cook, Jr.

Directed by John Huston.

Screenplay by John Huston.



Andrew MacRae is the author of two novels about a good-natured pickpocket, as well as numerous stories and poems. As an editor for Darkhouse Books, he has published over a dozen titles, including "Black Coffee," "The Anthology of Cozy-Noir," "Stories from the Near-Future," "Descansos," and the upcoming anthologies, "Sanctuary," and "Shhhh... Murder!"

# The Chickens

By Hester Young

Press Photo Credit: Francine Daveta Photography



THE HOUSE ON HICKORY AVE WAS A 60'S-FLAVORED ATROCITY, but Keesha wanted it badly. She could see past the mustard-colored vinyl, peeling wallpaper, and pink bathroom tile. She saw a safe neighborhood. A good school district. Teachers who might understand why her daughter rarely spoke, why Delanie preferred animals to people.

Keesha and Michael had grown up poor in a city that discouraged dreams, but here they were, so close to escaping, on the verge of home ownership and a better life for their daughter. Keesha *had* to have that house.

And then she saw the basement.

She knew straight off that something was wrong. There was an unpleasant odor as she followed Michael down the creaky, narrow stairs: dampness with sharp notes of ammonia. The smell was familiar, though she couldn't say why, and it left her uneasy.

"Is there water damage?" Michael asked, sniffing. "Mold?"

"No, no," the Realtor assured them cheerily. "It's water-tight."

In the weak light of a single bulb, Keesha could make out the water heater and boiler, a laundry area, some shelving, and the remnants of an old kitchen, its green linoleum countertops chipped and scratched. A large deep-freeze unit

sat unplugged in the middle of the floor, clearly out of place. Sensing something off, she nudged it with her foot—it was on wheels and moved easily—and flinched at the dark stains she saw beneath.

"The hell is that?" she demanded, but she already knew that it was blood.

The Realtor was quick to share the home's unusual history, to reassure them the mess on the floor was not evidence of a brutal crime but a marker of the previous owner's profession.

"He was a Jewish butcher," she informed Keesha and Michael, as they stared down at the rust-colored spatter. "He had a meat shop in the city right up until he died. And he kept things kosher here. That's why the house has two kitchens, one dairy, one meat."

Keesha edged away from the soiled concrete. "Gross." She rarely ate meat herself, had in fact been a vegetarian until a protein deficiency during pregnancy necessitated the occasional hamburger. "Did he kill animals down here?"

Michael gave her a look. "Oh, come on, Kee. You think the guy dragged live cows down *those* stairs?"

"Definitely no cows." The Realtor smiled. "He did most of his work at his shop. At home, it was just chickens."

Keesha winced. *That* was the smell. Bird droppings. The acrid fear of animals awaiting death.

"Poor things," she murmured.

She could picture it all too well, cages of poultry watching as the butcher beheaded members of their brood. Keesha's mother, Marie Flore, had been born in Haiti, and Keesha had visited the island once. Though memories of her uncle and



raucous cousins had receded with time, the image of a headless chicken running around her uncle's farm still burned bright. She was eight, then, and watching people kill their own food had left an indelible impression upon her, paved the way for years of vegetarianism. The odor, that awful odor, took her back. The whole damn basement smelled like a chicken coop.

Michael, for his part, did not seem to find the room disturbing.

"We'd rip out the kitchen, of course," he said, surveying the space, "and eventually install some new flooring. But this shouldn't be a dealbreaker." He turned to Keesha. "What do you think, baby? You want this house?"

She waited until they'd ascended the basement stairs to make her decision. The rest of the home was tacky and worn, but she could live with a fixer-upper. She peered out the window, imagined Delanie playing in the little scrap of yard. Her daughter was four, and though she could spend hours studying ants or listening intently to pigeons, she avoided most human contact. Keesha suspected Del might have some mild form of autism, but Michael refused to have her screened. *She's too young for labels*, he said.

A good school district could make all the difference, Keesha knew. They could recognize a problem when Delanie started kindergarten. They could provide special services. If they lived here, in this house, maybe Del would learn to be like other kids.

"Let's make an offer," Keesha said.

#

FROM THE BEGINNING, DELANIE LOVED THE HOUSE, ESPECIALLY THE BASEMENT.

"It's not safe," Keesha would scold, shooing her out. "It smells bad."

But Keesha could not entirely avoid the basement, since it housed the washer and dryer. Every time she ran laundry, Delanie would follow her down the steep steps, clutching her hand for balance. When they reached the bottom, the little girl explored every crevice, disappearing behind pipes or still-packed boxes, climbing unstable shelves, pushing aside the deep freeze unit to study the bloodstains no matter how many times Keesha begged her not to.

"It's just paint," Keesha told her, but Delanie seemed to know better.

Meanwhile, the chicken smell would not be defeated. Keesha opened the basement's single window, tried running a fan Michael borrowed from work, but the only effect was to allow bugs in—the window had no screen. In the end, she resigned herself to the odor, though she made her trips down as brief and infrequent as possible.

"Mama," Delanie told her one evening before Keesha left for a night shift at the hospital, "the chickens are sad."

Keesha was doing dishes and waiting for Michael to get home while her daughter played with plastic farm animals. She looked up from the pan she was scrubbing, surprised to hear Del's voice. "Oh yeah? Why are the chickens sad?"

"They didn't have any grass for a long time," Delanie said. "They like grass." She rose to her feet. "Can I get some from the yard?"

Keesha hesitated. She wasn't thrilled with the idea of Del scattering clippings around the kitchen just to feed some plastic toys, but the girl rarely spoke this much. *Encourage her verbal expression*, the pediatrician had said. Sighing, Keesha led her daughter outside. Together they gathered a few handfuls of the grass Michael had yet to mow.

It was late April, and the air was crisp. Though Keesha could hear the Hickory Ave traffic, the yard felt like a respite, a place where bugs buzzed and weeds flourished, and a single scraggly azalea bush flowered, as determined to bloom as Keesha herself. She was grateful for the house, for her life with Michael and Del, even if she and Michael scarcely saw each other these days. She only wished her mother had lived to see this place.

She reached up to get a sprig of azaleas for the kitchen. When she turned around again, her daughter was gone.

"Del?" She glanced around the yard and decided Del must have returned inside. "Delanie?" Keesha went through the rooms systematically, but she knew where her child had gone. Finally, finding every room empty, she stood at the top of the basement stairs and flicked on the light.

Each wooden step was sprinkled with a small heap of grass. She followed Delanie's trail, angry now. The sensation that she was being watched, not by a single entity but by several creatures, made her pulse quicken.

"Delanie Williams, you get your butt over here right now!"

At last she heard a tiny voice from the shadows.

"Here, chicky chicky chicky. Here, chicky chick."

Del was crouched beneath one of the crumbling kitchen counters, a pile of grass spread around her knees in a semi-circle.

Keesha grabbed her by the wrist and jerked her toward the stairs. "You may *not* come down here without me or Daddy, do you understand? You could've fallen on those stairs and busted your head open! Don't ever do that again!"

Delanie's forehead creased, but she did not cry as some children might've. "They were hungry," she said reproachfully. "They just wanted something to eat."

It occurred to Keesha that her daughter was not, in fact, talking about plastic animals, but some sort of imaginary pets. She wondered why Delanie had chosen the basement as their home. She and Michael hadn't told her about the butcher, but Del had big ears. She might've overheard.

Back upstairs, Keesha located a pair of Del's pajamas. Michael would be home soon, and she needed to get their daughter ready for bed. She reached to tug down her daughter's pants and paused.

The knees were smeared with bird droppings.

#

"THERE MUST BE A CHICKEN DOWN THERE," SHE TOLD MICHAEL THE FOLLOWING MORNING, still bleary-eyed from a twelve-hour shift at the hospital. "One who escaped the butcher. It's probably surviving on bugs."

"What, some kind of underground ninja chicken?" Michael scoffed. "Get real. Chickens are too dumb to hide. And we'd see the poop."

"I *did* see the poop. It was on Del's pants."

"She probably got that in the yard," Michael said. "Use your head, Kee. We've lived in this house for six weeks. There's not six weeks' worth of bird poop in that basement."

"*Something's* there," Keesha insisted. "Every time I'm in that basement, I feel it looking at me."

"You sound like your mother."

Coming from Michael, this was the harshest of insults. He'd never made a secret of his disdain for Marie Flore, no matter how many times Keesha tried to explain about Haiti, about cultural differences. Michael had always loved Keesha for her level-headedness, her rational outlook, her refusal to descend into histrionics—all the ways she and her mother differed. When Marie Flore finally succumbed to cancer last year, some tiny, guilty part of Keesha was relieved. It had been exhausting to field her husband and her mother's endless complaints about one another.

Michael's invocation of her mother meant he thought her foolish, thought she was privileging feelings over facts. Keesha didn't argue the point. If he wanted facts, that's what she'd give him. She would find the bird in the basement and prove him wrong.

Later that morning, after leaving Delanie with her mother-in-law, she began to search for proof of the fugitive chicken. The first thing she noticed as she made her way down the stairs was that the trail of grass Del had sprinkled yesterday was gone. It could've been Michael tidying up, but she didn't think so. He rarely helped out around the house.

Keesha moved quickly through the basement, searching for something that might serve as a makeshift nest. Once again, she couldn't shake the feeling that she was being watched, not by one thing, but by many. Yet where *were* they?

She remembered the feeling of entering her uncle's henhouse, that moment you transitioned from the bright outdoors into sudden darkness. Though temporarily blinded, you could sense the birds around you, hear them shuffling, clucking nervously at the presence of an intruder. Keesha wished she had a flashlight. The lone bulb at the bottom of the stairs didn't provide nearly enough light.

Unable to locate anything more than a few errant feathers, she gave up. This job would require a professional. In an old phonebook, she found a number for Animal Control and Wildlife Removal Services. Michael would never agree to the expense—they didn't have any extra money these days—but she wasn't about to share her home with unwelcome guests. She would tell Michael later, once the matter had been handled.

The next day Keesha was off from work. Delanie lay studying an old beetle carcass when the doorbell rang. A white man in a gray uniform stood fidgeting on her doorstep. He had close-cropped hair and watery blue eyes.

"I'm Angus from Animal Control," he said, extending a hand. "Heard you got a bird in the house."

"Looks like." Keesha shook his hand, cringing inwardly when Angus held it too long. "Come on in."

"Nice little place," he observed. "You live here alone?"

"With my husband," she said. "He'll be home soon."

"Ah. He couldn't handle the bird for you?" The man smirked, as if to indicate a deficiency in Michael's manliness. "Don't worry, I'll get it done. No charge unless I catch your bird, how's that for a guarantee?"

"Great. It's downstairs, if you want to have a look."

But Angus was in no hurry. He spotted Delanie bent over the dead beetle and smiled. "Cute kid. You home with her all day?"

"I'm a nurse," Keesha told him, annoyed that he'd mistaken her for a stay-at-home mom. "I work nights."

The man nodded, filing that away. "So what kind of bird we dealing with today?" he asked.

"A chicken, I think. I know that sounds weird, but..." Keesha led him to the basement before he could make any further attempts at conversation.



Angus nearly tripped on the precarious stairs, but caught himself at the last minute. He sniffed the air. "Smells like chicken, all right," he confirmed. "Kinda dark down here, huh?" He grabbed a flashlight from his tool belt and began shining it into corners. "You found any scat?"

"Not much," she admitted.

He stopped beneath the basement window and reached up as if to judge the distance. "This the only window?"

"Yeah." Keesha shifted her weight. She didn't know what made her more uncomfortable, the feeling of unseen avian eyes, or the way Angus's leering gaze slid across her body.

Angus tested the window, watched the glass pane swing open. "Plenty of room for a critter to crawl through," he mused. "Doesn't lock properly, either. Something determined could get in. I don't know about a chicken, though." He continued searching the basement, scrutinizing the walls and ceilings and peering into containers. "You can see where it's been pecking," he said, pointing to a cardboard box. The side was a mess of tiny holes.

She had all but given up hope of his finding anything when Angus pried back the lid of the deep freeze. Suddenly there was the unmistakable sound of wings, a growl and an angry squawk. The man stumbled backwards, clutching his face and cursing.

"Where the hell'd it go?" he demanded. There was a long scratch down the left side of his face, tiny beads of blood seeping from his skin.

"I—don't know," Keesha stammered, gazing down into the empty deep freeze. "I didn't see it." She did not understand how anything could've survived that deep freeze. Even unplugged, it was sealed. Shouldn't the creature have run out of oxygen?

They searched for half an hour, but whatever thing had attacked Angus remained elusive. Red-faced and humiliated that poultry was getting the best of him, the man switched tacts. "I'm putting down traps," he said. "We'll get that little bastard."

After retrieving the equipment from his car, he laid out three cages across the basement. "Call me when you catch it. Me and this guy have a score to settle." He gave Keesha his number, and though she dutifully programmed it into her phone, she wasn't sure she would call. The guy gave her the creeps.

#

THAT EVENING AT DINNER, DELANIE HAD A QUESTION. "MAMA," SHE SAID, LOOKING DOWN AT her plate of microwaved nuggets. "Are chicken nuggets made from real chickens?"

Keesha sighed. "Yes, baby girl."

Del pushed her plate away. "I don't want to eat chicken nuggets. I don't want to eat chicken anything."

"Why not?" Keesha asked, although she didn't feel much like eating chicken these days, either.

"Chickens are my friends," her daughter said. "I don't want to eat my friends."

"Okay." It was good, Keesha figured, to encourage empathy. "We don't have to eat chicken, Del. We don't have to eat any meat at all."

The next time she went to the grocery store, she bought tofu, veggie burgers, and a frozen cheese pizza. Michael complained once, and she suggested he make his own dinner. After that, he swallowed down whatever she served in silence.

#

A WEEK LATER, ANGUS CAME BACK TO COLLECT HIS TRAPS. IT WAS ONE OF KEESHA'S DAYS OFF and Delanie was napping. Keesha let him into the house reluctantly, stood at the top of the basement stairs while he gathered the ineffectual cages. The scratch from his previous visit had not healed well. Swollen and red, it appeared on its way to infection.

"You should get that looked at," Keesha told him, but Angus did not acknowledge his injury.

"Crafty little guy you got roaming around," he grumbled, studying the spray of white and speckled feathers that littered his empty traps. "The Harry Houdini of chickens, huh? I think poison's our best bet. I'll come back tomorrow." His unnerving blue gaze met hers briefly and then lingered on her breasts. "Will your boyfriend be home?"

Keesha wasn't about to give him a reason to return.

"Thanks," she told him, "but I think my husband will deal with it after all." She emphasized the word *husband*.

#

THAT EVENING, WHILE RUMMAGING THROUGH THE FRIDGE FOR DINNER, KEESHA NOTICED Delanie hunched in the corner, stroking something in her hand.

"What is that, Del?" she asked.

Her daughter hid one hand beneath her shirt.

Keesha's voice turned stern. "Give it here."

Reluctantly, Del laid the object in her outstretched palm. It was an egg, smooth and brown. The size of a chicken egg, but Keesha never bought the brown ones, only white.

"Where did you get that?"

Delanie was evasive. "I found it," she said, and Keesha knew that, despite all her warnings, her child had been prowling around the basement again.

"We can't keep this," she said shortly, and her daughter's face fell. "I don't want you going downstairs, Del, I mean it."

Still, Keesha had to know. Was it really a chicken egg? What was growing in there? She cracked the shell against the side of a bowl. A yellow yolk, encased by a clear and viscous white, slipped out. Chicken, the same you'd buy in any grocery store.

She threw it down the sink. For dinner, they ate macaroni and cheese.

#

IN JUNE, MICHAEL'S BOSS AT THE WAREHOUSE SWITCHED HIM TO THE NIGHT SHIFT. MICHAEL'S mother claimed she didn't have the space for Delanie to sleep over, so Keesha had to sweet-talk her boss into letting her work days again. It should've been easier, moving to a consistent schedule that favored one's normal circadian rhythms, but the change threw her off. At night, she found herself battling insomnia, unable to get comfortable, her mind racing. Michael's absence didn't help. She felt vulnerable without him.

She didn't want to use sleeping pills—they were habit-forming, and as a nurse, she knew better—so after a few nights of thrashing, she resigned herself to wakefulness. She fixed herself some hot milk and sat at the kitchen table, thumbing through a magazine.

That was when she heard the noises.

Scraping sounds coming from the floor below. Rustling. A chorus of soft clucks that came almost like a question.

Not just one chicken, but several.

She could hear them moving around down there in the dark, conversing in their strange language, gossiping, squabbling, singing tunelessly. They didn't sound angry, like the one that had slashed Angus's face. But where had they been hiding? Keesha had searched that whole basement, and so had Angus. Was there some secret bunker they'd missed, a safehouse that held an entire brood of chickens? It didn't make sense.

Keesha knew she should investigate, and yet somehow, she remained rooted to the spot. She took another sip of milk, read the same sentence of her magazine over and over.

When the ashy glow of dawn appeared, the chickens fell silent, so silent she wondered if she'd dreamed it all. Too exhausted to parse the experience, she dragged herself up to bed and caught a couple hours' rest before Delanie woke.

After that, she heard the chickens often, always in the early hours of the morning when Delanie was sleeping. She never heard them when Michael was home. His loud, rumbling snores seemed to inoculate the house against their nocturnal congregations.

Although the noises were not particularly threatening, she could never bring herself to venture into the basement—not at night. *They're only chickens*, she told herself. *You should at least get a look at them*. Once, she made it as far as the basement door. She pressed her ear to the wood, heard scurrying sounds and then, suddenly, a small tap-tap-tap at the bottom, as if made by a small beak.

She did not open the door.

Over the course of weeks, she came to learn their sounds. She heard cackles, clucks, and trills. She heard arguments break out amongst their ranks, squawks and hisses. Sometimes she heard a noise that sounded like humming, random notes strung together and repeated.

Michael noticed that she wasn't sleeping well but had no sympathy. "You're not the one working nights," he said in a voice shaded with resentment. "Why are *you* so tired?"

Keesha knew she could not tell her husband about the chickens, not without proof. She saw Michael only once a week now, on Sundays, and their time together was already strained. She didn't want to fight with him, didn't want to defend her sanity. Whatever he might say, she knew she wasn't crazy.

Her thoughts kept returning to the home's previous owner, that kosher butcher. She wondered exactly what had happened in the basement.

One day on her lunch break, she borrowed a free computer and began to research kosher slaughter. It was an act fueled by the kind of superstition she and Michael used to mock, and she found herself glancing over her shoulder as she read, ashamed.



The dietary rules of Judaism, she learned, were intricate, and to slaughter an animal correctly was no easy feat. A creature could not be shocked or anesthetized beforehand. It must be killed with the swift, clean stroke of a perfect knife. The animal's trachea and esophagus should be slit quickly, without hesitating, applying undue pressure, misplacing the knife, or tearing the tissue. Like Death Row inmates, sick and injured animals could not be killed. Furthermore, one must never slaughter a parent and its young on the same day. Any violation of these laws rendered an animal unfit for consumption.

Keesha couldn't help thinking of her mother as she read. Growing up, she'd been mortified by Marie Flore's practice of Catholic-flavored Vodou. She'd hated the altar and candles in their living room, the pictures of saints, the peculiar gifts her mother received from relatives in Haiti. But slitting animal throats and avoiding electricity during Shabbat struck her as equally outlandish. She thought her mother might've understood Orthodox Judaism, respected its careful adherence to procedure, if not the practices themselves.

She wished her mother were there to advise her. In life, Marie Flore was always stuffing odd items into her daughter's pockets, things for luck, and things to ward off evil: shells, buckeye nuts, an alligator foot. Though Keesha had found her mother's methods obscure and often cringe-worthy, she could now appreciate that Marie Flore, like the butcher, had lived within a system. And if her mother had taught her anything, it was that no good ever came from breaking the rules.

Perhaps the butcher of Hickory Ave had broken them.

Yet even if she blamed the butcher for whatever presence lingered in her basement, the question remained: what could she do about it? On that front, she had no answers.

Eventually, after a long string of restless nights, she reversed her stance on sleeping pills. It didn't matter what went on in the house at night, she decided. She just didn't want to hear it.

#

A FEW WEEKS LATER, KEESHA WAS PUSHING DELANIE ON THE SWINGS AT A LOCAL PARK WHEN she heard someone call her name. A familiar figure crossed the playground toward her.

"Angus," he reminded her. "From Animal Control. How's it going?"

"Fine," Keesha said, but she wished he'd go away. He didn't have a child or a dog or a book. There was no reason for him to be at that playground.

"You ever catch that chicken?" Angus asked. To her surprise, the wound on his face had still not healed. It was dark at the edges with dots of pus.

"I think the chicken left," Keesha lied, trying not to stare.

From her seat on the swing, Del shook her head. "Not *one* chicken," she muttered. "They're a big chicken family, and they all live together."

Angus glanced at her. "You saw them?" he asked, but Del didn't like the man any better than her mother did and fell quiet.

"We better go," Keesha said, lifting her child from the swing. "I have to get to work soon. Got a late shift." She didn't, but it seemed like a polite excuse to leave.

"A late shift," Angus repeated. "Of course. Because you're a nurse." He regarded her with his unsettling blue eyes. "Funny. I thought it was your husband who worked nights lately."

Keesha felt a chill pass over her. For the first time in her life, she wished that she carried a gun, mace, *something*.

"Our schedules are very unpredictable," she said, pressing Delanie to her hip and hurrying away. She would not go to that park again.

#

FOR THE NEXT THREE NIGHTS, KEESHA STOPPED TAKING HER PILLS. SHE WANTED HER HEAD clear, just in case.

She tried to talk to Michael. Someone was watching them, she said. A creepy white man at the park who knew too much about their comings and goings. She had a bad feeling about it.

"Probably just a nosy neighbor," Michael said.

*He knows our house*, Keesha wanted to tell him. *He's been inside*. But Michael would've been angry at her for calling Animal Control. He would've turned it around, made it her fault, told her she was getting paranoid just like her mother. Michael still hadn't adjusted to night work and was always in a bad mood these days.

She took to sleeping with a paring knife on her bedside table. A melodramatic gesture, she knew, and not likely to help near a city known for gun violence, but the small, sharp blade comforted her.

On the third night, unable to sustain a state of perpetual wakefulness, Keesha finally slept. And she dreamed. She dreamed of the butcher, his steel-rimmed spectacles and the soft white cloud of his beard. In the dimly lit basement, he held Keesha's

body down, one hand pressed to her throat, the other wielding a knife. But his hands were palsied with age, and he could not keep the knife from trembling. The blade wedged itself partway in her neck, and she was alive, still alive, producing a strange gargling sound. All around her, the chickens protested her fate, their clucks swelling with savage intensity.

Suddenly she was awake in her dark bedroom. She touched her throat, confirmed there was no blood. And yet, the noises from her dream continued. Down in the basement, the chickens were squawking, raising a ruckus like she'd never heard. KUH-KUH-KUH-KUH-KAAACK! She could hear them plainly, even from two floors up.

Footsteps scurried through the hall. Keesha slipped out of bed just in time to intercept Delanie at the top of the staircase. "You can't go down there," she whispered.

"But the chickens," Del said. "They're angry."

It was the first time anyone apart from Keesha had heard them, but she was too frightened to feel gratified. "Get in here, Del," she whispered, guiding her daughter back to the bedroom. As she locked the door behind them, there was a thud from deep within the house, so resounding it shook the floor.

Delanie cocked her head intently to one side, listening, as a high-pitched screeching began.

"Help me," someone moaned. "Help me."

It felt like a trap, some cunningly devised scheme to send Keesha downstairs. She didn't take the bait. Instead she took her daughter's hand in hers and squeezed it. There was no good reason for someone to be prowling around her basement. If only she had her phone. But she'd left it in the kitchen, charging. Of course she had.

For hours, she sat huddled on her bed, Del in one arm, the paring knife in the other. The screaming didn't stop, and neither did the chickens. Their cries were harsh and ragged. Predatory. As the screams grew less and less human, Keesha began to doubt herself. What if it was Michael, home early? What if he needed her help?

"I have to go down there." Her body shook as she tried to stand.

Del caught her by the wrist. "No," she said, alert but unafraid. "Not yet."

Keesha bit her lip, hesitating. In the end she stayed, and not just for her daughter. She'd seen plenty of injuries at the hospital, people crying from physical or emotional pain, but she'd never heard screaming like this. She didn't want to see what caused a person to make such sounds.

When dawn came, the house fell silent. Delanie seemed to relax.

"You can go down now, Mama. It's done."

Keesha waited several minutes and then, after instructing Del to stay put, made her way to the kitchen. In the early morning light, she retrieved her phone and dialed 911.

"I want to report a break-in."

The dispatcher said they were sending someone right away, that she and Delanie should wait in a safe place. Keesha hung up, strangely calm, her thoughts clear and dispassionate, as if they belonged to someone else. The patrol car would be there soon. She could guess what it would find.

Still, she had to see for herself.

When she opened the basement door, her nostrils caught a rush of powerful poultry stink. Somehow the odor no longer seemed so terrible. She flipped on the light and peered downward.

At the bottom of the stairs lay a man, a halo of blood fanning his close-cropped hair. His pale skin was a mess of scratches and tiny puncture wounds. His face had been ravaged by claws and beaks. Though his features were largely unrecognizable, she knew that his eyes—if he'd had any left—would've been a watery blue.

She descended the stairs, her heart as hard and clinical as if she were making her rounds at the hospital, and took a moment to confirm that Angus was dead. High on the rear wall, the basement window tilted open, ushering in a warm summer breeze. She stood beneath it, gulping in the air.

The patrol car would arrive shortly. But first, there was something she had to do.

In the backyard, she gathered several handfuls of grass. She found some leftover corn in the fridge, and part of a salad. She hoped they would like it. Kneeling at the top step of the basement staircase, she scattered the grass and corn and greens, ignoring the body that loomed below.

"Here, chicky, chicky, chicky," she crooned, making her voice as soft and gentle as Del's. "Here, chicky chicky." ■

*Hester Young is the author of "The Gates of Evangeline" and "The Shimmering Road." She holds a master's degree in English with a creative writing concentration from the University of Hawaii at Manoa, and her work has been published in literary magazines such as The Hawaii Review. Before turning to writing full-time, she worked as a teacher in Arizona and New Hampshire. Young lives with her husband and two children in New Jersey.*



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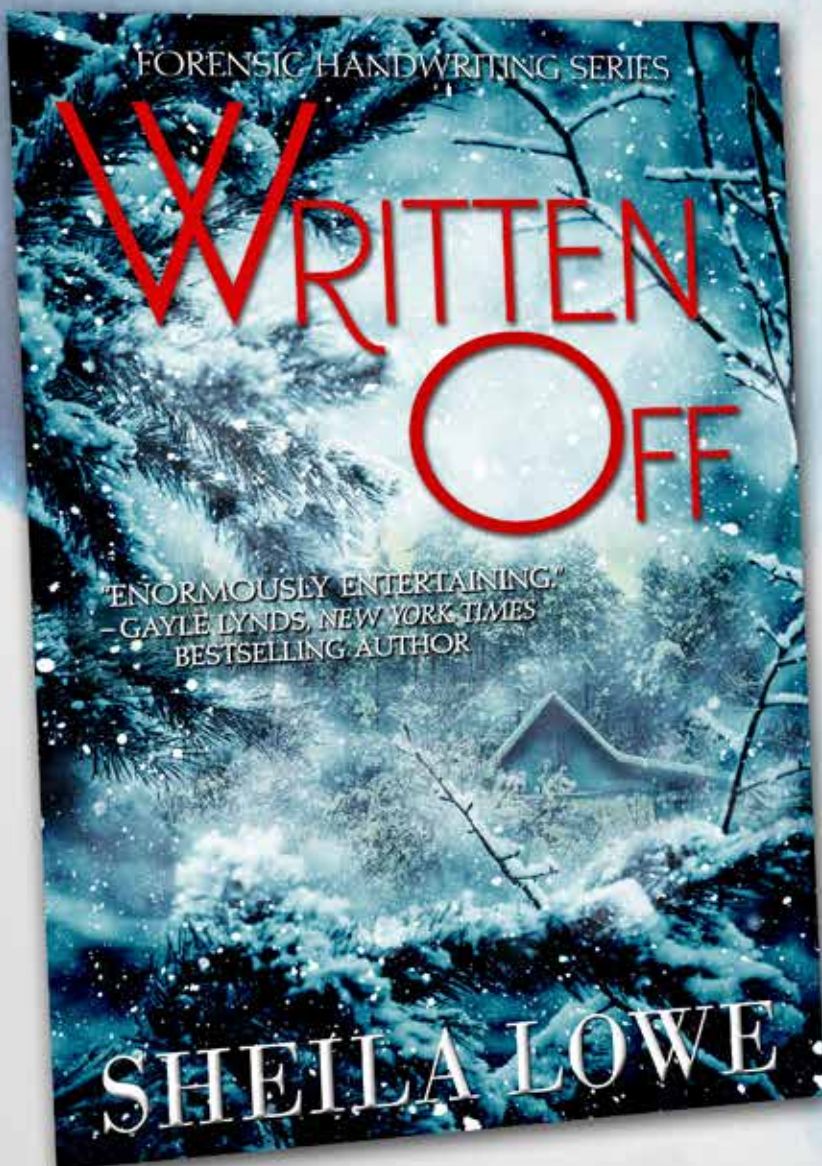




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